SCALES
Supporting Community Agriculture & Local Education Systems

A collaborative project led by:

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Center for School and Community Partnerships

In partnership with:

LunchAssist

Request for Applications

Release Date: Monday, November 27, 2023
Application Due Date: 11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time (EST) on Friday, January 26, 2024
Anticipated Award Date: Monday, April 1, 2024

USDA

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture funds.
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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DEFINITIONS

Economically or Socially Disadvantaged Small Businesses: 1) Small businesses owned by individuals that have faced barriers to access the capital, markets, and networks they need to grow their businesses because of certain statuses or membership in certain groups, including membership in a group that has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias within American society and; 2) Small businesses in Community Development Financial Institution Investment Areas, which are generally low-income, high-poverty geographies that receive insufficient support for the needs of small businesses, including minority-owned businesses.

Equity: The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Food Industry: A network of agriculture, manufacturing, food processing, marketing, wholesale and food distribution, foodservice, farmers and retail markets, regulatory, education, research and development, and financial services.

Food System: Sum of the actors and their interactions in the supply chain that includes the procurement, production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food products.

Grant: An award to be provided by the pass-through entity (Boise State University) to a subrecipient SFA or school district, to carry out specific activities to support the overall project.

Local: There are many options for defining local, and definitions vary depending on the unique geography and climate where a school is located, and on the abundance of food producers and manufacturers. Local is sometimes defined as being within 400 miles, or within the same county, state, or region. Please note that the Food and Nutrition Service does not have a definition of "local" for food procurement purposes, either at the national or regional level. Applicants can propose a definition of local that suits their needs and goals.

Local Education Agency (or Local Education System): As defined by the United States Department of Education, an entity involved in education including but not limited to school districts, county offices of education, and direct-funded charter schools.

Key Performance Indicator: A measurement, provided as a number, which provides a quantifiable indicator of progress toward an intended result.

Rural School Food Authority: A school food authority in which the majority of students are enrolled in a rural school as defined by a locality code of 41 (Rural-Fringe), 42 (Rural-Distant), or 43 (Rural-Remote) according to the National Center for Education Statistics locale classification tool (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/maped/LocaleLookup/).

School Food Authority (SFA): The governing body which is responsible for the administration of one or more schools and has the legal authority to operate Federal school meal programs therein or is otherwise approved by USDA Food and Nutrition Service to operate Federal school meal programs.

School Meal: A meal that qualifies for reimbursement with Federal funds because it has met USDA requirements and nutrition standards for school meal programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, collectively referred to as the Program).

Underserved Communities: Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

A. Program Description

A.1. Background

Project SCALES (Supporting Community Agriculture and Local Education Systems) is an initiative to foster innovation among school food authorities (SFAs) across the United States, with an overall goal of supporting local innovations and collaborations that ensure a resilient, just, equitable, and nutritious school food system. Project SCALES is funded by a cooperative agreement between the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the Center for School and Community Partnerships at Boise State University, including a partnership with LunchAssist, and collaboration with other contributors.

Child nutrition programs buffer poverty and increase nutrition security and school meal programs—including the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program—reach millions of students across the nation. Therefore, increasing the accessibility and sustainability of these programs can improve health equity. Project SCALES seeks to fund innovative projects that leverage the strengths and capacities that exist in communities across the United States.

There will be two rounds of grants available through Project SCALES, with the first focusing on rural communities. Rural areas experience significant health inequities, with higher rates of food insecurity and obesity than urban and suburban areas. While the causes of these health inequities are multi-faceted, many rural areas have been historically and intentionally under-resourced. However, rural communities also have many strengths including connectedness and a commitment to collaborative solutions, and a tradition of growing innovative solutions.

On November 27, 2023, the application period will open for SFAs in rural communities to apply for the first round of funding for Project SCALES. The first cohort will be eligible to receive up to $150,000 in funding per SFA and will be expected to participate in a professional learning community with other grantees during the performance period of April 2024 through June 2026. Project SCALES will fund up to 35 rural SFAs in this first cohort. The funding is to be used for locally-driven projects that address a demonstrated need and which propose innovative solutions to increasing connections with local suppliers of foods and beverages for school meal programs. Additional detail about project activities is provided in Section A.4. below.

It is anticipated that Project SCALES will issue a request for applications in fall of 2025 for availability for a second round of funding. At that time, applications will open to SFAs from urban, suburban, township, and rural SFAs. It is anticipated that a second cohort of up to 35 SFAs will be selected for funding between April 2026 and June 2028.

This request for applications only pertains to the first round of funding.

A.2. Goals and Objectives

The Project SCALES goals and objectives include:
1) to improve the K-12 school food supply chain by incentivizing innovation;
2) to establish and/or strengthen partnerships between various entities of the food system, including schools, food producers, processors, distributors, and other potential partners;
3) to create a sustainable, resilient, equitable, and nutritious school food system; and
4) to collect and disseminate lessons learned and share best practices for cross-sector partnerships in the K-12 school food system.

We invite applicants to submit a proposal for grant funding to support projects that show clear potential for achieving these overarching goals, with specific and measurable project-specific goals that can be accomplished within the funding period. Applicants should propose new and innovative approaches for improving their local food system.

Success for the first cohort of Project SCALES is defined by the following key performance indicators. Grant recipients will be asked to track and report these metrics to the Project SCALES team annually during the grant period:
1. Total dollars spent each school year on local food and beverage purchases.
2. Percentage of SFA food budget spent on local products.
3. Number of local food producers, aggregators, distributors, and coops that are partners/suppliers for each SFA.
4. Average daily participation (% students) for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

In addition, a variety of other project-specific metrics may be appropriate, depending on the activities conducted for each SFA's project. We do not expect all of these metrics to be collected, and the Project SCALES team will work with grantees on plans for how to collect performance indicators. Possible additional indicators include:
5. Types and frequency of activities and events held to promote school meals.
6. Changes in student attitudes about various food items and local foods/beverages.
7. Impacts on farmers/growers (i.e., production, staffing, revenue, sustainability).
8. Impacts on SFA budgets including per meal costs and operations (i.e., food cost percentage and labor cost percentage).
9. Other impacts on the both the school and commercial food marketplace such as changes in availability of locally-grown products regionally as a result of stimulating student-driven demand for products.

A.3. Description of Project SCALES Grants

Project SCALES will award up to $150,000 per rural SFA, in this first cohort. Up to 35 SFAs will be selected. Applicants should propose new and innovative approaches for improving their local food system (described below in Section A.4.). Substantial support for the implementation and evaluation of each SFA's project will be provided by the Project SCALES team. One person from each SFA is expected to attend a national Healthy Meals Summit (the date is yet to be determined but will likely be in the Fall of 2025). The Project SCALES team will work with USDA FNS and our dissemination partners to highlight SFA projects through press releases, blogs, website features, and social media channels. Collaboration from grantees is expected for gathering information to be used in developing these case study highlights and other reports, and to disseminate lessons learned.

The scoring criteria for applications are outlined in Section E.1.

A.4. Activities and Strategies

Applicants should propose activities that align with Strategies 1 and 2 (below). Activities should align with the list of key performance indicators for the overall Project SCALES initiative, listed in Section A.2. This includes the required indicators, as well as any other project-specific indicators that are relevant. Additional performance indicators may be suggested by applicants, and will be discussed and confirmed during the initial collaborative work with the Project SCALES team. These will drive the activities that will occur during the grant period. At the beginning of the award period, the Project SCALES team will work with each funded SFA to assess needs and readiness; develop a logic model; refine goals and strategies; identify process measures; and identify ways to monitor, document, and report (to the Project SCALES team) each key performance indicator.

Applicants are encouraged to think creatively about innovative solutions to meet the initiative's goals. Two broad types of strategies support these goals. Within each strategy area, applicants must describe specific activities.

Strategy 1: Partnerships (required)
Proposals must identify at least one external partner (not a school employee, student, or parent) to be involved throughout the duration of the project. A list of potential partner organizations is provided below, but applicants are encouraged to consider a variety of cross-sector partnerships, possibly including partners from sectors that may not regularly be included in the food system. The application should describe the roles and responsibilities of each partner, and the activities that will occur with these partners. Partnerships can be existing, developing, or new partnerships. The project director must obtain and submit a letter of support for the project from at least one external partner.

Potential partners (include at least one from this list):
- Food councils (e.g., State or community level food policy councils).
- Food producers (e.g., farmers, ranchers).
- Producer networks or associations.
- Food processing, distribution, or aggregation businesses.
- Farmers markets organizations.
- Community supported agriculture (CSA) networks/associations.
- Other agencies and businesses that may help to innovate (e.g., transportation, storage, software).

In addition to partnerships with external organizations, we encourage applicants to build local partnerships within their school district or system (i.e., their local education agency) and local community, by engaging teachers and school staff; students; and families or caregivers in their school meal programs' local procurement efforts. Promoting increased student and family engagement can support resilient food programs by driving demand and ensuring predictable participation levels among students. Partnerships with other district-level and school-level staff can support program sustainability.

Additional relevant partners in addition to those listed above (optional but encouraged):
- Parent groups and/or parent-teacher organizations.
- Other educators internal to the SFA, school district, or school such as teachers, counselors, social workers, and/or wellness committee members.
- Organized student groups (e.g., student councils, 4-H).
- Cooperative extension services.
- Community-based organizations.
- Relevant state agencies (e.g., Departments of Education, Agriculture, Health).

There are a variety of activities that could be supported by grants. Below is a list of some potential activities, but these are not the only partnership activities that can be proposed. We encourage applicants to think creatively about innovative and transformational partnership activities.

Potential activities for Strategy 1:
- Conduct local consensus discussions with community members.
- Capture and share local knowledge to spark interest in partnerships.
- Build a coalition, cooperative, or collective impact network.
- Collaborate with state agencies on implementation of the USDA Local Food for Schools (LFS) program or other relevant initiatives.
- Establish agreements with farmers markets or community supported agriculture hubs.
- Work with existing suppliers to support new producers, by mentoring new and beginning local farmers who are interested in learning how to become school food suppliers.

- Work with partners to conduct a comprehensive regional food system assessment to understand local barriers and opportunities.
- Organize student advisory boards.
- Increase demand for local foods through promotion strategies.
- Include small and large food producers and processors in promotional activities.
- Build school-level teams to plan and guide implementation of cafeteria changes.
- Involve students and families in building cross-sector partnerships.
- Conduct focus groups or listening sessions with school employees, parents, students, and/or community members to gather information on priorities and to gain supporters and champions.
- Organize learning sessions for farmers interested in selling to schools.
- Organize buyer-grower meet-ups for schools and local producers to meet and discuss potential partnerships.
- Engage students or parents in hosting cafeteria taste tests of local foods or developing recipes.

Strategy 2: Preparation (required)

Several types of efforts can improve preparation–sometimes described as capacity or readiness—to implement innovations. This includes changing physical structures, knowledge, skills, readiness, attitudes of key individuals, and pilot testing before large-scale changes are implemented. These can be particularly important when combined with innovative partnerships.

Potential activities for Strategy 2:

- Revise and reconfigure production systems for school food service, including the purchase of necessary materials and supplies.
- Improve skills of food service personnel through training initiatives.
- Change schedules or workflow to improve processing capacity.
- Build logistical capacity to coordinate crop production and menu planning.
- Develop agreements to improve transportation coordination.
- Identify innovative processing and warehousing solutions.
- Pilot test changes on a small scale before scaling up.
- Develop and test recipes using whole and local foods.
- Include kitchen staff in the development and monitoring of new processes and procedures.
- Schedule informational meetings with key district leaders to proactively discuss new logistics and project details.
- Hire full or part-time personnel to develop a local procurement program.

A.5. The Project SCALES Implementation Support Model

The Project SCALES model involves establishing a professional learning community and providing targeted technical assistance (TA) and implementation support for grantees. SFAs that are selected to receive grants will receive TA for carrying out procurement activities, building partnerships, and evaluating and monitoring key performance indicators. In addition, activities such as group learning sessions, mentoring, coaching, and access to resources, videos, and tip sheets will be provided to support implementation. These activities will be led by LunchAssist, a key partner on the Project SCALES team. LunchAssist is an independent and impartial organization that supports nutrition professionals in following federal and state regulations. They have developed an extensive collection of innovative TA tools, training materials, curated resources, consulting strategies, and an online learning management system. These tools all provide online support and a professional learning community for school districts and community partners.

Implementation supports will include: 1) proactive virtual engagement by LunchAssist's TA specialist, including regular support calls; 2) monthly group learning sessions on relevant topics, followed by team problem-solving; and 3) password-protected access to LunchAssist's online learning management system with resources relevant to local procurement, as well as additional materials relevant to this project.

Grantees will be expected to be active participants in the professional learning community. We encourage applicants to budget for staff time to participate in these activities, as well as time to participate in the required evaluation and reporting activities.

A.6. Identifying Successes and Lessons Learned: Evaluation Expectations

A key objective of Project SCALES and the USDA FNS Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative is to identify effective innovations. We will evaluate processes and outcomes of each SFA's project through a case study to capture lessons learned and success stories. The Project SCALES team will conduct the overall project evaluation activities, which grantees are expected to support. Grantees may be asked to assist in evaluation activities, including: participate in interviews, distribute surveys, provide administrative data (i.e., meal participation rates, financial data, vendor/supplier information), and/or participate in other evaluation activities as requested. We will develop and share reports about participating sites and will expect collaboration in creating and reviewing these materials to highlight grantee activities that are supported with Project SCALES funding.

In addition, we expect grantees to track their own activities and progress toward performance indicators, and to detail those processes and outcomes in regular quarterly reports. The Project SCALES team will work with each grantee to review proposed process and outcome indicators, develop a logic model, and establish an action plan.

Active participation in the project evaluation activities is expected from grantees. We do not require grantees to have substantial expertise in collecting data, and the Project SCALES team will provide guidance and support for grantees to complete site-level evaluation activities.

A.7. Centering Equity

Rural areas experience significant health inequities, with higher rates of food insecurity and obesity than urban and suburban areas. While the causes of these health inequities are multi-faceted, many rural areas have been historically and intentionally under-resourced. We adopt the definition of equity as "the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals—including individuals who live in underserved communities that have been denied such treatment."[1]

Figure 1: Getting to Equity Framework

Because child nutrition programs buffer poverty and increase nutrition security,[2] increasing the reach, accessibility, and sustainability of these programs can improve equity. Changes in policies, systems, laws, and practices are powerful ways to reduce injustices for individuals due to their race, ethnicity, economic status, or locale. Consequently, reductions in inequity can improve health.

Project SCALES grounds our work in the *Getting to Equity (GTE) framework*[3] developed by Dr. Shiriki Kumanyika. This provides a framework for how grantees can consider equity in systems-change initiatives (Figure 1). We encourage applicants to consider the GTE framework in their project plans and to specify how their strategies may improve equitable outcomes through policy and systems change interventions. Several opportunities can improve equity, such as: considering the need for multi-lingual communications; building strategic partnerships; leveraging community resources; centering voices with lived experience; and catalyzing existing community capacity.

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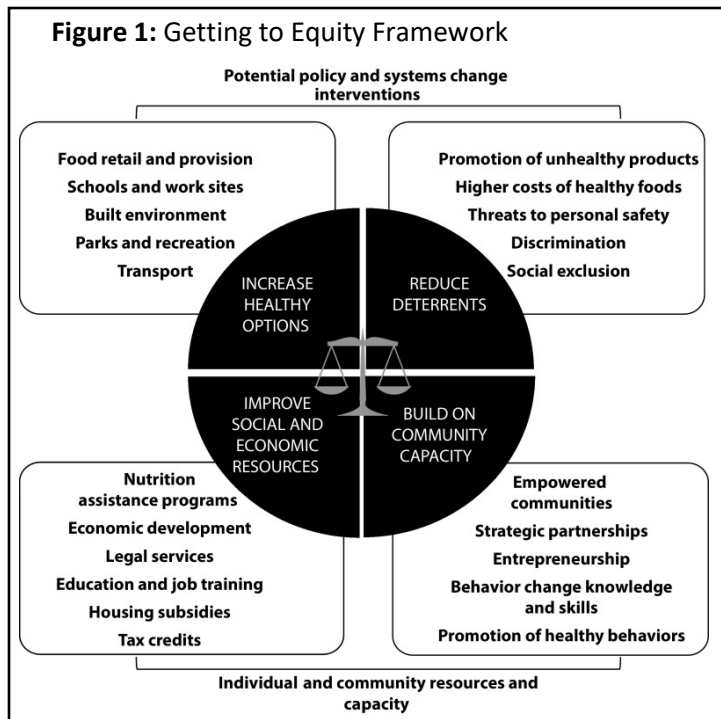
[1] Braveman PA, Arkin E, Proctor D, Kauh T, Holm N. Systemic and structural racism: definitions, examples, health damages, and approaches to dismantling. *Health Affairs*. 2022;41(2):171-178.

[2] Ralston K, Treen K, Coleman-Jensen A, Guthrie J. *Children's Food Security and USDA Child Nutrition Programs*. EIB-174. US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. 2017.

[3] Kumanyika SK. A framework for increasing equity impact in obesity prevention. *American Journal of Public Health.* 2019;109:1350-1357.

B. Federal Award Information

B.1. Overview

1. Total amount of funding available in this round: $5,250,000
2. Anticipated number of subawards: Up to 35
3. Anticipated amounts of grants: Up to $150,000 per SFA. Less funding can be requested if it is not needed, and it will not impact the application's score.
4. Period of performance: April 2024– June 2026

Key Dates [Cohort 1 only]
Optional Indication of Intent: Wednesday, December 20, 2023
Informational Webinar (English): Wednesday, December 6, 2023
Informational Webinar (Spanish): Wednesday, December 13, 2023
Application Deadline: Friday, January 26, 2024 (11:59 PM ET)
Notification of Awards: Monday, March 18, 2024
Funding Begins: Monday, April 1, 2024
Summit: Anticipated in Fall 2025
End of Funding Period: June 30, 2026
Cohort 1 Grantee Final Reports Due: August 1, 2026

B.2. Funding Type

This funding will be provided through grants, for which Boise State University will be the cooperator through USDA FNS. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis, determined by review of all applications with criteria described in Section E.1.

Funds will made available to grantees in two time periods: up to $90,000 will be available for the two budget periods between April 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. Another $60,000 will be available for the budget period between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026. Quarterly and annual financial reporting will be required. Drawdowns are to be made quarterly.

B.3. Funding Description and Allowable Costs

We will award up to $150,000 per SFA. All requested costs must be allowable, allocable, necessary, and reasonable in accordance with the OMB CFR Cost Principles including 2 CFR Part 200 and 2 CFR Part 400. Costs not allowed include but are not limited to: food/beverage purchases; lobbying; promotional swag; capital equipment; and gift cards, cash, or other monetary prizes.

Budgets may include expenses related to supplies, personnel, technology, marketing and promotion, training, travel and meetings, consultants, and contracts. All budget amounts should be in whole dollars. Budgets may request funding for a variety of needs, including:

1. Supplies (e.g., kitchen supplies such as knives, storage, blenders), less than $5,000 over the entire performance period.
2. Personnel costs (salary/benefits for new positions or for release time for current personnel).
3. Software (e.g., to enhance collaboration, menu planning).
4. Marketing and promotion activities (e.g., design and/or printing of brochures or posters for meal promotion activities and events).
5. Travel, including local travel to meet with partners, and national travel for learning/training purposes. Travel must be needed/justified using the per diem rates established in 41 CFR Part 301.
   - Grantees must budget for travel costs for one team member to attend the Healthy Meals Summit. Although the location and dates are not yet decided, this is anticipated to be a two-day meeting.
   - Because we are building a professional learning community, we recommend budgeting for one additional trip, as we will encourage site visits to share learning with other sites in the cohort.

We particularly encourage applicants to allocate project funding toward staffing costs, in order to increase capacity for efforts designed to implement innovations. This includes activities that can help to achieve the Project SCALES goals of strengthening local food systems by increasing collaborative partnerships, and by increasing student engagement in school food systems. Community partners should be compensated for their time and allowable expenses.

Indirect costs may be included at a de minimis rate of 10%, or at the rate that has been negotiated by each state education agency, to be applied to local education agencies. However, please also note that, as defined in the Education Department General and Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), 75.563 and 76.563, restricted rates apply to grants such as Project SCALES, which are made under federal programs with supplement-not-supplant requirements. This means that the funds are for support in addition to state and local funding. Such amounts are intended to supplement, but not replace local funds. Restricted grants include only indirect costs consisting of general management costs and fixed charges.

C. Eligibility Information

C.1. Eligibility

Grants will be made to SFAs (or school districts) as the primary entity. We encourage SFAs to identify and list potential local or regional partners in their application. At least one or more of these partnerships must be formalized at the time of application with a letter of support.

In this first round of funding, all grantees must be rural SFAs. A rural SFA is defined as having a majority of students within the SFA enrolled in a school that is defined as rural by the National Center for Education Statistics with rural locale codes of 41 (Fringe), 42 (Distant), or 43 (Remote).

C.2. Cost Share

Cost-sharing is not required.

C.3. Other Eligibility Criteria

Each SFA may submit only one application. Suspended or debarred entities are ineligible to submit applications. Applications not received through the online submission portal by the deadline will not be reviewed. Applicants will receive an email notification of confirmation of submission with the time and date of submission.

C.4. Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which an applying SFA may unfairly benefit through this project. SFAs are not eligible to apply if they have previously collaborated on a research or service project with any members of the Project SCALES team. SFAs that have contracted with LunchAssist as clients or members of LunchAssist PRO are not eligible for this project. SFAs that have completed a survey or an interview as part of the team's research projects are not considered ineligible, but prior partnerships involving more-substantial data collection or involvement in research studies will require consultation with the Project Director and/or USDA FNS. SFAs that have received Farm to School funding are eligible to apply but should be sure to describe prior projects in their application. If no conflicts of interest exist, please state that in the application.

D. Application and Submission Information

D.1. Application Materials

Templates for all application materials are all available through hotlinks in this document. Printable copies may also be obtained at www.ProjectSCALES.com.

D.2. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applications must be submitted online through our web portal at www.ProjectSCALES.com. Applicants will be required to register for an account on this site. Potential applicants are encouraged to register early and complete an "Indication of Intent" so that we can plan for the review process and can provide support if applications are started but not submitted.

Applications must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on Friday, January 26, 2024. All applications will be confirmed by email with a date and time stamp noting when the application was received. We encourage applicants to check for this email to verify that their submission was successful.

Additional Submission Requirements
1. Electronic submission is required through the portal at www.ProjectSCALES.com. This is a secure portal requiring password access and internet access.
2. Late application submissions will not be reviewed. Revisions or additional materials and supporting documents will not be accepted after the deadline.
3. Applications submitted without all of the required elements (including: project plan, budget, letter of support from superintendent) will not be reviewed.
4. Applications from ineligible entities will not be reviewed.

For technical assistance during the application process, support is available by emailing info@ProjectSCALES.com. As noted in Section B.1., we have scheduled sessions to provide more information about the application process. In addition, appointments can be made if technical support is needed. Support can be made available in other languages if needed.

D.3. Required Application Components

Cover Page (fillable form). This includes information about:
- Type of Agency
- SFA/Charter Information: Name, Address, Website, EIN
- Programmatic Point of Contact (SFA Director): Name, Title, E-Mail, Phone Number
- Superintendent Information: Name, Title, E-Mail, Phone Number
- Are there any potential conflicts of interest with members of the Project SCALES team and/or USDA FNS.

Executive Summary (not to exceed 300 words). Summarize the project in plain language which would be understandable for someone in your local community. Summarize the goals, activities, and objectives of the project, as well as the innovation and significance of the project for improving school food system resiliency.

Programmatic Point of Contact (SFA Director) credentials and professional experience (not to exceed 300 words).
Please briefly describe the credentials (e.g., RD, SNS) and the child nutrition background of the director of your SFA. If this person will not be the programmatic point of contact for your project, please also provide information about the project director.

Project Team (not to exceed 500 words). Describe key personnel who will work on this project and the percentage of time they will commit to the project. Describe new or existing partnerships or agreements with external partners and summarize the roles and responsibilities of each team member throughout the project. Purchasing from socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers is not required, but it is encouraged, and applications can receive additional points in the review process for these elements (See Section E.2.) Include information about the characteristics of potential suppliers such as farmers/ranchers and other partners (i.e., size of the business in terms of revenue and distance from your SFA), as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of owners (i.e., whether owners meet USDA's definition of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers).

Brief Description of the Community Served (not to exceed 1,000 words)
Please tell us—in your own words—what your community is like. What are the challenges and strengths of your local community and, in particular, who are the students served by your child nutrition programs? How many students do you feed daily (average daily participation for breakfast and lunch)? What are the issues those students and families face? We encourage you to use publicly-available demographic information to describe your community (i.e., US Census Bureau's American Community Survey, whether your community is considered an Opportunity Zone, current and past information about the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals or your school's Identified Student Percentage, or other indicators of disadvantage and/or lack of resources). Please tell us about the agricultural businesses in your area and what you see as potential partnerships that could address supply chain issues and improve the availability of nutritious foods and beverages for K-12 systems.

Description of Recent and Ongoing Challenges for Your School Meal Programs (not to exceed 1,000 words)
The pandemic caused many supply chain issues and, as a result, rapid innovation occurred in school meal programs to meet the urgent needs of students, families, and communities. We know that some of those issues have changed, while some continue to be problematic. Please

describe your current purchasing arrangements and what, if any, type of local procurement has been possible in your community or region. What challenges have you faced when procuring local foods for your meal programs, if any, and what opportunities are there to procure more foods locally? What is the local food landscape in your community or region?

Description of the Project (not to exceed 1,500 words)
Please describe the project plan. What are the key performance indicators that will be used to evaluate outcomes? Discuss the design, procedures, and activities to be completed**.** Describe partners and what types of activities will occur to enhance those partnerships. Identify members of the team who will lead specific aspects of the project. Provide a timeline that includes major project activities and milestones (this can be uploaded separately in the application portal as a one-page PDF, with a chart or figure to illustrate the timeline). State how the activities will consider equity, and how the project will be monitored to ensure that it does not exacerbate existing inequities. Please specify project goals and activities that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).

Innovation and Significance (not to exceed 1,000 words)
Please address the broader impacts of this project, and how it may shift current paradigms through novel concepts, approaches, or interventions. Describe the potential impact of the proposed project locally, and how it can yield knowledge about resilient local food systems. How might you and the Project SCALES team be able to translate your work to the larger community? Please describe what it would mean if this project were successful, and what next steps might build upon, scale up, or translate the lessons of this project to new contexts as well as potential to create permanent procedures and systems to sustain the work.

Change Management (not to exceed 500 words)
Systems change can be invigorating and fun, but also slow and challenging. When an initiative does not go as planned, how will you address barriers? Describe any prior experience with local procurement efforts, including prior external funding such as farm to school grants, and discuss what has worked and what has not.

Sustainability (not to exceed 500 words)
How will you sustain the positive changes made during your project so they endure after the grant term has ended? Describe the future of this project and how will you support it beyond the grant.

Collaborative Technical Assistance and Professional Learning Community (not to exceed 500 words)
We are seeking applicants who will actively participate in activities to support implementation, which include: 1) proactive virtual engagement with LunchAssist's TA specialist, including regular support calls; 2) monthly group learning sessions on relevant topics, followed by team

problem-solving; and 3) password-protected access to LunchAssist's online learning management system with resources relevant to local procurement. Describe your team's commitment to participating in these learning activities and willingness/readiness to make systematic changes to your meal programs.

In addition to a narrative response, the application module will also ask applicants to respond to the question "On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to take an active role in the virtual technical assistance and group learning sessions provided by LunchAssist?" with responses from 1 = not very likely to 10 = very likely.

Budget and Budget Narrative (no page limit). Provide detailed information for your budgetary needs and how the budget will be used. Funding may be used for allowable costs as described in Section B.3. Project periods will begin April 1, 2024 through June 30, 2026. A budget template and sample are available here.

Timeline Figure/Chart (1 page, optional).

District Administrator Letter of Support (required; no word limit).

Partner Letters of Support (at least one is required; no word limit).

E. Application Review Information

E.1. Criteria

All applications will be reviewed using the following criteria and point assignment:

Need (10 points)
▪ Does the application use reliable and valid sources of data (i.e., American Community Survey) to describe the community context?
▪ Does the application clearly identify the need in the community?
▪ Does the application clearly describe supply chain challenges faced by the SFA?
Equity (5 points)
▪ Does the application show potential for meaningful impact on equity by supporting underserved communities' access to healthy school foods?
▪ Has the Getting to Equity framework been incorporated into the application?
▪ Does the application propose to contract or partner with businesses with economically or socially disadvantaged owners?
▪ Will results be relevant to underrepresented and disadvantaged farmers/growers?
▪ Will results be relevant to SFAs that serve disadvantaged students?
Innovation and Significance (30 points)
Innovation (15 points)
▪ Does the project innovatively address a challenge in school food systems?
▪ Does the application seek to shift current paradigms through novel concepts, approaches, or interventions?
Significance (15 points)
▪ What is the scale of the potential impact on school food systems and markets?
▪ Will the project contribute towards improving the nutritional profile of school foods?
▪ Does the project have the potential to improve the foods marketed to students?
▪ Does the project increase the availability of and access to local foods in schools?
▪ Does the project have potential to inform broader knowledge about innovative solutions to local procurement that may work in other US communities?
▪ Could the project have transformative impacts to inform best-practice guidelines?

Goals, Activities, and Outcomes (20 points)

- Is the project plan as specified in the "Description of Project" clear?
- Is the overall plan for activities well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the goals?
- Is the project SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)?
- Does the application clearly describe the activities to occur during the project period, as well as what, how, and by whom each activity will occur?
- Does the application outline goals and objectives?
- Will the project use one or more key performance indicators as described in the RFA?
- Is it likely that the project will produce measurable outcomes within two years?

Capacity and Feasibility (20 points)

Capacity (10 points)

- Does the application demonstrate an understanding of challenges facing SFAs in meeting meal pattern standards?
- Does the application demonstrate an organizational commitment to child health broadly, and to nutrition specifically?
- Does the application confirm that the programmatic point of contact will be able to engage fully in the activities of the professional learning community?
- Is the programmatic point of contact positioned to be successful (having institutional support, relationships, experience, and a willingness to learn, and to share what they learn with others)?
- Does the application demonstrate the SFA's capacity and readiness for change?

Feasibility (10 points)

- Does the application indicate the willingness to collaborate with the Project SCALES team on process and outcome evaluation activities?
- If the project builds on existing work, what evidence exists for feasibility?
- If the work is in earlier stages of development, what is the likelihood of feasibility and how will any risky aspects be managed?
- Are potential problems and alternative strategies presented?

Partnerships (10 points)

- Does the project involve a partner organization in a meaningful way?
- Does the project have the potential to benefit communities through support from the food industry?

Sustainability (5 points)

- Are the activities to be completed during the project period likely to be sustainable beyond the end of the subaward period without additional funding?
- Does the SFA have a plan for sustaining local procurement after the grant ends?

E.2. Review and Selection Process

All eligible applications submitted by the deadline will be screened for further review. Each will be reviewed separately by three reviewers, including at least one from the Project SCALES team and at least one external reviewer with relevant content expertise. Each application will be scored using the application review criteria with points assigned as noted in Section E.1. Once reviews are completed, scores will be averaged. Applications will be divided into seven (7) groups based on USDA regional office location. The Project SCALES team will discuss the top 10 applications within each region. A proposed list of finalists will be generated, based on point scores. SFA characteristics (i.e., demographics including race/ethnicity and poverty) and community characteristics (i.e., location in a Qualified Opportunity Zone) will be considered when selecting grantees. In addition, because many SFAs have limited capacity for grant development, we will give priority to applicants who have not previously been able to secure grant funding for local procurement projects, but who score in an acceptable range on the evaluation criteria. Prior to selection of grantees, a list of finalists and recommended awardees will be presented to USDA FNS for review and discussion.

USDA FNS will review the funding recommendations compiled by the Project SCALES team, and will make final decisions about awards. USDA FNS may select applications that were not proposed for funding by the Project SCALES team.

E.3. Anticipated Announcement and Federal Award Dates.

We anticipate notifying applicants of selection by March 18, 2024.

F. Administrative Requirements

F.1. Audits of Project

Records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or any other relevant party are subject to examination by the cooperator, Boise State University, and/or the granting agency (USDA) or their designee as appropriate. This requirement will last for three (3) years from the grant agreement end date, receipt and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all federal and program retention requirements under 2 CFR 200.334, whichever is later.

F.2. USDA Privacy Policy

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service does not collect any personal identifiable information without explicit consent. To view the Agency's Privacy Policy, visit: https://www.usda.gov/privacy-policy.

F.3. Confidentiality of an Application

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of FNS transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. Any application that does not result in an award will be not released to the public. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

F.4. Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information

Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is any information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, such as name, social security number, date and place of birth, mother's maiden name, or biometric records, and any other information that is linked or linkable to an individual, such as medical, educational, financial, and employment information (National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) SP 800-122, Guide to Protecting the Confidentiality of Personally Identifiable information, April 2010).

Applicants submitting applications in response to this RFA must recognize that confidentiality of PII and other sensitive data is of paramount importance to USDA FNS. All federal and non-federal employees (e.g., contractors, affiliates, or partners) working for or on behalf of FNS are required to acknowledge understanding of their responsibilities and accountability for using and protecting FNS PII in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974; Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-06-15, Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information; M-06-16, Protection of Sensitive Agency Information; M-07-16, Safeguarding Against and Responding to the Breach of Personally Identifiable Information; and the NIST Special Publication (SP) 800-122, Guide to Protecting the Confidentiality of Personally Identifiable Information.

By submitting an application in response to this RFA, applicants agree that all data exchanges conducted throughout the application submission and pre-award process (and during the performance of the grant, if awarded) will be conducted in a manner consistent with applicable federal laws. By submitting a grant application, applicants agree to take all necessary steps to protect such confidentiality, including the following: (1) ensuring that PII and sensitive data developed, obtained or otherwise associated with USDA FNS funded grants is securely transmitted; (2) ensuring that PII is not transmitted to unauthorized users, and that PII and other sensitive data is not submitted via email; and (3) data transmitted via approved file sharing services, CDs, thumb drives, etc., must be encrypted. Transmission of applications through WizeHive's Zengine portal for Project SCALES is secure, but by submitting an application package, the applicant is indicating that they are aware of and accept the terms and conditions of WizeHive and the Zengine platform.

F.5. Data Collection and Ownership

Any data, electronic files, or web pages developed or created from this initiative are the property of USDA FNS. At the end of the grant period, all materials, data, electronic files, or web pages will be the property of USDA FNS. The Project SCALES team at Boise State University will provide USDA FNS with appropriate releases for all photographs and other materials as directed, giving USDA sole ownership with unlimited rights to the use of these materials.

F.6. Regulations and Assurances

Applicants chosen for an award from this RFA must comply with the following:

Federal Regulations:
- 2 CFR Part 170: "Reporting Subaward and Executive Compensation Information"
- 2 CFR Part 417: USDA "Non-procurement Debarment & Suspension"
- 2 CFR Part 418: USDA "New Restrictions on Lobbying"
- 2 CFR Part 421: USDA "Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)"
- 41 USC Section 22 "Interest of Member of Congress"
- 7 CFR Part 15: "Nondiscrimination"

Cost Principles:
All requested costs must be allowable, allocable, necessary, reasonable, and in accordance with the OMB Code of Federal Regulations Cost Principles as follows:
- 2 CFR Part 200: Subpart E, Cost Principles
- 2 CFR Part 400

Assurances:
Civil Rights Compliance
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d-et seq.), USDA regulations at 7 CFR Part 15, Nondiscrimination, and Department of Justice regulations at 28 CFR Part 42, Nondiscrimination; Equal Employment Opportunity: Policies and Procedures
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.) and USDA regulations at 7 CFR Part 15a, Education Programs or Activities Receiving or Benefiting from Federal Financial Assistance
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 1681 et seq.) and USDA regulations at 7 CFR Part 15a, Education Programs or Activities Receiving or Benefiting from Federal Financial Assistance, and Department of Justice regulations at 28 CFR Part 41, Implementation of Executive Order 12250, Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Handicap In Federally Assisted Programs
- Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.) The Grantee assures that it will immediately take any measures necessary to effectuate the requirements in these laws,

regulations, and directives. The Grantee gives this assurance in consideration of and for the purpose of obtaining the funds provided under this agreement.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment (Title I), state & local government services (Title II), places of public accommodation, and commercial facilities (Title III). (42 U.S.C. 12101-12213)

F.7. Procurement Requirements

All funded awardees will be required to abide by Federal, State, and Local procurement and bidding requirements for all purchases. Methods of procurement must be in accordance with the OMB Code of Federal Regulations Procurement Standards, 2 CFR Part 200: Subpart D.

Code of Federal Regulations and Other Government Requirements:
This grant will be awarded and administered in accordance with the following regulations 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subtitle A, Chapter II. Any Federal laws, regulations, or USDA directives released after this RFA is posted will be implemented as instructed.

Government-wide Regulations:
- 2 CFR Part 25: "Universal Identifier and System for Award Management"
- 2 CFR Part 170: "Reporting Subaward and Executive Compensation Information"
- 2 CFR Part 175: "Award Term for Trafficking in-persons"
- 2 CFR Part 180: "OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-Procurement)"
- 2 CFR Part 200: "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"
- 2 CFR Part 400: USDA's implementing regulation of 2 CFR Part 200 "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"
- 2 CFR Part 415: USDA "General Program Administrative Regulations"
- 2 CFR Part 416: USDA "General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments"
- 2 CFR Part 417: USDA "Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension"
- 2 CFR Part 418 USDA "New Restrictions on Lobbying
- 2 CFR Part 421: USDA "Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)"
- 7 CRR Part 16: "Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations"
- 41 U.S.C. Section 22 "Interest of Member of Congress"
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public access to Federal Financial Assistance records shall not be limited, except when such records must be kept confidential and would have been excepted from disclosure pursuant to the "Freedom of Information" regulation (5 U.S.C. 552)

F.8. Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

G. Agency Contacts

Please direct questions to:

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Our LunchAssist partners:

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H. Other Information

This is a new initiative. Grants will not be renewed or extended. However, it is anticipated that a second round of grants will be available through a second Project SCALES funding opportunity that will open in November 2025, which will be open to SFAs from urban, suburban, township, and rural locales (i.e., not only rural locales). SFAs who receive funding in the first round will not be eligible for a second round of funding; however, SFAs that apply in the first round and are not awarded funding will be able to apply for the second round of funding if they meet those eligibility criteria.

Project SCALES is part of the USDA's Healthy Meals Initiative, which is described at *https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/healthy-meals-incentives*.

Similar subgrant opportunities are being funded by USDA through cooperative agreements with the Chef Ann Foundation, Full Plates Full Potential, and the Illinois Public Health Institute, which are also part of the USDA's School Food System Transformation Challenge.