

# Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Q. Which activities are included in the “middle-of-the-supply-chain”?**

A. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines “middle-of-the-supply-chain” activities as activities in the Processing and/or Aggregation and Distribution stages of the food supply chain. As an example, Processing activities may include processing, packaging, or preserving crops; extracting products from crops; and/or creating value-added products from crops. Aggregation and Distribution activities may include storing, tracking, distributing, and/or delivering crops. Similar activities not listed here may also be included.

Enhancing worker safety and/or education and/or modernizing, developing, or expanding equipment or facilities used for Processing, Aggregation, or Distribution activities are also considered to be “middle-of-the-supply-chain” activities for the purposes of this program.

2. **Q. Which activities are NOT included in the “middle-of-the-supply-chain”?**

A. Activities related to production or to markets and consumers are **not** part of the middle-of-the-supply-chain. Costs and/or activities related to farm production may include farm equipment, tools, seeds or starts, or production related labor, training, or infrastructure. However, costs related to on-farm, post-harvest processing, preservation, and/or storage would be considered middle-of-the-supply-chain activities. Costs and/or activities related to markets and consumers may include expanding sales staff for a farm store; renovation of retail space, including additional refrigeration; marketing and promotion, etc.

3. **Q. How does an applicant determine if a proposal is appropriate for the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program?**

A. All proposals must support the middle of the food supply chain, meet one or more of the program priorities as described in the Request for Proposals (RFP), and be able to achieve one or more performance measures during the grant duration to be eligible for this program. In addition, all applicant businesses and organizations must be domestically owned, and applicants' facilities must be physically located within the State of California.

4. **Q. Will the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) provide assistance with the application process?**

A. CDFA will host several webinars providing an overview of the program, eligibility requirements, program priorities, and the application process. Office hours will

also be held weekly during the application period. For more information on webinars and office hours, or to register, please visit the [RFSI website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/) (<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/>).

**5. Q. How can applicants submit questions during the application period?**

A. CDFA will conduct five rounds of Questions and Answers (Q&A) to address general questions about the proposal process. Email all questions about the solicitation process to [grants@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:grants@cdfa.ca.gov). Questions received during webinars and office hours will also be included in the published Q&A. The deadline to submit questions is February 20, 2024, by 8:00 a.m. PT.

**6. Q. Will CDFA provide answers to specific questions regarding the eligibility of proposals or assist applicants in completing their proposals?**

A. Beginning January 4, 2024, CDFA will conduct weekly office hours to assist applicants with specific questions regarding their proposals. Office hours will continue throughout the duration of the application period. In addition, CDFA recommends all applicants attend at least one webinar and review the published Q&A.

**7. Q. Is technical assistance available?**

A. CDFA will partner with local organizations to provide technical assistance for applicants that are selected for funding. Technical assistance will be available for entering into a grant agreement and executing the grant, including record-keeping requirements, preparing for an audit, reporting, etc.

**8. Q. How does USDA define underserved farmers?**

A. USDA defines underserved farmers as a member of a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

**9. Q. What is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and is it required to submit a proposal?**

A. Entities doing business with the federal government must obtain a UEI through SAM.gov. Active registrants will have their UEI assigned and viewable within SAM.gov. A UEI is not required prior to submitting a proposal; however, if awarded RFSI funds, recipients will need to obtain a UEI before a grant agreement can be executed.

**10. Q. What is the difference between Infrastructure Grants and Simplified Equipment-Only Grants?**

A. Infrastructure Grants will fund projects that expand capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted agricultural products. This grant type is subject to match requirements. Simplified Equipment-Only Grants are “Fixed Price” grants, meaning they will fund only equipment purchases (and not associated facility upgrades, staffing, or other costs). No match is required for this grant type.

**11. Q. What are the award limits for Infrastructure Grants and Simplified Equipment-Only Grants? How much funding is available for each type?**

A. The minimum award amount for the Infrastructure Grants is \$100,000 and the maximum award amount is \$3,000,000. The \$3,000,000 award cap does not include the in-kind/matching funds from the Infrastructure Grant recipient. An Infrastructure Grant applicant can apply for up to \$3,000,000 of RFSI funding and will be required to provide the appropriate matching funds. Approximately \$22.5 million will be available for Infrastructure Grants.

The minimum award amount for the Simplified Equipment-Only Project grants is \$10,000 and the maximum award amount is \$100,000. Approximately \$7.5 million will be available for the Simplified Equipment-Only option.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

**1. Q. Who is eligible to apply for RFSI funding?**

A. Agricultural producers or processors; groups of agricultural producers and processors; nonprofit organizations, local governments, and Tribal governments operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities; and institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals bringing producers together to establish cooperative or shared infrastructure or to invest in equipment that will benefit multiple producers’ middle-of-the-supply-chain activities are eligible to apply.

**2. Q. Are applicants allowed to submit the same proposal to more than one grant program?**

A. Applicants may submit the same proposal to multiple state or federal grant programs; however, applicants are required to disclose the other grant programs. If the proposal is selected for funding by another state or federal award program after the proposal is submitted to the RFSI, the applicant must inform CDFA immediately. Applicants are allowed to receive RFSI funds to support activities within a project funded through multiple grant sources. However, RFSI funds may not be used to duplicate activities funded by another grant source.

3. **Q. Are applicants allowed to submit multiple proposals to RFSI?**
  - A. Applicants must select one funding track and may submit one application, total.
  
4. **Q. Which commodities are eligible for RFSI funding?**
  - A. Eligible commodities include specialty crops, dairy, grain (for food), and other sectors, given that the products are meant for human consumption. Eligible specialty crops include fruit, vegetables, dried fruits, tree nuts, horticultural products such as tea or honey, and culinary and medicinal herbs and spices. Note that some specialty crops, such as floriculture or ornamental trees, are not intended for human consumption and therefore not eligible for RFSI funding. Cannabis is also not eligible.
  
5. **Q. Is a project eligible if it includes meat and/or poultry?**
  - A. Projects supporting the meat and poultry industries are funded through other USDA programs. If, for example, a food hub processes eligible crops as well as meat and/or poultry, the proposal should demonstrate that robust tracking mechanisms are in place to ensure that RFSI funds are not used to support ineligible commodities. However, note that aquaculture is an eligible activity, given the project meets the other requirements of the RFSI.
  
6. **Q. Are individual producers and/or sole proprietors eligible to apply?**
  - A. Individual producers and sole proprietors are eligible to apply. However, those entities should be able to demonstrate that their proposal provides a broader benefit to local and/or regional producers, markets, stakeholders, the community, etc.
  
7. **Q. How are project beneficiaries defined?**
  - A. Project beneficiaries are the local and/or regional producers, markets, stakeholders, and communities, including the applicant organization, that will directly benefit from a project. The number cited in the Project Beneficiaries response should be a reasonable estimate that can be documented and reported upon during the duration of the grant, if selected for funding. For these reasons, stating that a project will benefit an entire industry or region is not an appropriate response for this question.
  
8. **Q. Are there any criteria for who can be named as Project Director(s), Project Manager(s), and/or collaborators who will directly manage activities funded through RFSI?**
  - A. CDFA does not have set requirements for these positions. It is up to the applicant to select the individual(s) best suited and appropriately qualified for the project.

**9. Q. Are projects required to last the full grant duration?**

A. Projects selected for funding may begin on or after October 1, 2024, after the execution of a grant agreement, and must end by February 26, 2027. As long as projects do not start before or end after the dates specified in the RFP, any duration is allowed. Please note that no-cost extension requests will not be facilitated beyond the maximum grant duration.

**10. Q. Are examples available of projects that would be eligible under the Infrastructure Grant category?**

A. There are examples of possible projects for each funding category provided in the [RFSI RFP](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi\\_request\\_for\\_proposals.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf)). Please note that these examples are not intended to be all inclusive.

## **AMPLIFUND APPLICATION**

**1. Q. Are the RFSI proposal applications available as a Word document?**

A. All RFSI proposals must be submitted using the AmpliFund online platform; links can be found on the [CDFA RFSI website](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/) (<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/>). As a result, the application is not available as a Word document and there is no page limit. However, each question in AmpliFund is assigned a character limit.

**2. Q. Can changes be made to a proposal that has already been submitted in AmpliFund?**

A. Changes can be made to proposals that have already been submitted in AmpliFund. If such a change is necessary, applicants should contact CDFA at [grants@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:grants@cdfa.ca.gov) or (916) 657-3231 and reference the RFSI along with the Project Title. All requests must be received within a reasonable amount of time before the submission deadline, no changes can be made after the submission deadline, and applicants are still required to resubmit their revised proposal before the submission deadline.

**3. Q. Is a federal tax ID required prior to submitting a proposal?**

A. Applicants must have a legal business name and a federal tax ID in order to submit a proposal. Applicants may begin an application in AmpliFund prior to receiving a federal tax ID number; however, a federal tax ID number must be entered in AmpliFund prior to submitting a proposal.

**4. Q. Where can applicants find the character limits for each question?**

A. The character limit for each question is provided in AmpliFund. This limit includes letters, numbers, punctuation, spaces, and special characters.

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. **Q. Where can applicants find additional information about the performance measures?**

A. The RFSI performance measures are detailed in the [RFSI RFP](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi\\_request\\_for\\_proposals.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf)). Projects must accomplish all selected performance measures and associated indicators during the grant duration.

2. **Q. Do projects that address more than one performance measure receive a higher priority for funding?**

A. The number of performance measures a project will address is not a factor in the scoring of proposals. Projects are not required to select more than one performance measure and indicator.

3. **Q. If an applicant selects more than one performance measure and/or indicator, do they all have to be achievable within the grant duration?**

A. All selected performance measures and associated indicators must be achievable and trackable within the grant duration.

## BUDGET SECTION

1. **Q. What are federal cost principles?**

A. Federal cost principles are regulations, based on organization type, used to determine allowable costs and ensure consistent treatment of federal funds. Applicants are responsible for identifying the federal cost principles appropriate to their organization, applying cost principles to RFSI grant funds consistently, and ensuring contractors and/or consultants comply with federal cost principle requirements.

2. **Q. What are indirect costs?**

A. Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”) are costs incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified specifically with a particular project, program, or organizational activity. Typically, these involve costs to run an organization as a whole, including administrative staff salaries, information technology services, rent, utilities, internet and telephone service, general use office supplies, insurance, and maintenance.

3. **Q. Is there a maximum rate for Indirect Funds?**

A. Infrastructure Grant recipients with a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) can request indirect costs up to the amount of their NICRA. A copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the Infrastructure Grant application.

Otherwise, applicants may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC).

MTDC are defined in [2 C.F.R. § 200.1](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR2a6a0087862fd2c/section-200.1) (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR2a6a0087862fd2c/section-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 Infrastructure Grant (regardless of the period of performance of the Infrastructure Grants 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 Infrastructure Grant 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 the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

**4. Q. Can Equipment-Only Grant projects request Indirect Funds?**

A. Simplified Equipment-Only Grants are not eligible for indirect.

**5. Q. What are fringe benefits?**

A. Fringe benefits are allowances and services provided by employers to their employees as compensation, in addition to regular salaries and wages. Fringe benefits should follow an organization's established policy and may include, but are not limited to, the costs of leave (vacation, family-related, sick, or military) employee insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefit plans. Please refer to [2 CFR 200.431](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=35fcd29238edd42c8b1f8b1628e39d47&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5#se2.1.200_1431) ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=35fcd29238edd42c8b1f8b1628e39d47&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5#se2.1.200\\_1431](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=35fcd29238edd42c8b1f8b1628e39d47&mc=true&node=pt2.1.200&rgn=div5#se2.1.200_1431)) for more information.

**6. Q. Does the RFSI impose a maximum fringe benefit rate?**

A. There is no maximum fringe benefit rate and applicants should follow their organization's established policies. However, fringe benefit rates greater than 50 percent may be questioned by USDA and additional information may be required.

**7. Q. What is the General Schedule 15 (GS-15), Step 10?**

A. The GS-15, Step 10 is the maximum pay allowed annually and hourly for contractors and consultants by the federal government. Applicants should use the GS-15, Step 10 rate for their area when developing contractual cost estimates to ensure rates are reasonable and consistent with fees in the marketplace for similar services. Contractor costs exceeding the GS-15, Step 10 rate must be paid from a source other than RFSI funds unless a justification is provided and approved by CDFA and USDA. To access the GS-15 step 10 rate, reference the [U.S. Office of Personnel Pay and Leave website](#)

(<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) and click on “GS Pay Tables” under “General Schedule and Locality Pay Tables.”

8. **Q. What is the difference between “special purpose” and “general purpose” equipment? Is there a minimum or maximum cost limit for special purpose equipment?**
- A. Both “special purpose” and “general purpose” equipment refer to tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000 net per unit. Purchasing “special purpose” equipment used only for technical activities is allowable under the conditions outlined in the [RFSI RFP](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf) ([https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi\\_request\\_for\\_proposals.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/rfsi/docs/rfsi_request_for_proposals.pdf)). “General purpose” equipment is used for purposes other than technical activities. Purchasing general purpose equipment is not allowable; general purpose equipment may be rented if necessary for project activities. The amount that can be charged for special purpose equipment cannot exceed the maximum award amount.

## **MATCHING FUNDS REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Q. Are matching funds a requirement of the RFSI?**
- A. USDA requires Infrastructure Grant recipients to contribute 50 percent of the total proposed project cost as a match to federal funding. Match may consist of cash match, in-kind contributions, or any combination thereof. Funds from other federal grant programs may not be used as match for this cooperative agreement. Funds from state grants, including CDFA grants, may be used as matching funds, so long as those costs do not originate from a federal pass-through grant, are not committed elsewhere as matching funds, and the source of those funds does not prohibit those funds from being used as match.

Simplified Equipment-Only Grants do not require matching funds.

2. **Q. Is a reduced match requirement available?**
- A. Historically underserved farmers and ranchers, disadvantaged small businesses, women-owned small businesses, and/or veteran-owned small businesses are eligible for a reduced match of 25 percent for Infrastructure Grants. Applicants must self-certify in their Infrastructure Grant applications as being eligible for this reduced match.
3. **Q. What is the difference between cash match and in-kind contributions?**
- A. Cash match refers to a dollar amount committed to a project from a source other than the RFSI. An in-kind contribution is the estimated dollar value of any time, services, property, or supplies donated to a project.



**4. Q. What qualifies as in-kind contributions for matching funds?**

A. In-kind contributions may include the value of goods or services donated to the project such as staff time, volunteer time, supplies, or the use of equipment or facilities. Note that in-kind costs must be reasonable. For example, if personnel time is used as match, the time must match the actual time spent working on the project (e.g., 20 percent full time equivalent), must be what that individual would normally earn for similar work, and must be reasonable according to standard personnel rates for similar positions in the geographic locality where the work is performed.

**5. Q. Can unallowable costs be used as matching funds?**

A. Only costs allowable under the federal cost principles, [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E) (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E>), and the program terms and conditions may be used as matching funds. For example, acquired real property, including land, is an unallowable cost and therefore cannot be used to meet the match requirement, while rental costs are an allowable cost and, thus, may be used to meet match requirements.

**6. Q. When are recipients required to report matching funds?**

A. Recipients are required to report matching funds on quarterly invoices and annual reports. Match reported on invoices must align with the match requirement set forth in the grant agreement and be proportional to the amount of federal funds being requested. Backup documentation for matching funds will be subject to the same requirements as federal funds. At a minimum, backup documentation should be sufficient to demonstrate the source and amount of the matching funds, as well as how those funds directly relate to overall project costs.

**7. Q. Can a proposal supply more than the minimum required matching funds?**

A. Infrastructure Grant recipients can provide more than the required match. However, this will not provide any advantage during the Technical Review of the applications. Any amount exceeding the required match will be considered “Voluntary Committed Cost Share” as defined in [2 CFR §200.1](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200) (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200>) and [2 CFR §200.306](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/section-200.306) (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/section-200.306>). Voluntary Committed Cost Share means cost sharing specifically pledged on a voluntary basis in the proposal's budget on the part of the non-federal entity and that becomes a binding requirement of a federal award.

Applicants for Equipment-Only Grants are not required to provide matching funds. However, applicants can choose to provide matching funds if the total cost of the equipment to be purchased exceeds the maximum award amount of \$100,000. In this case, applicants must provide matching funds sufficient to cover the difference between the maximum award amount and the total cost of the requested equipment.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

1. **Q. What is the Technical Review Committee (TRC) and how does the review process work?**
  - A. The TRC is a group of volunteers with knowledge and expertise regarding the California agricultural industry. This committee is broken up by funding category to review, evaluate, and make recommendations to CDFA on proposals submitted for funding to California's RFSI. The reviewers evaluate and score proposals individually and then meet to have an open discussion. The committee's recommendations are then presented to CDFA.
  
2. **Q. How does the review process work between CDFA and USDA for projects that receive funding?**
  - A. CDFA's administrative and technical review process helps to ensure that the proposals recommended to USDA for funding are timely and important for California agriculture and comply with all program rules and regulations. USDA has the final say regarding which proposals receive funding. USDA may approach CDFA with questions on specific proposals, in which case CDFA will work with the applicant to resolve any issues. In some cases, USDA may ultimately elect to decline a proposal.