

California Underserved and Small Producers (CUSP) Program

DRAFT Request for Proposals for Public Comment

Public Comment Due by 5pm on April 22, 2021

Send comments to: thea.rittenhouse@cdfa.ca.gov

Release Date: Pending Funding Availability

Applications Due: Pending Funding Availability



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PURPOSE

The proposed California Underserved and Small Producers Grant Program is designed to facilitate direct assistance to individual small-scale and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers^{1} who need support applying for economic relief grant programs and assistance with business planning and marketing strategies.

This program has two components for which applicants can apply for one or both:

Part 1: Technical Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers – Funding for technical assistance providers to support farmers and ranchers in applying for economic relief grant programs and assistance with business planning and marketing strategies and other business economic recovery activities.

Part 2: Direct Grant Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers – Eligible entities are also able to apply as a “regional administrator” for grant funds to distribute directly to farmers and ranchers to aid in economic recovery and relief measures and/or leverage existing economic relief funding programs

FUNDING AND DURATION

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) anticipates \$2 million for the California Underserved and Small Producers Grant Program, of which approximately \$1.35 million would be available for awards for Part 1, the Technical Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers (Technical Assistance) Grant Program, and \$550,000 for Part 2, the Direct Grant Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers (Direct Grant for Producers). Funding is contingent upon CDFA receiving a budget appropriation. Applicants may apply for awards between \$25,000- \$100,000 for technical Assistance Providers applying for Part 1, and up to \$150,000 if applying for Part 1 and 2, in order to account for additional expenses associated with administering the Direct Grant for Producers. CDFA reserves the right to offer an award amount different than the amount requested.

The grant duration is two (2) years, beginning June 2021- March 30, 2023. Funds may not be expended prior to establishing an executed agreement.

Proposed timeline, pending budget approval:

April 8 – April 22, 2021	Draft Request for Proposals (RFP) Released for 15-day Public Comment Period
April 19, 2021	Webinar
April 27, 2021	RFP Application Open
May 10, 2021	RFP Application Deadline
May 19, 2021	Anticipated Awards Announced

ELIGIBILITY

The following entities are eligible to apply for the Technical Assistance Grants and/or administer the block grant funds for farmers/ranchers: Non-profit organizations, Tribal Governments and Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs). Entities applying for Technical Assistance grants, hereafter referred to as Technical Assistance Providers or TAPs, must have demonstrated expertise in assisting historically underserved, small-scale farmers and ranchers to apply for economic relief fund programs, marketing or business planning technical assistance expertise, and/or administering a grant program or coordinated effort to assist farmers/ranchers during 2020 and COVID-19 pandemic.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Entities that receive grant awards may not charge fees to provide technical assistance to farmers and ranchers. Any outreach materials prepared by the grant recipient must indicate that the assistance is free, and no fees or costs will be imposed on the farmer or rancher

Grant recipients must prioritize assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (SDFRs), farms that are 100 acres or less in size and ranches that are 500 acres or less in size.

HOW TO APPLY

The two-part application must be submitted electronically to thea.rittenhouse@cdfa.ca.gov using the MS Word application document template.

Part 1: Technical Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers is mandatory.

Part 2: Direct Grant Assistance for Underserved Producers is OPTIONAL. This section is the application to apply to administer the regional grant funds directly for farmers and ranchers.

Clearly describe the organization's program and anticipated expenses, as applicable. All costs must be directly related to and necessary for completion of project. Awarded funds will be paid to the applicant organization. The organization is responsible for disbursement of funds to farmers who apply to the program.

Direct Grant Assistance for Underserved Producers Program Requirements:

- The grant amount for producers shall be \$10,000 per award
- The grants shall be awarded to small-scale, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
- The applicant organization shall provide clear methods to ensure accountability, and that farmer applicants spend the funding on necessary expenses related to COVID-19 relief

- Funding will solely be used for the provision of financial assistance to all eligible participants. Funds must be used consistent with state and federal law.

REVIEW PROCESS

CDFA will select the highest scoring applications for award of grant funds.

CDFA will conduct two levels of review during the application process. The first level is an administrative review to determine whether grant application requirements are met. The second level is a technical review to evaluate the merits of the grant application based on the detailed scoring criteria outlined below.

During the administrative review, the following may result in disqualification of a grant application:

- One or more unanswered questions necessary for the administrative or technical review;
- Missing, blank or unreadable content;
- Requests for more than the maximum award amount;
- Applications that do not comply with Eligibility or meet Program Requirements

Grant applications disqualified as a result of the administrative review may be appealed.

APPEAL RIGHTS: Any disqualification taken during the administrative review for the preceding reasons may be appealed to CDFA's Office of Hearings and Appeals Office within 10 days of receiving a notice of disqualification from CDFA. The appeal must be in writing and signed by the responsible party named on the submitted grant application. It must state the grounds for the appeal and include any supporting documents and a copy of the CDFA decision being challenged. The submissions must be sent to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Office of Hearings and Appeals, 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 or emailed to CDFA.LegalOffice@cdfa.ca.gov. If submissions are not received within the time frame provided above, the appeal will be denied.

Scoring Criteria – Technical Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

Criteria	Maximum Points
1. Program Description/ Statement of Need Scoring will be based on the description of activities and how project funding would supplement or increase current TA or activities aimed at economic relief for farmers and ranchers, anticipated impacts of the funding and how well the application described the applicant organizations capacity and outreach in languages other than English	25
2. Project Goals and Intended Outcomes Scoring will be based on the clarity of goals and outcomes as they relate to the program description and statement of need.	25
3. Project Objectives and Timeline Scoring will be based on the description of the activities outlined and how they fit within the project goals and outcomes	25
4. BUDGET Narrative Scoring will be based on the reasonableness of the budget and relevance the project activities and goals.	25
Total Points	100

Scoring Criteria – Direct Grant Assistance for Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

Criteria	Maximum Points
1. Program Description Scoring will be based on applicant description of existing grant program and capacity to administer a grant program for underserved producers.	25
2. Program Outreach and Collaboration Scoring will be based on applicant description on outreach to underserved producers and description of collaboration with other organizations to ensure broad outreach about the program	25
3. Targeting Historically Underserved Producers Scoring will be based on description of how applicant intends to ensure the immediate economic needs of the most vulnerable producers are met with this grant program.	25
4. Fund Distribution	25

Scoring will be based on description of how the applicant would ensure a timely distribution of funds and a detailed description of the accountability measures in place.	
Total Points	100

Notification and Feedback

All applicants will be notified regarding the status of their grant applications. Successful applicants will receive specific instructions regarding the award process, including information on invoicing and reporting requirements. Applicants not selected for funding will receive feedback regarding their applications within 60 days after receiving notification.

GRANT RECIPIENT INFORMATION

Grant Agreement

Applicants with projects selected for award of funds will receive a Grant Agreement package with specific instructions regarding award requirements including information on project implementation and payment process. Once a Grant Agreement is executed, grant recipients can begin implementation of the project. Grant recipients are responsible for the overall management of their awarded project to ensure all project activities are completed by the end of the project.

Payment Process

CDFA will provide grant recipients with the necessary grant award and invoicing documents. Funds will be allocated on a reimbursement basis. Invoices must be submitted quarterly and include all supporting documentation to substantiate expenses.

Reporting

Grant recipients must submit quarterly Progress Reports to CDFA identifying activities accomplished in the reporting period. CDFA will provide a reporting template and schedule to grant recipients. Reporting metrics include, but are not limited to:

- Total number of individuals assisted, including socially disadvantaged producers and/or farms and ranches 100 acres or less.
- Type of assistance
- Federal/state funds or programs helped secured

For auditing purposes, recipients are required to maintain detailed technical assistance records on-site. Additionally, CDFA might request applicant organizations to provide farmer testimonials or short farmer story to highlight the program and demonstrate program impact.

