



Agricultural Marketing Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Acer Access and Development Program

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## Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Applications

**Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-24-0016

**Publication Date:** March 21, 2024

**Application Due Date:** 11:59 PM Eastern Time on May 28, 2024

Modification: The application deadline has been extended to Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup> due to Grants.gov downtime maintenance. Applications deadlines dates were changed in pages 1, 2, 5 and 22.

Effective: 5/7/2024

## PROGRAM SOLICITATION INFORMATION

**Funding Opportunity Title:** Acer Access and Development Program

**Funding Opportunity Number:** USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-24-0016

**Announcement Type:** Initial

**Assistance Listing Number:** [10.174](#)

**Dates:** Applications must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time, May 28, 2024, through [Grants.gov](#). Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

**Executive Summary:** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2024 Acer Access and Development Program (Acer Program). AMS will competitively award grants to eligible applicants for projects that support the efforts of States, Tribal governments, and research institutions to promote the domestic maple syrup industry through activities associated with: promotion of research and education related to maple syrup production; promotion of natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry; market promotion for maple syrup and maple-sap products; encouragement of owners and operators of privately held land containing species of trees in the genus *Acer* to initiate or expand maple-sugaring activities on the land; or to voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities.

Approximately up to \$6 million will be available to fund applications under this solicitation. The final amount available is subject to Congressional action. All project types range from \$200,000 to \$500,000. Eligible applicants and activities remain the same as in previous years. This program does not require cost sharing or match.

In the FY 2023 application cycle, AMS received 20 applications and funded 13 (65%). In FY2024, AMS will competitively award grants to eligible applicants for projects that meet the purpose of the program, meet all program requirements, and are of high quality. All applications are reviewed using merit and customary evaluation procedures.

This announcement provides information about the eligibility criteria for applicants and projects, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an award.

AMS encourages applications submitted by, or intended to serve, smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, historically underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. For projects intending to serve these audiences, applicants should engage and involve those beneficiaries when developing projects and applications.

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encourages applicants to consider including goals and activities related to reducing and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change in their project's design and implementation.

**Stakeholder Input:** AMS seeks your comments about this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program. E-mail written stakeholder comments within six months of the publication date of this RFA to: [AMSGrants@usda.gov](mailto:AMSGrants@usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are commenting on the **Acer Access and Development Program RFA**.

## 2024 HIGHLIGHTS AND CHANGES

Below are highlights of major changes to the program since last year.

- The [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) have been updated to reflect recent changes to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200) and the Build America, Buy America Act for infrastructure projects.

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

AMS requests that applicants read the entire RFA prior to submitting their application to ensure that they understand the program's requirements.

The application checklist below provides the required documents for an application package.

This program requires that **all application packages** include the following:

- SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (Grants.gov)
- SF-424A – Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs (Grants.gov)
- Project Abstract (Grants.gov)
- Project Narrative Form ([section 5.2.4](#))
  - Use the required template
  - Do not use more than 250 words in the Project Abstract
  - Do not exceed the page limit for the Project Narrative
    - **The Project Narrative 30-page page limit applies to the Project Abstract, Alignment and Intent, Technical Merit, Achievability, Expertise and Partners, and Fiscal Plan and Resources sections. The supporting documents do not count against the limit for the Project Narrative.**
  - Ensure the application exclude unallowable costs and activities per [section 4.3](#).
- Signed Letter(s) of Commitment from each partner or collaborating organization at the time of application per [section 5.2.5](#).

If applicable, packages may also be required to include the following documents:

- Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) (PDF Attachment) per [section 5.2.6](#).

## TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

- To do business with the Federal Government and to submit your application electronically using Grants.gov, you must—
  - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN);
  - Provide your UEI number and TIN on your application;
  - Be registered in SAM.gov, the Government's primary registrant database; and
  - Maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.
- Register in Grants.gov and submit applications early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE.** AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks before the application deadline to ensure all certifications are met.
- The applicant organization registration process may take **more than four weeks** to complete. You must complete the organization registration to allow enough time to meet the required application submission deadlines. See [section 5.3.1](#) for information.
- Thoroughly read this RFA and follow all the instructions.
- Thoroughly review the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) to understand allowable and unallowable costs.
- Apply to the correct grant program in Grants.gov using the correct Assistance Listing Number “10.174” and Funding Opportunity Number “USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-24-0016.”
- Ensure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with [Grants.gov software](#).
- Limit Application File Size/ File Name Characters (50 or less).
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names (\$, %, &, \*, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- When uploading attachments, click the “Add Attachments” button (do NOT use the “paperclip” icon in Adobe Reader)
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are “accepted”.
- Input the correct UEI (formerly DUNS) number on the SF-424 form cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:
  - <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-faqs.html>
  - <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/workspace-overview.html>

## TIMING TO OBTAIN AND SUBMIT GRANTS.GOV REQUIRED ELEMENTS

Required Action	Timing to Obtain/Submit
AMS Deadline to receive final application and all supporting materials through Grants.Gov	May 27, 2024 – 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time
Obtaining Your Organization’s UEI Number (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Establishing an Active SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Obtaining a TIN/EIN (if you do not already have one)	Up to 2 weeks
Creating your Grants.gov profile and registering your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) authorization	Up to 4 weeks

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## 1.0 FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### 1.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Acer Access and Development Program (Acer Program) was initially authorized by section 12306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113—79) and amended under section 12501 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law 115—334). The program is codified in ([7 U.S.C. § 1632c](#)).

### 1.2 PURPOSE

To support the efforts of States, Tribal governments, and research institutions to promote the domestic maple syrup industry through the following activities:

- (1) Promotion of research and education related to maple syrup production.
- (2) Promotion of natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry.
- (3) Market promotion for maple syrup and maple-sap products.
- (4) Encouragement of owners and operators of privately held land containing species of trees in the genus *Acer*:
  - (A) to initiate or expand maple-sugaring activities on the land; or
  - (B) to voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities.

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#### 1.2.1 DEFINITION OF MAPLE-SUGARING

The collection of sap from any species of tree in the genus *Acer* for the purpose of boiling to produce food. *Acer* is a genus of trees or shrubs commonly known as maple.

### 1.3 PROJECT TYPES

Applicants must align their proposal to only one of the following two project types:

- Market Development and Promotion (MDP)
- Producer and Landowner Education (PLE)

All applications must illustrate a regional or national impact on domestic maple syrup or maple-sap products and have the potential to quantitatively increase maple-sugaring activities or maple syrup production.

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#### 1.3.1 MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION (MDP)

Market Development and Promotion (MDP) projects should emphasize improving **consumer** knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the maple syrup industry and its products. Specifically, this project type focuses on enhancing the market for domestic maple syrup and maple-sap products through consumer promotion, including education related to maple syrup production, research, and natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry.

Examples Include:

- Consumer campaigns to highlight and promote sustainable practices implemented by the maple syrup industry.
- Consumer education campaigns highlighting maple syrup and maple-sap products, inputs and output to generate greater awareness of maple product development.
- National consumer awareness campaigns about domestic maple syrup production.
- Increased consumer awareness of maple product development by general promotion of agritourism of land devoted to maple-sugaring.
- Campaigns that foster the development of relationships between U.S. maple producers and international buyers and traders.

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### 1.3.2 PRODUCER AND LANDOWNER EDUCATION (PLE)

Producer and Landowner Education (PLE) projects should emphasize improving **producer** knowledge, awareness, and understanding of research, educational resources, or natural resource sustainability practices affecting the maple syrup industry and its products. Specifically, this project type focuses on increasing maple syrup and maple-sap product producer knowledge and awareness of current research, educational resources, and natural resource sustainability practices that increase maple product production through increased efficiency and reduced inputs. PLE projects can also coordinate with landowners and operators of privately held land containing maple trees to initiate or expand maple-sugaring activities on the land or to voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities. These efforts must emphasize potential economic return for producers as well as landowners and operators of privately held land containing maple trees.

Examples include:

- Education campaigns highlighting new processes or procedures that streamline or decrease the cost of maple syrup or maple-sap products.
- Producer awareness campaigns encouraging landowners and maple syrup producers to use new, safer, and more efficient technologies.
- Establishing or expanding maple producer land-sourcing networks and organizations on a state, regional, or national level.
- Informational campaigns for landowners and operators of privately held land about the economic benefits of initiating or expanding maple-sugaring activities or making their land available for maple-sugaring activities.
- Campaigns that highlight the sustainability of operating maple-sugaring activities on privately held land.

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### 1.3.3 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

Projects are not eligible for funding if the proposed activities:

- Are to purchase land, or for construction of a building or structure.
- Are related to State, territorial, Tribal, regional, or other non-Federal entity specific maple syrup marketing campaigns.
- Benefit only one agricultural producer or individual.
- Depend upon the completion of another project or the receipt of another grant.
- Duplicate activities in a project that has received a Federal award from another Federal award program.

For additional allowable and unallowable activities please refer to the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#). Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing the Terms and Conditions should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under **8.0 Agency Contacts**.

### 1.4 PRIORITY AREAS

In accordance Congressional direction in the Joint Explanatory Statement that accompanied the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, AMS may prioritize funding for applications that support the promotion of research and education, natural resource responsibility, and market development and promotion, and that are from regions with sufficient distribution of *Acer saccharum* to support a commercially viable maple syrup industry.

## 2.0 AWARD INFORMATION

### 2.1 TYPE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

AMS will use a Grant Agreement to provide a federal award to successful applicants.

### 2.2 TYPE OF APPLICATIONS

**New application.** Applications are limited to new application type. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in section **6.0 Application Review Information**.

### 2.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

AMS anticipates that up to \$6 million will be available to fund applications in Fiscal Year 2024.

Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. USDA does not guarantee a specific number of awards.

### 2.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

AMS expects applicants to complete their projects within the required performance period. It is acceptable to complete a project before the scheduled performance period end date. However, AMS



encourages applicants to take the full grant period to allow ample time to complete projects. The applicant must indicate the start and end dates on Block 17 on the SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance.”

Applicants may not request less than or more than the respective minimum/maximum amounts. Applicants must justify the requested award funding amounts within the respective narrative and workplan sections on the project narrative.

Project Type	Duration (Months)	Start Date	Completion Date	Minimum Award	Maximum Award
MDP	36	September 30, 2024	September 29, 2027	\$200,000	\$500,000
PLE	36	September 30, 2024	September 29, 2027	\$200,000	\$500,000

### 3.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

#### 3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants are State agencies, Tribal governments, and research institutions from the 50 States, American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- *Research institutions* are organizations that typically conduct research with non-Federal and Federal funds, including colleges and universities, federally funded research and development centers, national user facilities, industrial laboratories, or other research institutes.

#### 3.2 PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

An applicant may subcontract or subaward with partners and collaborators. Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirements. Project partners and collaborators do not need to meet these eligibility requirements.

- A *partnership* is a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.
- A *collaborator* is a person or an organization unaffiliated with the applicant that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project and is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Partners and collaborators may be private or public, for-profit, or nonprofit entities, including but not limited to:

- New and beginning farmers and ranchers (individuals or entities that have not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participate in the operation);
- Rural enterprises (small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenue);

- Agri-businesses; and
- Local government entities.

Applicants are required to show evidence of existing community or industry support and engagement. Applications should demonstrate a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants. AMS will not award grant funds for projects that solely benefit one individual or entity.

### 3.3 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

To evaluate and report on the outcomes of the Acer Program on a national scale, AMS collects information on performance measures. These measures focus on: Providing short- and long-term impact indicators.

- More accurately reflecting grant recipients' accomplishments.
- Reducing burden on grant applicants and recipients.
- Improving AMS's ability to report on the impact of its grant programs.
- Standardizing measures across programs where appropriate.

Each project submitted in the proposal **must** include at least one of the five outcomes listed in the [Acer Performance Measures](#) and at least one of the indicators listed in the selected outcome(s). Additional information regarding the update to the performance measures can be found on the [AMS Grant Performance Measures](#) website.

## 4.0 FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

### 4.1 COST SHARING AND MATCHING

This funding opportunity does not have a federal cost sharing or matching requirement. Applicants should not include this topic in the submitted application nor subsequent performance or financial reports.

### 4.2 INDIRECT COSTS

*Indirect costs* (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”—defined at [2 CFR § 200.1](#) are those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

In accordance with [2 CFR § 200.414\(f\)](#), any non-Federal entity that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect cost rate, except State and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC). The applicant is authorized to determine the appropriate rate up to this limit. The de minimis rate does not require documentation to justify its use and may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both in accordance with [2 CFR § 200.403](#). Once elected, this methodology must be used

consistently for all Federal awards until a recipient chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the recipient may apply to do at any time.

All applicants who elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent must use the MTDC as the base. MTDCs are defined in [2 CFR § 200.1](#) as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDCs excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Other items may be excluded only when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate approved by its cognizant agency, the applicant must submit a copy of its approved *NICRA* with its application. Entities that would like to negotiate an indirect cost rate must contact their cognizant agency. For cognizant agency assignments, see [2 CFR § 200.1](#).

#### 4.3 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COST AND ACTIVITIES

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this document should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under **8.0 Agency Contacts**.

#### 4.4 COORDINATOR MEETING TRAVEL

Recipients are expected to attend AMS sponsored grants management meetings during the project's period of performance. The proposed budget should include travel funds for the Project Coordinator and any additional key personnel as reasonably determined by the recipient and AMS.

To estimate these costs in the budget section, please account for flight, hotel, per diem, and ground transportation expenses for a 3-day, 2-night stay. Location and dates are to be determined with a possibility of a virtual conference. If the conference is virtual, recipients will be able to reallocate those funds to another allowable item.

### 5.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

#### 5.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Applicants **MUST** apply to this RFA electronically via Grants.gov. No other submission method is accepted. AMS urges applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see Grants.gov's [How to Apply for Grants](#) webpage. This RFA contains the information needed to obtain and complete required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about applying through Grants.gov can be found in section **5.3 Grants.gov Application Submission and Receipt Procedures and Requirements**.

Applicants can find the opportunity under either the Assistance Listing (formerly CDFA) number “10.174,” or the Acer Funding Opportunity Number “**USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-24-0016.**”

## 5.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

### 5.2.1 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

**Required:** Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at [www.Grants.gov](http://www.Grants.gov). Applicants may use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on the SF-424.

Block	Instructions
#1 Type of Submission	Select Application
#2 Type of Application	Select New
#4 through #7	Not required
#8.c Organizational Unique Entity Identifier (UEI):	Enter applicant UEI for the organization submitting the application.
#8.d Address	Enter the organization street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code.
#10 Name of Federal Agency	AMS, USDA
#11 Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (Assistance Listing Number)	10.174
#12 Funding Opportunity Number	USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-24-0016
#13 Competition Identification Number	Not applicable
#14 Areas Affected by Project	Enter cities, counties, States affected by project.
#15 Descriptive Title of Applicant’s Project	Provide a short description of the project.
#16.a Congressional Districts for Applicant	Enter the Congressional district where your main office is located.
#16.b Congressional Districts for Program/Project	Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented. Write “All” if the project will be implemented in more than one location.
#17 Proposed Project Start Date and End Date	Start Date: September 30, 2024. End date: September 29, 2027.
#18.a Estimated Funding - Federal	Enter the total ACER award requested
#19 Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?	See section <b>5.6 Intergovernmental Review.</b>

### 5.2.2 SF-424A BUDGET INFORMATION

**Required.** The SF-424A is available via the opportunity at Grants.gov. Most information blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or adequately explained in the instructions. The following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on form SF-424A should be used for this RFA.

Please complete **only** sections A and B. (**Do not** complete sections C, D, E and F.)

**Section A – Budget Summary**

Box	Instructions
1.a – Grant Program Function or Activity	Enter “ACER – Federal”
1.b – Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	Enter “10.174”
1.e – Federal	Enter the amount of Federal funding requested for the project
1.f – Non-Federal	N/A for this program

**Section B – Budget Categories**

Box	Instructions
6.a – 6.j – Object Class Categories	<p>In Column 1, enter the amount of Federal funds requested for each Object Class Category. <b>Do not</b> include match funding</p> <p>For example, if you are requesting \$2,000 in Federal funds for “Travel”, enter 2000 in Column 1, box 6.c</p>

5.2.3 PROJECT ABSTRACT SUMMARY

**Required.** The [Project Abstract Summary](#) form will be used as the award description for the overarching Federal award. The Project Abstract box must include:

- Project purpose;
- Activities to be performed;
- Deliverables and expected outcomes;
- Intended beneficiary(ies): Who will benefit from this beyond the applicant organization?
- Subrecipient, key partner, and collaborator activities. Identify the key partners, collaborators and subrecipients you know will be part of the work are and how their engagement will support the program goals.

5.2.4 PROJECT NARRATIVE

**Required.** Applicants MUST prepare and submit a project narrative that includes the six sections below and clearly describe the objectives and goal, type of activities, applicable outcomes indicators, and fiscal plan and resources information. The Project Narrative must be typed, single-spaced, and in an 11-point font, not to exceed thirty (30) 8.5 x 11 pages. The Project Narrative must be submitted as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Project Narrative Attachment Form” button under SF-424 item #15. Handwritten applications or applications in MS Word will not be accepted.

Prior to submitting the application to Grants.gov, make sure that it is in final form and all track changes have been accepted. AMS has posted a [Project Narrative Form](#) template on the grant program’s application website. This template is highly encouraged but not required.

### **(1) Project Abstract**

Include a summary of 250 words or less suitable for dissemination to the public. This summary should include a concise outline of the project's purpose; activities to be performed, including subawards (when applicable); deliverables and expected outcomes; intended beneficiaries; and any other pertinent information.

### **(2) Alignment and Intent**

(i) Clearly state the purpose of the project and Project Type identified in section **1.3 Project Types**. Describe the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address in relation to the statutory language of the program ([7 U.S.C. § 1632c](#)). Include data and/or estimates that describe the extent of the issue, problem, or need.

(ii) List the objectives of the project. The objectives must be related to addressing the issue(s), problem(s), or need(s) mentioned above in section (2)(i).

(iii) Provide a description of the benefits that are intended to be achieved as a result of engaging in the activities associated with this project, including the number of affected producers or processors.

### **(3) Technical Merit**

(i) Provide a Work Plan that describes the activities and timeline associated with each project objective mentioned in the Alignment and Intent section.

The workplan should include: a timeline for each activity and major output including the anticipated date of completion; how and where the activities will take place; required resources; milestone(s) for assessing progress and success; the person(s) responsible for completing the activity, including collaborative arrangements or subcontractors; if conducting training and technical assistance, how participants will be recruited; and how you will help guide program development and delivery. AMS recommends using a table to display this information.

(ii) If the proposed project will be or has been submitted to another Federal program for funding, provide the grant program name.

(iii) If the proposed project builds on work previously funded by a Federal program, including [AMS grant programs](#), provide the year and grant program name, and describe how the proposed project would not duplicate work previously funded by the Federal government.

### **(4) Achievability**

(i) Provide baseline and/or estimated target numbers to all the applicable outcome indicators listed in the [Acer Performance Measures](#) that are relevant to the project. If an outcome indicator does not apply, state that it is not applicable. AMS will use outcomes measures to report impacts on a national scale and demonstrate the program performance.

(ii) For each completed outcome indicator, describe how you derived the numbers, how you intend to measure and achieve each relevant outcome and indicator, and any potential challenges to achieving the estimated targets and action steps for addressing them.

(iii) Describe how you will disseminate the project's results (positive and negative) to similar organizations, stakeholders, and others that may be interested in the project's results or implementing a similar project.

#### **(5) Expertise and Partners**

(i) List key staff, including personnel and external project partners and collaborators that comprise the Project Team, their roles, and their relevant experience and past successes in developing and operating projects similar to this project. Ensure that you have included Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations to support the information.

(ii) Describe your management plan for coordinating, communicating, and sharing data and reports among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, both internally to personnel and externally to partners and collaborators.

(iii) Describe how the project, and its partnerships and collaborations, will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds) if the project need is expected to extend beyond the grant period.

Provide a one- to two-page resume or summary of relevant experience and/or qualifications of the principal investigator(s) and for each of the other major project participants. Longer resumes will be disregarded. **The resume or summary does not count against the page limit for the Project Narrative.**

#### **(6) Fiscal Plan and Resources**

The Fiscal Plan and Resources must include a Budget Spreadsheet and Budget Narrative. The Budget Spreadsheet must show the relevant expenditure categories in the far-left column. Relevant cost categories include:

- Personnel
- Fringe Benefits
- Travel
- Special Purpose Equipment
- Supplies
- Contracts/Subawards
- Other
- Indirect Costs
- Program Income

Proceeding across the page, there must be a column showing the dollar amount of Federal funds requested. Provide separate Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, and cumulative budgets.

The Budget Narrative must break down and explain how the dollar amounts for each category shown on the Budget Spreadsheet were derived and what they cover. See section 8 of the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) for a full listing of allowable and unallowable costs.

**The supporting documents in the subsequent sections do not count against the page limit for the Project Narrative.**

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## 5.2.5 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNER AND COLLABORATOR ORGANIZATIONS

**Required.** Applicants MUST provide letters of commitment from all project partners and collaborators. More information can be found on partners and collaborators in section **3.2 Partners and Collaborators**. The letter must state the partner or collaborator agrees to the project management plan presented in the Project Narrative. Emails will not be accepted.

AMS strongly encourages applicants to use the [Suggested Partner Organization Template Letter](#) on the grant program's application website. If you do not use this template, your Letter of Commitment must, at a minimum, include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- A short introduction describing the partnering organization's mission and its interest in Acer development
- What the organization commits to participating in and supporting
- The time period of the partnership
- Roles of the participating individuals, as applicable, and any individual time commitments
- A statement that these individuals and the organization agree to abide by the management plan contained in the application

Submit *Letters of Commitment* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **LETTERS OF COMMITMENT**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters will not be accepted.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under Form SF-424 item #15.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Acer Program does not require Congressional letters of support nor do such letters carry additional weight during the evaluation process.

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## 5.2.6 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

**Required if the applicant has a NICRA.** Refer to section **4.2 Indirect Costs** for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

## 5.3 APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

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### 5.3.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY

Applicants **MUST** have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), an active SAM.gov account, and a Grants.gov account to submit an application. AMS recommends that applicants start the registration process in these systems immediately to allow enough time to meet application submission deadlines. Registration in these systems collectively may in some cases take **more than four weeks** to complete. The steps below provide details on how to complete each registration.



Individual applicants eligible to apply for this grant funding opportunity can find complete instructions here: <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>.

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://apply07.grants.gov/help/html/help/Register/OrganizationRegistration.htm>.

1. [Obtain a Unique Entity Identifier \(UEI\) Number:](#) Entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a UEI from SAM.gov. Applicants must enter the UEI number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational UEI" on the SF-424. Getting a UEI requires validation steps in SAM.gov. Applicants are encouraged to start this process as early as possible, and, if applicable, this includes providing guidance to subapplicants on getting their own UEI.
2. [Register with the System for Award Management \(SAM\):](#) In addition to having a UEI number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with SAM. Current SAM.gov registrants have already been assigned their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and can view it within SAM.gov. All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an active SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov. Organizations must maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.**
3. [Create a Grants.gov Account:](#) The next step in the registration process is to create an account with Grants.gov. Applicants must know their organization's UEI number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the Authorized Organization Role (AOR).
4. [Authorize Grants.gov Roles:](#) After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, including the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.
5. [Track Role Status:](#) After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you to track your status.
6. *Electronic Signature:* When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC must authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization to act as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

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### 5.3.2 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO AMS VIA GRANTS.GOV

Applicants can apply using Grant.gov [Workspace](#). Workspace is a shared, online environment where members of a grants team create and submit their grant applications. Workspace allows the grants team simultaneous access to complete and submit all application forms required by the grant-making agency. For each funding opportunity announcement, an applicant creates individual instances of a workspace.

1. *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
2. *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.
  - a. *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out the webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear like other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local storage device, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader. NOTE: You may need to visit the [Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov](#) to download the appropriate version of the software. There is no cost for Adobe Reader Software.
  - b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms*: Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.
  - c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First*: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant's name, address, and UEI number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.
3. *Submit via a Workspace*: Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in section **5.2 Content and Form of Application Submission** are included.
4. *Track via a Workspace*: After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

*Applicant Support*: Grants.gov provides additional [training resources, including video tutorials](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 (except federal holidays) toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, contact the individuals mentioned in section **8.0 Agency Contacts**.

## 5.4 APPLICATION SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

AMS will not consider any applications received after the deadline, any applications submitted by fax, email, or postal mail and any applications not responsive to the requirements of this RFA (eligibility, incomplete application, missing required attachments documents, etc.). See [AMS' Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures Policy](#).

Ensure that all components are complete before submission. Allow enough time for the application process, as it may take more than one attempt before your application is successfully submitted. AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks before the application deadline to ensure all certifications and registrations are met.

Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov using an electronic date/time stamp generated when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

Special Note for Applicants with Slow Internet Connections: Applicants using slow internet, such as dial-up connections, may experience significantly longer transmission times when submitting their application to Grants.gov, especially if there are large attachments contained in the upload. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error message or a successfully received transmission notification via email to the applicant AOR.

## 5.5 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applicants must submit applications electronically via [Grants.gov](#) by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on May 28, 2024. AMS cannot consider applications received after this deadline for funding. See [AMS' Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures Policy](#).

## 5.6 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

This program is not subject to [Executive Order 12372 \(Intergovernmental Review\)](#), which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

# 6.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

## 6.1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application will be reviewed competitively using the following criteria and scoring:

**Alignment and Intent** ..... **25 Points**

- 1) The application provides a clear and concise description of the specific issue, problem, or need addressed by the project and its objectives.
- 2) The project addresses an important marketing barrier, challenge, or opportunity, and aligns with the Acer Program's legislative and program goals.

- 3) The applicant identifies the intended beneficiaries, including the number of beneficiaries, and how they will benefit. The application demonstrates a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants in partnership activities.

**Technical Merit**.....**25 Points**

- 1) The application presents a clear, well-conceived, and suitable overall methodology for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
- 2) The application presents a realistic schedule for implementing the proposed project during the award project period.
- 3) If the project or entity was previously funded, the extent to which the previous lessons learned are incorporated into the proposed project.
- 4) The application complies with all written instructions and requirements described within the RFA and Project Narrative.

**Achievability**.....**15 Points**

- 1) The selected Outcome(s) and Indicator(s) are feasible for the scale and scope of the project including:
  - a. How indicator numbers were derived, with a clear means to collect feedback to evaluate and achieve each relevant Outcome Indicator; and
  - b. The anticipated key factors that are predicted to contribute to or restrict progress toward the applicable indicators, including action steps for addressing identified restricting factors.
- 2) The proposed project can be easily adapted to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems.
- 3) The applicant provides a comprehensive plan to disseminate the project's results (both positive and negative) electronically and in person to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.

**Expertise and Partners**.....**25 Points**

- 1) The proposed project represents qualification of the applicant (individual and team) and the relevant partnerships and collaborations to accomplish the project's goals and objectives and meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries, including:
  - a. Commitment from the key staff, demonstrated through Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations.
  - b. The key staff who will be responsible for managing the projects and the individuals (name and title) who comprise the Project Team; and
  - c. The expertise and experience of the Project Team necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project.

- 2) The application describes plans for coordination, communication, data sharing and reporting among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, both internally for the applicant personnel **and** externally for partners and collaborators.
- 3) The application describes how the project, and its partnerships and collaborations, will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds).

**Fiscal Plan and Resources** ..... **10 Points**

- 1) The application Budget Narrative/Justification provides a clear, detailed description for each budget line item, and is consistent with the size and scope of the project.
- 2) The budget and justification relate logically to the Project Narrative describing the project.
- 3) The application provides evidence that critical resources and infrastructure that are necessary for the initiation and completion of the proposed project that are currently in place.

## 6.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

### ***Step 1: Initial Qualification Screening***

Each application is initially reviewed for overall completeness, as well as compliance with eligibility and program requirements set forth in this RFA. If an application does not meet these requirements, it is removed from consideration. Please see [AMS's Late Applications, Denials and/or Appeal Procedures Policy](#) for more information.

### ***Step 2: Technical Review***

Each application that passes initial screening (Step 1) is evaluated by a panel of independent peer reviewers. AMS makes every attempt to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any assigned applications. The peer review panels evaluate their assigned applications using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers score applications and then confer with other panel members. The scoring and discussion serve as the basis for awarding and allocating grant funds and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.

### ***Step 3: Administrative Review***

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top rankings and recommendations. In addition to the rank and scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic diversity, and USDA priorities. AMS staff will work with top-ranked applicants to negotiate any revisions as necessary. AMS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by [2 CFR § 200.206](#).

## 7.0 AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

### 7.1 AWARD NOTICES

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award (NOA) to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. The NOA will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The NOA will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR § 200.211](#) and a reference to the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

### 7.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Unsuccessful applicants will be contacted by AMS via email as soon as possible after the awards are announced to inform them of the results. The unsuccessful applicants will receive anonymous review panel consensus comments regarding their proposals.

### 7.3 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the NOA, all AMS recipients must abide by the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), which reference applicable *Administrative and National Policy Requirements*.

### 7.4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

### 7.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF USDA SUPPORT

Proper acknowledgement of your USDA-AMS funding in published solicitations (e.g., for state competitions), presentations, press releases, and other communications is critical for the success of our agency's programs. Grantees must meet the acknowledgement requirements outlined in the applicable [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

## 8.0 AGENCY CONTACTS

### 8.1 PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact the ACER staff by email with questions about the program at [SAGPgrants@usda.gov](mailto:SAGPgrants@usda.gov). AMS staff is available to provide timely technical assistance.

**For additional information, please visit the ACER Website:**

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/acer>

## 8.2 ADDRESS

### **Acer Access and Development Program**

USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Room 1510 South Building, Stop 0264  
Washington, DC 20250-0264  
[www.ams.usda.gov/acer](http://www.ams.usda.gov/acer)

## 8.3 GRANTS.GOV QUESTIONS

All questions regarding Grants.gov technical assistance must be directed to Grants.gov's [Applicant Support](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 (except federal holidays) toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726 or email [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

## 9.0 OTHER INFORMATION

### 9.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

### 9.2 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The Freedom of Information Act ([FOIA](#)) of 1966 ([5 U.S.C. § 552](#)) and the Privacy Act of 1974 ([5 U.S.C. § 552a](#)), as implemented by USDA's regulations ([7 CFR part 1, Subpart A](#)) govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 2055-S, Stop 0201, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0201, Telephone: (202) 302-0650; or email: [AMS.FOIA@usda.gov](mailto:AMS.FOIA@usda.gov).

### 9.3 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 ([44 U.S.C. 3501](#)), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0240. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 4 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.