

USDA Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)

Application Toolkit

USDA, RURAL DEVELOPMENT

RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT



Rural Business Development Grant

**APPLICATION TOOLKIT
ARIZONA – FY 2025**

APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 28, 2025 @ 4:30 P.M. MST

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Instructions and Helpful Hints

Application Deadline: February 28, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. MST. Applications must be received by the Arizona State Office on or before the deadline. *This is not a postmark date.* Due to the office operating on a hybrid telework status, e-mailed applications will be accepted and should be sent to SM.RD.AZ.RBSSStateOffice@usda.gov prior to the application deadline.

Applications sent by mail or overnight courier should be addressed to:

USDA Rural Development
Attn: Business & Cooperative Programs
230 N 1st Ave, Suite 206
Phoenix, AZ 85003-1706

Provide one original application only. *Please do not bind your applications.*

APPLICATION INFORMATION WEBINAR:

December 11, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. MST – [REGISTER HERE](#)

January 15, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. MST – [REGISTER HERE](#)

February 12, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. MST – [REGISTER HERE](#)

YouTube RBCS How-To Video Series regarding SAM.gov and the SF 424 series of forms:

[RBCS How-To Apply Video Series for Applicants](#)

Matching Funds: Matching funds are not required by the regulation. However, smaller projects (less than \$100,000) with higher levels of matching funds are given higher priority in the scoring process.

Ceiling of Award Range: The regulation establishes no maximum level of Enterprise type grant funding. The maximum size of an Opportunity type grant will be limited to ten percent (10%) of the total state allocation or approximately \$40,000.

Non Set-Aside Funds:

The anticipated total funding for Arizona is approximately \$300,000. The number of awards is typically 8-10 grants, ranging from \$20,000 - \$80,000.

Native American Set-Aside Funds:

For funds requested from Native American congressionally mandated funds (set-aside funds), at least 75 percent of the project benefits must be received by members of a Federally Recognized Native American Tribe.

Funds of approximately \$3 million will be awarded competitively through a national competition.

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Instructions and Helpful Hints (continued)

Term Requirement: The project should be budgeted to be completed within one (1) full year after it has been awarded. Typically, the grant term is October 1 through September 30.

Anticipated Award Date: September 30, 2025

We encourage applicants to include the RBDG Scope of Work Template with their application. The RBDG RLF Plan Template should also be completed when applying for a grant to establish a revolving loan fund.

We encourage all applicants to review the scoring criteria and develop your grant application in accordance with program regulations. By doing so, you will be able to maximize your score and have the most competitive application. See RD Instruction 4280-E, Attachment 1 “Project Selection Criteria”.

Discretionary Points: The Agency has issued guidance on implementing Agency Initiatives by assigning up to 50 discretionary points to eligible RBDG program applications as follows:

USDA Rural Development is incorporating key Biden-Harris Administration priorities into program scoring and associated funding announcements beginning with fiscal year (FY) 2024 funding announcements. Many USDA Rural Development grant and technical assistance programs have the potential to support rural communities’ economic development effort and maintain and improve a healthy rural population by leveraging funding assistance to key Administration priorities.

These priorities build upon RD’s continuing commitment to serving traditionally underserved and economically challenged rural areas, such as Persistent Poverty Counties. The RBDG program will have a funding set-aside for areas of persistent poverty.

USDA Rural Development has identified three key priorities that will provide a pathway to facilitate economic growth for all rural Americans and is encouraging Applicants to consider projects that will advance the following three key priorities.

1. Assisting Rural communities to recover economically through more and better market opportunities and through improved infrastructure.
2. Ensuring all rural residents have equitable access to RD programs and benefits from RD funded projects.
3. Reducing climate pollution and increasing resilience to the impacts of climate change through economic support to rural communities.

The above priorities are being incorporated into the work we do across the Agency and with our partners to incentivize strategic engagement and investment. More information on Rural Development Key Priorities can be found at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points/rural-development-priorities-fy-2024>.

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Before submitting the application, please review the Application Checklist to make sure you have provided **all** the required application criteria.

For additional information and the program regulation (RD Instruction 4280-E), please visit the RBDG program website at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-business-development-grants>.

For questions or technical assistance in completing the application, please contact any of the following:

Don Irby, Tribal Relations Specialist

(928) 910-4474

Don.Irby@usda.gov

Clinton Kaasa, Business and Cooperatives Program Specialist

(602) 280-8757

Clinton.Kaasa@usda.gov

Jennifer Burton, Business and Cooperatives Program Specialist

(602) 280-8738

Jennifer.Burton@usda.gov

Roxanne Kimm-Yanagi, Business and Cooperatives Program Specialist

(602) 280-8709

Roxanne.KimmYanagi@usda.gov

Blake Jones, Business and Cooperatives Program Specialist

(602) 280-8716

Blake.Jones@usda.gov

You may also call the Business and Cooperative Programs main line at 602-280-8715 or email our inbox at SM.RD.AZ.RBSSStateOffice@usda.gov.

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APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Before you submit your application, please be sure you have addressed all of the following elements.

Required forms

- ☐ Form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance" – required for all applications
- ☐ Form SF-424A, "Budget Information-Non-Construction Programs"

OR

- ☐ Form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance" – required for all applications
- ☐ Form SF-424C, "Budget Information -Construction Programs"
- ☐ Form SF-424D, "Assurances - Construction Programs"

Hints for Completing Form SF 424, "Application for Federal Assistance":

Block 1. Type of Submission: Check "Application"

Block 2. Type of Application: Check "New"

Blocks 3, 4, 5a, 5b, 6, and 7: Leave blank

Block 10. Name of Federal Agency: USDA, Rural Development

Block 11. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.351

Block 11. CFDA Title: Rural Business Development Grant

Blocks 12 and 13: Leave blank

Block 19: Is Application Subject to Review by State Under E.O. 12372 Process: Check Box c.

All other blocks are self-explanatory.

Section 1. Summary Information

- ☐ Legal name of applicant
- ☐ Requested Grant Amount
- ☐ Active registration in the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://www.sam.gov>. Applicants must ensure they complete the Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations in SAM. Registering in SAM will automatically result in the creation of a Uniform Entity Identifier (UEI).

*** SAM registration should be completed as soon as possible as it can take a few weeks to complete the process.**

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APPLICATION CHECKLIST (continued)

Section 2. [Applicant Eligibility](#)

- ☐ Applicant Type

Section 3. [Project Eligibility](#)

- ☐ Business Opportunity Project
 - ☐ Demonstration of Need
 - ☐ Economic Development Result
 - ☐ Local and Area Strategic Plans
 - ☐ Suggested Performance Criteria
- ☐ Business Enterprise Project
 - ☐ Demonstration of Need
 - ☐ Development or Financing of Small & Emerging Business
 - ☐ Suggested Performance Criteria

Section 4. [Written Narrative](#)

- ☐ Project Need
- ☐ Project Benefits
- ☐ Eligible Grant Purpose
- ☐ Area to be Served
- ☐ Coordination with other Area Economic Development Plans and Strategies
- ☐ Goals to be Accomplished
- ☐ Jobs Created/Saved
- ☐ Applicants Expertise
- ☐ Method and Rationale to Select Service Recipients
- ☐ Work Plan Narrative
- ☐ Project Budget and Budget Narrative

Appendices

- ☐ [Appendix A](#) – Organizational Documents
- ☐ [Appendix B](#) – Proposed Scope of Work
- ☐ [Appendix C](#) – Latest 3 Years Financial Information
- ☐ [Appendix D](#) – Supplemental Funds Verification
- ☐ [Appendix E](#) – Documentation of Experience
- ☐ [Appendix F](#) – Letters of Small Business Commitment

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RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT (RBDG) APPLICATION TEMPLATE

SECTION 1: SUMMARY INFORMATION

Legal Name of Applicant: _____

Requested Grant Amount: \$ _____ (Please round to the nearest \$100)

Unique Entity Identifier (UEI): _____

UEI Expiration Date: _____

SECTION 2: APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Applicant Type– Please Check One:

- ☐ Public Body/Government Entity
- ☐ Native American Tribe/Federally-recognized tribal group
- ☐ Nonprofit Entity

Organizational documents/legal standing must be attached in [Appendix A](#)

Financial information must be attached in [Appendix C](#)

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SECTION 3: PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

Application Type – Please Check One:

- ☐ **Enterprise Grant** – Funds may be used to acquire or develop land, buildings, plants, equipment, access streets and roads, parking areas, utilities; provide technical assistance; establish revolving loan funds; and to create, expand, or operate rural distance learning programs that provide educational or job training instruction related to potential employment or job advancement to adult students. Please note that enterprise type projects must be used to finance or develop small and emerging businesses in rural areas. Projects that solely fund agriculture production are not eligible.
- ☐ **Opportunity Grant** – Funds may be used to analyze rural business (small and emerging or larger business) opportunities; identify and/or provide training opportunities to rural entrepreneurs; conduct leadership development; establish training or technology centers and conduct technical assistance or area-wide planning activities. Note that opportunity type projects must be consistent with any local and area-wide strategic plans for community and economic development. Please include the name and date of referenced plan.

All Applicants:

- **Demonstration of Need:**

[Insert explanation as to why the proposed project is needed]

- **Suggested Performance Criteria:**

Suggest one or more relevant criterion to be used to evaluate the performance of the grant project during its operational phase post-award, as benchmarks to assess whether or not the primary goals and objectives proposed in the scope of work are accomplished during the project period. These criteria should relate to the overall project goal of financing and/or assisting small and emerging businesses or conducting business opportunity projects, with a resulting creation or saving of jobs.

[Insert Performance Evaluation Criteria]

Enterprise Grant Applicants Only:

- **Development or Financing of Small & Emerging Private Businesses**

[Describe how grant funds will be used to finance and/or develop Small and Emerging Businesses in Rural Areas; provide certifications from the Small and Emerging Businesses that will be served. Letters shall be attached as Appendix F.]

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Opportunity Grant Applicants Only:

- **Economic Development Result**

[Describe the economic development that will occur as a result of the proposed project. Include demonstration of project sustainability]

- **Local and Area Strategic Plans**

[Describe how the project coincides with local or area-wide strategic plans. Provide name and date of plan.]

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SECTION 4: WRITTEN NARRATIVE

4.1 Project Need

[Insert explanation of why the project is needed]

4.2 Project Benefits

[Explain the benefits of the proposed project]

4.3 Eligible Grant Purpose

[Explain how the proposed project meets an eligible grant purpose]

4.4 Rural Area to be Served

[Describe the area to be served, identifying each governmental unit (i.e. town, county, community, chapter, etc.) to be affected by the project]

4.5 Coordination with Area Economic Development Activities

[Description of how the project will coordinate Economic Development activities with other Economic Development Activities within the project area.]

4.6 Businesses to be Assisted (Enterprise) and Economic Development to be Accomplished (Opportunity)

[Describe and provide the number of small, rural businesses to be assisted for Enterprise type grants and Economic Development to be accomplished for Opportunity type grants.]

4.7 Jobs Created/Saved

*[Describe how the proposed project will create jobs or save existing jobs in the service area and provide an estimated number of jobs created and jobs saved. Jobs created and/or saved are those of the businesses assisted and are directly related to, a result of, and attributed to the RBDG project. These jobs **must** be evidenced by letters from rural businesses that will be directly assisted by the project. Letters shall be attached as [Appendix F.](#)]*

Number of jobs expected to be created _____ and/or saved _____

4.8 Applicant Expertise

[Insert description of applicant's capability and expertise in doing the work proposed. If consulting with others on tasks, include their applicable experience. Attach résumés and other supporting documentation of experience in [Appendix E.](#)]

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4.9 Method and Rationale to Select Service Recipients

[Describe how the service area was selected and the businesses that will receive assistance. If the businesses haven't been selected, describe how they will be selected.]

4.10 Work Plan Narrative

[Insert work plan narrative]

4.11 Project Budget

Provide a project budget by task. The budget should include salaries, fringe benefits, consultant costs, indirect costs, and other appropriate direct costs for the project. Insert additional rows as needed.

Task #	Task Name and Description	Start Date	End Date	RBDG Funds	Supplemental Funds	Total Project Costs
	TOTAL PROJECT (Please use whole dollar amounts)			\$	\$	\$

Budget Narrative

[Provide explanation/clarification of the basis for the above budget figures.]

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: Organizational Documents

Attach evidence of Legal Authority and Good Standing.

Tip: The following describes the organization documents that must be presented regarding the RBDG applicant in the application. The organization document **must** show 1) the legal existence and 2) authority to perform the activities proposed in the application.

- **Public Bodies/Governmental Entities** (defined as Public Bodies and includes States, counties, cities, townships, and incorporated towns and villages, boroughs, authorities, districts, and education institutions organized under State and Federal laws, and Indian Tribes).
 - ☐ Evidence of legal organization (provide the relevant statute that created the entity)
 - ☐ Current list of members of the governing body with terms of office, i.e. when terms begin and end
- **Native American Tribes and other Federally-recognized tribal groups**
 - ☐ Evidence that it is a Federally-recognized tribe or tribal group. The most recent list was published in the Federal Register on January 8, 2024 at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2024-01-08/pdf/2024-00109.pdf>. **Please print and include a copy of this list with your application as evidence of eligibility. (If the applicant is not on the above Federal Register list, it must apply as a non-profit entity as described below.)**
 - ☐ Current list of members of the governing body with terms of office, i.e. when terms begin and end
- **Non-profit entities (including those formed in accordance with tribal laws)**
 - ☐ Articles of incorporation, including any amendments
 - ☐ Bylaws, including any amendments
 - ☐ Certificate of Good Standing with the Arizona Corporation Commission or Tribal government
 - ☐ Current list of members of the governing body with terms of office, i.e. when terms begin and end

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APPENDIX B: Proposed Scope of Work

Attach Proposed Scope of Work. There is a separate template to complete for the Scope of Work.

Please note use of the template will assure all required elements for the Scope of Work are included.

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APPENDIX C: Supporting Financial Documentation

Supporting financial documentation is **required** as follows to show financial capacity to carry out the proposed grant.

The following must be submitted:

- A. Submit and attach the applicant's **latest three (3) fiscal year-end financial statements, which would be for the years ending in 2024, 2023, and 2022**. At a minimum, these statements should consist of a balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows. Audits should be provided, if available. **If an audit is not yet available for the most recent fiscal year-end, financial statements must still be submitted for that year**. Financial information may be submitted on electronic media, i.e. CD/DVD ROM, USB flash drive, etc. in lieu of paper.
- B. If the applicant is less than three (3) years old, submit and attach all available fiscal year-end financial statements, consisting of balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows. Audits should be provided, if available. Financial information may be submitted on electronic media, i.e. CD/DVD ROM, USB flash drive, etc. in lieu of paper.
- C. If the applicant is a department or division of a municipal or tribal government, the latest three (3) fiscal year-end financial statements, consisting of balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows, for the municipal or tribal government **must** be provided, not just the statements applicable to department or division.

NOTE: Budgets or summaries of historical financial performance are not considered supporting financial documentation for the purpose of the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG).

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APPENDIX D: Supplemental Funds Verification

Attach documentation verifying that eligible supplemental funds are available and have been committed to the project. Documentation must be included in your application to qualify for consideration under the applicable scoring criterion.

If there is not a firm commitment in writing of the other (supplemental) funding, it may not be considered for leveraging and scoring purposes. Where there is not sufficient documentation, the project must be feasible without those funds.

Examples of acceptable documentation include: a signed letter from the source of funds stating the amount of funds, when the funds will be provided, and what the funds can be used for; an executed grant agreement; and a signed resolution from your governing board authorizing the use of a specified amount of funds for the project (if funds will be contributed by the applicant organization). In kind contributions must meet the requirements of 2 CFR part 200.

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APPENDIX E: Documentation of Experience

Attach documentation of the applicant's experience in completing the proposed project activities.

Provide a description of the grantee (applicant) experience and **provide résumés** of those who will be completing the work of the grant.

If the person who will complete the work, in whole or in part, is a contractor, include the contractor's résumé AND either a fully executed contract OR a written commitment showing the commitment to complete the contractor's responsibilities on the grant with a term sufficient to complete the work.

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APPENDIX F: Letters of Small Business Commitment

THESE ARE NOT LETTERS OF SUPPORT, BUT RATHER LETTERS FROM SMALL BUSINESSES THAT ARE COMMITTED TO PARTICIPATING IN AND/OR BENEFITING FROM GRANT ACTIVITIES.

For enterprise type projects, written evidence of commitment by a small and emerging business must be provided with the application to the Agency. For both enterprise and opportunity type projects, the Agency will award five (5) points for each letter of small business commitment up to 25 points.

Attach letters from small businesses that will be **assisted** by the proposed project activities. A small and emerging business for the purposes of the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) is any private or non-profit business which will employ less than 50 new employees **and** has less than \$1 million in gross revenue.

Points will only be awarded in the jobs created or supported category of the project selection criteria score sheet if a specific number is included in the small business commitment letters. Each letter must include the name of the small business providing the letter or be on the small business' letterhead, describe the connection to the project activities, and provide specific information relative to the number of jobs supported, saved, and/or created.

Generic or duplicated letters are not acceptable and will not receive points.

Letters of support from local, state, or Federal elected officials or other businesses and interested parties in the community do not count as letters of small business commitment and will not receive points.