

PART 4284 - GRANTS

Subpart G - Rural Business Opportunity Grants

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PART 4284 - GRANTS

Subpart G - Rural Business Opportunity Grants

§ 4284.601 Purpose.

This subpart outlines Agency policies and authorizations and sets forth procedures for making grants to provide technical assistance for business development and conduct economic development planning in rural areas. The purpose of this program is to promote sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs by:

- (a) Promoting economic development that is sustainable over the long term through local effort without subsidies or external support and that leads to improvements in quality as well as the quantity of economic activity in the community;
- (b) Catalyzing economic development projects by providing critical investments that enable effective development projects to be undertaken by rural communities that, with the Rural Business Opportunity Grants (RBOG) assistance, will be able to identify their needs and take full advantage of available resources and opportunities;
- (c) Focusing assistance on priority communities (defined in § 4284.603); and
- (d) Sponsoring economic development activities with significant potential to serve as examples of "best practices" that merit implementation in rural communities in similar circumstances.

§ 4284.602 Policy.

- (a) The grant program will be used to assist in the economic development of rural areas.
- (b) Funds allocated for use in accordance with this subpart are also to be considered for use by Indian tribes within the State regardless of whether State development strategies include Indian reservations within the State's boundaries. Indians residing on such reservations must have equal opportunity, along with other rural residents, to participate in the benefits of these programs.

(c) Agency officials will maintain liaison with officials of other Federal, State, regional, and local development agencies to coordinate related programs to achieve rural development objectives.

(d) Agency officials will cooperate with appropriate State agencies in making grants that support state strategies for rural area development.

§ 4284.603 Definitions.

Agency - The Federal agency within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with responsibility assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture to administer the RBOG Program. At the time of publication, that agency is the Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

Best practice project - An action that has potential applicability in other rural communities and which potentially has instructional value when shared with those communities.

Business support centers - Centers established to provide assistance to businesses in such areas as counseling, business planning, training, management assistance, marketing information, and locating financing for business operations. The centers need not be located in a rural area, but must provide assistance to businesses located in rural areas.

Economic development - The industrial, business and financial augmentation of an area as evidenced by increases in total income, employment opportunities, value of production, duration of employment, or diversification of industry, reduced outmigration, higher labor force participation rates or wage levels, or gains in other measurements of economic activity, such as land values.

Long-term - The period of time covered by the three most recent decennial censuses of the United States to the present.

Planning - A process to coordinate economic development activities, develop guides for action, or otherwise assist local community leaders in the economic development of rural areas.

Priority communities - Communities targeted for Agency assistance as determined by the USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development. Priority communities are those that are experiencing trauma due to natural disasters or are undertaking or completing fundamental structural changes, have remained persistently poor, or have experienced long-term population decline or job deterioration.

§ 4284.603 (Con.)

Project - The result of the use of grant funds provided under this subpart through technical assistance or planning relating to the economic development of a rural area.

Rural and rural area - Any area other than a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants including the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such a city or town. The population figure used must be in accordance with the latest decennial census of the United States. (Revised 10-15-02, SPECIAL PN.)

State - Any of the 50 States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands of the United States, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Sustainable development - Development planned and designed to consider and balance environmental quality, economic needs, and social concerns.

Technical assistance - A nonconstruction, problem-solving activity performed for the benefit of a business or community to assist in the economic development of a rural area. The Agency will determine whether a specific activity qualifies as technical assistance.

United States - The 50 States of the United States of America, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands of the United States, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

§§ 4287.604 - 4287.610 [Reserved]

§ 4284.611 Authorities, delegation, and redelegation.

The State Director is responsible for implementing the authorities contained in this subpart and for issuing State Supplements redelegating these authorities to appropriate Agency employees. Grant approval authorities are contained in RD Instruction 1901-A.

§ 4284.612 Forms and exhibits.

The Agency will use Exhibits A and B and the forms referenced in this Instruction to administering grants under this Instruction. Exhibit A will be used to request funds from the National Office. Portions of this Instruction appearing in italicized type are considered to be administrative procedure and have not been published in the Federal Register.

§§ 4284.613 - 4287.619 [Reserved]

§ 4284.620 Applicant eligibility.

(a) Grants may be made to public bodies, nonprofit corporations, Indian tribes on Federal or State reservations and other Federally recognized tribal groups, and cooperatives with members that are primarily rural residents and that conduct activities for the mutual benefit of the members.

(b) Applicants must have sufficient financial strength and expertise in activities proposed in the application to ensure accomplishment of the described activities and objectives.

(1) Financial strength will be analyzed by the Agency based on financial data provided in the application. The analysis will consider the applicant's tangible net worth, which must be positive, and whether the applicant has dependable sources of revenue or a successful history of raising revenue sufficient to meet cash requirements.

(2) Expertise will be analyzed by the Agency based on the applicant staff's training and experience in activities similar to those proposed in the application and, if consultants will be used, on the staff's experience in choosing and supervising consultants.

(c) Any delinquent debt to the Federal Government shall cause the applicant to be ineligible to receive any RBOG funds until the debt has been paid.

§ 4284.621 Eligible grant purposes.

(a) Grant funds may be used to assist in the economic development of rural areas by providing technical assistance for business development and economic development planning. Grant funds may be used for, but are not limited to, the following purposes:

(1) Identify and analyze business opportunities that will use local rural materials or human resources. This includes opportunities in export markets, as well as feasibility and business plan studies.

(2) Identify, train, and provide technical assistance to existing or prospective rural entrepreneurs and managers;

(3) Establish business support centers and otherwise assist in the creation of new rural businesses;

§ 4284.621(a) (Con.)

(4) Conduct local community or multi-county economic development planning;

(5) Establish centers for training, technology, and trade that will provide training to rural businesses in the utilization of interactive communications technologies to develop international trade opportunities and markets;

(6) Conduct leadership development training of existing or prospective rural entrepreneurs and managers; or

(7) Pay reasonable fees and charges for professional services necessary to conduct the technical assistance, training, or planning functions.

(b) Grants may be made only when there is a reasonable prospect that the project will result in the economic development of a rural area.

(c) Grants may be made only when the proposal includes a basis for determining the success or failure of the project and individual major elements of the project and outlines procedures that will be taken to assess the project's impact at its conclusion.

(d) Grants may be made only when the proposed project is consistent with local and area-wide strategic plans for community and economic development, coordinated with other economic development activities in the project area and consistent with any USDA Rural Development State Strategic Plan.

(e) A grant may be considered for the amount needed to assist with the completion of a proposed project, provided that the project can reasonably be expected to be completed within 2 full years after it is begun. If grant funds are requested to establish or assist with an activity of more than 2 years duration, the amount of a grant approved in any fiscal year will be limited to the amount needed to assist with no more than 1 full year of operation. Subsequent grant requests may be considered in subsequent years, if needed to continue the operation, but funding for 1 year provides no assurance of additional funding in subsequent years.

§§ 4284.622 - 4287.628 [Reserved]

§ 4284.629 Ineligible grant purposes.

Grant funds may not be used to:

- (a) Duplicate current services or replace or substitute support previously provided. If the current service is inadequate, however, grant funds may be used to expand the level of effort or services beyond what is currently being provided;
- (b) Pay costs of preparing the application package for funding under this program;
- (c) Pay costs of the project incurred prior to the effective date of the grant made under this subpart;
- (d) Fund political activities;
- (e) Pay for assistance to any private business enterprise which does not have at least 51 percent ownership by those who are either citizens of the United States or reside in the United States after being legally admitted for permanent residence;
- (f) Pay any judgment or debt owed to the United States; or
- (g) Pay costs of real estate acquisition or development or building construction.

§ 4284.630 Other considerations.

- (a) Civil rights compliance requirements. All grants made under this subpart are subject to title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and part 1901, subpart E of this title.
- (b) Environmental review. All grants made under this subpart are subject to the requirements of subpart G of part 1940 of this title. Applications for technical assistance or planning projects are generally excluded from the environmental review process by § 1940.333 of this title provided the assistance is not related to the development of a specific site. Applicants for grant funds must consider and document within their plans the important environmental factors within the planning area and the potential environmental impacts of the plan on the planning area, as well as the alternative planning strategies that were reviewed.
- (c) Other USDA regulations. This program is subject to the provisions of the following regulations, as applicable, which are incorporated by reference herein:

§ 4284.630(c) (Con.)

- (1) 7 CFR part 3015, "Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations";
- (2) 7 CFR part 3016, "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments";
- (3) 7 CFR part 3017, "Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) and Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants)";
- (4) 7 CFR part 3018, "New Restrictions on Lobbying";
- (5) 7 CFR part 3019, "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations"; and
- (6) 7 CFR part 3052, "Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-profit Organizations."

§§ 4284.631 - 4284.637 [Reserved]

§ 4284.638 Application processing.

(a) Applications.

- (1) Applicants will file an original and one copy of *Standard Form (SF) 424.1, "Application For Federal Assistance (For Nonconstruction),"* with the Agency State Office (available in any Agency Office).
- (2) All applications shall be accompanied by:
 - (i) Copies of applicant's organizational documents showing the applicant's legal existence and authority to perform the activities under the grant;
 - (ii) A proposed scope of work, including a description of the proposed project, details of the proposed activities to be accomplished and timeframes for completion of each task, the number of months duration of the project, and the estimated time it will take from grant approval to beginning of project implementation;

(iii) A written narrative which includes, at a minimum, the following items:

(A) An explanation of why the project is needed, the benefits of the proposed project, and how the project meets the grant selection criteria;

(B) Area to be served, identifying each governmental unit, i.e., town, county, etc., to be affected by the project;

(C) Description of how the project will coordinate economic development activities with other economic development activities within the project area;

(D) Business to be assisted, if appropriate; economic development to be accomplished;

(E) An explanation of how the proposed project will result in increased or saved jobs in the area and the number of projected new and saved jobs;

(F) Description of the applicant's demonstrated capability and experience in providing the proposed project assistance or similar economic development activities, including experience of key staff members and persons who will be providing the proposed project activities and managing the project;

(G) Method and rationale used to select the areas and businesses that will receive the service;

(H) Brief description of how the work will be performed including whether organizational staff or consultants or contractors will be used; and

(I) Other information the Agency may request to assist it in making a grant award determination.

(iv) The latest financial information to show the organization's financial capacity to carry out the proposed work. At a minimum, the information should include the most recent balance sheet and an income statement. A current audited report is required if available;

§ 4284.638(a)(2) (Con.)

(v) An evaluation method to be used by the applicant to determine if objectives of the proposed activity are being accomplished; and

(vi) Intergovernmental review comments from the State Single Point of Contact, or evidence that the State has elected not to review the program under Executive Order 12372.

(b) Letter of conditions. The Agency will notify the approved applicant in writing, setting out the conditions under which the grant will be made. The notice will include those matters necessary to assure that the proposed grant is completed in accordance with the terms of the scope of work and budget, that grant funds are expended for authorized purposes, and that the applicable requirements prescribed in 7 CFR parts 3015, 3016, 3017, 3018, 3019, and 3052 are complied with. The Letter of Conditions will be addressed to the applicant, signed by the State Director or other designated Agency representative, and mailed or handed to appropriate applicant officials. Each Letter of Conditions will contain the following paragraphs:

(1) "This letter establishes conditions which must be understood and agreed to by you before further consideration may be given to the application."

(2) "This letter is not to be considered as grant approval nor as a representation as to the availability of funds. The docket may be completed on the basis of a grant not to exceed \$_____."

(3) "Please complete and return the attached Form RD 1942-46, 'Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions,' if you desire further consideration be given your application."

(4) "You must certify to the Agency that the activities provided under the grant will benefit a rural area."

(5) "You must execute Form AD-1047, 'Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters - Primary Covered Transactions,' to certify that your organization is not debarred or suspended from government assistance. You also must obtain a certification on Form AD-1048, 'Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion - Lower Tier Covered Transactions,' from any person or entity you do business with as a result of this government assistance that they are not debarred or suspended from government assistance."

(6) "You must execute Form AD-1049, 'Certification Regarding Drug-Free Workplace Requirements (Grants) Alternative I - For Grantees Other Than Individuals,' to certify that you will provide a drug-free awareness program for employees."

(7) "You must obtain prior approval from the Agency for any change to the scope or objectives of the approved project. Failure to obtain prior approval of changes to the scope of work or budget can result in suspension or termination of grant funds."

(8) "You must certify that no Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid for lobbying activities in accordance with 7 CFR part 3018, Appendix A, and execute SF-LLL, 'Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying.'"

(c) Applicant's intent to meet conditions. Upon reviewing the conditions and requirements in the letter of conditions, the applicant must complete, sign and return a Form RD 1942-46, "Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions," to the Agency; or if certain conditions cannot be met, the applicant may propose alternate conditions to the Agency. The Agency must concur with any changes proposed to the letter of conditions by the applicant before the application will be further processed.

(d) Docket preparation. The following forms and documents will be part of the grant docket:

(1) Form RD 400-4, "Assurance Agreement."

(2) Complete application in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section.

(3) Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds."

(4) Letter of Conditions.

(5) Form RD 1942-46.

(6) Executed Forms AD-1047.

(7) AD-1049.

(8) Executed certification in accordance with 7 CFR 3018, Appendix A, that no Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid for lobbying activities and, if applicable, SF-LLL.

§ 4284.639 Grant selection criteria.

Agency officials will select projects to receive assistance under this program according to the following criteria:

(a) A score of 0 to 10 points will be awarded based on the Agency assessment of the extent to which economic development resulting from the proposed project will be sustainable over the long term by local efforts, without the need for continued subsidies by governments or other organizations outside the community.

(b) A score of 0 to 10 points will be awarded based on the Agency assessment of the extent to which the project should lead to improvements in the quality of economic activity within the community, such as higher wages, improved benefits, greater career potential, and the use of higher levels of skills than currently are typical within the economy.

(c) If the grant will fund a critical element of a larger program of economic development, without which the overall program either could not proceed or would be far less effective, or if the program to be assisted by the grant will also be partially funded from other sources, points will be awarded as follows based on the percentage of the cost of the overall program that will be funded by the grant.

- (1) Less than 20 percent - 30 points;
- (2) 20 but less than 50 percent - 20 points;
- (3) 50 but less than 75 percent - 10 points; or
- (4) More than 75 percent - 0 points.

(d) Points will be awarded for each of the following criteria met by the community or communities that will receive the primary benefit of the grant. However, regardless of the mathematical total of points indicated by paragraphs (d)(1) through (d)(5) of this section, total points awarded under paragraph (d) must not exceed 40.

- (1) Experiencing trauma due to a major natural disaster that occurred not more than 3 years prior to the filing of the application for RBOG assistance - 15 points;

- (2) Undergoing fundamental structural change in the local economy, such as that caused by the closing or major downsizing of a military facility or other major employer not more than 3 years prior to the filing of the application for RBOG assistance - 15 points;
- (3) Has experienced long-term poverty - 10 points;
- (4) Has experienced long-term population decline - 10 points; and
- (5) Has experienced long-term job deterioration - 10 points.

(e) A score of 0 to 10 points will be awarded based on the Agency determination of the extent of the project's usefulness as a new best practice as defined in § 4284.603.

(f) The State Director may assign up to 15 discretionary points to an application. If allocation of funds under National Office control is being considered, the Agency Administrator may assign up to 20 additional discretionary points. Assignment of discretionary points by either the State Director or the Agency Administrator must include a written justification. Permissible justifications are geographic distribution of funds, special importance for implementation of a strategic plan in partnership with other organizations, or extraordinary potential for success due to superior project plans or qualifications of the grantee.

§ 4284.640 Appeals.

Any appealable adverse decision made by the Agency may be appealed in accordance with USDA appeal regulations found at 7 CFR part 11. If the Agency makes a determination that a decision is not appealable, a request for a determination of appealability may be made to the National Appeals Staff. *If at any time prior to grant approval it is decided that favorable action will not be taken on an application, the State Director will notify the applicant in writing of the decision and of the reasons why the request was not favorably considered. The notification will inform applicant officials of their rights to informal review, mediation, and appeal of the decision in accordance with 7 CFR part 11 and 7 CFR part 1900, subpart B.*

§§ 4284.641 - 4287.646 [Reserved]

§ 4284.647 Grant approval and obligation of funds.

(a) The following statement will be entered in the comment section of the *Form RD 1940-1*, "Request For Obligation of Funds," which must be signed by the grantee:

"The grantee certifies that it is in compliance with and will continue to comply with all applicable laws; regulations; Executive Orders; and other generally applicable requirements, including those contained in 7 CFR part 4284, subpart G, and 7 CFR parts 3015, 3016, 3017, 3018, 3019, and 3052 in effect on the date of grant approval; and the approved Letter of Conditions."

(b) After *Form RD 1940-1* has been signed by the applicant and the approval official, appropriate staff may request an obligation of funds through the field office terminal system.

(c) The obligation date will be 6 working days from the date funds are reserved unless an exception is granted by the National Office. *RD Instruction 2015-C* applies to this program.

(d) Applicant notification of grant approval will be accomplished by mailing to the applicant on the obligation date a copy of the executed *Form RD 1940-1*, the approved scope of work, and Exhibit A to this Instruction. The grant will be considered closed on the obligation date.

§ 4284.648 Fund disbursement.

The Agency will determine, based on 7 CFR parts 3015, 3016, and 3019, as applicable, whether disbursement of a grant will be by advance or reimbursement. A *SF-270*, "Request for Advance or Reimbursement," (available in any Agency office) must be completed by the grantee and submitted to the Agency no more often than monthly to request either advance or reimbursement of funds. Upon receipt of a properly completed *SF-270*, the funds will be requested through the field office terminal system. Ordinarily, payment will be made within 30 days after receipt of a proper request for advance or reimbursement.

§ 4284.649 - 4284.655 [Reserved]

§ 4284.656 Reporting.

(a) A SF-269, "Financial Status Report," (available in any Agency office) and a project performance activity report will be required of all grantees on a quarterly basis. The grantee will cause said program to be completed within the total sums available to it, including the grant, in accordance with the scope of work and any necessary modifications thereof prepared by grantee and approved by the Agency. A final project performance report will be required with the final Financial Status Report. The final report may serve as the last quarterly report. The final report must provide complete information regarding the jobs created and saved as a result of the grant. Grantees shall constantly monitor performance to ensure that time schedules are being met, projected work by time periods is being accomplished, and other performance objectives are being achieved. Grantees are to submit an original of each report to the Agency. The project performance reports shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- (1) A comparison of actual accomplishments to the objectives established for that period;
- (2) Problems, delays, or adverse conditions, if any, which have affected or will affect attainment of overall project objectives, prevent meeting time schedules or objectives, or preclude the attainment of particular project work elements during established time periods. This disclosure shall be accompanied by a statement of the action taken or planned to resolve the situation; and
- (3) Objectives and timetable established for the next reporting period.

(b) Within 1 year after the conclusion of the project, the grantee will provide a project evaluation report based on criteria developed in accordance with §§ 4284.621(c) and 4284.638(a)(2)(v).

(c) The Agency may also require grantees to prepare a report suitable for public distribution describing the accomplishments made through the use of the grant and, in the case where the grant funded the development or application of a "best practice," to describe that "best practice."

§ 4284.656 (Con.)

(d) The grantee will provide for Financial Management Systems which will include:

(1) Accurate, current, and complete disclosure of the financial result of each grant.

(2) Records which identify adequately the source and application of funds for grant-supporting activities, together with documentation to support the records. Those records shall contain information pertaining to grant awards and authorizations, obligations, unobligated balances, assets, liabilities, outlays, and income.

(3) Effective control over and accountability for all funds. Grantee shall adequately safeguard all such assets and shall assure that funds are used solely for authorized purposes.

(e) The grantee will retain financial records, supporting documents, statistical records, and all other records pertinent to the grant for a period of at least 3 years after grant closing except that the records shall be retained beyond the 3-year period if audit findings have not been resolved or if directed by the United States. Microfilm copies may be substituted in lieu of original records. The Agency and the Comptroller General of the United States, or any of their duly authorized representatives, shall have access to any books, documents, papers, and records of the grantee which are pertinent to the specific grant program for the purpose of making audit, examination, excerpts, and transcripts.

§ 4284.657 Audit requirements.

Grantees must provide an annual audit in accordance with 7 CFR part 3052. The audit requirements apply to the years in which grant funds are received and years in which work is accomplished that will be paid for with grant funds.

§§ 4284.658 - 4284.666 [Reserved]

§ 4284.667 Grant servicing.

Grants will be serviced in accordance with part 1951, subparts E and O, of this title. Grantees will permit periodic inspection of the program operations by a representative of the Agency. All non-confidential information resulting from the Grantee's activities shall be made available to the general public on an equal basis.

§ 4284.668 Programmatic changes.

The Grantee shall obtain prior approval for any change to the scope or objectives of the approved project. Failure to obtain prior approval of changes to the scope of work or budget may result in suspension, termination, and recovery of grant funds.

§§ 4284.669 - 4284.683 [Reserved]

§ 4284.684 Exception authority.

The Administrator may, in individual cases, grant an exception to any requirement or provision of this subpart provided the Administrator determines that application of the requirement or provision would adversely affect USDA's interest. *Requests for exceptions must be in writing by the State Director. Requests must be supported with documentation to explain the adverse effect on the Agency's interest, proposed alternative courses of action, and show how the adverse effect will be eliminated or minimized if the exception is granted.*

§§ 4284.685 - 4284.698 [Reserved]

§ 4284.699 Member delegate clause.

No member of Congress shall be admitted to any share or part of this grant or any benefit that may arise therefrom; but this provision shall not be construed to bar as a contractor under the grant a publicly held corporation whose ownership might include a member of Congress.

§ 4284.700 OMB control number.

The reporting and recordkeeping requirements contained in this regulation have been approved by the Office of Management and Budget under the provisions of 44 U.S.C. chapter 35 and have been assigned OMB control number 0570-0024 in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. You are not required to respond to this collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Attachments: Exhibits A & B.

oOo

REQUEST FOR RBOG FUNDS FROM NATIONAL OFFICE

TO: Administrator, RBS
Washington, DC 20250

Attention: Specialty Lenders Division

State: _____

Name of Applicant: _____

A. Amount of grant funds requested: \$_____

B. Is this application ready for obligation? _____ If no,
give the estimated date the application will be ready for obligation of funds.

State Director

Date

oOo

PRIORITY SCORE - RBOG APPLICATION

Name of Applicant: _____

State: _____

(a) Sustainable Economic Development Points _____

(b) Quality of Economic Activity Points _____

(c) Leveraging Points _____

(d) (1) Natural Disaster Points _____

(2) Military Base/Employer Points _____

(3) Long term poverty Points _____

(4) Long term population Loss Points _____

(5) Long term Job Loss Points _____

Subtotal Points _____

(e) Best Practice Points _____

(f) State Director Discretionary Points _____

TOTAL.....

Administrator Discretionary Points _____

GRAND TOTAL.....

oOo