



Heartland Regional Food Business Center

Business Builder Subaward Request for Applications (RFA)

For food and farm enterprises in Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and northwest Arkansas (9 counties)

FUNDING ROUND 1

Total funding available Round 1: \$3,717,683

Total available funding all 4 Rounds: \$11,153,049

Applications due: October 15, 2024, by 11:59 pm CST.

Funding award range: \$5,000 to \$50,000

No matching funds are required.

This is a reimbursement funding program.

Online applications only at: <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>

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Introduction

The Heartland Regional Food Business Center will provide financial assistance through Business Builder (BB) Subawards of \$5,000 to \$50,000 each to support projects focused on meeting regional needs and increasing capacity among food and farm businesses working towards expansion in local and regional food markets. BB Subawards will go to projects predominantly aimed at starting or expanding food businesses in the region through value-added opportunities, diversification of on-farm activities, expansion of and/or access to new markets, and/or innovations to generate income. BB Subawards will provide food and farm businesses with the capital needed to launch and expand their businesses while they work to build income streams or identify needed investors. More information at <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>.

The Heartland Center is funded to work across Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, northwest Arkansas (Benton, Carrol, Boone, Washington, Madison, Newton, Crawford, Franklin, and Johnson counties), and the Turtle Island Trade Coalition sponsored by the Tribal Extension Office at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Our team is comprised of 14 key partners and 20 collaborating organizations in the five-state region. Funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture supports Heartland Center core services through the national Regional Food Business Center program. Core services are technical assistance, resource coordination, and building local and regional food system capacity. More information at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/rfbcp>.

Heartland Center Vision: Locally produced food will be a major contributor to a resilient and safe food supply. Regional networks will make local food an easy, everyday choice, supporting healthy people, community economies, and sustainable ecosystems.

Heartland Center Mission: The Heartland Regional Food Business Center ensures small, mid-size, diverse, and historically underserved food and farm entrepreneurs benefit from the right resource at the right time on their business building journey.

Heartland Center Values

- **Access:** We believe everyone should have access to local, high-quality, healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food.
- **Equity:** We are committed to providing information, resources, and initiatives that fit and strengthen small, mid-size, diverse, and historically underserved entrepreneurs and communities, including but not limited to language, culture, location, talents, and interests.
- **Justice:** We conduct restorative and regenerative food system work that builds resilient people, communities, and ecosystems.
- **Wealth Building:** We value the community wealth that resilient and equitable food systems build by increasing eight types of capital: social, natural, cultural, built, financial, political, individual, and intellectual.

More information on the Heartland Center's work can be found at heartlandfoodbusiness.org.

Business Builder Subawards Details

Amount of funds available: \$11.15 million (~\$3.72 million for each round) in 5 states and 9 northwest Arkansas counties.

Application details: All grants are competitive.

Business Builder Subaward Timeline (estimated dates**)			
RFP Release	Aug. 15, 2024	Jan. 15, 2025	June 15, 2025
Applications Due	Oct. 15, 2024	Mar. 15, 2025	Aug. 15, 2025
Award Notification	Jan. 15, 2025	June 15, 2025	Nov. 15, 2025

** if funds available

Anticipated award date: 90 days after applications due.

Maximum award: \$50,000

Minimum award: \$5,000

Length of projects: Projects should be completed within 12 months of award date. BB Subaward recipients should be aware of potential tax liability. Requests for a 6-month no-cost extension (no additional funding) will be considered on a case-by-case basis for subawardees in Rounds 1 and 2 (see Close Out of Projects below).

Priority Areas for Funding

Priority for funding are projects that accomplish the following desired outcomes:

1. Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Increase food and farm business and financial acumen, particularly among small and mid-size operators.
3. Create more, new, and better markets, and increase market awareness and access for small and mid-size producers and processors.
4. Increase the number of local producers that distributors, retailers and foodservice buyers source from, either directly or through intermediaries.
5. Increase the number of new food and farm businesses and improve the viability of existing businesses.
6. Increase the revenue of food and farm businesses served and/or increase local food capacity for the community served.

Funding priority will start with state allocation of funds. Each of the 5 states will be allocated up to 15% of total funding to fund projects from that state, or up to 75% of available funds for the Heartland Center's five states. The remaining 25% will fund a region-wide pool of remaining fundable applicants. After the top scoring projects from each state have been chosen, the remaining funded applicants will be chosen based on their score across the region-wide pool. Northwest Arkansas will receive no state allocation of funds; proposals will compete in the remaining 25% region-wide pool.

Applicants must score 70 points, inclusive of bonus points, to be considered for funding. These scoring and funding pool policies apply to all application rounds.

Applicant Eligibility

Primary qualifications: Eligible to apply are small food and farm businesses or nonprofit organizations either located in or serving the five-state Heartland Center region (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska) or its nine counties in northwest Arkansas (Benton, Carrol, Boone, Washington, Madison, Newton, Crawford, Franklin, Johnson).

Priority are small business projects that accomplish one or more of the Heartland Center's desired outcomes (see Desired Outcomes section). This program was designed to support projects focused on meeting regional needs and increasing capacity among businesses working towards expansion. Highly encouraged are BB Subaward projects that are predominantly focused on starting or expanding a business project in the region through value-added opportunities, diversification of on-farm activities, expansion of access to new markets, and/or innovations to generate income.

If the applicant is a business, to be eligible, the business must qualify as "small," defined as a business with fewer than 50 employees and less than \$3 million in gross annual revenues. The Heartland Center definition is adapted from the USDA Rural Development grants program as noted in this fact sheet https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fact-sheet/508_RD_FS_RBS_RBDG.pdf. The adapted definition considers food hubs and similar businesses that may have high revenues while serving numerous local and regional food producers and markets.

Applicants that fall under the following categories will receive up to 10 bonus points:

- Applicants will receive five bonus points if they are located in a distressed or at-risk community, to be determined using the EIG Distressed Communities Index (<https://eig.org/distressed-communities/?geo=counties&lat=38.55&lon=-96.42&z=4.12>). Applicants will use their zip code to determine if their location falls into Distressed or At-Risk tiers of the index. If no data is available at the zip code level, they will use the index' county-level data. In the rare case that no data is available for their location through the index, the entity may qualify if the county poverty rate is 20% or higher using the USDA Economic Research Service definition of high-poverty counties (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/poverty-area-measures/>). In this case the applicant would use the Data USA site (<https://datausa.io/map?measure=1DS0eK&groups%5B0%5D=ZipA6J%7C0&time=2022>) and select for Poverty Rate, County, and ACS 5-year Estimate.
- Additionally, the Heartland Center will make available 5 bonus points for applicants that are investment-ready, as evidenced by their work with a technical assistance provider to identify and resolve business issues and develop and pursue goals. The applicant will answer the following questions (250-word limit): Have you worked with a technical assistance provider to build your business? If yes, please explain how the technical assistance helped your business: What issues or goals did you work on? What type of progress have you made to address the issues or reach the goals? They will provide the name and affiliation of the technical assistance provider; the TA provider can be outside the Heartland Center-funded network. Reviewers will score investment readiness either 0 or 5 based on the applicant's answer regarding how technical assistance has helped the applicant address issues and/or meet business goals.

Applicants will self-verify their ability to meet these criteria in the application. We will not request documentation but will require a signature at submission that certifies what applicants have provided in their application is correct.

Applicants may apply in multiple BB Subaward application rounds. Total cumulative funds that any one entity may receive are \$50,000.

Examples of eligible businesses (this is not an extensive list):

- Retail food sales outlets
- Producers/farmers/ranchers
- Food/Farm cooperatives
- Value-added processors,
- Businesses involved in aggregation and distribution,
- Food hubs
- Farmers markets
- Non-profits.

IMPORTANT: If a project is recommended by reviewers for funding, the finalist MUST complete a “Financial Assistance Awards Only” registration in SAM.gov. They will submit the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) associated with this registration. Applicants are encouraged to complete the registration and submit the Financial Assistance Awards Only UEI with their application. This will prevent delays in the review process. There is no cost to get this registration. The process can take 15-20 days. It is acceptable to provide the associated UEI while the registration is pending.

SAM.gov Financial Assistance Awards Only registration is a requirement of BB Subaward administrator University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) for final clearance before the Heartland Center sends award recommendations to USDA. UNL final clearance includes review of allowable costs and risk assessment.

Allowable Costs

All BB Subawards are agreements with USDA, administered by Heartland Center co-director UNL, and subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in USDA’s [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), [Subpart E Cost Principles of 2 CFR 200](#), and AMS [Program Specific Terms and Conditions](#).

Costs specified in the applicant’s budget must meet the following general criteria in order to be allowable under federal awards:

- Be necessary and reasonable for the performance of the agreement and be allocable under the terms of the agreement.
- Conform to any limitations or exclusions set forth in Code of Federal Regulations 2 CFR 200 or in the agreement as to types or amount of cost items.
- Be consistent with policies and procedures of the non-federal entity (Heartland Center administrator UNL) that apply uniformly to both federally financed and other activities.

- Be accorded consistent treatment. A cost may not be assigned to a federal award as a direct cost if any other cost incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances has been allocated to the Federal award as an indirect cost.
- Be determined in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).
- Not be included as a cost or used to meet cost sharing or matching requirements of any other federally financed program in either the current or a prior period. See also [§ 200.306\(b\)](#).
- Costs must be adequately documented. See also [§§ 200.320](#).
- Cost must be incurred during the approved budget period.

Examples of what Funds may NOT be used for:

- Pay costs that have been or will be reimbursed by a third party.
- Pay costs incurred prior to the date the agreement is executed unless prior approval is granted.
- Pay costs that support or oppose union organizing.
- Pay costs associated with conducting research and development.
- Support a project that has a proposed period of performance longer than 48 months.
- Construction projects.
- Anything related to agricultural production of food, including animal feed.
- Equipment that is not related to the project or for general use.

Examples of allowable costs and activities include:

- Building a website.
- Setting up an online store.
- Marketing expenses.
- Feasibility studies.
- Packaging.
- Special purpose equipment (equipment used only for research, scientific, or technical activities related to the project, such as cold storage, bottling equipment, or delivery vehicles).
- Cost related to personnel working on the project.

Equipment is defined as tangible personal property (movable and not permanently attached to the land). This includes specialty vehicles and information technology systems exclusive of software. Software purchases less than \$5,000 are considered a supply expense. Tangible personal property must have a useful life of more than one year and a per unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000. Anything below \$5,000 would be considered a supply expense in the applicant's budget.

For questions, consult the Frequently Asked Questions document included on the Heartland Center's BB Subaward landing page, or use the contact form provided there to pose a question.

Match Requirements

There are no matching funds required for this BB Subaward. However, if costs come in higher than anticipated after the award has already been made, the awardee will be responsible for those costs.

Desired Outcomes

The ultimate goals of USDA regional food business centers are to provide assistance that will result in the following outcomes:

1. Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Increase food and farm business and financial acumen, particularly among small and mid-size operators.
3. Create more, new, and better markets, and increase market awareness and access for small and mid-size producers and processors.
4. Increase the number of local producers that distributors, retailers and foodservice buyers' source from, either directly or through intermediaries.
5. Increase the number of new food and farm businesses and improve the viability of existing businesses.
6. Increase the revenue of food and farm businesses served and/or increase local food capacity for the community served.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance (TA) is the work of helping food and farm entrepreneurs plan and take their next business building steps. Forms of TA include one-on-one guidance and training, group workshops and training, and peer-to-peer support. Heartland Center TA covers business planning and development (including legal, finance, record keeping), assistance finding and navigating financial and other resources, market development support, and connecting businesses with buyers, distributors, and others in the supply chain (value chain coordination).

The Heartland Center has an extensive network of TA providers that can help get applicants ready for submission. TA providers are there to help food and farm businesses expand their businesses. Use the "How Can We Help" contact form at the Heartland Center website for referral to a Heartland Center TA provider: <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/contact/>.

Applicants may receive 5 Bonus Points if they demonstrate that TA has helped them develop an investment-ready project. Work with non-Heartland Center TA providers qualifies.

Initiating contact and working with a TA provider can take time. This is one of the first things a business or nonprofit organization should do if considering applying for the BB Subaward.

PLEASE NOTE: Heartland Center TA providers cannot write BB Subaward grants for applicants. They are there for assistance and guidance. It is up to the applicant to comply with all tasks related to submission, contacts, reporting, and other requirements of the BB subaward.

Application

Applications will be submitted online through the BB Subaward landing page on the heartlandfoodbusiness.org website: <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>. Only applications submitted through the application portal at heartlandfoodbusiness.org will be accepted.

Heartland Center TA providers will be trained and ready to support applicants in navigating the application and using the technology.

Applicants can make an account and work on their application online saving changes as they go. They will also be able to download their completed application.

The application will be available in Spanish at the BB Subaward landing page on the Heartland Center website. Applications will be accepted in Spanish and reviewed by qualified Spanish-speaking reviewers.

In addition to overview information about the applicant and project, the Heartland Center will award points in the following sections:

Project Summary (250-word limit, up to 10 points)

Technical Assistance (0 or 5 bonus points)

Background (500-word limit, up to 20 points)

- Describe your background, experience, and expertise.
- Describe the background of your business.
- How will your background, experience, and expertise help you successfully complete this grant project?

Project Request (1,000-word limit, up to 25 points)

- Briefly describe your project.
- If the project is funded, how will this improve or expand your business? Describe at least two major expected changes.
- How do you know this is the right solution? Please explain.
- Do you have any existing equipment, infrastructure, or other resources that you intend to use to complete this project and make it a success?
- If applicable (such as if you are renting your farm or building), do you have permission to implement the project? Please explain.

Outcomes (500-word limit, up to 20 points)

- Which issue or opportunity in the list of desired outcomes (listed in the Desired Outcomes section of the RFA) does your project address?
- How will you determine success?

Timeline/workplan (no word limit, up to 10 points)

- Provide a detailed plan of work on the steps needed to complete your project.

Activity number	Activity	Timeline	Who is responsible
1			
2			
3			
4			

SAMPLE

Activity number	Activity	Timeline	Who is responsible
1	<i>Hire web designer</i>	<i>First quarter</i>	<i>Owner</i>
2	<i>Contract with online payment system</i>	<i>Second quarter</i>	<i>Owner</i>
3	<i>Integrate web site with online marketplace</i>	<i>Third quarter</i>	<i>Assistant</i>
4	<i>Collect data to determine success of online marketing</i>	<i>Fourth quarter</i>	<i>Assistant</i>

Budget (No word limit, up to 15 points)

- Complete provided tables for costs (personnel, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual/consultant, other, and indirect), associated narrative explanations, and budget summary. (See budget example Appendix D)

Bonus Points

- 5 bonus points are available to applicants that attest to the fact that their business or nonprofit organization is located in a distressed community, as determined by the EIG Distressed Communities Index (<https://eig.org/distressed-communities/?geo=counties&lat=38.55&lon=-96.42&z=4.12>). Applicants will use the business zip code to determine if their location falls into Distressed or At-Risk tiers of the index. If no data is available at the zip code level, they will use the index' county-level data. In the rare case that no data is available for their location through the index, the entity may qualify if the county poverty rate is 20% or higher using the USDA Economic Research Service definition of high-poverty counties (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/poverty-area-measures/>). In this case the applicant would use the Data USA site (<https://datausa.io/map?measure=1DS0eK&groups%5B0%5D=ZlpA6J%7C0&time=2022>) and select for Poverty Rate, County, and ACS 5-year Estimate.
- 5 bonus points are available to applicants that demonstrate in the Technical Assistance section above that they are investment-ready. The applicant will answer the following questions (250-word limit): Have you worked with a technical assistance provider to build your business? If yes, please explain how the technical assistance helped your business: What issues or goals did you work on? What type of progress have you made to address the issues or reach the goals? They will provide the name and affiliation of the technical assistance provider; the TA provider can be outside the Heartland Center-funded network.

Review Process

Applicants from each round will be reviewed at the same time in a competitive pool.

Review process:

- The scoring rubric listed in Appendix A will be used to score all BB Subaward applications.
- Reviewers will complete an initial scoring individually for each grant. Reviewer teams of three will then develop a consensus score.
- Applicants will then be ranked from highly fundable to not fundable. If an applicant scores below 70 points, including bonus points, the proposal will not be considered for funding.
- The applications are then vetted and voted on by the Governance Council, the Heartland Center's voting body. More information on the Governance Council can be found here: <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Design-and-Structure.pdf>.
- After the Governance Council vote, finalists will be sent to UNL for risk assessment and final check of allowable costs. Finalists cleared by UNL will be recommended to USDA for final clearance.
- The anticipated time for review, selection, approval, clearance, and final notification is 90 days after the submission deadline is closed. Applicants will be notified of finalist and final funding decisions.

Award process

Applicant awards will be determined at the discretion of the Heartland Center based on the applicant's eligibility, project eligibility, allowable costs, and overall availability of funds. Applicants will receive email notification of denial or finalist status from the Heartland Center once the review process is complete.

Upon final award notification, after UNL and USDA clearance, awardees must enter a written subaward agreement with UNL outlining program details, requirements, and state and federal terms and conditions. Applicants may be awarded funding at varying levels depending on the nature of the project. Favorable decisions will indicate the amount of the award, duration of the grant, and any special conditions associated with the project. Any project proposal funding depends on federal funds availability and final clearance from USDA.

- SAM.gov requirement. Successful applicants MUST complete a "Financial Assistance Awards Only" registration in SAM.gov. The Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) associated with their Financial Assistance Awards Only registration should be submitted with their application to avoid processing delays. Having the registration has no influence in the review process, but it will be required for final clearance. There is no cost. The process can take up to 15 to 20 days. Guidance is available at <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>
- Disbursement of funds. This is a reimbursement grant. BB Subaward recipients will be able to claim (invoice) expenses monthly throughout the project period. Subaward recipients will submit invoices to BB Subaward administrator UNL at least quarterly (see samples in Appendix D) with supporting documentation to access funds. Supporting documentation includes, but is not limited to, paid invoices, detailed receipts, proof of payment.

All BB Subaward recipients will be assigned a TA person from a Heartland Center team trained in the post-award process. The team of up to 13 TA providers across the Heartland Center's five states (no more than 10 BB Subaward recipients per TA provider) will check in regularly with recipients and help them navigate the post award process. This team will specifically support recipients in workplan management and outcome reporting. In addition, the Heartland Center will offer office hours with UNL Grants Administrative Associate (Aaron Boucher) for invoicing and other questions, including BB Subaward agreement terms and conditions.

Reporting

All BB Subaward recipients will be required to submit semi-annual performance reports on their projects. Reports will be submitted via the online portal. The reports will be due on June 30 and December 31 regardless of the start date. If the end date of the project falls between one of these dates the final (second) progress report can be submitted prior to the date listed above. The final award payment will not be made without the final (second) performance report. Interim and final reports will document all grant expenditures.

The performance reports include questions about:

- New business creation
- Increased revenue
- Increased knowledge about new market opportunities
- Increase in production to meet increased demand
- Increase in financial acumen
- New business plan developed
- New financial resources
- Increase in real property value

If there is a question that is not applicable to the project, "not applicable" can be selected.

In addition to the progress reports, the subawardee will complete a survey and submit a final financial report to close out the grant and receive final payment.

Monitoring

The Heartland Center reserves the right to perform on-site monitoring visits to all BB Subaward recipients to ensure that work is progressing within the required period and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Subawardees agree to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, codes, regulations, rules, and orders. The grant will be governed by and construed in accordance with the law. Subawardees will be accountable for all grant funds awarded. Subawardees shall maintain records, receipts, and accounting procedures and practices sufficient to reflect all costs claimed to have incurred during performance of the grant agreement. Interim and final reports will document all grant expenditures.

Close Out of Projects

All subawardees will have 12 months to complete their projects. If they are not able to complete their projects by the project end date, subawardees from Rounds 1 and 2 can request a 6 month “no cost” (i.e., no more grant funds can be added to the project) extension. If they are not able to spend all awarded funds, the remaining funds will be returned to the larger Business Builder funding pool and reallocated to fund new projects. A final financial report and a final performance report will be due within 60 days of the last day of the project end date for Rounds 1 and 2 and within 45 days for Round 3. Once these reports have been submitted and approved, the project will be considered closed. UNL will keep a record of the project no less than five years after the completion date.

Equal Opportunity

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, 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). 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](#) or 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 (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 (5 U.S.C. § 552) and the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a), as implemented by USDA's regulations (7 CFR § 1, Subpart A), govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 3943-S, Mail Stop 0202, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0273, Telephone: (202) 720-2498; or email: AMS.FOIA@usda.gov.

Internal Confidentiality Agreements

By submission of application, the applicant represents that it does not require any of its employees, contractors, or subrecipients seeking to report fraud, waste, or abuse to sign or comply with internal confidentiality agreements or statements prohibiting or otherwise restricting those employees, contractors, or subrecipients from lawfully reporting that waste, fraud, or abuse to a designated investigative or law enforcement representative of a Federal department or agency authorized to receive such information. Note that: (1) the basis for this representation is a prohibition in section 743 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, 5 U.S.C. § 5303 note, Pub. L. 114-113, (Division E, Title VII, General Provisions Government-wide) and any successor provisions of law on making funds available through grants and cooperative agreements to entities with certain internal confidentiality agreements or statements; and (2) section 744 states that it does not contravene requirements applicable to Standard Form 312, Form 4414, or any other form issued by a Federal department or agency governing the nondisclosure of classified information.

Delinquency on Federal Debt

Any organization or individual that is indebted to the United States and has a judgment lien filed against it for a debt to the United States, is ineligible to receive a federal grant. Applicants are required to indicate in their applications (on the SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance”) if they are delinquent on any federal debt. If the applicant discloses a delinquency, the SCBGP may not award the grant until the debt is satisfied or satisfactory arrangements are made with the agency to which the debt is owed. Anyone who has been judged to be in default on a federal debt and who has had a judgment lien filed against him or her should not be listed as a participant in an application for a SCBGP grant until the judgment is paid in full or is otherwise satisfied. No funds may be re-budgeted following an award to pay such an individual. The federal agency will disallow costs charged to awards that provide funds to individuals in violation of this requirement.

SAM.gov Registration

If a project is recommended by reviewers for funding, the finalist MUST complete a “Financial Assistance Awards Only” registration in SAM.gov and submit the associated Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). The finalist will not be cleared for funding without it. Applicants should do this before they submit their application to fast-track the award process. It will, however, have no influence in the review process. There is no cost to get this registration.

The Financial Assistance Awards Only registration is a requirement of BB Subaward administrator UNL for clearance before the Heartland Center sends final award recommendations to USDA for final clearance. UNL clearance includes review of allowable costs and risk assessment.

Sam.gov registrations run for one year. The subawardees will be required to have an active Financial Assistance Awards Only registration for the entire project or extension thereof. Subawardees will need to renew their registration yearly.

When registering in Sam.gov, a “Public” registration is preferred and will speed up the subaward process with UNL. This allows UNL to conduct an efficient risk assessment and provides ease of project

management. If a subawardee chooses to keep the information “private,” they would need to provide additional documentation to show they have completed the full registration.

Guidance for completing the Financial Assistance Awards Only registration in SAM.gov is available at <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>.

Appendix A: Scoring Rubric

Yes/No/?

Pre-screening

Is the application complete?

Does applicant meet eligibility criteria?

Does the application and budget request meet the objectives of the grant?

Are the requested expenses allowable?

Does the budget request have the required supporting documents (i.e., bids, estimates, permission to complete project if renting land or building)?

Does the application indicate whether the applicant has worked with a technical assistance provider? (See Technical Assistance section of application).

EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAXIMUM POINTS POSSIBLE
Project Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the summary clear and complete? 	10
Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the description of applicant's background, including the background of the business, clear and relevant? Will their experience and expertise help them complete the grant project successfully? 	20
Project Request <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it clear how this project will improve or expand this business? Did they describe existing equipment, infrastructure, or other resources they intend to use to complete this project? If applicable, did they demonstrate they have permission to implement the project? 	25
Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it clear what issue or opportunity of the Heartland Center's Desired Outcomes the project will address (as listed in RFA under Desired Outcomes)? Overall, the proposal/plan will contribute to Heartland Center desired outcomes. 	20
Work Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the steps to completion clear? Does the plan make sense? Overall, the proposal/plan is feasible. 	10
Budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budget request is clear. The budget request is justified (the need is described, including how the expense will meet the need). 	15

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budget request is reasonable (bids/estimates are in line with current pricing). 	
TOTAL POINTS	100
Bonus Points	
The applicant's enterprise is located in a Distressed or At-risk community as defined in the application's Bonus Point section.	5
The applicant describes in the application's Technical Assistance section how work with a technical assistance provider has helped them address business issues and goals.	5
BONUS TOTAL	10
GRAND TOTAL	110

Appendix B: Application Preview

Please apply online at the Heartland Center's *Business Builder Grants* landing page:

<https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>

Spanish version also available at <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/business-builder/>.

APPLICATION PREVIEW

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name of Business or Entity:

SAM.gov "Financial Assistance Award Only" UEI (if currently available. Required for final award clearance)

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Physical Address

Street:

City:

County:

State:

Zip:

ENTITY TYPE

Select organization/business primary entity role/type (select only one)

- Farmer, Rancher, Agricultural Producer
- Cooperative
- Food hub
- Aggregator (Other than food hub)
- Distributor
- Processor
- Non-profit Organization
- Value-added Production
- Farmers Market
- Retailer (e.g., grocer)
- Other: Please specify

SECONDARY ENTITY TYPE

Optional: Select any additional entity types that might apply (select all that apply).

- Farmer, rancher, agricultural producer
- Cooperative
- Food hub
- Aggregator (Other than food hub)
- Distributor

- Processor
- Non-profit organization
- Value-added production
- Farmer’s market
- Retailer (i.e.: grocer)
- Other: Please specify
- Other: Please specify

NEW OR EXISTING BUSINESS

Is this a new (established within the past year) or established business/organization?

- New (established within the past year)
- Existing (in operation longer than one year)

OPERATION PERIOD

If the recipient is a food or farm business, how many years has it been in operation under current ownership/management?

- Less than one year (or not yet in operation)
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 6 to 9 years
- 10 years or more

AGRICULTURE PRODUCT

What agricultural sector and/or food products does the recipient produce, manufacture, distribute, and/or promote? (Select all that apply.)

- Vegetables, fruits, or tree nuts
- Herbs (culinary or medicinal)
- Grains or pulses
- Livestock
- Dairy
- Fish, shellfish, and other seafood (wild-caught)
- Aquaculture
- Value-added product
- Foraged and wild harvested foods
- Other: Please specify.

PROJECT TITLE

Provide a descriptive project title in 15 words or less in the space below.

AWARD AMOUNT

What is the total amount of the BB Subaward request?

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Has this applicant/business received technical assistance or other services (training, resources, webinars, business planning, etc.), including support to complete the application?

YES / NO

Was assistance received from the Heartland Center (organizations listed as partners at heartlandfoodbusiness.org/partners)?

- YES / NO
- Enter name and affiliation of the technical assistance provider.

If no, did you receive assistance from another entity?

YES / NO

Enter name and affiliation of the technical assistance provider.

Please describe any assistance received (250 words. Bonus points: 0 or 5).

Specifically, describe how the technical assistance helped your business: What issues or goals did you work on? What type of progress have you made to address the issues or reach the goals?

DURATION OF PROJECT

- Project start date:
- Project end date:

PROJECT SUMMARY (up to 10 points)

Write a project summary of no more than 150 words and suitable for public dissemination that includes the following:

- Name and brief description of the business.
- A description of how the award funds will be used.
- An explanation of how the award will enhance the business viability, increase competitiveness, and/or expand access to markets.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Which of the following activities or investments will the funds support (Select all that apply.)?

- Staff time
- Business planning activities
- Software implementation
- Product development
- Marketing
- Business expansion
- Trainings
- Maintenance
- Purchase of equipment (such as food safety, processing and/or packaging equipment)
- Value chain and supply chain coordination and innovation
- Other: Please Specify

BACKGROUND (500-word limit, up to 20 points)

- Describe applicant’s background, experience, and expertise.
- Describe the background of applicant’s business.
- How will the background, experience, and expertise of applicant and business contribute to successful completion of this grant project?

PROJECT REQUEST (1,000-word limit, up to 25 points)

- Briefly describe your project.
- If the project is funded, how will this improve or expand your business? Describe at least two major expected changes.
- How do you know this is the right solution? Please explain.
- Do you have any existing equipment, infrastructure, or other resources that you intend to use to complete this project and make it a success?
- If applicable (such as if you are renting a farm or building), do you have permission to implement the project? Please explain.

OUTCOMES (500-word limit, up to 20 points)

- Which issue or opportunity in the Heartland Center list of desired outcomes does your project address (See Desired Outcomes section of the RFA)?
- How will you determine success?

TIMELINE/WORKPLAN (no word limit, up to 10 points)

Provide a detailed plan of work with the steps needed to complete your project.

Activity number	Activity	Timeline	Who is responsible
1			
2			
3			
4			

SAMPLE

Activity number	Activity	Timeline	Who is responsible
1	<i>Hire web designer</i>	<i>First quarter</i>	<i>Owner</i>
2	<i>Contract with online payment system</i>	<i>Second quarter</i>	<i>Owner</i>
3	<i>Integrate web site with online marketplace</i>	<i>Third quarter</i>	<i>Assistant</i>
4	<i>Collect data to determine success of online marketing</i>	<i>Fourth quarter</i>	<i>Assistant</i>

BUDGET

See template and example in Appendix D.

BONUS POINTS

Distressed or At-risk Community (0 or 5 points)

Applicants will receive 5 bonus points if they are located in a distressed or at-risk community, to be determined using the EIG Distressed Communities Index (<https://eig.org/distressed-communities/?geo=counties&lat=38.55&lon=-96.42&z=4.12>). Applicants will use their zip code to determine if their location falls into Distressed or At-Risk tiers of the index. If no data is available at the zip code level, they will use the index’ county-level data. In the rare case that no data is available for their location through the index, the entity may qualify if the county poverty rate is 20% or higher using the USDA Economic Research Service definition of high-poverty counties (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/poverty-area-measures/>). In this case the applicant would use the Data USA site (<https://datausa.io/map?measure=1DS0eK&groups%5B0%5D=ZlpA6J%7C0&time=2022>) and select for Poverty Rate, County, and ACS 5-year Estimate.

Provide signature attesting to distressed/at-risk community designation: _____

Technical Assistance (0 or 5 points)

An additional 5 points are available to applicants that demonstrate in the Technical Assistance section above that their project is investment ready as indicated by description of technical assistance received.

Appendix C: Sample Invoice and Documentation

Eastern Iowa Food Cooperative
 1613 Holstein Drive
 Amana, Iowa 52446

INVOICE

TO:

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
 Office of Sponsored Programs
 151 Prem S Paul Research Center
 PO Box 830861
 Lincoln NE 68583-0861

SPONSOR AWARD TITLE / NUMBER: **UNL Award # 25-6812-0004-4118** INVOICE NUMBER: **000001**
 INVOICE PERIOD: **01.01.2024 to 03.30.2024 (FINAL)**
 PAYMENT DUE: **April 22, 2024**
 Directed by: _____ REFERENCE NUMBER: **NA**

PLEASE REFERENCE ON REMITTANCE

ANALYSIS OF CLAIMED CURRENT AND CUMULATIVE COSTS

MAJOR COST ELEMENTS	EXPENSES	
	CURRENT	CUMULATIVE
Personnel	\$0.00	\$0.00
Fringe Benefits	\$0.00	\$0.00
Travel	\$0.00	\$0.00
Equipment	\$0.00	\$0.00
Supplies	\$0.00	\$0.00
Contractual/Subawards	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
Others (Specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00
Indirect Costs	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Amount	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00

Current period expenses - Amount Due \$2,500.00

NOTE: Payment due in 30 days -

PLEASE REMIT A COPY OF THE INVOICE ALONG WITH THE PAYMENT TO ENSURE PROPER CREDIT.

"By signing this report, I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that the report is true, complete, and accurate, and the expenditures, disbursements and cash receipts are for the purposes and objectives set forth in the terms and conditions of the Federal award. I am aware that any false, fictitious or fraudulent information, or the omission of any material fact, may subject me to criminal, civil or administrative penalties for fraud, false statements, false claims or otherwise. (US Code Title 18, Section 1001 and Title 31, Sections 3729-3730 and 3801-3812)."

Invoice Date: **March 21, 2024**

Nikobi Dean, Owner

ndeans@yahoo.com

Signature

Email Address

Nikobi Dean, Owner

Name & Title

Okoboji Website Development LLC
 1710 Lakeshore Drive
 Okoboji, IA 54981


INVOICE

Eastern Iowa Food Cooperative
 1613 Holstein Drive
 Amana, Iowa 52446

Invoice # 0000001
Invoice Date 03/21/2024
Due Date 03/21/2024

Item	Description	Unit Price	Quantity	Amount
Service	Website Development for the EIFC completed	2500.00	1.00	2,500.00
<p><u>NOTES:</u> Website is now completed as of 03.18.2024; approved by Nikobe Dean, Owner, on 03.19.2024 per email communication.</p> <p>Payment due 04.22.2024.</p> <p>Thank you for your business and we look forward to serving you again.</p>				
Subtotal				2,500.00
Total				2,500.00
Amount Paid				0.00
Balance Due				\$2,500.00

Appendix D: Sample Budget

	<p>Please Note: This budget workbook MUST be attached and submitted with your Business Builder Digital Application on the Heartland Regional Food Business Center Website: https://Heartlandfoodbusiness.org/</p>
APPLICANT INFORMATION	
Name of Business or Entity	Local Food LLC
UEI from Financial Assistance Award Only registration (SAM.gov), if available	Do not have yet
Phone Number:	555-555-5555
Email Address:	tastesgreat@localfood.farm
(Physical) Street Address:	1 Main St.
City:	My Town
County:	Cass
State:	Missouri
Zip Code:	12345
<i>Information from the Applicant Information section will only be used by USDA to verify eligibility for award.</i>	
BUDGET NARRATIVE	
<p><i>The budget must show the total cost for the project and provide a description and justification for each of the relevant category costs listed. The budget justification must provide enough detail to easily understand how costs were determined and how they relate to the Project Objectives and Expected Outcomes. Leave blank any expense category not funded by this project.</i></p>	

TRAVEL

Explain the purpose for each Trip Request. Please note that travel costs are limited to those allowed by formal organizational policy; in the case of air travel, project participants must use the lowest reasonable commercial airfares. For recipient organizations that have no formal travel policy and for-profit recipients, allowable travel costs may not exceed those established by the Federal Travel Regulation, issued by GSA, including the maximum per diem and subsistence rates prescribed in those regulations. This information is available at <http://www.gsa.gov>.

#	Trip Destination	Type of Expense (airfare, car, hotel, etc.)	Unit of Measure (days, nights, miles)	# of Units	Cost per Unit	Funds Requested
1	Monthly mileage	Car	miles	1500	\$0.67	\$ 1,005.00
Travel Subtotal						\$ 1,005.00

TRAVEL JUSTIFICATION

For each trip listed in the above table, describe the purpose of this trip and how it will achieve the objectives and outcomes of the project. Be sure to include approximately when the trip will occur. Add more trips by copying and pasting the existing listing or delete trips that aren't necessary.

1. This mileage will help the project owner and assistant to visit the local farmers that currently sell to the business. We will be able to get pictures and other media to use in the new media and in social marketing campaigns. This mileage will allow us to visit all 10 farms that we are currently working with.

EQUIPMENT

Describe any special purpose equipment to be purchased or rented using subaward funds. "Special purpose equipment" is tangible, nonexpendable, personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000 per unit and is used only for research, medical, scientific, or other technical activities. Rental of "general purpose equipment" must also be described in this section. Purchase of general purpose equipment is not allowable under this grant. For each Equipment item listed in the above table describe how this equipment will be used to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the project.

#	Equipment Item Description	Rental or Purchase	Estimated Acquisition Date	Funds Requested
1	15 X 15 walk-in cooler	Purchase	Mar-25	\$ 17,555.00
Equipment Subtotal				\$ 17,555.00

EQUIPMENT JUSTIFICATION

*For each Equipment item listed in the above table describe how this equipment will be used to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the project. Include how the cost of this item was determined. Add more equipment by copying and pasting the existing listing or delete equipment that isn't necessary. *If funded, subawardees will be required to submit 3 competitive pricing or rate quotes for equipment and contractual items \$10,000 and greater. Pricing and rates quotes are also encouraged for items less than \$10,000.**

1. This is for the purchase and installation of a new 15ft by 15ft walk-in cold storage cooler with an insulated floor to expand the capacity of our business. It will help us increase the volume of local food that we can sell into the market by 50%. The price for the item was a quote from Arctic Specialty LLC (a cold storage company) for the Walk-in and installation. The cost of the Thermoqueen walk-in unit is \$15,500 and the price of the installation (which includes a new electrical plug) is \$2055. When we are ready to purchase, I will seek multiple quotes to get the best price for what we need.

SUPPLIES

List the materials, supplies, and fabricated parts costing less than \$5,000 per unit and describe how they will support the purpose and goal of the proposal.

#	Supplies Item Description	Cost per Unit	# of Units	Estimated Acquisition Date	Funds Requested
1	Branded packaging- Boxes	\$1.50	2000	Feb-25	\$ 3,000.00
2	Branded packaging- Stickers	\$80	20	Feb-25	\$ 1,600.00
Supplies Subtotal					\$ 4,600.00

SUPPLIES JUSTIFICATION

Describe the purpose of each supply listed in the table above purchased and how it is necessary for the completion of the project's objective(s) and outcome(s).

1. Branded packaging- Boxes: once our new branding is completed, we will have the logo and contact information printed on the produce boxes we use to package farmers' products for our customers.
2. Branded Packaging- Stickers: this item is for 10,000 stickers; there are 500 color stickers in every roll and we plan to purchase 20 rolls. The stickers will have our new brand and contact information on them and will be used for sticking on things like clamshells and other packaging that is not one of our already printed boxes.

CONTRACTUAL / CONSULTANT

Provide a list of contractors/consultants, detailing out the name, hourly/flat rate, and overall cost of the services performed. Please note that any statutory limitations on indirect costs also apply to contractors and consultants. If funded, subawardees will be required to submit 3 competitive pricing or rate quotes for equipment and contractual items \$10,000 and greater. Pricing and rates quotes are also encouraged for items less than \$10,000.

#	Contractual Name / Organization	Hourly Rate / Flat Rate	Funds Requested
1	The Branding Company	\$9,850	\$7,500
2	Websites Are Us LLC	\$7,500	\$5,200
Contractual / Consultant Subtotal			\$ 12,700.00

CONTRACTUAL JUSTIFICATION

Provide for each of your real or anticipated contractors listed above a description of the project activities each will accomplish to meet the objectives and outcomes of the project. Each section should also include a justification for why contractual/consultant services are to be used to meet the anticipated outcomes and objectives. Include timelines for each activity. If contractor employee and consultant hourly rates of pay exceed the salary of a GS-15 step 10 Federal employee in your area, provide a justification for the expenses. This limit does not include fringe benefits, travel, indirect costs, or other expenses. OMB salary scale can be found here: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>

1. The Branding Company has given us a quote of \$7500 to create a new logo for us. This quote also includes developing a tag line, a style guide, an email marketing template, and two social media templates (Instagram and Facebook). We will work with them to get this done in the first quarter of the project.
2. Websites Are Us LLC will develop a simple website using our new branding guidelines. This quote also includes training us how to update the site on our own once it is complete. Included is the cost of the web domain and hosting in perpetuity. This website will link to our ecommerce site that is already up and running through Farmers Sell Here marketplace.

OTHER					
<p><i>Include any expenses not covered in any of the previous budget categories. Be sure to break down costs into cost/unit. Expenses in this section include, but are not limited to, meetings and conferences, communications, rental expenses, advertisements, publication costs, and data collection. If you budget meal costs for reasons other than meals associated with travel per diem, provide an adequate justification to support that these costs are not entertainment costs.</i></p>					
#	Other Item Description	Cost Per Unit	# of Units	Estimated Acquisition Date	Funds Requested
1	Social media marketing	\$20	50	1st one June 2025	\$ 1,000.00
2	Vehicle Wrap	\$500	1	Jul-25	\$ 500.00
Other Subtotal					\$ 1,500.00

OTHER JUSTIFICATION	
<p><i>Describe the purpose of each item listed in the table above and how it is necessary for the completion of the project's objective(s) and outcome(s).</i></p>	
1.	In order to boost our brand while on a budget, we will utilize social media ad campaigns. We are planning for 50 \$20 campaigns on Facebook, Instagram and possibly google. The first one will start in June once our website is ready to launch. We will run ads as needed to get more likes and drive traffic to the website.
2.	The delivery vehicle we use will be wrapped with art that contains our new logo. This was the price we were quoted from the local auto detailer.

INDIRECT COSTS	
<p><i>Indirect costs are any costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives that, therefore, cannot be readily identified with an individual project, program, or organizational activity. They generally include facilities operation and maintenance costs, depreciation, and administrative expenses. If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA), it is required to use this amount, and a copy of the NICRA must be submitted with the application. Otherwise, applicants may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC).</i></p> <p><u>Components of MTDC are all direct costs above: Salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services/contractual, travel, and other up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward.</u></p>	
Indirect Cost Rate (%)	Funds Requested
10%	\$ 4,540.00

Contractual / Consultant Subtotal	\$	4,540.00
BUDGET SUMMARY		
<i>Budget summary section will automatically update using subtotals in the section above</i>		
Expense Category		Funds Requested
Personnel	\$	8,040.00
Travel	\$	1,005.00
Equipment	\$	17,555.00
Supplies	\$	4,600.00
Contractual	\$	12,700.00
Other	\$	1,500.00
Direct Costs Sub-Total	\$	45,400.00
Indirect Costs	\$	4,540.00
Total Budget	\$	49,940.00

Glossary

Direct-to-Consumer: Sales at farmers' markets, on-farm stores or farm stands located on the operation, roadside stands or stores located off the farm, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), online marketplace, and other markets in which the producer sells directly to the end customer (e.g., pick-your-own and mobile markets) (USDA Economic Research Service, 2021).

Farmers Market: A collection of two or more farm vendors selling agricultural products directly to customers at a common, recurrent physical location (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2020).

Food Hub: A centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, 2020).

Local and Regional Food Systems: In local and regional food systems, food is produced and distributed on a local and regional scale rather than a national or international one. Food goes from farmer to table in fewer steps and with the identity of the food producer often maintained to retain information about where and how the food was produced. The goals of local food systems are improving the economic wellness of communities, increasing consumer access to fresh local foods, and creating viable markets for farmers and ranchers through value-based supply chains and rural/urban integration. Local food systems also help sustainable communities prosper by strengthening the economic resilience of farmers and ranchers, via partnerships and social networks. (Adapted from Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education)

Value Chain: A supply network in which agricultural products move from production through consumption in a local or regional market due to the cooperation and aggregation of small or mid-scale producer inputs; strategic business relationships that emphasize organizational interdependence (different competencies), trust, and transparency; and equitable distribution of responsibilities and rewards across the chain (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, 2022).

Network: Network can be defined as a group or system of interconnected individuals or organizations. Networks may be formal (e.g., named, codified in statute, meeting on a regular basis) or informal.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Two or more entities aligning efforts or working together in a shared activity or towards a shared goal.

Technical Assistance: Guidance, support, advice, assessment, and/or customized training provided to a beneficiary aimed at building capacity for that beneficiary to access new markets, increase viability, or increase business acumen.

Value-Added Agricultural Product: For the purposes of this program, value-added agricultural products are any agricultural commodity or product that: Has undergone a change in the physical state or form of the product (such as milling wheat into flour or making strawberries into jam) (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, 2022)