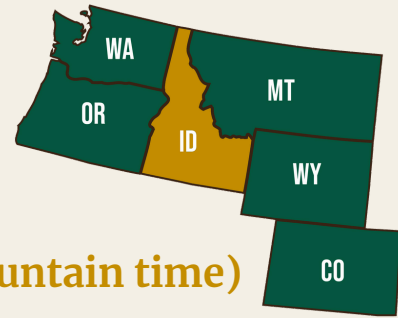




Request for applications

Idaho Business Builder

Fall 2024



Application deadline: January 15, 2025 (11:59pm Mountain time)

Summary of the Idaho Business Builder program

The NWRM RFBC Idaho team is offering grants between \$3,000 and \$15,000 that are designed to support small to mid-scale Idaho food and farm businesses, and to get locally produced food into local markets by strengthening food supply chains.

Your Idaho-based farm, ranch, or value-added food business may be eligible for this program. It is designed for farms and ranches in Idaho, as well as small to mid-scale businesses that meet the following criteria: (1) they are located in Idaho, and (2) they source from local or regional producers within a 450-mile radius of their business.

Projects must benefit at least two entities in the local food system, for example:

- A farm sells crops to a food maker who develops and markets a new product.
- A farm adds capacity to do minimal processing for schools to source locally.
- A farm expands capacity to grow direct or intermediated sales in local and regional markets.
- A food processing business increases its purchasing of locally or regionally produced ingredients, creating new market opportunities for one or more farms or ranches.

This is the first of two rounds in the Idaho Business Builder grant program. A total of \$100,000 will be awarded in this round, with an anticipated 7 to 15 awards being granted. Award announcements will be made by the end of February 2025, with the expectation that funded projects will be completed within 8 to 10 months. Details for round two of the program are expected to be released in November 2025.

Am I eligible?

The NWRM Business Builder grants are designed for farms and ranches in Idaho, and non-farm food businesses that are (1) located in Idaho and (2) sourcing from local or regional producers, defined as within Idaho or 450 miles of their business.

Entities must identify as one or more of the following:

- Farm, ranch, and fish/seafood businesses that are:
 - Small and mid-scale
 - Producing in, sourcing from, and focused on local and regional markets
- Value-added food businesses that are:
 - Small and mid-scale
 - Sourcing locally or regionally
 - Focusing on local or regional markets
- Food processors, aggregators, and distributors that:
 - Source locally or regionally
 - Serve multiple small- and mid-scale food and farm businesses
 - Focus on local or regional markets

What type of projects can I do with this grant?

For the Idaho Grants program, projects must benefit at least two entities in the local food system, for example:

- A farm sells crops to a food maker who develops and markets a new product.
- A farm adds capacity to do minimal processing for schools to source locally.
- A farm adds capacity to expand direct or intermediated sales in local and regional markets.
- A food processing business increases purchasing of local/regionally produced ingredients increasing market opportunities for one or more farms/ranches.

Types of eligible projects include:

- **Business planning:** This can include creating business plans, doing studies to see if an idea will work, grant writing, or loan application support.
- **Value chain coordination:** Covering costs for employees, equipment, and vehicles needed to connect different parts of the supply chain of your business.
- **Brand development:** Creating a brand and marketing materials, like websites.
- **Market research and outreach:** Doing market studies, hiring brokers, and reaching out to potential customers.
- **Trade shows:** Attending trade shows and buying supplies or creating marketing materials for them, focusing on local or regional markets.
- **New products and packaging:** Creating new products, labels, or packaging, and testing new recipes.
- **Improving product handling and sales:** Enhancing the way you process, market, or distribute your products.
- **Legal support:** Getting legal help to make your business stronger, manage risks, and grow.
- **Food safety:** Training, planning, and compliance to meet food safety rules for owners and employees.
- **Worker safety:** Improving safety for workers during post-harvest activities, such as training staff or purchasing safety equipment.
- **Farm-direct sales:** Building or expanding direct sales, like farm stands, U-Pick, or CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) platforms.

If what you need to strengthen your business viability and/or expand your markets isn't on this list, please contact the [Idaho State Business Builder team](#).

What can I pay for with this grant money?

Hiring outside help: You can hire businesses, independent consultants, or mentors with similar experience to help with your project.

Paying current employees: You can pay your employees to work on the project if it's outside their usual role with the business. For example, this could be for training or using a new process. You'll need to keep track of these costs with regular payroll records.

Buying supplies: You can buy supplies for the project. Examples include:

- Making sample batches of food to test with buyers or at trade shows
- Producing small batches of products for taste testing and improving recipes
- Buying packaging and labeling materials

Buying or renting equipment: You can buy or lease special equipment **needed for the project**. Examples include:

- Kitchen equipment and cold storage, like refrigerators, freezers
- Dry storage
- Special purpose delivery vehicles (for example, a refrigerated truck versus a general purpose pickup or van)
- Machines for packaging and labeling
- Software for managing sales, inventory, or equipment - Point of sale (POS) software and equipment
- Inventory management software

Food safety certification: You can cover costs for meeting food safety certification requirements including upgrades to practices and equipment

Costs to develop, revise, or implement a marketing plan: You can cover costs like developing a brand, setting up a website, or updating your packaging.

Travel costs: You can cover travel costs that are important for the project, but they must follow federal rules for travel rates. You can find the allowed rates on the [U.S. General Services Administration website](#) using the "per diem look-up calculator."

What CAN'T I pay for with this grant money?

- Projects and costs related to on-farm production
- Projects and costs related to meat and poultry slaughter and initial ("cut and wrap") processing. These projects are supported through other USDA programs.
 - Value-added products beyond boxed meat, such as pemmican, jerkies, stews, and ready-to-eat meals are allowable.
- Purchase of land or buildings
- Construction costs, with some exceptions, for example, installation costs for allowable equipment
- Some types of equipment, including general purpose equipment that is not specific to the grant-funded project. Please reach out to ask if you still have questions.
- Grant funds cannot be used to cover pre-award costs incurred before the effective start date of the project or fully executed agreement.

How much money can I get?

Grants will range between

\$3,000-\$15,000

Farm and food businesses can apply for and receive from more than one Business Builder grant program, but the total amount of Business Builder grant funding that an individual business can receive (including grants from other USDA regional food business centers) can't exceed \$100,000.

Total funds available in Round 1

\$100,000

Target number of grantees in this grant pool

7-15

More info about what businesses are eligible

What counts as "small" and "mid-scale"?

For this grant program, "small" and "mid-scale" are based on dollars, not acres.

FARMS, RANCHES, AND SEAFOOD HARVESTERS

Small = up to \$350,000 in gross cash farm income (GCFI)

Read the request for applications carefully, as some grants may focus on smaller businesses:

"Low-sales" = up to \$150,000 GCFI

"Moderate sales" = \$150,000 to \$350,000

Mid-scale = \$350,000 to \$999,999

ALL OTHER ELIGIBLE FOOD BUSINESSES

Small = up to \$350,000 in annual sales

Mid-scale = \$350,000 to \$999,999

What do we mean by "local" and "regional" for this program?

Farms or ranches must be in Idaho. Non-farm food businesses must be (1) located in Idaho and (2) sourcing from local or regional producers, defined as within Idaho or 450 miles of their business.

These grants are for businesses. What about nonprofits?

The Business Builder grant program was specifically created for for-profit businesses, which includes cooperatives, that often are not eligible for grants open to non-profit organizations.

Non-profit organizations that have a farm or food business (including a food hub) are eligible if they can verify that grant funds will only be used for the farm or food business market development, operations or investments in the enterprise part of their organizations.

Educational farms or food processors/manufacturers not owned by farmers, ranchers and/or fishers/seafood harvesters are eligible if they document that at least 50% of granted funds will be invested in activities that improve market access and sales for farmers, ranchers and/or fishers/seafood harvesters.

This program prioritizes historically underserved and underinvested farmers, ranchers, and food businesses.

“Historically Underserved” is a USDA term that includes four groups of farmers or ranchers:

- Beginning
- Socially Disadvantaged
- Veterans
- Limited Resource

“Underinvested” is a term used by USDA Regional Food Business Centers that refers to “populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life and initiatives”:

- Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color;
- Members of religious minorities;
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) persons;
- Persons with disabilities (physical or mental);
- Persons who live in rural areas;
- Persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality

What is required of me?

Legal entity and UEI: To receive a Business Builder grant, a business must be a legal entity and have a Unique Entity Identification number or UEI, issued by the U.S. government. [Quick Guide for Getting a UEI](#)

If you do not have a UEI number, you can apply for one on the [SAM.gov](#) website, which is managed by the General Services Administration of the United States government. There is no charge to use this site or to obtain a UEI number.

You may submit a Business Builder grant application before you receive your UEI. If you are selected for a grant, you will not be able to sign your grant agreement or receive grant funds until you provide your UEI.

You will also need to provide an Employer Identification Number (EIN; or Social Security Number if your business does not have an EIN) to receive grant funds.

No match funding or cost-share is required.

USDA rules and guidelines: All Business Builder grants and grantees must meet federal rules and guidelines required by USDA-AMS, according to their [terms and conditions](#).

Sign up on our grants website in advance: [Register online](#) to get a user name and password. This is required before you can fill out and submit an application. Don't wait!

Insurance and licensing: Business Builder grantees must agree to follow all state and federal regulations related to licensing and insurance relevant to their products and markets. This includes any new requirements related to new products and markets developed as part of a grant-funded project. Learning these requirements and coming into compliance should be included as a step in all projects.

Reporting: Business Builder grantees will be required to report progress and outcomes as detailed in your grant agreements. Reporting requirements will depend on the size and complexity of the project. Grantees will submit reports and payment requests through the NWRM RFBC Business Builder Grant portal.

This is a reimbursable grant. What does that mean?

A reimbursable grant is a type of funding in which you must first incur expenses and then submit documentation to the RFBC in order to be reimbursed. The key feature of this grant is that funds are not provided upfront but are paid after you have spent money according to the approved budget or project plan.

Here are some common elements of a reimbursable grant:

- **Pre-approved budget:** You must follow the budget approved by the RFBC.
- **Documentation required:** After spending, you submit proof, such as receipts or invoices, to the RFBC to be reimbursed
- **Conditional funding:** If the expenses do not align with your approved budget and the grant terms, you might not be reimbursed.
- **Timing:** the RFBC will process payments as quickly as possible, but it may take up to four weeks. To ease cash flow concerns, consider contacting a lender for a short-term loan.

Advance payments are possible, if your business meets the qualifications (more info in the “Grant set up and management” section of the [full grant guidelines](#)).

How are applications evaluated?

Grant applications will be evaluated by an impartial panel of reviewers who will score applications based on the project’s achievability, potential impact on business viability and market expansion, and other factors relevant to the specific request for applications.

We recommend applicants review [evaluation criteria](#) in advance so their applications can be as strong as possible.

Achievability (24 points possible)

- The project outcomes have specific time frames and budget allocations associated with them, all of which can be achieved within the project period (4 points)
- The applicant has experience with the proposed work, from past projects and/or staff/business partners for this project. (4)
- The project description, budget details, and evidence of prior work related to this project indicate a sufficient stage of planning and readiness. (8)
- The proposed budget is clear, provides sufficient detail to show how it aligns with the project's scope of work, and the applicant has provided justification for proposed expenses. (8)

Impact on Business Viability and Market Expansion (12 points possible)

- The project will increase viability of the business, for example, by improving profitability, general business management, workforce capability, workforce safety, operational efficiency, or other ways proposed by the applicant. (4)
- The projected impact to business viability seems reasonable given the proposed project and the applicant's current operation and/or level of planning. (4)
- The project adds additional sales channels for the applicant in line with applicant's capacity and market expansion goals, and/or increases the applicant's ability to perform in existing sales channels. (4)

Benefit for Other Eligible Businesses (16 points possible)

- The project will benefit underinvested businesses or communities (adequate documentation must be provided in application). (4)
- The project and business are focused on local and regional sourcing and marketing. (4)
- The projected improvements to regional food supply chain capacity seem reasonable for the proposed project and the applicant's current operation and/or level of planning. (4)
- The applicant is clear about the specific farms, ranches, fishing/seafood harvesting, and/or food businesses this project will directly benefit. (4)

Additional criteria (8 points possible)

- Applicant provides clear and specific details on how the identified equipment or infrastructure purchases will benefit the business financially. (4)
- The proposed financial benefits are achievable based on the provided information. (4)

All grantees selected by the NWRM Regional Food Business Center for funding must then be approved by USDA-AMS. At that point, we will notify grantees that they will receive a Business Builder grant and begin the grant set-up process.

When will awards be announced?

Applications due: January 15

Awards announced: end of February

Grant agreements signed: within 3 weeks of decision

Project period: 8-10 months

How do I apply?

The application process is described in detail below.

For the Idaho Business Builder Grants Program, you must also:

- Identify and briefly describe the other entity or entities that will benefit from this project, how they will benefit, and how they are involved in the project.

How can I learn more about applying?

Office hours and webinars about this RFA

The Idaho State Team will host a series of webinars during the Fall 2024 Business Builder Grant application period. All informational sessions and office hours will be recorded and posted to the website.

- Idaho Business Builder Grants - Informational Session 1 - Tuesday, November 5th, 10 am PT-11 am PT/11 am MT-12 pm MT [REGISTER HERE](#)
- Idaho Business Builder Grants - Informational Session 2 - Thursday, November 21st, 5 pm PT-6 pm PT/6 pm MT-7 pm MT [REGISTER HERE](#)
- Idaho Business Builder Grants - Office Hours 1 - Tuesday, December 3rd, 3 pm PT-4 pm PT/4 pm MT- 5 pm MT [REGISTER HERE](#)
- Idaho Business Builder Grants - Office Hours 2 - Thursday, January 9th, 11 am PT-12 pm PT/12 pm MT-1 pm MT [REGISTER HERE](#)

If you have questions about the Business Builder grant, please complete this [form](#). An FAQ will be posted to the website as questions come in.

How to apply for a grant

The NWRM Business Builder Grants Program will offer grants through competitive “[requests for applications](#)” (RFAs). These competitive RFAs are organized by Focus on Place, Focus on Topic, and Focus on Region. Each RFA has different priorities, however the Grant Guidelines and process of applying are the same.

All grant opportunities will be listed on our website as they become available.

When you [find the grant that is right for you](#), follow these steps:

1. Read the full [Grant Guidelines](#) and Request for Application for eligibility

Pro Tip: Attend an info session of the grant you’re interested in. Find an info session on our website [events](#) page.

2. When ready, follow the grant’s submission page to be routed to [Submittable](#)

Submittable is the software the NWRM USDA Regional Food Business Center uses to receive, review and manage grants. If you are not able to use this website, please

contact the Business Builder team [here](#).

3. Fill out the questions asked on the Submittable page.

Note that you will be routed to a multiple step process.

If you are not able to use the Submittable website, please contact us [here](#).

[See the Application Process page for more details](#)

First you will need to create a Submittable Account

To apply for the Business Builder Grants, you must first create a Submittable account. Visit nwrn-rfbc.submittable.com and click “View Your Submissions” in the top right corner of the page. You will need a valid email address to register. Once your account is created, you can access the online system.

Step 1: click sign up if you do not have a Submittable account	Step 2: create your Submittable account	Step 3: click to send a verification code to the email provided	Step 4: please enter the verification code to complete the Submittable account registration
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After creating your account, review the Business Builder Grants Program guidelines. At the bottom of the page, use the Organization Identifier search bar to enter your organization’s name, Employer Identification Number (EIN), or Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). If your organization doesn’t have an EIN or UEI, click “Skip” to proceed with the application.

First, let’s find your organization

Applicants can apply on behalf of a registered organization, or continue to the application.

Organization Identifier

[Learn more about organization registration requirements and data sources](#)

[Search organizations](#) [Skip and continue to application](#)

Step 1: Complete the Grant Eligibility Form

The eligibility form helps determine if you qualify for the Northwest and Rocky Mountain USDA Regional Food Business Center's Business Builder grants. Fill out the form to the best of your ability. If eligible, you will be automatically directed to the Business Builder Registration form.

Step 2: (If Eligible) Complete the Business Builder Registration

In the registration form, provide basic information about yourself and your business. Once you've successfully registered, you'll receive a confirmation email from the Business Builder team. They will review your registration and send you the grant application within two business days.

Note: The USDA Regional Food Business Centers prioritize diversity and equal access to our programs. While demographic questions are optional, your responses help us track the program's impact across different communities. These answers will not affect your grant application.

Step 3: Fill Out the Business Builder Application

After receiving the email notification that your application is available, fill out all required questions. If you need assistance, the form provides instructions, references, and a contact intake form to connect you with the appropriate team member. Once submitted, your application will be reviewed and scored by the evaluation team after the application window closes, and you will receive progress updates via email and within Submittable.

Your application will require:

- Consent Agreement Business information (name and contact details)
- Project goal (100 words or less)
- Evidence of collaboration for projects benefiting underinvested communities (if applicable)
- Project description and steps (500 words)
- Team experience, project type, total funds requested, and fund usage
- A budget (uploaded as a separate template)

Depending on the grant application, you may also need to provide supplemental documents. If you have any concerns about the information requested, please contact our team.

Examples of supplemental documents you may be asked to provide:

- Simple business plan (guidance will be provided)
- Financial projections
- Feasibility analysis for the project
- Letters of commitment from project partners or beneficiaries

All information you provide throughout the Business Builder grant process will be kept confidential. If you have any concerns about the information we are requesting, please contact the Business Builder Program Coordinator [here](#).

Note: The USDA Regional Food Business Centers value diversity and equal access to our programs and services. Answering these questions helps us track the impact of our programs on a variety of communities. You are not required to answer the demographic questions, and your answers will not be linked to your grant application.

Submit by or before the application deadline.

Idaho State team contact information

Applicants may submit questions regarding the RFA and application process [HERE](#). Responses to questions, along with an FAQ, will be posted to the Idaho webpage.

All questions submitted by Idaho applicants in the [linked form](#) above will be received and responded to as soon as possible by:

Taylor Reinman,

Idaho State Team Coordinator

USDA non-discrimination statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Confidentiality and Data Usage: Personally identifiable data collected in this application will be kept confidential. These data will primarily be used for application review and grant management by our

internal team and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. When we report on the performance of the Business Builder grants program to the grantor (USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service), we will remove and not share your personally identifiable data. Results from the Business Builder grants program may be published or presented in aggregated form at research conferences, and the anonymous data may be shared with other researchers through an online data repository.