



Business Builder Subawards, Round 1

Request for Applications

Application Due Date: April 7, 2025

[Click Here to Submit Your Application](#)

Important Information	
Award Amount	\$15,000 - \$100,000
Total Funding Available	\$10,000,000 <i>Between 180 and 350 awards</i>
Eligible Applicants	Farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with \$1M or less in annual revenue or \$350,000 or less in annual revenue are eligible to apply (funding track dependent)
Project Period	Start in August 2025 End before July 2027 <i>Up to 24 months</i>
Geographic Area	Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Washington DC and eastern counties in Pennsylvania and Maryland <i>For a list of eligible PA and MD counties, visit the Center website linked here.</i>
Allowable Funding Uses	Post-harvest activities (farm gate/landing to table), including processing, storage and transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special-purchase equipment • Business planning • Supply chain analysis and coordination • Product development • Market analysis • Minor improvements, rearrangements or alterations of existing buildings or facilities • Rental or lease of facilities or land • Staff time
Not Allowable	Purchasing land, buildings, or real estate; construction, demolition, or major rehabilitation of any building, structure, or land; non-specialized equipment such as tractors, trucks, or trailers; production costs such as seeds or fertilizer
Additional Funding Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No matching funds are required. • Funds are taxable as income. • Funds are reimbursable: Entities must spend funds first and will be reimbursed 60 days after request is submitted.

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Questions?

Visit the Northeast Regional Food Business Center Website ([linked here](#)) or send an email to the Northeast Regional Food Business Center at NortheastRFBC@nasda.org.

About the Funding Opportunity

Timeline and Overview

Event	Date
Application Launch + Pre-Recorded Webinar	Monday, February 24, 2025, 4:00pm ET
Informational Webinars	March 3 (9:30-10:30 a.m. ET) March 11 (10:30-11:30 a.m. ET) March 19 (12:00-1:00 p.m. ET) March 27 (1-2 p.m. ET)
Deadline for Applications	Monday, April 7, 2025, 5:00pm ET <i>(6 weeks from launch)</i>
Announcement of Subawards	Anticipated July
Contract Start Date	Anticipated August
Earliest Reimbursement Date	Anticipated October

Business Builder Background

The Northeast Regional Food Business Center (Center) Business Builder subaward program will equip small- and mid-sized farm and food businesses with funding to develop and amplify regional supply chains. Approximately \$16 million in funding is available for Business Builder awards within the next three years. These awards will be released in rounds, with \$10 million assigned to this round. The intended purpose of Round 1 is to fund projects that meet and meaningfully address Center objectives through one of three unique tracks. Subsequent rounds will be tailored to identified industry, geographic, or regional needs.

Competitive funding for Round 1 of Business Builder (BB) Subawards are available to individual food and farm businesses that are seeking support to grow their operations. Funding will be administered through three tracks, each with a different focus: purchase of special equipment, technical assistance or training, or developing their business through product or market expansion.

The Center will prioritize individual businesses and owners who have never previously received direct USDA grants of more than \$25,000 (excluding loans, disaster relieve or pandemic related payments).

The Center's Business Builder program aims to facilitate the following outcomes:

- Stronger and more inclusive sub-regional food systems that reflect the geographic and industry diversity of the Northeast region.
- Increased regional food system security through the production, aggregation, processing, and marketing of more products within the region.
- Increased regional food supply chain capacity to purchase and distribute more regional products.
- Increased capacity of agricultural and food businesses to increase profits through expansion or new product diversification.

Funding Tracks

Business Builder Awards, Round 1			
Track	Track 1: Equipment	Track 2: Business Development	Track 3: Product & Market Expansion
Purpose	Backing the purchase of equipment for post-harvest activities, from processing to market	Supporting business financial acumen and industry knowledge	Assisting businesses in expansion through new products, broader markets, and wider distribution
Allowable Expenses	Special-Purpose Equipment + Associated Technical Assistance	Business Technical Assistance or Training	Special-Purpose Equipment + Business Technical Assistance or Training
Examples	Including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash-and-pack stations • Refrigerated vans • Food safety upgrades • Cold storage units and ice machines • Grading equipment • Associated installation and maintenance • Hoppers and hoists 	Including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business strategy development • Supply chain analysis • Risk assessment and insurance consulting • Food safety training • Accounting frameworks • Value chain coordination • Workforce development 	Including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market analysis + packaging supplies • Product development + commercial grade appliances • Software implementation + staff time for training • Vacuum packing machines + HACCP development
Amount	\$25,000 - \$50,000	\$15,000 - \$25,000	\$50,000 - \$100,000
Eligibility	Farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with <u>\$350,000 or less</u> in annual revenue		Farm and food businesses including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with <u>\$1M or less</u> in annual revenue
Duration	Projects must be completed by August 31, 2027		

Eligible businesses may apply for costs associated with projects including, but not limited to:

- **Production Expansion and New Product Development:** including value-added production or product development to increase the amount and variety of regionally grown products.
- **Market Development:** market research, access, and general marketing support.
- **Financial Resource Development:** navigation of third-party funding opportunities.
- **Business Strategy and Development:** financial literacy, legal and regulatory awareness, and record keeping.

Track 1: Equipment

Purpose: Funding for farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with annual revenue of \$350,000 or less to purchase or lease special-purpose equipment for business expansion or enhancements. Funding can include complementary technical assistance and maintenance. \$2 million in funding available; between 40 and 100 awards

Overview of Allowable Activities and Expenses: Special-purpose equipment purchases that support business access to new markets and/or benefit regional supply chains are generally allowable. “Special purpose equipment” is tangible, nonexpendable property having a useful life of more than one year and cost of more than \$5,000 per unit. Special purpose equipment must be used only for research, medical, scientific, or technical activities.

Special-purpose equipment purchases in subawards may include:

- Storage, processing, distribution, aggregation, or marketing investments;
- Value chain/supply chain innovation or upgrades, including equipment or technology upgrades to support process adaptations; and,
- Product development, packaging, and marketing of agricultural products.

Track 2: Business Development

Purpose: Funding for farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with annual revenue of \$350,000 or less to leverage technical assistance or training to develop their current operations, including expansion or enhancements. \$2 million in funding available; between 80 and 133 awards

Allowable Activities and Expenses:

- Business technical assistance and business development services, including assistance with product development, marketing, financial planning, strategy development, and supply chain analysis
- Specialized training and workforce development, including staff time for these activities

Track 3: Product and Market Expansion

Purpose: Funding for farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits with annual revenue of \$1M or less to expand their production, distribute into new markets, and/or diversify value-added product offerings. \$6 million in funding available; between 60 and 120 awards

Allowable Activities and Expenses: Special-purpose equipment, training, or technical assistance (details listed above) related to new product development and/or growth into new markets or consumer bases.

“Special purpose equipment” is tangible, nonexpendable property having a useful life of more than one year and cost of more than \$5,000 per unit. Special purpose equipment must be used only for research, medical, scientific, or technical activities.

Award Duration and Amount

The Center has set aside \$10,000,000 in funds for Round 1. The maximum award amount for Business Builder awards is \$100,000; the minimum for Round 1 is \$15,000. Of total Round 1 funding, 40% (\$4M) will be prioritized for individual business owners who have never in the past received direct federal grant funding from USDA in excess of \$25,000 (excluding loans, disaster relief or pandemic related payments).

Applicants may not request less than or more than the minimum/maximum award amounts. Applicants must identify and justify a specific budget to support the proposed project activities.

Applicants are limited to applying for and receiving one award per funding round. Additional funding rounds over the next 2 years will be announced at a later date.

Applicants for Business Builder subawards can apply to multiple rounds of Northeast Regional Food Business Center funding. Applicants can receive funding for multiple rounds, with a total award limit of \$100,000 across rounds and across all Regional Food Business Centers nationally.

Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

Applicants and projects must meet **all** of the following requirements:

- Small and mid-size individual farm and food businesses, including aquaculture and wild-caught fisheries, and non-profits in urban and rural areas that operate along the regional food chain, including aggregators, distributors and retailers.
- Businesses that are new, or working towards expansion and other investment through:
 - Value-added opportunities,
 - Diversification of post-harvest activities, and
 - Expansion of access to new markets.
- Projects focused on regional needs throughout the supply chain, as identified in applicant statement of need.
- Projects focused on food produced regionally (for human consumption), including fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, seafood, grains, and dairy that support regional food supply chains and markets.
- Projects aligned with Center goals of increasing the amount and variety of regionally grown products and food businesses, increasing the capacity of Northeast supply chains, and building regional sustainability to ensure continued growth and resiliency of farms and food businesses.

Nonprofits are eligible to apply. Please consider organizational revenue based on your annual statement of financial position (or IRS Form 990) to determine size regarding track-specific eligibility.

Allowable Uses

Project costs may include:

- Business or financial planning services and training
- Market identification or research services
- New product recipe development, marketing materials, and package design
- Software purchase or implementation

- Rental or lease of facilities or land
- Minor improvements, rearrangements or alterations of existing buildings or facilities
- Value chain and supply chain research and coordination services, such as:
 - Sales forecasting, production planning, and inventory optimization
 - Partner relationship management, including joint cost-reduction initiatives
 - Supply chain risk assessments
 - Logistics network optimization, identification of efficient distribution networks
 - Sustainability analyses
- The purchase of special-purpose equipment or technology that supports access to new markets, including equipment for:
 - Transportation, processing, and aggregation
 - Storage investments (including cold storage)
 - Value chain/supply chain innovation, including equipment or technology upgrades
 - Product development, packaging, and marketing of agricultural products
- Staff time and contracting costs associated with any of these activities
- Indirect costs if the business or organization can provide a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA).

Unallowable Uses

Activities and materials that are ineligible for funding include:

- Costs primarily for agricultural or production-related expenses, such as farming guidance and production inputs (salaries, materials, supplies, soil, seeds, tools, greenhouses, fertilizer, irrigation system, or ingredients for a value-added product).
- Costs related to purchasing buildings or land.
- Construction costs or acquisition of construction-related materials, which may include, but is not limited to, the purchase of materials such as wood, nails, concrete, asphalt, roofing, gravel, sand, paint, installation, drywall, or plumbing.
- Costs that are contingent upon the completion of other projects or the receipt of other funding sources (e.g., different grants).
- Project expenses that have been covered wholly or partially by any other source (e.g., other federal funding programs, insurance). Duplicative funding is strictly prohibited.
- Costs that provide capital for revolving loan funds or seed equity funds.
- Costs related to existing debt obligations.
- Costs to purchase or lease general purpose equipment (motor vehicles, office equipment and furnishings, telephone networks, modular offices, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, and reproduction and printing equipment).

Please ensure that your project costs and activities align with program terms and conditions.

- [Regional Food Business Center FAQ \(Allowable Costs and Activities, pg. 5\)](#)
- [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions \(Allowable Costs and Activities, sec. 8\)](#)
- [Program Specific Terms and Conditions \(Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities, sec. 2\)](#)

Application Administration

All application documents must be submitted using the Center's web-based Grant Portal, accessed by the Center's Fluxx grant portal ([linked here](#)).

Applicants must either present a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number acquired via SAM.gov, or provide documentation that proves they are in the progress of obtaining a UEI at the time of application submission.

While the following are not required to apply, if an applicant is awarded, they will need to provide the following for payments:

- Current IRS Form W-9; and
- Direct Deposit form

Application Review

The review process for applications will involve assessing the proposed project and assigning weight through a combination of the following priorities:

- Business Readiness
- Project Readiness
- Impact on Business
- Impact on Northeast Food Systems

Additionally, the Business Builder award process will prioritize:

- Individual business owners who have never in the past received direct federal grant funding from USDA in excess of \$25,000 (excluding loans, disaster relief or pandemic related payments)

A fundamental goal of all Northeast Regional Food Business Center awards is to ensure a diverse and representative distribution of awards across geographies and sectors to the extent possible.

Process Overview

1. **Compliance Review:** Applications are screened for completion, eligibility and allowability.
2. **External Reviews:** Each application is reviewed by a total of three external reviewers. Reviewers use a scoring matrix, resulting in a score out of 100 for each application. After external reviewers have scored all applications, a meeting will be held to enable consensus-based evaluation decisions, including discussion of any outlier scores (greater than 20 points).
3. **Core Team Review:**
 - a. *Identification of Scoring Threshold:* Upon assessment of average application scores, a scoring threshold will be set by the Core Team, a group of key partner organizations. Projects receiving average scores below this threshold will not be recommended for funding, regardless of funding availability.
 - b. *Priority Application Selection:* Based on average reviews, and taking into account overall geographic and industry distribution, the Core Team will conduct a final review and make priority selections. Applications in this group that are not selected for priority funding will be moved to the general (non-prioritized) application pool for the last round of selection.

- c. *General Application Selection:* Based on average reviews, and taking into account overall geographic and industry distribution, the Core Team will conduct a final review of all applications and make final selections.

Award Notices

Upon completion of the competitive review process, recommended applications will be sent to USDA-AMS for review of eligible and allowable expenses. If USDA determines any program non-compliance of the selected awardees, the NASDA Foundation will communicate with the applicant to make the necessary changes. Final determination of approved projects and award amounts will be facilitated by the NASDA Foundation and made by the Center. Successful applicants will be notified by the Center via email as soon as possible after awards are approved.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by the Center via email as soon as possible after awards are approved. High scoring applications unable to be funded during Round 1 may be eligible to apply for subsequent funding rounds using the originally submitted application.

Award Administration

Reporting

Awardees should be expected to report on the following outcomes every 6 months during the project period and at the conclusion of the project, in addition to participation in bi-monthly, virtual meetings.

Outcome 1: Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships

1. Due to Center activities, has your business,
 - a. Increased sales or purchasing of regional food products?
 - b. Coordinated communication or marketing campaigns with other businesses or organizations?
 - c. Coordinated use of resources with other businesses or organizations to be more efficient?
 - d. Secured additional funding?
 - e. Collaborated with other businesses to achieve shared goals?
2. How many USDA agencies (if any) has your business successfully connected with?
3. Has your project taken steps to build or sustain partnerships with other regional businesses or organizations?
4. Has your business built or sustained new partnerships built or sustained affect regional supply chains?

Outcome 2: Create more and better markets and increase market awareness and access, ensuring small and mid-size producers and processors have the opportunity to gain access to distributors, retail outlets, and institutions

1. How many partnerships or collaborations have been established between your business and market access points?
 - a. How many have been formalized with written agreements?
 - b. How many have been made with/between underserved organizations?
 - c. How many have reported higher profits, increased access to institutional customers, or other value chain enhancements?

2. Does the project make specific contributions to improvements in the following aspects of the distribution/supply chain: increased efficiency, reduced costs, expanded customer reach, or increased online presence?
3. Have you adopted any practices or new technologies to improve distribution systems or supply chains due to Center activities?
4. Have you increased or improved processing distribution, storage and/or aggregation of regionally produced ag products?

Outcome 3: Increase food and farm business financial acumen, increase the number of new food and farm businesses and improve viability of existing businesses

1. Through Center support, have you
 - a. Created a new business?
 - b. Created a business development plan?
 - c. Increased revenue?
 - d. Increased knowledge about new market activities?
 - e. Increase production to meet increased demand?

Payments

Routine Reimbursements

Payment requests will be submitted quarterly through the grant management portal. Reimbursement requests will be reviewed within 30 days after a reimbursement request is submitted. Once the request is approved, claims are usually processed within 7-10 days; allow for an additional 7 business days for funds to be posted into accounts via direct deposit.

Advance Payments

The Center will operate primarily on a reimbursement-only basis. Advance payments may be made available on a case-by-case basis upon request. Advance payments must be limited to the amount needed and must be timed to be in accordance with actual, immediate cash requirements to be spent within 90 days. Examples of these cases could include: equipment or software purchases, payroll and operational expenses, registration costs, or contracting expenses. It is important to note that advance payments are not automatic and are subject to review each time a request is made.

Terms and Conditions

USDA AMS Terms and Conditions

Subawards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in both the USDA Program Specific Terms and Conditions and the 2021 USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions, including indirect costs (3.0 Subrecipient Monitoring and Management in the AMS Terms and Conditions and 2 CFR 200 (specifically <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.332>).

Award recipients will be required to return unspent funds. The Northeast Regional Food Business Center reserves the right to request funds in whole or in part if determined that the funds were not used for the intended purpose, as described in the application (or through a formal amendment to the project with Northeast Regional Food Business Center approval).

The Northeast Regional Food Business Center reserves the right to inspect and audit the project site following the payment received by the applicant for a period of up to three years following program completion.

Applicants who commit fraud or misrepresentation, or who do not adequately document or retain sufficient documentation, shall be subject to state and federal civil and criminal recourse to the extent permitted by law.

The applicant must retain records relating to the grant for a period of at least five years from the date of the final payment received by the applicant for this grant. The applicant must agree that such records will be submitted to the Northeast Regional Food Business Center or its designees or representatives upon request or upon audit of the completed project by the Northeast Regional Food Business Center or other authorized state or federal authorities.

Additional Terms and Conditions

By applying, your business or organization has made an assurance that it will comply with all applicable Federal statutes and regulations in effect during the subaward period. Awards will be based upon the submitted and approved project applications, and are subject to the following conditions:

- The subawardee must complete the full scope of work and all tasks outlined in the approved application by the Project End Date entered on the subaward application unless a written exception is granted by the Center.
- Proposed projects must meet all of the goals and requirements of Northeast Regional Food Business Center's Business Builder Award Program, as outlined in this Request for Applications.
- Any changes to the scope, tasks, deliverables, or expenses of this project must be approved in advance and in writing by the Center prior to work being modified or completed.
- Two e-Cornell courses per year offered by the Center for Regional Economic Advancement will be a requirement for Center funding. Courses are broken into video segments and should be completed within six months of the grantee onboarding meeting.
- Progress and Financial Reports must be submitted through the online grant management portal, with a Final Project Report due no more than 45 days after the Project End Date. The report will document program activities and results. As part of the reporting process, the awardee must provide a full accounting of all expenditures made with funds from this grant award, accompanied by the documentation specified in the Subaward Agreement. Reporting schedules will be included in the subawardee agreement.
- Data profile forms will be required to be completed by the Business Builder subawardee.
- Funds from this program may be combined with other federal funding programs as part of a larger business expansion. Documentation must be shown that there is no duplication of activities or funding.

Additional Resources

About the Northeast Regional Food Business Center

Through the Regional Food Business Center program, USDA established a total of 12 Regional Food Business Centers. These Centers serve all areas of the country and will provide coordination, technical assistance* and capacity building* for farmers, ranchers, and other food businesses.

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Foundation was selected by the USDA to establish the Northeast USDA Regional Food Business Center. The Northeast Regional Food Business Center will develop and amplify regional supply chains, with a strong emphasis on building community resiliency into these systems.

The Northeast Regional Food Business Center serves 11 states – Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont – and the District of Columbia. NASDA member collaborators include the Northeast State Departments of Agriculture and the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

The objectives of the Northeast Regional Food Business Center are to:

- Coordinate a regional network of Northeast food system partners and connect with other Regional Food Business Centers nationwide;
- Increase the amount and variety of regionally grown products and food businesses through technical assistance and capacity building;
- Increase the capacity of regional supply chains to identify, procure, aggregate, market and distribute products to major Northeast markets; and
- Build sustainability into Regional Food Business Center activities to ensure continued growth and resiliency.

Application Assistance

Checklist

A checklist is available online to assist applicants in preparing and completing the process. Applicants can access the checklist at the [link here](#).

- Required

- Please note: Applicants must either present a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number acquired via [SAM.gov](#), or provide documentation that proves they are in the process of obtaining a UEI at the time of application submission. This documentation must include a datemark and SAM.gov reference ID number, shown by screenshot of the SAM.gov website or a PDF or screenshot of an email from SAM.gov.

Information About Submitting Your Application Online

All application documents must be submitted using the Center’s web-based Grant Portal, accessed by following the “Access the Grant Portal” link on the Center website.

Starting February 24, 2024 at 4:00 PM ET the grant portal will be posted and open. At least 1 week before the due date, visit the grant portal to submit the eligibility questions and register for an account. It may take up to two days for your registration to be approved. Please reach out to the Center for assistance if you have not received an email with an application access link within two (2) days of registering. The Center will not accept late applications; be sure to utilize the six-week open application period to complete your application.

For reasons of security and functionality, applicants are required to complete all grant applications online using a modern, up-to-date browser. We suggest using Chrome, Edge, or any other current browser. The grant portal does not save automatically—please manually save early and often!

Writing Suggestions

It may be helpful to use a word processing program, such as Google Docs, to develop your application offline, then paste into the online system. Please allow for a full day to enter and submit your application online, in case of technical difficulties.

Keep your writing clear and simple; no need for elaborate language. Reviewers have been instructed to judge applications based on the proposed project's purpose and potential for success, not quantity or quality of words. You can assume reviewers have solid food systems knowledge, but not necessarily deep expertise in your business area.

Glossary

Terms with an asterisk (*) beside them have been defined by the United States Department of Agriculture & the Northeast Regional Food Business Center and can be found in the Glossary of Terms [linked here](#).

Budget Guidance

The budget worksheet within the application must include the total cost for the project and a simple description of each line item. The corresponding budget justification sections should provide enough detail for reviewers to easily understand how costs were determined and how they relate to the project's Plan of Work provided in the application. The budget should show a relationship between the work planned and performed to the costs incurred.

Refer to the Eligibility section above for more information on allowable and unallowable expenses.

Section	Definition	Justification Tips
Personnel & Fringe	Staff time associated with project activities	Include short descriptions of each staff position, including pay rates and fringe benefit costs
Materials & Supplies	Project-specific items that cost less than \$5,000 per unit	List materials, supplies, and fabricated parts, the quantity needed of each, and a short description of how they will assist in completion of project goals
Travel	Transportation, lodging, meals, and mileage associated with project-specific travel	Provide purpose of trip, including destination. GSA per diem rates (linked here) must not be exceeded
Equipment	Special-purpose equipment to be purchased or rented for the purpose of the project. "Special purpose equipment" is tangible, nonexpendable property having a useful life of more than one year and cost of more than \$5,000 per unit. Special purpose equipment must be used only for research, medical, scientific, or technical activities. Purchase of	List special-purpose equipment, quantity needed of each, and a short description of how the equipment will assist in completion of project goals

	general-purpose equipment is not allowable under this award	
Contracts	Costs for contracted services and authorized vendors performing services related to the proposed project	Provide a short description of services, including activities corresponding to the project's work plan, labor rates, and expenses
Other	Any expenses that don't fit into the above categories	List and describe each expense
Indirect Costs (For businesses with a NICRA ONLY)	Indirect costs are not allowed unless an entity has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA). For these entities, a copy of the approved NICRA must be submitted with their application.	No justification necessary. If your entity has an approved NICRA, please ensure an approved copy is uploaded with your application.

Application PDF
[Linked Here](#)

Scoring Rubric
[Linked Here](#)