

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture is soliciting Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Grant Program Request for Grant Proposals

Infrastructure Grant Application Guidance

Note: Applicants can ONLY apply for either the Infrastructure grant or Simplified Equipment-Only grant.

Application Due Date:

April 3, 2024, at 4:00 P.M. CST

No late submissions accepted.



Doug Goehring, Agriculture Commissioner
North Dakota Department of Agriculture

CONTENTS

1. Funding Opportunity Description	
a) Legislative Authority	2
b) Purpose.....	2
2. Award Information	
a) Available Funding.....	3
b) Award Amount.....	3
c) Matching Funds Requirement.....	3
d) Period of Performance	4
3. Eligibility Information	
a) Eligible Applicants.....	4
b) Eligible Requirements.....	5
c) Eligible Projects	5
d) Eligible and ineligible Commodities	7
4. Application and Submission Information	
a) Application Requirements	7
b) Application Review Information	8
c) Review and Selection Process	8
d) Anticipated Award Announcement.....	9
5. Award Administrative Information	
a) Award Notices	9
b) Policy Requirements	9
c) Reporting.....	12
d) Payment.....	13
e) Budget Adjustments.....	13
f) Contact	13

1. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

a) LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 1001(b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 (Pub. L. 117—2), as amended, authorizes the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to make grants and agreements to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency. For additional information, see the [Program Scope and Requirements](#).

Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) is intended to serve middle-of-the-supply-chain needs to add value and provide more, new, and better markets for locally or regionally produced food.

b) PURPOSE

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is charged with distributing funds to state departments of agriculture, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. [The Program Scope and Requirements published by AMS has announced the total amount of grant funds the ND Department of Agriculture \(NDDA\) will receive.](#)

The following funding priorities have been identified:

1. Transportation and distribution - vehicles, especially refrigerated, and shared distribution resources (staff, equipment such as a pallet lift) to minimize the number of duplicated miles and labor hours spent moving food from production locations to consumers.
2. Modernize or expand existing facilities or construction of new facilities for the following supply chain activities:
 - a. Cold storage- refrigerated food storage resources (walk-in, high volume capacity, shared, and geographically accessible) for continuous cold chain (storage & transportation, trained personnel, and efficient management/coordination procedures)
 - b. Processing/kitchens: shared, licensed food processing and preparation space to produce value-added local goods (changing or transforming a product from its original state to a more valuable state)
 - c. Aggregation - facility to maintain cold chain while aggregating products in preparation for distribution to consumers.
3. Food hub coordination - shared and coordinated “drop points” for cold storage, processing, aggregation, and distribution to consumers; supporting logistics and collaboration to move food regionally and state-wide across a network of growers.
4. Labor - food safety training, workforce development, processing, aggregation, and distribution staffing.

5. Administrative support - licensing/insurance support, paperwork and funding application support, crop planning.

North Dakota Food Action Plan Priorities:

1. Equipment to make food production, aggregation, and processing more efficient, including additional processing centers, such as on-farm produce washing and packing stations.
2. Hard and soft infrastructure to help with the aggregation and distribution of local food to help create more stabilized markets for producers.
3. Infrastructure and capacity building for local and hyperlocal food hubs.
4. New or upgraded facilities that can help support more middle-of-supply chain businesses, such as prep kitchens; and
5. Equipment and investment in efforts that expand that capacity for supplying culturally appropriate food through emergency food systems and programs.

2. AWARD INFORMATION

a) AVAILABLE FUNDING

NDDA has been awarded a total of \$2,955,000.00 in grant funding to be awarded **for infrastructure projects.**

b) AWARD AMOUNT

NDDA plans to award multiple grants from these funds. **The minimum grant request is \$100,000.00 and the maximum grant request shall not exceed \$2,955,000.00. NDDA may place a per-application cap on grant awards.**

c) MATCHING FUNDS REQUIREMENT

Matching Funds Requirement

Infrastructure grant applicants are required to contribute **50% of the total proposed project cost** as a match to federal funding. This applies to all applicants except those who qualify for the reduced match described below.

Reduced Matching Funds– Historically Underserved Groups

For historically underserved farmers and ranchers, or for other businesses that qualify under Small Business Administration (SBA) categories of small disadvantaged businesses, women-owned small businesses, or veteran-owned small businesses, the required match funding contribution or cost share is reduced to 25% of the project cost. NDDA requires applicants to self-certify in their Infrastructure Grant applications to be eligible for this reduced match.

Other Matching Fund Information

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. A match contribution to the project as described in [2 C.F.R. § 200.306\(e\)](#). These contributions cannot 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.

All matching contributions must be committed or secured at the time an applicant is recommended for an award.

Indirect costs may count toward the Infrastructure Grant applicant's match.

Program income (as defined in [2 C.F.R. § 200.1](#)) or any other Federal funds is an ineligible source of match or cost share.

Matching Funds and Letters of Verification

Each application must include the total amount of match 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.

Signed Match Verification Letters must accompany the Infrastructure Grant proposal at the time of application to the State. A template is located at: <https://www.ndda.nd.gov/rfsi>.

Match Verification will be managed and monitored by the NDDA and must be available upon request from the NDDA or USDA.

d) PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

RFSI grant funds will be awarded for projects **up to 2½ years (30 months) duration and must be completed by December 31, 2026.**

3. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

a) ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Entities eligible for Infrastructure Grants made by NDDA will be:

- Agricultural producers or processors, or groups of agricultural producers and processors
- 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 on the benefit of local and regional producers, and that meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA size standards. 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](#).
- Nonprofit organizations operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products
- Local government entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products

- Tribal governments operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products.
- Institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals THAT bring 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, and distribution of targeted agricultural products.

All applicant businesses and organizations must be domestically owned, and applicants' facilities must be physically located within the 50 States of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

b) ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To receive an award and enter into a Grant Award Agreement with the NDDA, all applicants must provide a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number to the NDDA. A UEI number is a twelve-digit number established and assigned by SAM.gov to uniquely identify business entities. A UEI number may be obtained from SAM.gov at: <https://gsa.gov/entityid>. ***NOTE: SAM.gov registration is not required to obtain a UEI. If your entity is already registered in SAM.gov, your UEI has already been assigned. Sign in to your SAM.gov account.***

c) ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people.

Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an organization because, unlike operations, projects have a limited duration with a definitive beginning and end. A project will also have an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.

Infrastructure Grants will fund projects that expand capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted agricultural products. Examples include:

- Expanding processing capacities, including adding product types, increasing production volumes, and supporting new wholesale/retail product lines.
- Modernizing equipment or facilities through upgrades, repairs, or retooling; (e.g., adapting product lines for institutional procurement or adding parallel processing capacity).
- Purchase and installation of specialized equipment, such as processing components, sorting equipment, packing, and labeling equipment, or delivery vehicles.
- Modernizing manufacturing, tracking, storage, and information technology systems.
- Enhancing worker safety through the adoption of new technologies or investment in equipment or facility improvements.
- Construction of a new facility.

- Increasing packaging and labeling capacities that meet compliance requirements under applicable laws (e.g., sealing, bagging, boxing, labeling, conveying, and product moving equipment).
- Increasing storage space, including cold storage.
- Develop, customize, or install climate-smart equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, increases efficiency in water use, improves air and/or water quality, and/or meets one or more of USDA's climate action goals.
- Modernize equipment or facilities to ensure food safety, including associated Hazard, Analysis, and Critical Control Points (HACCP) consultation, plan development, and employee training.
- Training on the use of all equipment purchased under the grant and associated new processes.

Allowable activities or tasks that could be a part of such projects may include:

- Hiring term-limited personnel to assist with project implementation activities.
- Purchasing special purpose equipment: defined in section 8.2 of the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#). This includes the purchase of special-purpose equipment for institutions or others that will benefit multiple producers through middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products.
- Analyzing potential facility upgrades and changes that meet regulatory requirements, obtaining design and/or architecture services, etc. (to the extent these costs are directly related to the project).
- Planning for HACCP or other food safety or worker safety measures or equipment recommendations; and
- Upgrades or new facilities for processing specific agricultural products, such as:
 - Aggregator warehouse and storage, including cooperatives.
 - Purchase of freezing equipment, freezer, or cold storage.
 - Processing, canning, preserving and pasteurization.
 - Preparation and packing.

The following activities are **not** eligible for funding:

- Acquiring real property (including land purchases), or any interest therein.
- Projects focused on meat and poultry processing, or other ineligible agricultural products as noted in section 1.2.1.
- Activities that have received a Federal award from another Federal award program.
- Claim expenses that have been or will be reimbursed under any Federal, State, or local government funding.
- Projects that have already received funding from another federal grant; sub-award programs may not receive funding for the same activities through an Infrastructure Grant. However, Infrastructure Grants may build on the successes of prior funding, such as the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Business Builder sub-awards, to fund subsequent activities.

d) ELIGIBLE AND INELIGIBLE COMMODITIES

Funds will support expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of locally and regionally produced food products, including specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry. Ineligible products include meat and poultry, wild-caught seafood, exclusively animal feed and forage products, fiber, landscaping products, tobacco, and dietary supplements.

4. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

a) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Application documents are posted on the NDDA website at <https://www.ndda.nd.gov/rfsi>. If you cannot access the site or have trouble with the application, please contact Deanna Gierszewski at degierszewski@nd.gov or 701-328-2191.

All applicants must adhere to the following instructions, in addition to other requirements as stated in this Request for Grant Proposals (RFGP) to be considered eligible for grant funds. The following information is addressed in the RFSI Infrastructure Grant Proposal.

Applications missing any of the subsequent information may be deemed ineligible.

- Each application must include the following documents: application, match verification letter, evidence of critical resources and infrastructure letter, collaborator organization letter, and any letters of recommendation. Documents must list the name of the company or individual submitting the proposal, street address, mailing address, telephone number, email address, and the person(s) who will be responsible for the project. These items can be found on the [NDDA website](#).
- Applications must describe in detail how the grant funds will be used.
- Applicants may include letters of support to enhance the quality of their proposal.
- Applications are not limited to a specific minimum or maximum project amount. NDDA reserves the right to offer an award amount less than the amount requested.
- Applications must be submitted on the USDA RFSI Infrastructure Grant Proposal. The match verification letter, evidence of critical resources and infrastructure letter, collaborator organization letter, and any letters of recommendation need to be submitted as their own attachments. Letters of support are encouraged.
- NDDA must receive an electronic copy of the full application that includes the application, match verification letter, evidence of critical resources and infrastructure letter, collaborator organization letter, and any letters of recommendation by the stated deadline - 4:00 p.m. CST on April 3, 2024.
- Do not modify the format of the letters or application or make your own form.

b) APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

NDDA and the RFSI Committee will review grant applications to ensure the application meets the statutory purpose of the program, all application criteria are fulfilled, and that costs are allowable. Below are the evaluation criteria:

	Max Points	Points Received
Project Purpose	25	
How well does the applicant define the specific issue, problem, or need of the project? Are the project objectives clear and appropriate? Is the project important, timely, and feasible? If a continuation project, has the applicant defined how the project will differ from and build upon prior projects?	Comments:	
External Project Support	15	
Do stakeholders, other than the applicant and those involved in the project, support this project and clearly state why?	Comments:	
Measurable Outcomes	30	
Does the project include at least one approved outcome measure that directly supports the project's purpose? Does the outcome measure include at least one indicator and related quantifiable result? Does the applicant appropriately describe how the project will collect the required data to report on the outcome and indicator?	Comments:	
Budget Narrative	20	
Is the amount requested reasonable? Are line items reasonable and appropriate? Is each category justification completed and reasonable?	Comments:	
Overall	10	
Is the proposal complete, well thought out, and written, and has demonstrated an appropriate amount of preliminary work to justify further research and development work on the project?	Comments:	
TOTAL	100	

c) REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

All applications will be reviewed by NDDA and the RFSI committee after the grant application deadline. Applications are evaluated on the merits of the proposals based on the scoring criteria listed above. Applicants will be notified during the review process if monetary adjustments to grant requests, project proposal scope of work, and/or project budget changes are necessary.

d) ANTICIPATED AWARD ANNOUNCEMENT

All eligible applications will be reviewed. Successful applications will be chosen on the merits of the project as they relate to the published criteria and will be included in the North Dakota State Infrastructure Grant Proposal, which will be submitted to AMS. Applicants will be notified in writing whether their project is selected for inclusion in the North Dakota State Infrastructure Grant Proposal. Funding is not guaranteed if the project is included in the State

Infrastructure Grant Proposal. NDDA anticipates that grant awards and notifications will be in April or May of 2024.

After grant awards have been made, all application packets and the associated evaluations will be made available to the public. If the applicant believes that any of the information contained in the application packet should be held confidential according to State or Federal law, the applicant must designate that information as “confidential” in the application packet and identify the applicable law. NDDA may determine that trade secrets or proprietary information may or may not continue to be held confidential.

5. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

a) AWARD NOTICE

Successful applicants will be sent a Notice of Grant Award (NOGA). Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, successful applicants will be required to sign a NOGA indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks, report results, and authorizing NDDA to monitor the progress of the proposed project.

NOGAs must be signed and returned to NDDA within 30 days of receipt. Failure to submit an executed copy of the NOGA within 30 days of receipt may result in the loss of awarded grant funds unless the delay was caused by circumstances outside the control of the applicant. Grant funds are not effective, and expenditures related to this grant should not be incurred until there is a fully executed NOGA by both parties.

b) POLICY REQUIREMENTS

General Compliance

All awarded grants must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the terms of the grant award as specified in the NOGA Requirements.

Applicants shall comply, **as applicable**, with Section 1001(b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 (Pub. L. 117—2), as amended; Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure [Program Scope and Requirements](#); USDA administrative requirements at [C.F.R. § 400](#); uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements for federal awards at [2 C.F.R. § 200](#) and [48 C.F.R. Subpart 31.2](#); and excluded and disqualified participant requirements at [2 C.F.R. § 180, Subpart C](#); [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) and the [RFSI Program Specific Terms and Conditions](#).

National Environmental Policy Act

Grant Applicants must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and all other federal environmental laws and regulations. NDDA is required to review projects for NEPA compliance prior to the award of Infrastructure Grant sub-award funds.

Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are any costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be readily identified with an individual project, program, or organizational activity. They

generally include facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses. If an Infrastructure Grant recipient has a NICRA, NDDA is required to honor that negotiated rate, and a copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the Infrastructure Grant application. Otherwise, applicants may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC). For additional information, refer to [section 4.2 of the Program Scope and Requirements](#).

Evidence of Critical Infrastructure

Evidence of Critical Infrastructure is required if critical resources and/or infrastructure are necessary for the completion of the proposed Infrastructure Grant project. Applicants must submit evidence that critical resources and infrastructure necessary to support the initiation and completion of a project are in place. Land, structures, and other critical resources must be in place and in working condition. The letter must indicate the critical resources that are necessary for the initiation and completion of the project and certify that they are in place and committed prior to the start date of the project.

An Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Letter must accompany the Infrastructure Grant proposal at the time of application to the NDDA. A template is located at: <https://www.ndda.nd.gov/rfsi>

Records Requirements

Grant recipient agrees to comply with regulation 2 CFR Part 200.334 – Record Retention and Access, to maintain financial records, supporting documents, statistical records, and all other pertinent records for a period of at least three (3) years after submission and acceptance of final report officially closing out the grant program. In cases where litigation, a claim, or an audit is initiated prior to expiration of the three (3) year period, records must be retained until completion of the action and resolution of issues, or the end of the three (3) year period, whichever is later. Retention is required for purposes of Federal or State examination or audit and is subject to examination.

Monitoring

NDDA reserves the ability to perform site monitoring visits to all applicants to ensure that work is progressing within the required timeframe and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring includes both financial and program information, as well as site visits.

Ineligible Costs

NDDA will not reimburse for any costs incurred by any applicant for work performed in the preparation and production of this RFGP, nor for any work performed prior to the formal Execution of the NOGA.

Open Records

RFGP submitted for funding, all related grant awards, and reports shall be subject to disclosure under the North Dakota open records law, N.D.C.C. CH. 44-04.

Under the North Dakota public records law and subject to the Confidentiality clause, certain records may be open to the public upon request. Public records may include: (a) records NDDA receives from the applicant under the NOGA, (b) records obtained by either party under the NOGA, and (c) records generated by either party under the NOGA.

Applicant agrees to contact NDDA immediately upon receiving a request for information under the public records law and to comply with NDDA's Instructions on how to respond to such request.

Other Considerations

All applications submitted in response to this RFGP become the property of NDDA. NDDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, otherwise use, and to authorize others to use materials produced under this grant agreement.

NDDA also reserves the right to:

- Post-funded RFGR or final reports to the NDDA website.
- Reject any or all RFGR received.
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in RFGR received after prior notification and agreement of the applicant.
- Use any or all ideas submitted unless those ideas are covered by legal patent or proprietary rights.
- Clarify the scope of this program, within the RFGP requirement and with appropriate notice to potential applicants, to best serve the interests of the State of North Dakota.
- Amend program specifications after their release, with appropriate written notice to potential applicants.
- Require a good faith effort on the part of the applicant to work with NDDA after project completion to develop or implement project results.
- Withhold any payments when grant award conditions are not met.

C) REPORTING

The applicant will be responsible for setting up and maintaining a project file that contains all records of correspondence with NDDA, receipts, invoices, and copies of all reports and documents associated with the project. All records, regardless of physical form, and the accounting practices and procedures of the applicant relevant to RFGP are subject to examination by the North Dakota State Auditor, the Auditor's designee, or Federal auditors, if required. Applicant shall maintain all of these records for at least three (3) years following completion of NOGA and be able to provide them upon reasonable notice.

NDDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the project. Information submitted in any report to NDDA will be a public record. Annual and final reports must be submitted using the required format.

Quarterly Performance Reports

Applicants shall submit, via email, the following documentation within 30 days of the close of each quarter for the length of the project (see reporting schedule below).

- a. A budget report (reporting template forthcoming)
- b. A signed effort report (reporting template forthcoming)
- c. A narrative report (reporting template forthcoming)

The reports shall include, but are not limited to, budget expenditures, effort reports, and a brief narrative of the project’s progress, as applicable. Failure to submit timely reports may result in the forfeiture of reimbursement for that quarter and may affect the screening process of future grant applications.

Reporting Periods

October 1 – December 31
January 1 – March 31
April 1 – June 30
July 1 – September 30

Report Due on or Before

January 31
April 30
July 31
October 31

The general information and template required for the Quarterly Performance Report (subject to change by AMS guidance) is forthcoming.

Final Performance Report

A final report must be submitted to NDDA by the Applicant no later than sixty (60) calendar days after the Agreement termination date. Failure to submit timely final reports may result in the forfeiture of final payment and may affect the screening process of future grant applications. The final report must be approved by NDDA and AMS. NDDA will not disburse the final payment until all requirements of the Agreement have been fulfilled. All remaining grant funds or outstanding grant funds must be reconciled. The final narrative report shall address all points listed below and be suitable for dissemination to the public.

The general information and template required for the Final Performance Report (subject to change by AMS guidance) is forthcoming.

In addition to the final project report, NDDA reserves the right to conduct a follow-up survey of funded projects to determine long-term impacts of the project.

Reporting Compliance

Applicants who do not submit the final report or who submit unacceptable presentations may be required to return previously distributed funds to NDDA.

D) PAYMENT

Applicant agrees to the payment by two installments; first half upon execution of award and the final half upon approval and acceptance of final report, provided all documentation has been received. Final payment request must include an itemized invoice and documentation of the work or expenses for which payment is requested (documentation, receipts, invoices, etc.)

and that the goods and services for which payment is requested were received and performed. NDDA has the right to disallow costs determined inappropriate or unreasonable.

E) BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS

Grant recipient agrees that any changes in the scope of service or budget during the project period needs prior written approval to NDDA. Grant Award Agreements shall only be modified by mutual written consent by NDDA and the Applicant. Unauthorized changes to Grant Award Agreements shall be void and without effect, and the Applicant shall not be entitled to any claim under this Agreement based on those changes.

F) CONTACT

For questions or assistance, please contact:
North Dakota Department of Agriculture
Attn: Deanna Gierszewski
600 E. Boulevard Avenue Dept. 602
Bismarck, ND 58505-0020
Phone: 701.328.2191
Email: degierszewski@nd.gov