



Writing Your Project Narrative

Utilizing the Review Criteria to Develop
Your Project Narrative



Regional Food System Partnerships Program



PROJECT NARRATIVE AND REVIEW CRITERIA

AMS LAMP GRANTS



Executive Summary

Tip: It can be easiest to do this last.

Alignment and Intent



NEED



GOAL



APPROACH

ALIGNMENT TO PROGRAM PURPOSE

Technical Merit



WORKPLAN

MILESTONES

TIMELINE

Achievability



MEASURE



ADAPT



DISSEMINATE

Expertise and Partners

KEY STAFF

COORDINATION



TEAM SKILLS

SUSTAINABILITY

Fiscal Plan and Resources

BUDGET AND
JUSTIFICATION



INVOICE



ALLOWABLE COSTS





Project Narrative and Review Criteria

Regional Food System Partnerships Program Narrative Form Guide

Instructions for Guide

This document is to be used as a guide to help prepare applications for the Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) program.

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 [RFSP 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

Issue

Talk about the issue you have identified and how your project will address this issue. This section should use key words and topics from Section 3.1 of the RFA. When responding in 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 issue 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.

Partnership Goals

Describe the specific goals of this partnership. What are you seeking to achieve through this partnership? How would forming this partnership improve marketing opportunities for farms and food businesses?

Description of the Partnership

Scope

Give a full description of the proposed region (geographic, economic, etc.). Explain why this region was chosen, why it is the best place to carry out this work and how this partnership working together would add the most value to farm and food businesses in this region (as opposed to each entity acting independently).

Producer and Food Business Benefit

Describe the intended benefits (direct and indirect, short- and long-term) for producers or food businesses resulting from partnership activities. 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. *Note: This is not required if your project is solely for planning or a feasibility study.*

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:

- ☐ Identify specific local or regional food system issues and explain how your project will address them?
- ☐ Show that the partners in your project have a strong history of working together OR give a clear plan on how your partners will work together in this project?
- ☐ **Describe where** the project is happening and why it needs to be there?
- ☐ Explain why it is better for the partners to work together instead of alone to improve the local or regional food system?
- ☐ Identify who will benefit from the project and how each partner will work to create these benefits? (Not required for planning or feasibility projects).
- ☐ Follow the instructions and requirements in the RFA and Project Narrative Template?

Technical Merit

Partnership Preparation

Has this partnership or any portion of this partnership engaged in any prior relevant activities? Give a brief history of how the partnership was developed and the accomplishments of the partnership. Discuss any current and future plans and how this project fits into those plans.

Work Plan

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 if the partnership has received any previous funding to support partnership activities or projects, and if this project has been submitted to another grant program.

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.

Community Engagement

Describe how you will involve the community in the project, including partnering with other organizations. If you recruit new community partners, how will they contribute to the project? Do you think there will be any challenges with recruiting partners? How will you address those challenges?

What types of technical assistance will this partnership be providing through this project? Who will be the target audience? What topics will be covered? How does this contribute to project objectives? *Note: Technical assistance related information is not required if your project is solely for planning or a feasibility study.*

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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:

- ☐ Describe the technical resources each partner brings to the project for development, implementation and/or management?
- ☐ Include a work plan with clear goals, objectives, and a system for how partners will work together?
- ☐ Present a realistic schedule for implementing project activities?
- ☐ Describe expected challenges to achieving project goals and working with partners and present plans to address those challenges?
- ☐ Incorporate lessons you’ve learned from previously working with these partners? (if applicable)

Achievability

Outcomes and Indicators

Four 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 four Objectives and choose the ones that best apply to your project. Choose at least one indicator(s) from Objectives 1-3 and it is strongly encouraged that you come up with your own indicator for Objective 4. For each selected indicator, state your estimated target number, how you determined that target number, and how you will evaluate your progress. Also, list any potential challenges to achieving the estimated targets and how you would address those challenges.

Outcome and Indicator Measurement Plan

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.

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.)

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.

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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:

- ☐ Include at least one reasonable outcome and indicator?
- ☐ Describe a monitoring and evaluation plan to gather feedback and measure project results?
- ☐ Explain your plan for distributing the project's results?
- ☐ Show how the partnership will continue without grant funds once the grant period is over?

Expertise and Partners

Key Staff (Applicant Personnel and External Partners/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.

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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?
- ☐ Provide names, job titles, and relevant work experience of all project team staff?
- ☐ Describe the specific role of each partner in achieving project goals and outcomes?
- ☐ Show how project beneficiaries will be active participants in the project?
- ☐ Describe coordination, communication, data sharing and reporting plans for the project partnership?

Fiscal Plan and Resources

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 the "Requested RFSP Funds" (Project Narrative Form page 2: question 8) and "Cost Share funds" (Project Narrative Form page 2: question 9) amounts.

You 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.

For more information about filling out your Budget and Justification, refer to the [Budget Toolkit](#).

Cost Share

Cost Share funds are required. Applicants must provide a minimum 25% cost share (must be CASH) of the Federal portion of the grant. You must submit signed [Letter\(s\) of Verification for Cost Sharing Funds](#) for each cost share commitment.

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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?
- ☐ Clearly describe how partner resources committed as cost sharing funds will be used? (cash/in-kind)
- ☐ Include signed [Letter\(s\) of Verification for 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 your project narrative and not exceed the page **Fifteen (15)** 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Project Narrative form content)?
- ☐ Convert your project narrative to a .pdf to submit to Grants.gov? (Handwritten applications or applications in MS Word will not be accepted).