**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development Division*



**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RFA Coordinator** | *All communication regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified below*.  **Name:** Michelle Webb **Title:** Director, Agricultural Resource Development  **Contact Information:** michelle.t.webb@maine.gov |
| **Submitted Questions Due** | *All questions must be received by the RFA Coordinator identified above by:*  **Date:** February 28, 2024, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **Proposal Submission Deadline** | *Proposals must be received by the Division of Procurement Services by:*  **Submission Deadline:** March 18, 2024, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time.  *Proposals must be submitted electronically to:* [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov) |

**Acknowledgment of Support**

Funding for the Maine 2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program was

made possible by a grant/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

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**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

The State of Maine is seeking proposals for the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). SCBGP is a grant program solicited annually, that funds market research, market promotion, and innovation projects that enhance the competitiveness of and create new markets for the state’s specialty crop producers. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and a review committee select projects to recommend to the USDA through a local competitive application process. If approved by the USDA, projects will become part of a State of Maine plan submitted for USDA AMS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding. SCBGP will not award grant funds for projects that benefit a single organization; single entities are encouraged to apply as project partners.

A copy of the RFA, as well as the Question & Answer Summary and all amendments related to the RFA, can be obtained at: [https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfps)

Proposals must be submitted to the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services, via e-mail, at: [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov). Proposal submissions must be received no later than 11:59 p.m., local time, on March 18, 2024. Proposals will be opened the following business day. Proposals not submitted to the Division of Procurement Services’ aforementioned e-mail address by the aforementioned deadline will not be considered for contract award.

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**RFA TERMS/ACRONYMS with DEFINITIONS**

The following terms and acronyms, as referenced in the RFA, shall have the meanings indicated below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Term/Acronym** | **Definition** |
| **Acknowledgment of Support** | The following acknowledgment of USDA funding must appear in all published materials or products, in any format (web sites, audiovisuals, etc.), that are substantially based upon or developed under an AMS award: *Funding for [Project or Publication] was made possible by a grant/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.* |
| **AMS** | The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is a division of the USDA that administers the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. |
| **Application** | A completed package containing all elements detailed in the RFA. |
| **Beginning Farmer** | The USDA defines a “beginning farmer” as an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation. |
| **Bid** | In this RFA, submitted applications are referred to as Applications. In some contexts, they may be referred to as Bids. |
| **Block grant** | Funding is awarded by the federal government (in this case, via the USDA) to a state to administer locally within the parameters of the grant program priorities. The SCBGP is funded by the USDA, and in Maine, the DACF administers the program, including establishing priority areas, coordinating the RFA process, contracting with successful applicants, and reporting on project progress to the USDA. |
| **Department or DACF** | Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry |
| **GAP** | Good Agricultural Practices prescribe sound food safety practices to ensure that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored in the safest manner possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. |
| **Indicators** | The Agricultural Marketing Service lists measurable indicators for each possible project Outcome (found in Part IV of the RFA). Eligible projects must address at least one indicator for each relevant Outcome. |
| **Indirect Costs** | “Costs of doing business,” such as utilities, rent, and furnishings, are indirect costs, and may not be included in the project budget. |
| **Letter of Support (LOS)** | If an individual farmer, farm business, or producer, applies, they must have an agricultural organization or commodity group as a partner who has an accepted role in the project and has included a Letter of Support. The project application and LOS must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to a single business or entity.  DACF encourages all applicants to submit at least one LOS from all applicants as doing so will help document industry support for a project. |
| **OMB** | Office of Management and Budget |
| **Outcomes** | The Agricultural Marketing Service lists seven possible Outcomes (listed in Part IV of the RFA) that SCBGP projects may address. Eligible projects must address at least one AMS Outcome. |
| **Priority Areas** | Each year the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry determines specific priorities for that year’s grant funding. Applications that directly target at least one of these priorities receive points for doing so in the scoring process. |
| **Reimbursement basis** | Grant funds will be paid to recipients based upon reimbursement requests (invoices) for approved project expenses according to a grant award contract. |
| **RFA** | Request for Applications |
| **RFA Coordinator** | The person designated by the DACF to coordinate all parts of the SCBGP application process. All questions regarding the application process must be submitted to the RFA Coordinator listed on the first page of this RFA. |
| **SCBGP** | Specialty Crop Block Grant Program |
| **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer** | A farmer who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. For an entity, at least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals to meet this definition. |
| **Specialty Crop** | [Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=specialty+crop+block+grants&f=treesort&fq=true&num=0&hl=true&edition=prelim&granuleId=USC-prelim-title7-section1621) (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and amended under section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill) [defines specialty crops](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop) as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” Eligible plants must be cultivated or managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification to be considered specialty crops. Processed products shall consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water. |
| **State** | State of Maine |
| **Subaward** | An award provided by the Department to a subrecipient to carry out part of a Federal award received by the Department. |
| **Subrecipient** | A recipient of a subaward from the Department to carry out a portion of the federal award. |
| **USDA** | United States Department of Agriculture |
| **USDA Specific Allowable Costs** | Grant expenditures that are specifically determined to be allowable as described within the corresponding [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) Allowable and Unallowable Costs Table in common categories for AMS grant programs. This table is not intended to be all-inclusive. The Applicant should consult the Federal Cost Principles [(Subpart E Cost Principles of 2 CFR § 200)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-E) for a complete explanation of the allowability of costs. |

**State of Maine - Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development Division*

**RFA# 202402032**

**Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

**PART I INTRODUCTION**

1. **Purpose and Background**

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (Department) is seeking applications that, if approved, will become part of a State Plan submitted for approval and funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) as defined in this Request for Applications (RFA) document. This document provides instructions for submitting Applications, the procedure, and criteria by which the awarded Applicant(s) will be selected, and the contractual terms which will govern the relationship between the State of Maine (State) and the awarded Applicant(s).

The [Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=specialty+crop+block+grants&f=treesort&fq=true&num=0&hl=true&edition=prelim&granuleId=USC-prelim-title7-section1621) (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the USDA to provide grants to State departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is eligible to submit a State Plan for these funds. The State Plan will include project Applications that are submitted, reviewed, and approved through this formal RFA process.

1. **General Provisions**
   1. From the time the RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding the RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator. No other person/ State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding the RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the bidding process, at the State’s discretion.
   2. Issuance of the RFA does not commit the Department to issue an award or to pay expenses incurred by an Applicant in the preparation of a response to the RFA. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings and software or system demonstrations, where applicable.
   3. All proposals must adhere to the instructions and format requirements outlined in the RFA and all written supplements and amendments (such as the Summary of Questions and Answers), issued by the Department. Proposals are to follow the format and respond to all questions and instructions specified below in the “Proposal Submission Requirements” section of the RFA.
   4. Applicants will take careful note that in evaluating a proposal submitted in response to the RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the proposal, information obtained through interviews/presentations (if any), and internal Departmental information of previous contract history with the Applicant (if any). The Department also reserves the right to consider other reliable references and publicly available information in evaluating an Applicant’s experience and capabilities.
   5. The proposal must be signed by a person authorized to legally bind the Applicant and must contain a statement that the proposal and the pricing contained therein will remain valid and binding for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the bid opening.
   6. The RFA and the awarded Applicant’s proposal, including all appendices or attachments, will be the basis for the final contract, as determined by the Department.
   7. Following announcement of an award decision, all submissions in response to this RFA will be public records, available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) ([1 M.R.S. § 401](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/1/title1sec401.html) et seq.).
   8. The Department, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to recognize and waive minor informalities and irregularities found in proposals received in response to the RFA.
   9. All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, are included by this reference. It is the Applicant’s responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.
2. **Eligibility to Submit Bids**

Provided that Applications meet all the specifications in this Request for Applications and the [USDA’s Notice of Federal Assistance,](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2023_SCBGP_RFA.pdf) the following entities are eligible to apply for this grant:

* Individuals
* Commodity groups
* Agricultural organizations
* Buy-local organizations
* Colleges and universities
* Producers, including Native American and disadvantaged farmers
* Municipalities
* State agencies
* Agricultural nonprofit organizations

**Applications must demonstrate a funding need for an eligible project and may not be submitted for ongoing organizational operations.** A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people. Projects are different from other ongoing operations in an organization because, unlike operations, projects have a definitive beginning and end – they have a limited duration. A project has an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.

Examples of projects include:

• Researching new cultivars;

• Providing outreach on specialty crops to youth, families, seniors, and the overall

community;

• Marketing apples through a targeted promotional campaign

Activities or tasks that could be a part of such projects might include:

• Hiring personnel

• Purchasing special purpose equipment: defined in [Section 8.2 of the applicable AMS](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf)

[General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) as equipment used only for research, scientific, or

technical activities.

• Holding an educational workshop

• Planting specialty crops

• Distributing product promotional material

**Projects must enhance the competitiveness of Maine-grown specialty crops** in either domestic or foreign markets. See the SCBGP [website](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop) for a list of eligible specialty crops and ineligible commodities.

**Projects must benefit more than one product or organization**. Applications for subrecipient grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects whose products or services promote or provide profit that solely benefits a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, recipients and subrecipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

**Only one project may be proposed per application.** Applications for multiple projects will not be considered for award and will be rejected without exception. However, an entity may submit more than one application as long as each Application represents a distinct project.

Examples of Acceptable Projects:

• A non-profit organization requests funds to demonstrate the viability of organic small fruit production and partners with Cooperative Extension to publicize the working model of diversification to other regional growers.

• A single farmer implements food safety practices or models on his/her property to meet food safety requirements and conducts a field day and training services to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the methods.

Examples of Unacceptable Projects:

• A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop to make a profit or to expand production of a single business or organization.

• A single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization so that it can increase its membership.

1. **Contract Term**

The Department is seeking a cost-efficient proposal to provide services, as defined in the RFA, for the anticipated contract period defined in the table below. The Department anticipates that most SCBGP projects will be completed in one or two years (12 or 24 months). In some instances, subrecipients may be approved for a no-cost contract performance period extension. Under no circumstance will such an extension result in a contract of more than 36 months in duration or one that goes beyond 8/31/2027.

Please note, the dates below are estimated and may be adjusted, as necessary, in order to comply with all procedural requirements associated with the RFA and the contracting process. The actual contract start date will be established by a completed and approved contract.

The term of the anticipated contract, resulting from the RFA, is defined as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Period** | **Start Date** | **End Date** |
| Period of Performance | 09/30/2024 | 09/29/2026 |

1. **Number of Awards**

The Department anticipates making multiple awards of up to $100,000 each as a result of this RFA process. Awards will be made through a competitive scoring process. The total number of awards will be determined by the total number of eligible applications received and the amount of each eligible applicant’s request. Awards will be selected in order by high to low application score. The Department reserves the right to request that applicants reduce their project budget by no more than 15% if it is in the best interest of the State to award the maximum possible number of subawards as a result of the RFA process.

**PART II SCOPE OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED**

1. **USDA Project Strategies**

The USDA encourages States to develop projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

• Enhancing food safety;

• Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply

with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (21 U.S.C. Chapter 27), for

example, developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good

Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such

systems (including USDA GAP) for small farmers, packers and processors;

• Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and

environmental outcomes;

• Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops;

• Pest and disease control;

• Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;

• Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and

• Sustainability.

The USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encourages applicants to consider including goals and activities related to reducing and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change in their project’s design and implementation.

1. **Commissioner Priority Areas**

The Commissioner of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has established priorities for the SCBGP award performance period. It is expected that any application involving specialty crop production will utilize best practices related to sustainability and climate change mitigation and resiliency.

Applications that integrate one or more of the priorities below will be considered more favorably in the evaluation process.

* Projects that enhance food safety education, primarily in relation to FDA rules regarding improved handling and processing of specialty crops;
* Projects to enhance soil and ecosystem health;
* Projects that market Maine specialty crops to diversified and expanded markets, or that research potential market expansion efforts and strategies.  Examples include but are not limited to increasing sales to institutions, and other target markets that are new or have potential for growth in sales of Maine agricultural products;
* Projects that improve adaptation and increase resilience to climate-related crop disturbances in support of long-term farm business vitality and productivity, such as through projects that address specialty crop’s ability to mitigate and/or adapt to climate change, conserve agricultural land and water, detect and manage emerging pests and diseases, or implementation of practices that sequester carbon, reduce atmospheric greenhouse gases, and/or improve soil health;
* Projects that alleviate supply chain disruptions for specialty crop inputs, processing, or distribution.

1. **Reporting**

The Department will collect reports from subrecipients in order to fulfill the USDA AMS SCBGP reporting requirements. AMS is required to report on the outcomes of the SCBGP on a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. By collecting, aggregating, and reporting performance data across all States and Territories, AMS can share the impact of the SCBGP with all stakeholders, including OMB, U.S. Congress, the agricultural community, and the public.

Each subawarded project must include at least one of the seven outcomes listed in the SCBGP Performance Measures and at least one of the indicators listed in the selected outcome(s). The progress of the one or more outcomes and indicators selected will need to be reported in the Annual Performance Report, and the results will be reported in the Final Performance Report. Please refer to the SCBGP Performance Measures for more information. **The Department encourages applicants to select, justify, and demonstrate how the applicant’s project will achieve no more than three outcomes listed in the SCBGP Performance Measures. One well-designed project outcome and one well-articulated indicator is sufficient.**

Subrecipients will submit performance reports including required quarterly, annual, and final reports to the Department according to the terms of the subaward contract. USDA AMS will review the reports and may request clarifying updates, justifications, amendments, and/or edits.

In compliance with the [USDA General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) Section 11: Acknowledgement of Support and as required in [2 CFR § 415.2](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-B/chapter-IV/part-415/subpart-B), subrecipients must acknowledge USDA AMS support in all publications written or published with USDA AMS grant or cooperative agreement support. This includes reports, pamphlets, posters, brochures, and, if feasible, any publication reporting the results of or describing a grant-supported activity. Subrecipients must also acknowledge USDA AMS support on any audio or video product including live or prerecorded radio or television programs, audio recordings and multimedia presentations.

The following acknowledgment of USDA funding must appear in all published materials or products, in any format (web sites, audiovisuals, etc.), that are substantially based upon or developed under an AMS award:

*Funding for [Project or Publication] was made possible by a grant/cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.*

Subrecipients are encouraged to use the USDA logo in their financial acknowledgment. Any other logo use requires approval in writing from the Department and AMS prior to finalizing documents for publication or printing. When using the USDA logo, please use the [logo acknowledgment images provided by USDA AMS](https://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/ams-logo).

**PART III KEY RFA EVENTS**

1. **Questions**
   1. **General Instructions:** It is the responsibility of all Applicants and other interested parties to examine the entire RFA and to seek clarification, in writing, if they do not understand any information or instructions.
      1. Applicants and other interested parties should use **Appendix E** (Submitted Questions Form) for submission of questions. The form is to be submitted as a WORD document.
      2. The Submitted Questions Form must be submitted, by e-mail, and received by the RFA Coordinator identified on the cover page of the RFA as soon as possible but no later than the date and time specified on the RFA cover page.
      3. Submitted Questions must include the RFA Number and Title in the subject line of the e-mail. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete/on time e-mail transmission and receipt.
   2. **Question & Answer Summary:** Responses to all questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the following website no later than seven (7) calendar days prior to the proposal due date: [Division of Procurement Services RFA Page](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfps). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding.
2. **Amendments**

All amendments released in regard to the RFA will also be posted on the following website: [Division of Procurement Services RFA Page](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfps). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain amendments. Only those amendments posted on this website are considered binding.

1. **Submitting the Proposal**
   1. **Proposals Due:** Proposals must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. local time, on the date listed on the cover page of the RFA.
      1. Any e-mails containing original proposal submissions or any additional or revised proposal files, received after the 11:59 p.m. deadline, will be rejected without exception.
   2. **Delivery Instructions:** E-mail proposal submissions are to be submitted to the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services at [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov).
      1. Only proposal submissions received by e-mail will be considered. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete e-mail transmission and receipt.
         1. Proposal submission e-mails that are successfully received by the [proposals@maine.gov](mailto:proposals@maine.gov) inbox will receive an automatic reply stating as such.
      2. E-mails containing links to file sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions. Only e-mail proposal submissions that have the actual requested files attached will be accepted.
      3. Encrypted e-mails received which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system will not be accepted as submissions. Please check with your organization’s Information Technology team to ensure that your security settings will not encrypt your proposal submission.
      4. File size limits are 25MB per e-mail. Applicants may submit files separately across multiple e-mails, as necessary, due to file size concerns. All e-mails and files must be received by the due date and time listed above.
      5. Applicants are to insert the following into the subject line of their e-mail proposal submission: **“RFA# 202402032 Proposal Submission – [Applicant’s Name]”**
      6. Applicant’s proposal submissions are to be broken down into multiple files, with each file named as it is titled in bold below, and include:

* **File 1 [Applicant’s Name] – Preliminary Information:**

*PDF format preferred*

**Appendix A** (Proposal Cover Page)

**Appendix B** (Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification)

All required eligibility documentation stated in PART IV, Section I.

* **File 2 [Applicant’s Name] – Project Overview:**

*PDF format preferred*

**Appendix F** (Commissioner Priorities, Project Summary, USDA Strategies, Expected Measurable Outcomes, Indicators, and Data Collection Measures) and all required information and attachments stated in PART IV, Section II.

* **File 3 [Applicant’s Name] – Proposed Services:**

*PDF format preferred*

**Appendix G** (USDA Project Profile Template) and all required information and attachments stated in PART IV, Section IV.

All required information and attachments stated in PART IV, Section III.

**PART IV PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

This section contains instructions for Applicants to use in preparing their applications. The Department seeks detailed yet succinct responses that demonstrate the Applicant’s qualifications, experience, and ability to perform the requirements specified throughout the RFA.

The Applicant’s proposal must follow the outline used below, including the numbering, section, and sub-section headings. Failure to use the outline specified in PART IV, or failure to respond to all questions and instructions throughout the RFA, may result in the proposal being disqualified as non-responsive or receiving a reduced score. The Department, and its evaluation team, has sole discretion to determine whether a variance from the RFA specifications will result either in disqualification or reduction in scoring of a proposal. Rephrasing of the content provided in the RFA will, at best, be considered minimally responsive.

Applicants are not to provide additional attachments beyond those specified in the RFA for the purpose of extending their response. Additional materials not requested will not be considered part of the proposal and will not be evaluated. Include any forms provided in the submission package or reproduce those forms as closely as possible. All information must be presented in the same order and format as described in the RFA.

**Application Format and Contents**

**Section I Preliminary Information** (File #1)

* 1. **Application Cover Page**

Applicants must complete **Appendix A** (Proposal Cover Page). It is critical that the cover page show the specific information requested, including Applicant address(es) and other details listed. The Application Cover Page must be dated and signed by a person authorized to enter into contracts on behalf of the Applicant. The authorized signature must be signed in black or blue pen ink or established through an e-signature software such as Adobe e-signature or DocuSign.

* 1. **Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification**

Applicants must complete **Appendix B** (Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification Form). The Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification Form must be dated and signed by a person authorized to enter into contracts on behalf of the Applicant.

* 1. **Litigation**

Applicants must attach a list of all current litigation in which the Applicant is named and a list of all closed cases that have closed within the past five (5) years in which the Applicant paid the claimant either as part of a settlement or by decree.  For each, list the entity bringing suit, the complaint, the accusation, amount, and outcome.

**Section II Project Overview Appendix F** (File #2)

1. **Commissioner Priorities (250 words or less)**
   1. A narrative description must identify and explain which, if any, of the Commissioner Priority areas (**listed in RFA Part II Scope of Services)** the project incorporates.
2. **Project Summary (500 words or less)**
   1. A narrative project summary must explain the project need, purpose, and primary goals of the project and should address the following:
      * + - Applications must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to a single business or entity.
          - Applications should reference any specialty crop stakeholders, other than the sub-applicant, individuals, and organizations involved in the project, that support the project (Letters of Support are encouraged)
          - Applications must explain how the project is likely to become self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent upon publicly and privately granted funds.
          - Previous SCBGP subrecipients must include a statement about how this new project application will amplify the success of past SCBGP award performance or if the project is unrelated, how lessons learned from prior SCBGP project(s) will be used to enhance the benefit of the broader specialty crop industry.
3. **USDA Strategies (250 words or less)**
   1. A narrative description must identify and explain which of the USDA Project Strategies referenced above in Part II of the RFA that will be integrated in the Project.
4. **Expected Measurable Outcomes, Indicators, and Data Collection Methods (500 words or less)**
   1. A list of the applicant’s selected SCBGP outcomes and indicators must be provided in this section.
      * + - All applicants must select at least one of the USDA SCBGP outcomes and at least one of the USDA SCBGP indicators listed here: [Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Outcomes and Indicators (usda.gov)](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPPerformanceMeasures.pdf)
          - Please select the outcome measure(s) that are the most relevant to the project and select at least one of the related quantifiable indicators prescribed.
          - The Department encourages applicants to select, justify, and demonstrate how the applicant’s project will achieve no more than three USDA SCBGP outcomes.
          - One well-designed project outcome and one well-articulated indicator is sufficient.
   2. A description of the applicant’s data collection methods, using the [USDA guidance](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPQuickGuide.pdf) must be provided in this section.
      * + - All data collection analysis must be completed by the project end date.

**Section III Proposed Services Appendix G** (File #3)

* 1. **Services to be Provided**

1. Applicants must submit a fully completed USDA [SCBGP PROJECT PROFILE TEMPLATE (usda.gov)](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Application_ProjectProfile_Template.pdf) (**as provided in Appendix G)**
2. Applicants will use the Project Profile Template to discuss the Scope of Services referenced above in Part II of the RFA.
3. The USDA AMS has the right to request edits and/or ask for clarification on any aspect of a submitted Project Profile Template prior to subrecipient contract execution as part of its SCBGP State Plan review process. The USDA AMS will determine if a project is ultimately eligible for funding and will take steps to ensure that each project is in compliance with the [USDA General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) and may deem all, or a portion, of any project to be ineligible which may subsequently require an adjustment in a final subrecipient award amount which may result in no contract being awarded after USDA review.

**PART V PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

Evaluation of the submitted proposals will be accomplished as follows:

1. **Evaluation Process – General Information**
   1. An evaluation team, composed of qualified reviewers, will judge the merits of the proposals received in accordance with the criteria defined in the RFA.
   2. Officials responsible for making decisions on the award selection will ensure that the selection process accords equal opportunity and appropriate consideration to all who are capable of meeting the specifications. The goals of the evaluation process are to ensure fairness and objectivity in review of the proposals and to ensure that the contract is awarded to the Applicant whose proposal provides the best value to the State of Maine.
   3. The Department reserves the right to communicate and/or schedule interviews/presentations with Applicants, if needed, to obtain clarification of information contained in the proposals received. The Department may revise the scores assigned in the initial evaluation to reflect those communications and/or interviews/presentations. Changes to proposals, including updating or adding information, will not be permitted during any interview/presentation process and, therefore, Applicants must submit proposals that present their rates and other requested information as clearly and completely as possible.
2. **Scoring Weights and Process**
   1. **Scoring Weights:** The score will be based on a 100-point scale and will measure the degree to which each proposal meets the following criteria.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scoring Category** | **Maximum Points**  **Available** |
| 1. The project proposed must enhance the competitiveness of Maine-grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to a single business or entity. The SCBGP will not award grant funds for projects that benefit a single organization (applications will not move forward if they do not meet this requirement). | *Pass/Fail* |
| 1. The Application is complete and adheres to the format outlined in the RFA. | *10 points* |
| 1. The Application clearly articulates how the Project, and the anticipated outcomes and indicators, will address a Commissioner priority area. | *10 points* |
| 1. The Application clearly describes how the Project seeks to integrate a USDA Project Strategy. | *10 points* |
| 1. The USDA SCBGP outcome(s) and indicator(s) are clearly defined in both the Project Overview (File #2) and the Proposed Services Project Profile Template (File #3), and the applicant fully demonstrates how the project will measure and achieve the selected outcomes(s) and indicator(s). | *10 points* |
| 1. The Application articulates methods of monitoring, data collection, and reporting indicating how project results and lessons learned will be disseminated to enhance the competitiveness of Maine-grown specialty crops. | *10 points* |
| 1. The Application demonstrates how the Applicant will comply with the USDA Acknowledgement of Support requirements. | *5 points* |
| 1. The Application demonstrates that specialty crop stakeholders, other than the sub-applicant, individuals, and organizations involved in the project, support the Project (Letters of Support are encouraged). | *5 points* |
| 1. The Application explains how the Project is likely to become self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent upon publicly and privately granted funds. | *5 points* |
| 1. The Applicant has been granted a SCBGP subrecipient contract in award years 2021, 2022, and/or 2023 and the Application articulates how this new proposed Project will amplify the success of past SCBGP award performance. If the proposed Project is unrelated to a prior award, the Application must articulate how lessons learned from prior SCBGP project(s) were used to inform the design of the new Project and ensure that outcomes will be achieved. | *5 points* |
| 1. The Application budget section is thoroughly complete and mathematically correct. | *15 points* |
| 1. The Application demonstrates compliance with USDA Specific Allowable Costs. The budget section includes a complete description of and justification for each cost including how it furthers the objectives of the project. | *15 points* |
| **Total Points** | ***100 points*** |

* 1. **Scoring Process:** The review team will use a consensus approach to evaluate and score the Application cover page, Non-disclosure form, and the Application Summary Template. Members of the review team will not score those sections individually but, instead, will arrive at a consensus as to assignment of points for each of those sections.
  2. **Scoring the Budget:** Regarding the grant funds requested and the proposed work, the review team will consider the degree to which the project represents a good return for the investment (money, time, etc.) as well as whether the project work and cost estimates (tasks and budget) are reasonable for the expected outcomes and objectives.
  3. **Negotiations:** The Department reserves the right to negotiate with the awarded Applicant to finalize a contract. Such negotiations may not significantly vary the content, nature or requirements of the proposal or the Department’s Request for Proposal to an extent that may affect the price of goods or services requested. The Department reserves the right to terminate contract negotiations with an awarded Applicant who submits a proposed contract significantly different from the proposal they submitted in response to the advertised RFA. In the event that an acceptable contract cannot be negotiated with the highest ranked Applicant, the Department may withdraw its award and negotiate with the next-highest ranked Applicant, and so on, until an acceptable contract has been finalized. Alternatively, the Department may cancel the RFA, at its sole discretion.

1. **Selection and Award**
   1. The consensus scoring review committee will make recommendations to the Department Commissioner for approval to be submitted in the SCBGP State Plan.
   2. Notification of conditional award selection or non-selection will be made in writing by the Department subject to approval by the State Procurement Review Committee.
   3. Issuance of the RFA in no way constitutes a commitment by the State of Maine to award a contract, to pay costs incurred in the preparation of a response to the RFA, or to pay costs incurred in procuring or contracting for services, supplies, physical space, personnel or any other costs incurred by the Applicant.
   4. The Department reserves the right to reject any and all proposals or to make multiple awards.
   5. Applicants selected during the RFA process will be required to complete all USDA requested changes to the submitted Project Profile Template to be included with the Department’s SCBGP State Plan to be submitted to the USDA.
   6. The Department will complete a SCBGP State Plan proposal for the USDA, and final award is contingent upon the acceptance of the State Plan by the USDA.
   7. **The USDA reserves the right to reject any and all Applications or to make adjustments to awards.**
2. **Appeal of Contract Awards**

Any person aggrieved by the award decision that results from the RFA may appeal the decision to the Director of the Bureau of General Services in the manner prescribed in [5 M.R.S.A. § 1825-E](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5sec1825-E.html) and [18-554 Code of Maine Rules Chapter 120](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/policies-procedures/chapter-120).  The appeal must be in writing and filed with the Director of the Bureau of General Services, 9 State House Station, Augusta, Maine, 04333-0009 within 15 calendar days of receipt of notification of conditional contract award.

**PART VI CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION AND CONDITIONS**

1. **Contract Document**
   1. The awarded Applicant will be required to execute a State of Maine Service Contract with appropriate riders as determined by the issuing department.

The complete set of standard State of Maine Service Contract documents, along with other forms and contract documents commonly used by the State, may be found on the Division of Procurement Services’ website at the following link: [Division of Procurement Services Forms Page](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/forms)

* 1. Allocation of funds is final upon successful negotiation and execution of the contract, subject to the review and approval of the State Procurement Review Committee. Contracts are not considered fully executed and valid until approved by the State Procurement Review Committee and funds are encumbered. No contract will be approved based on an RFA which has an effective date less than fourteen (14) calendar days after award notification to Applicants. (Referenced in the regulations of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, [Chapter 110, § 3(B)(i)](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/policies-procedures/chapter-110).)

This provision means that a contract cannot be effective until at least 14 calendar days after award notification.

* 1. The State recognizes that the actual contract effective date depends upon completion of the RFA process, date of formal award notification, length of contract negotiation, and preparation and approval by the State Procurement Review Committee. Any appeals to the Department’s award decision(s) may further postpone the actual contract effective date, depending upon the outcome. The contract effective date listed in the RFA may need to be adjusted, if necessary, to comply with mandated requirements.
  2. In providing services and performing under the contract, the awarded Applicant must act as an independent contractor and not as an agent of the State of Maine.

1. **Standard State Contract Provisions**
   1. Contract Administration

Following the award, a Contract Administrator from the Department will be appointed to assist with the development and administration of the contract and to act as administrator during the entire contract period. Department staff will be available after the award to consult with the awarded Applicant in the finalization of the contract.

* 1. Payments and Other Provisions

The State anticipates paying the Contractor on the basis of net 30 payment terms, upon the receipt of an accurate and acceptable invoice. An invoice will be considered accurate and acceptable if it contains a reference to the State of Maine contract number, contains correct pricing information relative to the contract, and provides any required supporting documents, as applicable, and any other specific and agreed-upon requirements listed within the contract that results from the RFA.

**PART VII LIST OF RFA APPENDICES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS**

**Appendix A** – Proposal Cover Page

**Appendix B** – Debarment, Performance, and Non-Collusion Certification

**Appendix C** – Cost Proposal Form

**Appendix D** – Submitted Question Form

**Appendix E** - Project Overview

**Appendix F** – USDA Project Profile Template

**APPENDIX A**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**PROPOSAL COVER PAGE**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Applicant’s Organization Name:** | |  | | |
| **Chief Executive - Name/Title:** | |  | | |
| **Tel:** |  | | **E-mail:** |  |
| **Headquarters Street Address:** | |  | | |
| **Headquarters City/State/Zip:** | |  | | |
| ***(Provide information requested below if different from above)*** | | | | |
| **Lead Point of Contact for Proposal - Name/Title:** | |  | | |
| **Tel:** |  | | **E-mail:** |  |
| **Headquarters Street Address:** | |  | | |
| **Headquarters City/State/Zip:** | |  | | |

* This proposal and the pricing structure contained herein will remain firm for a period of 180 days from the date and time of the bid opening.
* No personnel currently employed by the Department or any other State agency participated, either directly or indirectly, in any activities relating to the preparation of the Applicant’s proposal.
* No attempt has been made, or will be made, by the Applicant to induce any other person or firm to submit or not to submit a proposal.
* The above-named organization is the legal entity entering into the resulting contract with the Department if they are awarded the contract.
* The undersigned is authorized to enter contractual obligations on behalf of the above-named organization.

*To the best of my knowledge, all information provided in the enclosed proposal, both programmatic and financial, is complete and accurate at the time of submission.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name (Print):** | **Title:** |
| **Authorized Signature:** | **Date:** |

**APPENDIX B**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**DEBARMENT, PERFORMANCE, and NON-COLLUSION CERTIFICATION**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Applicant’s Organization Name:** |  |

*By signing this document, I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that the aforementioned organization, its principals and any subcontractors named in this proposal:*

1. *Are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, and declared ineligible or voluntarily excluded from bidding or working on contracts issued by any governmental agency.*
2. *Have not within three years of submitting the proposal for this contract been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against them for:*
   1. *Fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a federal, state, or local government transaction or contract.*
   2. *Violating Federal or State antitrust statutes or committing embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property.*
3. *Are not presently indicted for or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity (Federal, State or Local) with commission of any of the offenses enumerated in paragraph (b) of this certification.*
4. *Have not within a three (3) year period preceding this proposal had one or more federal, state, or local government transactions terminated for cause or default*.
5. *Have not entered into a prior understanding, agreement, or connection with any corporation, firm, or person submitting a response for the same materials, supplies, equipment, or services and this proposal is in all respects fair and without collusion or fraud. The above-mentioned entities understand and agree that collusive bidding is a violation of state and federal law and can result in fines, prison sentences, and civil damage awards.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name (Print):** | **Title:** |
| **Authorized Signature:** | **Date:** |

**APPENDIX C**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**COST PROPOSAL FORM**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Applicant’s Organization Name:** |  |
| **Proposed Cost:** | **$** |

**APPENDIX D**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

This form should be used by Applicants when submitting written questions to the RFA Coordinator as defined in Part III of the RFA.

If a question is not related to any section of the RFA, enter “N/A” under the RFA Section & Page Number. Add additional rows as necessary.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organization Name:** |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RFA Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
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**APPENDIX E**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**Project Overview (File #2)**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

**Project Overview**

1. **Commissioner Priorities (250 words or less)**
   1. A narrative description must identify and explain which, if any, of the Commissioner Priority areas listed in RFA Part II Scope of Services the project incorporates.
2. **Project Summary (500 words or less)**
   1. A narrative project summary must explain the project need, purpose, and primary goals of the project and should address the following:
      * + - Applications must clearly demonstrate benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to a single business or entity.
          - Applications should reference any specialty crop stakeholders, other than the sub-applicant, individuals, and organizations involved in the project, that support the project (Letters of Support are encouraged)
          - Applications must explain how the project is likely to become self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent upon publicly and privately granted funds.
          - Previous SCBGP subrecipients must include a statement about how this new project application will amplify the success of past SCBGP award performance or if the project is unrelated, how lessons learned from prior SCBGP project(s) will be used to enhance the benefit of the broader specialty crop industry.
3. **USDA Strategies (250 words or less)**
   1. A narrative description must identify and explain which of the USDA Project Strategies referenced above in Part II of the RFA will be integrated into the Project.
4. **Expected Measurable Outcomes, Indicators, and Data Collection Methods (500 words or less)**
5. A list of the applicant’s selected SCBGP outcomes and indicators must be provided in this section.
   * + - * All applicants must select at least one of the USDA SCBGP outcomes and at least one of the USDA SCBGP indicators listed here: [Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Outcomes and Indicators (usda.gov)](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPPerformanceMeasures.pdf)
         * Please select the outcome measure(s) that are the most relevant to the project and select at least one of the related quantifiable indicators prescribed.
         * The Department encourages applicants to select, justify, and demonstrate how the applicant’s project will achieve no more than three USDA SCBGP outcomes.
         * One well-designed project outcome and one well-articulated indicator is sufficient.
6. A description of the applicant’s data collection methods, using the [USDA guidance](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPQuickGuide.pdf) must be provided in this section.
   * + - * All data collection analysis must be completed by the project end date.

**APPENDIX F**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**USDA Project Profile Template (File #3)**

**RFA# 202402032**

**2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

The Applicant must submit Appendix G [USDA Project Profile Template](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Application_ProjectProfile_Template.pdf) as a separate file document. The acceptable font size for the narrative is 11 or 12 pitch with all margins at 1 inch.

**Note about opening USDA Adobe dynamic form templates:**

The USDA has shared that error may occur when the document is being opened in the internet browser and not through Adobe Acrobat.

We recommend downloading the dynamic form (USDA Project Profile Template) to your computer. To do this, click on the USDA Project Profile Template (PDF) link above. The document will begin to open in a new browser tab. You will likely see a “Please wait…” message. Click the Save icon to download the file to your computer. Next you will need to open your downloads folder (or whatever folder you saved the document in), right click on the document and click “open with.” You will then select Adobe Acrobat to open the document as a PDF.

If there is a yellow bar that appears at the top of the dynamic form after opening, you may have to click the “Enable Content” button in order to edit the document.

The State of Maryland created a [video demonstrating how to download and open dynamic files to Adobe Reader](https://youtu.be/Od7qyjnddak).