

OMB BURDEN STATEMENT: According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-0512. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

## **Fiscal Year 2004**

# **Food Stamp Program Participation Grants**

## **Request For Applications**

### **Critical Dates**

<b>February 9, 2004</b>	<b>Request for Applications announced by FNS</b>
<b>March 19, 2004</b>	<b>Letter of Intent</b>
<b>May 7, 2004</b>	<b>Proposals are due</b>
<b>June 2004</b>	<b>Awards to be announced</b>

An electronic version of this Request for Applications is available at  
<http://fns.usda.gov/>

FNS 729  
0584-0512

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Purpose</b>	3
<b>Who May Apply</b>	4
Eligible Entities	4
Letters of Commitment	5
Number of Applications	5
<b>Critical Dates for the FY 2004 Program Participation Grants</b>	6
<b>Funding and Duration</b>	6
<b>Use of Funding</b>	6
Allowable Use of Funds	6
<b>Application Review and Grant Award Process</b>	7
Screening and Review Process	7
Technical Evaluation Criteria	8
Selection of Grant Applications	10
Determination of Award Amounts	10
Award Notification and Issuance of Funds	11
Terms and Conditions	11
<b>Record Keeping and Reporting Requirements</b>	11
<b>Application Procedures</b>	12
Due Dates	12
Mailing Address	12
Application Package Checklist	13
<b>Attachments</b>	
Attachment 1 - Application for Federal Assistance	
Attachment 2 - Certifications	
Attachment 3 - Authorizing legislation, excerpt from Public Law 107-171	

## **PURPOSE**

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171), often referred to as the “Farm Bill”, authorized the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to award \$5 million dollars in grants for each of the fiscal years (FY) 2003 through 2007, to State agencies, public health or educational entities, or private nonprofit entities such as community or faith based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations, for projects aimed at simplifying the food stamp application and eligibility determination systems or improving access to food stamp benefits by eligible households. This solicitation offers funding for FY 2004, subject to appropriation. Funding for FY 2005 through 2007 is also subject to appropriation.

As the Department is keenly interested in encouraging and supporting partnerships between State agencies administering the FSP and private non-profit organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations, it is FNS’ intention to make \$1 million of the total \$5 million dollars available for an acceptable proposal or proposals that involve a partnership between a State Agency and one or more private non-profit organizations, including faith-based or community-based organizations. For the purposes of distinguishing the \$1 million dollars set-aside to encourage the partnerships as described above, this portion of the overall \$5 million will be referred to throughout the RFA as the \$1 million State/Non-Profit Partnership grants.

July 2000 represented the low point in Food Stamp Program (FSP) participation. Since that time, food stamp rolls have increased, with an average of 21.8 million individuals receiving benefits by June 2003. However, participation among those who are eligible for benefits - the ‘participation rate’ - remains low, especially among the working poor, elderly and immigrant populations, with approximately 4 out of 10 of those eligible for the food stamp program not participating. The State agencies that administer the FSP, called ‘State agencies’ throughout this Request For Applications (RFA), have made a concerted effort to fulfill agency priorities by simplifying policy, expanding outreach programs, and changing State administrative procedures. By breaking down barriers to participation, State agencies have seen their food stamp rolls increase.

Unfortunately, once these individuals begin the application process, they may experience confusion, delays, and difficulties. Many, while frustrated, complete the application process. Conversely, many choose to discontinue the process because they find the application process to be so daunting. Furthermore, once certified, the recipients may be dissuaded from continuing to receive food stamps because of the difficulties encountered while maintaining their cases or satisfying the recertification requirements. For that reason, it is not only important to increase public awareness regarding the food stamp program, but to provide a simpler process for recipients as well.

This grant competition is designed to support projects that develop and implement:

- Simple food stamp application and eligibility determination systems; or
- Measures to improve access to food stamp benefits by eligible applicants.

This RFA seeks diverse proposals that would make the entire process, from certification to recertification, easier and more efficient for the applicant/participant. The proposals should include innovative development of new or revised State or County food stamp systems that do not rely solely on outreach. While this innovation does not have to be a completely new idea or concept, the proposal needs to demonstrate that the idea is new and innovative to that specific State or County office. The proposed process can incorporate outreach activities **as long as they are not the main components of the project**. The proposal needs to demonstrate direct evidence that the proposed procedural or systemic changes would make the food stamp process easier for the participant.

As mentioned above, the Department is keenly interested in encouraging and supporting partnerships between State agencies administering the FSP and private non-profit organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations. The intent is to encourage relationships with private non-profit organizations with strong community ties and thereby create enhancements to State agency ability to reach eligible households and improve their certification systems. Improvements in public agency practices should be more effective if they are coordinated with community-based initiatives. For example, a successful proposal could tie an innovative State development with outreach activities, spearheaded by a private non-profit organization. While it would be expected that one party would likely be the project sponsor and the other party a sub grantee, between ten and twenty-five percent of the project funding must be allocated to the private non-profit organization.

Several of the projects funded by the FY 2003 grants proposed the creation of online application tools. This year we are encouraging proposals of more diverse systems and processes. We are not just searching for ideas that make use of new or existing technology, we are also open to ideas that may not be dependent on technology but could make use of personnel or procedural changes. This idea should not be thought of as a demonstration project, but instead as a new or useful idea to improve access and/or the food stamp eligibility, certification, case maintenance or recertification processes. Please make sure to include a detailed and thoughtful description of proposed changes and how these changes will positively impact the process.

## **WHO MAY APPLY**

### *Eligible Entities*

The entities eligible to receive grants under this competition are:

- The 53 State agencies that administer the FSP;
- State or local governments;
- Agencies providing health or welfare services;
- Public health or educational entities; and

- Private non-profit entities such as community-based or faith-based organizations, food banks, or other emergency feeding organizations.

### ***Letters of Commitment/Endorsement***

FNS recognizes that the grant proposals responding to this RFA will directly affect State agency operations. Therefore, if the grant proposal is from an entity other than a State agency, it must show that a State agency strongly endorses or is intimately involved in the proposed project in order to be considered. Please refer to the two types of letters described below to determine which is appropriate to submit with the RFA. Please note that State agencies are able to submit an application on their own as well as partner with another organization. Please refer to the section below on Number of Applications.

- **A Letter of Commitment** is required if an applicant is partnering with a State agency in its proposed project. The letter of commitment must describe the State agency's role in the project, the amount of time it intends to commit to the project, an attestation that it was involved in the planning of the project, that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project, and that it will use the results of the project to improve the State agency practices.

A letter of commitment is also required if the grant proposal is from a State agency working in partnership with another organization(s). The letter of commitment must describe the organization's role in the project, the amount of time it intends to commit to the project and an attestation that it will cooperate with the grant applicant in implementing the project.

- **A Letter of Endorsement** is required if the applicant is not partnering with a State agency. The letter of endorsement must explain that the State agency is aware of the proposed impact on its system and is supportive of the proposed project.

### ***Number of Applications***

As mentioned above, FNS has designed this grant competition to give State agencies control over the submission of applications involving their operations via the mechanism of "Statements of Commitment." If State agencies decide to submit more than one application each, or to enter into more than one partnership each, FNS encourages them to make explicit in each application its relationship to any others. As noted above, partnerships with other organizations require the submission of a letter of commitment. Thus, State agencies that decide to submit more than one application should carefully consider the allocation of time stated in each letter. State agencies with more than one partner organization may want to consider submitting a single application designed to make sub-grants to the partner organizations. Proposals forwarded by any given State agency should request funding for distinct, non-overlapping activities.

**CRITICAL DATES**

<b>February 9, 2004</b>	<b>Request for Applications announced by FNS</b>
<b>March 19, 2004</b>	<b>Letters of Intent due</b>
<b>May 7, 2004</b>	<b>Proposals are due</b>
<b>June 2004</b>	<b>Awards to be announced</b>

**FUNDING AND DURATION**

Up to \$5 million is available in FY 2004 for the Food Stamp Program Participation Grants. FNS will award the grants through a competitive process. FNS plans to announce the grant awards to the selected grantees in June 2004. Grantees will be allowed to use the grant funds for the duration of the project period. The grants will be funded for the period July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2007; however, we will entertain projects of shorter duration. We awarded five separate grants last year and anticipate awarding approximately the same number this year. However, this number could be more or less depending on the quality and nature of the grants. FNS reminds applicants that the submission of a proposal does not guarantee funding. Funding for approved grants will be provided through the Grant Award/Letter of Credit process, in the same manner as other funds, upon receipt of a properly executed Grant Agreement and subject to the availability of funding. All Program Participation Grants funds must be obligated and all activities under the Grant must be completed by June 30, 2007.

**USE OF FUNDING*****Allowable Use of Funds***

Projects predicated on demonstrating the effectiveness of waiving food stamp regulations in order to conform to other programs are not allowable. However, if during the grant period, a State agency determines it needs a waiver, it may apply for one, though there is no guarantee it would be approved. State and County offices have substantial flexibility regarding face-to-face interviews because this requirement can be waived in hardship cases. Furthermore, under existing regulations, States have the latitude to define what constitutes a hardship. As a result, the number of hardship waivers for face-to-face interviews can be increased without obtaining an approved waiver from FNS.

A project may consist of, but is not limited to:

1. Establishing methods for applying for benefits and determining eligibility that use communications by telephone (i.e., telephone centers that accept and begin processing applications and changes).

2. Coordinating the application and eligibility determination processes, including verification practices, under the FSP with those of other Federal, State, or local assistance programs (e.g., SCHIP, Medicaid, TANF and Child Care programs).
3. Establishing methods for applying for benefits that improve the administrative infrastructure used in processing applications and determining eligibility. For example, analysis of a State agency's existing application processing could suggest re-structuring staff assignments, changing the sequence of items in the application interview, or automating parts of the verification process.
4. Improving methods for enrolling eligible households.
5. Providing easier access to local food stamp office staff.
6. Providing the participant with easier access to food stamp services (e.g., allowing applicants to apply for services in grocery stores, malls, clinics, schools, etc.)
7. Streamlining local food stamp office procedures.
8. Training food stamp personnel to use systems, techniques, or skills involved in their grant-funded project or training that focuses on improving customer services, which are geared towards promoting easier or better access. (Training that aims to improve general casework or technological skills not linked to the program improvement strategies of a funded project would not be allowable.)
9. Re-designing application forms or other printed media used in the outreach, application, or certification processes of one or more State agencies to make them user-friendlier. (Development of such materials is allowable only if it is linked to actual food stamp operations in one or more specific State agencies.)
10. Procedures aimed at making the process of restoring food stamp eligibility for immigrants more effective and efficient. (This could include providing translators for non-English speaking participants.)

## **APPLICATION REVIEW AND GRANT AWARD PROCESS**

### ***Screening and Review Process***

FNS will screen all applications that meet the published deadline for submission to ensure their completeness and conformity to the requirements of this announcement. Applications that are fully responsive to the screening requirements will be reviewed competitively and scored against the criteria listed on pages 8-9. We will review and determine the technical merit of each grant application and provide a numerical score using the specified evaluation criteria and weights. We will review and score applications submitted for the \$4 million dollars independently from the \$1

million dollar State/Non-Profit Partnership grants. FNS will permit applicants to submit proposals for both sets of grants. These panels may be comprised of United States Department of Agriculture staff, other federal agency staff, and other individuals committed to furthering the goals of the FSP.

### ***Technical Evaluation Criteria and Weights***

The panels will use the same criteria for both sets of grants. Because the Department is also interested in promoting relationships with organizations **new** to the FSP, the panel reviewing the proposals for the \$1 million State/Non-Profit Partnership grants will award an additional 10 points to proposals where the joint effort between the State agency and the private non-profit is in fact a “new” relationship. For this purpose, a “new” relationship means a joint effort between a State agency and a private non-profit organization where the private non-profit organization has not had a financial arrangement involving the FSP and this particular State within the last three years.

#### **1. Soundness or Merit of Project Design (50 points)**

***Problem analysis - 5 points:*** The proposal clearly describes the problem to be solved and provides evidence that it is worth solving.

***Impact - 15 points:*** The proposal demonstrates a direct effect on the application, certification, case maintenance or recertification processes and provides evidence that the changes would make the food stamp process easier for the applicant/recipient. It spells out a clear progression from idea to practice in a State agency or County office. It describes the impact the project is expected to make. Impact can be described in terms of the percentage of a State agency’s or County office’s participant caseload that is expected to benefit, the size of positive impact on a specific population such as elderly applicants, or the degree of improvement applicants/participants are expected to experience. (As long as an impact is demonstrated, the effect does not have to be demonstrated to have occurred on a statewide level.)

***Quality - 15 points:*** The proposal shows thought, analysis, clarity, and the use of relevant facts and knowledge. The proposal shows that the project has the potential to be transferred successfully to other State agencies. The proposal shows that the project has the potential to be sustained after the grant period ends (It is understood that with current State budget problems that this may be difficult to predict). The proposal shows evidence of cooperative planning among partners, cooperative implementation of the project, and clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the partners. Letters of commitment or endorsement clearly outline either the State’s endorsement or partnership by following the format found at the top of page 5.

***Innovation – 5 points:*** The application proposes innovative development of new or revised State or County food stamp systems.

***Time period – 5 points:*** The proposal includes a project timeline that demonstrates sufficient time is allotted for proposed tasks.



**Feasibility - 5 points:** The project can be implemented without a waiver of FSP regulations and within the rubric of FSP law, policy, and practice.

**2. Budget Appropriateness and Economic Efficiency (10 points)**

**Budget:** In addition to the standard form 424A, the proposal includes a line item budget that demonstrates how funds will be spent, by whom and for what purpose. It also includes a budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies these costs. The proposal may include a tiered budget and narrative that describes adjustments the applicant would make if it were awarded funding at different levels, but only the primary budget will be analyzed against this criterion.

**Efficiency:** The proposal is cost effective – it demonstrates that the anticipated results are commensurate with the cost of the project.

**3. Organizational Experience and Management /Staff Capability (20 points)**

**Credibility:** The proposal establishes the applying organization’s credibility and capabilities.

**Communication:** The proposal demonstrates that effective communication will exist among staff and or partnering organizations. The proposal includes an organizational chart.

**Staff:** The proposal identifies the director and other key staff. The proposal includes resumes that demonstrate that the proposed staff has the appropriate technical and experiential backgrounds for their proposed roles. Or, the proposal includes job descriptions for positions that must be advertised.

**Letters of Commitment:** The proposal includes letters of commitment from the project director, key staff, and, if applicable, partnering organizations, if any, delineating duties and amount of effort that will each will contribute to the project.

**4. Project Oversight and Evaluation (15 points)**

**Oversight:** The proposal demonstrates effective and consistent oversight by qualified project managers. This can be demonstrated by an organization chart or narrative. The proposal includes the time commitment the project managers will dedicate to the project.

**Evaluation:** The proposal describes a well thought out, organized review and evaluation process that will measure whether the goals of the project have been met (an evaluation *plan* is not necessary). The evaluation should focus on measuring the impact the project seeks to make.

## **5. Presentation (5 points)**

***Quality:*** The application is well presented, well organized, well written, and complete.

***Format:*** The application is single-sided, on 8½ by 11 inch paper. Type size is at least 12 point and margins are at least one inch. If page limitations allow, the proposal should include a table of contents.

### ***Selection of Grant Applications***

After the panel evaluates and scores the grant applications, it will rank them by score, starting with the highest score. Awards will be considered based on rank funding order until the total available funds are committed. However, FNS reserves the right to fund out of rank order to achieve agency priorities (such as to grant an award to an entity that includes a joint effort between a State agency and a community-based or faith-based organization), geographic, demographic, or socioeconomic diversity, etc. The panel will then provide recommendations for funding to the selection official based on this method of selection. The selection official will consider panel recommendations, however, he or she may also consider other factors, such as past performance on FNS grants, geographic, demographic, or socioeconomic diversity, agency priorities, etc., in addition to the scores assigned by the technical review panel. If the panel review indicates that FNS has received few or no technically acceptable proposals, the selection official may determine that FNS will make no awards, or commit less than the \$5 million set aside for this purpose.

As mentioned above, FNS intends to award up to \$1 million to an eligible applicant that is a joint effort between a State agency and a community-based or faith-based organization. However, FNS reserves the right to award grants to several such entities, or not to award any grants to such entities if it does not receive an acceptable application.

### ***Determination of Award Amounts***

If an application has been selected and approved for funding and the budget submission is realistic and well supported, the application will be funded at the level requested. However, FNS reserves the right to fund applications at a lesser amount if it judges that the application can be implemented with less, or if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards.

The proposal may include, but is not required to include, proposed line item budgets and narratives for different funding levels. In other words, the proposal would include three budgets and narratives describing adjustments the applicant would make to the project if it were funded at three different levels. For example, the applicant's primary budget request would enable the applicant to implement the project Statewide. The applicant's secondary budget request for a lesser amount would enable the applicant to implement the project in five counties. The applicant's bottom line budget request would enable the applicant to implement the project in only two counties. An applicant's score will not be negatively affected by the lack of separate budgets nor will it be improved by the inclusion of separate budgets.

### ***Award Notification and Issuance of Funds***

FNS will notify selected State agencies or organizations in writing by June 2004. We will issue funds prior to the end of September 2004.

### ***Terms and Conditions***

For each project selected for funding, the applicant must sign a grant agreement, which will contain the terms and conditions of the grant. Uniform administrative requirements for grants appear at 7 CFR 3015. Administrative requirements for grants to State and local governments appear at 7 CFR 3016. Subparts A-E “Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement)” appear at 7 CFR 3017. Subparts F “Government-wide Requirements for Drug-free Workplace (Grants)” appear at 7 CFR 3021. Administrative requirements for grants to non-profit organizations and institutions of higher education appear at 7 CFR 3019. Cost principles for for-profit organizations appear at 41 CFR 1-15.2. Audits of state, local governments and non-profit organizations appear at OMB Circular A-133. Grantees are subject to the requirements of the applicable cost principles, which appear in the regulations cited above.

## **RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Grantees selected in connection with this solicitation will be required to submit quarterly Financial Status Reports (SF-269A), quarterly progress reports, and final reports. Grantees will be required to submit an original and two copies of each report. FNS will provide a reporting schedule and the address to which grantees may send reports at the time of award.

The selected agencies or organizations must operate a financial management system that provides accurate, current and complete disclosure of the financial status of the project. The progress reports must provide a brief description of the project activities conducted during the reporting period, major accomplishments with completion dates and budget deviations from the proposed plan, difficulties encountered and solutions developed, and major planned activities for the next quarter. The final progress report should be a project summary that includes lessons learned, future implications within the State, and transferability to other States.

Materials developed with funding from this grant must be submitted in MS Word format and a hard copy must also be submitted at the end of the grant period. The Federal awarding agency reserves a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish or otherwise use, and to authorize others to use, for Federal Government purposes the copyright in any work developed under a grant, sub grant, or contract under a grant or sub grant or any rights of copyright to which a grantee, sub grantee, or a contractor purchases ownership with grant support.

## **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

### ***Due Date for Letter of Intent***

The applicant should complete and submit the Intent to Submit an Application Form (see attached example) by **March 19, 2004**.

### ***Due Date for the Application Package***

- The completed application package must **be received** by FNS at the following address on or before **May 7, 2004 at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time**.
- You must meet this deadline by delivering the application or by mailing it sufficiently in advance of the deadline to ensure its timely receipt, or by submitting it electronically by accessing [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). If you mail the applications, we strongly suggest that you send it by a mail delivery service that guarantees delivery, and that you track its delivery to FNS. Late applications will not be considered in this competition. We will not consider additions or revisions to applications once they are received.

### ***Mailing Address and Contact Information***

- Application packages must be sent to Lynn Rodgers, Grants Management Officer USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Grants Management Division, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 738, Alexandria, VA 22302.
- Applicants may contact Lynn Rodgers to ask any questions about the grant application and questions seeking clarification of technical or procedural aspects of the grant competition via phone at (703) 305-2760, or via e-mail at [Lynn.Rodgers@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Lynn.Rodgers@fns.usda.gov).

## *Checklist for the Application Package*

### **The application package must include:**

#### **\_\_\_\_\_ The Application for Federal Assistance**

- Cover Letter – A cover letter should be the first page of the grant application. The cover letter must indicate which grant the application will compete for – the \$1 million dollar State/Non-Profit Partnership grants or the remaining \$4 million dollar Program Participation grants, or both. If the application is for the \$1 million dollar State/Non-Profit Partnership grant competition, and the partnership is a “new” one as defined above, the letter should include an attestation to that effect. If no such attestation is included, then we will assume the partnership is **not** new and therefore not entitled to the additional ten points.
- Grant proposal that responds to the criteria and includes all of the proposal components discussed herein;
- Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance, including a Data Universal Number (DUNS) (Effective October 1, 2003, all applicants of Federal Government Awards must include a DUNS number which can be obtained from the Dun and Bradstreet Group), and a Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (this grant is located under the Food Stamp Program State Administrative Expenses number – 10.561)
- Standard Form 424(A), Budget Summary;
- Standard Form 424(B), Assurances;
- Assurances/Additional certifications as included in the attachments to this solicitation document. The regulations governing the attached certifications (i.e., Drug –Free Workplace, Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension, and Anti-Lobbying Restrictions) require that a grantee submit the required certification with each new submission of a grant at the time of application;
- Optional Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants. This survey is a tool to allow the Federal government to better understand the population of applicants for Federal funds. The survey, which is voluntary, seeks input from nonprofit private organizations (not including private universities).

#### **\_\_\_\_\_ The Correct Number of Copies**

- An original bearing the original signature of the authorized representative.
- Two copies of the original application.

#### **\_\_\_\_\_ The Correct Format**

- The original must be ready for copying, i.e., single-sided, unstapled, unbound, and on 8 ½ by 11 white paper;
- Type size must be at least 12 point;
- Margins must be at least one inch;
- Original and copies must be on white paper;

- The application may be no more than thirty pages long, including attachments such as letter of commitment and resumes. The Federal application form and certifications and assurances do not count toward the thirty-page limit. The application and attachments cannot include videotapes, brochures, binders, folders, or sleeves.

FINAL:USDA:FNS:FSP:PDD:PDB:MJohnston:02/05/04:nc  
File:I:Program Participation Grants:04 RFA Final Draft