NEBRASKA
RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION

Rural Health Transformation Program
Request for Application (RFA)

1.1 School Kitchen Modernization Grants

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) is issuing this Request for Applications (RFA) for the purpose of entering into a Grant agreement and awarding Federal funds to eligible and qualified agencies. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has approved funding for Nebraska to provide grants totaling $2,234,048.00 (with a maximum award of $100,000.00 per school or school district per year) to rural or frontier schools to transition their food preparation and storage infrastructure to support the integration of more scratch-cooking and increased use of whole foods, as well as an increase in school meal participation.

The purpose of this project through the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) is to decrease the amount of 'out of the box' or 'heat and serve' items offered while increasing the amount of higher quality, more nutritious, less processed, and more scratch cooked food items offered in the school meals programs. A vast number of children in the United States do not consume adequate amounts of recommended nutrients from their diet. This grant aims to support inclusion of semi-scratch and scratch cooked and minimally processed protein foods in school breakfast and lunch meals. Grant recipients will reduce heat and serve menu items by 5% each month and will include locally produced protein in their breakfast and/or lunch menus 5% more times each month. Menu changes supported by this grant are intended to improve participation in the school meals programs by 10%.

The RFA will open on 05/28/2026 and applications will be accepted through 08/31/2026 and will be reviewed upon submission. All funds will need to be spent by the liquidation date of 06/30/2027.

RFA #	TOTAL FUNDING AVAILABLE	RELEASE DATE
RHTP Initiative # 1.1	$2,234,048.00	05/28/2026
APPLICATION DUE DATE	**PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE**	**APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND QUESTIONS**
08/31/2026	06/01/26 - 06/30/2027	nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov

Application Instructions:

To apply, a public or non-public school food authority must complete the application on pages 3 through 6 below, provide four-weeks of menus from SY2025-26, and submit supporting documentation for price quotes received for equipment that will be purchased with grant funding (if awarded). All required documentation must be submitted electronically to nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov.

Important note: School districts must submit four weeks of menus for all meal types (breakfast and/or lunch) served by the school kitchen facility that will use the equipment awarded from this grant.

Application scoring:

Applications will be scored based on the following:

- explanation of how requested equipment will support preparation and service of minimally processed protein foods, semi-scratch and scratch cooked items and how these items will improve nutrition quality of meals offered at school breakfast and lunch;
- provision of four weeks/one month of menus that includes identification of which menu items will be eliminated and what semi-scratch and scratch cooked items will be served instead;
- inclusion of at least three price quotes for desired equipment, including equipment specifications to ensure price comparison has been made on identical equipment

Awards:

Awarded applications can be up to $100,000.00 per school district/school food authority.

Eligibility:

- Rural Schools, School Districts, or Educational Services Units funding to purchase new equipment necessary to support the expansion or scale of healthy lunch options in rural and frontier counties.

Priority:

Applications will be prioritized based on several criteria:

- Rural and frontier counties;
- Location in food desert; and
- Poverty census data.

Evaluation of Applications:

NDE will evaluate all applications to determine whether the Applicant is an eligible entity, whether the Application meets the minimum requirements of this RFA, and whether the Applicant poses risk of noncompliance with federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the Grant, such that NDE should not award funding.

Complete evaluation criteria are outlined in the scoring rubric attached in this document. A scoring committee will evaluate all complete applications. NDE will award applicants based on the strength of their application and how effectively applicants demonstrate that the funding will result the following: a 5% decrease in the frequency of heat and serve menu items served monthly; a 5% increase in the frequency of minimally processed and locally produced protein items served in the school nutrition programs each month; and a 10% increase in student participation in the school breakfast and lunch programs.

Award of Funding:

Applications will be reviewed for completeness and awarded on a rolling basis. Only complete applications will be considered for funding awards. Awarded schools will be notified by a grant award notification transmitted via email. The NDE will process payments for approved grant purchases only after an awarded school has purchased approved equipment and provides all required documentation for reimbursement.

Equipment:

The purchases made available by this grant must support the service of locally produced protein items and a reduction in heat and serve items that will support an increase in student participation in the school meals programs. Eligible equipment must have a purchase value greater than $10,000.00. Purchases may include equipment such as blast chillers, salad bars, refrigeration units, scratch-cooking appliances, storage equipment, greenhouses, etc. For a list of eligible equipment, please visit this link. If your desired equipment is not found in the provided list, please contact the NDE at nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov to inquire about its allowability.

Use of Funds:

Applicant schools must outline in their application how they intend to use grant funds (see Purchasing & Procurement section). Funds may only be used for allowable equipment expenses that receive approval from the NDE. All purchases are subject to program requirements identified in 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 300. Administrative expenses are not an allowable expense of this grant. Construction costs are not allowable expenses of this grant.

Reporting Requirements:

Applicants must have a financial system in place to monitor their expenditures. Grantees may be audited at any time. All receipts must be made available upon request. Grantees will be required to submit an annual report due 06/30/2027 that includes:

- Annual budget report
- Supporting documentation that shows the approved grant expenditures have been purchased

Disposition Requirements:

Entities must follow federal requirements regarding the disposal of equipment purchased with federal funds.

Application

Applicant information:

School Name:

School Physical Address:

School City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Email:

RFA Contact:

Identify the location of your school (city/town, county, and state):

Explanation of Planned Purchases:

Please provide a detailed explanation of the equipment (e.g., tilt skillet, blast chiller, proofer) the school nutrition program/operation will purchase with the funds from this grant; identify the intended use for the equipment.

Explain how this equipment will support an increase in the service of semi-scratch or scratch made items in the school nutrition program. Please provide specific examples of what menu items will be discontinued or served less, and what items will be prepared and served instead.

Explain how your school nutrition program will select and incorporate new menu items. Consider how you will introduce new menu items, if you will solicit student feedback, and what will be done with that feedback.

Explain how your school nutrition program staff will be trained to prepare the selected semi-scratch and scratch cooked items?

Identify additional tools or resources your school nutrition program will use to support menu changes that will incorporate semi-scratch and scratch cooked items (i.e., Team Nutrition recipes). Identify how school nutrition program staff will be trained to prepare the selected semi-scratch and scratch cooked items.

Purchasing & Procurement

In the space below, please provide a **detailed explanation of the equipment** your school will need to purchase using the funds from this grant. For each item, include the exact product names along with **at least three** corresponding price quotes obtained from different vendors or sources.

If the **lowest-priced option** is not selected, include a clear justification explaining the rationale for choosing an alternative option, such as considerations related to quality, durability, warranty,

or specific features that better meet the program's needs.

Project Metrics:

Please provide a copy of a four-week/one-month menu of lunch meals from SY2025-26 in this application.

Below, identify what items on each menu will be substituted as a result of the addition of the new equipment purchase made possible by this grant that will support semi-scratch and scratch cooking.

Recipient schools must make the following menu adjustments with a goal to increase student participation in the school nutrition programs by 10%:

1. **Reduce heat and serve menu items served by 5% each month;**
2. **Replace 5% of their current protein meal component menu items with minimally processed and locally produced protein items each month; and**
3. **Increase the frequency of scratch cooked menu items by 5% each month.**

Is your application submission complete?

- ☐ All sections of this application are completed
- ☐ 4 weeks of **CURRENT** menus (reflecting all meal types the awarded school serves) for the school year 2025-2026
- ☐ Proof of 3 price quotes for desired equipment

Post Award Requirements:

- Proof of purchase of the requested equipment

- 4 weeks of menus (reflecting all meal types the awarded school serves) that reflect changes as a result of grant approved equipment purchases
- Awarded schools must fully expend their approved grant funds by 06/30/2027. After awards are announced, proper procurement of the equipment must be done and SFAs must submit documentation for payment as soon as possible, all documentation must be submitted by 07/01/2027.

Date:

Signature of RFA Contact:

Questions regarding the program and applications should be sent to: nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov.

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