

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**Rural Business-Cooperative Service****Announcement of Rural Cooperative Development Grant Application Deadlines and Funding Levels**

AGENCY: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of solicitation of applications.

SUMMARY: The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) announces the availability of approximately \$4.45 million in competitive grant funds for the fiscal year (FY) 2006 Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) Program. The intended effect of this notice is to solicit applications for FY 2006 and award grants on or before September 15, 2006. The maximum award per grant is \$225,000 and matching funds are required.

DATES: You may submit completed applications for grants on paper or electronically according to the following deadlines:

Paper copies must be postmarked and mailed, shipped, or sent overnight no later than May 20, 2006, to be eligible for FY 2006 grant funding. Late applications are not eligible for FY 2006 grant funding.

Electronic copies must be received by May 20, 2006, to be eligible for FY 2006 grant funding. Late applications are not eligible for FY 2006 grant funding.

ADDRESSES: You may obtain application materials for a RCDG at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm> or by contacting your USDA Rural Development State Office. You can reach your State Office by calling (202) 720-4323 and pressing "1".

Submit completed paper applications for a grant to Cooperative Programs, Attn: RCDG Program, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Mail Stop 3250, Room 4016-South, Washington, DC 20250-3250. The phone number that should be used for FedEx packages is (202) 720-7558.

Submit electronic grant applications at <http://www.grants.gov>, following the instructions found on this Website.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Visit the program Web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm>, which contains application guidance, including frequently asked questions and an application guide or contact your USDA Rural Development State Office. You can reach your State Office by calling (202) 720-4323 and pressing "1", or by selecting the Contacts link at the above Website. Applicants are encouraged to contact

their State Offices well in advance of the deadline to discuss their projects and ask any questions about the application process.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Overview**

Federal Agency: Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS).

Funding Opportunity Title: Rural Cooperative Development Grant.

Announcement Type: Initial announcement.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 10.771.

Dates: Application Deadline: You may submit completed applications for grants on paper or electronically according to the following deadlines:

Paper copies must be postmarked and mailed, shipped, or sent overnight no later than May 20, 2006, to be eligible for FY 2006 grant funding. Late applications are not eligible for FY 2006 grant funding.

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I. Funding Opportunity Description

RCDGs are authorized by section 310B(e) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1932(e)). Regulations are contained in 7 CFR part 4284, subparts A and F. The primary objective of the RCDG program is to improve the economic condition of rural areas through cooperative development. Grant funds are provided for the establishment and operation of Centers that have the expertise or who can contract out for the expertise to assist individuals in the startup, expansion or operational improvement of cooperative businesses. The program is administered through USDA Rural Development State Offices acting on behalf of RBS.

Definitions

The definitions published at 7 CFR 4284.3 and 4284.504 are incorporated by reference.

II. Award Information

Type of Award: Grant.

Fiscal Year Funds: FY 2006.

Approximate Total Funding: \$4.45 million.

Approximate Number of Awards: 22.

Approximate Average Award: \$202,500.

Floor of Award Range: None.

Ceiling of Award Range: \$225,000.

Anticipated Award Date: September 15, 2006.

Budget Period Length: 12 months.

Project Period Length: 12 months.

III. Eligibility Information**A. Eligible Applicants**

Grants may be made to nonprofit corporations and institutions of higher education. Grants may not be made to public bodies.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

Matching funds are required. Applicants must verify in their applications that all matching funds are available for the time period of the grant. The matching fund requirement is 25 percent of the total project cost (5 percent in the case of 1994 Institutions). Unless provided by other authorizing legislation, other Federal grant funds cannot be used as matching funds. However, matching funds may include loan proceeds from Federal sources. Matching funds must be spent in advance or as a pro-rata portion of grant funds being expended. Therefore, if you are providing 25 percent of the total project cost as match, you must show that 25 percent or more of the amount of grant funds being requested has been expended in matching funds. All of the matching funds must be provided by either the applicant or a third party in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. All of the matching funds must be spent on eligible expenses and must be from eligible sources. Any in-kind contributions must be performed for the benefit of the Center. The Center must be able to document and verify the number of hours worked and the value associated with the contribution. In-kind contributions provided by individuals, businesses, or cooperatives who are being assisted by the Center cannot be provided for the benefit of their own projects as USDA Rural Development considers this to be a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest. Applications will be considered ineligible if any proposed matching funds are for ineligible purposes.

C. Other Eligibility Requirements

Grant Period Eligibility: Applications should have a timeframe of no more than 365 days with the time period beginning no earlier than October 1, 2006 and no later than January 1, 2007. Projects must be completed within the 1-year timeframe. The Agency will not approve requests to extend the grant period.

Completeness Eligibility: Applications will not be considered for funding if they do not provide sufficient information to determine eligibility, if they are non-responsive to the submission requirements detailed in Section IV of this notice or if they are

missing any required elements (in whole or in part), except for the exceptions noted in the Section V.B.

Activity Eligibility: Applicants must propose the development or continuation of the cooperative development center concept or they will not be considered for funding. Additionally, applications that focus assistance to only one cooperative will not be considered for funding. Applicants that propose budgets that include more than 10 percent of total project costs that are ineligible for the program will be ineligible, and the application will not be considered for funding. If an application has ineligible costs of 10 percent or less of total project costs, it will be treated as described in Section V.B.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address To Request Application Package

If you plan to apply using a paper application, you can obtain the application forms and an application template for this funding opportunity at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm>. If you do not have access to the internet, or if you have difficulty accessing the forms online, you may contact your USDA Rural Development State Office. You can reach your State Office by calling (202) 720-4323 and pressing "1". Application forms can be mailed to you. If you plan to apply electronically, you must visit <http://www.grants.gov> and follow the instructions. Applicants are advised to visit the site well in advance of the application deadline if they plan to apply electronically to ensure they have obtained the proper authentication and have sufficient computer resources to complete the application.

B. Content and Form of Submission

You may submit your application in paper or in an electronic format. To view an application guide, visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm>. It is recommended that applicants use the template provided on the website. The template can be filled out electronically and printed out for submission with the required forms for paper submission or it can be filled out electronically and submitted as an attachment through <http://www.grants.gov>.

If you submit your application in paper form, you must submit one signed original of your complete application. The application must be in the following format:

- Font size: 12 point un-reduced.

- Paper size: 8.5 by 11 inches.
- Page margin size: 1 inch on the top, bottom, left, and right.
- Printed on only one side of each page.
- Held together only by rubber bands or metal or plastic clips; not bound in any other way.
- Language: English, avoid jargon.

The submission must include all pages of the application. It is recommended that the application be in black and white, not color. Those evaluating the application will only receive black and white images.

If you submit your application electronically, you must follow the instructions given at <http://www.grants.gov>. Applicants are advised to visit the site well in advance of the application deadline if they plan to apply electronically to ensure they have obtained the proper authentication and have sufficient computer resources to complete the application.

An application must contain all of the following elements. Any application that is missing any element or contains an incomplete element will not be considered for funding except as set forth in Section V.B.

1. *Form SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance."* In order for this form to be considered complete, it must contain the legal name of the applicant, the applicant's Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number, the applicant's complete mailing address, the name and telephone number of a contact person, the employer identification number, the start and end dates of the project, the Federal funds requested, other funds that will be used as matching funds, an answer to the question, "Is applicant delinquent on any Federal debt?," the name and signature of an authorized representative, the telephone number of the authorized representative, and the date the form was signed.

You are required to have a DUNS number to apply for a grant from USDA Rural Development. The DUNS number is a nine-digit identification number, which uniquely identifies business entities. There is no charge. To obtain a DUNS number, access <http://www.dnb.com/us/> or call 866-705-5711. For more information, see the RCDG Web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm> or contact your USDA Rural Development State Office. You can reach your State Office by calling (202) 720-4323 and pressing "1".

2. *Form SF-424A, "Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs."* In order for this form to be considered complete, the applicant

must fill out sections A, B, C, and D. The applicant must include both Federal and matching funds as requested on the form.

3. *Form SF-424B, "Assurances—Non-Construction Programs."* In order for this form to be considered complete, the form must be signed by an authorized official and include the title, name of applicant, and date submitted.

4. *Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants.* The Agency is required to make this survey available to all nonprofit applicants. Submitting this form is voluntary.

5. *Title Page.* The Title Page should include the title of the project as well as any other relevant identifying information. The length should not exceed one page.

6. *Table of Contents.* For ease of locating information, each proposal must contain a detailed Table of Contents (TOC) immediately following the Title Page. The TOC should include page numbers for each component of the proposal. Pagination should begin immediately following the TOC. In order for this element to be considered complete, the TOC should include page numbers for the Executive Summary, the Eligibility discussion, the Proposal Narrative and its subcomponents (Project Title, Information Sheet, Goals of the Project, Performance Evaluation Criteria, Undertakings, and Proposal Evaluation Criteria), Certification of Judgment, Verification of Matching Funds, and Certification of Matching Funds.

7. *Executive Summary.* A summary of the proposal, not to exceed two pages, must briefly describe the Center, including project goals and tasks to be accomplished, the amount requested, how the work will be performed (e.g., Center staff, consultants, or contractors) and the percentage of work that will be performed among the parties. In the event that more than two pages are submitted, only the first two pages will be considered.

8. *Eligibility.* The applicant must describe how it meets the applicant, matching, grant period and activity eligibility requirements in not to exceed two pages. In the event that more than two pages are submitted, only the first two pages will be considered.

9. *Proposal Narrative.* The proposal narrative is limited to a total of 35 pages. In the event that more than 35 pages are submitted, only the first 35 pages will be considered. The narrative portion of the proposal must include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Project Title. The title of the proposed project must be brief, not to exceed 75 characters, yet describe the

essentials of the project. It should match the Project Title submitted on the SF-424. The Project Title does not need to appear on a separate page. It can be included on the Title Page and/or on the Information Sheet.

ii. Information Sheet. A separate one-page information sheet which lists each of the evaluation criteria referenced in this funding announcement followed by the page numbers of all relevant material and documentation contained in the proposal that address or support the criteria. If the evaluation criteria are referenced on the Table of Contents, then submitting the information sheet is not necessary.

iii. Goals of the Project. The authorizing statute set forth the goals listed below for the Centers. A Center may have additional goals for its specific projects beyond the established goals (as stated in the Executive Summary); however, the applicants must, at a minimum, include the following in this section of the narrative:

1. A statement that substantiates that the Center will effectively serve rural areas in the United States;
2. A statement that the primary objective of the Center will be to improve the economic condition of rural areas through cooperative development;
3. A description of the contributions that the proposed activities are likely to make to the improvement of the economic conditions of the rural areas for which the Center will provide services; and
4. A statement that the Center, in carrying out its activities, will seek, where appropriate, the advice, participation, expertise, and assistance of representatives of business, industry, educational institutions, the Federal government, and State and local governments.

iv. Performance Evaluation Criteria. The Agency has established annual performance measures to evaluate the RCDG program. Therefore, in order to meet the requirements of this element, you must provide estimates on the following performance measures. When calculating jobs created, estimates should be based upon actual jobs to be created by the Center as a result of the RCDG funding or actual jobs to be created by businesses or cooperatives as a result of assistance from the Center. When calculating jobs saved, estimates should be based only on actual jobs that would have been lost if the Center did not receive RCDG funding or actual jobs that would have been lost without assistance from the Center. If the application is selected for funding, you will be required to report actual

numbers for these performance elements on a semi-annual basis and in your final performance report. Additional information on post-award requirements can be found in Section VI.

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

v. Undertakings. The applicant must expressly undertake to do the following in this section of the narrative:

1. Take all practicable steps to develop continuing sources of financial support for the Center, particularly from sources in the private sectors;
2. Make arrangements for the Center's activities to be monitored and evaluated; and
3. Provide an accounting for the money received by the grantee in accordance with 7 CFR part 4284, subpart F.

vi. Proposal Evaluation Criteria. Each of the evaluation criteria referenced in this funding announcement must be specifically and individually addressed in narrative form. See Section V.A. for a description of the Proposal Evaluation Criteria.

10. *Certification of Judgment Owed to the United States.* Applicants must certify that the United States has not obtained a judgment against them. No grant funds shall be used to pay a judgment obtained by the United States. It is suggested that applicants use the following language for the certification. "[INSERT NAME OF APPLICANT] certifies that the United States has not obtained a judgment against it." A separate signature is not required.

11. *Verification of Matching Funds.* Applicants must provide a budget to support the work plan showing all sources and uses of funds during the project period. Applicants will be required to verify all matching funds, both cash and in-kind. Verification of matching funds letters should be included in Appendix A and will not count towards the 35-page limitation. All proposed matching funds must be specifically documented in the application. If matching funds are to be provided by the applicant in cash, there

must be a statement that cash will be available, the amount of the cash, and the source of the cash. If the matching funds are to be provided by a third party in cash, the application must include a signed letter from that third party verifying how much cash will be donated and when it will be donated. Verification for funds donated outside the proposed time period of the grant will not be accepted. If the matching funds are to be provided by a third party in-kind donation, the application must include a signed letter from the third party verifying the goods or services to be donated, when the goods and services will be donated, and the value of the goods or services. Verification for in-kind contributions donated outside the proposed time period of the grant will not be accepted. Verification for in-kind contributions that are over-valued will not be accepted. The valuation process for in-kind funds does not need to be included in the application. However, the applicant must be able to demonstrate how the valuation was derived at the time of notification of tentative selection for the grant award. If the applicant cannot satisfactorily demonstrate how the valuation was determined, the grant award may be withdrawn or the amount of the grant may be reduced.

If matching funds are in cash, they must be spent on goods and services that are eligible expenditures for this grant program. If matching funds are in-kind contributions, the donated goods or services must be considered eligible expenditures for this grant program as well as be used for eligible purposes. The matching funds must be spent or donated during the grant period and the funds must be expended in advance or as a pro-rata portion of grant funds being expended. Therefore, if you are providing 25 percent of the total project cost as match, you must show that 25 percent or more of the amount of grant funds being requested has been expended in matching funds. Examples of unacceptable matching funds are in-kind contributions from individuals, businesses, or cooperatives being assisted by the Center to benefit their own project, donations of fixed equipment and buildings, and the preparation of your RCDG application package.

If acceptable verification for all proposed matching funds is missing from the application, the application will be determined to be incomplete and will not be considered for funding.

12. *Certification of Matching Funds.* Applicants must certify that matching funds will be available at the same time grant funds are anticipated to be spent

and that matching funds will be spent in advance of grant funding, such that for every dollar of the total project cost, not less than the required amount of matching funds will have been expended prior to submitting the request for reimbursement. Please note that this certification is a separate requirement from the Verification of Matching Funds requirement. Applicants should include a statement for this section that reads as follows: “[INSERT NAME OF APPLICANT] certifies that matching funds will be available at the same time grant funds are anticipated to be spent and that matching funds will be spent in advance of grant funding, such that for every dollar of the total project cost, at least 25 cents (5 cents for 1994 Institutions) of matching funds will have been expended prior to submitting the request for reimbursement.” A separate signature is not required.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Application Deadline Date: May 20, 2006.

Explanation of Deadlines: Paper applications must be postmarked by the deadline date (see Section IV.F for the address). Electronic applications must be received by <http://www.grants.gov> by the deadline date. If your application does not meet the deadline above, it will not be considered for funding. You will be notified that your application did not meet the submission requirements. You will also be notified by mail or by e-mail if your application is received on time.

D. Intergovernmental Review of Applications

Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental review of Federal programs, applies to this program. This EO requires that Federal agencies provide opportunities for consultation on proposed assistance with state and local governments. Many states have established a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to facilitate this consultation. For a list of states that maintain an SPOC, please see the White House Web site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>. If your state has an SPOC, you may submit a copy of your application directly for review. Any comments obtained through the SPOC must be provided to USDA Rural Development for consideration as part of your application. If your state has not established an SPOC, or you do not want to submit a copy of your application, USDA Rural Development will submit your application to the SPOC or other appropriate agency or agencies.

You are also encouraged to contact your USDA Rural Development State Office for assistance and questions on this process. You can find the USDA Rural Development State Office in the telephone directory under Federal government listings, by calling (202) 720-4323 and selecting option “1” or through the USDA Rural Development Web site: <http://www.rurdev.usda/>.

E. Funding Restrictions

Funding restrictions apply to both grant funds and matching funds. Grant funds may be used to pay up to 75 percent (95 percent where the grantee is a 1994 Institution) of the total project cost. Unless provided by other authorizing legislation, other Federal grant funds cannot be used as matching funds. However, matching funds contributed by the applicant may include proceeds from a Federal loan.

1. Grant funds and matching funds may be used for, but are not limited to, providing the following to individuals, cooperatives, small businesses and other similar entities in rural areas served by the Center:

i. Applied research, feasibility, environmental and other studies that may be useful for the purpose of cooperative development.

ii. Collection, interpretation and dissemination of principles, facts, technical knowledge, or other information for the purpose of cooperative development.

iii. Training and instruction for the purpose of cooperative development.

iv. Loans and grants for the purpose of cooperative development in accordance with this notice and applicable regulations.

v. Technical assistance, research services and advisory services for the purpose of cooperative development.

2. No funds made available under this solicitation shall be used for any of the following activities:

i. To duplicate current services or replace or substitute support previously provided. If the current service is inadequate, however, grant funds may be used to expand the level of effort or services beyond that which is currently being provided;

ii. To pay costs of preparing the application package for funding under this program;

iii. To pay costs of the project incurred prior to the date of grant approval;

iv. To fund political activities;

v. To pay for assistance to any private business enterprise that does not have at least 51 percent ownership by those who are either citizens of the United States or reside in the United States

after being legally admitted for permanent residence;

vi. To pay any judgment or debt owed to the United States;

vii. To plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct a building or facility, including a processing facility;

viii. To purchase, rent, or install fixed equipment, including laboratory equipment or processing machinery;

ix. To pay for the repair of privately owned vehicles;

x. To fund research and development;

xi. To pay costs of the project where a conflict of interest exists; or

xii. To fund any activities prohibited by 7 CFR part 3015 or 3019.

F. Other Submission Requirements

You may submit your paper application for a grant to Cooperative Programs, Attn: RCDG Program, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Mail Stop 3250, Room 4016-South, Washington, DC 20250-3250. The phone number that should be used for FedEx packages is (202) 720-7558. You may also choose to submit your application electronically using the following internet address: <http://www.grants.gov>. Applications may not be submitted by electronic mail, facsimile, or by hand-delivery. Each application submission must contain all required documents in one envelope, if by mail or express delivery service.

V. Application Review Information

A. *Proposal Evaluation Criteria:* All eligible and complete applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria. Failure to address any one of the following criteria will render the application incomplete, and the application will not be considered for funding, except as set forth in Section V.B. The total points available are 70.

1. *Administrative capabilities.* (1-7 points) The application will be evaluated to determine whether the subject Center has a track record of administering a Nationally-coordinated, regional or State-wide operated project. Centers that have capable financial systems and audit controls, personnel and program administration performance measures and clear rules of governance will receive more points than those not evidencing this capacity.

2. *Technical assistance and other services.* (1-7 points) The Agency will evaluate the applicant's demonstrated expertise in providing technical assistance in rural areas. This includes conducting feasibility studies, developing marketing plans, developing business plans, conducting applied research related to cooperative development, and performing those

other activities necessary for a group of individuals to form a cooperative.

3. *Economic development.* (1–7 points) The Agency will evaluate the applicant's demonstrated ability to assist in the retention of businesses, facilitate the establishment of cooperatives and new cooperative approaches and generate employment opportunities that will improve the economic conditions of rural areas.

4. *Linkages.* (1–7 points) The Agency will evaluate the applicant's demonstrated ability to create horizontal linkages among businesses within and among various sectors in rural areas of the United States and vertical linkages to domestic and international markets. These linkages must be among cooperatives and businesses, not development organizations.

5. *Commitment.* (1–7 points) The Agency will evaluate the applicant's commitment to providing technical assistance and other services to underserved and economically distressed areas in rural areas of the United States.

6. *Matching Funds.* (1–5 points) All applicants must demonstrate matching funds equal to at least 25 percent (5 percent for 1994 Institutions) of total project costs. Applications exceeding these minimum commitment levels will receive more points. If the applicant provides eligible matching funds of 25 percent, 1 point will be awarded; 26 to 35 percent, 2 points will be awarded; 36 to 45 percent, 3 points will be awarded; 46 to 55 percent, 4 points will be awarded; or 56 or greater percent, 5 points will be awarded. If the applicant is a 1994 Institution and provides eligible matching funds of 5 percent, 1 point will be awarded; 6 to 9 percent, 2 points will be awarded; 10 to 14 percent, 3 points will be awarded; 15 to 19 percent, 4 points will be awarded; or 20 or greater percent, 5 points will be awarded.

7. *Delivery.* (1–5 points) The Agency will evaluate whether the Center has a track record of providing technical assistance in rural areas and accomplishing effective outcomes in cooperative development. The Center's potential for delivering effective cooperative development assistance, the expected effects of that assistance, the sustainability of cooperative organizations receiving the assistance, and the transferability of the Center's cooperative development strategy and focus to other States will also be assessed.

8. *Work Plan/Budget.* (1–5 points) The work plan will be reviewed for detailed actions and an accompanying timetable for implementing the proposal. Clear,

logical, realistic and efficient plans will result in a higher score. Budgets will be reviewed for completeness and the quality of non-Federal funding commitments. Applicants must discuss the specific tasks (whether it be by type of service or specific project) to be completed using grant and matching funds. The work plan should show how customers will be identified, key personnel to be involved, and the evaluation methods to be used to determine the success of specific tasks and overall objectives of Center operations. The budget must present a breakdown of the estimated costs associated with cooperative development activities as well as the operation of the Center and allocate these costs to each of the tasks to be undertaken. Matching funds as well as grant funds must be accounted for in the budget.

9. *Qualifications of those Performing the Tasks.* (1–5 points) The application will be evaluated to determine if the personnel expected to perform key center tasks have a track record of positive solutions for complex cooperative development or marketing problems, or a successful record of conducting accurate feasibility studies, business plans, marketing analysis, or other activities relevant to Cooperative development center success. The applicant must also identify whether the personnel expected to perform tasks are full/part-time Center employees or contract personnel.

10. *Local support.* (1–5 points) Applications will be reviewed for previous and expected local support for the Center, plans for coordinating with other developmental organizations in the proposed service area, and coordination with State and local institutions. Support documentation should include recognition of rural values that balance employment opportunities with environmental stewardship and other positive rural amenities. Centers that demonstrate strong support from potential beneficiaries and formal evidence of the Center's intent to coordinate with other developmental organizations will receive more points than those not evidencing such support and formal intent. The applicant may submit a maximum of 10 letters of support or intent to coordinate with the application. These letters should be included in Appendix B of the application and will not count against the 35-page limitation. Additional letters from industry groups, commodity groups, local and State government, and similar organizations should be referenced, but not included in the

application package. When referencing these letters, provide the name of the organization, date of the letter, the nature of the support (cash, technical assistance, moral), and the name and title of the person signing the letter.

11. *Future support.* (1–5 points) Applicants should describe their vision for Center operations in future years, including issues such as sources and uses of alternative funding; reliance on Federal, State, and local grants; and the use of in-house personnel for providing services versus contracting out for that expertise. To the extent possible, applicants should document future funding sources that will help achieve long-term sustainability of the Center. Applications that demonstrate their vision for funding center operations for future years, including diversification of funding sources and building in-house technical assistance capacity, will receive more points for this criterion.

12. *Non-Agricultural Rural Cooperative Development.* (0 or 5 points) Applicants that propose to use more than 50 percent of grant and matching funds to work with rural residents and businesses who are not engaged in production agriculture to develop cooperative businesses will receive 5 points. All other applicants will receive zero points. The types of cooperative development that meet this criterion include, but are not limited to: Broadband cooperatives, housing cooperatives, healthcare cooperatives, shared-services cooperatives, daycare cooperatives, and any other type of cooperative that is not producing or marketing agricultural products.

B. Review and Selection Process

The Agency will conduct an initial screening of all proposals to determine whether the applicant is eligible and whether all required elements are complete. A list of required elements follows:

- SF-424
 - SF-424A
 - SF-424B
 - Title Page
 - Table of Contents
 - Executive Summary
 - Eligibility Discussion
 - Project Title
 - Information Sheet
 - Goals of the Project
 - Performance Evaluation Criteria
 - Undertakings
 - Administrative Capabilities
- Evaluation Criterion
- Technical Assistance and Other Services Evaluation Criterion
 - Economic Development Evaluation Criterion
 - Linkages Evaluation Criterion

- Commitment Evaluation Criterion
- Matching Funds Evaluation Criterion
- Delivery Evaluation Criterion
- Work Plan/Budget Evaluation Criterion
- Qualifications of Those Performing the Tasks Evaluation Criterion
- Local Support Evaluation Criterion
- Future Support Evaluation Criterion
- Non-Agricultural Rural Cooperative Development Criterion
- Certification of Judgment
- Verification of Matching Funds
- Certification of Matching Funds.

Incomplete applications that have four or less incomplete required elements and appear to be otherwise eligible will receive a letter requesting the incomplete items be provided within 12 business days of the date the letter was sent. If the requested items are not received when requested or are not complete, the application will not be further evaluated or considered for funding. Applicants that propose budgets that include more than 10 percent of total project costs that are ineligible for the program will be ineligible and the application will not be considered for funding. If an application has ineligible costs of 10 percent or less of total project costs, and otherwise appears eligible, the applicant will receive a letter requesting that all ineligible costs be removed from the budget and work plan and either replaced with eligible activities or eliminated within 12 business days of the date the letter was sent. Any other incomplete or ineligible applications will not be further evaluated or considered for funding. Reviewers appointed by the Agency will evaluate applications.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Award Date: The announcement of award selections is expected to occur on or about September 15, 2006.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive a notification of tentative selection for funding from USDA Rural Development. Applicants must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations before the grant award will be approved. Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification by mail.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

7 CFR parts 3015, 3019, and 4284. To view these regulations, please see the following internet address: <http://>

www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/cfr-table-search.html.

The following additional requirements apply to grantees selected for this program:

- Grant Agreement.
- Letter of Conditions.
- Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds."
- Form RD 1942-46, "Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions."
- Form AD-1047, "Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters—Primary Covered Transactions."
- Form AD-1048, "Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion—Lower Tier Covered Transactions."
- Form AD-1049, "Certification Regarding Drug-Free Workplace Requirements (Grants)."
- Form RD 400-1, "Equal Opportunity Agreement."
- Form RD 400-4, "Assurance Agreement."
- RD Instruction 1940-Q, Exhibit A-1, "Certification for Contracts, Grants and Loans."

Additional information on these requirements can be found at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/rcdg.htm>.

Reporting Requirements: You must provide USDA Rural Development with an original or electronic copy that includes all required signatures of the following reports. The reports should be submitted to the Agency contact listed on your Grant Agreement and Letter of Conditions. Failure to submit satisfactory reports on time may result in suspension or termination of your grant.

1. *Form SF-269 or SF-269A.* A "Financial Status Report" listing expenditures according to agreed upon budget categories, on a semi-annual basis. Reporting periods end each March 31 and September 30. Reports are due 30 days after the reporting period ends.

2. *Semi-annual performance reports that compare accomplishments to the objectives stated in the proposal.* Identify all tasks completed to date and provide documentation supporting the reported results. If the original schedule provided in the work plan is not being met, the report should discuss the problems or delays that may affect completion of the project. Objectives for the next reporting period should be listed. Compliance with any special conditions on the use of award funds should be discussed. The report should also include a summary at the end of the report with the following elements to assist in documenting the annual

performance goals of the RCDG program for Congress.

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

Reports are due as provided in paragraph 1 of this section. Supporting documentation must also be submitted for completed tasks. The supporting documentation for completed tasks includes, but is not limited to: Feasibility studies, marketing plans, business plans, publication quality success stories, applied research reports, copies of surveys conducted, articles of incorporation and bylaws and an accounting of how outreach, training, and other funds were expended.

3. *Final project performance reports.* These reports shall include all of the requirements of the semi-annual performance reports and responses to the following:

- a. What have been the most challenging or unexpected aspects of this program?
- b. What advice would you give to other organizations planning a similar program? These should include strengths and limitations of the program. If you had the opportunity, what would you have done differently?
- c. If an innovative approach was used successfully, the Grantee should describe their program in detail so that other organizations might consider replication in their areas.

The final performance report is due within 90 days of the completion of the project.

VII. Agency Contacts

For general questions about this announcement and for program technical assistance, please contact your USDA Rural Development State Office at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/rcdg/Contacts.htm>. You can also reach your State Office by calling (202) 720-4323 and pressing "1". If you are unable to contact your State Office, please contact a nearby State Office or you may contact the USDA Rural Development National Office at 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Mail Stop

3250, Rm. 4016–South, Washington, DC 20250–3250, telephone: (202) 720–7558, e-mail: cpgrants@wdc.usda.gov.

Dated: March 8, 2006.

Jackie J. Gleason,

Acting Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

[FR Doc. E6–4006 Filed 3–17–06; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Housing Service

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA): Section 515 Multi-Family Housing Preservation Revolving Loan Fund (PRLF) Demonstration Program for Fiscal Year 2006

AGENCY: Rural Housing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Rural Housing Service, (RHS), an Agency under USDA Rural Development, announces the availability of funds and the timeframe to submit applications for loans to private non-profit organizations, or such non-profit organizations' affiliate loan funds and State and local housing finance agencies, to carry out a housing demonstration program to provide revolving loans for the preservation and revitalization of low-income multi-family housing. Housing that is assisted by this demonstration program must be financed by USDA Rural Development through its multi-family housing loan program under section 515 of the Housing Act of 1949. This demonstration program will be achieved through loans made to intermediaries that establish programs for the purpose of providing loans to ultimate recipients for the preservation and revitalization of section 515 multi-family housing as affordable housing.

DATES: The deadline for receipt of all applications in response to this NOFA is 5 p.m., Eastern Time, June 19, 2006. The application closing deadline is firm as to date and hour. The Agency will not consider any application that is received after the closing deadline. Applicants intending to mail applications must provide sufficient time to permit delivery on or before the closing deadline. Acceptance by a post office or private mailer does not constitute delivery. Facsimile (FAX), and postage due applications will not be accepted.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Henry Searcy, Jr., Senior Loan Specialist, Multi-Family Housing Processing Division, STOP 0781 (Room 1263–S), or Bonnie Edwards-Jackson,

Senior Loan Specialist, Multi-Family Housing Processing Division, STOP 0781 (Room 1239–S), U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA Rural Development, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250–0781 or by telephone at (202) 720–1753 or (202) 690–0759, or via e-mail at Henry.Searcy@wdc.usda.gov or Bonnie.Edwards@wdc.usda.gov. (Please note the phone numbers are not toll free numbers.)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Paperwork Reduction Act

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*, OMB must approve all “collections of information” by USDA Rural Development. The Act defines “collection of information” as a requirement for “answers to * * * identical reporting or recordkeeping requirements imposed on ten or more persons * * *.” (44 U.S.C. 3502(3)(A)) Because this NOFA will receive less than 10 respondents, the Paperwork Reduction Act does not apply.

Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Requirements

(1) In accordance with the Fair Housing Act, title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Executive Order 12898, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, neither the intermediary nor the Agency will discriminate against any employee, proposed intermediary or proposed ultimate recipient on the basis of sex, marital status, race, color, religion, national origin, age, physical or mental disability (provided the proposed intermediary or proposed ultimate recipient has the capacity to contract), because all or part of the proposed intermediary's or proposed ultimate recipient's income is derived from public assistance of any kind, or because the proposed intermediary or proposed ultimate recipient has in good faith exercised any right under the Consumer Credit Protection Act, with respect to any aspect of a credit transaction anytime Agency loan funds are involved.

(2) The policies and regulations contained in 7 CFR part 1901, subpart E apply to this program.

(3) The Agency Administrator will assure that equal opportunity and nondiscrimination requirements are met in accordance with the Fair Housing Act, title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Executive Order 12898, the Americans

with Disabilities Act, and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

(4) All housing must meet the accessibility requirements found at 7 CFR 3560.60(d).

Programs Affected

This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under Number 10.415.

Overview

The Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 (Division A of Pub. L. 109–97) provides funding for, and authorizes USDA Rural Development to, establish a revolving loan fund demonstration program for the preservation and revitalization of the section 515 multi-family housing portfolio. The section 515 multi-family housing program is authorized by section 515 of the Housing Act of 1949 (42 U.S.C. 1485) and provides USDA Rural Development the authority to make loans for low income multi-family housing and related facilities.

Program Administration

I. Funding Opportunities Description

This NOFA requests applications from eligible applicants for loans to establish and operate revolving loan funds for the preservation of low-income multi-family housing within the Agency's section 515 multi-family housing portfolio. Agency regulations for the section 515 multi-family housing program are published at 7 CFR part 3560.

Housing that is constructed or repaired must meet the Agency design and construction standards and the development standards contained in 7 CFR part 1924, subparts A and C, respectively. Once constructed, section 515 multi-family housing must be managed in accordance with the program's management regulation, 7 CFR part 3560, subpart C. Tenant eligibility is limited to persons who qualify as a very low-, low-, or moderate-income household or who are eligible under the requirements established to qualify for housing benefits provided by sources other than the Agency, such as U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development section 8 assistance or Low Income Housing Tax Credit Assistance, when a tenant receives such housing benefits. Additional tenant eligibility requirements are contained in 7 CFR 3560.152.