



Food and
Nutrition
Service

Park Office
Center

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DATE: **August 15, 2017**

MEMO CODE: SP-41-2017

SUBJECT: 2018 Direct Certification Improvement Grant RFA

TO: State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is pleased to announce the release of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Direct Certification Improvement Grant Request for Applications (RFA). The grants are available to State agencies that administer the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) to fund the costs of improving your direct certification rates with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other needs-based assistance programs, as allowed under Federal statute and regulations.

Background and Authority

Section 749(h) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-80) [123 STAT. 2133] provided \$22 million that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) must issue as grants to State agencies that administer the NSLP and have the lowest rates of children directly certified for free meals, for the purpose of improving those rates. State agencies may use grant funds, in accordance with FNS requirements, to pay costs associated with improving their direct certification rates. Under this appropriation, in July 2010, FNS announced an RFA for State agencies to apply for Direct Certification planning and implementation grants. Applications in response to the 2010 RFA were accepted on a quarterly basis from November 2010 through July 2012, and FNS awarded 31 grants to 21 State agencies. A second RFA was released in December 2012, and later extended in July 2013, to allow quarterly applications through July 2014 for Direct Certification Improvement Grants. Under the second RFA, FNS has awarded 13 grants to 13 State agencies. With funds still available, a third RFA was released in May 2015 to allow quarterly applications through July 2016 for Direct Certification Improvement Grants. Under the third RFA, FNS awarded 9 grants to 9 State agencies.

FNS now is issuing a new Direct Certification Improvement Grant opportunity to make available to States approximately **\$2 million** in remaining funds to be used for direct certification improvements. The number of grants awarded is dependent upon the number and types of applicants, and any further availability of funds returned by previous grantees under previous Direct Certification Improvement Grant RFAs.

Purpose of Funding

The purpose of the Direct Certification Improvement Grants described under the RFA is to fund State agency activities in planning and implementing direct certification improvement projects that will help them reach and maintain the direct certification rate benchmark mandated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 to directly certify at least 95 percent of students in families receiving SNAP benefits each school year. Ultimately, FNS intends for the grants to assist States in improving access, increasing accuracy, and reducing paperwork in the NSLP and SBP by simplifying the certification process for free school meals.

Types of Grants Offered

Under the 2018 RFA, FNS offers two types of Direct Certification Improvement Grants:

1. **Tier 1: Limited-scope planning and implementation grants:** Tier 1 grants may be awarded for up to **\$250,000** under a simplified application process to fund short term projects of limited scope for the distinct purpose of improving direct certification rates.
2. **Tier 2: Full-scope implementation grants:** Tier 2 grants may be awarded for up to **\$1,000,000** to fund direct certification implementation projects of significant scope, for periods of one to three years.

Application Due Date

Under the 2018 RFA, States will have six opportunities to apply for Tier 1 or Tier 2 grants beginning November 15, 2017 and ending February 15, 2019 (pending availability of funds. Specifically November 15, 2017; February 15, 2018; May 15, 2018; August 15, 2018; November 15, 2018; February 15, 2019.

Eligibility Information

This RFA is extended to all State NSLP agencies; however, a State agency may apply for **only one grant during the RFA period.** Additionally, please note the following items associated with the 2018 RFA:

- All NSLP State agencies are eligible to apply for Tier 1 Direct Certification Improvement Grants, even if they were awarded grant(s) under previous direct certification grant RFAs. However, applications must clearly demonstrate the State's need for grant funds to enable it to reach and maintain SNAP direct certification rates at the 95 percent level.
- All NSLP State agencies are eligible to apply for Tier 2 Direct Certification Improvement Grants. State agencies applying for a second Tier 2 award or who have direct certification rates with SNAP that are already at 95 percent or higher, as reported in the latest Direct Certification Report to Congress, must present a compelling case in their application proposals as to why additional funds are necessary for improvements in their direct certification system or processes for them to reach and/or maintain rates at or above the mandated 95 percent benchmark. (The Reports to Congress can be viewed at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/CNP/cnp.htm>).

- FNS will accept only one grant application from any State agency under this RFA. However, if funds remain available at the end of the RFA period (ending February 15, 2019), FNS reserves the right to extend the RFA and reconsider this application restriction at that time.
- Grant awards under the RFA will not be competitive as long as sufficient funding is available to fund all fully responsive applications with potential to significantly improve direct certification performance. If sufficient funding is not available to award grants to all applicants, FNS reserves the right to give preference to applications from States with the lowest direct certification rates with SNAP, as reported in the latest Direct Certification Report to Congress. Preference also may be given based on the amount of grant funding already awarded to the applicant agencies for direct certification improvement purposes under the previous Direct Certification Grant RFAs (see summaries for previous grants at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-improvement-grants>). FNS reserves the right to close the RFA and accept no further applications at any point that available funds are exhausted.

Application Process (Electronic Submission)

Applicants must submit applications electronically through www.grants.gov by 11:59 PM, Eastern Standard Time, on the scheduled RFA due date. Applications received after the deadline date will be held until the following review period. FNS will not consider any additions or revisions to an application once it is received and will not accept mailed, faxed, or hand-delivered applications.

Materials and Information

The attached “Request for Applications for Direct Certification Improvement Grants” provides detailed information about this grant opportunity and the application process. For your convenience, the RFA and Microsoft Word versions of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 grant application Appendices are available both on the Child Nutrition Division’s (CND) PartnerWeb community at <https://www.partnerweb.usda.gov>, and the Grants.gov website at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/home.html>.

If you have questions regarding the extension of this grant opportunity, please contact Grant Officer Carla Garcia via email at Carla.Garcia@fns.usda.gov. We look forward to receiving your applications for funding.

Sincerely,

Original Signed

Original Signed

Lael J. Lubing
Director
Grants and Fiscal Policy Division

Sarah E. Smith-Holmes
Director
Program Monitoring and Operational Support Division
Child Nutrition Programs

Attachments