

# Specialty Crop Multi-State Program - Frequently Asked Questions

Updated Tuesday, November 24, 2015

- 1. I thought the SCMP deadline was January 14, 2016. Why do I have to apply by December 15, 2015?**

It's true that many multi-state partners were preparing for a January 14, 2016 deadline based on the information in the Request for Applications (RFA). However, the information USDA posted on the SCMP website on November 3 and that appeared in the USDA press release on November 9 indicated that the "deadline for multi-state partners to submit proposals to participating state departments of agriculture will be announced soon" and encouraged multi-state partners to contact a participating state to receive updates on the program as they are released.

The deadline was set to be the same for all participating states in order to leave enough time for states to screen applications and apply via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) by Jan 14, 2016. It's reasonable to expect that some states will handle more applications than others, so USDA set a deadline to accommodate the states that expect the most applications.

- 2. Can a for-profit company apply for SCMP funds?**

The SCMP legislation does not contain a definition of a multi-state partner. The RFA states that "examples of project partners include, but are not limited to," groups and organizations listed on pages 12–13. Since the list is not exhaustive, it is possible that a for-profit company could be a multi-state partner.

- 3. Do I need to download the SCMP application package from [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)?**

Multi-state partners should not download anything from [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Multi-state partners must submit their applications via email to a participating state by the deadline, which is 11:59 PM Eastern time on December 15, 2015. Complete instructions for submitting the application are available in the INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS document.

- 4. Whose information goes on the cover page of the application as described in section 4.3.2 of the RFA?**

The multi-state partners' names and contact information should be on the cover page, not the participating state. The participating state will complete the SF-424 and provide the relevant contact info on that form.

- 5. Can two national groups be multi-state partners?**

Yes; it is acceptable for two national groups to be multi-state partners.

6. **Is a national organization eligible for to apply for SCMP funds if the project benefits more than one state?**

As a single entity, the national organization cannot apply unless they find a partner. The partner could be a state affiliate of the national organization, a university, a nonprofit, a for-profit, or other entity appropriate for the project.

7. **The RFA does not list a definite funding start date, just that the project should start sometime in the 2016 calendar year. What will the earliest allowable start date be?**

Applicants may specify a project start date in the summer or fall of 2016 but should remain flexible. The actual start date will be determined at the time of award.

8. **Projects that Address Threats from Pests and Diseases: Does USDA consider plants as “pests” in this project category? I see that bullet point four of the Project Type explanation (see page 7 of the RFA), you do spell out “plant pests — so we wanted to get a clear understanding of whether the project category includes plants in the term “pests.”**

Yes, plant pests such as invasive species would fit into that category and be an acceptable topic for a SCMP proposal. The project proposal must focus on the plant pest as a threat for an eligible specialty crop. The narrative should clearly explain the connection. Proposals that study plant pests on non-specialty crops are not eligible.

9. **Will an applicant who receives SCMP funding in this round be eligible to apply in next year’s round if their SCMP-funded project is still in progress?**

A multi-state team that receives a SCMP award may apply for new SCMP funding before the original project is complete, but only for a new project that is not dependent on the results of the original project. A follow-up proposal that builds on the results of the first project is allowed only after the original SCMP project has been completed, and the final report on the original SCMP project has been submitted to and accepted by AMS SCMP. Proposals from the same multi-state team that are unrelated to the original project may be submitted before the original project is complete.

10. **Are partners required to register with the System for Award Management (SAM) or have a DUNS number?**

The following is USDA’s correction on the issue of SAM registration and screening of applications by participating states:

- Participating states and all multi-state partners must have a DUNS number and register with SAM prior to the December 15, 2015 deadline for multi-state applicants to submit applications to participating states. Before submitting an application to AMS, participating states will check SAM to ensure that the partners are not on the debar/suspend list. If a partner is on the debar/suspend list, the application will not be submitted to AMS. AMS SCMP will check the debar/suspend status of all parties before

any awards are made. If the participating state or any partners named on the proposal are on the debar/suspend list, the application will not be funded.

- The Instructions for Preparing and Submitting SCMP Applications posted to the AMS SCMP website on Nov 19 were revised on Nov 23.

**11. What are the grounds for an application not being screened by the participating state that receives it? What are the grounds for an application not being submitted to AMS?**

The only reason an application should not be accepted for screening by a participating state is if it did not meet the December 15, 2015 deadline. Participating states will not begin the screening of applications until after the December 15 deadline. Grounds for not submitting an application to AMS are covered in the Instructions for Preparing and Submitting SCMP Applications posted to the AMS SCMP website on November 19 and corrected on November 23 at

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCMP%20Instructions%20for%20Applicants%20Nov%2019.pdf> and appear below.

**GROUND FOR NOT SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION TO AMS**

- Participating states will not begin screening applications until after the December 15 deadline. Participating states will submit to AMS only the applications that meet all of the following requirements.
  - The proposal fits into at least one of the project category types outlined in section 1.3 of the RFA: Food safety; Plant pests and disease; Research; Crop-specific projects addressing common issues; or Marketing and Promotion.
  - The proposal meets the definition of a multi-state project outlined in section 1.4.1 of the RFA.
  - The application contains all required components as outlined in section 4.3 of the RFA and in the APPLICATION CHECKLIST AND REVISED REQUIREMENTS of the INSTRUCTIONS.
  - The request for funds is between \$250,000 and \$1 million.
  - Multi-state partners are not on the SAM debarment/suspension list.
- If a participating state has any question about whether or not an application meets these requirements, or has any other questions or concerns about the application, the SCMP state contact will discuss the issue with AMS SCMP. AMS will make the final decision whether or not the application meets the RFA requirements.

**12. What is the best way to handle letters of support? Should they be addressed to the participating state or USDA?**

Letters of support should be incorporated into the application file in the order specified in RFA section 4.2. In accordance with section 4.3.2 of the RFA:

**Letter(s) of Support from Stakeholders or Beneficiaries**

- Three (3) signed letters from specialty crop producer organizations and/or other stakeholders are required. The letters should describe why they endorse the project.
- Letters should be addressed to the State department of agriculture that will apply for the SCMP grant.

- Form letters are discouraged. Congressional letters of support do not meet this requirement.

**13. Is special equipment purchased through SCMP that is over \$5,000 subject to the full range of acquisition, use, management and disposition requirements under 2 CFR 200.313?**

Yes, that is correct.

**14. I have questions related to food safety projects and the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA). There is conflicting info coming out about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and whether PSA will be the only entity authorized to do trainings. Is there more clarification on this?**

USDA posted guidance at the SCMP website on October 30 about Food Safety Projects to address these concerns at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scmp/how-to-apply> under “Additional Guidance for Multi-State Partners.” It is also mentioned it in the Instructions for Preparing and Submitting SCMP Applications posted to the AMS SCMP website at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCMP%20Instructions%20for%20Applicants%20Nov%202019.pdf>.

**15. Universities can apply through the participating state, correct?**

Yes, universities can be multi-state partners.

**16. A university in my state can team up with university staff in another state, and this would meet the partner requirement from another state, correct?**

Yes. See section 1.4.3 of the RFA.

**17. A participating state can only submit one grant per specialty crop – for example, the state can’t submit two mushroom projects) – correct?**

No. There is no limit of any kind on the number of applications per specialty crop from one participating state. All applications will be considered separately by the review panel AMS will convene after the January 14, 2016 deadline. If the application meets all the SCMP requirements, it will be submitted to AMS.

**18. Do I need to include indirect costs for the participating state in my application?**

Clarification of the 8% Indirect Cost Limitation

As stated in the 2015 SCMP RFA, indirect costs for a submitted application may be a maximum of 8% of the award amount. For example, for a \$250,000 project, 8% or \$20,000 could be allocated for indirect cost, leaving \$230,000 for direct cost activities. Final allocation of the 8% will be decided during the budget negotiation phase between the participating state that submitted the application and the project partners whose SCMP proposal is in serious consideration for funding. The relevant parties will negotiate and decide how the 8% indirect cost will be distributed. Once the participating state and project partners make their decisions, AMS will give final approval before making the award.

19. From the RFA, pp 11–12: "A Participating State department of agriculture ... If awarded, uses subagreements or subcontracts as needed to carry out the project in order to maintain control of the project objectives, set policies, and ensure that the project is carried out in accordance with all applicable Federal statutes and regulations as well as with the SCMP award terms and conditions."

To me, this says that subcontracts must go through the participating, not the project personnel's organizations. Is this correct?

Sub-grants and Sub-contracts

The participating state of an awarded proposal is the grant recipient and will sign the agreement with AMS to administer the project. It will be up to the participating state and the multi-state partners to determine the contractual arrangements needed to get the work done. Some states may have more leeway than others with regard to such contracts. Multi-state partners should prepare a budget that clearly shows and describes the budget components for each partner and entity that will do the work to facilitate those discussions.

How the state sets up sub-grants and sub-contracts is up to the state. A state could do contracts with each entity or one contract or have a contract with a lead entity that does its own subcontracts. The state would be the recipient and signatory to the grant agreement.

20. As a participating state, would we be able to say that we will take a minimum of 4% for any application that is awarded through us and the rest would be negotiable?

The RFA did not discuss in detail the particulars relating to the apportionment of the 8% indirect cost. For applications that make the cut after the panel review is complete at AMS headquarters, the participating state that submitted the application and the multi-state partners will have to negotiate about how to divide up the 8%. Therefore, the budget in the original proposal is subject to change. AMS will approve the final budget after the negotiations and prior to final award selection.