Community Food Projects Electronic Submissions Advisory for 2018
Application deadline: 5:00pm EST December 4, 2017

A note about applying using Grants.gov:

The legacy PDF application package will be retired December 31, 2017. Grants.gov recommends applying with [Workspace](#) now. When you download the CFP application package from grants.gov, you will be given the option to apply using Workspace OR using the Legacy PDF package. Grants.gov has a number of excellent video tutorials on Workspace. The guide that follows includes necessary information for applicants using either Workspace or the Legacy system.

Introduction

NIFA requires electronic submissions through the Grants.gov process for all CFP applications. Electronic submission saves you the uncertainty and cost of shipping your grant proposal to USDA, but has its complexities. It requires a high level of attention to detail especially in the registration phase to be successful. In the Request for Applications, NIFA specifies several actions that must be taken BEFORE an application can be submitted and accepted through Grants.gov. Please review pp. 11-12 in the RFA for details.

Registration

Grants.gov notes that it should take 7 business days to [register](#). If your organization does not have an Employer ID Number from the IRS, the process will be delayed until you can [get one](#). **If you have not begun the registration process, you are urged to address these requirements promptly in order to have all the necessary steps completed on time. This is especially critical for any organization doing its first electronic submission.** An organization that has already submitted an electronic application to a federal agency will have many critical components in place, such as registration with Grants.gov and required software.

Note: If you are already registered, the System for Award Management (SAM) requires an annual renewal.

Grants.gov provides a detailed overview of the [steps](#) needed to register with them.

Following is a checklist of the items needed (in order) to complete the registration process:

☐ Acquire a DUNS number through [Duns and Bradstreet](#)

☐ Register with [System for Award Management](#) (SAM) and establish an E-business Point of Contact (E-biz POC)

☐ The authorized organizational representative (AOR, or the person who can submit grants) creates a grants.gov organizational profile with a username and password.

☐ The e-biz POC responds to a registration e-mail from grants.gov authorizing the AOR.

☐ The AOR can move forward with preparing and submitting a proposal.

Completing an electronic application:
It can take a lot more time to complete your first electronic application than you might have imagined! It takes time to get used to each form, to see how the components all work with each other, and to learn how to add, remove and change information. We urge first-time users to start getting familiar with these forms as soon as possible.   **Be sure to keep an extra backup of your application at all times, in case data is lost at any time during the process.**

Getting assistance:
The RFA provides links to download written guidance from NIFA.

Grants.gov has a number of excellent [resources](#), including guides and training videos on its resources website. These guides should be reviewed carefully as they contain the information needed to properly fill out an electronic application.

Grants.gov has a very professional and responsive helpline. But sometimes it can take more than one call to get what you need, so allow time for this. Remember, almost everyone doing an electronic application for the first time will encounter challenges and might need this help. **Please build in enough time for this by starting the application process early!**

Software
You can submit your proposal using a Mac or a Windows-based PC. You will need access to two important pieces of software. First, to be able to open the application package, you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader, which enables you to read PDF files. It is free from [Adobe.](#)

The RFA requires that all documents be in PDF format. You can easily make PDFs through the print function of Word or Excel etc.

You will likely need to combine multiple files into a single pdf file. For example, all of the support letters will need to be combined into a single file. Adobe Acrobat Reader does not work for that purpose. For that you will need a **PDF generator program** (such as Acrobat Professional or other cheaper / free software). Be sure to have a PDF program installed and working well in advance of submission.

Submitting on time: Your greatest risk with electronic submission is waiting until the last minute. It might have worked to get a hard copy proposal into overnight mail right at the deadline, but the risks for trying this electronically, especially your first time, are high. Delays at the end can occur for many reasons. Please don't let all your hard work go for naught by missing the deadline. There are plenty of horror stories of groups being disqualified because they missed the deadline by a few minutes.

Your application has to be free of errors and then arrive at NIFA on time without any snafus or delays at USDA's end.   You will need to have your sign in name and password ready, and be prepared for error messages that have to be addressed before the application is accepted.

NOTE: The administrative organizational representative (AOR) electronic signature and password is necessary to submit proposals. Please be sure you have this available!

<u>Wait! Don't Celebrate Yet!</u>
We highly recommend that you don't wait until the last day to submit your proposal. Internet traffic on deadline days can cause delays or problems uploading applications. In addition, you will need to make sure your application is accepted. Just because you hit the send button and got an e-mail that it was received doesn't mean the process is over.

Once an application is submitted, you should get five e-mails to assure that your proposal has been received and is accepted. The first four are crucial to ensure that the proposal is complete and received. Here is an actual example:

E-mail #1 (7:08 pm): "Your application has been received by Grants.gov, and is currently being validated. Your submission was received at <<*date and time*>>. Validation may take up to 2 business days. To check the status of your application please click here:"

E-mail # 2 (7:11 pm): "Your application has been received and validated by Grants.gov and is being prepared for Grantor agency retrieval [USDA]."

E-mail # 3 (7:25 pm): "Your application has been retrieved by the Grantor agency and is currently being reviewed."

E-mail # 4 (8:03 pm): "The grant application that you submitted to Grants.gov has been received by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), U.S. Department of Agriculture."

E-mail #5 (10 days later): "The following proposal has been received by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA):

Title: XXXX

Proposal Number Assigned by NIFA: 2015-xxxxx

Date Received: xx-xx-15

Grants.Gov Tracking Number: GRANTxxxxxxxx"

The proposal number and Grant.gov tracking numbers are essential for you to keep in case there are problems and if you need to refer to the proposal for any reason.

You will want to allow enough time BEFORE THE DEADLINE to get this receipt back. That means, if at all possible, getting your proposal in at least one or two days in advance. If you wait until the deadline, and there are problems with your proposal, you probably will not have the time to fix the problem before the 5 pm submission cutoff. There are literally hundreds of federal proposals prepared for other programs that have missed the electronic deadlines because they waited until the last minute, and were subsequently rejected for any funding consideration. Please don't let your proposal be added to this long list!

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* This document was prepared by Hugh Joseph and updated by Andy Fisher and New Entry Sustainable Farming Project to help CFP grant applicants understand the challenges connected with the electronic submissions process. We have done our best to assure the accuracy of the information provided, including verifying information with CFP Program

staff. However, this does not represent official USDA policy nor is it a substitute for the guidelines from NIFA concerning the CFP Program. **Please use this guide only in conjunction with the Request for Applications (RFA) released by NIFA. In case of conflicting information, NIFA and/or grants.gov always supersedes any guidance contained herein.**