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Fiscal Year 2006

Food Stamp Program Participation Grants

Request For Applications

Critical Dates

March 14, 2006 **Request for Applications announced by FNS**

June 7, 2006 **Proposals are due**

August 2006 **Awards to be announced**

An electronic version of this Request for Applications is available at
<http://fns.usda.gov/>

FNS 729
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AUTHORIZATION

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171), often referred to as the “Farm Bill”, authorized the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to award \$5 million dollars in grants for each of the fiscal years (FY) 2003 through 2007, to State agencies*, public health or educational entities, or private nonprofit entities such as community-based or faith-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations, for projects aimed at simplifying the food stamp application and eligibility determination systems or improving access to food stamp benefits by eligible households. This solicitation offers funding for FY 2006.

** Throughout this RFA the term “State agencies” refers to the agencies of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Guam that administer the Food Stamp Program.*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this grant competition is to support efforts by State agencies and their community-based and faith-based partners to develop and implement:

- Simple food stamp application and eligibility determination systems; or
- Measures to improve access to food stamp benefits by eligible applicants.

This RFA seeks diverse proposals that would make the entire process, from certification to recertification, easier and more efficient for applicants and participants. The proposals should include innovative development of new or revised State or County food stamp systems that do not rely solely on outreach. While this innovation does not have to be a completely new idea or concept, the proposal needs to demonstrate that the idea is new and innovative to that specific State or County office. The proposed process can incorporate outreach activities **as long as they do not exceed 25% of the project cost.** The proposal needs to demonstrate direct evidence that the proposed procedural or systemic changes would make the food stamp application and certification process easier for the participant.

We encourage potential applicants to read carefully the review criteria on pages 7-10.

These criteria show potential applicants the qualities FNS expects successful proposals to have; they will also guide the reviewers’ evaluation of proposals.

Difference between the Program Participation Grants and the Outreach Grants

The purposes stated above are in sharp contrast with those of the Food and Nutrition Service’s (FNS) Outreach Grants Program, which strives to increase food stamp participation by marketing the program, helping applicants complete the application forms, and expanding the range and number of places people can go to get information and assistance with their food stamp applications. Where the Outreach Grants are primarily concerned with getting applicants into the food stamp office, the Program Participation Grants are primarily concerned with improving the

quality and efficiency of operations **within** the food stamp office, such as streamlining office procedures or using technology (e.g. telephones) to improve the application process. For this reason, Program Participation Grants do not support projects that devote more than 25% of the requested grant funds to outreach activities--such as advertising, application assistance, screening or pre-qualifying applicants, or out-stationing eligibility workers--whose purpose is to attract or recruit food stamp applicants.

WHO MAY APPLY

Eligible Entities

The entities eligible to receive grants under this competition are:

- The 53 State agencies that administer the FSP;
- State or local governments;
- Agencies providing health or welfare services*;
- Public health or educational entities*; and
- Private non-profit entities* such as community-based or faith-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations.

*** Non-profit organizations are required to submit a copy of the IRS Determination Letter, form 501(c)(3) or proof of application for exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, a list of their Board of Directors if applicable, and their most recent financial statements signed by the Treasurer or the Treasurer of the board. Educational entities are also required to submit their most recent financial statements signed by the Treasurer or Treasurer of the board. Applications submitted without these will be considered non-responsive and eliminated from consideration.**

FISCAL YEAR 2006 PRIORITIES

The grant competition described in this RFA specifically encourages applications that respond to the two priorities described below.

IF YOUR APPLICATION ADDRESSES ONE OR BOTH OF THESE PRIORITIES, PLEASE INDICATE WHICH ONES IN YOUR COVER LETTER.

1. Partnerships

The Department is keenly interested in encouraging and supporting partnerships between State agencies administering the FSP and private non-profit organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations. Toward that end, FNS intends to make at least one award of up

to \$1 million to an otherwise acceptable proposal that involves a partnership between a State agency and one or more private non-profit organizations. The intent is to encourage relationships with private non-profit organizations with strong community ties and thereby enhance the State agencies' communication with the communities they serve. Improvements in public agency practices should be more effective if they are coordinated with community-based initiatives. FNS intends to award grants to applicants, who would then award sub-grants to their partners as applicable. Either a State agency or a private, non-profit group can be an applicant.

2. Serving Traditionally Underserved and Economically Depressed Geographic Areas that Overlap State Boundaries

FNS is interested in funding a project that consists of a partnership **between or among State agencies** that serves traditionally underserved and economically depressed geographic areas that overlap state boundaries. Examples of such areas include but are not limited to the Mississippi Valley, the Lower Mississippi Delta, or Appalachia. FNS recognizes that State food stamp systems may differ. However, the culture, needs and access barriers of the individuals living in these areas may be the same. Therefore, multiple State agencies may be able to address these barriers better together than alone. For such a project, FNS would award the grant to the main applicant, in this case the lead State agency, who would then award sub-grants to its partners such as the second State agency and others such as community-based or faith-based organizations as appropriate.

Number of Applications

As mentioned above, FNS has designed this grant competition to give State agencies control over the submission of applications involving their operations via the mechanism of "Letters of Commitment or Endorsement." If State agencies decide to submit more than one application each, or to enter into more than one partnership each, FNS encourages them to make explicit in each application its relationship to any others. State agencies that decide to submit more than one application should consider carefully the allocation of time stated in each application. State agencies with more than one partner organization may want to consider submitting a single application designed to make sub-grants to the partner organizations. Proposals forwarded by any given State agency should request funding for distinct, non-overlapping activities.

Letters of Commitment or Endorsement

FNS recognizes that the grant proposals responding to this RFA will directly affect State agency operations. Therefore, if the grant proposal is from an entity other than a State agency, it must show that a State agency strongly endorses or is intimately involved in the proposed project in order to be considered. Please refer to the two types of letters described below to determine which is appropriate to submit with the proposal. Please note that State agencies are able to submit an application on their own as well as partner with another organization. Please refer to the section above on Number of Applications. **Applications submitted without a letter of commitment or a letter of endorsement will be considered non-responsive and eliminated from consideration.** We will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received. Therefore, applicants must include the letter of commitment or letter of endorsement

with their application package to be considered for funding. Such letters may be addressed to the project director of the FNS Grant Officer.

A Letter of Commitment is required if an applicant is **partnering** with a State agency in its proposed project. The State agency's letter of commitment must

- describe the State agency's role in the project,
- the amount of time it intends to commit to the project,
- include an attestation that it was involved in the planning of the project, that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project, and that it will use the results of the project to improve the State agency practices, and
- be on the respective State agency's letterhead and be signed by an authorizing official.

A letter of commitment is also required if the grant proposal is from a State agency working in partnership with another organization(s). The letter(s) of commitment must describe

- the organization's role in the project,
- the amount of time it intends to commit to the project and an attestation that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project, and
- must be provided on the respective organization's letter head and be signed by an authorizing individual.

A Letter of Endorsement is required if an applicant is not partnering with a State agency. The State agency's letter of endorsement must

- explain that the State agency is aware of the projected impact on its system and is supportive of the proposed project, and
- be on the respective State agency's letterhead and be signed by an authorizing official.

FUNDING AND DURATION

Up to \$5 million are available in FY 2006 for the Food Stamp Program Participation Grants. FNS will award the grants through a competitive process. FNS plans to announce the grant awards to the selected grantees in August 2006. Grantees will be allowed to use the grant funds for the duration of the project period. The grants will be funded for the period September 2006, through August 2009; however, we will entertain projects of shorter duration. We awarded six separate grants in FY 2005 and anticipate awarding approximately the same number in FY 2006; however this number could be larger or smaller depending on the quality and nature of the grants. FNS reminds applicants that the submission of a proposal does not guarantee funding. Funding for approved grants will be provided through the Grant Award/Letter of Credit process, in the same manner as other funds, upon receipt of a properly executed Grant Agreement and subject to the availability of funding. All Program Participation Grants funds must be obligated and all activities under the Grant must be completed by August 31, 2009.

USES OF FUNDS

Allowable Uses of Funds

Projects predicated on demonstrating the effectiveness of waiving food stamp regulations in order to conform to other programs are not allowable and will not be considered for funding. However, if during the grant period, a State agency determines it needs a waiver, it may apply for one, though there is no guarantee it would be approved. FNS reminds applicants that State agencies have authority to waive face-to-face interviews in hardship cases. Furthermore, under existing regulations, States have the latitude to define what constitutes a hardship. As a result, State agencies can increase the number of hardship waivers for face-to-face interviews they grant without obtaining an approved waiver from FNS.

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Screening and Review Process

FNS will screen all applications that meet the published deadline for submission to ensure their completeness and conformity to the requirements of this announcement. **FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received.** Applications that are fully responsive to the screening requirements will be reviewed competitively and scored against the criteria listed on pages 7-10. One or more review panels may be comprised of United States Department of Agriculture staff, other federal agency staff, and other individuals committed to furthering the goals of the FSP. The resulting scores will provide a ranking of applications according to technical merit for use by selecting officials. (Please see *Selection of Grant Awards* on page 10.)

Technical Evaluation Criteria and Weights

The panels will use the same criteria for all applications, including those that address FY 2006 priorities. The Department is interested in promoting relationships with organizations **new** to the FSP. For this purpose, a “new” relationship means a joint effort between a State agency and a private non-profit organization where the private non-profit organization has not had a financial arrangement involving the FSP and this particular State within the last three years.

Applicants must clearly state in their cover letters that the relationship is “new.”

1. Soundness or Merit of Project Design (50 points)

Problem analysis: The proposal clearly describes the access or participation problems to be solved and provides evidence that they are worth solving.

Impact:

- The proposal demonstrates a direct effect on the application, certification, case maintenance or recertification processes and provides evidence that the changes would make the food stamp process easier for the applicant/recipient.
- It shows a clear progression from idea to practice in a State agency or County office.
- It describes the impact the project is expected to make. Impact can be described in terms of the degree of improvement applicants/participants are expected to experience while going through the application certification process, the percentage of a State agency's or County office's participant caseload that is expected to benefit, or the size of positive impact on a specific population such as elderly applicants (As long as an impact is demonstrated, the effect does not have to be demonstrated to have occurred on a statewide level.).

Quality: The proposal shows:

- thought, analysis, clarity, and the use of relevant facts and knowledge,
- that the project has the potential to be transferred successfully to other State agencies,
- that the project has the potential to be sustained after the grant period ends,
- that partners cooperated in planning the project and clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the partners, and
- the letters of commitment or endorsement clearly outline either the State's endorsement or partnership by following the guidelines found on page 6.

Innovation: The application proposes innovative development of new or revised State or County food stamp application processing or certification systems, or portions thereof.

Time period: The proposal includes a project timeline which demonstrates that sufficient time is allotted for proposed tasks.

Feasibility: The project can be implemented without a waiver of FSP regulations and within the rubric of FSP law, policy, and practice.

2. Budget Appropriateness and Economic Efficiency (10 points)

Budget: The proposal includes:

- a standard form 424A,
- a line item budget that demonstrates how funds will be spent, by whom and for what purpose, including funds intended to support outreach activities (budgets should not designate more than 25% of the overall funds to outreach activities).
- a budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies these costs (see **NOTE**).
- if desired, a tiered budget and narrative that describes adjustments the applicant would make if it were awarded funding at different levels (only the primary budget will be analyzed against this criterion).

Efficiency: The proposal is cost effective – it demonstrates that the anticipated results are commensurate with the cost of the project.

NOTE: Proposal submissions which omit the required budget forms, budget narratives and/or line item descriptions will not receive the full point value for this criterion. Therefore, applicants should recognize that a well written budget narrative that justifies the proposed project expenditures assists the reviewers during the review process.

3. Organizational Experience and Management /Staff Capability (20 points)

Credibility: The proposal establishes the applying organization’s credibility and capabilities.

Communication: The proposal demonstrates that effective communication will exist among staff and or partnering organizations. The proposal includes an organizational chart of the proposed project.

Staff: The proposal identifies the director and other key staff. The proposal includes resumes that demonstrate that the proposed staff has the appropriate technical and experiential backgrounds for their proposed roles. If the applicant is unable to identify the director and key staff, it must include with the application package job descriptions for positions that must be advertised. Applicants should address their contingency or back-up plans in the event of key staff departures.

Letters of Commitment: The proposal includes letters of commitment from the project director, key staff, and, if applicable, partnering organizations, delineating duties and amount of effort that each will contribute to the project. These letters are in addition to the letter of commitment from a partnering State agency.

4. Project Oversight and Evaluation (15 points)

Oversight: The proposal demonstrates

- effective and consistent oversight by qualified project managers,
- the time commitment the project managers will dedicate to the project, and
- includes an organizational chart or narrative for the project.

Evaluation: The proposal describes a well thought out, organized review and evaluation process that will measure whether the goals of the project have been met. The evaluation should focus on measuring the impact the project seeks to make.

5. Presentation (5 points)

Executive Summary: If page limitations allow, the proposal should include an executive summary of the project of not more than one page.

Quality: The application is well presented, organized, written, and complete.

Format: The application is single-sided, on 8½ by 11 inch paper. Type size is at least 12 point and margins are at least one inch. The application is limited to 30 pages including attachments. If page limitations allow, the proposal should include a table of contents and an executive summary.

Selection of Grant Applications

After the panel evaluates and scores the grant applications, it will rank them by score, starting with the highest score and make recommendations to the selecting official. The selecting official will consider the panel recommendations. In general, awards will be based on rank funding order. However, **FNS reserves the right to fund out of rank order to achieve agency priorities (such as to grant an award to an entity that includes a joint effort between a State agency and a community-based or faith-based organization), geographic (such as to grant an award to an entity(s) that proposes a project in an historically underserved and economically depressed area such as the Mississippi Delta or Appalachia), demographic, or socioeconomic diversity, etc.** If the panel review indicates that FNS has received few or no technically acceptable proposals, the selecting official may determine that FNS will make no awards, or commit less than the \$5 million set aside for this purpose.

As mentioned above, FNS intends to award at least \$1 million to an eligible applicant that is a joint effort between a State agency and a community-based or faith-based organization, and to fund at least one project that consists of a State/State partnership that focuses on a shared geographic region that is traditionally underserved and economically disadvantaged. However, FNS reserves the right to award grants to several such entities, or not to award any grants to such entities if it does not receive acceptable applications.

Determination of Award Amounts

If an application has been selected for funding and the budget submission is realistic and well supported, the application will be funded at the level requested. However, FNS reserves the right to fund applications at a lesser amount if it judges that the application can be implemented with less, or if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards.

Award Notification and Issuance of Funds

FNS will notify selected State agencies or organizations in writing in August 2006. We will make the funds available in September 2006.

Terms and Conditions

For each project selected for funding, the applicant must sign a grant agreement, which will contain the terms and conditions of the grant. Uniform administrative requirements for grants appear at 7 CFR 3015. Administrative requirements for grants to State and local governments appear at 7 CFR 3016. Subparts A-E “Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)” appear at 7 CFR 3017. Subparts F “Government-wide Requirements for Drug-free Workplace (Grants)” appear at 7 CFR 3021. Administrative requirements for grants to non-profit organizations and institutions of higher education appear at 7 CFR 3019. Grantees and sub-grantees must adhere to cost principles applicable to their organizational status, i.e., OMB Circulars A-87, A-21, and A-122. Cost principles for for-profit organizations appear at 41 CFR 1-15.2. Audits of State, local governments and non-profit organizations appear at OMB Circular A-133. Grantees are subject to the requirements of the applicable cost principles, which appear in the regulations cited above.

If chosen, the applicant must agree to make a good faith effort, on a continuing basis, to maintain a drug-free workplace (including taking specific actions described at 7 CFR Sec. 3021.200 through 3021.230; and (B) identify all workplace locations where work under Federal award will be performed (7CFR sec. 3021.200). Since Federal entities will no longer collect a paper certification, this may include the following:

- notifying all sub-grantees and contractors of the Drug Free Workplace rules,
- making conforming changes to your internal procedures, directives, training materials, etc., and/or
- incorporating the new rules into your sub-grantee monitoring practices.

FNS will obtain assurance that applicants are neither suspended nor debarred prior to making an award. Applicants chosen for award will also be required to ensure that all sub-contractors and sub-grantees are neither excluded nor disqualified under the suspension and debarment rules found at 7 CFR sec. 3017.300 by doing any **one** of the following:

- reviewing the Excluded Parties List System (EPLS) found at www.epls.gov, or collecting a certification that the entity is neither excluded nor disqualified. Since a Federal certification form is no longer available, the grantee or sub-grantee electing this method must devise it own, including a clause to this effect in the sub-grant agreement and in any procurement.

RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Grantees selected in connection with this Request for Applications will be required to submit quarterly Financial Status Reports (SF-269A), quarterly progress reports, and final reports. Grantees will be required to submit an original and two copies of each report. FNS will provide a reporting schedule and the address to which grantees may send reports at the time of award.

The selected agencies or organizations must operate a financial management system that provides accurate, current and complete disclosure of the financial status of the project. The

progress reports must provide a brief description of the project activities conducted during the reporting period, major accomplishments with completion dates and budget deviations from the proposed plan, difficulties encountered and solutions developed, and major planned activities for the next quarter. The final progress report should be a project summary that includes lessons learned, future implications within the State, and transferability to other States.

Materials developed with funding from this grant must be submitted in MS Word format and a hard copy must also be submitted at the end of the grant period. 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.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Due Date for the Application Package

The completed application package must **be received** by FNS at the following address on or before **June 7, 2006 at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time**. FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they have been received.

Applicants must meet this deadline by delivering the application or by mailing it sufficiently in advance of the deadline to ensure its timely receipt, or by submitting it electronically by accessing www.grants.gov, a new government-wide website designed for electronic submission of applications/proposals. If you opt to submit your application/proposal electronically through the grants.gov portal, **please allow ample time to familiarize yourself with the system's requirements.** Users of this system will need both a Data Universal Number (DUNS) and a Contract Registry Number (CCR) thus, we suggest you visit the site sometime prior to attempting to submit your application electronically to review the instructions on how to obtain a DUNS assignment as well as a CCR. While both numbers are required to submit the application electronically via grants.gov, the DUNS number is a requirement even if the application is submitted in hardcopy format. You can contact Dun and Bradstreet at 1-800-234-3867 to obtain a DUNS number. All applicants that opt to submit their application/proposal via www.grants.gov must also send an email to Lisa Johnson, Grant Officer, at Lisa.Johnson@fns.usda.gov advising that the application was submitted through the grants.gov portal. This email must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on the due date as well. Users should also be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices and that the initial confirmation is strictly to advise that an attempt was made to apply electronically rather than confirmation that the application was accepted.

- For mailed or delivered applications, one original and two copies must be submitted. If you opt to mail your application we strongly suggest using a mail delivery service that guarantees delivery and allows you to track delivery to FNS. Also, FNS will not accept faxed or direct e-mailed applications.
- Late applications will not be considered in this competition.

Mailing Address and Contact Information

- Application packages, mailed or hand-delivered, must be sent to Lisa Johnson, Grants Management Officer, Food and Nutrition Service, Grants Management Division, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 738, Alexandria, VA 22302.
- Applicants may contact Lisa Johnson to ask any questions about the grant application and questions seeking clarification of technical or procedural aspects of the grant competition via phone at (703) 305-2848, or via e-mail at Lisa.Johnson@fns.usda.gov .

Checklist for the Application Package

The application package must include:

_____ The Application for Federal Assistance

- Cover Letter – A cover letter should be the first page of the grant application. The cover letter must indicate which FY 2006 priorities, if any, the application addresses. (The FY 2006 priorities are State/Non-Profit Partnerships and Underserved or Economically Depressed Geographic Areas). If no indication is provided the application will not be considered for the \$1 million dollar State/Non-Profit Partnership priority. If the application addresses the \$1 million dollar State/Non-Profit Partnership priority, and the partnership is a “new” one as defined above, the cover letter must include an attestation to that effect.
- Grant proposal that responds to the criteria and includes all of the proposal components discussed herein;
- Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance, including a Data Universal Number (DUNS) (Effective October 1, 2003, all applicants of Federal Government Awards must include a DUNS number which can be obtained from the Dun and Bradstreet Group), and a Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (this grant is located under the Food Stamp Program State Administrative Expenses number – 10.580)
- Standard Form 424(A), Budget Summary;
- Standard Form 424(B), Assurances;
- An Anti-Lobbying Certification. If the entity or applicant does not conduct lobbying activities, please indicate “not applicable” on the form;
- Certification Regarding Debarment: Applicants chosen for award will be required to attest that they are not suspended or debarred and will be required to verify that all sub-awardees and contracts are not suspended or debarred.
- Optional Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants. This survey is a tool to allow the Federal government to better understand the population of applicants for Federal funds. The survey, which is voluntary, seeks input from nonprofit private organizations (not including private universities).
- Non-profits and educational entities are required to submit their most recent financial statements.

_____The Correct Number of Copies

- An original bearing the original signature of the authorized representative.
- Two copies of the original application.

_____The Correct Format

- The original must be ready for copying, i.e., single-sided, unstapled, unbound, and on 8 ½ by 11 inch white paper;
- Type size must be at least 12 point;
- Margins must be at least one inch;
- Original and copies must be on white paper;
- The application may be no more than thirty pages long, including attachments such as letter of commitment and resumes. The Federal application forms, i.e., SF-424, SF-424(A) and SF-424(B) and Anti-Lobbying certifications do not count toward the thirty-page limit. The application and attachments cannot include videotapes, brochures, binders, folders, or sleeves.

Tips for Proposal Writers

- 1. Read the RFA carefully, more than once.**
- 2. Use the review criteria on pages 7-10 to structure your proposal.**
- 3. State clearly in your cover letter which FY 2006 priority your application addresses, if any; if your application involves a “new” partnership, so state in your cover letter.**
- 4. Make sure budget figures are consistent across displays.**
- 5. Don’t assume that reviewers know anything about your organization or its work.**
- 6. Don’t leave out required components such as budgets, resumes, or letters of commitment.**
- 7. Have one or more people who weren’t involved in writing the proposal read it and give your suggestions for improving it.**