

OMB BURDEN STATEMENT: According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are 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 0584-0512. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average **40** 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

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

Food and Nutrition Service  
National School Lunch Program  
Fiscal Year 2015

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

**DIRECT CERTIFICATION  
IMPROVEMENT GRANTS**

CFDA#: 10.579

KEY DATES

RFA Release Date: *May 4, 2015*

Application Submission Date:

*July 15, 2015*  
*October 15, 2015*  
*January 15, 2016*  
*April 15, 2016*  
*July 15, 2016*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	4
A. Background and Authority	4
B. Purpose of Grant Funding	5
II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION	6
A. Funding Amount	6
B. Award Type	6
C. Non-Competitive	8
D. Application and Review Dates	9
E. Award Periods	9
F. FNS Collaboration with State Grantees	10
III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	10
A. Eligible Applicants	10
B. Cost Sharing or Matching	11
IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION	11
A. Access to Application	11
B. Content of the Application Submission	12
C. Format of the Application Submission	14
D. Electronic Submission	15
E. Application Confirmation	17
F. Submission Date and Time	17
G. Funding Restrictions	18
V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION	18
A. Initial Screening	18
B. Panel Review	18
C. Review and Selection Process	21
D. Determination of Award Amounts	21
VI. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION	22
A. Federal Award Notice	22
B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements	22
C. Reporting	25

VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS	26
VIII. OTHER INFORMATION	26
RFA APPLICATION CHECKLIST	27
RFA BUDGET NARRATIVE CHECKLIST	28
APPENDIX A: LINK TO RESOURCES	30

SEPARATE DOCUMENTS

APPENDIX B: TIER LIMITED-SCOPE GRANT PROPOSAL TEMPLATE & INSTRUCTIONS

APPENDIX C: TIER 2 FULL-SCOPE GRANT PROPOSAL TEMPLATE & INSTRUCTIONS

## I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service invites State agencies that administer the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) to apply for Direct Certification Improvement Grants to fund the costs of improving their direct certification rates with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other assistance programs, as allowed under Federal statute and regulations. Under this request for applications (RFA), approximately \$4.5 million is available for grants to NSLP State agencies to fund direct certification improvement projects.

### A. Background and Authority

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Public Law 108-265 [42 United States Code 1751 et. seq.], required all local educational agencies (LEAs) to establish, by school year (SY) 2008-2009, a system to directly certify children as eligible for free school meals when they are members of households that receive SNAP benefits. Under direct certification, children are approved for school meal benefits automatically without an application from the child's household. Direct certification normally is accomplished through data matching between school enrollment records and public assistance program eligibility records.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill, P.L.110-246) [42 USC 1758a.] required FNS to assess the effectiveness of State and local efforts to directly certify children for free school meals when they are members of households receiving SNAP, and to provide annual reports to Congress indicating State progress in this area. Each year since 2008, FNS has computed direct certification rates for each State using estimates of the number of school-age SNAP participants (between ages 5 and 17) and the number of children from SNAP households directly certified as eligible for free school meals. These rates have been published in the annual Report to Congress: *Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program: State Implementation Progress*. The national average direct certification rate for children in SNAP households for SY 2013-2014 was calculated as 87 percent, a decrease of 2 percentage points from the 89 percent reported for SY 2012-2013. The Reports to Congress for 2008 through 2013 are available at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/CNP/cnp.htm>.

Section 749(h) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-80) [123 STAT. 2133] provided \$22 million that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) must issue as grants to State agencies that administer the NSLP and have the lowest rates of children directly certified for free meals, for the purpose of improving those rates. State agencies may use grant funds, in accordance with FNS requirements, to pay costs associated with improving their direct certification rates. Under this appropriation, in July 2010, FNS announced an RFA for State agencies to apply for Direct Certification planning and implementation grants. Applications in response to the 2010 RFA were accepted on a quarterly basis from November 2010 through July 2012, and FNS awarded 31 grants to 21 State agencies. A second RFA was released in December 2012, and

later extended in July 2013, to allow quarterly applications through July 2014 for Direct Certification Improvement Grants. Under the second RFA, FNS has awarded 13 grants to 13 State agencies. FNS now is issuing a new Direct Certification Improvement Grant opportunity to make available to States approximately **\$4.5 million** in remaining funds to be used for direct certification improvements.

#### B. Purpose of Grant Funding

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 (P.L. 111-296) [124 STAT. 3185] amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to add provisions intended to encourage States to improve program access through direct certification, including:

1. Requiring States to reach percentage benchmarks for direct certification rates for children in households receiving assistance under SNAP according to the following timelines:
  - 80% for SY 2011-2012;
  - 90% for SY 2012-2013; and
  - 95% for SY 2013-2014 and each school year thereafter.
2. Requiring States that fall below the benchmark for the previous school year to develop and implement continuous improvement plans (CIPs) to describe: 1) specific measures that the State will use to identify more children who are eligible for direct certification, including improvements or modifications to technology, information systems, or databases; 2) a timeline for the State to implement those measures; and 3) goals for the State to improve direct certification results.

The purpose of the Direct Certification Improvement Grants described in this RFA is to fund State agency activities in planning and implementing direct certification improvement projects that will help them **reach and maintain the direct certification rate benchmarks** mandated by the HHFKA.

For this purpose, funds may be used for:

- Making technology improvements;
- Providing technical assistance to LEAs; or
- Implementing new or revised State or LEA direct certification systems.

In addition, the grants are intended to fund improvements in direct certification with other public programs where there is statutory authority for direct certification, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), foster care, migrants, homeless, etc. Ultimately, FNS intends for the grants to assist States in improving access, increasing accuracy, and reducing paperwork in the NSLP and SBP by simplifying the certification process for free school meals.

## Using Grant Funds for Direct Certification with Medicaid

Applicants may propose to use a portion of the grant funds for activities related to direct certification with Medicaid. However, the use of grant funds for this purpose will be restricted to State agencies that apply for a grant to improve their direct certification rate with SNAP and are participating in the demonstration projects to evaluate direct certification with Medicaid, as described in FNS Memorandum SP 12-2014 Revised, *Request for Applications for Participation in Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid in School Year (SY) 2014-2015*. This memorandum, along with attachments, is located at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/policy.htm>.

## II. FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

### A. Funding Amount

FNS is issuing this Direct Certification Improvement Grant opportunity to make available to States approximately **\$4.5 million** in remaining funds to be used for direct certification improvements. The number of grants awarded is dependent upon the number and type of applicants.

### B. Award Type

The FY 2015 Direct Certification Improvement Grant award process involves two types of awards. State agencies may apply for only one grant award under this RFA.

1. Tier 1: Limited-scope planning and implementation projects - up to \$150,000
2. Tier 2: Full-scope implementation projects - up to \$1,000,000

#### **Tier 1: Limited-Scope Planning and Implementation Grants - up to \$150,000**

Tier 1 grants may be awarded for up to **\$150,000** under a simplified application process to fund short term projects of limited scope for the distinct purpose of improving direct certification rates. Please note that **funds limited to no more than \$75,000 for planning activities**. If a State agency proposes to conduct both planning and implementation activities under the grant, the proposed budget must clearly delineate between the costs associated with planning and the costs associated with implementation to ensure that planning costs do not exceed \$75,000.

Regardless of the activities proposed, applicants must provide sufficient documentation to explain and justify all grant project cost estimates to establish that they are reasonable, necessary, allowable and allocable to the purpose of these grants. Additionally, FNS retains authority to award less than the amount requested in the application.

Tier 1 grants may have a performance period of **up to one year** and are intended to pay the costs of direct certification improvement activities, such as one or a combination of the following:

1. Planning activities (limited to no more than \$75,000 in costs for planning only), including acquiring expert assistance in:
  - Assessing and analyzing direct certification processes and systems to identify and prioritize needed improvements and plan for implementation; and
  - Developing continuous improvement plans (CIPs), as required for States that do not meet the mandated direct certification benchmarks.
2. Upgrades, add-ons, or other enhancements to existing direct certification systems and processes;
3. Purchase of new software or hardware for direct certification purposes;
4. Training LEAs to target specific known problem areas in the direct certification process; or
5. Some combination of the above.

For example, a State agency may have a good direct certification system in place, but needs to engage in short-term projects of limited scope to add a new feature or make one or more adjustments, such as, but not limited to:

1. Increasing match frequency;
2. Adding data elements or new algorithms for more accurate data matching;
3. Adding/improving online lookup capability;
4. Improving data exchange processes with SNAP and TANF agencies;
5. Creating/updating software and reporting tools;
6. Making changes necessary to comply with revised Federal reporting requirements for direct certification data;
7. Simplifying LEA access to data matches;
8. Adding or improving ability to identify other children in the household who are categorically eligible for free meals due to SNAP/TANF/FDPIR eligibility of at least one household member;
9. Prioritizing unmatched results for easier processing;
10. Purchasing hardware or software for direct certification purposes. Software and hardware purchases may be for use by the NSLP State agency, by LEAs within their State, or by SNAP/TANF agencies for the purpose of direct certification;
11. Conducting training with LEAs to improve performance in accessing and processing data matches timely and accurately;
12. Adding or improving monitoring capability so the State agency can assess direct certification performance; or

13. Other targeted efforts to improve current direct certification systems and processes.

To develop an application for a Tier 1 grant, State agencies must address the questions in the *Appendix B: Tier 1 Limited-Scope Grant Proposal Template & Instructions*. The instructions are designed to assist State agencies in developing fully responsive Tier 1 grant applications for viable projects of limited scope and to bring consistency to the proposal process for evaluation purposes.

**Tier 2: Full-Scope Implementation Grants – Up to \$1,000,000**

Tier 2 full-scope implementation grants may be awarded for up to **\$1,000,000** to fund direct certification implementation projects with a performance period of **one to three years**. These grants are for the purpose of supporting State agencies in carrying out projects of significant scope to improve direct certification performance. Tier 2 grants are intended for States that already know “what they need to do to improve,” but lack the resources to implement the improvements. Planning activities, such as system analysis, process assessments, and CIP development are not acceptable activities for these full-scope implementation grants. In order to develop a reasonable proposal for a project of this larger scope, FNS assumes that State agencies already have completed assessment and planning activities and are prepared to move forward with an implementation project.

Tier 2 grants may fund major training and technology improvements (for example, a major re-write of the State’s direct certification system to move from district-level matching to State-level matching) or combinations of improvement activities that will exceed \$150,000 in total cost. Potential uses of Tier 2 grant funds include any of the implementation activities listed above (except for planning activities) under “Tier 1: Limited-Scope Planning and Implementation Grants - up to \$150,000,” as well as more extensive implementation projects to implement new direct certification technologies and training.

Applicant agencies must address the questions in the *Appendix C: Tier 2 - Full-Scope Grant Proposal Template & Instructions* to develop an implementation grant application. Appendix C instructions and tips are designed to: 1) guide applicants in thinking through all aspects of implementing proposed solutions, with particular emphasis on reducing risks associated with technology related aspects of their proposals; and 2) assist applicants in considering and capturing budget items such as, but not limited to, costs for personnel, contractors, purchasing equipment, developing training, supplies and travel. Following the guidance will assist State agencies to develop fully responsive implementation grant applications, and help to bring consistency to the proposal process for evaluation purposes.

The maximum amount of any single full-scope implementation grant is **\$1,000,000**. However, the size of implementation grants will likely vary, based on differences in project scope, the responsiveness of application packages (see **Section IV Application and Submission Information**), and clarity of demonstrated need. Regardless of the activities proposed, applicants must provide sufficient documentation to explain and justify all grant project cost estimates to establish that they are reasonable, necessary, allowable and allocable to the purpose of these grants. Additionally, FNS retains authority to award less than the amount

requested by an applicant.

### **C. Non-Competitive**

Grant awards under this RFA will not be competitive as long as sufficient funding is available to fund all fully responsive applications with potential to significantly improve direct certification performance. If sufficient funding is not available to award grants to all applicants, FNS reserves the right to give preference to applications from States with the lowest direct certification rates with SNAP, as reported in the latest Direct Certification Report to Congress. Preference also may be given based on the amount of grant funding already awarded to the applicant agencies for direct certification improvement purposes under the previous Direct Certification Grant RFAs (see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Grants/Grants2012.htm>). FNS reserves the right to close the RFA and accept no further applications at any point that available funds are exhausted.

**IMPORTANT:** The CND grants website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm> will be updated to indicate closure of the RFA if grant funds are exhausted before July 15, 2016 (the final application deadline). If this occurs, the closure information will display as a notice on this public website. **Potential applicants should check the website to ensure that funds are available before submitting an application.**

### **D. Application and Review Dates**

#### **Tier 1: Limited-Scope Planning and Implementation Grants:**

The deadline schedule for Tier 1 applications may be found in Section IV. FNS will process Tier 1 applications within approximately 45 days from the application deadline by which it was received.

#### **Tier 2: Full-Scope Implementation Grants:**

The deadline schedule for Tier 2 applications may be found in Section IV. FNS will process Tier 2 applications within approximately 90 days from the application deadline by which it was received.

### **E. Award Periods**

The award period for the FY 2015 Tier 1 and Tier 2 grants will be as follows, beginning from the date of the award:

- Tier 1 limited-scope grants will be awarded for up to one year; and
- Tier 2 full-scope implementation grants will be awarded for one to three years.

All grant funds must be obligated and all program activities under the grant (other than activities relating to the close out of the grant) must be completed by the end of award period. The closeout of the grant must occur no later than 90 days following the end of the award period, and

all obligations incurred under the grant must be liquidated by this date. Any funds that are not liquidated within 90 days following the end of the award period must be returned to FNS. In addition, the final progress reports are due to FNS no later than 90 days following the end of the award period. Please see Section VI Federal Award Administration Information for additional reporting requirements.

#### **F. FNS Collaboration with State Grantees**

FNS intends to work collaboratively with grant applicants and grantees throughout the application process and the life of grants awarded through this RFA. Accordingly, within approximately three weeks of this RFA's publication, FNS will conduct a webinar with all State agencies and FNS regional offices to review the RFA and address questions regarding the application process. Notification of the webinar date, time and call-in information will be communicated to State agencies via the Child Nutrition Division's PartnerWeb community at <https://www.partnerweb.usda.gov>.

FNS anticipates awarding the funds as cooperative agreements to allow FNS more active participation with the cooperator during both project development and project execution. Examples of FNS participation include activities such as the following:

1. Ongoing evaluation of quarterly progress and financial reports to monitor the grantee's project activities to ensure that the objectives, terms and conditions of the agreement are met;
2. Periodic on-site and off-site technical assistance to provide evaluation and guidance on project activities and outputs as they relate to child nutrition program objectives, including: providing program guidance on curriculum development; evaluation of training materials and websites; evaluation of technology improvements; review of project plans and milestones; review of procurement documents for sub-grantee involvement (i.e., requests for proposals, contracts, statements of work, and project plans) and other technical assistance related to project objectives; and
3. Periodic collaborative meetings for multiple grantees for the purposes of technical assistance, training, problem solving and sharing successful or promising practices. Meetings may be conducted as webinars, teleconferences or training workshops at a program related conference.

Summaries of Direct Certification grants that were awarded under the previous RFAs are located on the FNS Child Nutrition Division grants website at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/grants>

### **III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

#### **A. Eligible Applicants**

Per Section 749(h) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and

Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-80), grants are available to State agencies that administer the NSLP and have the lowest direct certification rates for children who are members of households receiving SNAP benefits. Because of the statutory mandate under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act for States to **reach** and **maintain** direct certification rates with SNAP of at least 95 percent, and due to the number of recent and upcoming changes in direct certification policy and procedures which may require adjustments to State and local direct certification systems (i.e., elimination of SNAP letter method as a method of direct certification, pending changes in direct certification reporting requirements, mandated increase in frequency for running matches, continuous improvement plans, etc.), this grant opportunity is extended to all States, as follows:

1. **All NSLP State agencies** are eligible to apply for **Tier 1** Direct Certification Improvement Grants, even if they were awarded grant(s) under previous direct certification grant RFAs. However, applications must clearly demonstrate the State's need for grant funds to enable it to reach and maintain SNAP direct certification rates at the 95 percent level.
2. **All NSLP State agencies** are eligible to apply for **Tier 2** Direct Certification Improvement Grants, State agencies applying for a second Tier 2 award or who have direct certification rates with SNAP that are already at 95 percent or higher, as reported in the latest Direct Certification Report to Congress, must present a compelling case in their application proposals as to why additional funds are necessary for improvements in their direct certification system or processes for them to reach and/or maintain rates at or above the mandated 95 percent benchmark. (The Reports to Congress can be viewed at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/CNP/cnp.htm>).
3. FNS will accept **only one grant application** from any State agency under this RFA. However, if funds remain available at the end of the RFA period (ending July 2016), FNS reserves the right to extend the RFA and reconsider this application restriction at that time.

#### **B. Cost Sharing or Matching Considerations**

There are no cost sharing or matching requirements to participate in this grant project.

### **IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

#### **A. Access to Application**

Applicants may obtain the RFA package by downloading the application from the FNS website <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/grants> or by downloading the application from the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website. To be considered for awards, applications must be submitted to

Grants.gov. Applications submitted via mail service, facsimile or e-mail will not be considered for funding.

State agencies have the option of applying for either a Tier 1 grant or a Tier 2 grant, but not both. Only one grant application in response to this solicitation will be accepted from any State during the life of the RFA.

- Tier 1 simplified applications (see Appendix B for narrative proposal template) for limited-scope planning and implementation applications must be received by 11:59 pm eastern time on the application due date. Applications submitted after the given deadline will not be accepted.
- Tier 2 applications (see Appendix C for narrative proposal template) for full-scope implementation projects applications must be received by 11:59 pm eastern time on the application due date. Applications submitted after the given deadline will not be accepted.

Applicants may request a paper copy of this solicitation and required forms by contacting the FNS Grants Officer at:

Carla Garcia  
 Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS  
 3101 Park Center Drive Room 740  
 Alexandria, VA 22301  
 E-mail: Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov  
 Phone Number: (703) 305-2760

**B. Content of the Application Submission**

To be considered complete, Direct Certification Improvement Grant applications must include all the required documents and information listed in the following sections for the specific type of grant -- Tier 1 or Tier 2.

**Tier 1: Limited-Scope Planning and Implementation Grant Applications**

To be considered complete, application packages for Tier 1 grants must include all information listed in the following table. Failure to provide any item on the list could result in your application being removed from competition.

<b>Table 1 – Checklist for TIER 1 Simplified Application Package</b>		
<b>Grant Type</b>	<b>Application Due Dates</b>	<b>Maximum per Award</b>
<b>TIER 1 – Simplified Application for Limited-Scope Planning &amp; Implementation Grants</b>	<b>July 15, 2015 October 15, 2015 January 15, 2016 April 15, 2016</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>

<b>July 15, 2016</b>	
<b>Required Documents and Information</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<p><b>1. Tier 1: Limited-Scope Grant Proposal Template (or similar format) - <i>Appendix B</i></b></p> <p>10-page limit</p> <p>Make sure pages are numbered</p>	<p>For a Tier 1 grant project proposal narrative to be considered complete, applicants must structure and develop their proposal narrative by answering all questions listed in the <b><i>Appendix B: Tier 1 Limited-Scope Grant Proposal Template &amp; Instructions.</i></b></p> <p>Applicants should address all questions in the order they are listed. The instructions are intended to simplify both the narrative development for applicants and the evaluation process for reviewers.</p>
2. Form SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>
3. Form SF-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>
4. Form SF-424B, Assurances – Non-Construction Programs	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>
5. Form SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>
6. Indirect Cost Rate Agreement	If Indirect Costs are included in the budget, applicants must provide a copy of their agency’s signed Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with a Federal agency.
7. Justification for Sole Source Contracts	If contractual costs are included in the budget estimate and the contractor is (or will be) acquired without competition, the applicant must provide a justification for a sole source contract.

**Tier 2: Full-Scope Implementation Grant Applications**

To be considered complete, application packages for Tier 2 grants must include all information listed in the following table. Failure to provide any item on the list could result in your application being removed from competition.

<b>Table 2 – Checklist for TIER 2 Full Application Package</b>		
<b>Grant Type</b>	<b>Application Due Date (if funds remain available)</b>	<b>Maximum per Award</b>

<b>TIER 2 Application for Full-Scope Implementation Grants</b>	<b>July 15, 2015 October 15, 2015 January 15, 2016 April 15, 2016 July 15, 2016</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>
<b>Required Documents and Information</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	
1. Cover Page	Include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agency Name and Address</li> <li>- Contact Information - Name, address, phone number, email address, and fax number for the NSLP agency administrator and staff person(s) responsible for the application;</li> <li>- Brief abstract to summarize proposed grant project goals, objectives and proposed solution (maximum 250 words)</li> </ul>	
2. Tier 2: Full-Scope Implementation Grant Proposal Template (or similar format) – <i>Appendix C</i>  35-page limit for responses to Questions 1-22  Make sure pages are numbered	For Tier 2 Implementation project proposal narrative to be considered complete, applicants must structure and develop their project proposal by answering all questions in the <i>Appendix C: Tier 2 Full-Scope Implementation Grant Proposal Template &amp; Instructions</i> . The template is designed to guide applicants in thinking through all aspects of proposed solutions, with particular emphasis on reducing risks associated with technology related aspects of their proposals prior to the grant award. Applicants should address all questions in the order they are listed.	
3. Form SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>	
4. Form SF-424A, Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>	
5. Form SF-424B, Assurances – Non-Construction Programs	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>	
6. Form SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities	Link to form at: <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm</a>	
7. Indirect Cost Rate Agreement	If Indirect Costs are included in the budget, applicants must provide a copy of their agency’s signed Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with a Federal agency.	
8. Justification for Sole Source Contracts	If Contractual costs are included in budget estimate and the contractor is (or will be) acquired without competition, the applicant must provide a justification for a sole source contract.	

### C. Format of the Application Submission

Applications should meet the following formatting guidelines:

1. **10-page** maximum length for **Tier 1** grant narrative response to **Appendix B**;
2. **35-page** maximum length for **Tier 2** grant narrative response to **Appendix C**;
3. Page restrictions apply only to content of the narrative proposals and do not apply to other required forms and supporting documents, such as the SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, cover page, indirect cost rate agreement, resumes, letters of support, and assurance forms);
4. 8 ½” by 11” paper;
5. 12 point Times New Roman or Arial font size (smaller font may be used in tables, charts and graphs as long as they are clearly readable);
6. Numbered pages.

### D. Electronic Submission

Applicants **must submit applications electronically through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)** by 11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on the scheduled RFA due date. Applications received after the deadline date will be held until the following review period. USDA will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. FNS will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications. To submit the application electronically via the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website, there are a number of steps in the registration process that will be required before the application may be submitted. It is very important that users of the [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) system familiarize themselves with the requirements for system use (see below).

#### Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) Number

In order to submit an application via [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), applicants must have obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered in both the new Systems for Award Management (SAM) and on [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). The applicant is strongly advised to allow ample time to initiate the [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) application submission process. Please visit the following websites to obtain additional information on how to obtain a DUNS number ([www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)) and register in SAM (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>).

**DUNS Number:** In order to obtain a DUNS number, if your organization does not have one, or if you are unsure of your organization’s number you can contact Dun and Bradstreet via the internet at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-888-814-1435, Monday thru Friday, 8am-9pm EST. There is no fee associated with obtaining a DUNS number. Obtaining a DUNS number may take several days to obtain.

#### System for Award Management (SAM)

**What is SAM?:** The System for Award Management (SAM) is combining Federal procurement systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance into one new system.

For additional information regarding SAM see the following link:

[https://www.acquisition.gov/SAM\\_Guides/Quick%20Guide%20for%20Grants%20Registrations%20v1.pdf](https://www.acquisition.gov/SAM_Guides/Quick%20Guide%20for%20Grants%20Registrations%20v1.pdf)

Below is some additional information that should assist the applicant through this process:

**SAM Registration:** For applicant organizations that were previously registered in the CCR, relevant applicant information is already in SAM; set up a SAM account as necessary to update any information. To register in SAM, the applicant's DUNS number, Tax ID Number (TIN), and taxpayer name (as it appears on the applicant's last tax return) are all required. SAM verifies all information submitted by the applicant using several systems. This verification takes at least **48 hours** after your registration is submitted to SAM. Applicants must have a valid SAM registration no later than 3 days prior to the application due date of this solicitation. **Applicants that do not receive confirmation that SAM registration is complete and active should contact SAM at: <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list>.**

**SAM Presentation/Training:** GSA has created a presentation of a SAM training. To view the presentation, please visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmHcKCchaiY>

This will be extremely useful for SAM users that are:

- Registering at SAM for the first time
- Setting up user permissions from CCR into the SAM registration (called migrating)
- Updating / renewing CCR record in SAM

**PLEASE BE AWARE:** In some instances the process to complete the migration of permissions and/or the renewal of the entity record will require **5-7 days or more**. We strongly encourage grantees to begin the process at least **3 weeks before** grant the due date of the grant solicitation.

Grants.gov

**Grants.gov Registration:** In order to apply for a grant, your organization must have completed the above registrations as well as register on Grants.gov. The Grants.gov registration process can be accessed at [www.grants.gov/applicants/get\\_reistered.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_reistered.jsp). Generally, the registration process takes between **3-5 business days**. Allow your entity ample time to complete the necessary steps, for the submission of your grant application package, on grants.gov.

Please be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices; applicants should ensure receipt of confirmation that the application was accepted.

**NOTICE: Special Characters not Supported:** All applicants **MUST** follow grants.gov guidance on file naming conventions. To avoid submission issues, please follow the guidance provided in the grants.gov Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

**Are there restrictions on file names for any attachment I include with my application package?**

File attachment names longer than approximately 50 characters can cause problems processing packages. Please limit file attachment names. Also, do not use any special characters (example: &, -, \*, %, /, #, -), this includes periods (.), spacing followed by a dash in the file and for word separation, use underscore (example: Attached\_File.pdf) in naming the attachments. **Please note that if these guidelines are not followed, your application will be rejected. FNS will not accept any application rejected from [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) portal due to incorrect naming conventions.**

In order to submit an application via grants.gov, applicants must have obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered in both the new Systems for Award Management (SAM) and on grants.gov. The applicant is strongly advised to allow ample time to initiate the grants.gov application submission process. All applicants must have current Central Contractor Registry (CCR) status at the time of application submission and throughout the duration of a federal award in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25. Please visit the following websites to obtain additional information on how to obtain a DUNS number ([www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)) and register in SAM (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>).

**E. Application Confirmation**

Please be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices; you need to be sure that you have confirmation that the application was accepted. Once the confirmation notice that the application has been accepted by the system is received, applicants must then send an email to notify the FNS Grant Officer that the proposal has been submitted through the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) portal and that they have received a confirmation notice from [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) that the application has been accepted by the system. It is recommended that you submit the online application at least two weeks before the application deadline so you may resolve any submission issues.

Carla Garcia  
Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS  
3101 Park Center Drive Room 740  
Alexandra, VA 22301  
E-mail: [Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov)  
Phone Number: (703) 305-2760

Applicants experiencing difficulty submitting applications to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) should contact the grants officer listing above for further instructions.

**F. Submission Dates and Times**

The complete application must be uploaded on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by 11:59 PM, Eastern Time of the scheduled on the scheduled RFA due date. Applications received after the deadline date will be held until the following review period. FNS will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received. FNS will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications.

## **G. Funding Restrictions**

In addition to the administrative requirements contained in this RFA, the provisions below will also be a part of the agreement between FNS and the State agency:

1. Funds authorized cannot be used to replace existing funding (e.g. State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds) earmarked by the State agency for administrative review, oversight and training.
2. Current expenditures of State and local funds for the operation of school nutrition programs shall not be diminished as a result of receipt of funds to implement direct certification improvements.
3. Funds cannot be used to shift existing staff from their normal duties paid with SAE funds to support the grant activities unless the staff that are reassigned are replaced with additional staff in the positions that are vacant.
4. Funds must be used for FNS approved Direct Certification Improvement grant project activities for the purpose of improving direct certification processes and rates.

## **V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

### **Review Criteria & Evaluation Factors**

FNS will evaluate the applications in accordance with the criteria outlined in this section to select applications for awards. The actual number of awards will depend on the quality of the applications and the availability of funds. Funds will be made available via a Cooperative Agreement award document following the award announcements.

### **A. Initial Screening**

FNS will screen all applications to ensure they are eligible and fully responsive. Eligible and responsive applications are those that meet the following requirements:

- Submitted by eligible applicants (see **Section III A. Eligible Applicants**);
- Submitted on or before the required deadline (see **Section II D. Application and Review Dates**);
- Are complete (see **Section IV B. Content of the Application Submission**); and
- Are in the required format (see **Section IV C. Format of the Application Submission**).

Ineligible or nonresponsive applications **will be removed from further consideration** for grant funds. Thereafter, FNS will review and consider eligible applications in accordance with the evaluation process described in the following paragraphs.

## **B. Panel Review**

After initial screening, FNS will convene a technical evaluation panel of FNS staff to consider the merit of each grant application. Each application that passes initial screening will be given to the panel to be evaluated as to how well it addresses each application component. The panel will determine if all questions are addressed adequately and identify any areas that need further clarification. If further clarification is needed to determine the merit of the application, FNS will notify the applicant in writing and describe any information that is needed to make the award decision. Applicants will be given an opportunity to provide additional information and documentation needed to clarify the proposal content.

### **1. Evaluation of Tier 1 Proposals (Simplified application for funding up to \$150,000)**

The panel review for Tier 1 applications will focus, at a minimum, on the following components:

- **Project Purpose and Impact on Direct Certification**
  - The significance of the problem(s) to be addressed is clearly demonstrated and proposed activities are appropriate to address the problem(s) identified.
  - The project goals and objectives are in line with the purpose of the funding described in *Section I-B, Purpose of Grant Funding*.
  - The project activities to be completed during the grant period clearly support sustainable improvements that will likely increase direct certification rates with SNAP (and other public programs, if applicable). Proposed activities are in line with the examples given for Tier 1 projects in *Section II-A, Tier 1: Limited-Scope Planning and Implementation Project*.
- **Project Timeline and Sustainability**
  - The scope and timeline proposed for the project are reasonable and attainable during the proposed grant time frame.
  - The applicant demonstrates that the State agency has the capacity to implement and sustain the program improvements resulting from the grant activities after the Direct Certification Improvement Grant funding ends.
- **Budget Plan**
  - The total funding amount requested is appropriate for the scope of the project.
  - Proposed costs are reasonable, necessary, allowable and allocable to carry out the project's goals and objectives.

- The budget includes a line item description for every allowable cost. If planning activities are included, the budget for planning costs is clearly separated so that all planning costs can be reviewed separately from costs for implementation activities.
- Budget calculations and documentation show clearly how the budget components were developed and costs estimated.
- If indirect costs are included, the applicant agency's Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with a Federal agency is provided and the indirect cost rate is applied correctly to allowable direct costs.
- If contractual costs are included in budget estimate and the contractor is (or will be) acquired without competition, the applicant has provided strong justification for a sole source contract with copies/references to State statutes, regulations and policies that support the sole source decision.

## **2. Evaluation of Tier 2 Proposals (Full application for funding up to \$1,000,000)**

The panel review for Tier 2 applications will focus, at a minimum, on the following components:

- **Project Purpose, Goals and Impact on Direct Certification**

- The significance of the problem(s) to be addressed is clearly demonstrated and proposed implementation activities are appropriate to address the problem(s) identified.
- The project goals and objectives are in line with the purpose of the funding described in *Section I-B, Purpose of Grant Funding*.
- The project activities to be completed during the grant period clearly support sustainable improvements that will likely increase direct certification rates with SNAP (and other public programs, if applicable). Proposed activities are in line with the examples given for Tier 2 projects in *Section II-B, Full-Scope Implementation Projects*.
- The performance measures used to assess success are realistic, measureable and clearly defined.

- **Project Planning, Design and Management**

- The project organization, project management approach (including staffing, procurement of contractors, communications planning, quality assurance planning, risk management planning, system development lifecycle process planning where applicable, partnering with appropriate stakeholders, tracking timelines, measuring performance, monitoring progress, etc.) indicate that the applicant has the capacity to manage and execute the implementation project successfully to meet the goals of the project.

- The scope and timeline proposed for the project are reasonable and attainable during the grant time frame.
- **Budget Plan**
  - The total funding amount requested is appropriate for the scope of the project;
  - Proposed costs are reasonable, necessary, allowable and allocable to carry out the project's goals and objectives;
  - The budget includes a line item description for every estimated cost and shows how it supports the project goals.
  - Budget calculations and documentation show clearly how the budget components were developed and costs estimated.
  - If indirect costs are included, the applicant agency's Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with a Federal agency is provided and the indirect cost rate is applied correctly to allowable direct costs.
  - If contractual costs are included in budget estimate and the contractor is (or will be) acquired without competition, the applicant has provided strong justification for a sole source contract with copies/references to State statutes, regulations and policies that support the sole source decision.
- **Sustainability and Transferability**
  - The proposed implementation project is likely to produce outcomes and information that not only will aid the applicant State agency in accomplishing direct certification improvements, but also will produce knowledge that is transferable to other State agencies for similar improvement projects.
  - The applicant demonstrates that the State agency has the capacity to implement and sustain the program improvements resulting from the grant activities after the Direct Certification Improvement Grant funding ends.

### C. **Review and Selection Process**

Grant awards under this RFA will not be competitive as long as sufficient funding is available to fund all fully responsive applications. If sufficient funding is not available to award grants to all applicants, FNS reserves the right to give preference to applications from States with the lowest direct certification rates with SNAP, as reported in the latest Direct Certification Report to Congress.

The Selection Official has ultimate authority to decide which applications are approved and funded, and *generally* will adhere to the recommendations made by the technical review panel, provided that funding is available. However, the Selection Official reserves the right to deviate from those recommendations to take other factors into account when granting awards and/or not awarding a particular award. Other USDA or FNS priorities the Selection Official may consider

include, *but are not limited to*: the innovation demonstrated in an application; agency priorities; and the evaluation by the technical review panel.

#### **D. Determination of Award Amounts**

As part of the technical review process, FNS will review applicants' budgets to ensure that all costs are reasonable, necessary, allowable and allocable to the purposes of this RFA. Applications selected and approved for funding with budgets that are realistic, well justified, and supported will likely be funded at the requested amounts. However, FNS reserves the right to fund applications out of rank order to achieve priorities identified earlier; or at lesser amounts if FNS determines that the project can be implemented with less funding; or at lesser amounts if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards. This is subject to availability of funds.

FNS will review and consider the merit of each grant application and reserves the right to fund only those applications that are able to demonstrate the applicant's capability to improve their State's direct certification processes and rates. Additionally, FNS may adjust the amounts requested in the application to ensure that funds are made available at appropriate levels. FNS also reserves the right to suspend or terminate an award for materially failing to perform in accordance with a State agency's application.

## **VI. FEDERAL AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION**

### **A. Federal Award Notice**

Unless an applicant receives a signed award document with terms and conditions; any contact from a FNS grants or program officer should not be considered as a notice of a grant award. No pre-award or pre-agreement costs incurred prior to the effective start date are allowed unless approved and stated on FNS' signed award document.

The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of this RFA. Only the recognized FNS authorized signature can bind the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service to the expenditure of funds related to an award's approved budget.

### **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF AN APPLICATION**

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of FNS transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of

an application that does not result in an award will be not released to the public. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

The agency requires all panel reviewers to sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the application review and evaluation process. Names of applicants, including States and tribal governments, submitting an application will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of the reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

## ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

### Debarment and Suspension 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417

A recipient chosen for an award shall comply with the non-procurement debarment and suspension common rule implementing Executive Orders (E.O.) 12549 and 12669, “Debarment and Suspension,” codified at 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417. This common rule restricts sub-awards and contracts with certain parties that are debarred, suspended or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in Federal assistance programs or activities. The approved grant recipient will be required to ensure that all sub-contractors and sub-grantees are neither excluded nor disqualified under the suspension and debarment rules prior to approving a sub-grant award by checking the System for Awards Management (SAM) at [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov).

### Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration 2 CFR Part 25

Effective October 1, 2010, all grant applicants must obtain a Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number as a universal identifier for Federal financial assistance. Active grant recipients and their direct sub-recipients of a sub-grant award also must obtain a DUNS number. To request a DUNS number visit: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>.

The grant recipient must also register its DUNS number in the new Systems for Award Management (SAM). If you were registered in the CCR, your company’s information is already in SAM and you will just need to set up a SAM account. To register in SAM you will need your entity’s DUNS and your entity’s Tax ID Number (TIN) and taxpayer name (as it appears on your last tax return). Registration should take **3-5 days**. If you do not receive confirmation that your SAM registration is complete, please contact SAM at <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list..>

FNS may not make an award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with the requirements described in 2 CFR 25 to provide a valid DUNS number and maintain an active SAM registration with current information.

### Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information 2 CFR Part 170

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 (Public Law 109–282), as amended by Section 6202 of Public Law 110–252 requires primary grantees of Federal grants and cooperative agreements to report information on sub-grantee obligations and executive compensation. FFATA promotes open government by enhancing the Federal Government’s accountability for its stewardship of public resources. This is accomplished by making Government information, particularly information on Federal spending, accessible to the general public.

Primary grantees, including State agencies, are required to report actions taken on or after October 1, 2010, that obligates \$25,000 or more in Federal grant funds to first- tier sub-grantees. This information must be reported in the Government-wide FFATA Sub-Award Reporting System (FSRS). In order to access FSRS a current CCR registration is required. A primary grantee and first-tier sub-grantees must also report total compensation for each of its five most-highly compensated executives. Every primary and first-tier grantee must obtain a DUNS number prior to being eligible to receive a grant or sub-grant award. Additional information will be provided to grant recipients upon award.

#### Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2009, Public Law 110-417

Section 872 of this Act requires the development and maintenance of a Federal Government information system that contains specific information on the integrity and performance of covered Federal agency contractors and grantees. The Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) was developed to address these requirements. FAPIIS contains integrity and performance information from the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System, information from the CCR database, and suspension and debarment information from the EPLS. FNS will review and consider any information about the applicant reflected in FAPIIS when making a judgment about whether an applicant is qualified to receive an award.

#### CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

This grant will be awarded and administered in accordance with the following regulations 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subtitle A, Chapter II. Any Federal laws, regulations, or USDA directives released after this RFA is posted will be implemented as instructed.

#### Government-wide Regulations

- 2 CFR Part 25: “Universal Identifier and Central Locator Contractor Registration”
- 2 CFR Part 170: “Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information”
- 2 CFR Part 175: “Award Term for Trafficking in Persons”
- 2 CFR Part 180: “OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-Procurement)”
- 2 CFR Part 200: “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”

- 2 CFR Part 400: USDA’s implementing regulation of 2 CFR Part 200 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”
- 2 CFR Part 415: USDA “General Program Administrative Regulations”
- 2 CFR Part 416: USDA “General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments”
- 2 CFR Part 417: USDA “Implementation of OMB Guidance on Non-Procurement Debarment and Suspension”
- 2 CFR Part 418 USDA “New Restrictions on Lobbying
- 2 CFR Part 421: USDA “Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)”
- 41 U.S.C. Section 22 “Interest of Member of Congress”
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public access to Federal Financial Assistance records shall not be limited, except when such records must be kept confidential and would have been excepted from disclosure pursuant to the “Freedom of Information” regulation (5 U.S.C. 552)

General Terms and Conditions of the award may be obtained electronically. Please contact the Grants Officer at:

Carla Garcia  
 Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS  
 3101 Park Center Drive Room 740  
 Alexandria, VA 22301  
 E-mail: [Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov)

**C. Reporting**

**FINANCIAL REPORTING**

The award recipient will be required to enter the SF-425, Financial Status Report data into the FNS Food Program Reporting System (FPRS) on a quarterly basis. In order to access FPRS, the SAs are required to obtain USDA e-authentication certification and access to FPRS. More detailed instructions for reporting will be included in the FNS Federal financial assistance award package.

**PROGRESS REPORTING**

The Quarterly Progress Reports must include (**in narrative form**): 1) a brief description of the planned activities for the report period; 2) accomplishments for each activity and completion dates; 3) a description of any deviations from the approved plan—this summary should discuss difficulties encountered and solutions developed; 4) any other unique aspects that would be useful to share; and 5) an overview of plans for the coming quarter. A Progress Report must be submitted quarterly. In addition, a final progress report is due to FNS no later than 90 days

following the end of the award period. Completion dates and the process for reporting will be provided to those receiving awards.

Copies of any deliverables, media or publicity releases/articles and links to materials on websites also should be included or papers resulting from the grant should be attached to the final report. All products should include an acknowledgement of the source of funding. The Federal awarding agency reserves a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, for Federal Government purposes, the copyright in any work developed under a grant, sub-grant, or contract under a grant or sub-grant or any rights of copyright to which a grantee, sub-grantee, or a contractor purchases ownership with grant support. The recipient may be required to submit performance/progress reports to FNS using SF-PPR, Periodic Progress Report.

## **VII. FEDERAL AWARDING AGENCY CONTACTS**

For questions regarding this solicitation, please contact the Grants Officer at:

Carla Garcia  
Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS  
3101 Park Center Drive Room 740  
Alexandra, VA 22301  
E-mail: [Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov)

## **VIII. OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Projects that Include U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Place Based Initiatives**

Proposals with projects that include interventions in communities that have been designated USDA Place Based Initiatives will receive five bonus points. The USDA Place Based Initiatives include but are not limited to:

1. **StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity (SF)** – StrikeForce aims to create self-sustaining, long-term economic development in persistent poverty rural communities by increasing investment through intensive outreach and stronger partnership with community leaders, businesses, and foundations. StrikeForce seeks to improve food security by increasing access to safe and nutritious foods.
2. **Promise Zones (PZ)** - Promise Zones are part of the President's plan where the Federal government partners with and invests in selected high-poverty urban, rural, and tribal communities. Promise Zones leverage Federal resources to build up existing local capacity to create jobs, increase economic security, leverage private investment, expand educational opportunities, increase access to quality affordable housing, reduce violent crime and improve public safety.

3. **White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2)** – As part of the President's priority to strengthen the middle class, create jobs, and build ladders of opportunity, SC2 seeks to increase cooperation between community organizations, local leadership, and the federal government. SC2 pairs on the ground Federal inter-agency teams with the Mayor and city leadership to support the community's vision for economic development. These SC2 Teams offer technical assistance and expertise to help leverage existing Federal resources to grow local capacity and stimulate economic growth in distressed areas.
4. **Partnership for Sustainable Communities** - The Partnership for Sustainable Communities work to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution.
5. **Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2)** - KYF2 strengthens the connection between farmers and consumers to better meet critical goals, including reinvigorating rural economies, promoting job growth, and increasing healthy and local food access in America. Through KYF2, USDA integrates programs and policies that stimulate food- and agriculturally-based community economic development, foster new opportunities for farmers and ranchers, and cultivate healthy eating habits and educated consumers.

## **RFA APPLICATION CHECKLIST**

All proposals submitted under this RFA must contain the applicable elements as described in this announcement. The application must be submitted electronically through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), by midnight on [add the deadline date]. The following checklist has been prepared to assist in ensuring that the proposal is complete and in the proper order prior to submission.

- ✓ Read the RFA carefully, usually more than once.
- ✓ Have you obtained a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and registered the number in the System for Award Management (SAM)?
- ✓ Have you verified that your Central Contractor Registration is active?
- ✓ Have you registered your entity in grants.gov and are you authorized as a user in grants.gov to submit on behalf of your agency?
- ✓ Have you prepared and submitted the appropriate forms as shown under the Required Grant Applicant Forms section of this RFA?
- ✓ Have you included the RFA CFDA # [enter the number] on your application?
- ✓ Have you included your contact information: telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address?
- ✓ Have you addressed, met, and considered any program specific requirements or restrictions?
- ✓ Is the project's proposal clearly stated?
  - Does it comply with any format requirements?
  - Does it comply with the page limitation?

- Most importantly does it directly relate to the RFA's objectives and priorities?
  - Don't assume that reviewers know anything about your organization and its work.
- ✓ Have one or more persons read your proposal who did not participate in its writing and ensure that it was it clear to them?
- ✓ Does the proposed project and budget meet the bona fide needs of the RFA?
- ✓ Is the budget summary included?
  - Does it agree with the calculations shown on the OMB budget form?
  - Is the budget in line with the project description?
- ✓ Be sure to submit a timely application into [www.Grants.gov](http://www.Grants.gov) in order to meet the RFA application deadline.
- ✓ FNS reserves the right to request additional information not clearly addressed in the initial application.

## RFA BUDGET NARRATIVE CHECKLIST

This checklist will assist you in completing the budget narrative portion of the application. Please review the checklist to ensure the items below are addressed in the budget narrative.

NOTE: The budget and budget narrative must be in line with the proposal project description (statement of work) bona fide need. FNS reserves the right to request information not clearly addressed.

BUDGET ITEM	YES	NO
Personnel		
Did you include all key employees paid for by this grant under this heading?		
Are employees of the applicant's organization identified by name and position title?		
Did you reflect percentage of time the Project Director will devote to the project in full-time equivalents (FTE)?		
Fringe Benefits		
Did you include your organization's fringe benefit amount along with the basis for the computation?		
Did you list the type of fringe benefits to be covered with Federal funds?		
Travel		
Are travel expenses itemized? For example origination/destination points, number and purpose of trips, number of staff traveling, mode of transportation and cost of each trip.		
Are the Attendee Objectives and travel justifications included in the narrative?		
Is the basis for the lodging estimates identified in the budget? For example include excerpt from travel regulations.		

BUDGET ITEM	YES	NO
Equipment		
Is the need for the equipment justified in the narrative?		
Are the types of equipment, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased listed in the budget?		
Is the basis for the cost per item or other basis of computation stated in the budget?		
Supplies		
Are the types of supplies, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased reflected in the budget?		
Is the basis for the costs per item or other basis of computation stated?		
Contractual: (FNS reserves the right to request information on all contractual awards and associated costs after the contract is awarded.)		
Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost for a contract or sub-grant expense(s) shown on the budget?		
A justification for all Sole-source contracts must be provided in the budget narrative prior to approving this identified cost.		
Other		
Consultant Services. – Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost shown on the budget. The following information must be provided in the justification: description of service, the consultant’s name and an itemized list of all direct cost and fees, number of personnel including the position title (specialty and specialized qualifications as appropriate to the costs), Number of estimated hours X hourly wages, and all expenses and fees directly related to the proposed services to be rendered to the project.		
For all other line items listed under the “Other” heading. - List all items to be covered		

BUDGET ITEM	YES	NO
under this heading along with the methodology on how the applicant derived the costs to be charged to the program.		
Indirect Costs		
Has the applicant obtained a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) from a Federal Agency? If yes, a copy of the most recent and signed negotiated rate agreement must be provided along with the application.		
If no negotiated agreement exists, the basis and the details of the indirect costs to be requested should also be reflected in the budget.		

FOR GRANT APPLICANT USE ONLY. DO NOT RETURN THIS FORM WITH THE APPLICATION

## APPENDIX A: LINKS TO RESOURCES

- **FY 2010-2012 Direct Certification Grant Summaries**  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Grants/2010dc\\_grantssummaries.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Grants/2010dc_grantssummaries.htm)
- **FY 2012-2104 Direct Certification Grant Summaries**  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/2013-direct-certification-improvement-grants>
- **Request for Applications and Standard Application Forms SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, SF-LLL**  
CND Grants Website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm>  
Grants.Gov: <http://www.grants.gov/>