



General Tips on Crafting a FMPP Grant

1. Form Your Idea & Create a Team

Once you confirm which of the grants that you will pursue, look at past awards to understand the areas that AMS funds with these grants. It doesn't mean that your grant should mimic those or only attempt to do the same idea. But since market leaders are a peer group that learn best from specific examples and replicable pilots underway, starting there may help confirm your idea or help to frame your approach. Check out the [thumbnails of](#) past year's awardees.

Of course, if you have a new idea that will result in better sales and activity for your DTC farmers and vendors, that may also be appreciated by reviewers. Just make sure you clearly outline the need and how you can achieve this new idea.

It is vital that one person is assigned to **oversee** this writing process (usually it is the same person who will be responsible for uploading the final proposal on grants.gov). That doesn't mean that only one person should write the entire proposal! Ask board members to do small pieces of the work, such as to gather the letters of commitment needed or to be a sounding board during the process.

Every FMPP must include partners who will share the work and the outcomes of the project. Ask those partners for help in drafting pieces or reviewing drafts along the way. It is usually helpful to have a Google folder for the grant writing and to keep the latest draft of the proposal. Clearly defined partnerships are vital to the success of these grants and expected by the reviewers. After all, a 3-year project that is funded at tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars is likely a complex and ambitious project and should result in deeper connections and a better network for your market or project team.

As of a few years ago, the FMPP grant has two areas of funding: **capacity building** and **community development, training, and technical assistance** awards.

Remember: there is match required for FMPP grants.

Capacity building (CB) is what it sounds like; funds and support for an organization to do work that directly support vendors or other direct marketing producers with more promotion to shoppers, or trainings for vendors, or developing or expanding outlets. The language in the document makes that very clear:

CB projects should demonstrate a direct benefit to farm and ranch operations serving local markets (including new and beginning farmers) ...

They even give some examples, although applicants are not limited to these:

- Local farmer, rancher, or market manager training and education.
- Farmers market, roadside stand, CSA, or agritourism activity startup and/or expansion.
- Market analysis and planning for a direct producer-to-consumer market opportunity.
- Recruitment and outreach to new and beginning farmers and ranchers, as well as to consumers in support of direct producer-to-consumer markets.

Community development, training, and technical assistance (CTA) awards are focused more on building networks and supporting direct marketing outlets and producers with



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resources and training. The examples indicate the successful applicants will go far beyond developing or promoting a single direct marketing outlet. This is also important:

CTA projects should engage a diverse set of local and regional foods stakeholders, including farmers and ranchers, to illustrate a substantive effect on the local and regional food system and stakeholders.

And includes some examples although as above, applicants are not limited to using these:

- Conducting statewide or regional farmer, rancher, or manager (i.e., farmers market manager) training and education in developing or maintaining their own direct producer-to-consumer enterprise.
- Assisting farmers and ranchers in advertising and promoting their locally and regionally produced agricultural products through training and technical assistance.
- Establishing or expanding producer-to-consumer networks and organizations on a state, regional, and national level, which includes efforts to develop sourcing channels using direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities with corporate, non-profit, and public institutions.

Both areas of FMPP are meant to *increase the consumption of or access to local foods **and** to develop new opportunities for producers by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, **or** assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of direct marketing outlets.*

Notice the “and” in that first sentence; that tells you that adding a shopper promotion program is great, but you also need to prepare your vendors for that opportunity. Ask yourself as you develop the plan if you are making a clear case for accomplishing that in your proposal. How will producers benefit? Or which outlets will be developed or expanded? How will shoppers be increased or invited to participate more often?

2. Diving into the Plan

Once you know what you want to accomplish with your proposal, decide which grant is the right fit, and start to gather the list of documentation needed, you should begin to draft the **thumbnail/executive summary**, which is part of the Narrative form.

Starting with the thumbnail will ensure that your proposal has a succinct idea, a plan, and a goal. This is helpful to have early on as you will need to be gathering support from vendors, partners, and the board. The form for this section only allows 200 words, so this will require some wordsmithing. Using your spell and grammar check tool included in Microsoft Word will help, as will using the Word Count tool. Don’t worry about making it perfect now, as you will need to tweak it later, but try to come close to the number of words required. The thumbnail can be used to introduce the project to partners and to get letters of support. Your **objectives** are closely tied to the **executive summary** and should be clearly tied to the impacts on the farmer and rancher beneficiaries and other beneficiaries spelled out in your narrative. Objectives then become the basis for the **work plan**.



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The **work plan and the budget** should be worked on concurrently as there will be many edits to both throughout the drafting. Don't be intimidated by the work plan section; start filling out the details with the major deliverables by quarter, and then decide later if you need to make it more detailed.

A few years ago, AMS and FMC did a [webinar](#) on how to create a logic model for grants that may be beneficial for some of you. But generally, if you think of the work plan as what tasks will be done, who will do them, what resources they need, how to gauge the success of each task, and how to measure what that task's long-term effect is on the community you serve, you will be fine.

In the Narrative form, this is how the work plan is laid out:

List and describe each planned activity: <i>Include the scope of work and how it relates to the project objectives</i>	Anticipated Completion Date:	Required Resources: <i>For completion of each activity</i>	Milestones: <i>For assessing progress and success of each activity</i>	Who will do the work? <i>Include collaborative arrangements or subcontractors</i>
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Do know the difference between the different areas of the work plan: activities, resources (or inputs), milestones (outputs), and assignments. Outcomes are part of the next section under Indicators.

For example, let's say you are going to hold training workshops for current vendors which is an **activity**. When are they going to be held? Who will be responsible for getting vendors there? Who will be responsible for the logistics? The content being presented? Is this to be repeated later in the project life?

The meeting space and handouts would be some of the **resources** for this task.

How many vendors attending would be a success? What do you hope they take away from the event? How will you know if the vendors incorporated what they learned? What will that new knowledge do for the farmer and/or market over the long run?

The number of vendors who attended is a **milestone** or output. How vendors increased their sales, or their product availability based on what they learned at these meetings is an **impact or outcome** and is covered in the Outcome Indicator Measurement section. How you will assess those changes should be spelled out too. Will you survey vendors at the beginning of the project and then at the end to see what they learned through the project? If shopper education is a primary focus, will you be asking those shoppers how they changed their shopping based on what they learned from the project? Related to that is the need to describe how your team has the collective capability and resources to collect data and document changes this project will make in your community.

As for the **budget**, a good way to start is, once the work plan is drafted by quarters, calculate the most general line items such as personnel, equipment, supplies, contractual, travel and indirect costs (as needed), and add any more detail in later versions. If you have access to other budgets awarded by the USDA AMS in recent years, it can help orient your budget work. Read carefully through the allowable and unallowable costs section, as well as the sections on critical resources and sub award restrictions.



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Reviewers often look at the budget early in the process to see if it follows the work plan closely enough and if the tasks are properly funded. In other words, just saying you will hire staff to manage the project is not enough for most reviewers; they want to know how you will find the staff you need and how you will make sure the organization or team will have the capacity, resources, and partners to do the work and to assess it too. In many cases, you will have the need to pay another organization or person to accomplish a task which makes them a subcontractor.

Once the executive summary, work plan, and budget are underway, it may be helpful to have another member of the team begin to work on the rest of the **narrative** part of the proposal. Using the executive summary as a beginning, write the narrative as if you are communicating with USDA, and with your own community of shoppers, vendors, and partners.

Talk about the need for the project, what you hope to accomplish (with your draft work plan as the guide), and how the market and its partners can make that happen using this support. It is important that the project narrative is compelling right from the start and makes the case for a significant change in the circumstances in or around this market.

Make a list of what is required with documentation. Many markets work hard to write a great proposal but then don't make it past the first review due to missing documentation. Like suggested before, it is usually a good idea to create a google folder to store the documentation, so that all members of the team can upload and access them when needed. Also, good to ask someone else besides the main grant writer to double check the list of documents to make sure everything is there.

3. Outcome Indicators

Check out [this post](#) we did on calculating the indicators that are included in the proposal. Access to the FMC metrics site is available through an annual subscription

Metrics was designed for markets to be in control of the data collection process, but also to be able to share the collection work or the resulting data with their partners at the market's discretion. Metrics resources can be helpful to markets in creating a strategy to collect and use the data needed for the indicators for FMPP or other project reports.

There are other resources available for market evaluation needs besides Metrics. Finding the appropriate evaluation templates and tools is very important so don't choose the first one you hear about.

When collecting data for multi-year projects, establishing a baseline of data is the first step. And to do that, the collection method you use must be the same each time you collect data in the baseline year and in years after. Metrics has collection templates and resources for markets to gather data season after season, tips on how to choose the right days to collect



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data, and how much data to collect for data like those indicators contained with FMPP/LFPP.

4. Letters of Collaboration & Final Review

This is often another area where unsuccessful applicants often don't meet the requirements listed. The letters need to address the specific project goals, be gathered from all those the project is meant to support and must be signed. Letters that do not contain the letter writer's role(s) on the project, or if the letters do not have a statement agreeing to the management plan contained in the proposal, are not acceptable. There are more requirements for the letters and a template to use on the application. Having letters from producers that this project will positively impact is very important. (A tip from past grantees: remember, there is no word count limit for letters!)

When everything is drafted, read through the project **evaluation criteria** section. This will tell you which areas points are awarded by reviewers. The reviews happen in two ways: 1) technical review by your peers from around the country, and 2) an administrative review conducted by AMS staff. The areas where large amounts of points are awarded should be noted. It might be helpful to ask a board member or a partner to review your draft considering the reviewer point system to make sure you have covered the main areas.