**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

*Agricultural Resource Development Division*



**RFA# 202403071**

**Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure 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](mailto:michelle.t.webb@maine.gov) |
| **Submitted Questions Due** | *All questions must be received by the RFA Coordinator identified above by:*  **Date:** April 10, 2024no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **Application Submission Deadline** | *Applications must be received by the Division of Procurement Services by:*  **Submission Deadline:** April 29, 2024, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time.  *Applications must be submitted electronically to:* [Proposals@maine.gov](mailto:Proposals@maine.gov) |

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Page** |
|  |  |
| **RFA DEFINITIONS/ACRONYMS** | **3** |
|  |  |
| **PART I OVERVIEW OF THE GRANT OPPORTUNITY** | **7** |
| 1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND |  |
| 1. GENERAL PROVISIONS |  |
| 1. ELIGIBILITY TO SUBMIT BIDS |  |
| 1. AWARDS |  |
| 1. APPEAL OF CONTRACT AWARDS |  |
|  |  |
| **PART II ACTIVITIES AND REQUIREMENTS** | **10** |
|  |  |
| **PART III KEY PROCESS EVENTS** | **19** |
| 1. INFORMATIONAL SESSION |  |
| 1. SUBMISSION OF QUESTIONS |  |
| 1. AMENDMENTS |  |
| 1. APPLICATION SUBMISSION |  |
|  |  |
| **PART IV APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION** | **21** |
| 1. EVALUATION PROCESS – GENERAL INFORMATION |  |
| 1. SCORING PROCESS |  |
| 1. SCORING WEIGHTS |  |
| 1. SELECTION AND AWARD |  |
| 1. CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION AND CONDITIONS |  |
|  |  |
| **PART V APPLICATION FORM** | **29** |
|  |  |
| **APPENDIX A** – SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM | **30** |

**RFA TERMS/ACRONYMS with DEFINITIONS**

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Term/Acronym** | **Definition** |
| **Acknowledgment of Support** | In addition to the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) section 11.0 Acknowledgement of Support, this program also requires that the subrecipient follow AMS requirements for signage and acknowledgment of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. |
| **AMS** | The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is a division of the USDA. The Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. AMS also provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country. |
| **Application** | A completed package containing all elements detailed in the RFA. |
| **Beginning Farmer** | A “[beginning farmer or rancher](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-VII/subchapter-D/part-760/subpart-B/section-760.107)” means for this section a person or legal entity who for a program year both:  (i) Has never previously operated a farm or ranch, or who has not operated a farm or ranch in the previous 10 years, applicable to all members (shareholders, partners, beneficiaries, etc., as fits the circumstances) of an entity, and  (ii) Will have or has had for the relevant period materially and substantially participated in the operation of a farm or ranch. See also: [Beginning Farmer.](https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/bfrp_definition.aspx) |
| **Department or DACF** | Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry |
| **Build America, Buy America (BABA)** | Any public infrastructure Project funded under RFSI must coordinate with AMS to ensure adherence to BABA guidance. For such Projects, the subrecipient must comply with the Buy America Sourcing requirements outlined in the Build America, Buy America (BABA) provisions of the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684/text).However, the BABA small grants waiver will apply to subawards with total federal funding below the Simplified Acquisition Threshold, currently at $250,000. BABA does not apply to Maine RFSI Infrastructure Project Grants or RFSI Equipment-Only Grants as they do not surpass this threshold of $250,000. See: [eCFR :: 2 CFR Part 184 -- Buy America Preferences for Infrastructure Projects](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part-184) |
| **Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers** | Some groups of people are identified in Farm Bill legislation and in USDA policy as being Historically Underserved (HU). Members of these groups have been historically underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs. [Four groups are defined by USDA as “Historically Underserved,”](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers) including farmers or ranchers who are: Beginning; Socially Disadvantaged; Veterans; and Limited Resource. |
| **Indirect Costs** | Indirect costs are any costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives that therefore, cannot be readily identified with an individual project, program, or organizational activity. They generally include facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses. If an applicant has a NICRA, it is required to use this amount, and a copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the application. Otherwise, applicants may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC). See RFSI [Program Scope and Requirements section](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RFSI_ProgramScopeandRequirements.pdf) 4.2 Indirect Costs for further guidance. |
| **Infrastructure Project Grant** | The Department will work in partnership with the USDA to make competitive investments in middle of the supply chain infrastructure through RFSA Infrastructure Project Grant subawards to eligible Applicant entities. |
| **Letter of Support (LOS)** | A Letter of Support is an optional application component that facilitates the Applicant’s demonstration of stakeholder support. |
| Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher | The term [Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers) means a participant:   * With direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and * Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.   A Self-Determination Tool is available to the public and may be completed online or printed and completed hardcopy at: [https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov](https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/)/. |
| Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partners | Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partners with a current LFPA contract with the Department are also determined by the RFSI Program to meet the criteria to be considered processors or other middle-of-the-supply chain businesses owned by socially disadvantaged individuals. |
| **Maine-Grown and Harvested Food and Beverage Product** | All RFSI Infrastructure Project Grant-funded foods and beverages must be for human consumption, be intended to contribute to more and better markets for local producers (no foods intentionally produced or processed for donation to a food bank or pantry network).  RFSI funded foods must b*e produced in the State of Maine and contain 51% or more agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in Maine by weight or volume. Water is excluded from this requirement.* The USDA defines grown, harvested, or produced to mean farm cultivated and harvested and not wild-caught. No meat, poultry, foraged, or wild-caught ingredients may be included in food products funded in any manner through the RFSI program.  Priority points will be granted to Project Applications for middle of the supply chain activities where the funded foods contain 67% *or more agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in Maine by weight or volume. Water is excluded from this requirement.* |
| **Middle of the Supply Chain** | The middle of the supply chain is the stage that occurs after agricultural production and before the product is sold to consumers. The food supply chain involves the following stages: 1) Production, 2) Processing, 3) Aggregation/Distribution, and 4) Markets/Consumers. For the purposes of RFSI, “middle of the supply chain” refers to the middle stages: 2) Processing and 3) Aggregation/Distribution.  RFSI funds cannot be used for 1) Production activities/costs, including farm equipment, tools, supplies, gardening, or production-related labor/training or 4) Market/Consumers activities. Please note that in accordance with the RFSI [Program Scope and Requirements section](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RFSI_ProgramScopeandRequirements.pdf), on-farm post-harvest processing, preservation, and storage/cold storage are allowable activities. |
| **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** | Requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. See: [National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)](https://www.epa.gov/nepa/what-national-environmental-policy-act) and related applicable agency regulations and instructions, [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/historic-preservation-policy-tools/legislation-policy-and-reports/section-106-of-the-national-historic-preservation-act) (NHPA), and [the Endangered Species Act](https://www.fws.gov/law/endangered-species-act) (ESA). |
| **Project** | 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 and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, a Project 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 limited duration with a definitive beginning and end. A Project will also have an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks. RFSI Infrastructure Project grants will fund projects that expand capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted agricultural products. |
| **Reimbursement basis** | Grant funds will be paid to subrecipients based upon reimbursement requests (invoices) for approved project expenses according to a grant award contract. |
| **RFSI** | Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program |
| **Small Disadvantaged Business, Women-Owned Small Business, or Veteran-Owned Small Business** | A business entity applicant that meets the SBA-determined eligibility criteria for one or more of the [SBA categories](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs) of small disadvantaged business, women-owned small business, or veteran-owned small business.  These types of applicant entities are permitted to request that the required match funding contribution or cost share is reduced to 25% of the proposed Project cost. |
| **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher** | A [socially disadvantaged](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers) is, for this program, a producer or processor who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Gender is not included as a covered group. RFSI socially disadvantaged groups include the following and no others:  (i)American Indians or Alaskan Natives,  (ii) Asians or Asian-Americans,  (iii) Blacks or African Americans,  (iv) Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and  (v) Hispanics.  For an entity, at least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals to meet the criteria for socially disadvantaged. The term entities reflect a broad interpretation to include partnerships, couples, legal entities, etc. |
| **State** | State of Maine |
| **SBA** | Small Business Administration |
| **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. |
| **Unique Identifier Number (UEI)** | The 12-digit UEI number replaces the 9-digit DUNS number provided by Dun & Bradstreet which were previously used by the agency to uniquely identify organizations receiving federal funds. There is NO cost to register in SAM.gov. |
| **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. See also [RFSI Specific Terms and Conditions.](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RFSI_Specific_TermsandConditions_FY23.pdf) |
| **Veteran Producers or Processors** | A person who served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, including the reserve components thereof, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable and who also meets the definition of beginning farmer or rancher (BFR).  The VFR must: a) not have operated a farm or ranch; or b) not have operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 consecutive years. For a legal entity or joint operation to be considered a VFR entity, all members must meet the definition of VFR. See [Veteran Farmer Program Definition](https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/VFR_Definition.aspx) |

**PART I OVERVIEW OF THE GRANT OPPORTUNITY**

## Purpose and Background

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (Department) is seeking applications for the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI) 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 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA AMS) is partnering with state Departments of Agriculture to invest in food supply chain resilience, market access, and value-added processing infrastructure through the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI).

The purpose of the Maine Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program is to build resilience across Maine’s middle of the food supply chain. Funds will support expanded capacity for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, and distribution of Maine-produced food and beverage products, including specialty crops (farm cultivated and processed for human food consumption), dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, and other food products, excluding meat and poultry.

All RFSI Infrastructure Project Grant-funded foods and beverages must be for human consumption, be intended to contribute to more and better markets for local producers (no foods intentionally produced or processed for donation to a food bank or pantry network). RFSI funded foods must b*e produced in the State of Maine and contain 51% or more agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in Maine by weight or volume. Water is excluded from this requirement.* The USDA defines grown, harvested, or produced to mean farm cultivated and harvested and not wild-caught. No meat, poultry, foraged, or wild-caught ingredients may be included in food products funded in any manner through the RFSI program. Priority points will be granted to Project Applications for middle of the supply chain activities where the funded foods contain 67% *or more agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in Maine by weight or volume. Water is excluded from this requirement.*

The Department will work in partnership with the USDA to make competitive subaward investments in middle of the supply chain infrastructure (Infrastructure Project Grants) to domestic food and farm businesses and other eligible entities. Projects will begin no earlier than September 1, 2024, and must be completed by May 24, 2027.

## General Provisions

1. From the time this RFA is issued until award notification is made, all contact with the State regarding this RFA must be made through the RFA Coordinator identified on the cover page of this RFA. No other person/State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFA. Violation of this provision may lead to disqualification from the application 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, where applicable.
3. All applications 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. Applications are to follow the format and respond to all questions and instructions specified in Part III of the RFA.
4. Applicants will take careful note that in evaluating an application submitted in response to this RFA, the Department will consider materials provided in the application, 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 the Applicant’s experience and capabilities.
5. The application 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 applications received in response to the RFA.
9. All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, shall be included by this reference. It shall be the Applicant’s responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.

## Eligibility to Submit Applications

All applicant businesses and organizations must be domestically owned, and applicants’ facilities must be physically located in Maine. Applicants doing business along the state’s border or have locations in multiple states should only apply in one state to avoid duplication of federal funds. Applicants that have received prior state or federal funding are eligible to apply for RFSI funding for a specific Project that will have distinct and measurable outcomes, activities, and expenditures that will not be funded through state or federal funds.

Entities eligible for RFSI Infrastructure Project Grants are:

* Agricultural producers or processors, or groups of agricultural producers and processors.
* Nonprofit organizations operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products.
* For-profit entities operating middle of the supply chain activities such as processing, aggregation, or distribution of targeted agricultural products, whose activities are primarily focused for the benefit of local and regional producers, and that meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards.
  + - For-profit entities must meet the eligibility requirements of the SBA small business size standards matched to industries described in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). For more information on these size standards, please visit [SBA’s Size Standards webpage](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-guide/size-standards). For a quick check on whether your business qualifies, please use the SBA [Size Standards Tool](https://www.sba.gov/size-standards/index.html)
* Local government entities operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products.
* Tribal governments operating middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural products.
* Institutions such as schools, universities, or hospitals bringing producers together to establish cooperative or shared infrastructure or invest in equipment that will benefit multiple producers middle of the supply chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution of targeted agricultural product.

## Awards

The Maine Department of Agriculture (DACF) will work in partnership with USDA to make competitive sub-award investments in middle of the supply chain infrastructure (Infrastructure Project grants) to domestic food and farm businesses and other eligible entities. Project activities will begin no earlier than the date stated in an awarded subrecipient contract (contracts will not be executed prior to July 1, 2024). All Projects must be completed by May 24, 2027. There will be no opportunity for contracts to be extended beyond May 24, 2027.

The Department anticipates making multiple awards of no less than $100,000 and no more than $250,000 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.

1. **Appeal of Contract Awards**

Any person aggrieved by the award decision that results from this Request for Applications may appeal the decision to the Director of the Bureau of General Services in the manner prescribed in 5 MRSA § 1825-E and 18-554 Code of Maine Rules, Chapter 120 (found here: [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 contract award.

**PART II ACTIVITIES AND REQUIREMENTS**

# 

1. **Infrastructure Project Grant Activities**

The Department will work in partnership with the USDA to make competitive investments in middle of the supply chain infrastructure through RFSA Infrastructure Project Grant subawards to eligible Applicant entities.

A Project is defined as a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive, distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period 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 limited duration with a definitive beginning and end. A Project will also have an overarching goal that the applicant wants to accomplish through a series of individual activities or tasks.

RFSI Infrastructure Project Grants will fund projects that expand middle of the supply chain capacity and infrastructure for the aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of targeted agricultural products. Examples include:

* + - Expanding processing capacities, including adding product types, increasing production volumes, and supporting new wholesale/retail product lines;
    - Modernizing equipment or facilities through upgrades, repairs, or retooling; (e.g., adapting product lines for institutional procurement or adding parallel processing capacity, construction of wastewater management structures, etc.);Purchase and installation of specialized equipment, such as processing components, sorting equipment, packing and labeling equipment, or delivery vehicles;
    - Modernizing manufacturing, tracking, storage, and information technology systems;
    - Enhancing worker safety through adoption of new technologies or investment in equipment or facility improvements;
    - Construction of a new facility;
    - Increasing packaging and labeling capacities that meet compliance requirements under applicable laws (e.g., sealing, bagging, boxing, labeling, conveying, and product moving equipment);
    - Increasing storage space, including cold storage;
    - Develop, customize, or install equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, increases efficiency in water use, improves air and/or water quality, and/or meets one or more of USDA’s climate action goals;
      * In all programs, 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 mitigating and adapting to climate change in their Project’s design and implementation.
    - Modernize equipment or facilities to ensure food safety, including associated Hazard, Analysis, and Critical Control Points (HACCP) consultation, plan development and employee training;
    - Training on the use of all equipment purchased under the grant and associated new processes.

1. **Maine RFSI Infrastructure Grant Priorities**

RFSI Infrastructure Project grant applications must align with one or more of the following Maine RFSI Infrastructure Project Grant Priorities:

* Projects that will achieve on-farm facility infrastructure improvements (including expansion and modifications to existing buildings and/or construction of new buildings at existing facilities) to resolve middle-of-the-food-supply chain challenges.
  + The on-farm facilities to receive upgrades, repairs, or reconfigurations must be facilities that enhance middle-of-the-food-supply chain activities and not production related activities.
* Projects that support processing and packaging improvements (including value-added processing, hiring term-limited personnel to assist with project implementation, copacking and packaging investments, and processing, canning, and preserving as an area most in need of investment, drying, hulling, shelling, milling, cooking, baking, juicing, distilling, and fermenting).
* Projects that support storage and distribution improvements (including cold storage, aggregator warehouse and storage space, and delivery and distribution investments).
* Projects that directly benefit underserved or underrepresented food producers.
  + Applicants must indicate if their project will directly benefit underserved farmers and ranchers, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran producers, or processors or other middle-of-the-supply chain businesses owned by socially disadvantaged individuals including Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partners.
* Projects that demonstrate stakeholder support.
  + Applicants will be encouraged to describe the stakeholders that support the need for their project and why (other than the applicant and organizations involved in the project). Letters of support are encouraged.
* Projects that improve middle-of-the-supply-chain challenges within Maine’s targeted agricultural products (specialty crops, dairy, grains for human consumption, aquaculture, value-added products).

1. **USDA RFSI Infrastructure Grant Priorities**

RFSI Infrastructure Project grant applications must align with one or more of the following USDA RFSI Infrastructure Project Grant Priorities:

* Expand value-added product capacity and resiliency
  + Projects that support the development of value-added products available to consumers.
  + Focus on small and medium-sized enterprises that add options and choices for consumers and producers (emphasis on value-added);
* Workforce/economic impact
  + Projects that support proposals that provide fair prices, fair wages and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural communities.
  + Projects that offer family-supporting job quality and treatment/safety of workers;
* Diversity of processing infrastructure
  + Projects that increase diversity in processing options in terms of business model approaches, geography, and availability to underserved communities.
  + Applications that are submitted by cooperatives, farmer- and worker-owned enterprises.
* Projects that offer more and better market opportunities and new streams of revenue to small and mid-sized agricultural producers, including those who may not have access to value-added opportunities or processing to meet market demand for premium or value-added products, such as underserved producers.

1. **Allowable Use of Funds for Middle of the Supply Chain Activities and Investments**

RFSI Infrastructure Project Grants to middle-of-the-supply businesses must create more diverse local and regional market options and create more economic opportunities for communities, allowing them to retain more of the value chain dollar. States must ensure that Infrastructure Project grants are used for the purpose of expanding the middle of the supply chain capacity for locally and regionally produced foods and offer more and better market opportunities and new streams of revenue to small and mid-sized agricultural producers, including those who may not have access to value-added opportunities or processing to meet market demand for premium or value-added products, such as underserved producers. The Department and the USDA reserve the right to make changes to, and final determination of eligible expenses.

The USDA defines the middle of the food supply chain as the stage that occurs after agricultural production and before the product is sold to consumers. These activities include the processing, aggregation, and distribution of agricultural products between leaving the field and entering the marketplace. Therefore, grant funds cannot be used for the cultivation, harvest, or retail marketing of eligible food and beverage products. Allowable activities or tasks that could be a part of such Projects may include:

* + - Hiring term-limited personnel to assist with project implementation activities;
    - Purchasing special purpose equipment: defined in section 8.2 of the AMS General Terms and Conditions. This includes the purchase of special purpose equipment for institutions or others that will benefit multiple producers through middle-of-the-supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, and distribution of targeted agricultural products;
    - Analyzing potential facility upgrades and changes that meet regulatory requirements, obtaining design and/or architecture services, etc. (to the extent these costs are directly related to the project);
    - Planning for Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) or other food safety or worker safety measures or equipment recommendations; and
    - \* Upgrades or new facilities for processing specific eligible agricultural products, such as:
      * On-farm post-harvest processing, preservation, and storage/cold storage;
      * Post-harvest cleaning and grading;
      * Aggregator warehouse and storage, including cooperatives;
      * Purchase of freezing equipment, freezer, or cold storage;
      * Processing, canning, preserving and pasteurization;
      * Preparation and packing;
      * Drying, hulling, shelling, and milling; and o Cooking, baking, juicing, distilling, fermenting.

\* All construction and renovation activities must be completed by licensed contractors. Applicants must ensure that facility improvements comply with all applicable license and permit requirements by the state, county, or other local jurisdiction for their type of facility (for example, food processing, dairy, food storage, etc.) Applicants must also ensure there is no conflict of interest in contracting or purchasing of goods and services.

1. **Non-Allowable Use of Funds**

RFSI Applications must demonstrate how the project will increase processing capacity in the state or region and contribute to more and better markets for the targeted agricultural products of farmers and ranchers in the state or geographic area, including whether and how it benefits underserved producers.

Activities that only support existing capacity and/or market value and do not expand processing and middle of the supply chain capacity in the state or region are ineligible for RFSI funding.

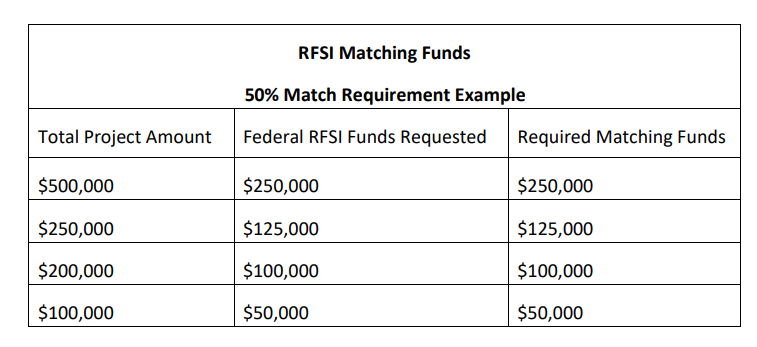
Additionally, activities and expenses that are NOT eligible include but are not limited to:

* + - Any pre-harvest activities and expenses (for example, green houses, tractors, row covers, irrigation equipment, soil amendments, seed, livestock animals, feed, or other agricultural inputs).
    - On-going operating costs that do not directly support completion of the proposed Project.
    - Acquiring real property (including land purchases), or any interest therein.
    - Projects that include meat and poultry processing, wild-caught seafood, foraged or non-farmed ingredients, animal feed and forage products, fiber, soaps, herbs not intended for human consumption, floriculture, horticulture, landscaping products, tobacco, medicine, or dietary supplements.
    - Activities that have received a state or Federal award for the same activity or expense.
  + Claiming expenses that have been or will be reimbursed under any Federal, State, or local government funding; and
  + Applicants that have already received funding from another federal grant or subaward may not receive funding for the same activities through RFSI. However, RFSI Infrastructure Project grants may build on the successes of prior funding, such as the Maine AIIP and the USDA Regional Food Business Centers Business Builder subawards, to fund subsequent activities.
    - Fees or issuance costs associated with the issuance of loans or debt.
      * Expenses that have been or will be reimbursed by insurance.
    - Costs incurred and/or payments made outside of the performance period outlined in the contractual grant agreement.
    - Illegal activity under federal or state law or regulation.

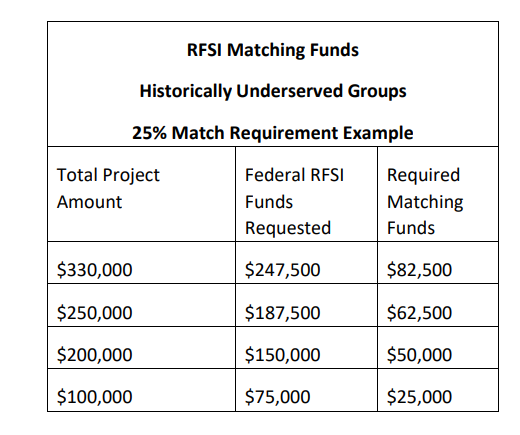
Note: if an Applicant proposes a minor unallowable activity (e.g., an equipment item that is considered general purpose rather than special purpose) that is deemed to be insignificant to the overall Project outcomes if removed from the Project, the Application may pass as eligible. However, the Department, as guided by the USDA, will reduce any Project budget by subtracting unallowable activities and expenditures prior to awarding a contract.

1. **Matching Funds**
   1. **Matching Funds Requirement**

Infrastructure Project Grant subrecipients are required to contribute 50% of the total proposed project cost as a match to federal funding. This applies to all applicants except those who qualify for the reduced match described in the next section. RFSI Infrastructure Project Grants require a cost sharing match. Cost sharing or matching is the portion of project costs not paid by State or Federal funds, which could be cash and/or in-kind contributions. Cash can be a financial outlay, or cash donations from non-Federal third parties. In kind can be the value of non-cash contributions typically in the form of value of personnel, goods, and services, including direct and indirect costs. Other State and Federal funds cannot be used as a match. (See 2 CFR [§§ 200.1](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR2a6a0087862fd2c/section-200.1) and [§§ 200.306](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/section-200.306)).



* 1. **Reduced Matching Funds – Historically Underserved Groups**



For Applicants that are [historically underserved farmers and ranchers](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers), or for other applicant businesses that qualify under [SBA categories](https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs) of small disadvantaged business, women-owned small business, or veteran-owned small business, the required match funding contribution or cost share may be reduced to 25% of the Project cost. States must require that applicants self-certify in their Infrastructure Grant applications to being eligible for this reduced match.

* 1. **Other Matching Funds Information**

In-kind contributions are defined, when used as a cost share or match for a grant, as the value of goods or services provided for the benefit of the grant program, where no funds transferred hands. For example, a partner, such as a tribal community member, may volunteer their professional expertise as a match contribution to the project as described in 2 C.F.R. [§ 200.306(e)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/section-200.306). These contributions cannot satisfy a cost sharing or matching requirement for this grant program if they are used toward satisfying a match requirement under any other Federal grant agreement to which the applicant is a party.

All matching contributions must be committed or secured at the time an applicant is recommended for an award. Indirect costs may count toward the Infrastructure Grant applicant’s match. Refer to section 4.2 in the [USDA RFSI Program Scope and Requirements, Indirect](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/RFSI_ProgramScopeandRequirements.pdf) for more information. Program income (as defined in 2 C.F.R. [§ 200.1](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR2a6a0087862fd2c/section-200.1)) or any other Federal funds is an ineligible match or cost share source.

All construction and renovation activities must be completed by licensed contractors. All in kind contributions for processing and construction must backed with a letter from a licensed business on the qualified contractor’s letterhead. Matching contributions cannot be inflated, the wage must be the company wage. For example, an Applicant may not charge a higher wage to DIY construction costs than the wage they are currently paid for their current position.

* 1. **Matching Funds Letters of Verification**

Each application must include the total amount of match and how it will specifically align with their requested funding. All construction, including electrical, plumbing, HVAC, etc. activities must be completed by licensed professionals with the appropriate Maine qualifications. If the Applicant is, or employs, a licensed contractor they would be permitted to include licensed construction expenses, including their own labor, that directly relate to the Project in their application. However, all in kind contributions that include construction activities, need to be backed with a letter from a qualified business on the respective letterhead, outlying the activities and value of activities that are being committed to meet the matching requirements. Matching contributions cannot be inflated, the wage must be the company wage for that individual’s position. For example, an Applicant cannot charge a higher wage to DIY construction costs than the wage the individual is currently paid for their current position (e.g. you cannot charge a contractor wage for a processing laborer to conduct construction activities even if they poses a construction-specific license.

Applicants must submit one match verification letter for each cash or in-kind resource signed by the matching organization. The Matching Funds Letter of Verification template may be downloaded from the [Maine RFSI webpage](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/resilient-food-systems-infrastructure.shtml). Match Verification Letters must minimally include the following:

* Project Applicant
* Project Title
* Cash Commitment per year (if applicable) and Total Cash Match
* In-kind Contribution per year (if applicable) and Total In-kind Match. Break down items into categories as applicable:
  + Salaries (employee name, title, duties, pay rate/hr., amount matched per year)
  + Items/Activities (fair market value per unit, how value is determined, and amount matched per year)
  + Explanation of how each type of match will correspond to the budget or be used by the applicant.
* Signature of Matching Organization Representative with typed name and title. Signed Match Verification Letters must accompany the Infrastructure Grant proposal at the time of application.
  1. **Budget Match Worksheet**

Each application must include the RFSI Budget Match Worksheet which may be downloaded from the [Maine RFSI webpage](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/resilient-food-systems-infrastructure.shtml). This worksheet includes a budget example and a template for the Applicant to complete to document Requested RFSI Funds, Grantee Matching Funds, and RFSI Total Project Cost.

1. **Evidence of Critical Infrastructure**

Evidence of Critical Infrastructure is required if critical resources and/or infrastructure are necessary to complete the proposed grant project. Applicants must submit evidence that critical resources and infrastructure necessary to support the initiation and completion of a project are in place. Critical resources and infrastructure can be facilities, land, structure, use of city street/parks, shared-used kitchen, and/or other essential resources for the proposed project activities. Land, structures, and other critical resources must be in place and in working condition at the time of application submission. The letter must indicate the critical resources necessary for initiating and completing the project and certify that they are in place and committed prior to the start date of the project.

A template for the Evidence of Critical Infrastructure may be downloaded from the [Maine RFSI webpage](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/resilient-food-systems-infrastructure.shtml).

Letters of Evidence of Critical Infrastructure must minimally include the following:

* Project Applicant
* Project Title
* A statement about committing/approving/granting permission, etc., of the critical resource or infrastructure to the project for the time period
* A description of the approved use of the critical resource or infrastructure approved for the project, any costs associated with its use, and any qualifying circumstances for its use

1. **Indirect Costs**

Indirect costs are any costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be readily identified with an individual project, program, or organizational activity. They generally include facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses. If an Infrastructure Project Grant recipient has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), States are required to honor that negotiated rate, and a copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the Infrastructure Grant application. Otherwise, applicants may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC).

1. **Disbursement of Funds**

Award recipients must sign an official State of Maine agreement with Maine DACF indicating their commitment and responsibilities toward completing their RFSI project in a manner consistent with State of Maine policies and all applicable state and federal laws and regulations. Recipient businesses must be registered as a vendor with the Maine Division of Procurement Services before final approval can take place.

1. **Reporting Requirements**

Grant subrecipients will be required to submit annual performance reports as required by the Department and the USDA throughout the duration of the project and a final performance report upon completion of the project. The Department or its designee(s) reserves the right to perform site monitoring visits to any and all awardees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame and that fiscal procedures are being followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring includes both financial and program information as well as site visits.

1. **Other Requirements**
   1. **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

All activities funded under this RFA must comply with the [National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)](https://www.epa.gov/nepa/what-national-environmental-policy-act) and related applicable agency regulations and instructions, [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/historic-preservation/historic-preservation-policy-tools/legislation-policy-and-reports/section-106-of-the-national-historic-preservation-act) (NHPA), the  [Endangered Species Act](https://www.fws.gov/law/endangered-species-act) (ESA), other laws and regulations as outlined therein, and any applicable state, local, or tribal laws. A review for NEPA compliance is required prior to the award of grant funds. If selected for an award, applicants must provide all requested information to support compliance with NEPA, NHPA, ESA, and all other federal environmental laws and regulations.

* 1. **Build America, Buy America (BABA)**

Any public infrastructure project funded under RFSI must coordinate with AMS to ensure adherence to BABA guidance. For such projects, the recipient must comply with the Buy America Sourcing requirements outlined in the Build America, Buy America (BABA) provisions of the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3684/text).

* *For-Profit Entities:* BABA does not apply to for-profit entities (prime or subrecipient) particularly for infrastructure projects. AMS will review facilities owned by public entities to determine whether BABA requirements apply, following USDA guidance to exempt de minimis grant awards and other inapplicable activities. All other Infrastructure Grant entities that surpass the $250,000 threshold of applicable procurement costs must adhere to BABA.
* *Small Grants Waiver:* The small grants waiver will apply to awards with total federal funding below the Simplified Acquisition Threshold, currently at $250,000. BABA does not apply to Equipment Only Grants as they do not surpass this threshold of $250,000.
* *Resource:* [2 CFR Part 184 - BUY AMERICA PREFERENCES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part-184)
  1. **UEI SAM.Gov**

All subrecipients of RFSI funds must have a Unique Entity Identifier number (UEI) in SAM.Gov prior to being issued a subrecipient contract. There is NO cost to register in SAM.gov.

* 1. **Acknowledgement of Support**

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).

In addition to the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf) section 11.0 Acknowledgement of Support, this program also requires that the recipient follow AMS requirements for signage and acknowledgment of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. USDA AMS will provide guidance on necessary signage and acknowledgment.

**PART III KEY PROCESS EVENTS**

## Submission of 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 A** (Submitted Questions Form) for submission of questions. The form is to be submitted as a WORD document.
     2. Questions 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 State’s Division of Procurement Services [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants) website. 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.

## Amendments

All amendments released in regard to this RFA will be posted on the Division of Procurement Services [Grant RFPs and RFAs](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/grants) website. 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.

## Application Submission

* 1. **Applications Due:** Applications 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 application submissions or any additional or revised application files, received after the 11:59 p.m. deadline, will be rejected without exception.

1. **Delivery Instructions:** Applications must be submitted electronically to the State of Maine Division of Procurement Services at [proposals@maine.gov](mailto:proposals@maine.gov).
   1. Only applications received by e-mail will be considered. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete e-mail transmission and receipt.

Application 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.

* 1. E-mails containing links to file sharing sites or online file repositories will not be accepted as submissions. Only e-mail application submissions that have the requested files attached will be accepted.
  2. Encrypted e-mails received which require opening attachments and logging into a proprietary system will not be accepted as submissions. It is the Applicant’s responsibility to check with its organization’s information technology team to ensure that security settings will not encrypt its application submission.
  3. File size limits are 25MB per e-mail. Applicants may submit files 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 as described above.
  4. Applicants are to insert the following into the subject line of their e-mail submission: “**RFA# 202403071 Application Submission – [Applicant’s Name]**”.

1. **Submission Contents**
2. All forms must be submitted as a single, typed, separate PDF file.
3. Applicants are not to provide additional attachments beyond those specified in the RFA or Application Form for the purpose of extending their response. Materials not requested will not be considered part of the application and will not be evaluated.
4. All application **MUST** include the following (found in Part V of the RFA) unless otherwise stated:
   * + 1. Maine RFSI **Application Form**
       2. USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template
       3. Match Verification Letter(s)
       4. RFSI Budget Match Worksheet
       5. Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Letter
5. Applicants **MAY optionally** include the following:
   * + 1. Letter(s) of Support (up to three)
       2. [Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher](https://stateofmaine-my.sharepoint.com/personal/michelle_t_webb_maine_gov/Documents/Documents/RFSI/Limited%20Resource%20Farmer%20or%20Rancher) Self-Determination Tool: <https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.
       3. Building permits, plans, and designs.

**PART IV APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

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 applications and to ensure that all contracts are awarded to the Applicants that provide 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 applications received. The Department may revise the scores assigned in the initial evaluation to reflect those communications and/or interviews/presentations. Changes to applications, 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.
   4. Failure to respond to all questions and instructions throughout the RFA may result in the application 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.
2. **Scoring Process:** The evaluation team will use a consensus approach to evaluate and score all sections listed below. 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.
3. **Scoring Weights:** The score will be based on a 100-point scale and will measure the degree to which each application meets the following criteria.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scoring Criteria** | **Points Available** |
| 1. **Eligible Entity**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template.**    2. The Applicant is an eligible entity as described in Part 1 Section C of this RFA. | **Pass/Fail** |
| 1. **Eligible Project Proposed**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template.**    2. The Application describes an eligible Project that meets the Project definition and terms as described in Part 2 Section A of this RFA. | **Pass/Fail** |
| 1. **Middle of the Supply Chain Activities Proposed**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template.**    2. The Application describes a Project that is based on allowable middle of the supply chain activities as described in Part 2 Section D of this RFA. | **Pass/Fail** |
| 1. **Market impact to increase Maine’s middle of the supply chain capacity (specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address).**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template Specific Issue, Problem, or Need that this Project will Address section.**    2. The Application demonstrates market impact and articulates how the Project is designed to solve challenges and increase middle of the supply chain capacity and resiliency (e.g. processing, aggregation, and distribution) of Maine-produced agricultural food and beverage products in the state or region and contribute to more and better markets for the targeted agricultural products of farmers and ranchers in the state. Specifically:       1. the degree to which the Project proposes to solve challenges in Maine’s food system by increasing, or improving, middle of the supply chain capacity and resiliency.       2. The degree to which the Project adds additional, or improved, sales channels for the Applicant. | **7** |
| 1. **The Project funded foods contain 67% or more Maine grown, harvested, or produced ingredients.**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section.**    2. Priority points will be granted to Project Applications for middle of the supply chain activities where the funded foods contain 67% *or more agricultural raw materials grown, harvested, or produced in Maine by weight or volume. Water is excluded from this requirement.* | **3** |
| 1. **Maine RFSI Priorities**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section.**    2. The Application clearly articulates how the Project will address one or more of the Maine RFSI Infrastructure Grant priority areas.       1. Projects that will achieve on-farm facility infrastructure improvements (including expansion and modifications to existing buildings and/or construction of new buildings at existing facilities) to resolve middle-of-the-food-supply chain challenges.          1. The on-farm facilities to receive upgrades, repairs, or reconfigurations must be facilities that enhance middle-of-the-food-supply chain activities and not production-related activities.       2. Projects that support processing and packaging improvements (including value-added processing, hiring term-limited personnel to assist with project implementation, co-packing and packaging investments, and processing, canning, and preserving as an area most in need of investment, drying, hulling, shelling, milling, cooking, baking, juicing, distilling, and fermenting).       3. Projects that support storage and distribution improvements (including cold storage, aggregator warehouse and storage space, and delivery and distribution investments). | **10** |
| 1. **USDA RFSI Priorities**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section.**    2. The Application clearly articulates how the Project will address one or more of the USDA RFSI Priorities       1. Expand value-added product capacity and resiliency          1. Projects that support the development of value-added products available to consumers.          2. Focus on small and medium-sized enterprises that add options and choices for consumers and producers (emphasis on value-added);       2. Workforce/economic impact          1. Projects that support proposals that provide fair prices, fair wages and new and safe job opportunities that keep profits in rural communities.          2. Projects that offer family-supporting job quality and treatment/safety of workers;       3. Diversity of processing infrastructure          1. Projects that increase diversity in processing options in terms of business model approaches, geography, and availability to underserved communities.          2. Applications that are submitted by cooperatives, farmer- and worker-owned enterprises          3. Projects that offer more and better market opportunities and new streams of revenue to small and mid-sized agricultural producers, including those who may not have access to value-added opportunities or processing to meet market demand for premium or value-added products, such as underserved producers. | **5** |
| 1. **Benefit to Underserved or Underrepresented food producers.**    1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section.**    2. The Application clearly articulates how the Project will directly benefit underserved farmers and ranchers, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran producers, or processors or other middle-of-the-supply chain businesses owned by socially disadvantaged individuals including Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Producer Partners.    3. For projects intending to serve these entities, the Applicant has demonstrated involvement of those beneficiaries when developing the proposed Projects and Application. | **5** |
| 1. **Expected Performance Measures**    1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template Expected Performance Measures Section.**    2. The Applicant thoroughly articulated the Project's purpose, deliverables, expected outcomes, and performance measures. The Applicant provided a description of the general tasks/activities to be completed during the project period to fulfill the Project's purpose, deliverables, expected outcomes, and performance measures.    3. The Applicant must identify at least one of the predetermined indicators listed under Outcome 2: Capacity in the middle of the supply chain for local/regional food products **OR** Outcome 3: Increase economic viability of local/regional producers and processors. The Applicant must provide quantifiable expected outcomes (expected numbers) based on the Project’s projects scope of work. | **5** |
| 1. **Stakeholder Support**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template External Project Support Section and any submitted letters of support.**    2. The Application clearly demonstrates stakeholder support for the Project. Successful applicants will effectively demonstrate community impact and support. Applicants must describe the stakeholders that support the need for the Project and why (other than the Applicant and organizations involved in the project). Up to three letters of support are encouraged and may be assigned points. | **5** |
| 1. **Community Impact**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template External Project Support Section and any submitted letters of support.**    2. The Application clearly demonstrates community impact including labor and workforce considerations.       1. The review team will consider the degree to which the Project directly addresses a specific gap or barrier within Maine’s local and regional food supply chain.       2. The Application articulates the specific farms, processors, food businesses and community stakeholders the Project will benefit. | **10** |
| 1. **Project Viability, Feasibility, and Readiness**     1. **Demonstrated in the Maine RFSI Application Form Project Narrative section and the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template, submitted letters of support, the RFSI Budget Match Worksheet, Match Verification Letters, Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Letter, and any documents submitted with the Application.**    2. The Application demonstrates the Applicant and Project’s financial viability, technical feasibility, and readiness.    3. The Project description of activities and purpose is clear, reasonable, and achievable by the proposed Project end date (no later than May 24, 2027).    4. The Applicant has demonstrated a sufficient state of planning and readiness to implement the proposed Project.    5. The Project will improve the Applicant’s business resiliency and will create opportunities to build upon these efforts after the Project is completed. The Applicant has demonstrated reasonable assurances that the entity will viable and economically sustainable after RFSI funding has ended.    6. The specific Project outcomes will increase the viability of the Applicant entity’s infrastructure such as: workforce capability, workforce safety, operational efficiency, food safety, waste, or wastewater management.    7. The Applicant has demonstrated the capacity to report outcomes and indicators to demonstrate investment impact. | **15** |
| 1. **Evidence of Critical Infrastructure**     1. **Demonstrated in the Evidence of Critical Resources and Infrastructure Letter and supported by any forms and/or documents submitted with the Application.**    2. The Applicant has demonstrated experience with the proposed work, including past Projects and/or appropriate staff/business relationships.    3. The Application provides evidence that the critical resources and infrastructure that are necessary for the proposed Project to be successful are in place.    4. The Applicant has submitted an error-free Evidence of Critical Infrastructure Form that is complete and adheres to the format outlined in the RFA.    5. Applicants must submit evidence that critical resources and infrastructure necessary to support the initiation and completion of a Project are in place. Critical resources and infrastructure can be facilities, land, structure, use of city street/parks, shared-used kitchen, and/or other essential resources for the proposed project activities. Land, structures, and other critical resources must be in place and in working condition at the time of application submission. The Form must indicate the critical resources necessary for initiating and completing the project and certify that they are in place and committed prior to the start date of the Project. | **5** |
| 1. **Budget Completeness**     1. **Demonstrated in the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template budget sections and the RFSI Budget Match Worksheet.**    2. The Application budget section is thoroughly complete and mathematically correct. The budgets align with the budget narrative and the proposed Project activities. | **10** |
| 1. **Budget Narrative and Justification**     1. **Demonstrated in the USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template budget sections and the RFSI Budget Match Worksheet.**    2. The Application demonstrates compliance with allowable costs as described in Part 2 Section D of this RFA and the [USDA General Terms and Conditions](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2024_AMSGeneralTermsandConditions.pdf)    3. The budget clearly demonstrates the total cost for the Project and articulate how category costs listed in the budget are derived.    4. The budget sections are free of mathematical and accounting errors, the budget sections reconcile.    5. The budget section includes a complete description of and justification for each cost including how it furthers the objectives of the Project.    6. The budget justification provides enough detail for reviewers to easily understand how costs were determined and how they relate to the Project Objectives and Expected Outcomes.    7. The budget demonstrates a relationship between work planned and performed to the costs incurred. 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 (deliverables and budget) are reasonable for the expected outcomes and objectives. | **10** |
| 1. **Matching Funds**     1. **Demonstrated in the Match Verification Letters and the RFSI Budget Match Worksheet.**    2. The Applicant has submitted an error-free Matching Funds Verification Letter and Budget Match Worksheet that is complete and adheres to the format outlined in the RFA. The matching funds documentation must demonstrate that all matching contributions will be committed or secured at the time the Applicant is recommended for an award.    3. All eligible entities must provide a 50% match OR a 25% graduated match of the total project cost. Applicants must submit written and signed verification of match commitment from any party, including the eligible entity, who will contribute a match of non-Federal resources to this project. | **5** |
| 1. **Application Completeness**    1. **Demonstrated by all forms and supporting documents submitted.**    2. The Application and all required documents are complete and adhere to the format outlined in the RFA. | **5** |
| **Total Points** | ***100 Points*** |

1. **Selection and Award**
   1. Notification of conditional award selection or non-selection will be made in writing by the Department.
   2. Issuance of this RFA in no way constitutes a commitment by the State 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.
   3. The Department reserves the right to reject any and all applications or to make multiple awards.
   4. The consensus scoring review committee will make recommendations to the Department Commissioner for approval to be submitted to the USDA for further review and approval.
   5. In awarding funds under this program, the Department may coordinate with other agencies or entities that the Department deems necessary.
   6. The Department reserves the right to determine number of awards and modify, partially fund, or increase awards at the Department’s discretion.
   7. Applicants selected during the RFA process will be required to complete all USDA requested changes to the Project Application and supporting documentation.
   8. The Department will complete a Maine RFSI Infrastructure Project Grant proposal for the USDA, and final award is contingent upon the acceptance of the Maine proposal by the USDA.
   9. The USDA reserves the right to reject any and all Applications or to make adjustments to awards. 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.
2. **Contract Administration and Conditions**
   1. The awarded Applicants will be required to execute a State of Maine Service Contract with the appropriate riders as determined by the issuing Department.
   2. 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.
   3. 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 Applicants in the finalization of the contract.
   4. 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.
   5. The Department will pay grant funds to the awarded subrecipient on a reimbursement-only basis. Subrecipients will receive reimbursement for only approved costs listed in the contract that results from the RFA.
   6. 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 complies with all specific and agreed-upon requirements listed within the contract that results from the RFA which may include: submission on the Department provided template, the State of Maine contract number, the Awardee’s State of Maine Vendor number, documentation of proof of payment for approved expenses (e.g., itemized receipt) for approved budget categories and line items for allowable expenses, and payment documentation for staff hours (e.g., expanded general ledger, timesheets, or pay stubs that show: the employee hours billed to a project during the payroll period; the employee net pay; other itemized payroll expenses).

**PART V APPLICATION FORM**

## Applicants must use the Forms embedded below to submit their application in response to this RFA.

## The Application Form, Critical Resource Infrastructure Template and Matching Funds Letter of Verification may be obtained in a Word (.docx) format by double clicking on the document icons below.



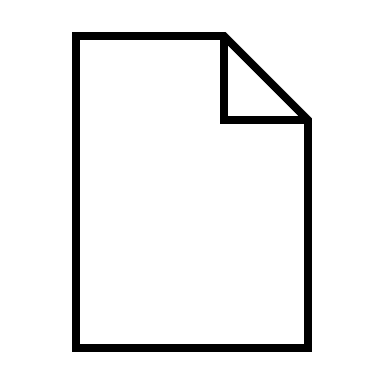




## The RFSI Budget Match Template may be obtained in an Excel (.xlxs) format by double clicking on the document icon below.



**[The USDA Template may be obtained in a PDF format by Ctrl+clicking on the wording or icon below.](C:\\Users\\Jessica.A.Routhier\\OneDrive - State of Maine\\Desktop\\RFSI_InfrastructureGrantTemplate_revised_09.2023.pdf)**

[](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/documents/rfsi-infrastructuregranttemplate-092023.pdf)

[USDA Infrastructure Grant Proposal Template](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/grants/documents/rfsi-infrastructuregranttemplate-092023.pdf)

**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).

**APPENDIX A SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM**

**State of Maine**

**Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**RFA# 202403071**

**Maine Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program**

This form should be used by Applicants when submitting written questions to the RFA Coordinator.

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. Submit this document in WORD format, not PDF.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Applicant Entity Name:** |  |

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