USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
EASTERN SHORE

Writing Your Project Narrative

Utilizing the Review Criteria to Develop Your Project Narrative

Farmers Market Promotion Program and Local Food Promotion Program

PROJECT NARRATIVE AND REVIEW CRITERIA

AMS LAMP GRANTS

Executive Summary

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Tip: It can be easiest to do this last.

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Project Narrative and Review Criteria

Farmers Market Promotion Program and Local Food Promotion Program Narrative Form Guide

This document is to be used as a guide to help prepare applications for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) or Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP).

Applicants MUST use the provided Project Narrative Form, complete all sections of the Project Narrative Form and comply with the specific instructions and format as directed within the Request for Applications (RFA's).

For assistance with the Applicant Information on the first two pages of the Project Narrative Form – please refer to the FMLFPP Applicant Information Technical Guide.

Executive Summary

Sum up your plan! The executive summary is the first impression of the project and is an opportunity to capture the reviewer's attention. In 250 words or less, talk about the purpose of the project, what you are trying to achieve, who the intended beneficiaries are, how they will benefit and how you plan to make it all happen! **It might be easiest for this to be the last step.** Use generic language that is easily understood by all audiences. The executive summary will be published on the USDA AMS website for public view. This summary should be the same as the one provided on the Project Abstract Summary form.

Alignment and Intent

This section is not included in either of the Turnkey Project Narrative Forms.

Problem/Need

Talk about the problem or need you have identified and how your project will address this problem or need. This section should use key words and topics from Section 3.1 of the RFA. When responding to this section, do not just provide statistics and data related to your project. Instead, explain why this project, executed in this way, would address the problem or need you identified. Data and statistics are helpful, but explaining your project in plain language can make your application easier to understand.

Objectives

Identify and clearly describe at least 3 project objectives (you can add additional objectives if needed). The objectives should be realistic and clearly describe what your organization hopes to accomplish with the project.

The number of objectives must be realistic for the length of the grant period – listing more objectives than necessary does not strengthen your application.

Describe the objectives of the project in a way that is specific, measurable and something you can achieve. Throughout the rest of your application, you will be asked to show how your workplan, outcomes, staff and budget align with your chosen objectives, so make sure you are comfortable and confident with what you have written here. It is good to have more than one objective.

Example:

Objective 1: Increase access for at least 40 farmers and 25 agricultural value-added producers to inter-island and regional wholesale markets by expanding the managerial capacity of the food hub with part- time staff.

Beneficiaries and Impacts
Your response to this question must include a detailed description of who you plan to benefit with the proposed project and if possible, how many of these beneficiaries you expect to reach. Have you considered engaging project beneficiaries as active participants in planning and executing your project? If so, describe your plans to do so in this section. Also, describe the expected short- and long-term impacts of this project on these beneficiaries. Specifically, be sure to focus on the benefits to farms, food businesses and/or ranch operations serving local markets.

Think Like a Reviewer!
Review Criteria Checklist: Alignment and Intent

Read through your response to the "Alignment and Intent" section and go through the checklist below to ensure that your responses in this section address every question below.

Did you:
☐ Clearly describe **what** the problem is and how you want to solve it?
☐ Identify **who** will benefit from the project and how?
☐ Describe **where** the project is happening and why it needs to be there?
☐ Explain how local and regional food businesses benefit from your project activities?
☐ Follow the instructions and requirements in the RFA and Project Narrative Template?

Technical Merit

Workplan
Describe in detail the plan to achieve each of the objectives described in the Alignment and Intent section. This includes:
- Description of each planned activity and how it relates to a specific objective
- Timeline for each activity including projected completion date (must be within the period of performance for your project)
- Resources required to complete each activity
- Project milestones (used to judge progress and success of each activity)
- Responsible staff for completing each activity (if someone is listed here, they must also be listed as Key Staff in the Expertise and Partners section)
    - If you plan to conduct trainings or provide technical assistance, also include how participants will be recruited and how you will help guide program development and delivery.

Previously Funded Projects

The project narrative asks the three questions below:

1. Have you received a past FMPP or LFPP Grant?
2. Have you submitted this project to another Federal grant program?
3. Are you a current RFSP recipient?

If your answer is "yes" to any of the above questions, you must provide the year, funding source and description. If you have an AMS grant, you must also include the AMS agreement number for grants received in the past five (5) years. Describe how the project is different from previous grants or how it supplements the proposed activities; and, if applicable, provide the results of the project. Include lessons learned and how these lessons will be incorporated into this project. Projects that are duplicates of a previous grant will not be selected for funding.

Think Like a Reviewer!
Review Criteria Checklist: Technical Merit

Read through your response to the "Technical Merit" section and go through the checklist below to ensure that your responses in this section address every question below.

Did you:
☐ Include a work plan with clear objectives, activities, resources and responsible staff?
☐ Present a realistic schedule for implementing project activities?
☐ Show that staff and contractors have a reasonable amount of time and resources to get the project done?
☐ Have measurable tasks to achieve your objectives?
☐ Share about any previous funding received for similar projects and how you would incorporate lessons you've learned from previously funded projects? (if applicable).

Achievability

Outcome Indicator

Six Objectives and associated Indicators that have been developed by USDA AMS are listed within this section of the Project Narrative Form. Look through the list of indicators within each of the six Objectives and choose the ones that best apply to your project. Choose at least one Outcome and Indicator from the list that will be addressed through your project. For each selected Indicator state your estimated target number (you will need to describe how you reached that estimated target number in the following "Outcomes Indicator Measurement" section). If an Outcome or Indicator does not apply, check N/A (Not Applicable).

Outcome Indicator Measurement

For each selected Outcome and Indicator, describe how you determined your estimated target number, and how/when you will evaluate your progress. Also, list any potential challenges to achieving the estimated target numbers and how you would address those challenges.

Potential Adaptation of Project by Others

Discuss if and how this project can be adapted to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems. Describe what benefits and actions others may take in response to the expected project results. Reviewers will be considering if your project can be easily adapted by others when evaluating your proposal. *Note: this section was*

intentionally removed from the simplified Turnkey Project Narratives and does not need to be completed for Turnkey Project applications.

Dissemination of Project Results

State how you will spread the word about the results (both positive and negative) of the project. List similar organizations, beneficiaries or other relevant parties that would be interested in your results or implementing a similar project and the methods you plan to use to share this information (in-person, publications, podcasts, etc.) *Note: this section was intentionally removed from the simplified Turnkey Project Narratives and does not need to be completed for Turnkey Project applications.*

Think Like a Reviewer!
Review Criteria Checklist: Achievability

Read through your response to the "Achievability" section and go through the checklist below to ensure that your responses in this section address every question below.

Did you:
☐ Select at least one Outcome and Indicator that align with project objectives?
☐ Explain how target numbers for Outcome and Indicator(s) were decided?
☐ Define a way to evaluate and achieve each Outcome and Indicator?
☐ Describe expected challenges to achieving Indicators and plans to address those challenges?
☐ Show how the project can be adapted to other communities? (Not applicable to Turnkey projects).
☐ Explain your plan for how to distribute the project's results? (Not applicable to Turnkey projects).

Expertise and Partners

Key Staff (Applicant Personnel and External Partner/Collaborators

List all key project staff, including applicant organization personnel and external project partners and collaborators that comprise the Project Team, their role in the project, their relevant experience, qualifications and past successes in developing and operating projects similar to your proposed project. You must include Letters of Commitment from Partner and Collaborator Organizations to confirm the information provided in the application and their commitment to the project.

Project Management Plan

Describe your project management plan for coordination, communication, and data sharing and reporting among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, including both internal applicant organization personnel and external partners and collaborators.

Within this plan, explain the roles/responsibilities of the project team and how they will contribute to achieving the project's objectives, activities and outcomes. Your plan should describe who would have day-to-day responsibility for key tasks such as: leadership of the project; monitoring the project's ongoing progress, preparing reports; communicating with other partners. It should also describe the approach that will be used to monitor and track the progress of the project team.

May 2025 – https://www.ams.usda.gov

Project Sustainability

Explain how you will keep the project, its partnerships and collaborations, and the results of the project going after the grant ends and funding is no longer available. Describe the project's plans to ensure high levels of participation, collaboration and engagement among partners and beneficiaries and what work will be done to sustain this after the completion of the project. This could include but is not limited to, continued collaboration with partners, the implementation of new practices, and commitment to continuing to identify and address issues in the community. *Note: this section was intentionally removed from the simplified Turnkey Project Narratives and does not need to be completed for Turnkey Project applications.*

Think Like a Reviewer!
Review Criteria Checklist: Expertise and Partners

Read through your response to the "Expertise and Partners" section and go through the checklist below to ensure that your responses in this section address every question below.

Did you:
☐ Include Letters of Commitment from all project partners and collaborators?
☐ Explain which key staff will manage the projects?
☐ Ensure that all key staff listed in your workplan are also listed in the Key Staff section?
☐ Provide names, job titles, and relevant work experience of all project team staff?
☐ Include a plan on how to collaborate with external project partners and contractors?
☐ Describe coordination, communication, data sharing and reporting plans for both the internal project team and external project partners?
☐ Show how the project and partnerships will continue without grant funds once the grant period is over?

Fiscal Plan and Resources

You must complete the Budget and Justification section and make sure that you have included evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure (see section 4.9 in the RFA) if a project is dependent on land, infrastructure, building permits, facilities not already secured, or other resources that are essential for the execution of the proposed project activities.

Applicants are also required to submit the SF-424A Budget information For Non-Construction Programs form along with completing the budget section of the Project Narrative.

Budget and Justification

Provide the total cost of the project and the breakdown of project costs by cost categories (personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual/subawards, other, and indirect costs). Explain how these costs were determined and how they relate to the Project Objectives, Expected Outcomes and the project work plan.

The budget must show the total cost for the project and describe how you came up with the costs listed in each category. The budget justification must provide enough detail for reviewers to easily understand how costs were determined and how they relate to the project objectives and expected outcomes. The budget must show a relationship between the work you plan to do, and the costs listed in the budget.

You must account for both federal funds and cost share funds in the budget and be specific about the amounts for each category. The cost-share amounts listed in the table (provided within the Project Narrative Form) must

match the amounts described in the matching fund letters. The total costs on the budget summary table must match the subtotals in "Requested FMPP or LFPP Funds" (Project Narrative Form page 2: question 8) and "Cost Share funds" (Project Narrative Form page 2: question 9) amounts.

For more information about filling out your Budget and Justification, refer to the Budget Toolkit Snapshot.

Cost Share

Cost Share funds are required. Applicants must provide a minimum 25% cost share (can be cash or in-kind) of the Federal portion of the grant. You must submit signed Letter(s) of Verification for Cost Sharing Funds for each cost share commitment.

Think Like a Reviewer!
Review Criteria Checklist: Fiscal Plan and Resources

Read through your response to the "Fiscal Plan and Resources" section and go through the checklist below to ensure that your responses in this section address every question below.

Did you:
☐ Include a clear and detailed description for each budget line item?
☐ Explain how the budget is consistent with the size and scope of the project?
☐ Explain how the budget logically relates to the project narrative?
☐ Show that you have the critical infrastructure to start and complete the project already? (if applicable).
☐ Include signed Letter(s) of Verification of Cost Sharing Funds to show that cost-sharing funds or in-kind contributions are available?
☐ Make sure the responses to question 8 and 9 in the Project Narrative Form Template match your budget summary table?

Additional Check: Form Requirements
Did you:
☐ Use the Project Narrative Form Template?
☐ Use 11-point font, type and single space and not exceed the page limit?
   ▪ **Fifteen (15)** 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Project Narrative form content) for Capacity Building and Community Development, Training and Technical Assistance Projects
   ▪ **Five (5)** 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Turnkey Project Narrative form content) for both types of Turnkey Projects
☐ Convert your project narrative to a .pdf to submit to Grants.gov? (Handwritten applications or applications in MS Word will not be accepted).