



Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program

Fiscal Year 2021 Request for Applications

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-FSMIP-G-21-0004

Publication Date: March 23, 2021

Application Due Date: May 24, 2021 - 11:59 PM Eastern Time

Program Solicitation Information

Funding Opportunity Title: Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP)

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-FSMIP-G-21-0004

Announcement Type: Initial

Assistance Listing Number (formerly CFDA): [10.156](#)

Dates: Applications must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time, May ____, 2021 through [Grants.gov](#). Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Executive Summary: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP). AMS will competitively award matching grants to eligible applicants for projects that explore new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products and encourage research and innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of the U.S. marketing system.

It is anticipated that approximately \$1 million will be available in total to fund applications under this solicitation. The final amount available is subject to Congressional action. The maximum award is \$250,000. In the FY 2020 application cycle, AMS received 24 applications and funded 6 (25%) of the applications. As such, to be competitive, applications must be complete and of high quality.

Funding will be available for use beginning September 30, 2021. A \$1 for \$1 match, in the form of cash or in-kind resources, is required.

This announcement provides information about the eligibility criteria for applicants and projects and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an award.

AMS encourages applications intended to serve, smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. For projects intending to serve these audiences, applicants should engage and involve those beneficiaries when developing projects and applications.

Stakeholder Input: AMS seeks your comments about this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA. Email written stakeholder comments within six months of the publication date of this RFA to: AMSGrants@usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are commenting on the **Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program RFA**.

2021 Highlights and Changes

The RFA and [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) were updated to reflect current changes in the Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR § 200](#)).

Application Checklist

AMS requests that applicants read the entire RFA prior to submitting their application to ensure that they understand the program's requirements.

The application checklist below provides the required and conditionally required documents for an application package.

FSMIP requires that **all application packages** include the following:

- SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (in Grants.gov)

The following required application components must be combined into one PDF in the order listed below.

- Project Narrative
 - Must use required template
 - Executive summary supports project goals and objectives, and is no longer than 250 words
 - Ensure it does not exceed the page limit specified in Section 4.2.2
 - Ensure project excludes unallowable costs and activities per Section 4.6.4
- Fiscal Plan and Resources
- Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations
- Personnel Qualifications
- Verification of Matching Funds Letter for EACH Cash or In-kind Resource

When applicable, application packages may be required to include the following documents:

- Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) (PDF Attachment)

Timing to Obtain and Submit Grants.gov Required Elements

Required Action	Timing to Obtain/Submit
AMS Deadline to receive final application and all supporting materials	May 24, 2021– 11:59 p.m. [Eastern Time]
Obtaining Your Organization's DUNS Number (if you do not already have one)	1-2 business days
Establishing an Active SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Obtaining a TIN/EIN (if you do not already have one)	Up to 2 weeks
Creating your Grants.gov Profile and Registering Your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) Authorization	Up to 2 weeks

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1.0 FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

1.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) is authorized by section 204(b) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 ([7 U.S.C. § 1623\(b\)](#)).

1.2 PURPOSE

To explore new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products, and encourage research and innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of the U.S. agricultural marketing system. FSMIP funds a wide range of applied research projects that address barriers, challenges, and opportunities in marketing, transportation, and distribution of U.S. food and agricultural products domestically and internationally.

1.3 PROJECT TYPES

Applicants must align their proposal to one of the four project types:

- Agricultural Product Distribution (handling, storage, processing, transportation, and distribution)
- Cooperative Development (cooperation among Federal and state agencies, producers, industry organizations, and others in the development and effectuation of research and marketing programs to improve the distribution processes)
- Economic Research to Clarify Marketing Barriers and Opportunities, including regulatory compliance costs
- Agricultural Product Development

AMS acknowledges that projects may align with multiple project types. If a project aligns with more than one project type, the applicant must assign one primary project type and may have multiple secondary project types.

Proposals must have a strong marketing focus, must involve research, and the primary beneficiaries must be agricultural producers and agribusinesses. Additionally, they may address topics dealing with any level of the marketing chain including direct, wholesale, and retail as well as issues of importance at the State, multi-State, or national level. Training or education related proposals must include a research component that tests its effects on the marketing goals.

FSMIP will consider unique smaller-scale proposals that may serve as pilot projects or case studies as models for others. Such proposals must include an objective to analyze opportunities and formulate recommendations regarding how the project could be scaled up or expanded to other regions.

1.3.1 ELIGIBLE PROJECT TOPICS

FSMIP projects can:

- Determine the best methods for processing, preparing for market, packing, handling, transporting, storing, distributing, and marketing agricultural products.

- Determine the costs of marketing agricultural products in their various forms and through various channels.
- Assist in the development of more efficient marketing methods, practices, and facilities to bring about more efficient and orderly marketing, and reduce the price spread between the producer and the consumer.
- Develop and improve standards of quality, condition, quantity, grade, and packaging in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices.
- Eliminate artificial barriers to the free movement of agricultural products in commercial channels.
- Foster new/expanded domestic and foreign markets and new/expanded uses of agricultural products.
- Collect and disseminate marketing information to anticipate and meet consumer requirements, maintain farm income, and balance production and utilization.

1.3.2 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

Projects are not eligible for funding if the proposed activities:

- Are related to construction or purchasing land for use by a non-Federal entity.
- Benefit only one agricultural producer, entity, or individual.
- Depend upon the completion of another project or the receipt of another grant.
- Duplicate activities of a project that has received a Federal award from another Federal award program.

2.0 AWARD INFORMATION

2.1 TYPE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

AMS will use a Grant Agreement to provide a Federal award to successful applicants.

2.2 TYPE OF APPLICATIONS

New application. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in section [5.0 Application Review Information](#).

2.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

It is anticipated that approximately \$1 million will be available to fund applications in FY 2021. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

2.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

AMS expects applicants to complete their projects within the required timeframe. It is acceptable to complete a project before the scheduled performance period end date. However, AMS encourages applicants to take the full grant period to allow ample time to complete projects. The applicant must

indicate the start date and end date on Block 17 of the SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance”. Required project start dates and completion dates are provided below.

Award size varies by project type. Applicants may not request less than or more than the respective minimum/maximum amounts. Applicants must justify the requested funding amounts within the project narrative.

Duration (Months)	Start Date	Completion Date	Minimum Award	Maximum Award
36	September 30, 2021	September 29, 2024	\$50,000	\$250,000

3.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants are state departments of agriculture, state agricultural experiment stations, and other appropriate state agencies from the 50 States, American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- The term “other appropriate state Agency” means a state university, a state college, or a state government entity such as a state department of forestry, natural resources, or energy.
- The terms “state university” and “state college” include land-grant universities and colleges which are defined as institutions of higher education in the United States and designated by a state to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Tribal colleges and universities that became land-grant institutions in 1994, under the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act, as well as other State-run colleges and universities are also eligible.

3.2 PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

An applicant may subcontract or subaward with partners and collaborators. Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirements. Project partners and collaborators do not need to meet these eligibility requirements.

- A *partnership* is a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.
- A *collaborator* is a person or an organization unaffiliated with the applicant that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project and is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Partners and collaborators may be private or public, for-profit or nonprofit entities, including but not limited to:

- New and beginning farmers and ranchers (individuals or entities that have not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participate in the operation);
- Rural enterprises (small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenue);

- Agri-businesses; and
- Local government entities

Applicants are required to show evidence of existing community or industry support and engagement. Applications should demonstrate a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants.

3.3 COST SHARING AND MATCHING

FSMIP requires a \$1-for-\$1 match in the form of cash and/or in-kind non-Federal resources. There is no competitive advantage for an applicant to provide a cost share or match that exceeds the required amount. If the project is selected for funding, any exceeding amount will be considered voluntary and must be documented.

Cost sharing or the required match must be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. Refer to [2 CFR § 200.306](#) for additional Federal requirements and definitions, including the basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions.

In-kind contributions when used as a cost share or match for a grant are generally defined as the value of goods or services provided by a third party for the benefit of the grant program, where no funds transferred hands. These contributions cannot satisfy a cost sharing or matching requirement for this grant program if they are used toward satisfying a match requirement under any other Federal grant agreement to which the applicant is party.

All matching contributions **must be committed or secured** at the time an applicant is recommend for an award. An award will not be issued unless all matching funds over the life of the grant are secured. Additional anticipated matching funds not in place by the time the project commences cannot be counted toward the matching requirement.

Applicants will indicate the total amount of match and how it will specifically align with their requested funding when completing the budget section of the Project Narrative and submit letters or other documentation verifying the match for EACH cash and/or in-kind resource. Refer to section [4.2.5 Matching Funds and Letters of Verification](#) for more information. Indirect costs may count toward the match. Refer to section [4.6.2 Using Indirect Costs for Cost Sharing or Matching](#) for more information.

Applicants cannot use program income (as defined in [2 CFR § 200.1](#)) or any kind of Federal funds as a match or cost share.

4.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

4.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov in response to this RFA. We urge applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see Grants.gov's [Apply for Grants](#) webpage. This RFA contains the information needed to obtain and complete required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about

applying through Grants.gov can be found in section [4.7 Grants.gov Application Submission and Receipt Procedures and Requirements](#).

Applicants can find the opportunity under either the Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) number “10.156,” or the FSMIP Funding Opportunity Number “USDA-AMS-TM-FSMIP-G-20-0004.”

4.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

4.2.1 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Required: Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at Grants.gov. Most information blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or adequately explained in the instructions. However, applicants must use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on form SF-424.

Block	Instructions
#1 Type of Submission	Application
#2 Type of Application	New
#4 through #7	Not required
#8c Organizational DUNS	Applicant DUNS# for the organization submitting the application. See D&B Request a DUNS Number
#8d Address	Enter the organization street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code.
#10 Name of Federal Agency	AMS, USDA
#11 Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (Assistance Listing Number)	10.156
#12 Funding Opportunity Number	USDA-AMS-TM-FSMIP-G-21-0004
#13 Competition Identification Number	Not applicable
#14 Areas Affected by Project	Enter cities, counties, States affected by project.
#15 Descriptive Title of Applicant’s Project	Provide a short description of the project.
#16a Congressional Districts for Applicant	Enter the Congressional district where your main office is located.
#16b Congressional Districts for Program/Project	Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented. Write “All” if the project will be implemented in more than one location.
#17 Proposed Project Start Date and End Date	Start Date: September 30, 2021. End date: September 29, 2024.
#18a Estimated Funding - Federal	Total FSMIP award requested.
#18b – 18f Estimated Funding – Applicant	Enter the amount of match or cost share from the applicant organization and/or other partners.
#19 Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?	See section 4.5 Intergovernmental Review

4.2.2 PROJECT NARRATIVE

Required. The Project Narrative must be submitted as a PDF, attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under form SF-424 item #15. Handwritten applications or

applications in MS Word will not be accepted. The Project Narrative must be typed, single-spaced, in an 11-point font, not to exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages.

Prior to submitting an application to Grants.gov, make sure that it is in final form (e.g., if you used the “track changes” function, accept all changes before submitting so that the mark-up is not visible upon final submission).

The supporting documents listed in the subsequent sections do not count against the 15-page limit for the Project Narrative.

(1) Executive Summary

Include a summary of 250 words or less suitable for dissemination to the public. This summary should include a concise outline of the project’s outcome(s) and description of the general tasks to be completed during the project period to fulfill this goal.

(2) Alignment and Intent

(i) Clearly state the purpose of the project and Project Type identified in section **1.3 Project Types**. Describe the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address in relation to the statutory language of the program ([7 U.S.C. § 1623\(b\)](#)). Include data and/or estimates that describe the extent of the issue, problem, or need.

(ii) List the objectives of the project. The objectives must be related to addressing the issue(s), problem(s), or need(s) mentioned in section (2)(i).

(iii) Provide a description of the benefits that are intended to be achieved as a result of engaging in the activities associated with this project, including the number of affected producers or processors.

(3) Technical Merit

(i) Provide a Work Plan that describes the activities and timeline associated with each project objective. Include the following information for each objective mentioned in the Alignment and Intent section above: a timeline for each activity and major output including the anticipated date of completion; how and where the activities will take place; required resources; milestone(s) for assessing progress and success; the person(s) responsible for completing the activity, including collaborative arrangements or subcontractors; if conducting training and technical assistance, how participants will be recruited; and how you will help guide program development and delivery.

(ii) If the proposed project will be or has been submitted to another federal program for funding, provide the grant program name.

(iii) If the proposed project builds on work previously funded by a federal program, including [AMS grant programs](#), provide the year and grant program name, and describe how the proposed project, if funded, would not duplicate work previously funded by the federal government.

(4) Achievability

(i) Provide at least one distinct, quantifiable, measurable project outcome and associated indicator. If the outcome measures are long-term and occur after the project's completion, identify an intermediate outcome that occurs before, and is expected to help lead to the fulfillment of long-term outcomes.

(ii) For each completed outcome indicator, describe how you derived the numbers, how you intend to measure and achieve each relevant outcome and indicator, and any potential challenges to achieving the estimated targets and action steps for addressing them.

(iii) Describe how you will disseminate the project's results (positive and negative) to similar organizations, stakeholders, and others that may be interested in the project's results or implementing a similar project.

(5) Expertise and Partners

(i) List key staff, including personnel and external project partners and collaborators that comprise the Project Team, their roles, and their relevant experience and past successes in developing and operating projects similar to this project. Ensure that you have included Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations to support the information.

(ii) Describe your management plan for coordinating, communicating, and sharing data and reports among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, both internally to personnel and externally to partners and collaborators.

(iii) Describe how the project, and its partnerships and collaborations, will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds) if the project is expected to extend beyond the grant period.

4.2.3 FISCAL PLAN AND RESOURCES

Required: The Fiscal Plan and Resources includes the Budget Spreadsheet and Budget Narrative. The Budget Spreadsheet must show the relevant expenditure categories in the far-left column. Relevant cost categories include:

- Personnel
- Fringe Benefits
- Travel
- Special Purpose Equipment
- Supplies
- Contracts/Consultants
- Indirect Costs
- Program Income
- Other

Proceeding across the page, there must be a column showing the dollar amount of Federal funds requested and separate columns showing the dollar amount for each of the non-Federal entities that will provide matching resources. Provide separate Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, and cumulative budgets.

The Budget Narrative must break down and explain how the dollar amounts for each category shown on the Budget Spreadsheet were derived and what they cover. See section [4.6.3 Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities](#) for a full listing of allowable and unallowable costs.

The Fiscal Plan and Resources do not count toward the 15-page Project Narrative maximum.

4.2.4 PERSONNEL QUALIFICATIONS

Required: Provide a one- to two-page resume or summary of relevant experience and/or qualifications of the principal investigator(s) and for each of the other major project participants. *Longer resumes will be disregarded.*

4.2.5 MATCHING FUNDS AND LETTERS OF VERIFICATION

Required: Each application is required to have written verification of match commitment from any party, including the applicant, who will contribute cash or in-kind matching non-Federal resources to the project.

Submit one letter verifying the match for EACH cash or in-kind resource, signed by the matching organization.

AMS highly encourages you to use the [SUGGESTED MATCH VERIFICATION TEMPLATE LETTER](#) on the AMS application website. If you do not use this template, your match verification document must minimally include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- Cash Commitment per year (if applicable) and Total Cash Match
- In-kind Contribution per year (if applicable) and Total In-kind Match. Break down items into categories as applicable:
 - Salaries (employee name, title, duties, pay rate/hour, amount matched per year)
 - Items/Activities (fair market value per unit, how value determined, and amount matched per year)
- Explanation of how each type of match will correspond to the budget or be used by the Applicant.
- Signature of Matching Organization Representative with typed name and title.

Submit *Matching Fund and Letters of Verification* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **MATCH VERIFICATION LETTERS**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters will not be accepted.

4.2.6 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNER AND COLLABORATOR ORGANIZATIONS

Required: Applicants must provide letters of commitment (in MS Word or PDF) from all project partners and collaborators. More information on partners and collaborators can be found in section [3.2 Partners and Collaborators](#). The letter must state the partner or collaborator agrees to the project management

plan presented in the Project Narrative. Emails will not be accepted. The federally negotiated indirect rate, distribution base, and rate type must be available publicly on an OMB-designated Federal website.

AMS highly encourages you to use the [Suggested Partner Organization Template Letter](#) on the program application website. If you do not use this template, your Letter of Commitment must minimally include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- A short introduction describing the partnering organization’s mission and its interest in FSMIP development
- What the organization commits to participating in and supporting
- The time period of the partnership
- Roles of the participating individuals, as applicable, and any individual time commitment
- A statement that these individuals and the organization agree to abide by the management plan contained in the application

Submit *Letters of Commitment* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **LETTERS OF COMMITMENT**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters will not be accepted.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under Form SF-424 item #15.

PLEASE NOTE: FSMIP does not require Congressional letters of support nor do such letters carry additional weight during the evaluation process.

4.2.7 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

Required if the applicant has a NICRA. Refer to section [4.6.1 Indirect Costs](#) for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under SF-424 item #15.

4.3 SUBMITTED APPLICATION QUALIFICATION

Applicants must submit applications via [Grants.gov](#) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 24, 2021. AMS cannot consider applications received after this deadline for funding.

Your application may **not be reviewed or considered for funding** if it is:

- Received by Grants.gov after the submission deadline
- Submitted via any method other than through [Grants.gov](#).
- Submitted to the wrong grant program.
- Not responsive to the requirements of this RFA (eligibility, incomplete application, not providing all required documents, etc.)

See [AMS’ Late and/or Nonresponsive Applications Policy](#) for more information.

4.4 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov. Ensure that all components of the application are complete before submission. Allow enough time for the application process, as it may take more than one attempt before your application is successfully submitted. AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks prior to the application deadline to ensure all certifications and registrations are met.

Only applications submitted and validated by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 24, 2021, [Grants.gov will be accepted](#). See [AMS' Late and/or Nonresponsive Applications Policy](#).

4.5 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

This program is not subject to [Executive Order 12372](#), which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

4.6 FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

4.6.1 INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”—defined at [2 CFR § 200.1](#)) are those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

As stated in [2 CFR § 200.413](#) and [414](#), any non-Federal entity that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect cost rate, except State and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC), which may be used indefinitely. No documentation is required to justify the 10% de minimis indirect cost rate. As described in [2 CFR § 200.403](#), costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until a recipient chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the recipient may apply to do at any time.

All applicants who elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent must use the MTDC as the base. MTDCs are defined in [2 CFR § 200.1](#) as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDCs exclude equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Other items may be excluded only when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of its cognizant agency for indirect costs.

If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate approved by its cognizant agency, the applicant must submit a copy of its approved *NICRA* with its application. Entities that would like to negotiate an indirect cost rate must contact their cognizant agency. For cognizant agency assignments, see [2 CFR § 200.1](#).

4.6.2 USING INDIRECT COSTS FOR COST SHARING OR MATCHING

The maximum amount of indirect costs allowed for a project may be included under the Federal portion of the budget or, alternatively, may be offered as a matching contribution if no indirect costs are requested on the Federal portion of the budget. For example, if a proposed project's maximum allowable indirect costs are \$20,000, the applicant may include \$20,000 on the Federal portion of the budget or \$20,000 as a matching contribution, but not both.

The applicant may split the indirect cost allocation between the Federal and non-Federal portions of the budget only if the total amount of indirect costs does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowed. Alternatively, the recipient may request any other combination that, when combined, does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowable. Refer to [2 CFR § 200.413](#) and [414](#) for additional information on determining if costs charged to the award are direct or indirect.

4.6.3 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COSTS AND ACTIVITIES

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this section should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under [7.0 Agency Contact](#).

4.6.4 COORDINATOR MEETING TRAVEL

Recipients are expected to attend AMS sponsored grants management meeting during the project's period of performance. The proposed budget should include travel funds for the Project Coordinator and any additional key personnel as reasonably determined by the recipient and AMS.

4.7 GRANTS.GOV APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

4.7.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY THROUGH GRANTS.GOV

The application **organization** registration process can take **up to four weeks** to complete. Therefore, complete your registration allowing sufficient time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

Individual applicants eligible to apply for this grant funding opportunity should refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

[Prior to registering in Grants.gov:](#)

- 1) **[Obtain a DUNS Number:](#)** All entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Applicants must enter the DUNS number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational DUNS" on the SF-424 form.

- 2) [Register with SAM](#): In addition to having a DUNS number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with the System for Award Management (SAM). All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an *active* SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov.**

Register with Grants.gov:

- 1) [Create an account with Grants.gov](#): Applicants must know their organization's DUNS number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need to assign an individual to the AOR role.
- 2) [Authorize Grants.gov Roles](#): After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, which may include the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.
- 3) [Track Role Status](#): After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you to track your status.
- 4) **Electronic Signature**: When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC **must** authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

4.7.2 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO AMS VIA GRANTS.GOV

Applicants may use the Grants.gov Workspace, a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement, an applicant can create individual instances of a workspace.

- 1) *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
- 2) *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.
 - a. *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out the webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local storage device storage, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader.

NOTE: You may need to visit the [Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov](#) to

download the appropriate version of the software. There is no cost for Adobe Reader Software.

- b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms:* Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.
 - c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First:* The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant name, address, and DUNS number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the form SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.
- 3) *Submit a Workspace:* Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting the application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the closing date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in section [4.2 Content and Form of Application Submission](#) are included.

- 4) *Track a Workspace:* After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides additional [training resources, including video tutorials](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email support@grants.gov. Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, contact the individuals mentioned in section [7.0 Agency Contacts](#).

4.7.3 TIMELY RECEIPT REQUIREMENTS AND PROOF OF TIMELY SUBMISSION

All applications must be received by the due date established in section [4.4 Submission Date and Time](#). *Proof of Timely Submission* is automatically recorded by Grants.gov using an electronic date/time stamp generated when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When AMS successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will electronically acknowledge receipt of the application to the applicant AOR's email address. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding by AMS. AMS will not accept applications packages by fax, email, or postal mail. See [AMS' Policy on Late Applications](#).

Special Note for Applicants with Slow Internet Connections. Applicants using slow internet connections, such as dial-up connections, may experience significantly longer transmission times when submitting

their application to Grants.gov, especially if there are large attachments contained in the upload. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error message or a successfully received transmission notification via email to the applicant AOR.

4.7.4 TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

- Register and submit applications early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE.**
- Thoroughly read this RFA and follow all the instructions provided by AMS.
- Apply to the correct grant program.
 - Assistance Listing (formerly CFDA) number “**10.156**” and Funding Opportunity Number “**USDA-AMS-TM-FSMIP-G-21-0004.**”
- Make sure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) software. Grants.gov supports Adobe Reader version 9.0.0 and higher.
- Limit Application File Size/ File Name Characters (50 or less).
- When uploading attachments, click the “Add Attachments” button (do NOT use the “paperclip” icon in Adobe Reader)
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are “accepted”.
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names (\$, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- Input the correct DUNS number on the SF-424 form cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:
<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-faqs.html>
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html>

5.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

5.1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application will be reviewed competitively using the following criteria and scoring:

Alignment and Intent..... **25 Points**

- 1) The extent to which the application provides a clear and concise description of the specific issue, problem, or need addressed by and objectives for, the project.
- 2) The extent to which the project addresses an important marketing barrier, challenge, or opportunity and aligns with FSMIP’s legislative and program goals.
- 3) The extent to which the applicant identifies the intended beneficiaries and how they will benefit, including the number of beneficiaries. The application demonstrates a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants in partnership activities.

Technical Merit.....**25 Points**

- 1) The extent to which the application presents a clear, well-conceived, and suitable overall methodology for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
- 2) The extent to which the application presents a realistic schedule for implementing the proposed project during the award project period.
- 3) If the project or entity was previously funded, the extent to which the previous lessons learned are incorporated into the proposed project.
- 4) The application complies with all written instructions and requirements described within the RFA and Project Narrative Template.

Achievability.....**15 Points**

- 1) The extent to which the Outcomes and Indicator(s) are feasible for the scale and scope of the project including:
 - a. How indicator numbers were derived, with a clear means to collect feedback to evaluate and achieve each relevant Outcome Indicator; and
 - b. The anticipated key factors that are predicted to contribute to and restrict progress toward the applicable indicators, including action steps for addressing identified restricting factors.
- 2) The extent to which the proposed project can be easily adapted to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems.
- 3) The extent to which the applicant provides a comprehensive plan to disseminate the project's results (both positive and negative) electronically and in person to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.

Expertise and Partners.....**25 Points**

- 1) The extent to which the proposed project represents qualifications of the applicant (individual and team) and the relevant partnerships and collaborations to accomplish the project's goals and objectives and meets the needs of the intended beneficiaries, including:
 - a. Commitment from the key staff demonstrated through Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations;
 - b. The key staff who will be responsible for managing the projects and the individuals (name and title) who comprise the Project Team; and
 - c. The expertise and experience of the Project Team necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project.
- 2) The extent to which the application describes plans for coordination, communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, both internal applicant personnel **and** external partners and collaborators.
- 3) The extent to which the application describes how the project, and its partnerships and collaborations, will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds).

- 1) The extent to which the application Budget Narrative/Justification provides a clear, detailed description for each budget line item, and:
 - a. How the budget is consistent with the size and scope of the project; and/or
 - b. How the budget relates logically to the Project Narrative describing the project.
- 2) The extent to which the application provides evidence that critical resources and infrastructure are currently in-place that are necessary for the initiation and completion of the proposed project.
- 3) The extent to which the applicant demonstrates its partners' or collaborators' contribution of non-Federal cash resources or in-kind contributions are available and obtainable for the project as evidenced through the submitted Matching Funds and Letters of Match Verification.

5.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Step 1: Initial Qualification Screening

Each application is initially reviewed for overall completeness, as well as compliance with eligibility and program requirements as set forth in this RFA. If an application does not meet these requirements, it is removed from consideration. Please see [AMS' Late and/or Non-Responsive Applications Policy](#) for more information.

Step 2: Technical Review

Each application that passes initial screening (Step 1) is evaluated by a panel of independent peer reviewers. AMS makes every attempt to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any assigned proposals. The peer review panels evaluate their assigned proposals using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers confer with other team members to derive a consensus score. The consensus review serves as the basis for awarding and allocating grant funds and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.

Step 3: Administrative Review

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top rankings and recommendations. In addition to the review panel's rank and scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic diversity, and USDA priorities. AMS staff will work with top-ranked applicants to negotiate any revisions as necessary. AMS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by CFR 200.206.

6.0 AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

6.1 AWARD NOTICES

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award and Grant Agreement to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. Grant Agreements consist of a 1-page Agreement Face Sheet (AMS-33) that will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The Notice of Award and Grant Agreement will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR § 200.210](#) and a reference to the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

6.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Unsuccessful applicants will be contacted by AMS via email as soon as possible after the awards are announced to inform them of the results. AMS will email unsuccessful applicants the anonymous review panel consensus comments regarding their proposals.

6.3 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the Notice of Award and Grant Agreement, all AMS recipients must abide by the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), which reference applicable *Administrative and National Policy Requirements*.

6.4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

7.0 AGENCY CONTACTS

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

7.1 TEAM LEAD

Mr. Martin Rosier

Phone: (202) 260-8449

E-Mail: Martin.Rosier@usda.gov

7.2 GRANTS MANAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

Ms. Beverly Thompson

Phone: (202) 260-8704

E-Mail: Beverly.Thompson@usda.gov

7.3 ADDRESS

Federal State Marketing Improvement Program

USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Room 2055 South Building
Stop 0201
Washington, DC 20250-0269
www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants

8.0 OTHER INFORMATION

8.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

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

8.2 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 ([5 U.S.C. § 552](#)) (FOIA) and the Privacy Act of 1974 ([5 U.S.C. § 552a](#)), as implemented by USDA's regulations ([7 CFR § 1, Subpart A](#)) govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 1671-S, , 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0273, Telephone: (202) 302-0650; or email: AMS.FOIA@usda.gov.

8.3 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0240. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.