

## Rural Health Transformation Program Request for Application (RFA)

### 1.3 Farm-to-School Procurement and Policy Technical Assistance (TA)

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 approximately \$8,344,000.00 to support local food production, processing, aggregation, and distribution infrastructure in order to expand availability of kitchen-ready products and reduce preparation burden on school kitchens. Funding must be used to purchase food production, aggregation, processing, and distribution equipment that supports access to local foods, including proteins, that promote healthy eating. This funding is also intended to support farm-to-school procurement capacity, coordination between local producers and schools, and participation in related technical assistance activities. NDE will award funding to qualified Applicants who submit a complete application, as described below. A total award of this amount of funds is not guaranteed but is subject to the Applications received, to the actual money appropriated to the NDE, and to the NDE’s discretion.

The RFA will open on 06/12/2026 and applications will be accepted through 08/31/2026 and will be reviewed upon submission. The agreement period will begin on the effective date of the executed grant agreement. Approved purchases and required documentation must be completed and submitted by the deadlines identified in the executed grant agreement, but no later than 06/30/2027.

RFA #	APPROXIMATE TOTAL FUNDING AVAILABLE	RELEASE DATE
RHTP Initiative # 1.3	\$8,344,000.00	06/15/2026
APPLICATION DUE DATE	PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE	APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND QUESTIONS
08/31/2026	06/01/26 - 06/30/2027	<a href="mailto:nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov">nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov</a>

### **Application Instructions:**

To apply, an entity must fully complete this RFA and submit it electronically to [nde.nsweb@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.nsweb@nebraska.gov). Questions regarding the program and applications should be sent to [nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov). Applications that do not contain the required information may be rejected. NDE reserves the right to evaluate Applicants and award funds in a manner utilizing criteria selected at the NDE’s discretion and in the best interest of meeting the objectives of the funding involved.

### **Awards:**

Awarded applications can be up to \$150,000.00 per entity.

## **Eligibility:**

Eligible entities include local farmers, ranchers, producers, cooperatives, and food suppliers.

## **Priority:**

Entities serving rural and frontier counties, tribal communities, and communities with food deserts will be prioritized.

## **Evaluation of Applications:**

The 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.

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 be used to purchase food production, aggregation, processing, and distribution equipment that supports school access to local foods, including proteins, that promote healthy eating.

Applications will be evaluated based on the following general criteria:

- Alignment with the purpose of Initiative 1.3, including increasing school access to locally produced, minimally processed foods;
- Demonstrated need for the requested equipment;
- Identification of schools to be served and evidence that the equipment will support school meal access to local foods;
- Readiness to complete procurement, purchase, installation, and reimbursement documentation within the grant period;
- Priority for rural, frontier, tribal, and food desert communities;
- Ability to comply with financial, reporting, inventory, and documentation requirements.

## **Award of Funding:**

Applications will be reviewed for completeness. Funding will be awarded based on the strength of the Application and how the use of funding from this grant will improve the Applicant's ability to process, aggregate, produce, and distribute local foods, including proteins, for use in school meals. Applications will be awarded on a rolling basis for awards up to \$150,000.00 to be used for allowable purchases as funding allows. No promise for funds is binding on NDE, and no funds will be paid to any Applicant until a grant has been executed by both the Applicant and NDE. Costs incurred before the grant agreement is fully executed are not reimbursable unless specifically authorized in writing by NDE. Awarded entities will be notified by a grant award notification transmitted via email. The NDE will process payments for approved grant purchases only after an awarded entity has purchased approved equipment and provides all required documentation for reimbursement.

## **Equipment:**

Eligible items must have a purchase value greater than \$10,000.00. Allowable purchases are those used to scale up food production, aggregation, processing, and distribution to schools in order that they may have access to a greater volume and variety of locally grown and raised foods to serve in the school meals

programs. Eligible equipment may include trailers, forklifts, pallet jacks, packaging equipment, refrigeration units or generators, and food safety equipment.

### **Use of Funds:**

Applicants must outline in their application how they intend to use grant funds. Funds may only be used for allowable equipment expenses that receive approval from the NDE. Funds must be used to increase the access of locally produced, minimally processed foods. Funds awarded by this grant cannot be used for anything not directly related to food production, processing, aggregation, and distribution. Applicants must outline in this Application how they intend to use grant funds in the Purchasing & Procurement section. Funds may only be used for allowable expenses that receive approval as part of the entity's submitted Application. Administrative costs, food, and construction are not allowable costs for this grant. All purchases are subject to program requirements identified in 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 300.

### **Program Income:**

This grant is intended to build capacity for local food production, processing, aggregation, and distribution so that schools have greater access to locally produced foods. Grant-funded activities should support this capacity-building purpose and should **not** be structured primarily to generate income for the Applicant.

Applicants must disclose whether the equipment purchased with grant funds is expected to support the sale of local foods to schools or other revenue-generating activity. The sale of food or agricultural products in the ordinary course of an Applicant's business is not, by itself, treated as program income under this RFA. However, income that is earned as a result of award-supported project activities may be subject to federal program income requirements and additional tracking, reporting, or use restrictions. Renting or leasing equipment purchased with these funds is considered generating program income.

NDE, in consultation with DHHS as needed, will determine whether any income must be treated as program income based on the specific facts of the award, the approved project activities, and applicable federal requirements. Awarded entities must track, report, and use any program income as directed by NDE or as required in the executed grant agreement.

### **Reporting Requirements:**

Applicants must have a financial system in place to monitor their expenditures. Grantees may be audited at any time. All receipts, procurement records, quotes, invoices, proof of payment, and equipment records must be made available upon request. Grantees will be required to submit reports as identified in the executed grant agreement. Reporting may include information on equipment purchased, schools served, products supplied or expected to be supplied to schools, volume or value of local foods provided, and participation in NDE-hosted technical assistance activities.

### **Disposition Requirements:**

Entities must maintain records for equipment purchased with federal funds, use the equipment for the approved grant purpose, safeguard the equipment against loss or misuse, and not sell, transfer, dispose of, or repurpose the equipment without prior approval from NDE. Entities must follow federal requirements regarding the management and disposal of equipment purchased with federal funds.

## Application

### Applicant information:

Entity Name:

Entity Physical Address:

Entity City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Email:

RFA Contact:

Identify the schools to be served (school name, city/town, county, and state):

### Explanation of Planned Purchases:

Please provide a detailed explanation of the equipment the entity will purchase with the funds from this grant, including its intended use, specifications, cost, and whether it is expected to support the sale of local foods to schools or other revenue-generating activities.

Explain how this equipment will support an increase in food production, aggregation, processing, and/or distribution to establish or enhance schools' access to locally grown foods, including proteins, served in the school meals program.

Describe how the schools to be served will select and incorporate new menu items using the locally produced foods supported by this project. Consider how new menu items may be introduced, whether student feedback will be solicited, and how that feedback may be used.

Is there existing infrastructure equipment already in use in your operation? If yes, will the equipment funded through this grant work with your existing operation and in what way(s)?

Identify additional tools, resources, or technical assistance needs that may support the schools to be served in incorporating locally produced, minimally processed foods into school meals, including semi-scratch or scratch-cooked items. If known, describe how school nutrition program staff may be trained to prepare these items.

### **Purchasing & Procurement**

This RFA has document submission requirements to receive reimbursement for allowable purchases approved through this grant Application process. In the space below, please provide a **detailed explanation of the equipment** your entity will 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.

Identify the position/person in your organization who will be responsible for the following duties: procurement using a price comparison method in order to choose the best price option; retaining documentation related to procurement and purchase of allowable grant-approved items; attending required NDE-hosted trainings to support this grant project; and submission of all required documentation for receipt of funding.

### **Post Award Requirements:**

- Proof of purchase of the requested equipment;
- Procurement documentation, including quotes and justification if the lowest-priced option was not selected;
- Proof of payment;
- Equipment records sufficient to document the equipment purchased, location, use, and continued availability for the approved grant purpose;
- Participation in required NDE-hosted trainings or technical assistance activities;
- Submission of required reports identified in the executed grant agreement;
- Awarded entities must fully expend their approved grant funds by 06/30/2027. After awards are announced, proper procurement of the equipment must be completed, and entities must submit documentation for reimbursement 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](mailto:nde.nutritionservices@nebraska.gov).