

From Kelly Crane, former awardee/reviewer: These questions are best answered by AMS staff, but here is the best of my understanding (AMS, please feel free to erase or correct if I get this wrong): When all the applications are received each year, they divide them all into groups of 10 or so, loosely organized geographically. They then assign them to teams of reviewers outside that area to avoid conflicts of interest. So the geographic group that an application lands in is specific to that year and not a fixed geographic area. For example, I think that if there were 30 applications received from California entities one year, 5 from Oregon, 2 from Washington and 3 from Idaho, then for that particular year, they may be sorted into 4 groups: 3 different groups of CA applications and one group that contained all of the other 3 PNW states' applications. And then the next year could be totally different based on the density of applications in a geographic area. I don't believe that AMS has any pre-set geographic regions that they use each year for review peer purposes. I hope that this is correct and helps clear up some confusion!

1. Can we find out what the geographic locations are for grant scoring, and which geographic locations are the most competitive?

From USDA: USDA does not have a pre-set geographic region for the peer review process. Reviewers are selected and assigned to FMPP or LFPP depending on their subject matter expertise and experience. Review teams are formed with reviewers from the same region or time zone to allow flexibility at the time of coordinating consensus review calls. Depending on the number of applications we can have up to 30-50 teams. Each team is assigned between 10-15 applications.

Applications are assigned to teams outside of the application area. For example, reviewers from the East Coast are assigned applications from the West Coast and reviewer from the West Coast are assigned applications from the East Coast to avoid conflict of interest.

California and New York submit the most applications to the FMLFPP program, and projects from these states are often split between multiple review Teams based on the criteria above.

2. Is there a map that shows the review regions? Is there information on the number of 2018 applications by each region?

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USDA does not map the distribution of applications, however we do announce the list of awarded projects each fiscal year. Information can be found using the links below.

FMPP: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp/awards>

LFPP: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/lfpp/awards>

3. Is there a way for us to know what Geographic Region our applications are sorted into for the reviewers?

From USDA: USDA does not have a pre-set geographic region for the peer review process. Reviewers are selected and assigned to FMPP or LFPP depending on their subject matter expertise and experience. Review teams are formed with reviewers from the same region or time zone to allow flexibility at the time of coordinating consensus review calls. Depending on the number of applications we can have up to 30-50 teams. Each team is assigned between 10-15 applications.

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4. Are proposals from the same state competing with one another more than with proposals from other parts of the country? Are southwest states only competing with each other? Are there allocations for different parts of the country?

From USDA: A review team may evaluate projects from one geographic area. However, the reviewers will be assigned to evaluate projects outside of their residential area. For example, reviewers in the Midwest may evaluate projects from the Southwest and vice versa. Reviewers sign a Conflict of Interest form requiring that they notify AMS of any previous knowledge of grant projects or applicants in their review portfolio.

### **Application**

5. Would you suggest building on or correcting the issues found in last year's application that was not funded? [From Kelly Crane, former awardee/reviewer:](#) It's up to you of course, but I would advise taking a good hard look at the feedback you got. Did everyone love your project concept, but have some nitpicky technical criticisms or issues with the way you laid out your

performance metrics? If so, those issues are easily resolved with additional thought, planning, application revisions, etc. If folks thought that the project concept itself was weak or the design and proposed activities lacked impact, that could signal that you might want to consider a different approach entirely. The benefit of building on an existing project is that you already have the benefit of reviewer feedback.

6. We've had reviewers deduct points because our per diem was too high. We require staff to eat at local food restaurants if possible while travelling so our per diem is higher by policy. Should we just reduce our per diem for Federal grants and make up the difference ourselves? [From Kelly Crane, former awardee/reviewer](#): I can't speak to whether or not the AMS staff may accept a higher-than-federal rate per diem during their review, but I can talk about it from a reviewer's perspective. I typically expect to see everyone use federal rates for that year reflected in the budget (per diems, mileage, etc.). If you have compelling reason to use a higher per diem, providing as much evidence to support that as possible would be advisable. For example, creating a separate attachment with a copy of your policy, any additional explanation necessary, copies of receipts as examples, etc. Evidence is key. That being said, you can't control who is on your review team and what perspectives they are bringing. You will have to decide whether or not the value of requesting a higher per diem is high enough to justify the risk of having points deducted. Personally, had I read your application and been provided with enough evidence to support that need, I probably would have given it full points but included a note to the AMS reviewers asking if it was allowed to request higher than the federal standard and let them sort it out... but that's just me.

[From USDA](#): Organizations can set their own per diem rates, but USDA recommends staying as close to the recommended [GSA](#) rate. Per diem rates should be reasonable and the grantee must specify what is included in the per diem rates (Lodging, meals, fees etc.) for USDA to clearly evaluate the cost. Reviewers are not expected to be experts on Federal regulations or on the AMS General Terms and Conditions. While peer reviewers may flag this as an issue, if it ranks high enough for selection, AMS will provide the ultimate decision on allowability. Ensure that the proposal is written well yet concisely, and that your costs are justified.

7. For the dispersal of funds to an awardee, is it by reimbursement only or can organizations draw down funds in upfront increments?

[From USDA](#): An awardee can receive payment by reimbursements or advances. Reimbursements are the preferred method. Requests for advance payments must be limited to amounts needed to meet actual and immediate cash needs. Advance payments must be accompanied by a justification and will be evaluated by USDA on case by case basis. Generally, USDA allows 3-months as advance payment, but it can vary depending on the awardee needs.

8. I've been told by a 2017 FMPP winner to include up to 10k in fees for Management Concepts training in Washington DC. Is that true for this year?

From USDA: Federal Grants Management Training is an allowable cost for awardees if it helps meet the objectives of the project and it's determined that it will help the organization execute the project activities. All costs should be reasonable, allocable and necessary. USDA would not consider \$10K for grant management training a reasonable cost, unless you are training a larger organization. You would need to provide adequate justification. Also, while AMS recommends that all grant recipients take grants management training, there are various options, including free options that our grants management specialists can discuss with you.

9. It seems that this years' RFA focuses solely on supporting producers and not on enhancing food access or security for consumers; is this an accurate reading?

From USDA: The FMLPP program continues its efforts to build connections between farmers and consumers, help create economic opportunities for small and mid- sized family farmers and increase access and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products. Due to time limit discussion on the program priorities was limited. Specifically, there are actually some important enhancements to the RFAs regarding food safety. I encourage you to review the following information:

RFA's:

- [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#)
- [Local Food Promotion Program](#)

Webinar recordings:

- Grant.gov: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/event/grantsgov-applicant-overview>
- FMLFPP: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/event/farmers-market-and-local-food-promotion-program-fmlfpp-applicant-webinar-0>

10. Does work plan have to be in grid format?

From USDA: Yes, the project narrative is an OMB approved form, so no changes are allowed on its format or its margins.

11. How many objectives is appropriate for a high-quality project?

From USDA: It depends on the organization and their capacity to complete the project objectives within the 3-year limit. Normally, we see applications with 3-4 objectives. It's recommended that applicants are realistic and consider the amount of work versus the time allotted for completion. Competitive applications are not those that have more objectives but rather those that demonstrate a well-established execution plan.



## **Partners**

12. Can a CSA be one of the partners in an LFPP proposal or is LFPP only for non direct markets?

From USDA: LFPP projects must develop, coordinate, or expand local and regional food business enterprises. Local or regional food businesses are organizations that serve as an intermediary between producers and buyers by carrying out one or more local or regional food supply chain activities such as processing, distribution, aggregation, and/or storing of locally-or regionally produced food products. Depending on how the project is framed a CSA could be a fit for LFPP.

13. Kelly mentioned getting congressional letters of support yet the application says these letters have no sway and are unnecessary. Please explain this difference advice.

From USDA: Applicant are required to provide letters of commitment from partners and collaborators. Letters of commitment must demonstrate partners or collaborators involvement in the project activities. Congressional letters do not carry any weight during the evaluation process, although you are welcome to include them if desired.

## **Match**

14. Match question. Can you clarify what you mean when you say match is 25% of total federal grant? Example: Federal grant \$100,000. Match \$25,000. Total budget: \$125,000. Is this correct?

From USDA: FMLFPP program requires 25% of the total amount of the Federal portion of the grant. This is correct. The federal funds will be for \$100,000 and the \$25,000 will come from the the recipients share.

15. Can the match be cash and in kind? How important is the cash match? How much does the cash match need to be?

From USDA: FMLFPP requires (no exceptions) cost sharing or match of 25% of the total amount of the Federal portion of the grant. Cost sharing or match can come in the form of cash or in kind. If the 25% match is provided there's is no specific requirement that it should come from one specific source.

16. We will be asking for the 10% indirect cost because we do not have an approved indirect cost proposal. In addition to this 10% can we add as a matching fund the cash contribution (or in-kind) of the time our core staff work on managing the grant for the three years?

From USDA: You can split the indirect or use it in full as a matching source. Salaries and fringe of individual(s) for time incurred for project activities is also allowed.

17. Can the volunteer market manager's time be considered part of the match?

From USDA: Yes, volunteer hours are allowed. The rate should be consistent with what is paid for similar work with the recipient's organization or similar paid in the labor market. Volunteer hours should be tracked and documented to show evidence of the volunteer work performed.

18. How does one use volunteer hours for match when it is required to verify all match resources at the time of application?

From USDA: Applicant must submit a matching verification letter that contains the number of volunteers planned on being used for project activities, description of the duties, hours expected to be worked by the volunteers and projected dollar value. If funded, the organization may be asked to provide evidence of volunteer recruitment, attendance, etc.

19. Does salary gap count? For example the amount you would pay a contractor by the hour v. what they "donate" . \$60 charge but regularly compensated \$100 /hr means a match of \$40?

From USDA: Yes, donated services by a contractor will count as match if it is an allowable cost. The organization must decide how they want to split the time and salary to be use as match or to be paid by the federal grant. USDA uses the Department of Labor's [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) information to determine reasonable salaries and wages.

### **Eligibility**

20. Could you help clarify if a food hub who operates a multi-farm csa would be best suited for a FMPP or a LFPP grant?

From USDA: It really depends on what types of project activities are planned for the project. If you are selling directly to the consumer the best fit will be FMPP. If there is an intermediary between the producer and the consumer LFPP will be a best fit. Please contact USDA to better answer this question.

[USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov)

[USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov)

Phone: 202-720-0933

21. Often small farms want to begin processing their excess into shelf stable products for their direct to consumer market and then find institutional markets interested in buying their products. Since the LF/FMPP are divided by market, which program is best? Mostly the farmers would be processing for direct markets.

From USDA: If you are selling directly to the consumer the best fit will be FMPP. If there is an intermediary between the producer and the consumer LFPP will be the best fit. In the case that both components are mixed in the same project you will have to decide what project activities are mostly covered. Normally, one activity stands out more than another.

22. Expanded definition of producer-to-consumer: In the LFPP RFA, one of the examples given for implementation projects is "Cultivating new wholesale market channels through online portal or virtual marketplace." Should I read that as wholesale market channels excluding sales to retail/restaurant/institution?

From USDA: No. Retail, restaurants or institutions can be part of the wholesale market channel for LFPP if there is an intermediary channel involved. The changes on the definition were expanded to FMPP if producers decide to sell directly to these institutions.

23. Does a mobile market fit as a business that delivers and sells agricultural products?

From USDA: It really depends on what type of project activities are planned for the project. Mobile markets tend to fit more the FMPP as a direct producer to consumer activity. Please contact USDA to better answer this question.

[USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov](mailto:USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov)

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24. We have two partner groups in two different areas of Puerto Rico whom both do direct producer-consumer and are intermediary for small farmers in their area. Our organization is the one submitting the application. Should we be submitting both grants?

From USDA: As the submitting organization, you may submit to both FMPP and LFPP as long as the project work is different. You can submit one project for FMPP and another project for LFPP. If selected for funding, you can receive both awards, but to be eligible for future awards, your current LFPP project will need to be closed out prior to applying for a future LFPP project, and your current FMPP project would need to be closed out prior to applying for a future FMPP project.

## **Metrics**

25. Do you have advice for developing measurement methods for Outcome 2 (increase in customers or sales of local and regional agricultural products)? We anticipate it being very difficult to gather sales/customer data from the businesses we will work with.

Answer from FMC: [This resource](#) may be of assistance, as will this [2018 webinar](#). There is no doubt that gathering data from the businesses involved in these projects can be difficult, but it is necessary if one primary goal of an FMLFPP project is to increase that business (*this from the LFPP RFA: LFPP's purpose is to help support the development, coordination, and expansion of local and regional food business enterprises to help increase access and availability to locally and regionally produced agricultural products. This from the FMPP RFA: Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) is to increase domestic consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, or assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of, domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities* ) So to start, we recommend bringing in the businesses as partners in this project, asking about and adding their goals for their businesses (i.e. increase new business by 10%? Add more wholesale customers for their farm products?) and creating a data sharing relationship that will help them in their business development. Next, we recommend that a strong agreement about what data you will need and how you will safeguard that data. This [section](#) and [this section](#) of the FMC Metrics Guide may be of assistance.

26. How important are stats in providing details? Answer from FMC: They are vital to getting funded through this grant. Can strong concepts with limited regional supporting data points be accepted?

27. Are you going to discuss Outcomes and Indicators? See resource linked in #25, and watch the . Specifically, we are submitting a planning grant and would like some guidance on the estimated number. Answer from FMC: Our suggestion is to start at the "wrong end"and work your way back.Indicator #5 has some specific indicators for an LFPP planning grant :

5.a. For projects developing a plan to establish or expand a local and regional food business enterprise and conducting a needs assessment: Number of unmet consumer needs, barriers to local foods, unserved populations, etc. identified through the use of a comprehensive need's assessment.

5.b.	Number of plans (business, economic, feasibility) developed based on a comprehensive needs assessment.
5.c.	Amount of non-Federal financial, professional, and technical assistance measured in dollars secured as a result of the developed plan(s).

## **Other**

28. How are grant reviewers chosen? What are their qualifications?

From USDA: AMS accepts reviewers on a rolling basis for all of its programs, including FMLFPP. Reviewers must provide their resume, which should detail their experience related to the specific grant program. For example, for FMLFPP, we would look for individuals with local and regional food system knowledge and expertise. Anyone can apply to be a reviewer, and we often suggest it as a good option for those interested in applying to our grant programs who may want to learn more about the application process for future years. The AMS reviewer application site is: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/peer-review>.

29. My sam account expires in july. Should I renew before the grant deadline?

From USDA: Yes, you should renew as early as possible to ensure your FMLFPP application, and any other grant applications, are accepted by Grants.gov.

30. May former grantees use the resources at AMSTA? Response from AMSTA: Yes, we welcome former grantees to attend our webinars, access the online database, and join the peer to peer discussion group. While the one-on-one consulting sessions from our mentor team is intended for current grantees, we are happy to answer questions and provide some limited consulting support to former and potential (applicant) grantees. Contact us through our Help Center to speak with our coordinator team for more information!