



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:



Request for Applications for Cohort 2

Release Date: Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Application Due Date: Friday, December 13, 2024

Boise State University is now accepting applications for Cohort 2 grants, which will support schools, growers, producers, processors, and other food system partners to engage in innovative projects that increase capacity and relationships to serve nutritious, locally sourced, and culturally relevant products in school meals.



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DEFINITIONS

Community-based Organization (CBO): A nonprofit, non-governmental, or charitable organization that represents community needs and works to address them.

Culturally Relevant and Traditional Food: Food familiar to a community that celebrates a group's cultural and religious needs, preferences, and traditions.

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 groups that have 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, Latine, 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 (LGBTQ) 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, production, food processing, food aggregators, marketing, wholesale and food distribution, foodservice, farmers and retail markets, regulatory, education, research and development, and financial services.

Food Industry Partner: A partner that is defined as a food manufacturer, food producer, food processor, food aggregator, or food distributor. A food industry partner can be considered a small or large business or anything in between (see definition of small or large business).

Food Support Organizations: Nonprofit organizations working to improve the food system. This includes organizations focused on reducing hunger, advancing food justice and equity, promoting local agriculture, food systems education and engagement, and more.

Food System: A system consisting of procurement, manufacturing and production, processing, aggregating, distribution, and consumption of food products in the supply chain.

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

Historically Underfunded and/or 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.

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. Applicants may propose a definition of local that suits their project.

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.

School Food Authority (SFA): A governing body that has the legal authority to operate Federal school meal programs or is otherwise approved by USDA Food and Nutrition Service to operate Federal school meal programs.

School Food Marketplace: The exchange of goods, services, and labor between SFAs and distributors, manufacturers, and producers.

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., the National School Lunch Program, and the School Breakfast Program).

Small and Large Business: A small business is defined by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as a business with revenue from \$1 million to over \$40 million and employing from 100 to over 1,500 employees. Any other business above \$40 million and employing above 1,500 employees is a large business. This can also vary by industry type and is also defined by the SBA in a Table of Small Business Size Standards.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers: The USDA defines socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDFRs) as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice. SDFRs include farmers who are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander. For some but not all USDA programs, the SDFR category also includes women.

Social Responsibility: This is an ethical concept that refers to the idea that individuals and organizations should act in ways that benefit society as a whole. The organization has responsibility for the societal and environmental impacts of its decisions and activities, through transparent and ethical behavior that supports sustainable development, health, and societal welfare.

Value-Added Product: A product that has had a change in its original physical state or form, such as milling wheat into flour and making fruit into jam.

A. Program Description

A.1. Overview

Project SCALES (Supporting Community Agriculture and Local Education Systems) is funded by a cooperative agreement between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service and the Center for School and Community Partnerships at Boise State University. This funding opportunity is part of the USDA Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative’s School Food System Transformation Challenge Grants. This is the second of two rounds of grants available through Project SCALES. Cohort 1 (announced in April 2024) was focused on rural communities, with 12 projects funded.

On October 22, 2024, the application period will open for Cohort 2 grants. While the first round of grants focused on rural communities, Cohort 2 is open to rural, suburban, and urban communities. Cohort 2 grants will support the overall goals of the Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative by funding *innovative projects that seek to build and strengthen relationships among stakeholders in the school food system, increase local procurement of foods and beverages in school meal programs, strengthen the school food marketplace, include local and national producers, and invest in the infrastructure needed to sustain these changes*. Projects that bring new industry into the school food supply chain are of particular interest. Additional detail about project activities is provided in [Section A.3](#). below.

Applications will be accepted for projects that include teams of **at least three partners**, which must include at least one school food authority (SFA) or a group of SFAs. In addition, one of the partners must be from food industry (food manufacturer, producer, processor, aggregator, or distributor). There should be at least one additional partner from any sector involved in the food system. Funding periods for Cohort 2 grants will last **up to three years**, with projects beginning July 1, 2025, and ending no later than June 30, 2028. Funding is available in amounts ranging from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.

This RFA contains information on Cohort 2 grants, including eligibility requirements, project expectations and deadlines, how to apply, and other important information.

A.2. Goals

School meal programs—including the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program—buffer poverty and increase nutrition security for millions of students across the nation.¹ Increasing the reach and sustainability of these programs can improve equitable

¹ 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.

outcomes for students, families, and communities. The food industry is uniquely positioned to integrate innovative solutions to aid in transforming school food systems. Industry partners can address the challenges of a changing food system by taking on a social responsibility to leverage their resources for the benefit of the nation's students. Building strategic, innovative partnerships with food industry and leveraging community resources and capacity is essential for fostering a thriving local food system, and Project SCALES will invest in school food systems transformation through the funding of projects aligned to our overall initiative.

The Project SCALES goals include:

- **improving the K-12 school food supply chain** by incentivizing innovation and building partnerships between various entities of the food system including food manufacturers or producers;
- **reducing barriers for schools** related to sourcing, ordering, processing, and/or storing locally sourced foods and beverages;
- **supporting school nutrition teams** in using fresh local ingredients, being responsive to student preferences and cultural relevance, and increasing scratch cooking;
- **leveraging social responsibility of food industry** to create innovative solutions for the school food system; and
- **identifying sustainable solutions and best practices** for the K-12 food system that are scalable and replicable.

We invite applicants to submit a proposal for grant funding to support projects that show clear potential for achieving one or more of these goals.

A.3. Activities and Strategies

Applicants should propose innovative and collaborative approaches that reimagine what the school food system could look like, and which have the potential to be sustained and scaled elsewhere. Below is a list of some potential activities, but these are not the only ones that can be proposed. We encourage applicants to think creatively about innovative and transformational partnerships and projects, particularly those that bring new industry into the school food supply chain.

Potential activities:

- Develop a streamlined online ordering system for SFAs to order food from local growers, producers, or processors.
- Enhance statewide and/or regional distribution and storage infrastructure to address food access challenges for SFAs.
- Review and revise procurement contracts to include geographic preference options.

- Establish "forward contracting" to get producers committed to planting products pre-purchased by SFAs.
- Develop infrastructure to create value-added products ([see Definitions](#)) that meet the nutritional requirements of school meal programs.
- Develop regional school food hubs for food processing, batch cooking, storage, etc.
- Build operational capacity to coordinate crop production and menu planning.
- Improve transportation and delivery of local foods to schools.
- Develop agreements to improve transportation coordination.
- Identify and implement innovative processing and warehousing solutions.
- Work with food manufacturers to produce a new product for use in both school meal programs and in the commercial marketplace.
- 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.
- 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.

Project SCALES centers the concept 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.”² Because child nutrition programs buffer poverty and increase nutrition security, increasing the reach, accessibility, and sustainability of these programs can improve equity. Changes in policies, systems, and practices are powerful ways to reduce injustices for individuals due to their race, ethnicity, economic status, or locale. We encourage applicants to consider how their projects may improve equitable outcomes for individuals and communities through innovations and systems changes. Applications from teams that include organizations that represent historically underfunded or underserved communities will receive higher points on the Social Responsibility and Opportunity component of the scoring rubric ([see Section E.1.](#)).

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. Applicants working on local procurement goals may propose a definition of local that suits their project.

² 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.

A.4. Grant Teams

Applications will be accepted from teams of ***at least three partners***, which must include at least one SFA or group of SFAs that participates in the National School Lunch Program, and one partner from the food industry (a food manufacturer, producer, processor, aggregator, or distributor). At least one additional partner must be on the project team and that third partner may be an additional SFA or industry partner, or can be from another relevant sector, such as community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, small businesses, state government and/or local government agencies, or Indian Tribal Organizations.

One organization must be designated as the lead partner. The lead partner will be responsible for coordinating all grant activities and reporting requirements, and must demonstrate that they have the administrative and fiscal capacity to manage a grant of this size, as well as the capacity to ensure that the project activities are completed and that resources are divided appropriately and equitably among partners.

Potential 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 specific roles and responsibilities of each partner, and the activities that will occur with these partners. Partnerships can be existing, developing, or new partnerships.

Additional eligibility requirements are noted in [Section C: Eligibility Information](#).

A.5. Implementation Support

The Project SCALES team will provide expert technical assistance (TA) to facilitate project implementation by grantees. TA will be customized and proactive, designed to support each team's funded work. A variety of TA activities and resources will be offered to grantees, such as group learning sessions, mentoring, coaching, training videos, etc. TA 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.

A.6. Identifying Successes and Lessons Learned

A key goal of Project SCALES and the USDA FNS Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative is to identify effective innovations in the school food system. The Project SCALES team will help grantees track the outcomes of their projects. Grantees will be asked to participate in interviews, provide administrative data (i.e., financial data, vendor information), and/or other evaluation activities as requested. We will develop videos and printed stories about grantee projects and will expect grantees to collaborate in creating and reviewing these materials.

Success for Project SCALES is defined by key performance indicators. Grantees will be asked to track and report metrics to the Project SCALES team. A variety of project-specific metrics may be appropriate, depending on the activities conducted for each project. We do not expect all of these metrics to be collected, and the Project SCALES team will work with grantees on plans for the indicators they will use.

Grantees should expect indicators to potentially include:

- Number of new food products produced for inclusion in the school food marketplace.
- Number of new food providers (manufacturers, producers, processors, and aggregators) in the school food marketplace.
- Number of local industry partners committed to providing products to support SFAs in providing culturally relevant and traditional foods.
- Types and frequency of activities and events held to promote school meals.
- Impacts on farmers/growers (i.e., production, staffing, revenue, sustainability).
- Total dollars spent each school year by the SFA on local food and beverage purchases.
- Percentage of the SFA's food budget spent on local products.
- Number of local food producers, aggregators, distributors, and co-ops that are partners/suppliers for the SFA.
- Impacts of the project on SFA budgets, including per meal costs and operations (i.e., food cost percentage and labor cost percentage).
- Other impacts on the school and commercial food marketplace such as changes in availability of locally grown products as a result of stimulating student-driven demand.

B. Grant Information

B.1. Overview

- USDA and Boise State University anticipate awarding up to \$8.5 million in Cohort 2 grants.
- Anticipated number of grants: up to 17
- Funding requests can range from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.
- Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding for a proposed project.
- Cost-sharing (matching funds from grantees) is not required.

Important dates:

Application deadline: Friday, December 13, 2024 (11:59 PM ET)

Anticipated announcement of awards: May 2025

Funding begins: July 1, 2025

Funding ends: No later than June 30, 2028

Final grant reports due: August 1, 2028

Funding will be provided through subawards from Boise State University. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis, determined by review of applications with criteria described in [Section E.1](#).

B.2. Funding Description and Allowable Costs

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](#). Additional detail and examples are available in the Budget Instructions at www.ProjectSCALES.com.

Budgets may request funding for a variety of needs, including:

1. **Salaries and fringe benefits:** Salary/wages and associated fringe benefits to successfully plan and implement the project, including release time for existing positions or to create new positions. All staffing costs must be clearly linked to the project's activities.
2. **Equipment:** Equipment that has a per item cost greater than or equal to \$10,000 (e.g., cold storage, processing equipment), up to a maximum allowable cost of \$50,000 per item.
3. **Supplies:** Items with a per unit cost that is less than \$10,000 (e.g., kitchen supplies such as knives, storage, cutting boards, storage bins).
4. **Contractual:** Contracts with partner organizations or other contracted work.
5. **Other costs:**
 - Software (e.g., to enhance collaboration, menu planning).
 - Marketing and promotion activities (e.g., design and/or printing of brochures or posters for meal promotion activities and events).
 - Language translation services.
 - Other justifiable costs.
6. **Travel:** This includes local travel to meet with partners, and national travel for learning/training purposes.
 - Grantees must budget for travel costs for at least one team member to attend the two-day Healthy Meals Summit in Las Vegas, Nevada in October 2025.

We encourage applicants to allocate project funding toward staffing costs, to increase capacity for efforts designed to implement innovations, and to ensure their ability to engage in the required reporting, evaluation, and technical assistance elements of Project SCALES. This includes a suggested effort of at least 20% time for the project director at the lead organization. All partner organizations should be compensated for their time and allowable expenses.

Unallowable costs include, but are not limited to:

- Lobbying;
- Advertising and public relations costs not directly related to this funding opportunity;

- Capital improvements: funds cannot be used for any major improvement to facilities and infrastructure that would add to the permanent value of the building;
- Vehicles may not be purchased; however, vehicles may be rented for travel or leased for distribution purposes;
- Promotional swag and door prizes;
- Gift cards, cash, or other monetary awards; and,
- Food (such as for events, lunch, or meal services).

Indirect costs may be included at a de minimis rate of 15%, or at the rate specific to the lead applicant organization, if a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement exists. For SFA applicants, please 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

Projects must be collaboratively administered by ***at least three partners, with one lead partner and at least two partner organizations***. All partners should be involved in implementing the project. One of the three partners must be from the food industry and one must be a school food authority (SFA).

Potential partners include:

- School food authorities that operate the NSLP (at least one SFA is required)
- Food industry (at least one food industry partner is required). This includes:
 - ✓ Food manufacturers or producers
 - ✓ Food processors
 - ✓ Food aggregators (e.g., food hubs)
 - ✓ Food distributors
- Growers and producers (e.g., farms, orchards, ranches, fisheries)
- Food support organizations, including food systems-focused nonprofits
- Public sector agencies (e.g., local, county, or state government agency or department)
- Indian Tribal Organizations
- Community-based organizations
- Small businesses
- Other food system partners

Suspended or debarred entities are ineligible to submit applications. See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/debarred-list> for a list of debarred entities.

Applicants must have an active Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned to an entity by <https://sam.gov>.

- Existing entities can find their UEI by following the steps here: https://www.fsd.gov/gsafsd_sp?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0041254
- New entities can get a UEI by registering in the System for Award Management.
- Entities must maintain an active UEI throughout the grant period.

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.

Each team may submit only one application. The lead partner can be listed as a partner in other USDA HMI grants but cannot be the lead on more than one funded HMI project. Previous awardees cannot apply to this cohort.

All partners must be based in the contiguous United States, Hawaii, Alaska, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

D. Application Instructions

D.1. How to Apply

Templates for all application materials are available through hotlinks in this document or at www.ProjectSCALES.com.

Applications must be submitted online through our web portal at www.ProjectSCALES.com. This is a secure portal requiring password access and internet access. Applicants will be required to register for an account on this site. Potential applicants are encouraged to register early so that we can provide support if applications are started but not submitted.

Applications must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on Friday, December 13, 2024. Applications will be confirmed by email with a date stamp noting when the application was received. We encourage applicants to check for this email to verify that their submission was successful.

Late submissions will not be reviewed, and revisions will not be accepted after the deadline. Applications submitted without all required elements will not be reviewed. Applications from

ineligible entities will not be reviewed. Due to the anticipated volume of applications, the Project SCALES team will not be able to provide detailed feedback to applicants that are not selected for funding.

During the application process, support is available by emailing ProjectSCALES@boisestate.edu. Clarification to questions can be provided by email, or appointments for teleconference meetings can be scheduled if needed.

D.2. Recommendations for Submitting a Strong Application

- **Review the RFA and website carefully** before reaching out with questions. For questions, please email ProjectSCALES@boisestate.edu.
- **Write your application in a word processing program** (Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc.) so that it can be reviewed, edited, and saved prior to entering it into the online portal.
- **Read application questions carefully** to ensure you are answering all questions completely. Keep the word limits in mind for each section.
- **Be concise and clear.** Aim to keep your responses comprehensive yet succinct.
- **Use plain, easily understood language.** Limit the use of abbreviations and define acronyms at their first use.
- **Consider the audience.** Reviewers are knowledgeable about USDA child nutrition programs but may not be familiar with your community or geographic region.
- **Review scoring criteria** to ensure that your application addresses all criteria.
- **Double-check and proofread.** Prior to submitting your application, ensure that all required attachments are uploaded, and review the application for spelling, grammar, and clarity.

We strongly discourage the use of Artificial Intelligence programs when composing applications. Reviewers prefer to learn about the applicant organization/partners and the goals of the project in the authentic voice of the applicant.

D.3. Required Application Components

The following section specifies information that will be required in the application process. An application template is available online at www.ProjectSCALES.com.

Project Title

Lead Partner Organization

Name
Address
Type of Agency
Website
Universal Entity Identifier (UEI)

Project Director Contact Information

Name
Title
E-Mail Address
Phone Number

Partner Organization Names

Dates of Project

Total Amount of Funding Requested

Executive Summary (no more than 300 words). Summarize the project in plain language that 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. We suggest writing this summary after the rest of the application is prepared.

Project Team (no more than 1,000 words).

Describe the lead partner organization and the project director for the grant. Briefly describe the credentials and relevant expertise of the project director. Applicants that plan to hire for this role should include a job description. Project directors should have experience in grant management, child nutrition or food systems, and other skills that will ensure grant project success. Describe partner organizations and the role of each partner in the project. Share the history of collaboration between partners, if this is an existing collaboration. Partnering with organizations that serve [historically underfunded or underserved communities](#) is not required, but it is encouraged and will be considered in the review process ([See Section E](#)).

Community Setting (no more than 1,000 words).

What is the food landscape in your community or region? Describe the SFA (or multiple SFAs) that will be involved in the work. What are the challenges and strengths of the community and, in particular, who are the students served by school nutrition programs? How many students does the SFA feed daily (average daily participation for breakfast and lunch)? What are the issues those students and families face? We encourage the use of publicly-available demographic information to describe your community (i.e., US Census Bureau's [American Community Survey](#), current and past information about the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals or Identified Student Percentage, or other indicators of disadvantage and/or lack of resources). Describe the food industry partner or partners that will be involved in the work. How will the food industry partner contribute to the variety and availability of nutritious foods for K-12 systems? Describe how the food industry partner will leverage social responsibility to address innovative solutions for the food system. Describe potential suppliers such as farmers/ranchers and other partners (i.e., size of the business in terms of revenue), as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of owners (i.e., whether owners meet USDA's definition of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers).

Project Description (no more than 2,000 words).

Describe the project. Discuss the activities to be completed, and which members of the team will lead each aspect of the project. We strongly recommend that you 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 have the potential to support the goals of this RFA. Specify project goals and activities that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). What are the key performance indicators that will be used to evaluate outcomes for each activity? Describe the potential impact of the proposed project, and how it can yield scalable knowledge about resilient food systems.

Potential to Sustain the Innovation (no more than 500 words).

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. How will you sustain the positive changes made during your project so they endure after the grant term has ended?

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.2](#). Project periods will begin July 1, 2025, and must end by June 30, 2028. Carryover will not be allowed. A budget template and sample are available on the Project SCALES website. If your budget includes equipment purchases (i.e., equipment that has a per item cost greater than or equal to \$10,000), please upload at least two quotes for each piece of equipment as part of the budget PDF.

Timeline Figure/Chart (1 page, optional but recommended).

Letters of Commitment from Partners (required).

The lead applicant must include a letter of commitment from **each partner** in the application packet. Each letter should indicate the partner’s commitment to the proposal, and role on the project. Letters should be in PDF format, on letterhead, and signed by an authorized organizational leader. Please note that a letter is required from all of the SFAs/districts involved in the project, regardless of whether they are the lead applicant or a supporting partner. The SFA letter(s) should be on district letterhead and be signed by the superintendent (or charter school administrator).

Letters of Support (optional).

Applicants may upload additional letters of support from relevant organizations or individuals who are not serving formally as a partner on the team.

Do any of the partner organizations represent a historically underfunded and/or underserved community? (See Definitions)

- Yes
- No
- I’m not sure
- Prefer not to answer

E. Application Review Information

E.1. Scoring Rubric

All applications will be reviewed using the following criteria and point assignment, with up to 100 points possible:

Goals, Activities, and Outcomes (20 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Is the plan specified in the “Project Description” section clear?▪ Is the 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 that align with the RFA?▪ Will the project use key performance indicators as described in the RFA?
Innovation (15 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Does the project innovatively address a challenge in school food systems?▪ Does the project encourage innovative partnerships between food manufacturers and the school food system?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the project include innovations in new product development to meet school food system needs? ▪ Does the application seek to use novel concepts, approaches, or programs?
Significance (15 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the scale of the potential impact on school food systems and markets? ▪ Will the project improve the nutritional profile of school foods? ▪ Does the project have the potential to improve the foods marketed to students? ▪ Does the project have potential to inform knowledge that may work in other US communities?
Partnerships (20 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the project involve multiple partners in a meaningful way? ▪ Does the project include a food industry and SFA partnership? ▪ Does the project have the potential to benefit communities through support from the food industry?
Capacity (10 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the application demonstrate an understanding of challenges facing SFAs in meeting meal pattern standards? ▪ Does the application demonstrate an organizational commitment to child nutrition? ▪ Does the application confirm that the lead partner organization and project director will be able to engage in the technical assistance, reporting, and evaluation activities? ▪ Is the programmatic point of contact positioned to be successful (i.e., having institutional support, relationships, experience, and a willingness to share what they learn with others)?
Need (10 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the application use data 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 SFAs and/or food industry?
Social Responsibility and Opportunity (5 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the applicant demonstrate attention to social responsibility in the project design? ▪ Does the application show potential for meaningful impact on equity by supporting underserved communities' access to healthy school foods? ▪ Does the application propose to contract or partner with businesses with economically or socially disadvantaged owners? ▪ Will results be relevant to SFAs that serve disadvantaged students?
Sustainment of the Innovation (5 points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are the activities to be completed during the project period likely to be sustainable beyond the end of the grant period without additional funding? ▪ Does the applicant have a plan for sustaining the innovations after the grant ends?

E.2. Review and Selection Process

All eligible applications submitted by the deadline will be reviewed separately by three reviewers, scored using the review criteria and point system above. Reviewers will be required to sign a conflict of interest form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the review process, and will agree to keep all application materials confidential.

Once reviews are completed, scores will be averaged and applications will be sorted by score. Applications will be discussed by the Project SCALES team, and a list of proposed finalists will be sent to USDA FNS for review and discussion. USDA FNS will review the recommendations and the full application packets, and make final decisions about funding. USDA FNS may select applications that were not proposed for funding by the Project SCALES team.

We anticipate notifying applicants of selection in May 2025.

Due to the anticipated volume of applications, the Project SCALES team will not be able to provide detailed feedback to applicants that are not selected for funding.

F. Grantee Requirements

If awarded grant funding, the lead partner must sign a subaward agreement with Boise State University, indicating the intention to complete the proposed tasks by the end of the grant period and authorizing Boise State University to monitor the progress of the project. Grantees must commit to participating in all activities outlined below.

F.1. Evaluation

The Project SCALES team will be highly engaged many of the activities for evaluation (e.g., conducting interviews; advising grantees on gathering financial/purchasing data), however, grantees will be required to attend to these activities and should budget staff time accordingly. All grantees will be required to report on core metrics (e.g., number of dollars spent on local products). Grantees should also be prepared to track progress toward their project's unique objectives.

F.2. Financial and Progress Reporting

Grantees will be required to submit quarterly financial reports and quarterly progress reports, which will be due on January 15, April 15, July 15, and October 15 of each year the grant is active. These reports will detail how the project is progressing and how funds have been spent. The Project SCALES team will provide reporting templates. A final report will be due 60 days after the end of the period of performance. The lead partner's project director, or another

designee, will be responsible for completing and submitting these reports to the Project SCALES team.

F.3. Bi-Annual Virtual Progress Meetings

The project director for each grantee team will participate in a virtual meeting at least annually with the Project SCALES Director to review progress toward project goals.

F.4. Technical Assistance

Technical assistance from [LunchAssist](#) will be customized and proactive, designed to support each grant team's funded work. A variety of TA activities and resources will be offered to grantees, such as group learning sessions, mentoring, coaching, training videos, etc. Grantees will be expected to remain engaged in these meetings and networking opportunities provided through the Project SCALES Cohort 2 learning community.

F.5. Site Visits

Grantees will be expected to host and participate in a two-day, on-site visit with Project SCALES team members, up to two times during the grant period. USDA FNS may accompany the Project SCALES team on site visits. These visits will be planned far in advance and costs will be covered by Project SCALES, but grantees should budget for staff time to host site visits.

F.6. Travel

All grantees are expected to send at least one team member to the Healthy Meals Summit in Las Vegas, Nevada, in October 2025. The purpose of this summit is to recognize grantees, share best practices, and discuss strategies for sustaining achievements. This summit is the only required travel for grantees. Travel costs should be included in the submitted budget, including airfare, lodging, meals and other necessary expenses.

G. Administrative Requirements

G.1. Audits of Project

Records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or any other relevant party are subject to examination by 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 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.

G.2. USDA Privacy Policy

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

G.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 not be released to the public. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

G.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, the applicant is indicating that they are aware of and accept the terms and conditions of WizeHive and the Zengine platform.

G.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.

G.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)

G.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 CFR 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)

G.8. Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant’s name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted 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; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
Program.Intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

H. Contact Information

Please direct questions to:

Lindsey Turner, PhD

Project SCALES Director

Center for School and Community Partnerships

Boise State University

1910 University Drive

Boise, ID 83725-1742

Email: ProjectSCALES@boisestate.edu