Regional Food System Partnerships Program

Scoring Matrix

Based on type – look for budget and timeline fit, NOT whether they selected the correct type
Planning & Design: 2 years, $100,000 - $250,000
Implementation & Expansion: 3 years, $250,000 – $1 million

This matrix may be used by reviewers when assessing applications for the Regional Food System Partnerships Program (RFSP). Each criteria includes suggested questions to consider as you score each application.

A **perfect** score (maximum points available) under a Section/Criteria should have no weaknesses. Likewise, a rating of "Poor" (i.e., zero points) for a Section/Criteria should have no strengths.

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Score →	21 – 25	15 – 20	8 – 14	1 – 7	0
Alignment and Intent 25 Points	Essentially no deficiencies. Strong, convincing justification. Contains a concise, well-conceived problem/issue statement. The objectives are precise, attainable, and meet the purpose of the grant program and will significantly benefit stakeholders.	Slight deficiencies. Convincing justification. Contains a very good problem/issue statement. The objectives fit the intent of the grant program and impact the intended beneficiaries.	Minor deficiencies. Adequate justification and problem/issue statement. The objectives generally align with the purpose of the grant program, but there is room for improvement in the level of detail provided. Project has the potential for successfully benefitting the region and the intended beneficiaries.	Several deficiencies in basic aspects of the project. Includes a justification and problem/issue statement but could have been better stated. The ideas are not well-developed and may not be feasible to support a successful project or significantly impact the beneficiaries.	Major deficiencies in one or more aspects of the project. Fails to make a case for the project. The project does not fit the intent of the grant program. Required sections or details are missing.

Alignment and Intent Questions

- Does the proposal have a clear and concise description of the specific issue, problem, or need, and project objectives?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the project adequately demonstrate how it meets the purpose of RFSP (i.e., the development and strengthening of partnerships within a regional food system)?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the proposal describe who the intended beneficiaries are and how they will benefit including the estimated number of beneficiaries?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the application comply with all instructions in the RFA and Project Narrative (fit within page limit, include all required documents, meet match requirements, etc.)?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Score →	21 – 25	15 – 20	8 – 14	1 – 7	0
Technical Merit 25 Points	Essentially no deficiencies. Clear, well-described, focused, feasible plan and methodology with proper resources. The methodology is suitable and feasible. A clear plan is articulated, including a clear timeline to complete all objectives. If applicable, the proposed project builds on previous partnership work or activities and lessons learned to successfully meet goals.	Slight deficiencies, but overall a solid project. Project is feasible, personnel and partnerships are appropriate, and timeframe is doable. If applicable, the proposed project builds on previous partnership work or activities and lessons learned to successfully meet goals.	Minor deficiencies. Would benefit from more detail or a stronger focus. The project's work plan/approach generally outlines the applicant's goals and intent, but there is room for improvement as far as specificity of the work and/or the timeline. If applicable, the proposed project builds on previous partnership work or activities and lessons learned to successfully meet goals.	Several deficiencies. Omits discussion of one or more relevant aspects of the work plan, or personnel. If the applicant proposes to build upon previous partnership activities, the currently proposed project does nothing to build off past success and lessons learned.	Major deficiencies. Vague and confusing work plan. Unclear who is responsible for the project. Timeframe difficult to understand, unrealistic or not discussed. Required sections or details are missing.

Technical Merit Questions

- Is there a clear and well-conceived plan to fulfill the goals and objectives of the project, including activities, timeline, and resources and responsibilities for partners?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Is the timeline reasonable based on the planned activities? Does it clearly outline how the partnership will meet the intended goals and objectives?

- For a Planning/Design proposal, does the application provide a clear plan for recruiting and convening a diverse group of potential partnership members?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- For an Implementation/Expansion proposal, does the application include a description of how the project will build upon previous efforts?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Score →	12 – 15	8 – 11	4 – 7	1 – 3	0
Achievability 15 Points	Essentially no deficiencies. The proposed project is extremely likely to succeed based on its goals, objectives, and selected performance measures. The applicant has an exceptionally detailed plan to evaluate the work and collect feedback to achieve each relevant objective. The challenges discussed are realistic and the strategies to address them appear well-defined and practical. Outcomes and indicator(s) are appropriate for the scale and scope of the project.	Slight deficiencies. The proposed project is likely to succeed based on its goals, objectives, and selected performance measures. The applicant has a solid plan to evaluate the work and collect feedback to achieve each relevant outcome indicator(s). The challenges discussed are realistic and the strategies to address them are adequate. Outcomes and indicator(s) are mostly appropriate for the scale and scope of the project.	Minor deficiencies. The proposed project may succeed, but it is difficult to tell what degree. The applicant's evaluation plan needs improvement. The challenges discussed may be realistic and the strategies to address them relevant. The applicant could improve their plan to disseminate results of their work. The applicant could strengthen outcomes and indicator(s).	Several deficiencies. The proposed project is unlikely to succeed, and the work has been done before. There are few details regarding an evaluation plan. The challenges discussed are not realistic and the strategies to address them may not be adequate. The applicant does not have a clear plan to disseminate results, their outcomes and indicator(s) are few or are unclear.	Major deficiencies. The proposed project cannot fulfill its goals, objectives, and selected performance measures and the work is unoriginal. Required information and details are missing.

Achievability Questions

- Are the Outcomes and Indicators appropriate for the scale and scope of work proposed?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Has the applicant selected at least one Outcome and corresponding Indicator (as required)?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the application adequately describe a monitoring and evaluation plan for the project that includes what data is to be collected, how, when and by whom, in order to measure the project's results against original baselines?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Did the applicant describe any anticipated key factors that may restrict progress toward the selected Indicators, and action steps for addressing these factors?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- If the applicant provided an 'Optional" outcome for Outcome 4, did they 1) actually describe the outcome as required, and 2) provide at least one corresponding Indicator to measure progress towards that outcome?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the application describe how the partnership plans to continue beyond the grant's period of performance? (This can be about more than just getting more funding, such as having a target/goal for number of partners that enter into working agreements after the grant ends, etc.).

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Score →	21 – 25	15 – 20	8 – 14	1 – 7	0
Expertise and Partners 25 Points	Essentially no deficiencies. The applicant has clearly articulated the project's management plan and partnerships. The project's key participants are diverse and well-qualified to work on local and regional agricultural activities and their past performance illustrates that they can fulfill their obligations. Partners are actively engaged in the project and have a vested interest in helping fulfill the project's activities and outcomes. All participants are actively committed to communicating the results of the project to ensure success beyond the life of the grant.	Slight deficiencies. The applicant has articulated the project's management plan and partnerships. The project's key participants are mostly diverse and qualified to work on local and regional agricultural activities and they can fulfill their obligations. Partners are engaged in the project and have an interest in the applicant fulfilling the project's activities and outcomes. Participants are committed to communicating the results of the project to help sustain success beyond the life of the grant.	Minor deficiencies. The management plan and partnerships are not extraordinary, and the diversity and qualifications of key participants could be strengthened. Roles of partners are mentioned, but it's not entirely clear what role they will play in the project beyond achieving individual success. There is no clear indication that the partners will help communicate the project results to help sustain the project beyond the life of the grant.	Several deficiencies. The management plan and partnerships are severely lacking, or the qualifications of key participants are insufficient. There are few partnerships and if provided at all, are tangential or not included in the work plan/ approach. There is little to no plan to communicate the project results and there seems to be little interest in sustaining the project beyond the life of the grant.	Major deficiencies. There is no management plan and no mention of partnerships or cooperative linkages. There is no plan to communicate the project results and no mention of sustaining the project beyond the life of the grant. Required information and details are missing.

Expertise and Partners Questions

- Are letters of commitment in place from all partner organizations?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Is the partnership substantial and diverse enough to accomplish the project's goals and objectives?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Do the partners have sufficient overall experience to successfully implement the proposed project? If not, does the application describe how the partnership will address gaps in experience?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the application demonstrate a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants in partnership activities (such as planning or conducting workshops, hosting meetings, etc.)?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Does the application describe plans for coordination, communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the partnership and other stakeholder groups?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
Score →	9 – 10	6 – 8	3 – 5	1 – 2	0
Fiscal Plan and Resources 10 Points	Essentially no deficiencies. Budget clearly correlates to each project objective and accounts for all proposed activities. All items are allowed and reasonable. The overall budget is fully appropriate for the scope of the project. Stated infrastructure competently exists and will allow the project to start and be completed on solid footing and will even sustain the project beyond the grant's performance period. Letters of matching funds verify funding sources and demonstrate how valuations were established.	Slight deficiencies. Budget largely correlates to each of the project objectives and accounts for all major proposed activities and most minor proposed activities. All major items and most minor items are allowed and reasonable. The overall budget is appropriate for the scope of the project. Stated infrastructure exists and will allow the project to start on solid footing. Letters of matching funds verify majority, if not all funding sources and demonstrate how valuations were established.	Minor deficiencies. Budget may not consistently correlate to each project objective, but project goals will likely be met. Most major and minor items are allowable and reasonable. The overall budget is generally appropriate for the scope of the project. Stated infrastructure is appropriate but may not be sufficient to solidly start/complete the project. Letters of matching funds verify most funding sources and demonstrate how valuations were established.	Several deficiencies. Budget does not correlate well to the project. Some major and multiple minor items are not allowable and/or reasonable. The overall budget request may be over or underestimated for the scope of the project. Stated infrastructure are inadequate to insure on-time start of the project and weaken chances of success. Letters of matching funds cannot be clearly verified sources or demonstrate how valuations were established.	Major deficiencies. Many serious shortcomings in the budget. Many items are clearly not allowable and/or reasonable. There is no correlation between the budget and the project objectives. The overall budget request is significantly either too large or too small for the scope of the project. Required information and details are missing.

Fiscal Plan and Resources Questions

- Is the budget consistent with the size and scope of the project narrative? Are there elements in the project narrative not included in the budget, or vice versa?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Are the planned expenditures in the budget clearly described, reasonable, and necessary for the success of the project?
    - Strength
    - Weakness

- Has the applicant provided the required match letters for each match source listed in the application, and do those letters accurately correspond to the match resources described in the application's budget?
    - Strength
    - Weakness