

Questions and Answers for Request for Partners # #RFA-FY26-SE-892
USDA FY26 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Update: The deadline for application submissions is May 11, 2026.

Q1: Is there a list of eligible specialty crops?

A1: Yes. Please see USDA’s list of eligible specialty crops and a separate list of ineligible commodities: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop> (RFA Section 7.2 Project Description).

Q2: How do we respond to the RFP using the online form in the DOEE Grants Management System (GMS)?

A2: The question prompts in the online form (GMS Section 11 Narrative) align with the RFP requests. Use the last open field for additional responses, if needed.

Q3. The RFP says that an applicant may request between \$25,000 - \$75,000. Would that total award of \$25K-\$75K be an annual amount, or is that the total over 3 years?

A3. The amount awarded would be for the 3-year grant period, not annual.

Q4. Can I include indirect costs in my budget?

A4. No.

Q5. Would a training program be an allowable cost?

A5. Yes.

Q6. Would staff salaries related to a (training) program be considered an indirect cost and therefore not included in the budget?

A6. Salaries and fringe benefits for staff who work directly on the award are an allowable direct cost.

Q7. Should we be concerned about language around climate change or equity?

A7. Yes. The USDA FY26 SCBG NOFO has maintained the same language as the changes highlighted in the FY25 SCBG RFA. Among them are the following: (a) removed language encouraging “...applicants to include 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...”, and (b) removed language encouraging applications that “...benefit smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities...” including all language related to “underserved” farmers and ranchers. Applicants should follow this guidance in their applications.

Q8. How much detail do I need to provide in my budget regarding stipends?

A8. Please provide details such as number of people receiving the stipend, how much the stipend will be and enough detail regarding how the stipends will be distributed and/or tracked to ensure there is no fraud, waste, or abuse.

Q9. Can one entity submit multiple proposals?

A9. Yes, one entity can submit multiple proposals. Please ensure that the projects are separate and discrete from one another.

Q10. Can I use the funds for staff and contractors?

A10. Yes.

Q11. What's the role of the match, if not required nor used in scoring?

A11. While we do not require a match and it does not impact your score, some applicants choose to include one to demonstrate how they bridge the gap between grant funds and the true cost of the program to ensure the organization is not running it at a loss.

Q12. When we write out the work plan, ideally using the template you provided, should we be aligning the outputs and objectives to those listed in Appendix 7?

A12. Yes. Use the outcomes and indicators in Appendix 7 as applicable. Include additional activities, tasks, outputs and outcomes as needed.

Q13. For education-oriented projects, what kinds of measurable outputs and outcomes are most persuasive to reviewers?

A13. Please see Appendix 7 SCBG Outcomes and Indicators for a full list of permissible outcomes for this RFP. None of these outcomes will be weighted more heavily or considered more persuasive for reviewers. Please choose the outcomes and indicators that best fit your proposed project.

Q14. Are you looking for diversity in programming among the proposals?

A14. Per DOEE's scoring criteria, we are looking for projects that are a creative response to the USDA's scope of permissible proposals. Diversity of proposals across the portfolio is not a consideration within our criteria.

Q15. If a project involves a technical tool or service developed by the applicant, what distinguishes a strong public-benefit proposal from one that feels too commercially focused?

A15. A tool or service is considered to be for public benefit if will be made publicly available to others in the industry, such as via a print or online resource, in-person workshop, or webinar.

Q16. Would we have an opportunity to tweak our proposals?

A16. Applicants may revise their proposals at any time during the open application period. No further revisions will be accepted after the application submission deadline of May 11 at 11:59 PM.

Q17. Where can I get information about how to document partners in my application?

A17. See section 3.1 subsection (4) "Partners" for more information on how to document partners and what information is needed in a letter of support.

Q18. Regarding Appendix 5 – Points for Local Entities, I am a District business but do not have my Local Business Enterprise certification". What other proof can I submit?

A18: To get the additional points for local entities, businesses must provide Local Business Enterprise certification from DSLBD or **official notification of certification approval** from DSLBD.

Q19: Is it permissible to budget for food that is used for cooking in education classes with students and/or adults?

A19: Yes, you can include food costs in your budget if they are directly linked to educational activities of your project.

Q20: Regarding the "Project Description" requirements (RFA Section 3.1(b)(1), pp. 10-11), should the goals and objectives through project activities, outputs and outcomes narrative be entered directly into the Section 11 narrative text fields of the online portal (GMS), or uploaded as a standalone attachment in Section 13 (Uploads)? If we upload an attachment, does the entry count toward the 22,000-character narrative limit?

A20: Unless the RFA states otherwise, Project Description requirements should be included within the text fields of the narrative (Section 11). Additional information and documents may be uploaded in Section 13, Uploads. Entries in Section 13 do not count towards the 22,000 narrative character limit.

Q21: Regarding the submission format for RFA Section 3.1.(c)(1) Organization, should we include this information within GMS Section 11 (specifically under Question/Answer 16), or submit it as a standalone additional information attachment in Section 13 of the GMS? Also, are there specific character limits for GMS Section 11, field 16?

A21: For RFA Section 3.1(c)(1), describe the named Applicant's history, mission, and current or past projects that demonstrate the organization's capacity to achieve the project's goals in the Narrative (GMS Section 11). To provide further information, you can reference your website or upload an organizational brochure or résumé in GMS Section 13 (Uploads).

There is no character limit for Field 16, but the entry limit for the entire Narrative Section 11 is 22,000 characters.

Q22: During the pre-application presentation, it was mentioned that indirect costs are not allowed for this grant. However, the application portal requests Indirect Cost Information, Section 4.6, if the project budget includes an indirect cost rate over 10% of direct costs described in the RFA. Could you please clarify if indirect costs are unallowable for the FY26 cycle?

A22: You cannot include indirect costs in your budget.

Q23: The RFA requires a work plan as an "Additional Attachment," but no template is provided in the application portal. Is there a specific DOEE or USDA template we must use? If not, does DOEE have a preferred format or required categories beyond activities and timeline, such as outputs, outcomes, or responsible parties?

A23: There is no specific DOEE or USDA template required for the work plan. Applicants may use their own format, ensuring it covers project activities and an implementation timeline. Applicants may include any additional categories they feel are necessary to provide a complete picture of their project.

Q24: Would a project that sourced specialty crops from Maryland for distribution across DC still qualify for this award?

A24: Yes, as long as they comply with the requirements of the RFP, including by addressing a local project issue and accomplishing the outcome and indicator requirements.

Q25: Are subcontracts/subgrants allowed? If so, are costs rolled into a single "contractor" line item or included in personnel or other budget lines? Do contractor costs need to be documented in the budget justification?

A25: Yes, they are allowed. Costs must be entered as contractor line items—either as a single rolled-up total or as separate line items—and must be fully detailed and justified in the budget narrative per RFA Section 3.1(b)(2).

Q26: Are vehicle costs for delivery of specialty crops to education sites permissible? If so, are there specific parameters for vehicle costs?

A26: Leasing of vehicles is allowable. Purchasing of vehicles is allowable only if it is special purpose – e.g. refrigerated vans. Purchasing of general-purpose vehicles such as cars or cargo vans is not allowable. For more information see [USDA Agricultural Marketing Service General Terms and Conditions, Section 8.2](#).

Q27: Is transportation (via rideshare) of part time staff to/from education sites a permissible cost?

A27: Yes.