USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Snapshot:

Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM (RFSP)

NAVIGATING THE 2026 RFSP NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Understand RFSP *(Section 3.0 in NOFO)*

RFSP helps connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. The RFSP focuses on making local or regional food economies stronger and more resilient.

Project Types and Eligible Activities

(Sections 3.3-3.5 in NOFO)

Two project types:

- Planning and Design *(2 years)*
- Implementation and Expansion *(3 years)*

Priority Considerations

(Section 3.6 in NOFO)

AMS will prioritize applications that:

- Leverage non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, State, Tribal, or national efforts.
- Cover an area that includes distressed low-income rural or urban communities. with areas of persistent poverty.
- Have multiple entities and partners, including multiple entity and partner types.

Eligible Applicants and Partners

(Sections 2.1-2.3 in NOFO)

Only partnerships are eligible to apply to RFSP. A partnership is an agreement between one or more eligible entities (see section 2.2) and one or more eligible partners (see section 2.3).

Cost Share

(Sections 2.5, 4.6 in NOFO)

RFSP requires a cash cost share equal to 25% of the amount of federal funds being requested. Applicants must submit signed letters verifying the cost share for EACH resource.

Review Criteria

(Section 6.2 in NOFO)

Applications that meets the initial qualifications screening requirements will be reviewed and scored competitively in the following areas:

- Alignment and Intent
- Technical Merit
- Achievability
- Expertise and Partners
- Fiscal Plan and Resources

Prepare and Submit Through Grants.gov

(Section 5.0 in NOFO)

- Obtain Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- Obtain a TIN/EIN
- Register in SAM.gov (System for Award Management)
- Create a Grants.gov Account
- Submit & Track via Grants.gov Workspace

Letters of Commitment

(Section 4.6 in NOFO)

Applicants MUST provide letters of commitment, (not just letters of support) from all project partners and collaborators listed in the Project Narrative.

Previously Funded Projects

Visit the grant website to view previously funded projects.

Register & Submit your Application Early

Complete your registration to these systems early and submit your application package a week prior to the close date to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues.

Review Your Application Package

Ensure your application package includes all required documents as outlined in Section 4.1: Application Checklist.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

RFSP

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-26-0006 (displayed prominently in NOFO).
Publication date: April 21, 2026.
Application due: June 5, 2026, 11:59 PM ET (electronic submission via Grants.gov only).
Assistance Listing (CFDA): 10.177.

What is RFSP offering?

RFSP funds partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan, develop, and strengthen the local or regional food economy.

Who is eligible?

A partnership is an agreement between one or more eligible entities and one or more eligible partners. Only eligible partnerships may apply to RFSP.

Eligible Entities (must include at least one):	Eligible Partners (must include at least one):
▪ Producer ▪ Farmer or Rancher Cooperative ▪ Producer Network or Association ▪ Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture ▪ Food Council ▪ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network or Association ▪ Local Governments ▪ Nonprofit Corporations ▪ Public Benefit Corporations ▪ Economic Development Corporations ▪ Regional Farmers Market Authority ▪ Tribal Governments	▪ State Agencies or Regional Authority ▪ Philanthropic Organizations ▪ Private Corporation ▪ Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) ▪ Commercial, Federal or Farm Credit System Lending Institution

What activities can RFSP fund?

RFSP offers funding for two types of projects:

Project Type	Duration (Months)	Minimum Award	Maximum Award
Planning and Design	24	$100,000	$250,000
Implementation and Expansion	36	$250,000	$1,000,000

Planning and Design Projects: Support the early stages of developing or strengthening local or regional food systems ($100,000 – $250,000).

- Bringing together partners to define the scope and structure of the regional food system, share opportunities and challenges, and develop engaged approaches to address challenges and improve connection and success across the regional food system. Conducting feasibility studies and data-driven implementation plans that achieve measurable goals for the partnership's work in developing the regional food system.
- Connecting food value chain entities with partners and funders to collaborate and engage in activities that strengthen the regional food system.

- Researching specific market, mid-tier value chain, or infrastructure investments (including studies analyzing the capital needs or gaps of the regional food system) to help prioritize next steps at the local, regional, state, or tribal government level.
- Developing metrics and benchmarks to measure and evaluate the partnership's early development work for achieving partnership goals.

Implementation and Expansion Projects: Build on existing efforts to enhance or expand the food system ($250,000 – $1,000,000).

- Creating value chains where producers, manufacturers, buyers, and other related actors form collaborative, transparent partnerships share a commitment to operational values and social mission goals.
- Developing systems or processes for ongoing community engagement and businesses engagement to provide a forum for ideas, concerns, and updates across the regional food system.
- Helping food system enterprises find resources, providing technical assistance to partners and stakeholders, and applying for programs and resources that align with regional food system efforts, including other LAMP programs or capital investments.
- Analyzing regional capital needs and gaps and identifying resources to support implementation activities.

Cost Sharing

This funding opportunity requires cost share funds from non-Federal sources in the form of cash contributions equal to a minimum of 25% of the amount of Federal funds being requested.

- Cost sharing must be in the form of allowable direct costs and align with the project goals and purposes. Applicants electing the 15% de minis rate indirect costs may not use indirect cost as cost share. Only applicants with a valid Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) may use indirect costs as an in-kind contribution, but not as a cash contribution.
- You cannot use program income (funds generated from the proposed program) as cost sharing.
- Cash contributions are generally defined as an actual cash contribution (not the 'value' of someone's time/effort) from the applicant's general revenue/reserves/savings/line of credit, or 3rd-party partner(s), or other non-Federal grants.
- Cost share contributions cannot be used for RFSP if they are already being used toward satisfying a cost share requirement under any other Federal grant agreement to which the applicant is a party.
- If an applicant voluntarily pledges cost sharing above the required 25%, the additional cost share becomes a binding requirement of the Federal award once the award is issued. It may also count toward meeting the Priority Area for using significant non-Federal financial and technical resources.

If an applicant decides not to request indirect costs in the full amount they are allowed, the applicant can offer that portion as an in-kind contribution. This would not be considered as part of the required 25% cash contribution.

Subawards

The applicant may use sub-awarding and/or sub-contracting methods with eligible partners via its partnership agreement to complete the proposed project. The applicant may not use the grant to create its own smaller grant program (mini-grant programs) to competitively "re-grant" RFSP funds, or for activities that are not central to the purpose of the project, or for unknown costs.

The recipient may use its cost share funds to offer mini-grants if so desired, as long as they further the project's purposes and comply with Federal cost share requirements at 2 CFR § 200.306.

Priority Areas

AMS will give priority consideration to applications that:

- Use significant non-Federal financial and technical resources and work together with other local, State, Tribal, or national efforts. Any cost share above and beyond the cost share requirement can help support the application.
- Serve areas that include distressed low-income rural or urban communities with areas of persistent poverty. These areas should have significant opportunities for high impact investment, as

demonstrated by a "distressed "or "at-risk" score on the Distressed Communities Index (DCI) developed by the Economic Innovation Group.

- Involve multiple entities and partners, even if such partners are not located within the defined region of the partnership.

Applicants are not required to meet these priorities to be eligible to apply or receive grant funds. AMS will review and apply priority consideration, based on applicant narrative responses, during its administrative review process. AMS may prioritize partnerships or regions which have not received awards in the recent past.

Contact Us and Learn More!

Please email: IPPGrants@usda.gov for questions related to the Regional Food System Partnership Program

Visit the AMS LAMP Grant Toolkits & Application Support Page for more technical assistance resources.

For additional examples of funded grant projects, visit Seeds of Success or RFSP Funded Awards.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.
Photo Credit: USDA