



April 11, 2024

Food Security Infrastructure Grant Tips

View the [Request for Responses \(RFR\)](#) for this round of FSIG. Apply before **May 2nd at 4:00pm**. This document is a brief update based on previous years' in-depth FSIG workshop. Watch past years' [workshop recording](#) and [video update](#). Contact SEMAM with any questions: shickey@semaponline.org.

BACKGROUND ON FSIG:

- There is huge demand for this grant, and they try to spread funding across many applicants. This means you may receive only partial funding, especially if you're requesting a large amount.
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** FSIG is being administered by MDAR instead of the Office of Energy and Environment Affairs (EEA, MDAR's parent agency). As a result, there are separate applications for farms (Part I) and all other food system applicants (Part II), and reviewers will likely have more familiarity with farms!
 - Past recipients were more often other parties in the MA food system (ex. food pantries, school systems, etc.), and we expect that this shift will make farms more competitive.

ELIGIBILITY DETAILS:

- Up to \$500,000 are available per project but only a handful will receive close to this amount
 - **NEW THIS YEAR:** Requests of \$25,000 or more must demonstrate a cash match of at least 25% of project costs.
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** Applicants that have received more than \$1 million total through previous rounds of FSIG are not eligible. Applicants that have never received FSIG funds will be prioritized.
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** If the project will take place on land not owned by the applicant, you must have secure access to the land. MDAR typically interprets this as a written lease for 3+ years, and they may request a copy during the review process.
- Those on APR land must have already attained or be in the process of obtaining permission for their projects at the time of application, if required (ie. permanent infrastructure)
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** Produce farms must register with MDAR's Produce Safety Program as a condition of funding, which may subject your farm to audits and inspections.
- 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, marketing, seed, and overhead costs are *not* covered
 - Deer fencing is allowable, even though it's not explicitly named in the RFR

SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION:

- You must provide quotes for *all* line items of the budget
- You should know how you'll pay for your project up front *before you get the grant*. Banks offer letters confirming your line of credit; lenders providing a bridge loan may offer a letter of intent
- Submitting a recent (updated within 3 years) business plan will boost your score
- **NEW THIS YEAR:** All supplemental materials (including quotes, budget, proof of funding, letters of support, and business plans) must be emailed to FSIGGrant@mass.gov, and *must also be received by the 2pm deadline*. They cannot be attached to the online application. Allow extra time to submit both components (online application + email).



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

- FSIG goal is to (1) support availability of local food, (2) improve MA food equity & accessibility, and (3) build resiliency across the food supply chain, especially in marginalized populations
- You must connect your project's impacts to each of these goals if possible – don't just say you need a delivery van; explain how it will meet each of these goals

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

- Because there is huge demand for FSIG, reviewers look for easy ways to remove applicants from consideration – projects that won't meet the deadlines are the first to go
- FSIG projects are expected to start in September 2024 and must be completed by June 30, 2025. Be detailed in your timeline, and if you expect to finish your project before June 30, list its operational benefits during the remainder of the contract period

STRATEGY 3: Compartmentalize funding requests 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 public record, projects are listed alongside one sentence, and those that get funded will discuss food security, access, and/or equity in MA communities in this one sentence
- 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 "Review Criteria" section of RFR (page 9 and 10) 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 on your business (ie. estimated sales increases) and on the food system (ie. expected market expansion, potential for collaboration or replication)

- 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

STRATEGY 7: Document and quantify as much as you can

- Ex. How many new households will this project help you reach? How many additional markets will you attend as a result of this project? How many more pounds of food can you grow/store?
- Even if figures are rough estimates, they will help, so long as they're reasonable estimations
- If you're anticipating business growth, especially if expanding your outlets, letters of support from your customers & community will help



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EVALUATION INSIGHT:

- Reviewers are typically 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.
- Similarly, reviewers may not be familiar with why your application for a piece of production equipment is essential to your farm business (ie. tractors, implements, post-harvest infrastructure) – explain your project impacts as if the reviewer has never been to a farm before
- The RFR estimates contracts will begin in September 2024. Because so many people apply and reviewer recommendations have to go all the way up to the governor's office to be approved, don't be surprised if contracts are sent later than this.
 - SEMAP will keep you posted as best we can on any anticipated delays
 - Keep in mind that *you can't spend any funds before completing a contract with MDAR*, so if your project timeline is inflexible, grant funding might not be the best fit

*If you are located in Norfolk, Bristol, or Plymouth counties, and you want SEMAP to review a draft of your application, please send it to shickey@semaponline.org by **Monday, April 22nd**. Applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, and those received after April 22nd cannot be guaranteed a review.*

Resources to Support Your Application:

- [Request your scores](#) from previous FSIG applications, and get in the habit of doing this after each grant notification, successful or unsuccessful.
- Along with 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 by Friday, April 26th to discuss this or be connected with someone in your county.