

# USDA REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTERS PROGRAM

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## STAKEHOLDER TOOLKIT

The USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program Stakeholder Toolkit includes several resources to help organizations invested in local and regional food systems communicate opportunities available through the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program. All information provided is available for public use.

Toolkit includes:

### **Program Information**

- Introduction & Program Overview
- Key Dates and Request for Applications (RFAs)
- Webinar
- Eligible Applicants
- Timing to Obtain and Submit Grants.gov Required Elements
- Additional Information
- Key Messages

### **Shareable Resources**

- Individual Graphics
- Sample Social Media Resources
- Sample Social Media Posts w/Graphics
- Sample Emails to Stakeholders
- Program Quick Links

**Thank you for your help in spreading the word about this important opportunity!**

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

### Introduction & Program Overview

U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) will invest up to \$400 million to create USDA Regional Food Business Centers (Regional Food Centers) which will provide essential coordination, technical assistance, and capacity-building services to build resilient local and regional food systems. These Centers will serve as USDA food and business hubs around the country and build on USDA grants and cooperative agreement work through larger regional-scale investments, which will encourage locally-driven planning and scaled-up solutions to fit regional needs.

USDA intends to fund centers in at least six regions. This will include a national tribal center and at least one center serving each of three targeted areas: Colonias (counties on the US/Mexico border), persistent poverty or other communities of high need/limited resources areas of the Delta and the Southeast, and high need areas of Appalachia, as well as centers in other regions of the country. As communities emerge from COVID-19 seeking to build resilience in their food systems and improve markets for the farmers and ranchers most affected, USDA will be ready to partner closely through these Centers to support that recovery and growth.

Regional Food Centers will serve as a cornerstone in the development of the local and regional supply chains. The Regional Food Centers will provide technical assistance to small and mid-sized producers and other food businesses in the middle of the supply chain to help them access local and regional markets by facilitating linkages throughout the supply chain. Small and mid-sized producers often struggle to access markets because our current food system prioritizes price and efficiency. The Regional Food Centers will support producers by providing localized assistance to access a variety of markets, including linking producers to wholesalers and distributors. By strengthening connections between rural and urban areas, the Regional Food Centers will drive economic opportunities across the region, creating a more diversified and resilient food system.

The Regional Food Centers will have three main responsibilities:

- **Coordination** - Regional Food Centers will act as regional hubs coordinating across geographic areas, with USDA, other federal, state, and tribal agencies with relevant resources, regional commissions, and the other Regional Food Centers. They will conduct outreach to underserved communities and businesses.
- **Technical Assistance** - Regional Food Centers will provide direct business technical assistance to small- and mid-sized food and farm businesses (producers, processors, distributors, and other businesses within the food supply chain) and food value and supply chain coordination. Each Regional Food Center will identify priority areas for technical assistance (e.g., specialty crop processing for institutions, aggregation/distribution) for the region it plans to serve.
- **Capacity Building** - The Regional Food Centers will provide financial assistance through business builder subawards up to \$100,000 to support projects focused on emerging regional needs and businesses that are working towards expansion and other investment. These subawards may support staff time, business planning activities, software implementation, the purchase of equipment, such as food safety, processing and packaging equipment, value chain and supply chain coordination and innovation, product development, marketing, and other expenses as outlined in the RFA.

## Key Dates & Request for Applications (RFA)

Funding Opportunity Name	Opportunity Number	Open Date	Closing Date
USDA Regional Food Business Centers	USDA-AMS-TM-LRFD-C-0001	09/07/2022	11/22/2022

## Webinar

### USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program Applicant Webinar

**When:** Monday, September 19, 2022, 3:00 PM Eastern Time

**Topic:** U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced \$360 million in cooperative agreement funding for the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program to an estimated ten entities over the course of approximately two years to support regional food supply chains. USDA Regional Food Business Centers will provide essential regional coordination, technical assistance, and capacity-building services.

[Register for this webinar.](#)

## Eligible Applicants

All applications to lead a Regional Food Center must come from an eligible entity (“the applicant”) representing a partnership and must be physically based in the region. A partnership is an agreement among three or more eligible entities representing at least two of the eligible entity types. To demonstrate partnerships, the applicant must submit letters of commitment outlining the partnership. Within 45 days of award, the partnership will provide USDA with a Memorandum of Understanding between the partners detailing how each partner will contribute to the Regional Food Center.

The applicant must be the organization in the partnership that is responsible for receiving and managing the award. Partnerships that include organizations that serve or represent Limited Resource Entities are strongly encouraged to apply, including organizations that may not have capacity to apply as lead applicants. Serving or representing a Limited Resource Entity means that the organization provides technical assistance services to, and meaningfully engages, historically underserved farmers, ranchers, and businesses in addressing their needs. See USDA definition of [Historically Underserved Groups](#) for further information.

All applicants and the eligible entities that make up the partnership must have a physical presence within, and have a history of serving, the region for which they are applying to serve as a Regional Food Center, and must be domestic entities owned and operated within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or Indian tribal lands in the geographic regions of the United States.

Applications should include engagement from multiple sectors such as local, state, tribal, or regional governments, tribal-serving organizations, food policy councils, producers and/or producer organizations, universities, urban and rural food system stakeholders, philanthropy, and entities across the food value chain and supply chain, such as distributors, processors, food hubs, retailers, and underserved communities and agricultural businesses. In cases where more than one application proposes to serve the same, similar, or overlapping geographic regions, USDA may invite finalists to partner with other eligible entities in their region and resubmit an expanded partnership proposal for reconsideration.

Eligible entities include:

Entity Type	Description
<b>Producer Network or Association</b>	Producer group- or member-owned organizations that provide, offer, or sell agricultural products or services through a common distribution system for the mutual member benefit of the owners, as well as organizations that assist, represent, or serve producers or producer networks.
<b>Food Council</b>	Food policy council or food and farm system network that represents multiple organizations involved in the production, processing, and consumption of food, and local, tribal, and State governments.
<b>Tribal Governments</b>	Tribal government has the meaning as defined in the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-454; 108 Stat. 4791, 4792).
<b>State Agencies or Regional Authorities</b>	State government agencies such as departments of agriculture or natural resources, planning commissions, councils of governments, regional economic development organizations/districts, and similar organizations.
<b>Institutions of Higher Education</b>	Educational institutions that meet the requirements specified at <a href="#">20 U.S.C. § 1001</a> .
<b>Nonprofit Corporations</b>	Any organization or institution, including nonprofits with State or IRS or Tribal 501 (c) status and accredited institutions of higher education, where no part of the organization's or institution's net earnings inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.
<b>Economic Development Corporations</b>	Organizations whose missions are to improve, maintain, develop, and/or market or promote a specific geographic area.

## 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	November 22, 2022 11:59 p.m. [Eastern Time]
Establish an Active SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one) at which point you will be assigned a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) Number (if you do not already have one) <sup>1</sup>	7-10 business days
Obtain a Tax Identification Number (TIN)/Employer Identification Number (EIN) (if you do not already have one) <sup>2</sup>	Up to 2 weeks
Create your Grants.gov profile and register your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) authorization <sup>3</sup>	Up to 2 weeks

### Additional Information

For more information about grant eligibility, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters) or contact us at [RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov](mailto:RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov)

### Do you need grant writing tips?

Check out the Grants.Gov website. This series of tips will help you prepare a solid grant application package: <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/category/learngrants/grant-writing-basics/>

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<sup>1</sup> On April 4, 2022, the federal government, including the USDA, will transition away from using DUNS numbers created through Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) as its entity identifier. To streamline and ease processes for entities doing business with the federal government, entities will use a Unique Entity Identifier created in SAM.gov. You can learn more about this transition on the GSA's Unique Entity Identifier Update web page.

<sup>2</sup> Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) and Employer Identification Number (EIN) are defined as a nine-digit number that the IRS assigns to organizations. To obtain a free EIN from the IRS, visit: <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/how-to-apply-for-an-ein>.

<sup>3</sup> To create your Grants.gov account, click on the following link and scroll down to "How to Register a Grants.gov account": <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>

## Key Messages: USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program

- Small and mid-sized producers often struggle to access markets. USDA Regional Food Centers will serve as USDA's cornerstone in the development of the local and regional supply chains and support producers by providing localized assistance to access local and regional supply chains, including linking producers to wholesalers, processors, and distributors.
- With \$400 million in funding, USDA will create USDA Regional Food Business Centers staffed with technical experts knowledgeable about financing tools and USDA programs to assist building a sustainable local and regional food system with a special emphasis on historically underserved areas of the country.
- USDA intends to select at least six Regional Food Centers. There are four priority areas that will each have at least one Regional Center: Indian Country (potentially including multiple geographic regions – up to nationwide; Colonias (counties on the US/ Mexico border); high need areas of the Delta and Southeast; or high need areas of Appalachia.
- The USDA Regional Food Centers will offer regionally tailored activities to increase food and farm business and finance acumen; create more and better markets and increase market awareness and access, ensure small and mid-size producers have the opportunity to gain access to distributors, retail outlets and institutions; increase the number of new food and farm businesses and viability of existing businesses; and increase the revenue of food and farm business served.
- USDA Regional Food Centers will strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by recent national emergencies, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. They will also build on the resilient strategies exhibited in local and regional food systems across the country.
- As communities emerge from the challenges associated with the pandemic seeking to build resilience in their food systems and improve markets for the farmers and ranchers most affected, USDA will be ready to partner closely with them through these Centers to support that growth.
- USDA Regional Food Centers will support small to mid-sized producers, processors, and distributors that sell into all types of markets, including local and regional markets. AMS will ensure smaller farms, ranches and businesses, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities are served.
- USDA Regional Food Centers will collaborate with existing USDA programs and services to complement their purposes and activities. For instance, USDA grant recipients under Local Agriculture Markets Program (LAMP) grants or other programs would be served by the Regional Food Centers, and Regional Food Centers would also be able to help farmers and food businesses navigate USDA loans and other relevant programs.
- USDA Regional Food Centers will be leaders in food systems development and will contribute to the body of knowledge in food systems and market development.
- The USDA Regional Food Centers (Regional Food Centers) will have three main responsibilities:
  - **Coordination** - The Regional Food Centers will act as regional hubs coordinating across geographic areas, with USDA, other federal, state, and tribal agencies with relevant resources, regional commissions, and the other Regional Food Centers. They will conduct outreach to underserved communities and businesses.
  - **Technical Assistance** - The Regional Food Centers will provide direct business technical assistance to small- and mid-sized food and farm businesses (producers, processors, distributors, and other businesses within the food supply chain) and food value and supply chain coordination. Each Regional Food Center will identify priority areas for technical assistance (e.g., aggregation/distribution, specialty crop processing for institutions) for the region it plans to serve.

- **Capacity Building** - The Regional Food Centers will provide financial assistance through business builder subawards up to \$100,000 to support projects focused on regional needs and businesses that are working toward expansion and other investments. These subawards may support staff time, business planning activities, software implementation, the purchase of equipment, such as food safety, processing and packaging equipment, value chain and supply chain coordination and innovation, product development, marketing, and other expenses as outlined in the RFA.

## Background on RFA and Cooperative Agreements

- Recognizing that a single entity will not be best situated to conduct all USDA Regional Food Center activities and responsibilities, the RFA requires that partnerships of three or more eligible entities submit applications representing at least two of the eligible entity types.
- AMS encourages applications from diverse partnerships that collaborate to offer the best possible service and support across a defined region.
- AMS will help applicants navigate the application process and understand best practices for greatest chance of success.
- AMS will enter into cooperative agreements to partner on planning and implementation of Regional Food Centers.
- Eligible entities are domestic entities owned, operated, and located within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or Indian tribal lands in the geographic regions of the United States.
- Eligible applicants include: producer networks or associations, food councils, tribal governments, state agencies or regional authorities, institutions of higher education, nonprofit corporations, economic development corporations, and partnerships between one or more eligible entities.
- USDA intends to select at least six Regional Food Centers. There are four priority areas that will each have at least one Regional Center: Tribal Center; Colonias (counties on the US/ Mexico border); high need areas of the Delta and Southeast; or high need areas of Appalachia.
- USDA intends to make additional awards that serve other areas of the country, with the goal of creating a national network.
- A geographic region is defined as reaching at least three states or territories (does not need to be contiguous), or a 400-mile radius.
- Matching funds from applicants are not required.
- Applicants must serve smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. Applicants intending to serve these entities should engage and involve those beneficiaries in the development of projects and applications.
- For more information on the USDA Regional Food Centers Program, or to find information on applicant webinars and assistance, visit: [www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters)

## SHAREABLE RESOURCES

### Individual Graphics

<p><b>Step 1: Check Eligibility</b></p> <p>Check to see if you're eligible to apply by reading Section 3.0 of the Request for Applications.</p>	<p><b>Step 1: Eligibility</b></p> <p>Check to see if you're eligible to apply by reading Section 3.0 of the Request for Applications.</p>
<p><b>Step 2: Registration</b></p> <p>Registering for a Grants.Gov account can take up to four weeks and involves multiple steps. Start the process early to meet the submission deadline.</p>	<p><b>Step 2: Register in Grants.Gov</b></p> <p>Registering for a Grants.Gov account can take up to four weeks and involves multiple steps. Start the process early to meet the submission deadline.</p>
<p><b>Step 3: Review Documents</b></p> <p>Read the Request for Applications (RFA) carefully to understand what documents you need to submit with the application.</p>	<p><b>Step 3: RFA Review</b></p> <p>Read the Request for Applications (RFA) carefully to understand what documents you need to submit with the application.</p>
<p><b>Step 4: Apply</b></p> <p>Once you have thoroughly read the RFA, know you are eligible, and understand what documents are required, you're ready to start the application process. Visit Grants.gov's Apply for Grants webpage to begin.</p>	<p><b>Step 4: Apply</b></p> <p>Once you have thoroughly read the RFA, know you are eligible, and understand what documents are required, you're ready to start the application process. Visit Grants.gov's Apply for Grants webpage to begin.</p>



## Sample Social Media Resources

### Tweets:

- USDA announced the availability of approximately \$400M to provide essential local and regional food systems coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building services through USDA's new Regional Food Business Centers.
- USDA will fund at least 6 centers, to include a national tribal center. The centers will provide coordination, technical assistance, & capacity building to help farmers, ranchers, & other food businesses access new markets and navigate federal, state & local resources.
- We have heard stories throughout the pandemic on the resiliency of #localandregionalfoodsystems projects. Now, we have an opportunity to further support this important local and regional food sector. Submit your USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program applications before November 22, 2022!

### Suggested Twitter Cards:



## Sample Social Media Posts w/Graphics

USDA announced the availability of approximately \$400M to provide essential local and regional food systems coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building services through USDA's new Regional Food Business Centers.

[www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters)



Join us Monday, Sept. 19th for the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program Applicant Webinar. #localandregionalfoodsystems

To register, visit:

<https://www.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WNmL4kUICASWi8CCmVcvXcUQ>



Regional Food Business Centers will support initiatives that benefit smaller farms & ranches, new & beginning farmers & ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, & underserved communities.

[www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters)



## Sample Emails to Stakeholders

### Long Version - Announcement to Remind Stakeholders to Share Information:

**Subject Line:** USDA Makes \$400 Million available to support local and regional food systems

**Body:**

Great news for local and regional food systems! The USDA recently announced \$400 million to provide essential local and regional food systems coordination, technical assistance, and capacity-building services through USDA's new Regional Food Business Centers.

The Regional Food Business Centers will build on USDA grants and cooperative agreement work through larger regional-scale investments, which will encourage locally-driven planning and scaled-up solutions to fit regional needs. As communities emerge from COVID-19 seeking to build resilience in their food systems and improve markets for the farmers and ranchers most affected, the USDA Regional Food Business Centers will be ready to support that recovery and growth.

Wondering if you qualify for funding? Read the Request for Applications (RFA). It explains who can apply for funding and how to do it. You can apply to the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Program now through November 22, 2022.

You can find the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Requests for Applications (RFAs) on the program's webpage at: [www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters)

- USDA requires that applicants prioritize service to underserved communities and businesses. Applicants should engage and involve these beneficiaries when developing projects and applications. AMS specifically encourages applications that include plans for outreach to Indian Tribes and Native communities.

### **Want More Information?**

Sign up for an USDA grant webinar at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/webinars>. USDA will host a USDA Regional Food Business Centers webinar on Monday, September 19, 2022, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

### **Need Grant Writing Tips?**

Check out the Grants.Gov website. This series of tips will help you prepare a solid grant application package: <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/category/learngrants/grant-writing-basics/>.

### **Have Questions?**

USDA staff are available to help! visit [www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters) or contact us at [RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov](mailto:RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov)

### **Not Applying, but Want to Help?**

Please consider being a peer reviewer! Reviewers will help USDA select high-quality grant applications for funding. To learn more, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/peer-review>.

## **Short Version - Announcement to Remind Stakeholders to Share Information:**

**Subject Line:** USDA Makes \$400 Million available to support local and regional food systems

### **Body:**

Great news for local and regional food systems! The USDA recently announced \$400 million to provide essential local and regional food systems coordination, technical assistance, and capacity-building services through USDA's new Regional Food Business Centers.

The Regional Food Business Centers will build on USDA grants and cooperative agreement work through larger regional-scale investments, which will encourage locally-driven planning and scaled-up solutions to fit regional needs. As communities emerge from COVID-19 seeking to build resilience in their food systems and improve markets for the farmers and ranchers most affected, the USDA Regional Food Business Centers will be ready to support that recovery and growth.

### **Wondering if you qualify for funding?**

Read the Request for Applications (RFA) at:

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RegionalFoodBusinessCentersRFA.pdf>

### **When is the deadline?**

Applications are due November 22, 2022.

### **Want more information?**

Sign up for a USDA grant webinar at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/webinars>. USDA will host USDA Regional Food Business Centers webinar on Monday, September 19, 2022, at 3 p.m. Eastern Time.

USDA staff are available to help! visit [www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters](http://www.ams.usda.gov/regionalcenters) or contact us at [RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov](mailto:RegionalFoodCenters@usda.gov)

## **Program Quick Links**

### **USDA Regional Food Business Centers**

- [2022 USDA Regional Food Business Centers - Request for Applications \(RFAs\)](#) (PDF)
- [USDA Regional Food Business Centers Overview Video](#) (2 minutes)
- [USDA Regional Food Business Centers Overview Video](#) (15 minutes)
- [USDA Regional Food Business Centers Fact Sheet](#) (PDF)