

Request for Proposals

Emerging Farmer Technical Assistance Grant

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Grant Overview

Overview

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications from organizations to:

1. Provide technical and culturally appropriate services to emerging farmers, and/or
2. Pay for up to 65% of emerging farmers' premium expenses each year up to two years under the [USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance](#) program.

The Emerging Farmer Technical Assistance Grant program comes in response to our [Emerging Farmers Working Group](#), which has identified access to technical assistance as one of the top needs for emerging farmers. Technical assistance consists of farm business support, such as: helping farmers with financials, business planning, regulations, land access, marketing, and applying for state and federal programs.

Emerging farmers include farmers who are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, members of a community of color, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, or any other emerging farmers as determined by the commissioner of agriculture.

Funding, Eligibility, and Application Instructions

Funding availability

The Minnesota State Legislature approved a one-time appropriation of \$577,000 for this grant program with approximately \$540,000 that will be awarded as grants. Grant contract terms will begin no sooner than August 2023 and end no later than June 30, 2024. The maximum award is \$100,000, and the minimum award is \$10,000. Matching funds are not required.

Funding will be allocated through a competitive review process by a committee of content and community specialists with regional knowledge. We expect to announce selected grantees in July. If selected, you may only incur eligible expenditures when the grant contract agreement is fully executed and the grant has reached its effective date.

Priorities and outcomes

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making. [Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities.

This grant program will fund business technical assistance for emerging farmers, which includes farmers who are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, members of a community of color, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, or any other emerging farmers as determined by the commissioner of agriculture.

The intended outcomes of this grant are:

1. Organizations provide one-on-one assistance to emerging farmers across Minnesota who need help with financials, business planning, record keeping, regulations, land access, marketing, applying for state and federal programs, and/or other farm business needs.
2. Emerging farmers become aware of and sign up for [USDA's Micro Farm Crop Insurance](#).
3. Organizations provide the MDA with recommendations for effective ways to provide culturally appropriate technical assistance to emerging farmers.

Eligibility

Organizations that support emerging farmers in Minnesota are eligible to apply for this grant award. Applicants may collaborate with stakeholders as they develop a proposal. Applicants must be in good standing with the State of Minnesota, which means:

- No back taxes owed.
- No defaults on Minnesota State-backed financing for the last seven years.
- Acceptable performance on past MDA grants.
- Compliant with current state regulations.

Eligible expenses for this grant include, but are not limited to:

- Compensation for staff who provide technical assistance
- Supplies and travel expenses for providing technical assistance
- Up to 65% of emerging farmers' premium expenses each year up to two years under the [USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance](#) program
- Outreach expenses for promoting technical assistance and/or crop insurance services
- Up to 10% of the grant may fund an organization's indirect expenses, such as: office and utility expenses, accounting/bookkeeping services, legal fees, etc.

Expenses that are **not eligible** include, but are not limited to:

- Any expense incurred before the grant contract begins
- Real estate and depreciable equipment (farmland, tractors, etc.)
- Costs associated with crop production (inputs, harvest boxes, etc.)
- Alcohol at any outreach or educational events
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expenses resulting from failure of the applicant to comply with Federal, State, local, or Native American tribal laws and regulations
- Fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions
- Political activities in accordance with provisions of the Hatch Act (5 United State Code 1501-1508 and 7324-7326).

How to submit questions

Submit questions about or related to this Request for Proposals (RFP) to Jenny Heck at jenny.heck@state.mn.us, 651-201-6316. No other MDA employees are authorized to consult or answer questions about this opportunity. **You must submit questions by 8:00 a.m. on June 19, 2023.**

Answers will be posted within five business days in the Q&A section on the [Emerging Farmers Technical Assistance Grant webpage](#).

How to apply

We strongly encourage applicants submit proposals through our online application system, available on the [program webpage](#). If this is not possible, contact jenny.heck@state.mn.us at least 10 business days before the deadline to make another arrangement. **The MDA must receive your application by 8 a.m. on June 26, 2023.** Late applications will not be considered.

Note: The MDA is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems causing an application to be received late. It is the applicant's responsibility to confirm that MDA received the submission before the deadline.

Selection criteria and weight

The review committee will evaluate each application on a 100-point scale. Below are the scoring metrics that reviewers will consider. See [Appendix B](#) for a copy of the scoring template.

1. Project overview and need (20 points)
2. Experience and qualifications (30 points)
3. Workplan (15 points)
4. Budget (20 points)
5. Outreach and evaluation plan (15 points)

Note: Applicants applying to support farmers with [USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance](#) premium payments must have some familiarity, training, or technical experience with crop insurance. This may include attending a program webinar, [reviewing program details online](#), and/or experience with other crop insurance programs. Applicants without any familiarity with the crop insurance program will be automatically denied for this portion of the funding.

Application review process and timeline

This is a competitive opportunity. A committee that includes subject matter experts will review all applications received by the deadline and may recommend whole or partial funding. The commissioner of agriculture will consider the committee’s recommendations before making an award decision.

The review committee and commissioner may use the applicant’s history as a state grantee and capacity to perform the work when making their decisions. If selected, recipients may only incur eligible expenditures **after** the grant contract agreement is fully executed and the grant has reached its start date. The award decisions of the MDA are final and not subject to appeal.

Questions due no later than 8:00 a.m. (Central Time).....	June 19, 2023
Applications due no later than 8:00 a.m. (Central Time).....	June 26, 2023
Review process.....	approx. 2 weeks
Selected grantees announced; grant agreement negotiations begin.....	July 2023
Contract executed (approved) and grant begins.....	August 2023

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Grant monitoring

State grant policy ([MINN. STAT. 16B.97](#) and [Policy 08-10: Grant Monitoring \(PDF\)](#)) requires:

1. A monitoring visit for grants of **\$25,000 or higher**. These will be conducted in-person when possible or over the phone and include review of the project, reporting, and evaluation.
2. A financial reconciliation of grantee's expenditures at least once during the grant period for grants of **\$50,000 and higher**. The grantee must make receipts, employee timesheets, invoices, and any other supporting documents available upon request by the State.

Financial review process

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to make grants to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that are financially stable enough to carry out the purpose of the grant. All NGOs applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to a grant award made of **\$25,000 and higher**. Individuals and for-profit businesses are not subject to this requirement.

In order to comply with [Policy 08-06: Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations \(PDF\)](#), please review the following criteria and submit whichever document applies to your situation:

- Grant applicants with annual income of under \$50,000, or who have not been in existence long enough to have a completed IRS Form 990 or audit, should submit their most recent board-reviewed financial statements.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of \$50,000 or more and less than \$750,000 should submit their most recent IRS Form 990.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of over \$750,000 should submit their most recent certified financial audit.

Project evaluation and reporting

Awardees are required to participate in project evaluation to help the MDA demonstrate the impact of this grant program and identify areas for improvement and development. Grantees must submit an end of project report to the MDA no later than 60 days after the close of the grant period, or August 31, 2024.

The report will cover the following topic areas:

- Details on emerging farmers supported by the project (number, geographic distribution, type of farm)
- Details of outreach you provided for your project and number of farmers your organization worked with because of this grant that you had not previously worked with.
- Types of technical assistance offered to emerging farmers because of this grant.
- Number of farmers who applied for and received USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance because of this grant.
- Impacts of receiving technical assistance and support with crop insurance premiums
- Recommendations for the MDA about the most effective ways to serve emerging farmers, including outreach and delivery of services.

In addition, the MDA may ask grantees to send a survey to the farmers involved in the project, asking for voluntary demographic information and program recommendations.

Contracting

Prior to beginning work on the grant project(s) and receiving reimbursements, the grantee must:

- [Register as a vendor in SWIFT](#), the state's accounting system, and submit other required documentation within three weeks of award notification; and
- Sign a grant contract agreement indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks. The agreement also authorizes the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. State of Minnesota grant contract agreement templates are available for your review on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs](#) webpage.

Grant payments

Per [Policy 08-08 \(Grant Payments\)](#), reimbursement is the preferred method for making grant payments. However, grantees may request an initial payment of up to 25% of the award upon execution of the grant agreement, detailing the specific need for an advance. Grantees will request reimbursement by invoicing MDA each quarter. All grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget. The State shall review each request for reimbursement against the approved grant budget, grant expenditures to-date, and the latest grant progress report before approving payment. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making, 2022 \(Word\)](#)).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.
- A grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

In cases where a conflict of interest is in question or disclosed, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to, revising the grant work plan or grantee duties to mitigate the risk, requesting the grant applicant to submit an organizational conflict of interest mitigation plan, disqualification from eligibility for the grant award, amending the grant, or termination of the grant contract agreement.

Public data

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under this program. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Data Practices Act as private or nonpublic, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([MINN. STAT. 13.599](#)):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants and amount requested will be public data once proposal responses are opened.
- All remaining data in proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified below) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant contract agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified as nonpublic data, see below) will be public data after the

evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant contract agreements have been fully executed).

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets

Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e. the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application, the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

Grantee bidding requirements

The grantee must follow these rules for any grant-funded services and/or materials that are expected to cost:

- \$100,000 or more – must undergo a formal notice and bidding process.
- Between \$25,000 and \$99,999 – must be competitively awarded based on a minimum of three verbal quotes or bids.
- Between \$10,000 and \$24,999 – must be competitively awarded based on a minimum of two verbal quotes or bids or awarded to a targeted vendor, which includes economically disadvantaged or veteran-owned businesses. Learn more with our [vendor selection resources](#).

The grantee must take all necessary affirmative steps to assure that targeted vendors from businesses with active certifications through these entities are used when possible:

- [Targeted Group, Economically Disadvantaged and Veteran-Owned Vendor List](#) (Minnesota Office of State Procurement)
- [Minnesota Unified Certification Program](#) (Metropolitan Council)
- [Central Certification Program](#) (Hennepin County, Ramsey County, and City of Saint Paul)

The grantee must maintain:

- Written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the actions of its employees engaged in the selection, award, and administration of contracts.
- Support documentation of the purchasing and/or bidding process utilized to contract services in their financial records, including documentation justifying a single/sole source bid, if applicable.

The grantee must not contract with vendors who are [suspended or debarred in Minnesota](#).

Audits

The grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 8](#)). This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant contract agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Affirmative action and non-discrimination requirements for all grantees

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([MINN. STAT. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability regarding any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Voter registration requirement

The grantee will provide voter registration services for its employees and for the public served by the grantee ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).

Appendix A. Application Questions

1. Project overview and need

- Summarize what your organization will do with this grant funding.
- Describe the need for this project and its potential impact.
- Describe the emerging farmers your organization will support and how many.
- Will you be working with any farmers outside your past/current clients with this funding?
- Is your organization planning to offer emerging farmers technical assistance, support with USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance premium payments, or both?
- If you will be offering technical assistance, select what areas will be included: (business plans, crop insurance, financials, grants, land access, loans, marketing record keeping, regulations, taxes, other)
- If you are collaborating with another organization for this project, please describe their role in the project. You will also need to upload a letter of support.

2. Experience and qualifications

- Describe your organization's ability to provide technical assistance. Please describe experience as it pertains to all the areas of technical assistance you selected in the previous section.
- Describe your organization's experience working with emerging farmers and any culturally relevant practices you use to provide technical assistance.
- If offering support with USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance premiums, describe your organization's familiarity or experience with the program (Attended webinar, [reviewed program details](#), experience with other crop insurance programs). **Note:** some sort of familiarity of the program is required for organizations offering crop insurance support
- Describe any other qualifications relevant to the project. (optional)

3. Workplan

- Describe the activities you plan to undertake and when you plan to do them.

4. Itemized budget

- Using the template provided, please submit an itemized project budget. Please review the [financial management](#) section of this RFP for information about allowable and unallowable costs.
- If awarded this grant, will your organization require an advance payment (Yes/No)? If yes, explain why and what percent of the total will you need to receive as an advance (up to 25%).

5. Outreach and evaluation

- Describe your outreach plan for this project. How will you market your services to emerging farmers in Minnesota?
- Describe your plan to monitor progress on the three outcomes established for this grant program by the MDA.
 - (1) Organizations provide one-on-one assistance to emerging farmers across Minnesota who need help with financials, business planning, record keeping, regulations, land access, marketing, applying for state and federal programs, and/or other farm business needs.
 - (2) Emerging farmers become aware of and sign up for [USDA's Micro Farm Crop Insurance](#).
 - (3) Organizations provide MDA with recommendations for effective ways to provide culturally appropriate technical assistance to emerging farmers.

6. Applicant information

- Legal name of applicant (business entity)
- Organization's address
- Is this organization a [nongovernmental charitable organization](#)? (yes/no)
- What is this organization's annual income? (<\$50,000; \$50,000-750,000; >\$750,000)
- Name, title, telephone number, and email address of contact person for application

7. Authorized representative

- If awarded a grant, is the person authorized to sign contracts on behalf of the organization? (Yes/No)
- If no, provide name, title, mailing address, telephone number, and email address for the applicant's Authorized Representative who will sign any resulting grant contract agreement.

8. Eligibility

- Confirm that the following statements apply to your business:
 - The business is in good standing with the State of Minnesota. (No back taxes owed, no defaults on Minnesota state-backed financing for the past seven years, in compliance with current state regulations, acceptable performance on past MDA grants.) (Yes/No)
 - The business is in Minnesota or authorized to conduct business in Minnesota. (Yes/No)
 - Is anyone involved in the project or the application for the grant an employee or spouse of an employee of the MDA? (Yes/No)
 - No work has started on the proposed project or will work start before the grant contract agreement is signed by all parties. The MDA is unable to reimburse for any work that is performed prior to the effective date of the grant contract agreement. You may begin planning your project before the grant contract agreement is signed, but you may not contract for or purchase any goods or services included in your grant budget, including those expenses covered by matching funds. (Yes/No)

Note: If your proposal is selected for funding, you will also be required to provide the financial review documentation information described in the financial management section of this RFP.

Appendix B. Proposal Review Template

Note: Applicants applying to support farmers with USDA Micro Farm Crop Insurance **must** have some familiarity, training, or technical experience with crop insurance. This may include attending a program webinar, reviewing program details online, experience with other crop insurance programs. Applicants without any familiarity will automatically be denied for that portion of funding.

Item	Maximum Score
<p>1. Project overview and need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant articulates the need and potential impact of this project. (5 points) • Proposed outcomes of project are realistic for the size of budget request. (5 points) • Applicant identifies the emerging farmer group(s) they will serve. (5 points) • Applicant plans to provide TA and insurance premium support. (3 points) • Applicant plans to work with more or new emerging farmers who they haven't worked with previously. (2 points) 	20
<p>2. Experience and qualifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the areas of TA they outlined, applicant has strong understanding and demonstrated experience. (15 points) • Applicant has an effective plan to provide culturally appropriate services. (15 points) • If providing Micro Farm insurance support, applicant has familiarity with the program. (pass/fail, see note above) 	30
<p>3. Workplan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplan is thorough and realistic. (10 points) • Timeline provides dates for each step of the applicant's workplan. (5 points) 	15
<p>4. Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget clearly details all project costs. (10 points) • Budget is cost effective and reasonable. (10 points) • Budget does not contain unallowable costs. (pass/fail, we will not award funding for ineligible budget items) 	20
<p>5. Outreach and evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's plan for outreach is thorough and effective. (10 points) • Applicant's plan for evaluation is effective and will be used to create recommendations for the MDA. (5 points) 	15
<p>Total</p>	100