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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE**

**Fiscal Year 2015 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
Process and Technology Improvement Grants**

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

CFDA#: 10.580

DATES:

RFA Release Date: xx/xx/2015

Application Submission Date: 11:59 EDT xx/xx/2015

Award Date: By September 30, 2015

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I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

Section 11(t), Grants for Simple Application and Eligibility Determination Systems and Improved Access to Benefits, of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, authorizes the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to award up to \$5 million annually in grants to State agencies*; public health or educational entities; or private nonprofit entities, such as community-based or faith-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations, for projects aimed at simplifying the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application and eligibility determination systems or improving access to SNAP benefits by eligible households.

THIS SOLICITATION IS CONTINGENT UPON THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS.

*** Throughout this RFA the term “State agencies” refers to the agencies of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Guam that administer SNAP.**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this grant competition is to support efforts by State agencies and their community-based and faith-based partners to develop and implement:

- Simple SNAP application and eligibility determination systems; or
- Measures to improve access to SNAP benefits by eligible applicants.

This RFA seeks diverse proposals that would make the entire process easier and more efficient for applicants and participants.

Grant proposals should focus on improving the quality and efficiency of operations and processes within the SNAP office. Specifically, FNS is interested in initiatives that use new technologies or examine office processes in order to improve application processing timeliness for initial applications or re-certifications.

We encourage potential applicants to carefully read the five review criteria listed in the RFA. These criteria outline the qualities FNS expects successful proposals to have; they will also guide the reviewers' evaluation of proposals.

Fiscal Year 2015 Priorities

The grant competition described in this RFA specifically encourages applicants respond to the three priorities described below.

1. Workflow Analysis and Process Management

With rising caseloads, low staffing levels, and diminished funding, State agencies need to examine office processes and identify and implement efficiencies to meet the increased demands of administering SNAP. FNS is interested in funding projects that examine office processes and identify and implement efficiencies, for example, through specialization of tasks, caseload sharing, or other such initiatives. These projects can include partnerships with vendors or contractors on business process re-engineering (BPR) techniques or train-the-trainer programs to achieve efficiencies. FNS also encourages projects with partnerships with private non-profit organizations (such as food banks or other non-profits) to review and re-engineer SNAP business processes. FNS will fund the costs of conducting a BPR process analysis on local office procedures as well as the costs of implementing efficiencies that are identified through a BPR process. Using BPR, State agencies have identified and implemented approaches to achieve office efficiencies such as: creating a two-track triage team for low-risk and higher-risk applications; forming paperwork and processing teams or maintenance teams for handling case re-certifications and changes; using specialized case workers, who focus on complicated policy areas, such as immigration; establishing specialized units to focus exclusively on verifying documents so caseworkers have time for interviews and customers can get in and out of the office quickly. States have contracted with vendors/contractors for document verification using data matching that provide faster and more complete verification information. For this priority, the proposal should focus on one or more local offices as opposed to the State agency.

2. Technology Improvements

In response to today's challenges, FNS supports technological strategies that can improve client services and save States valuable time and money. To that end, FNS is interested in funding projects that use technology to achieve procedural changes (such as electronic application filing, document imaging, telephone interviews, web-based access to case status information) to simplify the enrollment process, facilitate reporting requirements and improve client retention. We invite proposals that allow workers to spend less time on data entry, reduce the number of telephone calls (especially about simple matters such as case status), or result in fewer documents lost (for example through document imaging). Technology can reach populations that have difficulty visiting the local offices and thereby improve access. For example, some States have service centers or kiosks with computers and internet access so clients can apply for benefits or check the status of their applications if they do not have access to a personal computer. This may lead to increased access because State agencies can identify potentially eligible participants and decrease the amount of staff time necessary for each case. Other technological strategies include, but are not limited to: increased phone capacities, call centers, real-time data access services, and online-case access/status for clients. Implementation of technological strategies can be a result of a BPR process as described above.

3. Process and Communication Improvements to Decrease Churning

“Churning” is defined as when a household exits SNAP and then re-enters the program within 4 months. Churning is a policy concern due to the financial and administrative burden incurred by both the SNAP households and SNAP State agencies. An FNS study, *Understanding the Rates, Causes, and Costs of Churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, estimated that the rate of churn ranged from 17 to 28% across the six study States, based on Fiscal Year 2011 data. About a third of households that churned were off the program for less than 1 month and more than half of churners were likely to have been eligible for SNAP during the time they were not participating. We invite proposals that address the causes and costs associated with churn by identifying and implementing process and communication improvement actions to reduce churn. A process improvement action such as allowing electronic signatures can reduce the burden of clients establishing their eligibility in order to remain on the program. Communication improvement actions such as improved mailings and notification processes for recertification and improved customer service call centers may help avoid delays and issues in the agency-client communications. Implementation of strategies to reduce churning can also result from successful implementation of BPR strategies as part of larger modernization efforts. More information regarding the churning study is available online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/understanding-rates-causes-and-costs-churning-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

FUNDING AND DURATION

Up to \$5 million is available in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 for the SNAP Process and Technology Improvement Grants. FNS will award the grants through a competitive process. FNS plans to announce the grant awards to the selected grantees no later than September 30, 2015. Grantees will be allowed to use the grant funds for the duration of the project period. The grants will be funded for the period September 30, 2015, through August 31, 2018.

FNS reminds applicants that the submission of a proposal does not guarantee funding. Funding for approved grants will be provided through the Grant Award/Letter of Credit process, in the same manner as other funds, upon receipt of a properly executed Grant Agreement and subject to the availability of funding. All SNAP Process and Technology Improvement Grant funds must be obligated and all activities under the Grant must be completed by August 31, 2018.

If the activities funded under this grant are part of a larger eligibility system project with total projected costs exceeding \$5 million, an Advance Planning Document (APD) must be submitted and approved prior to the expenditure of these grant funds. Guidance on the APD process can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/apd/. Applicants also need to be reminded that if the proposed project funded with this grant benefits other programs in addition to SNAP then the costs must be allocated appropriately between all of the benefiting programs. This grant funding can only be used for SNAP’s share of the costs. The anticipated number of awards range from 6 to 11.

Funding per Award

Funding per award is dependent on the number of awards granted. It is anticipated that funding per award can range from a low of \$20,000 to a high of \$2,000,000.

Type of Award

These projects will be awarded in the form of a Federal grant.

Procurement Contracts

Procurement contracts may be awarded under this grant project.

Allowable Uses of Funds

Funds from this RFA are for new projects and shall not be used for the ongoing cost of carrying out an existing project. Also, FNS reserves the right to request information on all contractual awards and costs after the award of the grantee's contract. Furthermore, projects predicated on waiving SNAP regulations are not allowable and will not be considered for funding. However, if during the grant period, a State agency determines a waiver is needed, the State may apply for one but there is no guarantee FNS will approve the waiver.

SNAP Process and Technology Improvement Grants do not support projects that devote more than 25 percent of the requested grant funds to outreach activities, such as informational materials, pure application assistance, screening/pre-qualifying applicants, or whose purpose is to attract SNAP applicants.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**Eligible Entities**

The entities eligible to receive grants under this competition are:

- The 53 State agencies that administer the SNAP¹;
- State or local governments¹;
- Agencies providing health or welfare services²;
- Public health or educational entities²; and
- Private non-profit entities² such as community-based or faith-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations.

¹ **State agencies and State and local governments should have the necessary approvals of state officials (such as councils or legislatures) of funding prior to submitting the**

application. Applicants should also acknowledge in their application that all necessary approvals for funding have been obtained.

² **Non-profit organizations are required to submit a copy of the IRS Determination Letter, form 501(c)(3) or proof of application for exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, a list of their Board of Directors if applicable, and their most recent audited financial statements signed by the Treasurer or the Treasurer of the board. Educational entities are also required to submit their most recent financial statements signed by the Treasurer or Treasurer of the board. Applications submitted without these will be considered non-responsive and eliminated from consideration. All corporations, including non-profit corporations are required to complete the attached representation regarding felony convictions and tax delinquency.**

Cost Sharing or Matching

There is no cost sharing or matching required to participate in this grant project.

Other Eligibility Criteria

Limitations on the Number of Applications

FNS has designed this grant competition to give State agencies control over the submission of applications involving their operations via the mechanism of “Letters of Commitment or Endorsement.” If State agencies submit more than one application each, or enter into more than one partnership each, FNS encourages them to make explicit in each application its relationship to any others. State agencies that submit more than one application should consider carefully the allocation of time stated in each application. State agencies with more than one partner organization may wish to consider submitting a single application designed to make sub-grants to the partner organizations. Proposals forwarded by any given State agency should request funding for distinct, non-overlapping activities.

Responsiveness Criteria

The complete application must be uploaded to www.grants.gov by **11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on xx/xx/2015**. Applications received after the deadline date will be deemed ineligible and will not be reviewed or considered. USDA will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. USDA will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Applicants may request paper copy of this solicitation and required forms by contacting the FNS Grants Officer at:

Kimberly Shields, Grant Officer
Grants and Fiscal Policy Division
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS
3101 Park Center Drive Room 740

Alexandra, VA 22302
E-mail: Kimberly.Shields@fns.usda.gov

2. Content and form of application submission:

Suggested format to describe project:

For ease of review, we ask that project descriptions be similarly organized under the headings below. ***Please be as clear and concise as possible when writing your proposal.***

To maximize your score, be sure to include all information required under these headings as specified under the heading ***Technical Evaluation Criteria and Weight*** beginning on page 13 of the RFA.

Executive Summary

Table of Contents

1. Soundness or Merit of Project Design
2. Budget Appropriateness and Economic Efficiency
3. Organizational Experience, Staff Capability and Management
4. Implementation and Evaluation

FNS strongly encourages eligible applicants interested in applying to this program to adhere to the following applicant format. The proposed project plan should be typed on 8 ½" X 11" white paper with at least 1 inch margins on the top and bottom. All pages should be single-spaced, in 12 point font. The project description with relevant information should be captured on no more than 25 pages, not including the cover sheet, table of contents, resumes, letter of commitment(s), endorsement letter(s), budget narrative(s), appendices, and required forms. All pages, excluding the form pages, must be numbered.

3. Required Grant Application Forms:

All applicants must complete the following forms:

The following grants.gov forms are required of grant applicants. They are located at http://www.grants.gov/agencies/aforms_repository_information.jsp:

The following required OMB forms can be obtained at: <https://apply07.grants.gov/apply/FormsMenu?source=agency>

(A) Non-Construction Grant Projects Forms: SF-424 Family

1. Application and Instruction for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
2. Budget Information and Instruction (SF-424A)

3. Assurance-Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)

SF LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities): Indicate on the form whether your organization intends to conduct lobbying activities. If your organization does not intend to lobby, write “Not Applicable.”

Special Instructions

Letters of Commitment or Endorsement

FNS recognizes that the grant proposals responding to this RFA will directly affect State agency operations. Therefore, if the grant proposal is from an entity other than a State agency, it must show that a State agency strongly endorses or is involved in the proposed project in order to be considered.

Please refer to the two types of letters described below to determine which is appropriate to submit with the proposal. Please note that State agencies are able to submit an application on their own as well as partner with another organization. Please refer to the section above on Number of Applications. Applications submitted without a letter of commitment or a letter of endorsement will be considered non-responsive and eliminated from consideration. FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received. Therefore, applicants must include the letter of commitment or letter of endorsement with their application package to be considered for funding. Such letters may be addressed to the FNS Grant Officer.

A Letter of Commitment is required if the grant proposal is from a State agency working in partnership with another organization(s). The letter(s) of commitment must describe:

- the organization’s role in the project,
- the amount of time it intends to commit to the project and an attestation that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project, and
- must be provided on the respective organization’s letterhead and be signed by an authorizing individual.

A Letter of Endorsement is required if an applicant is not partnering with a State agency. The State agency’s letter of endorsement must:

- explain that the State agency is aware of the projected impact on its system and is supportive of the proposed project, and
- be on the respective State agency’s letterhead and be signed by an authorizing official.

Electronic Submission: The complete application must be uploaded to www.grants.gov by **11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on xx/xx/2015**. Applications received after the deadline date will be deemed ineligible and will not be reviewed or considered. USDA will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. USDA will not accept mailed,

faxed, or hand-delivered applications. Please allow sufficient time to complete your application package and ensure the package is uploaded through the www.grants.gov web portal.

Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and System for Award Management (SAM)

Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) Number

In order to submit an application via grants.gov, applicants must have obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered in both the new Systems for Award Management (SAM) and on grants.gov. The applicant is strongly advised to allow ample time to initiate the grants.gov application submission process. Please visit the following websites to obtain additional information on how to obtain a DUNS number (www.dnb.com) and register in SAM (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>).

DUNS Number: In order to obtain a DUNS number, if your organization does not have one, or if you are unsure of your organization's number you can contact Dun and Bradstreet via the internet at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-888-814-1435, Monday thru Friday, 8am-9pm EST. There is no fee associated with obtaining a DUNS number. Obtaining a DUNS number may take several days to obtain.

System for Award Management (SAM)

What is SAM?

The System for Award Management (SAM) is combining Federal procurement systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance into one new system.

For additional information regarding SAM see the following link:

https://www.acquisition.gov/SAM_Guides/Quick%20Guide%20for%20Grants%20Registrations%20v1.pdf

Below is some additional information that should assist the applicant through this process:

SAM Registration: For applicant organizations that were previously registered in the CCR, relevant applicant information is already in SAM; set up a SAM account as necessary to update any information. To register in SAM, the applicant's DUNS number, Tax ID Number (TIN), and taxpayer name (as it appears on the applicant's last tax return) are all required. SAM verifies all information submitted by the applicant using several systems. This verification takes at least **48 hours** after your registration is submitted to SAM. Applicants must have a valid SAM registration no later than 3 days prior to the application due date of this solicitation. **Applicants that do not receive confirmation that SAM registration is complete and active should contact SAM at:** <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list>.

SAM Presentation/Training: GSA has created a presentation of a SAM training. To view the presentation, please visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmHcKCchaiY>

This will be extremely useful for SAM users that are:

- Registering at SAM for the first time
- Setting up user permissions from CCR into the SAM registration (called migrating)
- Updating / renewing CCR record in SAM

PLEASE BE AWARE: In some instances the process to complete the migration of permissions and/or the renewal of the entity record will require **5-7 days or more**. We strongly encourage grantees to begin the process at least **3 weeks before** the due date of the grant solicitation.

Grants.gov Registration: In order to apply for a grant, your organization must have completed the above registrations as well as register on Grants.gov. The Grants.gov registration process can be accessed at www.grants.govapplicants/get_reistered.jsp. Generally, the registration process takes between **3-5 business days**.

Allow your entity ample time to complete the necessary steps, for the submission of your grant application package, on grants.gov. Please allow sufficient time to complete your application package and ensure the package is uploaded through the www.grants.gov web portal.

Please be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices; applicants should ensure receipt of confirmation that the application was accepted.

NOTICE: Special Characters not Supported

All applicants **MUST** follow grants.gov guidance on file naming conventions. To avoid submission issues, please follow the guidance provided in the grants.gov Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

Are there restrictions on file names for any attachment I include with my application package?

File attachment names longer than approximately 50 characters can cause problems processing packages. Please limit file attachment names. Also, do not use any special characters (example: &, -, *, %, /, #, ', -), this includes periods (.), spacing followed by a dash in the file and for word separation, use underscore (example: Attached_File.pdf) in naming the attachments. **Please note that if these guidelines are not followed, your application will be rejected. FNS will not accept any application rejected from www.grants.gov portal due to incorrect naming conventions.**

In order to submit an application via grants.gov, applicants must have obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered in both the new Systems for Award Management (SAM) and on grants.gov. The applicant is strongly advised to allow ample time to initiate the grants.gov application submission process. All applicants must have current Central Contractor Registry (CCR) status at the time of application submission and throughout the duration of a federal award in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25. Please visit the following websites to obtain additional information on how to obtain a DUNS number (www.dnb.com) and register in SAM (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>).

Please be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices; you need to be sure that you have confirmation that the application was accepted.

1. Submission Dates and Times

APPLICATION DUE DATE: The complete application must be uploaded on www.grants.gov by **11:59 PM, Eastern Time on xx/xx/2015**. Applications received after the deadline date will be deemed ineligible and will not be reviewed or considered. FNS will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. FNS will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications. Please allow sufficient time to complete your application package and ensure the package is uploaded through the www.grants.gov web portal. All applications must be submitted through the grants.gov web portal.

Applicants experiencing difficulty submitting applications to www.grants.gov should contact the grants officer listed above, or the grants.gov support team, for further instructions.

2. Intergovernmental Review (if applicable)

This funding opportunity may be subject to the requirements of EO 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs". This Executive Order was issued with the desire to foster the intergovernmental partnership and strengthen federalism by relying on State and local processes for the coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance and direct Federal development. The Order allows each State to designate an entity to perform this function.

If you are located within a State that does not have a SPOC, you may send application materials directly to a Federal awarding agency.

For a list of State agency contacts, please visit the Office of Management website at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc/

3. Funding Restrictions

Pre-award cost will not be awarded for this grant project. Projects predicated on waiving SNAP regulations are not allowable and will not be considered for funding. However, if during the grant period, a State agency determines a waiver is needed, the State may apply for one but there is no guarantee FNS will approve the waiver.

SNAP Process and Technology Improvement Grants do not support projects that devote more than 25% of the requested grant funds to outreach activities, such as informational materials, pure application assistance, screening/prequalifying applicants, or whose purpose is to attract or recruit SNAP applicants.

4. Other Submission Requirements

Electronic Submission: The complete application must be uploaded to www.grants.gov by **11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on xx/xx/2015**. Applications received after the deadline date will be deemed ineligible and will not be reviewed or considered. USDA will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. USDA will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications. Please allow sufficient time to complete your application package and ensure the package is uploaded through the www.grants.gov web portal. All applications must be submitted through the grants.gov web portal.

Applicants experiencing difficulty submitting applications to www.grants.gov should contact the grants officer listed above, or the grants.gov support team, for further instructions.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Review Criteria

FNS will screen all applications that meet the published deadline for submission to ensure their completeness and conformity to the requirements of this announcement. **Application packages are required to be complete upon submission. FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received under any circumstances.** Applications that are fully responsive to the initial screening requirements will be reviewed competitively and scored based upon the five evaluation criteria and weights listed below. One or more review panels may be comprised of United States Department of Agriculture staff, other federal agency staff, and other individuals committed to furthering the goals of the SNAP. The review panel will evaluate each grant application on how well it addresses each grant evaluation criteria. The resulting scores will provide a ranking of applications according to technical merit for use by selecting official.

Technical Evaluation Criteria and Weights

1. Soundness or Merit of Project Design (40 points)_

Problem analysis: The proposal is included and clearly describes the problem to be solved and provides evidence that the proposed approach is well-suited to solve the identified issue.

Impact:

- The proposal demonstrates a direct effect on the SNAP process and provides evidence that the changes would benefit the applicant/recipient.
- It shows a clear progression from idea to practice in a State agency or County office.
- It describes the impact the project is expected to make. Impact can be described in terms of the degree of improvement applicants/participants are expected to experience while going through the application/certification process, the percentage of a State agency's or County office's participant caseload that is expected to benefit, or the size of positive impact on a specific population, such as elderly applicants.

Quality: The proposal shows thought, analysis, clarity, and the use of relevant facts and knowledge.

Sustainability: The proposal shows that the project has the potential to be transferred successfully to other State agencies or statewide and that the project has the potential to be sustained after the grant period ends.

Letters of Commitment or Endorsement: The application includes letters of commitment or endorsement that clearly outline either the State's endorsement or partnership by following the guidelines found on page 6 of this RFA.

Innovation: The application proposes innovative development of new or revised State or County SNAP application processing or certification systems, or portions thereof.

Feasibility: The application proposes projects that are capable of being accomplished and likely to be implemented.

2. Budget Appropriateness and Economic Efficiency (25 points)

Budget: The proposal includes:

- A line item budget **See Attachment C - Application Package Checklist to assure each category is addressed in the budget.**
- A narrative that demonstrates how funds will be spent, by whom and for what purpose
- The narrative should provide enough detail for reviewers to easily understand how costs were determined and how they relate to the goals and objectives of the project. **There should be adequate justification for budget costs based on current industry costs/standards. Information on costs should be obtained from applicable organizations or from online sources.**
- Additionally, a copy of the approved negotiated indirect cost rate agreement must be attached if indirect costs are shown as a budget expense to the project.
- If applicable, the budget must show how the costs are allocated among the benefiting programs and demonstrate that this grant is only going to fund SNAP's share.
- If desired, a tiered budget and narrative that describes adjustments the applicant would make if it were awarded funding at different levels (only the primary budget will be analyzed against this criterion).
- All non-profit organizations must include their 501(c)(3) determination letter issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Efficiency: The proposal is cost effective – it demonstrates that the anticipated results are commensurate with the cost of the project.

Contractual and Consultant Costs: Proposals who wish to hire a consultant or contract work out must provide the following information.

Consultants name and description of service

- Itemized list of all direct costs and fees
- Salaries must have the number of personnel including the position title
- Specialty and specialized qualifications as appropriate to the salary
- Number of estimated hours times hourly wage

- All expenses and fees directly related to the proposed services to be rendered to the project

Applicants that are required to issue a bid should provide a narrative explaining the requirement and provide a reasonable estimate of Contractual and Consultant Costs.

NOTE: Proposal submissions which omit the required budget forms, budget narratives and/or line item descriptions will not receive the full point value for this criterion. Therefore, applicants should recognize that a well-written budget narrative which justifies the proposed project expenditures assists the reviewers during the review process.

3. Organizational Experience, Staff Capability and Management (15 points)

Credibility: The proposal establishes the applying organization's credibility and capabilities.

Oversight: The proposal demonstrates that effective and consistent oversight by qualified project managers will be implemented throughout the project.

Communication: The proposal demonstrates that effective communication will exist within the organization and, if applicable, with partnering organizations. The proposal includes an organizational chart of the proposed project.

Staff: The proposal identifies the project director or manager and other key staff. The proposal includes resumes that demonstrate that the proposed staff has the appropriate technical and experiential backgrounds for their proposed roles. If the applicant is unable to identify the project director or manager and key staff, it must include with the application package job descriptions for positions that must be advertised. Applicants should address their contingency or back-up plans in the event of key staff departures.

Time Commitment: The proposal outlines the amount of time and effort the project director or manager, key staff, and, if applicable, partnering organizations, will contribute to the project.

4. Implementation and Evaluation (15 points)

Timeline: The proposal includes a project timeline that outlines proposed tasks and demonstrates that sufficient time is allotted for each activity.

Evaluation: The proposal describes a well-thought-out, organized review and evaluation process that will measure whether the goals of the project have been met. The evaluation should focus on measuring the impact the project seeks to make. Please be sure to include information on who will measure the goals of the project, how the goals will be measured, when the goals will be measured and what the organization will be measuring.

5. Presentation (5 points)

Quality: The application is well-presented, well-written and void of grammatical errors.

Format: The application is single-sided, on 8½ by 11 inch paper. Type size is at least 12 point and margins are at least one inch. The project follows the suggested format. The application must not exceed 25 pages, including attachments such as resumes, and budget, but excluding mandatory forms and certifications (i. e. SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, SF LLL,)). The proposal must include the cover letter followed by the table of contents with page numbers and in the order prescribed below. All pages, excluding the form pages, must be numbered.

2. Review and Selection Process

Following the initial screening process, FNS will assemble a peer panel group to review and determine the technical merits of each application. The peer panel will evaluate the proposals based on how well they address the required application components. The peer panel members will recommend applications for consideration for a grant award based on the evaluation scoring. The selecting official reserves the right to award a grant to meet agency priorities, program balance, geographical representation, or project diversity.

The selecting official will consider the panel recommendations. In general, awards will be based on rank funding order. However, **FNS reserves the right to fund out of rank order to achieve agency priorities (such as to grant an award to an entity that includes a joint effort between a State agency and a community-based or faith-based organization, demographic, or socioeconomic diversity, etc.)**. If the panel review indicates that FNS has received few or no technically acceptable proposals, the selecting official may determine that FNS will make no awards, or commit less than the \$5 million set aside for this purpose.

As mentioned above, FNS is interested in funding projects that address priorities areas specified on pages 3 – 5 of this RFA. However, FNS reserves the right to award grants to several such entities, or not to award any grants to such entities if it does not receive acceptable applications.

3. Anticipated Announcement and Federal Award Dates

FNS will notify selected State agencies or organizations in writing in September 2015. Funding of applications will be provided through the grant award/letter of credit process upon receipt of a properly executed grant agreement and subject to the availability of funding. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) expects to make funds available to the grantee in advance of need.

4. Debriefing Requests

Non-selected applicants may request a debriefing to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of submitted proposals. This information may be useful when preparing future grant proposals. Additional information on debriefing requests will be forwarded to non-selected applicants.

VI. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

1. Federal Award Notice

Unless an applicant receives a signed award document with terms and conditions; any contact from a FNS grants or program officer should not be considered as a notice of a grant award. No pre-award or pre-agreement costs incurred prior to the effective start date are allowed unless approved and stated on FNS' signed award document.

The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of this RFA. Only the recognized FNS authorized signature can bind the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service to the expenditure of funds related to an award's approved budget.

2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

CONFIDENTIALITY OF AN APPLICATION

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of FNS transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. Any application that does not result in an award will be not released to the public. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

The agency requires all panel reviewers to sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the application review and evaluation process. Names of applicants, including States and tribal governments, submitting an application will be kept private, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of the reviewers will remain private throughout the entire process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Federal Tax Liabilities Restrictions

None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax

liability, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

Felony Crime Conviction Restrictions

None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that was convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

Debarment and Suspension 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417

A recipient chosen for an award shall comply with the non-procurement debarment and suspension common rule implementing Executive Orders (E.O.) 12549 and 12669, "Debarment and Suspension," codified at 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417. This common rule restricts sub-awards and contracts with certain parties that are debarred, suspended or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in Federal assistance programs or activities. The approved grant recipient will be required to ensure that all sub-contractors and sub-grantees are neither excluded nor disqualified under the suspension and debarment rules prior to approving a sub-grant award by checking the System for Award Management (SAM) at www.sam.gov.

Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration 2 CFR Part 25

Effective October 1, 2010, all grant applicants must obtain a Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number as a universal identifier for Federal financial assistance. Active grant recipients and their direct sub-recipients of a sub-grant award also must obtain a DUNS number. To request a DUNS number visit: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>.

The grant recipient must also register its DUNS number in the new Systems for Award Management (SAM). If you were registered in the CCR, your company's information is already in SAM and you will just need to set up a SAM account. To register in SAM you will need your entity's DUNS and your entity's Tax ID Number (TIN) and taxpayer name (as it appears on your last tax return). Registration should take **3-5 days**. If you do not receive confirmation that your SAM registration is complete, please contact SAM at <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list>.

FNS may not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with the requirements described in 2 CFR 25 to provide a valid DUNS number and maintain an active SAM registration with current information.

Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information 2 CFR Part 170

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 (Public Law 109–282), as amended by Section 6202 of Public Law 110–252 requires primary grantees of Federal grants and cooperative agreements to report information on sub-grantee obligations and executive compensation. FFATA promotes open government by enhancing the Federal Government’s accountability for its stewardship of public resources. This is accomplished by making Government information, particularly information on Federal spending, accessible to the general public.

Primary grantees, including State agencies, are required to report actions taken on or after October 1, 2010, that obligates \$25,000 or more in Federal grant funds to first-tier sub-grantees. This information must be reported in the Government-wide FFATA Sub-Award Reporting System (FSRS). In order to access FSRS a current CCR registration is required. A primary grantee and first-tier sub-grantees must also report total compensation for each of its five most-highly compensated executives. Every primary and first-tier grantee must obtain a DUNS number prior to being eligible to receive a grant or sub-grant award. Additional information will be provided to grant recipients upon award.

Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2009, Public Law 110-417

Section 872 of this Act requires the development and maintenance of a Federal Government information system that contains specific information on the integrity and performance of covered Federal agency contractors and grantees. The Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) was developed to address these requirements. FAPIIS contains integrity and performance information from the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System, information from the CCR database, and suspension and debarment information from the EPLS. FNS will review and consider any information about the applicant reflected in FAPIIS when making a judgment about whether an applicant is qualified to receive an award.

CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

This grant will be awarded and administered in accordance with the following regulations 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subtitle A, Chapter II. Any Federal laws, regulations, or USDA directives released after this RFA is posted will be implemented as instructed.

Government-wide Regulations

- 2 CFR Part 25: “Universal Identifier and Central Locator Contractor Registration”
- 2 CFR Part 170: “Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information”
- 2 CFR Part 175: “Award Term for Trafficking in Persons”
- 2 CFR Part 180: “OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-Procurement)”
- 2 CFR Part 200: “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”

- 2 CFR Part 400: USDA’s implementing regulation of 2 CFR Part 200 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”
- 2 CFR Part 415: USDA “General Program Administrative Regulations”
- 2 CFR Part 416: USDA “General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments”
- 2 CFR Part 417: USDA “Implementation of OMB Guidance on Non-Procurement Debarment and Suspension”
- 2 CFR Part 418 USDA “New Restrictions on Lobbying”
- 2 CFR Part 421: USDA “Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)”
- 41 U.S.C. Section 22 “Interest of Member of Congress”
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public access to Federal Financial Assistance records shall not be limited, except when such records must be kept confidential and would have been excepted from disclosure pursuant to the “Freedom of Information” regulation (5 U.S.C. 552)

General Terms and Conditions of the award may be obtained electronically. Please contact the Grants Officer at:

Kimberly Shields
Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS
3101 Park Center Drive Room 740
Alexandra, VA 22301
E-mail: Kimberly.Shields@fns.usda.gov

3. Reporting

FINANCIAL REPORTING

The award recipient will be required to enter the SF-425, Financial Status Report data into the FNS Food Program Reporting System (FPRS) on a quarterly basis. In order to access FPRS, the grant recipient must obtain USDA e-authentication certification and access to FPRS. More detailed instructions for reporting will be included in the FNS Federal financial assistance award package.

PROGRESS REPORTING

Quarterly Progress Reports—Quarterly progress reports must be submitted to FNS. These progress reports must provide a description of the activities conducted during the reporting period, major accomplishments with completion dates and budget information, deviations from the proposed plan, difficulties encountered, solutions developed to overcome difficulties, and major planned activities for the next quarter.

The recipient may be required to submit performance/progress reports to FNS using SF-PPR, Periodic Progress Report. These reports are due 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter. More detailed specifications for the quarterly progress report content and submission will be included in the agreement. Any additional reporting requirements will be identified in the award terms and conditions, including results of the grant project.

Final Report— A report of up to 25 pages must be submitted within 90 days of the expiration of the grant period. This report will be composed of a short Executive Summary and the following:

- A project description including a concise summary of the major accomplishments, the difficulties encountered, and the solutions developed to resolve the difficulties; and
- A discussion of the project results and lessons learned.

Copies of any deliverables, media or publicity releases/articles and links to materials on websites also should be included or papers resulting from the grant should be attached to the final report. All products should include an acknowledgement of the source of funding. The Federal awarding agency reserves a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, for Federal Government purposes, the copyright in any work developed under a grant, sub-grant, or contract under a grant or sub-grant or any rights of copyright to which a grantee, sub-grantee, or a contractor purchases ownership with grant support.

VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACT

For questions regarding this solicitation, please contact the Grants Officer at:

Kimberly Shields
Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS
3101 Park Center Drive Room 740
Alexandra, VA 22301
E-mail: Kimberly.Shields@fns.usda.gov

VIII. OTHER INFORMATION

Projects that Include U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Place Based Initiatives

Proposals with projects that include interventions in communities that have been designated USDA Place Based Initiatives may receive priority consideration. The USDA Place Based Initiatives include but are not limited to:

1. **Strike Force for Rural Growth and Opportunity (SF)** – StrikeForce aims to create self-sustaining, long-term economic development in persistent poverty rural communities by increasing investment through intensive outreach and stronger partnership with community leaders, businesses, and foundations. StrikeForce seeks to improve food security by increasing access to safe and nutritious foods.

2. **Promise Zones (PZ)** - Promise Zones are part of the President's plan where the Federal government partners with and invests in selected high-poverty urban, rural, and tribal communities. Promise Zones leverage Federal resources to build up existing local capacity to create jobs, increase economic security, leverage private investment, expand educational opportunities, increase access to quality affordable housing, reduce violent crime and improve public safety.

3. **White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2)** – As part of the President's priority to strengthen the middle class, create jobs, and build ladders of opportunity, SC2 seeks to increase cooperation between community organizations, local leadership, and the federal government. SC2 pairs on the ground Federal inter-agency teams with the Mayor and city leadership to support the community's vision for economic development. These SC2 Teams offer technical assistance and expertise to help leverage existing Federal resources to grow local capacity and stimulate economic growth in distressed areas.

4. **Partnership for Sustainable Communities** - The Partnership for Sustainable Communities works to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution.

5. **Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2)** - KYF2 strengthens the connection between farmers and consumers to better meet critical goals, including reinvigorating rural economies, promoting job growth, and increasing healthy and local food access in America. Through KYF2, USDA integrates programs and policies that stimulate food- and agriculturally-based community economic development, foster new opportunities for farmers and ranchers, and cultivate healthy eating habits and educated consumers.

RFA APPLICATION CHECKLIST

All proposals submitted under this RFA must contain the applicable elements as described in this announcement. The application must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov, by **11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on xx/xx, 2015**. The following checklist has been prepared to assist in ensuring that the proposal is complete and in the proper order prior to submission.

- ✓ Read the RFA carefully, usually more than once.
- ✓ Have you obtained a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered the number in the System for Award Management (SAM)?
- ✓ Have you verified that your Central Contractor Registration is active?
- ✓ Have you registered your entity in grants.gov and are you authorized as a user in grants.gov to submit on behalf of your agency?
- ✓ Have you prepared and submitted the appropriate forms as shown under the Required Grant Applicant Forms section of this RFA?

- ✓ Have you included the RFA CFDA #10.580 on your application?
- ✓ Have you included your contact information: telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address?
- ✓ Have you addressed, met, and considered any program specific requirements or restrictions?
- ✓ Is the project's proposal clearly stated?
 - Does it comply with any format requirements?
 - Does it comply with the page limitation?
 - Most importantly does it directly relate to the RFA's objectives and priorities?
 - Don't assume that reviewers know anything about your organization and its work.
- ✓ Have one or more persons read your proposal who did not participate in its writing and ensure that it was clear to them?
- ✓ Does the proposed project and budget meet the bona fide needs of the RFA?
- ✓ Is the budget summary included?
 - Does it agree with the calculations shown on the OMB budget form?
 - Is the budget in line with the project description?
- ✓ Be sure to submit a timely application into www.Grants.gov in order to meet the RFA application deadline.
- ✓ FNS reserves the right to request additional information not clearly addressed in the initial application.

Tips for Proposal Writers

The Soundness or Merit of Project Design section of the application is your opportunity to convince reviewers that your project meets the selection criteria. Below are some general recommendations to help you present your project in a way the reviewers will find compelling and persuasive.

- Read the RFA carefully and more than once.
- State clearly in your executive summary if your application addresses the FY 2015 Priorities.
- Use the five review criteria to structure your proposal correctly.
- Follow the instructions and discuss each criterion in the order they are presented in the instructions. Use headings to differentiate narrative sections by criterion.
- Be clear and succinct. Reviewers are not interested in jargon, boilerplate, rhetoric, or exaggeration. They are interested in learning precisely what you intend to do, and how your project responds to the selection criteria.
- Make sure budget figures are consistent across displays and narratives.
- Avoid circular reasoning. The problem you describe should not be defined as the lack of the solution you are proposing.
- Explain how. Avoid simply stating that the criteria will be met. Explicitly describe how the proposed project will meet the criteria.
- Don't make assumptions. Do not assume your reviewers know anything about your organization, your proposed program, or your partners. Avoid overuse of acronyms.

RFA BUDGET NARRATIVE CHECKLIST

This checklist will assist you in completing the budget narrative portion of the application. Please review the checklist to ensure the items below are addressed in the budget narrative.

NOTE: The budget and budget narrative must be in line with the proposal project description (statement of work) bona fide need. FNS reserves the right to request information not clearly addressed.

	YES	NO
Personnel		
Did you include all key employees paid for by this grant under this heading?		
Are employees of the applicant's organization identified by name and position title?		
Did you reflect percentage of time the Project Director will devote to the project in full-time equivalents (FTE)?		
Fringe Benefits		
Did you include your organization's fringe benefit amount along with the basis for the computation?		
Did you list the type of fringe benefits to be covered with Federal funds?		
Travel		
Are travel expenses itemized? For example origination/destination points, number and purpose of trips, number of staff traveling, mode of transportation and cost of each trip.		
Are the Attendee Objectives and travel justifications included in the narrative?		
Is the basis for the lodging estimates identified in the budget? For example include excerpt from travel regulations.		
Equipment		

Is the need for the equipment justified in the narrative?		
Are the types of equipment, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased listed in the budget?		
Is the basis for the cost per item or other basis of computation stated in the budget?		
Supplies		
Are the types of supplies, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased reflected in the budget?		
Is the basis for the costs per item or other basis of computation stated?		
Contractual: (FNS reserves the right to request information on all contractual awards and associated costs after the contract is awarded.)		
Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost for a contract or sub-grant expense(s) shown on the budget?		
A justification for all Sole-source contracts must be provided in the budget narrative prior to approving this identified cost.		
Other		
Consultant Services. – Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost shown on the budget. The following information must be provided in the justification: description of service, the consultant’s name and an itemized list of all direct cost and fees, number of personnel including the position title (specialty and specialized qualifications as appropriate to the costs), Number of estimated hours X hourly wages, and all expenses and fees directly related to the proposed services to be rendered to the project.		
For all other line items listed under the “Other” heading. - List all items to be covered under this heading along with the methodology on how the applicant derived the costs to be charged to the program.		

Indirect Costs		
Has the applicant obtained a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) from an Federal Agency? If yes, a copy of the most resent and signed negotiated rate agreement must be provided along with the application.		
If no negotiated agreement exists, the basis and the details of the indirect costs to be requested should also be reflected in the budget.		

FOR GRANT APPLICANT USE ONLY. DO NOT RETURN THIS FORM WITH THE APPLICATION