



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program 2024

APPLICATION TEMPLATE

NOTICE TO ALL RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICANTS

- This template is provided to assist you with developing a fiscal year (FY) 2024 application and is not intended to relieve you from your responsibility for reading the Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program regulations (7 CFR Part 4284, subparts A&F) and the FY 2024 Notice of Solicitation of Applications
- Use of this application template is not required. However, applicants must provide the required information.
- Use of the template does not imply or ensure a favorable eligibility determination.
- In addition to the information requested in the template, applicants must complete and submit all required Federal forms and registrations, and append specified documentation to support claims for applicant eligibility, experience, and local support; as specified by the program.
- Applications received that do not include ALL required materials will be considered incomplete and ineligible.
- The template provides guidance on the requirement and should be deleted prior to submitting your application.
- Complete your document and add your table of contents on page two. Use the References ribbon and the Table of Contents button to add an Automatic table of contents.
- **Your Proposal Narrative should NOT exceed 40 pages, using at least 11 point font size. Certifications and Appendices do not count against this page limit.**

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICATION TITLE HERE]"

A 2024 RURAL COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION

Submitted by:

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICANT NAME HERE]"

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICANT STREET ADDRESS]"

"[CLICK AND INSERT CITY, STATE, ZIPCODE HERE]"

"[CLICK AND INSERT DATE HERE]"

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provide a summary of the proposal, not to exceed two pages, briefly describing the Center, including project goals and tasks to be accomplished, the amount requested, how the work will be performed (e.g., Center staff, consultants, or contractors) and the percentage of work that will be performed among the parties.

"[CLICK AND TYPE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY HERE]"

ELIGIBILITY DISCUSSION

[Instructions] Describe how you meet the eligibility requirements for applicant, matching funds, other eligibility requirements, and the grant period, not to exceed two pages.

Applicant Eligibility

[Instructions] Grants may be made to nonprofit corporations and institutions of higher education. Grants may not be made to public bodies, for-profit corporations, or individuals. Indicate your applicant type and provide your CAGE number and expiration date and Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS).

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY DISCUSSION]"

Cost Sharing or Matching Funds Eligibility

[Instructions] Your matching funds requirement is 25 percent of total project costs (5 percent for 1994 Institutions). Indicate the total amount of in-kind and cash matching contributions that will be available to the project during the grant period, the source of those funds, the use of those funds, and the matching funds percentage of total project costs. Please see Section C.2., "Cost Sharing or Matching" in the FY 2024 NOFA for other matching funds guidelines and an example of how to calculate matching funds. Verification for matching funds must be contained in Appendix A.

"[CLICK AND INSERT MATCHING ELIGIBILITY DISCUSSION]"

Other Eligibility Requirements

[Instructions] Your activities must be for eligible purposes identified in 7 CFR § 4284.508, which may also include programs providing for the coordination of services and sharing of information among the Centers. All project activities must be for the benefit of a rural area, or Persistent Poverty counties, as defined in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, SEC. 736, with a population that does not exceed 55,000. Describe the proposed activities that will be provided with total project funds. **Note: Your application will not be considered for funding if it focuses assistance on only one cooperative or mutually-owned business; requests more than the maximum grant amount; or proposes ineligible costs that equal more than 10 percent of total project costs. Only one application can be submitted per applicant. If two applications are submitted (regardless of the applicant name) that include the same Executive Director and/or advisory boards or committees of an existing center, both applications will be determined ineligible for funding.**

"[CLICK AND INSERT OTHER ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS DISCUSSION]"

Grant Period Eligibility

[Instructions] Your application must include no more than one-year grant period or it will not be considered for funding. The grant period should begin no earlier than October 1, 2024, and no later than January 1, 2025. Indicate the grant period for your FY 2024 application here.

"[CLICK AND INSERT GRANT PERIOD ELIGIBILITY DISCUSSION]"

Satisfactory Performance Eligibility

[Instructions] If you have an existing RCDG award, you must be performing satisfactorily on all awards to be considered eligible for a new RCDG award. Satisfactory performance includes being up-to-date on all financial and performance reports and being current on all tasks as approved in the work plan. Indicate and describe the status of any existing RCDG awards.

"[CLICK AND INSERT SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE ELIGIBILITY DISCUSSION]"

GOALS OF THE PROJECT

[Instructions] You should include the following:

- A. A statement that substantiates that the Center will effectively serve rural areas in the United States;
- B. A statement that the primary objective of the Center will be to improve the economic condition of rural areas through cooperative development;
- C. A description of the contributions that the proposed activities are likely to make to the improvement of the economic conditions of the rural areas for which the Center will provide services. Expected economic impacts should be tied to tasks included in the work plan and budget; and
- D. A statement that the Center, in carrying out its activities, will seek, where appropriate, the advice, participation, expertise, and assistance of representatives of business, industry, educational institutions, the Federal government, and State and local governments.

"[CLICK AND INSERT THE GOALS OF THE PROJECT HERE]"

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION MEASURES

[Instructions] The Agency has established annual performance evaluation measures to evaluate the RCDG program. You must provide estimates on the following performance evaluation measures. It is permissible to have a zero in a performance element. When you calculate jobs created, estimates should be based upon actual jobs to be created by your organization as a result of the RCDG funding or actual jobs to be created by cooperative businesses or other businesses as a result of assistance from your organization. When you calculate jobs saved, estimates should be based only on actual jobs that have been lost if your organization did not receive RCDG funding or actual jobs that would have been lost without assistance from your organization.

- Number of groups who are not legal entities assisted.
- Number of businesses that are not cooperatives assisted.
- Number of cooperatives assisted.
- Number of businesses incorporated that are not cooperatives.
- Number of cooperatives incorporated.
- Total number of jobs created as a result of assistance.
- Total number of jobs saved as a result of assistance.
- Number of jobs created for the Center as a result of RCDG funding.
- Number of jobs saved for the Center as a result of RCDG funding.

[Instructions] You can also suggest additional performance elements for example where job creation or jobs saved may not be a relevant indicator (e.g. housing). These additional criteria should be specific, measurable performance elements that could be included in an award document.

"[CLICK AND INSERT PERFORMANCE MEASURES INFORMATION HERE]"

UNDERTAKINGS

[Instructions] You must describe how you will undertake to do each of the following. We would prefer if you described these undertakings within scoring criteria to reduce duplication in your application. The specific scoring criterion where you should address each undertaking is noted below. However, if you would rather address undertakings separately, describe how you will undertake to do each of the following under here.

- A. Take all practicable steps to develop continuing sources of financial support for the Center, particularly from sources in the private sectors (should be presented under scoring criterion number j., utilizing the specific requirements of Section E.1.j. of the Notice);
- B. Make arrangements for the Center's activities to be monitored and evaluated (should be addressed under scoring criterion number h., utilizing the specific requirements of Section E.1.h.); and
- C. Provide an accounting for the money received by the grantee in accordance with 7 CFR part 4284, subpart F. This should be addressed under scoring criterion number a., utilizing the specific requirements of Section E.1.a.

"[CLICK AND INSERT UNDERTAKINGS INFORMATION HERE]"

SCORING CRITERIA

[Instructions] Your application will not be considered for funding if you do not address all of the scoring criteria. Evaluators will base scores only on the information provided or cross-referenced by page number in each individual evaluation criterion. Newly established or proposed Centers that do not yet have a track record on which to evaluate the following criteria should refer to the expertise and track records of staff or consultants expected to perform tasks related to the respective criteria. Proposed or newly established Centers must be organized well-enough at the time of application to address their capabilities for meeting these criteria. Please describe specific project(s) when addressing a.-e. of this paragraph.

Administrative Capabilities

[Instructions]

- a. Administrative capabilities (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your demonstrated track record in carrying out activities in support of development assistance to cooperatively and mutually owned businesses. At a minimum, you must discuss the following administrative capabilities:
 - 1. Financial systems and audit controls;
 - 2. Personnel and program administration performance measures;
 - 3. Clear written rules of governance; and
 - 4. Experience administering Federal grant funding no later than the last 5 years, including but not limited to past RCDGs. Please list the name of the Federal grant program(s) and the amount(s) of funding received.

You will score higher on this criterion if you can demonstrate that the Center has independent governance. For applicants that are universities or parent organizations, you should demonstrate that there is a separate board of directors for the Center.

"[CLICK AND INSERT ADMINISTRATIVE CAPABILITIES DISCUSSION HERE]"

Technical Assistance and Other Services

[Instructions]

- b. Technical assistance and other services (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your demonstrated expertise no later than the last 5 years in providing technical assistance and accomplishing effective outcomes in rural areas to promote and assist the development of cooperatively and mutually owned businesses. You must discuss at least:
1. Your potential for delivering effective technical assistance;
 2. The types of assistance provided;
 3. The expected effects of that assistance;
 4. The sustainability of organizations receiving the assistance; and
 5. The transferability of your cooperative development strategies and focus to other areas of the U.S.

A chart or table showing the outcomes of your demonstrated expertise based upon the performance elements listed in Section D.2.b.5.iii. or as identified in your award document on previous RCDG awards. At a minimum, please provide information for FY 2019 - FY 2023 awards. You may also include any performance outcomes from an FY 2023 RCDG award. We prefer that you provide one chart or table separating out award years. The intention here is for you to provide actual performance numbers based upon award years (fiscal year) even though your grant period for the award was for the next calendar or fiscal year. Please provide a narrative explanation if you have not received a RCDG award.

You will score higher on this criterion if you provide more than 3 years of outcomes and can demonstrate that the organizations you assisted within the last 5 years are sustainable.

"[CLICK AND INSERT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DISCUSSION HERE]"

Economic Development

[Instructions]

- c. Economic development (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your demonstrated ability to facilitate:
1. Establishment of cooperatives or mutually owned businesses;
 2. New cooperative approaches (i.e., organizing cooperatives among underserved individuals or communities; an innovative market approach; a type of cooperative currently not in your service area; a

new cooperative structure; novel ways to raise member equity or community capitalization; conversion of an existing business to cooperative ownership); and

3. Retention of businesses, generation of employment opportunities or other factors, as applicable, that will otherwise improve the economic conditions of rural areas.

You will score higher on this criterion if you provide quantifiable economic measurements showing the impacts of your past development projects no later than the last 5 years and identify your role in the economic development outcomes.

"[CLICK AND INSERT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION HERE]"

Past Performance

[Instructions]

- d. Past performance in establishing legal business entities (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your demonstrated past performance in establishing legal cooperative business entities and other legal business entities during October 1, 2019 – June 3, 2024. Provide the name of the organization(s) established, the date of formation and your role in assisting with the incorporation(s) under this criterion.

In addition, documentation verifying the establishment of legal business entities must be included in Appendix C of your application and will not count against the 40-page limit for the narrative. The documentation must include proof that organizational documents were filed with the Secretary of State's Office (i.e. Certificate of Incorporation or information from the State's official Web site naming the entity established and the date of establishment); or if the business entity is not required to register with the Secretary of State, a certification from the business entity that a legal business entity has been established and when. Please note that you are not required to submit articles of incorporation to receive points under this criterion.

You will score higher on this criterion if you have established legal cooperative businesses.

"[CLICK AND INSERT PAST PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION HERE]"

Networking and Regional Focus

[Instructions]

- e. Networking and regional focus (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your demonstrated commitment to:
 1. Networking with other cooperative development centers, and other organizations involved in rural economic development efforts, and
 2. Developing multi-organization and multi-state approaches to addressing the economic development and cooperative needs of rural areas.

You will score higher on this criterion if you can demonstrate the outcomes of your multi-organizational and multi-state approaches. Please describe the project(s), partners and the outcome(s) that resulted from the approach.

"[CLICK AND INSERT NETWORKING AND REGIONAL FOCUS DISCUSSION HERE]"

Commitment

[Instructions]

- f. Commitment (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your commitment to providing technical assistance and other services to under-served and economically distressed areas in rural areas of the United States.

You will score higher on this criterion if you define and describe the underserved and economically distressed areas within your service area, provide statistics, and identify projects within or affecting these areas, as appropriate. Projects identified in the work plan and budget that are located in persistent poverty counties as defined in SEC. 736 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2024, will score even higher on this criterion.

"[CLICK AND INSERT COMMITMENT DISCUSSION HERE]"

Matching Funds

[Instructions]

- g. Matching Funds (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your commitment for the 25 percent (5 percent for 1994 Institutions) matching funds requirement. A chart or table should be provided to describe all matching funds being committed to the project. However, formal documentation to verify all of the matching funds must be included in Appendix A of your application. You will be scored on how you identify your matching funds.
 1. If you met the 25 percent (5 percent for 1994 Institutions) matching requirement, points will be assigned as follows:
 - In-kind only – 1 point,
 - Mix of in-kind and cash – 3-4 points (maximum points will be awarded if the ratio of cash to in-kind is 30 percent and above of matching funds), or
 - Cash only – 5 points.
 2. If you exceeded the 25 percent (5 percent for 1994 Institutions) matching requirement, points will be assigned as follows:

- In-kind only – 2 points,
- Mix of in-kind and cash – 6-7 points (maximum points will be awarded if the ratio of cash to in-kind is 30 percent and above of matching funds), or
- Cash only – up to 10 points.

"[CLICK AND INSERT MATCHING FUNDS DISCUSSION HERE]"

Work Plan/Budget

[Instructions]

- h. Work Plan/Budget (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your work plan for detailed actions and an accompanying timetable for implementing the proposal. The budget must present a breakdown of the estimated costs associated with cooperative and business development activities as well as the operation of the Center and allocate these costs to each of the tasks to be undertaken. Matching funds as well as grant funds must be accounted for in the budget. You must discuss at a minimum:
1. Specific tasks (whether it be by type of service or specific project) to be completed using grant and matching funds;
 2. How customers will be identified;
 3. Key personnel; and
 4. The evaluation methods to be used to determine the success of specific tasks and overall objectives of Center operations. Please provide qualitative methods of evaluation. For example, evaluation methods should go beyond quantitative measurements of completing surveys or number of evaluations.

You will score higher on this criterion if you present a clear, logical, realistic, and efficient work plan and budget.

Note: If your work plan and budget is duplicative of your existing award, your application will not be considered for funding. If your workplan and budget is duplicative of a previous or existing RCDG and/or Socially Disadvantaged Groups Grant (SDGG) award, your application will not be considered for funding. The Agency will make this determination. Please note that the Agency normally allows one active award to ensure that there is no duplication of services.

"[CLICK AND INSERT WORK PLAN/BUDGET DISCUSSION HERE]"

Qualifications of those Performing the Tasks

[Instructions]

- i. Qualifications of those Performing the Tasks (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your application to determine if the personnel expected to perform key tasks have a track record of:
1. Positive solutions for complex cooperative development and/or marketing problems; or

2. A successful record of conducting accurate feasibility studies, business plans, marketing analysis, or other activities relevant to your success as determined by the tasks identified in the your work plan; and
3. Whether the personnel expected to perform the tasks are full/part-time employees of your organization or are contract personnel.

You will score higher on this criterion if you demonstrate commitment and availability of qualified personnel expected to perform the tasks.

"[CLICK AND INSERT QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE PERFORMING TASKS DISCUSSION HERE]"

Local and Future Support

[Instructions]

j. Local and Future Support (maximum score of 10 points). A panel of USDA employees will evaluate your application for local and future support. Support should be discussed directly within the response to this criterion.

1. Discussion on local support should include previous and/or expected local support and plans for coordinating with other developmental organizations in the proposed service area or with state and local government institutions.

You will score higher if you demonstrate strong support from potential beneficiaries and formal evidence of intent to coordinate with other developmental organizations.

You may also submit a maximum of 10 letters of support or intent to coordinate with the application to verify your discussion. These letters should be included in Appendix B of your application and will not count against the 40-page limit for the narrative.

2. Discussion on future support will include your vision for funding operations in future years. You should document:
 - (i) New and existing funding sources that support your goals;
 - (ii) Alternative funding sources that reduce reliance on Federal, State, and local grants; and
 - (iii) The use of in-house personnel for providing services versus contracting out for that expertise. Please discuss your strategy for building in-house technical assistance capacity.

You will score higher if you can demonstrate that your future support will result in long-term sustainability of the Center.

"[CLICK AND INSERT LOCAL AND FUTURE SUPPORT DISCUSSION HERE]"

Administrator Points

[Instructions]

- k. Administrator Discretionary Points (maximum of 10 points). The Administrator may choose to award up to 10 points to an eligible non-profit corporation or institution of higher education that has never previously been awarded an RCDG grant or whose application seeks to advance the key priorities addressed in the Supplemental Section of this notice. Data sources for the key priorities are found at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points>. Points will be assigned as follows:
 - I. Applicant has never received a RCDG award – 5 points;
 - II. Applicant seeks to advance one or more key priorities addressed in the Supplemental Section of this notice – 5 points

CERTIFICATIONS

CERTIFICATION OF JUDGMENT

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICANT'S NAME HERE]" certifies that the United States has not obtained an unsatisfied judgment against its property and will not use grant funds to pay any judgments obtained by the United States."

CERTIFICATION OF MATCHING FUNDS

"[CLICK AND INSERT APPLICANT'S NAME HERE]" certifies that matching funds will be available at the same time grant funds are anticipated to be spent and that expenditures of matching funds shall be pro-rated or spent in advance of grant funding, such that for every dollar of the total project cost, at least 25 cents (5 cents for 1994 Institutions) of matching funds will be expended."

APPENDIX A: VERIFICATION OF MATCHING FUNDS

[Instructions] You must provide documentation in your application to verify all of your proposed matching funds. Please see Section D.2.b.8. of the FY 2024 NOFO for verification document requirements on each type of matching funds contribution and clarifications on identifying matching funds appropriately. In addition, please see Section C.2. of the NOFO for additional guidelines on matching funds. The documentation must be included in this Appendix and will not count towards the 40-page limitation. Verification templates are available at <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-cooperative-development-grant-program>"

APPENDIX B: LETTERS OF SUPPORT

[Instructions] You may submit a maximum of 10 letters of support or intent to coordinate with the application. These letters should be included as part of this Appendix and will not count against the 40-page limitation.

APPENDIX C: Past Performance

[Instructions] You must provide documentation in your application to verify past performance in establishing legal business entities. The documentation must include proof that organizational documents were filed with the Secretary of State's Office (i.e. Certificate of Incorporation or information from the State's official Web site naming the entity established and the date of establishment); or if the business entity is not required to register with the Secretary of State, a certification from the business entity that a legal business entity has been established and when. Please note that you are not required to submit articles of incorporation. This documentation must be included as part of this Appendix and will not count against the 40-page limitation.