



January 25, 2023  
Food Security Infrastructure Grant Tips

View the [Request for Responses \(RFR\)](#) for this round of FSIG. Apply before **March 2nd at 11:59pm**. Draft your responses in a separate document so you have a copy of your application. If you applied for FSIG in the last round of funding, [request your score](#), regardless of whether you received the award or not (and get in the habit of doing this after each grant application!).

This document is a brief update based on last year's in-depth FSIG workshop. Watch last year's [workshop recording](#) and watch a [video update](#) for this year's grant. View the [website and background](#) of our expert grant-writer and presenter, Rose Wilson. Contact SEMAP with any questions: [shickey@semaponline.org](mailto:shickey@semaponline.org).

### **BACKGROUND ON FSIG:**

- There is huge demand for this grant. FSIG in the past has fully and partially funded proposals, with only 25% of all applications last round having been funded at all
- Though farmers are highly encouraged to apply, past recipients were more often other parties in the MA food system (ex. food pantries, school systems, etc.)
  - Farmers received 33% of total FSIG funds last year
  - **NEW THIS YEAR:** Organizations researching food insecurity in MA may apply for FSIG. This will increase competition for funds.
- Up to \$500,000 per project but only a small handful receive close to this amount
- There is no limit to the number of times you can be granted FSIG funds year-to-year

### **READING BETWEEN THE LINES ON THIS APPLICATION:**

- **NEW THIS YEAR:** The RFR and application include non-exhaustive lists of eligible projects based on type of entity applying (ie. farm vs. pantry). Even though this list isn't comprehensive, your project is much more likely to receive funding if it is included on this list. As best you can, only request funds for projects on these lists.
  - Lists of eligible projects are different on the RFR and the online application. We are inquiring with EEA about this and will update this file if we get an answer.
- Requests over \$100,000 *should have a match* (can be in-kind, as in labor, but this should be well-documented – even if you don't take a regular salary, estimate this)
  - Match would strengthen applications under \$100,000, but is not necessary
- Capital infrastructure only
  - Must be *durable* equipment (ex. machinery to fill yogurt containers is eligible, but the yogurt containers themselves are not)
  - Must be new, *not used*
  - Land and marketing costs are *not* covered
  - **NEW THIS YEAR:** Drought infrastructure is covered!
- Must provide quotes for *all* line items of the budget
  - Must know how you'll pay for your project *before you get the grant*, which is a reimbursement program – if this is through a bridge loan, get documentation
- Won't fund farmer or farmworker labor, but *will* fund contractor labor for eligible projects, as long as they are not regularly on your payroll and *licensed in Massachusetts*
- Attach quotes as a *single* PDF; attach additional materials as *single* PDF



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**STRATEGY 1: Find opportunities for your project to directly align with funders' goals**

- FSIG goal is to (1) support MA access to local food, (2) support MA food equity, and (3) mitigate food distribution disruptions in MA, especially in marginalized populations
- We don't just want to know that you want a delivery van, we want to know that it will support local food access in underserved communities and *how*

**STRATEGY 2: Pay attention to all the deadlines and contract dates**

- Because there is huge demand for FSIG, reviewers are looking for easy ways to remove applicants from consideration – projects that won't meet the deadlines are the first to go
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** FSIG projects are expected to start by July 1, 2023 and must be completed by June 30, 2024. *A whole year!* Be detailed in your timeline, and if you expect to finish your project before June 30, 2024, list its operational benefits during the remainder of the contract period.

**STRATEGY 3: Compartmentalize funding request as much as you can**

- As many funded projects won't receive the full requested amount, it's helpful to prove that you can still do something with partial funding
- This also prevents you from receiving partial funding and being unable to use it at all or make any progress on your project

**STRATEGY 4: Distilled to one sentence, your project should discuss the priorities of the grant (in the case of FSIG, food access/equity)**

- In the public record, projects are listed alongside one sentence, and those that get funded will discuss food security, access, and/or equity in MA communities
- This is the one line that state legislators see, so reviewers fund projects that prove that this grant was money well-spent and is worth funding again
- Should be the first sentence in your project description

**STRATEGY 5: Identify the keywords in the RFR and then use them in your application**

- Incorporating keywords and phrases in "Evaluation Criteria" section of RFR where they suit your project will make it easy for reviewers to see value of your project
- Ex. "resiliency," "alleviate immediate needs," "ensure stronger long-term access," "culturally relevant," etc.
- Don't be buzzword-y – you'll need to be specific about how your project will achieve these things, but using their own words strengthens your app

**STRATEGY 6: Highlight long-term impacts of this project on your business (ie. estimated sales increases) and on the food system (ie. expected market expansion, potential for collaboration or replication)**

- If you are a farm with a small gross income asking for the maximum amount, you'll need to demonstrate how this project will grow your business, gross income, and community presence
- Grant reviewers are investing in your business, and want to see that it may make you a more profitable or economically-sustainable business that will continue to serve marginalized communities AND/OR that it could be scaled/shared to support other businesses



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### **STRATEGY 7: Document and quantify as much as you can**

- How many new households will this project help you reach? How many additional markets will you attend as a result of this project? Etc.
- Even if figures are rough estimates, they will help, so long as you document how you arrived at them
- If you're estimating business growth, letters of support from your customers & community will help

*Note for beginning farmers: Because you have no (or limited) historical records of serving marginalized populations or any populations at all, you'll need more letters of support from community members, customers, lending institutions, etc.*

### **NEW THIS YEAR: Trends We Noticed in Last Year's Reviews**

- Reviewers are from many government departments and aren't necessarily familiar with the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). To demonstrate your impact on food security, it may not be enough to say you accept HIP. Be clear about why this improves regional food security.
- If your project will take place on APR land and may require a certificate of approval (COA) or a special permit, get in touch with your APR contact to discuss the allowability of your project *before applying*. No need to file for the COA or special permit before submitting, but have a conversation. Then, in your application, mention that you have proactively done so. If your APR contact green-lights your project, mention that!

### **Resources to Support Your Application:**

- Along with farmers serving BIPOC and low-income populations, those serving [Environmental Justice Communities](#) and any of our 26 [Gateway Cities](#) will be scored higher
- Specifically identify how your project will support goals of the [MA Local Food Action Plan](#)
- These organizations may be able to support you with a bridge loan: MA Food Trust, Farm Credit, Pioneer Valley Grows, your own regional bank
- Leverage relationships with your Buy Local organization – SEMAP is happy to write letters of support for farmers in Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth counties, and our partners in other counties may do the same. Email [shickey@semaponline.org](mailto:shickey@semaponline.org) to discuss this or be connected with someone in your county.

Apply for [business assistance](#) from SEMAP for future grants, business planning, marketing strategizing, etc.