

NEBRASKA

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FY 2025 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

Request for Concept Proposals

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE 10.170

Released:
November 25, 2024

Concept Proposals Due:
January 31, 2025

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About the Program

Purpose

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) is pleased to announce a competitive solicitation process to award Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding to projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture. Please visit USDA's website at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp> to view a comprehensive list of eligible specialty crops, ineligible commodities, and examples of projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops under the SCBGP.

Funding and Duration

NDA anticipates awarding approximately **\$820,000** to projects enhancing the competitiveness of Nebraska specialty crops. A maximum grant award does not exist and neither NDA nor the SCBGP requires a cost sharing or matching requirement. All projects are subject to the availability of funds. Grant funds cannot be expended before September 30, 2025, or after September 29, 2028. NDA reserves the right to offer an award amount less than the amount requested.

SCBGP assists State departments of agriculture in the 50 States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by:

- (1) Leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops;
- (2) Assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;
- (3) Expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and
- (4) Addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

Eligibility Requirements

Projects must enhance the competitiveness of U.S. or U.S. territory-grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Each project must identify at least one expected measurable outcome and indicator that specifically demonstrates the project's impact in enhancing the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. Funds will not be awarded for projects that benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, grant funds cannot be used to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners. Proposals should be initiated by organizations, industry groups, or

academic institutions, or should involve collaboration or partnerships between producers, industry groups, academics, or other organizations. Applicants may cooperate with any public or private organization or two or more individuals or organizations may propose a joint project. Applicants should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual.

Solicitation Process and Timeline

Competitive Grant Application Review Process

NDA's competitive solicitation process will be divided into two phases: Phase I, Concept Proposal and Phase II, Grant Proposal. Concept Proposal instructions are listed below. Projects with the highest combined scores will serve as recommendations to the Director of Agriculture as to which applicants should be invited to complete a Grant Proposal. All applicants will be notified of their grant application status, and whether they have been selected to complete the Phase II, Grant Proposal application. All Grant Proposals must fully describe the project's purpose, objectives, beneficiaries, external support, measurable outcomes, indicators, data collection, budget narrative, oversight, and commitment. An applicant's failure to meet eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in NDA's rejection of the proposal prior to or after the application review.

Phase I, Concept Proposal

In Phase I, interested, eligible non-profit organizations, local, state, and federal government entities, for-profit organizations, producer groups, and colleges or universities must submit Concept Proposals. Concept Proposals must be submitted through AmpliFund by **January 31, 2025** and must briefly describe the project in a clear, concise manner and be responsive to the categories identified in the Concept Proposal. Applicants can access the AmpliFund application portal by going to <https://ne.amplifund.com/Public/Opportunities/Details/358be2b1-87cb-4262-b365-81f7c4f967ab>.

Once the Concept Proposals have been collected, and the submission deadline has expired, NDA will determine whether the submitted Concept Proposals meet SCBGP grant eligibility requirements and will assess all applicants' past grant performances (if any). A SCBGP Field Review Panel will then be formed, which will likely be comprised of representatives from public agencies and non-profit entities with an interest and expertise in specialty crop food and agricultural systems. The panel will rank proposals against the evaluation criteria and questions listed on the Technical Evaluation Criteria Score Sheet. Depending on the nature of the Concept Proposals, the panel may seek additional peer review for more specialized proposals.

Phase II, Grant Proposal

The panel will make recommendations to the Director of Agriculture as to which applicants should be invited to submit a Phase II, Grant Proposal. The Director will ultimately decide which projects will be invited to Phase II.

Review and Notification

Review Criteria

NDA's intent is to fund projects that can produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to Nebraska specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent. Concept Proposals will be evaluated on the criteria set forth in the Concept Proposal Questions, Scoring, and Review Criteria section of this document.

Review Process

NDA will conduct two levels of review during the Concept Proposal process. The first level is an administrative review to determine whether Concept Proposal requirements are met and will assess applicants' past NDA grant performances (if any). The second level is a technical review to evaluate the merits of the Concept Proposals. The NDA SCBGP Field Review Panel will perform the technical review. This panel is comprised of a collective representation of growers and industry personnel from public agencies and non-profit entities with an interest and expertise in specialty crop food and agricultural systems. The panel will rank proposals against the evaluation criteria and questions listed on the Technical Evaluation Criteria Score Sheet.

Notification and Feedback

Projects that are disqualified utilizing the criteria above and those not invited to Phase II will be notified. Successful applicants will be invited to Phase II and will receive instructions for submitting a Grant Proposal. Applicants not invited to participate in Phase II may contact NDA and request feedback on their Concept Proposals (if available).

Assistance and Questions

Questions regarding this grant and/or the competitive solicitation process should be directed to NDA at (402) 471-6857 or casey.foster@nebraska.gov.

Concept Proposal Submission Instructions

Interested applicants can apply by completing the Concept Proposal application via AmpliFund, which accessible via the Internet at <https://ne.amplifund.com/Public/Opportunities/Details/358be2b1-87cb-4262-b365-81f7c4f967ab>. All Concept Proposals must be submitted though this online portal on or before **January 31, 2025**.

Timeline

| Phase I: Concept Proposal | |
|--|------------------|
| Release Request for Concept Proposals | December 2024 |
| Concept Proposals Due | January 31, 2025 |
| Phase II: Grant Proposal (<i>by invitation only</i>) | |
| Invitation to Grant Proposals | Early March 2025 |
| Grant Proposals Due to NDA | March 31, 2025 |
| Grant Proposals Sent to USDA for Approval | May 2025 |
| Award | |
| Announcement of Award Funding | September 2025 |

Funding Areas

Funding areas are intended to clearly define the SCBGP priorities and help prospective applicants to both develop their projects and submit their projects in the most appropriate category.

In practice, Concept Proposals might seem to address elements from multiple funding areas. However, applicants must select one of the areas listed in the Concept Proposal.

Concept Proposals should:

- Demonstrate a high likelihood of success
- Describe the specialty crop grower benefit and grower connection to the project
- Be scalable to the larger community
- Demonstrate industry need and support
- Illustrate a sustainable funding source beyond the life of the proposed grant
- Include an outreach component addressing how project results, research findings, and conclusions will be extended to specialty crop growers

Funding Areas:

- Agriculture Education and Outreach
- Nutrition Education and Consumption
- Environmental Crop Research/Conservation
- Enhancement of Food Safety/Food Security
- Plant Pest and Disease Control
- Trade Enhancements/Innovations
- Good Agricultural Practices
- Organic and Sustainable Production Practices

Requirements and Limitations

Federal Cost Principles

Federal cost principles are regulations based on organization type used to determine allowable costs and ensure consistent treatment of costs. Applicants are responsible for identifying the federal cost principles appropriate to their organization and consistent application of cost principles to the SCBGP grant funds. They are used to ensure contractors or consultants comply with federal cost principle requirements.

- State, local or Indian tribal governments, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities will be subject to 2 CFR 200.
- For-profit organizations will be subject to 48 CFR Subpart 31.2.

Indirect Costs

The maximum indirect cost rate is eight percent (8%) of the project's budget.

Applicants are responsible for presenting costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances consistently and must not include costs associated with an established indirect cost rate agreement as direct costs. In addition, applicants cannot allocate a cost as a direct cost if it is also incurred as an indirect cost for the same purpose and vice versa.

Direct costs are costs that can be identified specifically with a particular award, project, program, service, or other organizational activity or that can be directly assigned to such an activity relatively easily with a high degree of accuracy. Typically, direct costs include, but are not limited to, compensation of employees who work directly on the award to include salaries and fringe benefits, travel that is necessary for the project, contractual expenses, and equipment and supplies used for the project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”) are costs incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified specifically with a particular project, program, or organizational activity. Below are typical indirect costs for specific types of organizations. The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect costs. Direct charging of these costs may be appropriate where all of the following conditions are met:

- Administrative or clerical services are integral to a project or activity;
- Individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity;
- Such costs are explicitly included in the budget or have the prior written approval of the federal awarding agency; and
- The costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.

The following are considered indirect and should not be included in the Projected Budget as direct costs:

- Information technology services;
- Rent;
- Utilities and internet service;
- Telephone service (mobile and landline);
- General office supplies; and
- Insurance.

Disqualifications

The following may result in the disqualification of a project proposal:

- Proposals from applicants with an active exclusion on the federal System for Award Management (SAM). Visit <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/> for additional information to register your organization or to verify the status of your organization;
- Incomplete proposals, including proposals with one or more unanswered question and/or missing, blank, unreadable, corrupt, or otherwise unusable attachments;
- Proposals that include activities outside the grant duration; and
- Proposals with unallowable costs or activities necessary to complete the project.

Expected Measurable Outcomes and Indicators

Each project submitted must include at least one of the predetermined outcomes indicators as defined by the USDA. If there are multiple sub-indicators under the

selected indicator, select at least one. Outcomes and indicators can be selected from the dropdown menus in the application.

Applicants must clearly explain how they will collect the required data to report on the outcome(s) and indicator(s). The progress of each indicator must be reported in the Annual Performance Report and the result in the Final Performance Report. USDA's outcomes and indicators can be found at <https://nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/scbgrp/NewOutcomeMeasures+Indicators.pdf>.

Concept Proposal Questions and Scoring

Applicants must complete the following questions in the Concept Proposal. Failure to fully complete the Concept Proposal will result in disqualification.

Organization/Business Type (not a scored question):

Select the organization type that best describes the applicant.

Organization/Business Name (not a scored question):

Legal name of the organization that will be the lead applicant, serve as lead for the project, and will receive grant funds.

Address, Phone Number, and Email Address (not a scored question):

Enter the organization's mailing address, phone number, and email address.

Primary Contact Information (not a scored question):

Name of the individual overseeing the project and provide his/her phone number and email.

Unique Entity Identification (UEI) Number (not a scored question):

List the applicant's UEI number. Instructions on how to find or obtain a UEI number can be found at <https://sam.gov/content/home>.

Federal Tax ID Number (not a scored question):

Enter the applicant's Federal Tax Identification Number.

Has the Organization Previously Received Grant Funds through the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (not a scored question)?

Answer yes or no.

Has the Organization Previously Received Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Funds (not a scored question)?

Answer yes or no.

Funding Area (not a scored question):

From the dropdown menu, select the most appropriate funding area for the project. Failure to select a funding area will result in disqualification.

Project Title (not a scored question):

Concisely describe the project in 15 words or less.

Project Purpose (30 points):

In two or three paragraphs, identify the specific and existing issue, problem, or need the project will address, and explain the timeliness and relevance to the specialty crop industry. Be sure to address how this project will provide a direct benefit to Nebraska's specialty crop industry, and how it appears to have a likelihood of success and relevance to the specialty crop industry. If this project builds upon a prior year project, describe how the project differs from, compliments, or builds upon the previous work.

Expected Measurable Outcomes (5 points):

Proposals must result in at least one of eight outcomes as predetermined by USDA. Identify one outcome measure and indicator the project will achieve. Outcomes are measurable changes in behavior or conditions that reflect a positive impact to the specialty crop industry. Select one of the outcome measures from the dropdown menu. Be sure to describe how your project appears to have a likelihood of success and relevance to the specialty crop industry.

Outcome Indicators (20 points):

Provide one indicator for your selected outcome and the related quantifiable results.

Explanation to Accomplish Project (25 points):

Explain how the data will be collected and how the project will accomplish the outcomes measure and indicator selected.

Beginning or Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher (not a scored question):

Indicate whether the applicant is a Beginning Farmer or Rancher or a Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher. A Beginning Farmer or Rancher means an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than ten (10) years and substantially participates in the operation. A Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher means a farmer or rancher who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Multi-State Partnership (not a scored question):

Is the application a multi-state partnership? Answer yes or no.

If a Multi-State Partnership, Name the Other State(s) (not a scored question):

If the application is a multi-state partnership, name the other state(s).

Projected Budget (20 points):

Complete the budget template. All budget items should enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops and correlate to the purpose of the project.

Complete each budget category by entering the amount of grant funds budgeted for each category. The budget template includes limited space to provide a brief description of the costs or activities associated with each budget category. Failure to complete the required budget template may result in disqualification.

If applicable, under Cash Match and In-Kind Match, enter the total amount of matching funds and/or in-kind contributions committed to this project from other sources. Under the Total column and row, enter the sum of funds requested, plus match.

Please note that matching funds are not a requirement of the SCBGP. However, matching funds are encouraged and may serve as evidence to demonstrate industry commitment to, or support for, the project.

Scoring will be based on the extent to which the budget is rational and sound and consistent with the project's purpose, outcome, and indicator. Is it feasible that the proposed work can be accomplished given the proposed budget?

Personnel: Estimate the salary and wage costs for individuals employed by the applicant organization that will receive grant funding. Salary and wage costs for individuals, not employed by the applicant organization, must be listed under Contractual.

Fringe Benefits: Estimate the total fringe benefit costs for the project participants. Fringe benefit costs for individuals, not employed by the applicant organization, must be listed under Contractual.

Travel: Calculate the costs for the travel by taking into account destinations, number of trips, days traveling, transportation costs, estimated mileage rate, and estimated lodging and meal costs. Travel costs for individuals not employed by the applicant organization must be listed under Contractual. Allowable travel costs may not exceed those established by the Federal Travel Regulation, issues by GSA, including the maximum per diem and subsistence rates prescribed in those regulations. This information is available at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel-resources>.

Equipment: Equipment is defined as tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the NFE for financial statement purposes, or \$5,000. Equipment expenses are allowable for rental costs of general purpose equipment when provided in the approved budget or with prior written approval. Vehicles may be leased, but not purchased. The lease or rental agreement must terminate at the end of the grant cycle. For vehicle and equipment leases or rentals, with an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000, rates should be in light of factors such as rental costs of comparable vehicles and

equipment, if any; market conditions in the area; alternatives available; and the type, life expectancy, condition, and value of the vehicle or equipment leased.

Special purpose equipment is an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$5,000 to be used only for research, scientific, or technical activities. Within the description column, indicate the type of special purpose equipment to be purchased (if any).

Special purpose equipment is allowable, with prior approval for acquisition costs and rental costs, provided the following criterion is met:

1. Necessary for the research, scientific, or other technical activities of the grant award;
2. Not otherwise reasonably available and accessible;
3. The type of equipment is normally charged as a direct cost by the organization;
4. Acquired in accordance with organizational practices;
5. Must only be used to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops;
6. More than one single commercial organization, commercial product, or individual must benefit from the use of the equipment;
7. Must not use special purpose equipment acquired with grant funds to provide services for a fee to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent services; and
8. Equipment is subject to the full range of acquisition, use, management, and disposition requirements under 2 CFR 200.313 as applicable.

Prior written approval for allowable costs, that were not included in the approved project and/or the latest budget, include rental of land and building space, equipment (including special purpose equipment), organization costs, and rearrangement and reconversion costs. If a request is made, it must include the following:

1. A description of and justification for the cost including how it furthers the objectives of the project; and
2. If applicable, a comparison between the most recent budget and the proposed budget as well as an updated budget narrative of the affected cost categories.

If purchasing or renting equipment, identify the item and its value. Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land are unallowable. If the cost per unit is under \$5,000, then include the item(s) under Supplies.

Supplies: Estimate the costs for supplies to be purchased. Supplies are items with an acquisition cost of less than \$5,000 per unit that are used exclusively for the objectives of the project. Within the description column, provide a brief explanation of the types of supplies needed for the project. General use office supplies (paper, printer ink, pens, et cetera) are considered indirect costs under the SCBGP.

Contractual: Estimate the costs for any work on the project that will be performed by individuals not employed by the applicant organization (consultants, contractors, partner organizations, et cetera).

Other: Estimate all other costs such as conferences or meetings, speaker/trainer fees, publication costs, data collection, and other budgeted costs associated with the project.

Indirect Costs: Indirect costs cannot exceed eight percent (8%) of the project's budget. Indirect costs represent the expenses of doing business that are not readily identified with a particular grant, contract, project function or activity, but are necessary for the general operation of the organization and the conduct of activities it performs.

Program Income: Estimate the amount of income (if any) that may be generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of the award. Within the description column, explain how program income may be generated. Program income cannot be used as profit for an organization and must be fully reinvested into the project.

Total number of points in the Concept Proposal: 100.

Other Federal Grant Programs

Projects More Relevant to Other Grant Programs

The Specialty Crop Multi-State Program (SCMP) offers grants to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by funding collaborative, multi-state projects that address the following regional or national level specialty crop issues: food safety; plant pests and disease; research; crop-specific projects addressing common issues; and marketing and promotion. Multi-state projects must provide solutions to problems that cross state boundaries and must explain the impact the projects will have on a multi-state or national level. For more information, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scmp>.

Projects that support the increase of fruits and vegetables in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase and/or include technologies for benefit redemption systems should consider submitting those projects to the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) at <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-grant-program>.

Projects that support domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities, or local and regional food business enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, or store locally or regionally produced food products should consider submitting those projects to the Farmers Market Promotion Program (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp>) or the Local Food Promotion Program (<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/lfpp>).

Projects designed to solve critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities that use systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches can also apply for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI). The intent of the SCRI program is to solve the needs of the various specialty crop industries through the promotion of collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology. The SCRI program will give priority to projects that are multi-state, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary, and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public. For more information, go to <https://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/specialty-crop-research-initiative-scri>.

Projects designed to explore new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products, and encourage research and innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of the U.S. agricultural marketing system and have an applied research and marketing focus should consider applying for a Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) grant. For more information, go to <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fsmip>.