**April 22, 20STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development*



**RFA# 202102018**

**Agricultural Development Grant**

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| **RFA Coordinator** | *All communication regarding the RFA must be made via email to:***Contact Information:** agdevelopmentgrant@maine.gov |
| **Submitted Questions Due** | *All questions must be received by the RFA Coordinator identified above by:***Date:** March 24, 2021, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **Proposal Submission** | *Proposals must be received by the Division of Procurement Services by:***Submission Deadline:** April 22, 2021, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time.*Proposals must be submitted electronically to the following address:***Electronic (e-mail) Submission Address:** Proposals@maine.gov |

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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:

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| **Term/Acronym** | **Definition** |
| **ADG** | Agricultural Development Grant |
| **Agricultural Product** | For the purposes of this project, an agricultural product is “a Maine-grown fresh, or Maine-processed agricultural food, fiber, or horticultural product derived from plants, animals, plant or animal byproducts, freshwater farmed fish, or aquaculture, with the intent that the product be sold or otherwise marketed to generate income.” |
| **Applicant** | The person or organization applying for a grant. (Maine-based public agencies, private for-profit companies, and non-profit companies and institutions are eligible.) |
| **Department** | Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry |
| **Fiscal Year** | The State of Maine Fiscal Year runs from July 1 – June 30.  |
| **Indirect Costs** | “Costs of doing business,” such as utilities, rent, and furnishings, are indirect costs, and may not be included in the budget as match or for grant funds. |
| **Innovation** | Innovation is the application or implementation of new and/or improved practices, models, technology, and ideas to create measurable change. Examples include but are not limited to application of new institutional practices/models to improve performance and be more competitive, and the application of new ideas or technical practices to develop, produce, and market new or improved goods and services. |
| **Match** | Applicants are required to provide matching funds towards the proposed project. All projects require a match of at least 25% of the total project cost. (Note: the match must be 25% of the total project cost, not the total amount of grant funds requested.) Projects that contain any marketing component must include a 50% match of the total project cost. Match most often is cash investment in project costs, but may, at the discretion of the review committee, include in-kind costs such as personnel or direct travel expenses. Match may not include existing resources (such as equipment) already in use by the applicant. In general, indirect costs may not be applied to the match requirement. |
| **Methodology** | Each project proposal should clearly explain the methodology to be used. The methodology is the plan to conduct activities that will accomplish the goals of the project. It should be thorough, reasonable, cost-effective, justifiable, and appropriate for the project staff. |
| **Priority Areas** | Each year the Commissioner of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry determines specific priorities for this year’s grant funding. Applications that directly target one of these priorities receive points for doing so. |
| **Reimbursement Basis** | Grant monies will be paid to successful Applicants upon submittal of invoices for approved project expenses. |
| **State** | State of Maine |

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

*Agricultural Resource Development*

**RFA# 202102018**

**Agricultural Development Grant**

**PART I INTRODUCTION**

1. **Purpose and Background**

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (“Department”) is seeking grant applications which, if approved, will receive funding from the Agricultural Development Grant Program as defined in this Request for Applications document. This document provides instructions for submitting applications, the procedure and criteria by which the awardees will be selected, and the contractual terms which will govern the relationship between the State of Maine (“State”) and the selected awardees.

The 119th Legislature authorized an Agricultural Development Grant Program (7 M.R.S., Chapter 10, governed by Departmental Rule [Chapter 33](https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/01/001/001c033.doc)). The Legislature identified the agricultural industry need for accelerating new market development, adoption of improved technology and promotion of agricultural products produced in Maine.

The Commissioner may allocate the grant funds among projects involving market research, market promotion, or a combination of those activities for the purpose of expanding existing markets and developing new markets for agricultural products produced in Maine; or for testing and demonstrating new technologies related to the production, storage or processing of State agricultural products. All submitted applications need to be for projects which demonstrate readiness and that can be commenced immediately upon acceptance.

The Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has established the priority areas for this Request for Applications. Applications that incorporate one or more of the priorities below will be considered more favorably in the evaluation process. See application document for current annual priority areas.

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**

Maine-based individuals, private for-profit businesses (e.g. farms and food producers), nonprofits, and organizations (including public agencies), are eligible to apply and are invited to submit applications in response to this Request for Applications.

Further, recipients of ongoing grants may reapply in a new application for additional funding but must justify the extended commitment sought. Funding will be contingent upon satisfactory progress and accountability of all funds awarded at the time of re-application, continued congruence with program needs, and availability of grant funds.

1. **Contract Term**

The Department anticipates that most projects will be completed in 1-2 years. (Please note that these are estimated dates and may be adjusted, as necessary, in order to comply with all procedural requirements associated with this Request for Applications 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:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Period** | **Start Date** | **End Date** |
| Period of Performance | August 1, 2021 | July 31, 2023 |

1. **Number of Awards**

The Department anticipates making multiple awards as a result of the RFA process. An entity may submit applications for more than one project, provided the projects are clearly distinct.

**PART II 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. Failure to comply with these instructions will result in disqualification of an application.
		1. Applicants and other interested parties must use **Appendix A** – 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: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants). 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: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants). 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. 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.
		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.
		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# 202102018 Proposal Submission – [Applicant’s Name]”**
		6. Applications are to be submitted in PDF or WORD format only. No other formats will be accepted.

**PART III PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

This section contains instructions for Applicants to use in preparing their applications. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

* 1. The application for this Request for Applications is available as a separate document on the following webpage: [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants)
	2. The “Application Cover Page” must be the first page of the application package. It is important 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.
	3. The Applicant must complete and submit the “Debarment, Performance and Non-Collusion Certification Form”. Failure to provide this certification may result in the disqualification of the Applicant’s application, at the discretion of the Department.
	4. The Applicant is asked to be brief and concise in providing written information required in the application.
	5. Departmental Rule Chapter 33 allows, to the extent provided by statute, applicants to request certain information be deemed confidential at the Commissioner’s discretion (whether provided prior to application submittal, included in the application, or provided to fulfill reporting requirements).
	6. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to provide all information requested in the Request for Applications package at the time of submission. Failure to provide information requested in this Request for Applications may, at the discretion of the Department’s Grant Review Team, result in a lower rating for the incomplete sections or disqualification.

**PART IV PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

Evaluation of the submitted proposals will be accomplished as follows:

1. **Evaluation Process - General Information**
2. The Commissioner shall appoint a five-member Agricultural Development Grant Review Team, which will judge the merits of the applications received in accordance with the criteria defined in the Request for Applications, and in accordance with the most advantageous cost and economic impact considerations (where applicable) for the State. The Committee will make recommendation to the Commissioner on the acceptance or rejection of grant applications.
3. Officials responsible for making decisions on the selection of project applications shall 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 applications and to ensure that the grant is awarded to the Applicants whose applications best satisfies the criteria of the Request for Applications at a reasonable/competitive cost.
4. The Department reserves the right to communicate and/or schedule interviews/presentations with Applicants if needed to obtain clarification of information contained in the Applications received, and the Department may revise the scores assigned in the initial evaluation to reflect those communications and/or interviews/presentations. Interviews/presentations are not required, and changes to applications will not be permitted during any interview/presentation process. Therefore, Applicants should submit applications that present their proposed budget and other requested information as clearly and completely as possible.
5. **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.

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| **Scoring Criteria** | **Maximum Points Available** |
| The application is determined to be a Commissioner Priority Area (alignment with priority area/s is clearly stated in the narrative, and the project demonstrably aligns with the state Priority Area/s.) | 10 points |
| Identification of Need/Opportunity and Justification | 20 points |
| Project Goals, Objectives, Deliverables (these should be clearly stated, reasonable, and quantifiable when possible) | 20 points |
| Innovation | 10 points |
| Degree of Risk (risks inherent to the project and/or the vendor are elucidated and explained; failure to explain risk, and/or proposing a high risk project will result in no points awarded in this area) | 5 points |
| Project Methodology and Schedule (the plan for conducting the work is clear and organized) | 5 points |
| Project Management (the staff who will conduct the project are qualified and available) | 5 points |
| Budget & Budget Narrative (the budget is comprehensive, realistic, reasonable, includes adequate and appropriate match, and offers a good return on investment) | 25 points |
| **Total Points** | * + 1. **points**
 |

* 1. **Scoring Process:** The Agricultural Development Grant Review Team will use a consensus approach to evaluate and score all sections listed above. Members of the review team will not score those sections individually but, instead, will arrive at a consensus regarding assignment of points for each of those sections.

Regarding the proposed funds requested and the proposed work, the Agricultural Development Grant Review Team will consider the degree to which the project represents a good return for the investment (money, time) as well as whether the project work and cost estimates (tasks & budget) are reasonable for the expected outcomes, along with the amount and quality of proposed matching funds or services.

* 1. **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 application or the Department’s Request for Application 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 Grant Review Team will provide recommendations of award(s) to the Commissioner for final approval.
	2. Notification of conditional award selection or non-selection will be made in writing by the Department.
	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.
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.

**APPENDIX A**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

**SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM**

**RFA# 202102018**

**Agricultural Development Grant**

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| **Organization Name:** |  |

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| **RFA Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
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*\* If a question is not related to any section of the RFA, state “N/A” under “RFA Section & Page Number”.*

*\*\* Add additional rows, if necessary.*