

Final as 6.22.2021

Funds Availability:

1. (Question) How much funding is available?

(Answer) Up to \$3,000,000 is available for cooperative agreement funding. The maximum award per recipient is \$250,000.

2. (Question) How many awards does USDA anticipate making?

(Answer) The number of awards will be based on the number of applications received, scoring and the requested grant funds of the highest-ranking applications. The highest scoring application in each of the four Regions (e.g. Northeast, South, Midwest, West) will be selected first. The remaining applications, regardless of Region, will be selected starting with the highest scoring application, until all remaining available funds are exhausted.

3. (Question) Will applicants who identify more than one community receive more funding?

(Answer) There is neither an advantage nor disadvantage to the number of communities served. Funding will be based on the scoring criteria as described in Part VI; Section B “Scoring Process”; and the “Review and Selection Process” described in Part VI; Section C of the NOFA. The maximum award amount for any one applicant is \$250,000.

Definitions

1. (Question) What is “rural placemaking” under RPIC?

(Answer)

- *Placemaking* means a process involving public, private, philanthropic and community partners working together to strategically improve the social, cultural, and economic structure of a community. This work is based on a sense of place with qualitative and quantitative outcomes.
- For the purpose of this notice, placemaking is the process of creating quality places where people want to live, work, and play. Ultimately, the goal is to create greater social and cultural vitality in rural communities aimed at improving people's social, physical, and economic well-being. The key elements of quality places include, but are not limited to, a mix of uses; effective public spaces; broadband capability; transportation options; multiple housing options; preservation of historic structure; and respect of community heritage, arts, culture, creativity, recreation, and green space.

2. (Question) What does “multi-jurisdictional” mean?

(Answer) Multi-jurisdictional means more than one jurisdiction. Jurisdiction refers to a unit of government or other entity with similar powers, such as a city, county, district, special purpose district, township, town, borough, parish, village, state, Indian tribe, etc.

3. (Question) What does “multi-sectoral” mean?

(Answer) Multi-sectoral means intentional collaboration between two or more sectors (e.g., utility, health, housing, community services, etc.) to accomplish goals and achieve outcomes in communities and regions.

4. (Question) What does “substantial involvement” mean as part of the cooperative agreement?

(Answer) Agency staff intends to actively engage in the placemaking process, and it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify tasks where RD staff can provide substantial involvement in the project. If these tasks are not identified, the application will not be eligible for funding.

5. (Question) What are some examples of substantial involvement?

(Answer)

- Technical assistance providers may co-host with RD staff to hold joint convenings for community members, partners, and stakeholders. Technical assistance providers should invite RD staff to community meetings and keep them informed of progress under the workplan.
- Joint collaboration or participation between RD and the recipient in carrying out the work plan, including collecting data, making presentations, literature reviews, training development, conducting research, drafting papers and reports, and providing technical assistance.
- RD may provide training to the recipient’s personnel on RD programs.

Eligible Applicant:

1. (Question) What types of private groups or entities are eligible under the NOFA?

(Answer) Small private entities who meet the [size standards established by the U.S. Small Business Administration \(SBA\)](#) are eligible; they must demonstrate the capacity to deliver and support rural placemaking planning activities within at least one of the four regions, and have previous experience with federal grant administration and demonstrate experience in economic development and placemaking technical assistance.

2. (Question) Is the applicant considered to be the community that will receive placemaking technical assistance or is the applicant the technical assistance provider?

(Answer)

- The applicant is the technical assistance provider and will need to demonstrate they meet the capacity requirements of delivering placemaking technical assistance.
- Technical assistance providers can be public or private groups, organizations, or Institutions of Higher Learning that demonstrate experience and expertise in providing placemaking technical assistance to rural communities and have previous experience with federal grant administration and demonstrate experience in economic development and placemaking technical assistance.

Eligible Project:

1. (Question) Does RPIC fund urban and rural planning and land use projects?

(Answer) RPIC was created to fund comprehensive rural placemaking activities for rural communities. RPIC will use the Rural Business Service’s Rural Area definition as outlined in Section 343(a)(13)(A)(i) of the

Agricultural Act of 1961 & Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act which defines "rural area" as any area **other than** (1) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants and (2) any rural urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such city or town described in subparagraph (1) above.

2. (Question) Are applicants required to develop a regional plan (such as a Community Economic Development Strategy - CEDS)?

(Answer)

- RPIC is a technical assistance and planning process for qualified entities to support rural community leaders to create places where people want to live, work, and play. This initiative is to provide planning support, technical assistance, and training to communities to foster placemaking activities in rural communities.
- The applicant is to provide assistance so that a placemaking plan is developed with implementation strategies. The placemaking plan may be an output of the technical assistance provided by the applicant; and/or an existing placemaking plan can be strengthened.
- The applicant's proposal is to identify a detailed description of the region(s) served (e.g. Northeast, South, Midwest, West); and describe if the plan is multi-sectorial or multi-jurisdictional.

3. (Question) Is an applicant required to cover an entire region (e.g. Midwest Region or state)?

(Answer) No, the applicant does not need to serve an entire region. See Part III of the NOFA for the definition of region. The requirement is for the applicant to identify, in their application, the geographic locations their project will serve. Part VI of the funding notice requires the applicant to identify in what primary region they will be serving; this should be described in the Executive Summary of the proposal.

4. (Question) How may funds be used under RPIC?

(Answer) Funds are to be used to finance technical assistance providers to deliver planning support, training and to support the implementation activities to rural communities in support of rural placemaking. For more information refer to the NOFA, Part I, Section B.

5. (Question) Can funds be used to purchase materials including public furniture, historic doors, historic windows, exhibit display furniture to help preserve an historic building, structure, or residence?

(Answer) No. Funding under RPIC finances technical assistance, and mentoring activities associated for planning through implementation actions associated with rural placemaking. See unallowable costs under 2 CFR Part 200.

6. (Question) Can funds be used finance the costs of construction, improvement, or acquisition of facilities and equipment?

(Answer) No. Funding under RPIC finances technical assistance, and mentoring activities associated for planning through implementation actions associated with rural placemaking. See unallowable costs under 2 CFR Part 200.

7. (Question) Can a portion of RPIC funding be used for administration fees such as paying for a grant writer?

(Answer) No, for more information, please review Part IV. Section E. *Ineligible Project Costs* and 2 CFR Part 200 and 400 for list of unallowable costs. Funds cannot be used for grant writing services or any cost incurred in advance of the award date of the Cooperative Agreement.

8. (Question) Can the applicant use these RPIC funds to subcontract with or hire a consultant to perform the majority of tasks for planning and/or implementation?

(Answer) No, for more information, please review Part IV. Section E. *Ineligible Project Costs* and 2 CFR Part 200 and 400 for list of unallowable costs. The award will be made through a Cooperative Agreement, the awardees are referred to as Cooperators. The Cooperative Agreement requires substantial involvement and collaboration between RD Staff and the Cooperator. The Cooperators are expected to provide the majority of technical assistance and project development. If the Cooperator were to hire a consultant to do the majority of the work, the result is that there would be no “cooperative” relationship between the hired consultant and RD staff.

9. (Question) What is considered a prohibited use of funds?

(Answer) In addition to costs identified as unallowable by 2 CFR Part 200 or 400, the following costs are prohibited for this program. Neither award funds nor matching funds can be used to pay for the following types of expenses (this is not a comprehensive list of unallowable costs, see 2 CFR Part 200). Here are some types of unallowable costs.

- Under Technical Assistance funding - (this is not a comprehensive list of unallowable costs, see 2 CFR Part 200).
 - Construction (in any form).
 - Intermediary preparation of strategic plans for recipients (when it is the majority/primary cost in the budget).
 - Grants to individuals.
 - Funding a grant where there may be a conflict of interest, or an appearance of a conflict of interest, involving any action by the Agency.
 - Purchasing real estate.

Cost Share (Matching Funds)

1. (Question) Is there a match required for this grant?

(Answer) Yes –

- A minimum 15 percent match of the federal grant amount requested for the cooperative agreement award is required for all applications. Matching commitments may be made in cash by the applying organization, or a combination of cash and confirmed funding commitments with third-party in-kind contributions. This minimum match of at least 15 percent of the federal amount requested must be committed for a period of not less than the cooperative agreement performance period. Cost sharing/matching must be committed at the time of application submission.
- Applicants may recruit one or more private, philanthropic, and/or eligible public partner(s) to provide the matching 15 percent of the applicant’s proposed federal funding request (i.e., the federal grant amount requested), or the applicant can provide the full match as their own CASH

contribution. It is permissible to provide a combination of third party in-kind contribution (as defined in 2 CFR §200.96) from a partner and CASH contribution from the applicant, but it is not permissible for the applicant to provide their own in-kind contribution as part of the match combination. If the applicant is going to provide their own match contribution, that match must be documented as a CASH contribution.

2. (Question) How are match commitments submitted to USDA?

(Answer) Verification of Matching Funds: The Matching Funds Letter must be signed by the donating organization's authorized representative on the organization's letterhead and must identify the amount of matching funds or in-kind services/goods, the time period during which matching contribution will be available, and the source of the funds, as applicable (e.g. cash on hand, etc.).

- If providing an in-kind match, the third-party contributor must provide details on how those in-kind sources will be identified and tracked by the contributor.
- The contributor must also attach/stipulate the value of each of the goods or services (including the indirect/direct costs) being offered.
- If using calculated hours for estimating any in-kind service, the contributor must also provide how the value was arrived at for calculating the total cost for the in-kind match and associated personnel, as applicable.
- Additional details about cost sharing or matching funds/contributions are located at 2 CFR §200.306. Applicant matching funds must be included in the proposal's budget justification. For matching funds offered by project partners, a separate Matching Funds Letter is required for each cash and/or in-kind match contribution. Matching Funds Letters must be signed by the authorized organizational representative of the contributing organization and the applicant organization, which must include:
 - the name, address, and telephone number of the contributor,
 - the name of the applicant organization,
 - the title of the project for which the contribution is made,
 - the dollar amount of the contribution, and
 - a statement that the contributor commits to furnish the contribution during the cooperative agreement period.
- Applications without signed written commitments are deemed incomplete and will be ineligible. The value of applicant contributions to the project is established according to Federal cost principles. Applicants should refer to 2 CFR 200.306 for additional guidance on matching funds, in-kind contributions, and allowable costs.

Application Submissions

1. (Question) Can applicants mail applications to USDA Rural Development if there is a technical issue with Grants.gov?

(Answer) No. All applications must be submitted using Grants.gov by the deadline. The Agency is not responsible for any technical malfunctions or website problems related to Grants.gov. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in application submission through Grants.gov. If issues are encountered with Grants.gov, please contact the Grants.gov help desk at (800) 518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

2. (Question) How can applicants apply online?

(Answer) To apply via Grants.gov, applicants must follow the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) system registration requirements to submit applications. *USDA recommends applicants review registration instructions at least two weeks before the applicant plans to submit the application.*

3. (Question) How can applicants register on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

(Answer) To register in the Grants.gov system, go to www.grants.gov, click “Applicants”, then click “Get Registered.”

4. (Question) How can applicants make sure all required documents are included in the application prior to submission?

(Answer) All checklists, application materials, and standard forms necessary for submission are included in the www.grants.gov, application package.

5. (Question) Can technical assistance providers who serve more than one community submit multiple applications that identify different communities or regions in order to increase my chances for award?

(Answer) No. Applicants may not submit more than one application. However, applicants may identify more than one community that will receive placemaking assistance in the application.

Application Review

1. (Question) What is the Optional Innovation Seed Grant?

(Answer)

- This is an optional criterion for Applicants; and will be scored only if their proposal and budget provides for a system of funding Innovation Seed Grants. The seed grants are to be utilized to fund new and innovative projects highlighted in the placemaking plan. These seed grants are considered small financial awards for the purpose of getting a specific project implemented in the placemaking plan. The applicant can set aside, from the applicant’s award, funds for an Innovation Seed Grant up to a maximum of 10 percent. For more detailed information see NOFA, Part VI, Section B Sub-Section (g).

2. (Question) How will this criterion for the Optional Seed Grants be evaluated?

(Answer) The applicant should provide a brief narrative of how the Innovation Seed Grant will be developed, administered, and implemented. See NOFA, Part VI, Section B, Sub-Section (g) (iii) for details.

3. (Question) How must seed grants be used?

(Answer)

- The seed grant must be used for placemaking plan implementation by funding a new and innovative project identified in the “placemaking plan” under Option 1 or Option 2 of the scoring criteria.

- These seed grants are considered small financial awards for the purpose of getting a specific project implemented in the placemaking plan. For more detailed information see NOFA, Part VI, Section B, Sub-Section (g).