

Thank you for your interest in the New York State Resilient Food Infrastructure Program being administered by the [Farm and Food Growth Fund](#). Below are a set of answers to the questions that potential applicants have either emailed us directly or asked during the initial Office Hour session held on May 29, 2024.

Please also take note of the additional resources below, which also are on our [RFSI webpage](#). The key document for you to familiarize yourself with, and which you should use as a guide to your application, is the [NYS RFSI Request For Applications](#). Additional [How To's](#) and a [Webinar](#) (click 'To Apply' to access webinar) describing the application process are on our website. For any additional questions, please email us at RFSI@ffgrowthfund.org.

Additional RFSI Documents include:

- [USDA-AMS Program Scope and Requirements](#)
- [USDA-AMS General Terms and Conditions](#)
- [USDA-RFSI- Program Specific Terms and Conditions](#)
- [USDA-RFSI-Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [USDA-Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#)
- [Small Business Administration \(SBA\) Size Standard Tool](#)
- [Small Business Administration Table of Size Standards](#)
- [Build America, Buy America \(BABA\) Requirements](#)
- [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) Citizen's Guide](#)
 - [USDA AMS Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment](#)
- Obtain a Unique Entity ID (UEI) through System for Award Management ([SAM.gov](#))

Questions and Answers

Q. What is the definition of shovel ready? Does it mean permits in place? Contractors hired and ready to go?

A. Shovel ready means your project is advanced to a stage of development for **building to begin** before February 15, 2025. This means that at the time of your application, you have site control and a corresponding Evidence of Critical Infrastructure letter(s) if necessary, and you are aware of the building requirements in your locality and whether a building permit and/or other permits/approvals are required for your project. If approvals/permits are necessary, you have either acquired the approval/permit or you are in discussions with the locality about acquiring the approval/permit. You should be able to clearly describe this in your application.

Please refer to the NYS RFSI Request for Applications to determine if your project requires an Evidence of Critical Infrastructure Letter, which is required if critical resources and/or infrastructure are necessary for the completion of the proposed grant project. Applicants must submit evidence that critical resources and infrastructure necessary to support the initiation and completion of a project are in place. Critical resources and infrastructure can be facilities, land, structure, use of city street/parks, shared-use kitchen, and/or other resources that are essential for the proposed project activities. Land, structures, and other critical resources must be in place and in working condition at the time of application submission.

Q. If we have NOT completed the NYS Environmental Assessment Form been completed, do we have to complete it? When I check "no" in the app, it does not say to upload anything, so I'm assuming not?

A. As per the previous question, applicants should know what permits and environmental review is required for their project to be implemented at the time of submission. Not every project will require a NYS Environmental Impact Assessment. If yours does not, check no and move to the next question.

However, every applicant **MUST** complete the Applicant Environmental Questionnaire that is linked in the application itself. Download the form and then upload it to the application through the *Upload a file* tab. If your project requires further environmental review, you must either have secured all permitting/review or have begun the process. All applicants must be aware of what further environmental review is required for the successful implementation of their projects.

Additionally, all activities funded under this RFA must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related applicable agency regulations and instructions, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), other laws and regulations as outlined therein, and any applicable state, local, or tribal laws. The FFGF will conduct a review for NEPA compliance prior to the award of the grant funds. If selected for an award, applicants must provide all requested information to support compliance with NEPA, NHPA, ESA and all other federal environmental laws and regulations. [A Citizen's Guide to NEPA \(doe.gov\)](#) is a relatively short guide that provides an overview of NEPA requirements. **All projects that have any existing permits, consultations, and other proof of compliance must submit them with the application to demonstrate project readiness and feasibility.**

Q. How important is costing breakdown: How accurate? Is ballpark acceptable?

A. It is very important to be accurate and to secure actual bids/cost breakdowns. The RFSI grant has very specific directions regarding the budget process. If you look at the Budget section of the How To document, on the FFGF RFSI webpage, it clearly describes the procedures and allowable expenses for applicants and is broken out by expense type. ([here](#)). In addition, as the [evaluation criteria](#) does examine shovel readiness and that the budget is clearly aligned with the project's activities, objectives, and outcomes, an accurate budget demonstrates that the project is well thought out and well on its way to successful implementation.

Q. What are the qualifiers for historically underserved?

A. This [link](#) defines Historically Underserved for the purposes of this grant program. Applicants self-certify if they meet the requirements.

Q. What would qualify as matching funds? Would we need local funds to match? Could in-kind time as a grant-writer be considered a match? Volunteer food hours as in-kind?

A. Matching funds are either Financial (cash) or In-Kind contributions that the project applicant applies to the project. All matching contributions **must be committed or secured at the time an applicant is recommended for an award**. Signed match verification letters **must be submitted with your application**. See [here](#).

In-kind contributions are defined, when used as a cost share or match for a grant, as the value of goods or services provided for the benefit of the grant program, where no funds transferred hands. For example, a partner may volunteer their professional expertise as a match contribution to the project as described in [2 C.F.R. § 200.306\(e\)](#). See [here](#).

Cash matching funds **cannot** come from another **Federal** grant. Additionally, no cash or in-kind contribution can satisfy a cost sharing or matching requirement for this grant program if they are used toward satisfying a match requirement **under any other Federal grant agreement to which the applicant is a party**.

Regarding the specific questions above, only activities that further the specific project are eligible to be used as match. Therefore, an applicant's ongoing operational costs are not eligible. **Indirect Costs** may be used as matching funds.

Q. Do the RFSI priorities and objectives outlined on your website cover both the State and Federal, and are they all inclusive?

A. Yes. Please review both the Priority and Evaluation Criteria sections of the Request for Applications. ([Here](#))

Q. Is the grant limit per company or per address? For example, my company has 3 different sites in NY, so can the company apply max limit for each unit?

A. An organization can only submit one application regardless of how many locations it has in operation. Every applicant is required to obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). For more information, please visit gsa.gov to obtain yours.

Q. Once awarded, are there any conditions on by when the company should have a Purchase Order placed or the grant expires?

A. All projects must be completed by February 27, 2027.

Q. Can purchase orders be issued prior to the grant being awarded?

A. No! Only costs incurred after the signing of the MOU with the Farm and Food Growth Fund will be reimbursed.

Q. Can this funding support a Cold Storage from an apple farm?

A. The RFSI program's goals are to expand each state's middle-chain capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storage, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted local and regional agricultural food products. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines "middle-of-the-supply-chain" activities as activities in the Processing and/or Aggregation and Distribution stages of the food supply chain. As an example, Processing activities may include processing, packaging, or preserving crops; extracting products from crops; and/or creating value-added products from crops. Aggregation and Distribution activities may include storing, tracking, distributing, and/or delivering crops. Similar activities not listed here may also be included. Enhancing worker safety and/or education and/or modernizing, developing, or expanding equipment or facilities used for Processing, Aggregation, or Distribution



activities are also considered to be “middle-of-the-supply-chain” activities for the purposes of this program.

Costs related to on-farm, postharvest processing, preservation, and/or storage would be considered middle-of-the-supply-chain activities. Accordingly, on-farm cold storage is a qualified project. **HOWEVER**, RFSI projects **MUST benefit multiple farms and farm businesses**. Applicants must demonstrate that on-farm infrastructure projects significantly impact other farm businesses. To be very clear, this is an **eligibility requirement**, not a scoring indicator.

The RFSI request for Applications details many of the types of projects that are eligible. Additionally, allowable activities or tasks that could be a part of such projects must follow the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), and in the [RFSI Program Specific Terms and Conditions](#). Where there are differences between the RFSI Special Terms and Conditions and the AMS General Terms and Conditions, the RFSI terms take precedence.

Q. An organization is considering applying for this year’s RFSI program, for funding new food storage infrastructure. However, they are already going to receive Community Project Funds for this same project.

A. Projects which have already received funding from another federal grant or subaward programs may not receive funding for the same activities or expenses through an Infrastructure Grant. Applicants receiving other federal funding for a project should disclose other federal sources of funding and make clear in their application how each federal grant will fund distinct activities and what costs are associated with each source of funding. Please note that it is also unallowable to count other federally awarded funding to meet the match requirement of the total project costs of an infrastructure grant.

Q. If you break a project up between building and equipment, can you have a different sources of federal funds for each?

A. The RFSI Infrastructure grant allows for Equipment purchases. Applicants do not need to separate out the equipment expenses. Refer to the *Eligible Expenses* section of the RFSI Request for Applications.



Q. What if we were to distribute "meat" products, is that allowed?

A. NO! Under the NYS RFSI grant program the following products are eligible: New York State raised and produced food products including [specialty crops](#), dairy products, grains for human consumption, land-based aquaculture and near-shore shellfish, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. Processed products must contain a minimum of 51% New York State produced raw ingredients.

Q. Could you clarify what it means regarding the stipulation that Meat and Poultry are excluded and ineligible to apply? Does this mean, that if my project involved the aggregation and distribution and production of a variety of products such as vegetables, flowers, dairy products along with meat products, am I considered ineligible because I am including meat products in my proposal? Is there a way to include meat products? If I wanted to build a warehouse and distribution center, would I be able to use the warehouse to aggregate and distribute my meat products along with the vegetables, flowers, and dairy products? Or would the proposal be deemed ineligible because of the meat products?

A. To clarify, the USDA and NYS have already dedicated funds to aid meat and poultry-based projects via other programs such as MPEG, MPPEP, etc. The purpose of RFSI is to address other needs in the food system, meaning that the inclusion of meat/poultry and flower products would be deemed ineligible for funding. If you can demonstrate very clearly that none of the ineligible products are involved in the project, then you could be considered for funding.

Q. What is the RFP's definition of agricultural food products? Can a portion of the budget be used to purchase and distribute food product (NYS sourced) across the five boroughs of New York City?

A. Please refer to the [Eligible Products](#) response. Distributing NYS sources eligible food products across the five boroughs of New York City is an allowable project.

Q. Would you be able to share more about applicant eligibility requirements? Specifically, would regional food banks be eligible to apply?

A. Please refer to the *Eligible Entities* section of the RFSI Request for Applications which states that the following entities are eligible for Infrastructure Grants made by FFGF:



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- Agricultural producers or processors, or groups of agricultural producers and processors;
 - Nonprofit organizations operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products;
 - Local government entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products;
 - Tribal governments operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products; and
 - Institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals bringing producers together to establish cooperative or shared infrastructure or invest in equipment that will benefit multiple producers middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural product.

All applicant businesses and organizations must be physically located in New York State and domestically owned.

Q. If two distinct farms are applying together for a joint project (for example a building which would house two processing operations), but one is historically underserved and the other is not, how would reimbursement rates be calculated?

A. While there can be numerous partners within an application, only one entity may apply as the lead organization, utilizing its Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Accordingly, the lead organization would determine eligibility for reduced match requirements. For information on how to register with SAM.gov and get a UEI number, visit <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>.

Q. The Eligible Projects section says BABA Act is not applicable to for-profit entities. Does that mean that BABA Act is not applicable to a for-profit farmer, processor, distributor, or otherwise eligible business under RFSI?

A. That is correct, nor does it apply to projects receiving less than \$250,000. Any public infrastructure project funded under RFSI program must coordinate with FFGF to ensure adherence to BABA guidance. For such projects, the recipient must comply with the Buy

America Sourcing requirements outlined in the Build America, Buy America (BABA) provisions of the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#). BABA is *not applicable to for-profit entities* (either prime or subrecipient). AMS will review facilities owned by public

entities to determine whether BABA requirements apply, following USDA guidance to exempt *de minimis* grant awards and other inapplicable activities. All other Infrastructure

Grant entities that surpass the \$250,000 threshold of applicable procurement costs must adhere to BABA. Buy America Preferences for RFSI funded projects can be found in [2 CFR Part 184](#).

Q. Is it required to have letters of support / specific commitment from other farms that would benefit along with application, or ok to just indicate a list of potential partners / general market the project aims to collaboratively serve?

A. There is an *EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT* section where Applicants should indicate who the external stakeholders are, the role they will play in the project, and why their support of the project is critical to its success. This is typically the producers/processors that will benefit from the projects activities and have indicated their support and need for these activities. Up to three stakeholders, and at least one stakeholder, must provide letters of support stating their participation/benefit from the project. Refer to page 14 in the [How To Guide](#).

Q. If we apply for an infrastructure grant, but the review committee thinks the project would be more competitive as a smaller equipment grant, would they work with the applicant to adjust the application down to the other category or will applications only be considered in the category they specifically apply for?

A. Applicants may only receive funding from either the Infrastructure or Equipment-only projects, but not both. Unsuccessful Infrastructure grant applicants may submit for the Equipment-only grant when released.

Q. Are there examples from previous successful applications that show what the committee is looking for in the budget narrative?

A. This is the first time the RFSI grant program has operated. There is a very detailed explanation in the [How To](#) document referenced above about what the USDA requires for each budget line item.

Q. Our grant writing team doesn't have a lot of experience working with these kinds of grants. Is there a list of grant writers or project managers who y'all recommend?

A. There are numerous Technical Assistance providers throughout New York who can support your project, including the Cooperative Extension and Economic Development



Offices in your county. In addition, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets has partnered with the [Northeast Farms of Color Land Trust](#) (NEFOC). They will support other Business Technical Assistance providers through their Holistic Technical Assistance framework to provide business planning services to producers/businesses seeking to develop RFSI projects and/or expand processing, aggregation, storage, or distribution of food, and provide technical assistance for the successful implementation of RFSI projects. To access NEFOC services, applicants may contact Gabriela Pereyra: Gaby@nefoclandtrust.org.

Q. Following up on the deadline question - if the project is started but contractor delays or other aspects out of the applicant's control prevent it from being completed by Feb '27, what are the consequences? Is there a scenario where the applicant would be required to pay back funds already reimbursed in the project, or would reimbursements just end at that date and the applicant would be responsible for costs to finish?

A. No funding will be released after February 27, 2027. Projects that are delayed will not receive funding for the delayed components. Please note that reimbursements will only be made after actual expenses are incurred and paid by the grantee and the equipment or contracted service is received or completed.

Q. With the emphasis on food agriculture, I am assuming the answer to this is no...can the grant cover any kind of beverage business?

A. Non-alcoholic beverages are eligible products under this grant.

Q. Can we redo the eligibility form? I believe our project meets the criteria of being middle of supply chain and we will be benefiting multiple farms in our area.

A. In the event that you need to re-submit your eligibility form, you may contact the RFSI@ffgrowthfund.org for assistance.

Q. If costs end up exceeding original cost estimates, how would this impact reimbursement percentages?

A. Awarded projects will enter into a MOU with the FFGF incorporating the budget request. While there is limited flexibility to make changes during the program within the budget line items so long as the anticipated outcomes remain consistent, no additional funding will be made available for cost overruns.

Q. By what date would we know if we are awarded a grant?

A. Awards are expected to be made in the late summer/early fall of 2024.

Q. What kind of refrigeration equipment is covered under the program? Could replacement projects be part of it? Like a compressor or condenser replacement?

A. Repairs are not eligible expenses under the grant. Costs associated with modernization are eligible. Please refer to the *Eligible Activities* section of the RFSI [Request for Applications](#).

Q. I can a lot of veggies for market. It sounds like purchasing new pressure cookers would work for this grant? Could we also get the jars and lids needed for canning?

A. The pressure cookers would qualify so long as you are purchasing a minimum of 51% New York State vegetables from multiple New York State Farms. The jars and lids do not qualify. Please refer to the aforementioned [Eligible Costs](#).

Q. Which organizations will be on the review committee?

A. The review committee will consist of subject matter experts in the priority areas.

Q. Would a loan that was contingent on being awarded this grant be acceptable for demonstration of funds?

A. Signed Match Verification Letters must accompany the Infrastructure Grant proposal at the time of application. Each application must include the total amount of matching funds and how it will specifically align with their requested funding. Additionally,

applicants must submit one match verification letter for EACH cash or in-kind resource signed by the matching organization. A Match Verification Template Letter is provided on the application.

Accordingly, so long as the lender submits a match verification letter indicating that the funding is available, it would qualify.



Q. Please can you define the use of “market” in the scoring rubric, and provide some examples? Are “markets” here equated to buyers (XYZ bakery, ABC store, G Hospital)? Or are they regional/place-based (Finger Lakes, Mid-Hudson)? Or something else?

A. Markets are equated to buyers, so intermediaries such as food hubs, aggregators, wholesalers, and distributors with the goal of increasing local food sales to institutions such as schools, hospitals, and correctional facilities. Eligible entities must be NYS-based but regions are not a factor when scoring.

Q. If this will be a new processing facility, the percentage increase will be 100% for markets and farms, is that correct?

A. If this project currently is not operational in any sense, then this would result in a 100% increase.

Q. Would a digital infrastructure project be eligible? I am working on a platform to connect institutional procurement officers with local producers, and believe this would create new markets, jobs, and opportunities for mid-size producers to aggregate products and meet institutional volume requirements.

A. The RFSI program will focus on funding Infrastructure Grant activities in each state that:

Expand capacity for processing, aggregation and distribution of agricultural products to create more and better markets for producers;

Modernize manufacturing, tracking, storage, and information technology systems;

Enhance worker safety through adoption of new technologies or investment in equipment

Accordingly, so long as this project benefits multiple NYS farms and serves multiple NYS markets, it is an eligible activity.

Q. Can an individual producer or sole owner apply to RFSI for funding?

A. Individual producers and/or sole owners are eligible to apply. Individual producers and sole owners are eligible to apply. However, those entities must be able to demonstrate that their proposal provides benefits to multiple producers and/or markets.

Q. What retail related activities are eligible for funding?

A. Eligible retail related activities can include creating distribution channels to new retail opportunities, or expanding processing and packaging capacities, including adding product types, increasing production volumes, and supporting new retail product lines.

Q. Are for profit entities, such as food hubs or distribution companies, eligible for infrastructure grant?

A. For-profit entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, or distribution of targeted agricultural products, whose activities are primarily focused for the benefit of local and regional producers, and that meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards are eligible.

For-profit entities must meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards matched to industries described in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). For more information on these size standards, please visit SBA's Size Standards webpage. For a quick check on whether your business qualifies, please use the Size Standards Tool.

Q. Does the RFSI program require cost sharing or matching?

A. Yes, Infrastructure Grant Recipients require a match. The program requires cost sharing or matching of 50% of the project cost as a match to federal funding. For underserved farmers and ranchers, a reduced match contribution is required at 25% of the project costs.

Q. How should an applicant document if they qualify for reduced match?

A. Qualifying applicants for the Infrastructure Grant projects will self-certify their eligibility for the 25% reduced match to 25%. Please review the Infrastructure Grant Template for more information on self-certification.

For more FAQ's, please click [here](#).