

## Get Ready to Apply for a USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant

An educational session at the 2007 Southern SAWG Annual Conference

January 28, 2007

This session focused on the grant cycle that ended in Spring 2007. For information on current CFPCGP grants, contact the program through [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov) or call Elizabeth Tuckermanty at 202-205-0241.

### Presenters

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### Summary and Highlights

The USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFPCGP) awards grants to private non-profit organizations. Awards are between \$10,000 and \$300,000 for 1-3 years. Organizations seeking assistance must be community based (incorporating community members into the plan) and show concern about food, farms, and environmental stewardship. Also, grant applicants should show a long-term, multi-system plan as well as an interagency approach with stakeholder collaborations. Since 1996, USDA has awarded over 243 grants.

**Doug Walton** of the *Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture* spoke about his application experience. He first noted that the Kerr Center did not receive the grant on their first attempt and encouraged applicants not to be discouraged. In 2001, the Kerr Center began to broaden their scope and took a community food systems approach. One of their programs includes a Farm-to Schoolwork Program in Oklahoma.

According to Mr. Walton, one of the key ingredients for a successful grant application is having a project outline. Specifically, begin with an idea and expand it into objectives and activities. This outline will be

useful in going through the application process. Also, applicants should be cautioned against leaving budgeting to the end and should approach this aspect of the grant process early. Because each organization must be able to match everything in their budget dollar for dollar, it is important to figure out where the money is coming from and what it will be used for. It is important to note that money can also be thought of as the value of time, service, and volunteers. Because this is a federal grant, there must also be a non-federal match, meaning that there are no pre-existing ties to the federal government.

**Julia Sampson** has been a past CFPCGP reviewer. A panel of grant reviewers is chosen and each reviewer reads between 15-20 proposals in a month. Most importantly, these reviewers want to be an advocate for your application. Sampson noted eight common pitfalls of community food project grants:

1. Unbalanced budget.
2. Not having a suitable match for a community grant. For example when professional fees are exaggerated or government positions are indicated for the match.
3. The description of the community to be served is weak.
4. The budget is heavy on salaries or only benefits one entity. For example, a red flag is raised when 90% of the budget goes to the salary of three people, especially when the grant is supposed to be serving the community.
5. There is a lack of focus, too many unconnected projects in one proposal. Reviewers want SMART (Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-bound) goals.
6. A lack of original solutions. Innovative thinking that is tailored to your community is encouraged, instead of just copying what another community has done.
7. There is a lack of continuity. For example, the budget narrative does not match the budget or support letters don't match proposal activities.
8. There are surprise collaborators. Make sure that you have gotten official agreements from your collaborators before indicating their names on the application.

Lastly, grant applicants should pay special attention to their narratives, making certain that the activities serve the overall goal of the project and that the solutions are original and innovative.

Along with general information about the grants, **Liz Tuckermanty** noted important requirements that all grant applicants should be aware of:

- There is a dollar for dollar match required
- Submissions for this grant must be made electronically through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).
- The private non-profit organization must prove that it can be self-sustaining in three years.

Tuckermanty also noted a few new highlights to CFPCGP grants. First, there is money for infrastructure improvement if this can be justified through community involvement. Secondly, there is between \$10,000 and \$25,000 available for planning grants for those just getting started. Also reviewers are paying special attention to marketing.

**Dionne Toombs** gave an update on the application process. The guide to submitting the grant is located at [www.csrees.usda.gov](http://www.csrees.usda.gov). Toombs suggested keeping the guide close throughout the application process. To retrieve the application, you can take these steps.

1. Go to [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).
2. Click on electronic submission to find the grant opportunity.
3. It is easiest to search by the grant number which is 10.225

When completing the grant, make sure to check for errors and save your submission. All files, including references should be uploaded in a PDF format. You will receive e-mail notification about the results of the first screening. Initially, grants are rejected because the due date has passed, because of a non-

conformance to PDF format, because of other formatting issues, and because of budgetary problems. Make sure to call if you have not heard back in 30 days about the status of your grant.

Toombs also noted a few important things.

- Make sure to register with [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) at least 2 months in advance.
- Download Pure Edge Viewer software.
- Verify the funding opportunity and the name.
- Make sure all documents are PDF.
- Save as you go.
- Use Internet Explorer.
- Submit applications on broadband.

In past years, the Community Food Security Coalition offers support for organizations applying for CFPCGP grants. See their website at [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org) for current support available.