

# Farm Loan Program: Technical Assistance Provider Network Funding Opportunity

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## Request for Applications

**Application Deadline: August 30, 2024**



**SOUTHERN  
EXTENSION  
RISK  
MANAGEMENT  
EDUCATION**



National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**SOUTHERN EXTENSION RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION CENTER  
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITY TITLE: FARM LOAN PROGRAM:  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDER NETWORK**

**ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE: Request for Applications (RFA)**

**Dates:** Applications must be submitted to Extension Risk Management's Results Verification System (RVS) website by 5:00:59 PM (Central Standard Time), on **August 30, 2024**.

Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

**Summary:** The Southern Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) Center is requesting applications for the Farm Loan Program Technical Assistance Provider Network. This announcement seeks applications from eligible organizations with a demonstrated capacity to serve new and returning farm loan borrowers in the Farm Service Agency system.

**Contents of this Announcement:**

- I. [Funding Opportunity Description](#)
- II. [Award Information](#)
- III. [Eligibility Information](#)
- IV. [Application and Submission Information](#)
- V. [Application Review Information](#)
- VI. [Award Administration Information](#)
- VII. [Program Contacts](#)
- VIII. [Appendix A](#)
- IX. [Appendix B](#)

## **I. Funding Opportunity Description**

### **A. Legislative Authority and Background**

[7 U.S.C. 1524\(a\)](#) authorizes the Secretary, acting through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), to establish a competitive grants program, through regional risk management education centers, the Agriculture Risk Management Education Partnerships Program (ARME). Section 11125 of the 2018 Farm Bill, Public Law 115-334, amended the program. Through this solicitation the U.S. Department of Agriculture seeks to create a technical assistance network to support producers in accessing its Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loan programs, connecting to farm programs, and participating in other USDA programs. USDA through its Farm Service Agency (FSA) seeks to fund a network to support and further expand existing program outreach and education efforts to producers with a focus on financially distressed producers who struggle to access FSA Farm Loan Programs (FLP's) and to obtain FSA loans.

The Southern ERME Center (Southern Center) will establish regional Technical Assistance Provider Network (TAPN) cooperators through funding grass roots community-based and/or other organizations who have demonstrated experience delivering technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers; and who can specifically assist these producers in helping them to succeed in applying for and using FLP's. This includes the ability to provide one-on-one support to both rural and urban producers such that producers who receive this support throughout the application process will be less likely to have incomplete or withdrawn applications.

### **B. Stakeholder Input**

The Southern Center welcomes comments, suggestions and/or recommendations regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of a subsequent RFA for the Farm Loan Program Technical Assistance Provider Network.

### **C. Purpose and Priorities**

The purpose of this RFA is to provide funding to TAPN Cooperator organizations to help address barriers to farm loan financing by assisting financially distressed producers to successfully obtain FSA loans and access FLP's. Cooperator organizations should have demonstrated experience delivering technical assistance to farmers and ranchers with a local presence in the communities being served.

Funding will support the TAPN Cooperator organization's capacity to address local issues relevant to supporting producers in accessing farm loan programs (FLP's); and to work with producers whose farm loan applications have been rejected or withdrawn. TAPN Cooperator applicants must have the technical and financial expertise necessary to assist producers to apply for or maintain participation in FSA Farm Loan programs, including providing screening for program readiness and application assistance and support for compiling documentation. Cooperator applicants should have a keen understanding of the different levels of knowledge possessed by the producers being

served and be able to provide one-on-one support to ensure producers can successfully access programs. Cooperator applicants demonstrating experience in providing agriculture training with the capacity to establish and manage a TAPN for the target audience are preferred.

### **TAPN Objectives**

TAPN Cooperators must meet the following objectives:

1. Provide standardized, consistent, and reliable support to producers at every stage of the loan making process.
2. Make standardized materials (e.g., digital tools, user guides, training materials) easily accessible to producers seeking assistance in applying to and using FSA FLPs. These materials will be developed and provided by FSA and the ERME Centers. By standardizing the information and providing technical assistance, TAPN's aim is to ensure that all producers have equitable access to accurate and up-to-date information. This is to provide transparency, minimize confusion, enhance the producer's ability to navigate loan programs successfully, and prepare a complete loan making or servicing application.
3. Increase the accessibility of credit for farmers and ranchers who face challenges in securing loans through traditional lending channels. The technical assistance that TAPN Cooperators will provide is meant to provide producers with a smoother loan application experience which will contribute to reduced rates of withdrawn and rejected loan applications.
4. Assist producers with transitioning to digital tools, as these tools come online from FSA, aiming to simplify loan application processes and increase access for all eligible farmers and ranchers.
5. Advise FSA on producers' requirements for digital tools and methods to improve producers' online and in-person experiences.
6. TAPN Cooperators will assist producers one-on-one and in groups, with a focus on developing lending readiness and helping underserved producers to:
  - learn about FLP credit products,
  - understand the loan application process,
  - gather application documents,
  - develop application documents,
  - educate producers on record keeping,
  - help manage FLP borrower and producer expectations, and
  - ensure producers understand how to access loan servicing, primary loan servicing options and processing.

### **TAPN Topic Areas:**

- Financial Records and Analysis
- Business and strategic planning
- Cost of production and benchmarking

- Asset Management
- State and Federal Farm Programs

**TAPN Training**

TAPN training will be an integral part of the establishment of the regional networks, with obligatory attendance at trainings provided by ERME Centers. An in-person project orientation will occur in the beginning stages of the project. The focus for training sessions will be twofold: 1) receive guidance on how to effectively interact with FSA offices, which will include working with FSA personnel to build enduring partnerships that involve trust and established lines of communication for the purpose of enhancing the FLP producer experience; and 2) introduce a comprehensive curriculum for the TAPN cooperators and their producer participants. This will involve a multi-faceted approach with a portfolio of modular resources that TAPN cooperators can format for their target audience. Travel dollars for 3 in-person trainings (one per year) through the project period needs to be included in the project budget.

**Southern Region Critical Areas:**

Proposals may target one or more of the ten critical areas listed in Figure 1 below.

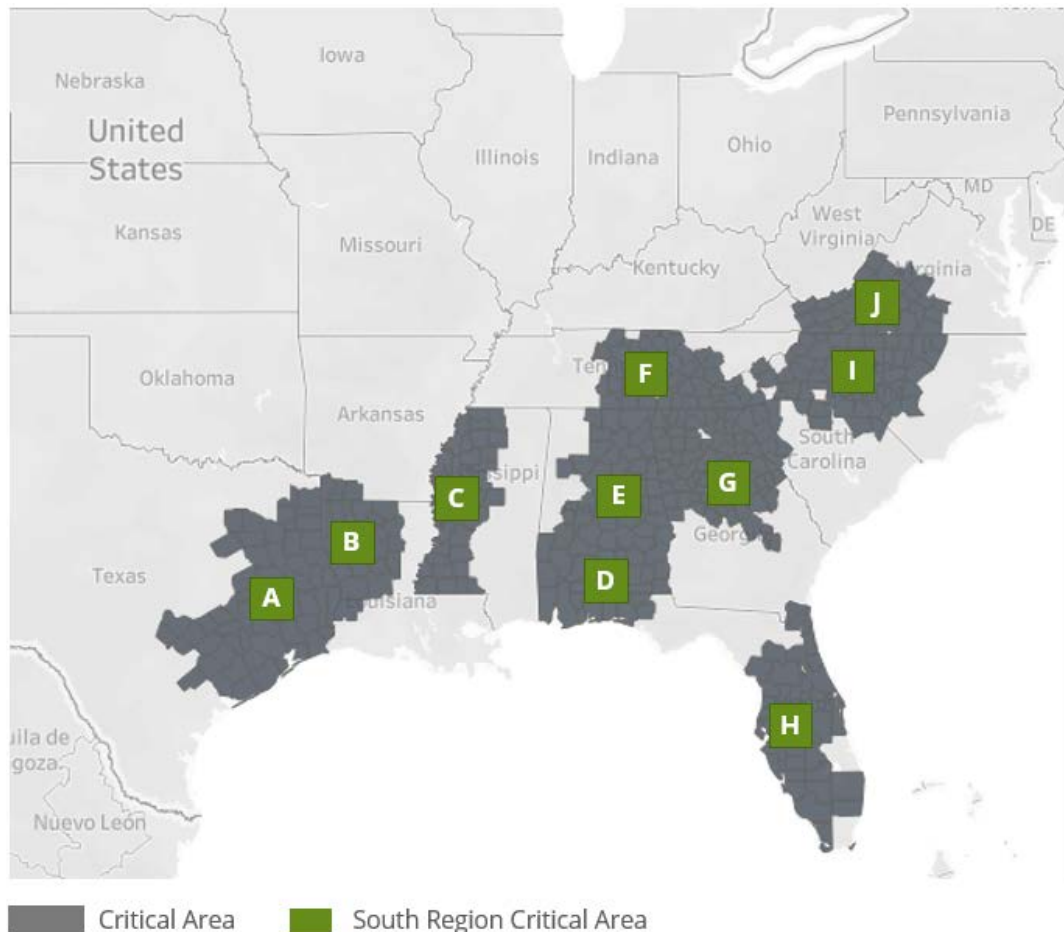


Figure 1. Map of Designated Critical Areas for TAPN Project Development

**South Region Critical Areas: (The ordering of the critical areas does not indicate a ranking.)**

- A. East Texas
- B. Western Louisiana
- C. Western Mississippi
- D. Southern Alabama
- E. Southeast (AL & GA)
- F. Western Tennessee
- G. Northern Georgia
- H. Central Florida
- I. Western North Carolina
- J. Appalachian (VA, WV, & NC)

Critical Areas including counties:

**A. East Texas:**

<b>Western Louisiana: Included Counties</b>		
HARRIS, TX	JEFFERSON, TX	MATAGORDA, TX
TRINITY, TX	FAYETTE, TX	GRIMES, TX
POLK, TX	AUSTIN, TX	HOUSTON, TX
MADISON, TX	COLORADO, TX	LEON, TX
TYLER, TX	CHAMBERS, TX	CALDWELL, TX
WALKER, TX	FORT BEND, TX	BASTROP, TX
BRAZOS, TX	LAVACA, TX	HAYS, TX
SAN JACINTO, TX	WHARTON, TX	TRAVIS, TX
BURLESON, TX	BRAZORIA, TX	DE WITT, TX
MONTGOMERY, TX	GALVESTON, TX	WALLER, TX
LEE, TX	JACKSON, TX	ORANGE, TX
HARDIN, TX	LIBERTY, TX	WASHINGTON, TX

**B. Western Louisiana:**

<b>Western Louisiana: Included Counties</b>		
DE SOTO, LA	PANOLA, TX	ANGELINA, TX
MILLER, AR	CALDWELL, LA	RAPIDES, LA
LAFAYETTE, AR	RED RIVER, LA	VERNON, LA
COLUMBIA, AR	WINN, LA	NEWTON, TX
MORRIS, TX	NATCHITOCHE, LA	JASPER, TX
CASS, TX	CHEROKEE, TX	TYLER, TX
CAMP, TX	SHELBY, TX	BEAUREGARD, LA
CADDO, LA	LA SALLE, LA	ANDERSON, TX
BOSSIER, LA	NACOGDOCHES, TX	HENDERSON, TX
WEBSTER, LA	SABINE, LA	VAN ZANDT, TX
CLAIBORNE, LA	GREGG, TX	KAUFMAN, TX
UNION, LA	BIENVILLE, LA	NAVARRO, TX
UPSHUR, TX	JACKSON, LA	OUACHITA, LA
MARION, TX	RUSK, TX	SMITH, TX
HARRISON, TX	LINCOLN, LA	

**C. Western Mississippi:**

<b>Western Mississippi: Included Counties</b>		
YAZOO, MS	MARSHALL, MS	CLAIBORNE, MS
DE SOTO, MS	ATTALA, MS	WARREN, MS
TATE, MS	MADISON, MS	SHARKEY, MS
PANOLA, MS	HINDS, MS	ISSAQUENA, MS
COAHOMA, MS	COPIAH, MS	WASHINGTON, MS
BOLIVAR, MS	LINCOLN, MS	HUMPHREYS, MS
TUNICA, MS	PIKE, MS	HOLMES, MS
QUITMAN, MS	WALTHALL, MS	SUNFLOWER, MS
TALLAHATCHIE, MS	AMITE, MS	LEFLORE, MS
CARROLL, MS	WILKINSON, MS	FRANKLIN, MS
GRENADA, MS	ADAMS, MS	LAFAYETTE, MS
YALOBUSHA, MS	JEFFERSON, MS	

**D. Southern Alabama:**

<b>Southern Alabama: Included Counties</b>		
BUTLER, AL	CONECUH, AL	CHOCTAW, AL
BIBB, AL	WASHINGTON, AL	BULLOCK, AL
TALLAPOOSA, AL	COFFEE, AL	WILCOX, AL
COOSA, AL	DALE, AL	BARBOUR, AL
CHILTON, AL	COVINGTON, AL	PIKE, AL
HALE, AL	HOUSTON, AL	CRENSHAW, AL
PERRY, AL	BALDWIN, AL	CLARKE, AL
ELMORE, AL	ESCAMBIA, AL	MONROE, AL
LEE, AL	GENEVA, AL	HENRY, AL
AUTAUGA, AL	HOLMES, AL	MONTGOMERY, AL
DALLAS, AL	WALTON, FL	LOWNDES, AL
MACON, AL	WASHINGTON, FL	ESCAMBIA, FL
MARENGO, AL	OKALOOSA, FL	MOBILE, AL
RUSSELL, AL	SANTA ROSA, FL	

**E. Southeast AL & GA:**

<b>Southeast AL &amp; GA: Included Counties</b>		
CLEBURNE, AL	CULLMAN, AL	HEARD, GA
MADISON, AL	BLOUNT, AL	SPALDING, GA
JACKSON, AL	ETOWAH, AL	MERIWETHER, GA
WHITFIELD, GA	FULTON, GA	TROUP, GA
MURRAY, GA	GWINNETT, GA	LAMAR, GA
CATOOSA, GA	COBB, GA	PIKE, GA
DADE, GA	POLK, GA	CHAMBERS, AL
WALKER, GA	PAULDING, GA	TALLAPOOSA, AL
DE KALB, AL	SAINT CLAIR, AL	COOSA, AL
GILMER, GA	CALHOUN, AL	CHILTON, AL
MORGAN, AL	DE KALB, GA	UPSON, GA
GORDON, GA	HARALSON, GA	HARRIS, GA
MARSHALL, AL	JEFFERSON, AL	ELMORE, AL
FLOYD, GA	CARROLL, GA	LEE, AL
CHATTOOGA, GA	DOUGLAS, GA	MACON, AL
PICKENS, GA	ROCKDALE, GA	RUSSELL, AL
CHEROKEE, AL	NEWTON, GA	WALKER, AL
BARTOW, GA	TALLADEGA, AL	FAYETTE, AL
CHEROKEE, GA	CLAYTON, GA	COWETA, GA

Southeast AL & GA: Included Counties		
FORSYTH, GA	HENRY, GA	RANDOLPH, AL
SHELBY, AL	FAYETTE, GA	CLAY, AL

## **F. Western Tennessee:**

Western Tennessee: Included Counties		
HAMILTON, TN	BEDFORD, TN	FANNIN, GA
CLAY, TN	SWAIN, NC	DE KALB, AL
PICKETT, TN	MONROE, TN	GILMER, GA
FENTRESS, TN	MCMINN, TN	WHITE, GA
OVERTON, TN	GRUNDY, TN	LUMPKIN, GA
JACKSON, TN	GRAHAM, NC	GORDON, GA
TROUSDALE, TN	MOORE, TN	MARSHALL, AL
SMITH, TN	LINCOLN, TN	FLOYD, GA
MORGAN, TN	FRANKLIN, TN	CHATTOOGA, GA
WILSON, TN	BRADLEY, TN	PICKENS, GA
PUTNAM, TN	MARION, TN	CHEROKEE, AL
ANDERSON, TN	MACON, NC	HALL, GA
KNOX, TN	CHEROKEE, NC	BARTOW, GA
CUMBERLAND, TN	POLK, TN	CHEROKEE, GA
DE KALB, TN	CLAY, NC	FORSYTH, GA
RUTHERFORD, TN	MADISON, AL	ETOWAH, AL
WHITE, TN	JACKSON, AL	COBB, GA
ROANE, TN	WHITFIELD, GA	POLK, GA
CANNON, TN	MURRAY, GA	PAULDING, GA
LOUDON, TN	CATOOSA, GA	HARALSON, GA
BLOUNT, TN	DADE, GA	DAVIDSON, TN
WARREN, TN	WALKER, GA	SUMNER, TN
RHEA, TN	TOWNS, GA	LIMESTONE, AL
VAN BUREN, TN	COFFEE, TN	MEIGS, TN
BLEDSON, TN	UNION, GA	MARSHALL, TN

## **G. Northern Georgia:**

Northern Georgia: Included Counties		
BARROW, GA	FRANKLIN, GA	NEWTON, GA
JACKSON, NC	HALL, GA	TALIAFERRO, GA
GRAHAM, NC	HART, GA	COLUMBIA, GA
TRANSYLVANIA, NC	BANKS, GA	MCDUFFIE, GA
MACON, NC	ABBEVILLE, SC	CLAYTON, GA
CHEROKEE, NC	BARTOW, GA	HENRY, GA
POLK, TN	CHEROKEE, GA	WARREN, GA
GREENVILLE, SC	GREENWOOD, SC	FAYETTE, GA
CLAY, NC	FORSYTH, GA	JASPER, GA
PICKENS, SC	JACKSON, GA	COWETA, GA
OCONEE, SC	ELBERT, GA	PUTNAM, GA
RABUN, GA	MADISON, GA	HANCOCK, GA
WHITFIELD, GA	FULTON, GA	HEARD, GA
MURRAY, GA	GWINNETT, GA	SPALDING, GA
TOWNS, GA	COBB, GA	GLASCOCK, GA
UNION, GA	POLK, GA	JEFFERSON, GA
FANNIN, GA	PAULDING, GA	WASHINGTON, GA
GILMER, GA	MCCORMICK, SC	MERIWETHER, GA
HABERSHAM, GA	CLARKE, GA	LAMAR, GA
ANDERSON, SC	OGLETHORPE, GA	MONROE, GA
WHITE, GA	WILKES, GA	PIKE, GA
LUMPKIN, GA	LINCOLN, GA	BALDWIN, GA



<b>Northern Georgia: Included Counties</b>		
STEPHENS, GA	OCONEE, GA	JONES, GA
GORDON, GA	DE KALB, GA	WILKINSON, GA
FLOYD, GA	WALTON, GA	UPSON, GA
CHATTOOGA, GA	HARALSON, GA	BIBB, GA
PICKENS, GA	CARROLL, GA	TWIGGS, GA
MONTGOMERY, GA	MORGAN, GA	CRAWFORD, GA
TREUTLEN, GA	DOUGLAS, GA	PEACH, GA
TOOMBS, GA	ROCKDALE, GA	LAURENS, GA
GREENE, GA		

## **H. Central Florida:**

<b>Central Florida: Included Counties</b>		
PASCO, FL	HILLSBOROUGH, FL	NASSAU, FL
ALACHUA, FL	HARDEE, FL	GLADES, FL
PUTNAM, FL	HIGHLANDS, FL	HENDRY, FL
LEVY, FL	MANATEE, FL	PALM BEACH, FL
MARION, FL	SARASOTA, FL	CHARLOTTE, FL
VOLUSIA, FL	DE SOTO, FL	COLLIER, FL
LAKE, FL	FLAGLER, FL	LEE, FL
CITRUS, FL	ST. JOHNS, FL	MONROE, FL
SUMTER, FL	DUVAL, FL	BROWARD, FL
SEMINOLE, FL	BREVARD, FL	OSCEOLA, FL
ORANGE, FL	POLK, FL	PINELLAS, FL
HERNANDO, FL		

## **I. Western North Carolina:**

<b>Western North Carolina: Included Counties</b>		
DAVIDSON, NC	GUILFORD, NC	MONTGOMERY, NC
MONTGOMERY, VA	ALAMANCE, NC	STANLY, NC
PULASKI, VA	ORANGE, NC	CUMBERLAND, NC
FRANKLIN, VA	DURHAM, NC	UNION, NC
FLOYD, VA	CALDWELL, NC	ANSON, NC
WYTHE, VA	WAKE, NC	HOKE, NC
HALIFAX, VA	IREDELL, NC	CHEROKEE, SC
CARROLL, VA	DAVIE, NC	RICHMOND, NC
PATRICK, VA	ALEXANDER, NC	YORK, SC
HENRY, VA	BURKE, NC	SCOTLAND, NC
GRAYSON, VA	RANDOLPH, NC	CHESTER, SC
GALAX, VA	CHATHAM, NC	CHESTERFIELD, SC
ASHE, NC	ROWAN, NC	MARLBORO, SC
ALLEGHANY, NC	CATAWBA, NC	PITTSYLVANIA, VA
SURRY, NC	LEE, NC	POLK, NC
STOKES, NC	RUTHERFORD, NC	MCDOWELL, NC
CASWELL, NC	HARNETT, NC	BUNCOMBE, NC
ROCKINGHAM, NC	CLEVELAND, NC	MADISON, NC
GRANVILLE, NC	LINCOLN, NC	AVERY, NC
PERSON, NC	MOORE, NC	YADKIN, NC
WILKES, NC	MECKLENBURG, NC	FORSYTH, NC
WATAUGA, NC	CABARRUS, NC	

**J. Appalachian VA, WV, & NC:**

<b>Appalachian VA, WV, &amp; NC: Included Counties</b>		
HENRY, VA	LUNENBURG, VA	FRANKLIN, NC
BATH, VA	WYTHE, VA	FORSYTH, NC
ROCKBRIDGE, VA	HALIFAX, VA	GUILFORD, NC
NELSON, VA	SMYTH, VA	ALAMANCE, NC
ALLEGHANY, VA	CARROLL, VA	ORANGE, NC
AMHERST, VA	MECKLENBURG, VA	DURHAM, NC
BOTETOURT, VA	PATRICK, VA	WAKE, NC
BUCKINGHAM, VA	GRAYSON, VA	IREDELL, NC
CRAIG, VA	GALAX, VA	DAVIE, NC
BEDFORD, VA	ASHE, NC	ALEXANDER, NC
APPOMATTOX, VA	ALLEGHANY, NC	DAVIDSON, NC
GILES, VA	SURRY, NC	RANDOLPH, NC
CAMPBELL, VA	WARREN, NC	CHATHAM, NC
ROANOKE, VA	STOKES, NC	ROWAN, NC
PRINCE EDWARD, VA	CASWELL, NC	LEE, NC
MONTGOMERY, VA	ROCKINGHAM, NC	MOORE, NC
TAZEWELL, VA	GRANVILLE, NC	CABARRUS, NC
BLAND, VA	PERSON, NC	MONTGOMERY, NC
CHARLOTTE, VA	VANCE, NC	STANLY, NC
PULASKI, VA	WILKES, NC	PITTSYLVANIA, VA
FRANKLIN, VA	YADKIN, NC	NOTTOWAY, VA
FLOYD, VA		

**II. Award Information**

**A. Available Funding**

The maximum amount of funds anticipated to be awarded is **\$400,000 per project**.

**B. Project Period**

The estimated project period for awards will be 3 years beginning on **November 1, 2024** and completed no later than **October 31, 2027**.

**C. Award Type**

The funding for selected projects will be in the form of a subaward agreement. The Southern ERME Center will determine the precise terms and conditions defining contractual obligations that are a part of the award process and will include, but may not be limited to the following:

1. Approval of your final budget and narrative that is part of the application submission.
2. Compliance with Uniform Guidance (UG).
3. Monitoring your (organization's) performance through quarterly and final reports.
4. Reviewing federal funds spent on requests for reimbursement (invoices).

### **III. Eligibility Information**

#### **A. Eligible Entities**

1. Community-based agricultural organizations and/or other organizations both public and private that have demonstrated experience in providing technical and financial expertise necessary to assist producers. This includes:
  - Community based non-profit organizations.
  - 1994 Tribal Colleges or Universities (TCU's)
  - 1890 and other land grant universities
  - Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education.
  - Agricultural organizations,
2. Individuals are not eligible applicants.

#### **B. Qualifying Criteria for Applications**

Any applications that are non-compliant with the following requirements will be at risk of being excluded from review. Applicants disqualified on these grounds will be notified via email.

1. Applications must comply with the submission instructions and content requirements set forth in this announcement, including the Required Documents Section (IV-B, Item 12).
2. Any application that arrives later than 5:00:59 PM (Central Standard Time) will be disqualified from competition.
3. Applications must be submitted via the online Results Verification System through the Southern ERME Center website.
4. Maximum amount of funding may not exceed \$400,000 See section II.A.

#### **C. Cost-Sharing or Matching**

ERME does **not** require matching support.

### **IV. Application and Submission Information**

#### **A. Form of Application Submission**

All applications must be submitted through the Extension Risk Management on-line Results Verification System (RVS). First time applicants will be required to register in the RVS through the Southern ERME Center's website.

All applicants will be notified, by e-mail, with confirmation of submission of their application by ERME RVS.

#### **B. Content of Application Package Submission**

- 1) **Project Overview** – Describe the critical area(s) your network will target, your anticipated target audience, how your proposed TAPN goals will align with the TAPN objectives; and especially as it pertains to your ability to provide individual one-on-one support to producers to ensure that they can successfully access and

utilize FSA FLPs.

- 2) **Proposed Outcomes** – (i) Identify TAPN outcomes that you want producers to understand; e.g. aspects of financial risk including record keeping and how to apply for and develop loan applications; develop; e.g. ability to develop financial statements and to complete loan application documents both one-on-one and in groups; implement; e.g. confidence and skills necessary to make loan applications to their respective FSA service center. (ii) identify, for each outcome the participant action, and the number of producers you anticipate will achieve that action/outcome; and (iii) identify verification/performance measures for tracking producer achievement of each of the proposed TAPN outcomes.
- 3) **Target Delivery Area** – Describe the relationship with the audience in the critical area(s) you are proposing to serve, including if you are already serving producer communities within these targeted areas with targeted education, training and/or technical assistance. Describe how you intend to build, or have already established a level of trust that can enhance their experience with FLP's. Additionally, describe how your relationships within the agricultural community can strengthen your ability to engage producers.
- 4) **Proposed Outcomes Narrative** – Describe as a TAPN Cooperator how you will structure your approach to providing technical assistance, what tools you will use to help improve producers financial risk and how you will help them achieve optimal loan preparedness that can contribute to reduced rates of withdrawn and rejected loan applications. Describe why your approach is appropriate for this target audience; and how you will utilize your technical and financial expertise, and knowledge of local issues to ensure participants are successful.
- 5) **Project Steps** – Describe a **logical progression** of the project's plan of work. Map out the timeline for each task/project step to be accomplished during the proposed award period including a plan for evaluation.
- 6) **Organizational Capacity** – Describe your organization's history and experience and why you are equipped to serve as a TAPN Cooperator including your organization's capacity to deliver technical and financial expertise to this target audience. Detail your organization's demonstrated experience serving producers who face challenges accessing FSA Farm Loan Programs Describe the skills, knowledge and experience of your team members and how their expertise can lend itself to establishing lasting relationships with both producers and FSA service providers to eliminate barriers to FSA financing for producers. Indicate the capability of the Project Director (Co-Project Director) to achieve the program purpose and priorities stated in this funding announcement, including evidence of solid working relationships within the target audience. Applicants demonstrating experience in providing agriculture training with the capacity to establish and manage a TAPN for the target audience are preferred.

- 7) **Project Team** – Team members are the Project Director, (Co-Project Director) and all other individuals who will actively participate in the development, delivery and management of your TAPN - whether from the applicant organization or not. For each team member provide: (i) name; (ii) organization; (iii) email address; (iv) telephone number; (v) describe their role and responsibility in the project; and Project Team members who will serve as a consultant or sub-awardee are required to submit additional documentation (see section IV.C).
- 8) **Project Collaborators** – Collaborators are outside people or organizations who will bring expertise and/or provide access to your target audience, For each project collaborator provide: (i) name; (ii) organization; (iii) email address; (iv) telephone number; (v) describe their role and responsibility in the project; Letter must clearly state their contributing role, expertise, and/or knowledge that will support the delivery of proposed TAPN outcomes. Letters must be signed and dated and addressed to the Western Center’s Director but delivered to the Project Director for inclusion with the application. Applicants must upload the letters as PDF documents. **Form letters are not allowed.** Project Collaborators who will serve as a consultant or sub-awardee are required to submit additional documentation (see section IV.C).
- 9) **Technical Assistance** – Describe the capacity to work one-on-one with producers to provide technical assistance in the FSA FLP loan application and loan servicing request processes. Specifically describe the teams’ proposed approach to help prepare producers to better understand the loan application process and financial and other documents necessary for a successful borrower experience. Describe your capacity and approach to evaluate and document producer participants successes and challenges to achieve your proposed outcomes and producer experience in accessing FSA Farm Loan Programs
- 10) **Budget** – Enter the total amount of funds requested. A detailed, budget form must be uploaded to the application as a required document. The budget form is available for download in the online application system and detailed instructions for each line item are available in Appendix A to this RFA (Budget and Budget Narrative Instructions).
  - i. **Indirect Costs** – Indirect costs allowed for projects submitted under this RFA may not exceed the lesser of the institution’s official federally negotiated indirect cost rate or 30% of the total Federal funds awarded. If your organization does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate, an F&A rate of 10% Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) will be allowed.
  - ii. **Proposed or Pending Applications** – Identify the source and amount of funding and/or funding pending from other sources for projects related to the work proposed in this application.
- 11) **Budget Narrative** – Enter your Budget Narrative information directly into the online application system. Identify and describe costs associated with each budget line-item amount; include subawards or sub-contracts, consultants, and indirect costs. Detailed

instructions are available in: (i) Appendix A to this RFA (Budget and Budget Narrative Instructions); (ii) the online application Instructions; and (iii) Application Resources (<http://extensionrme.org/Resources.aspx#RVS>).

12) **Required Documents** – All submitted applications must contain a completed and signed ERME Cover Sheet, and an ERME Budget Form. Letters of commitment from project collaborators, consultants and subawards should be uploaded in the Project Team or Project Collaborators sections.

- i. **ERME Cover Sheet (SF424)** - Is a fillable PDF template that must be completed and signed by applicant organization's authorized representative or fiscal agent. Applicants must upload as a PDF document.
- ii. **ERME Budget Form** - Is a fillable PDF template that must be completed and uploaded as a PDF document.

### **C. Subawards and Consultants**

Funding may be used to provide subawards not to exceed 49 percent of the requested budget. All sub-awardees must comply with applicable requirements for subawards. Consultants are subject to the allowable rates of pay as identified in Appendix A. Sections A & B Salaries. Detailed instructions for subawards and consultants are available in Appendix A to this RFA (Budget and Budget Narrative Instructions) and in the online application Instructions. The following documentation is required:

1. Consultant
  - a. Letter of commitment which contains a brief description of what they or the organization will bring to the project, the **specific responsibility** that they will have within the project and their hours and rate of pay.
  - b. An abbreviated (2 page maximum) resume or curriculum vitae.
2. Subaward
  - a. A separate subaward budget form (utilize the ERME Budget Form)
  - b. A separate budget narrative
  - c. A letter of commitment outlining the organization's statement of work for the project

### **D. Submission Dates and Times**

We recommend that you conduct a thorough review of the application before submission via the Results Verification System. A checklist is included in Appendix B of this RFA to assist with the review. Applications must be submitted to the RVS no later than 5:00:59 PM (Central Standard Time) on **August 30, 2024**. Email confirmation of receipt will be sent to all applicants.

### **E. Confidential Information**

In accordance with 7CFR 2500.017, the names of entities submitting applications, as well as application contents and evaluations, except those involved in the review process, will be kept confidential to the extent permissible by law. If an applicant chooses to include

confidential or proprietary information in the application, it will be treated in confidence to the extent permitted by law, provided that the information is clearly marked by the applicant with the term “confidential and proprietary information.”

**V. Application Review Information**

**Evaluation Criteria**

Applications that meet the threshold criteria in Section III of this announcement will be reviewed according to the evaluation criteria set forth below.

Applications are evaluated on their strengths and weaknesses relative to the merits of other applications. Funding decisions will be made based on the rankings and recommendation of the review panel. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions no later than **October 11, 2024**.

**A. Evaluation Criteria**

Criteria	Weight
<p>1. <b>Proposed Outcomes:</b> Will evaluate the extent to which the proposed outcomes can: (i) assist producers with developing lending readiness; (ii) provide equitable access to FLP’s; (iii) contribute to reduced rates of withdrawn and rejected loan applications; and (iv) help improve producers’ financial risk.</p>	20
<p>2. <b>Outcomes Verification:</b> Will evaluate the effectiveness of the applicant’s plan for evaluating and tracking producer achievement of the proposed TAPN outcomes.</p>	10
<p>3. <b>Project Narrative:</b> Will evaluate (i) the effectiveness of the TAPN’s plan to improve financial risk and how this will help producers achieve optimal loan preparedness; (ii) suitability of education and training approaches for the target audience and (iii) knowledge of local issues to ensure participant success.</p>	20
<p>4. <b>Audience</b> – Will evaluate (i) ability of applicant organization to establish a relationship with the target audience to promote engagement and trust and (ii) strength of relationships within the agricultural community that will contribute to and enhance producer engagement.</p>	10

<p><b>5. Team/Organizational Capacity and Collaborators:</b> Equal value will be attributed to: (i) evaluating the skills, knowledge and experience of the project team and organization to effectively establish and manage a TAPN and (ii) evaluating how well-engaged collaborators will increase the likelihood of producer engagement</p>	20
<p><b>6. Technical Assistance:</b> Will evaluate (i) demonstrated experience in providing loan application assistance for the target audience; (ii) teams’ proposed approach to help prepare producers to better understand the loan application process and make application to FSA FLPs and (iii) capacity to work one-on-one with producers to provide technical assistance in the FSA FLP application process.</p>	20

**B. Selection of Reviewers**

Reviewers are selected based upon training and experience in relevant agricultural fields. Reviewers are drawn from a diverse group of experts to create balance in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and professional expertise.

**VI. Award Administration Information**

**A. Award Notices**

Following evaluation of applications, all applicants will be notified regarding their status.

1. **Application Notifications and Feedback:** ERME anticipates notification of successful and unsuccessful applicants via email or postal mail by **October 11, 2024**. This notification will be sent only to the Project Director.

2. **Successful Applicants:** ERME will advise the applicant that their proposed project has been successfully evaluated and recommended for funding. This notification is not an authorization to begin work. The subaward agreement is the authorizing document and will be provided to each awardee organization electronically or via postal mail. All subaward agreements will be initialized by **November 1, 2024**; however, situations may arise over which the regional ERME Center has no control, and which could delay this date.



## **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

A listing and description of general federal regulation and cost principles applicable to subaward agreements under this RFA are available in Appendix A to the RFA (Budget and Budget Narrative Instructions).

## **C. SAM Registration and Unique Entity Identifier Number**

In accordance with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), all applicants must register with the System for Award Management ([SAM.gov](http://SAM.gov)) and obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number. There is no cost to use SAM.gov and you can use this site to update, renew, or check the status of your entity's registration. After your entity is successfully registered with SAM.gov, your Unique Entity ID will be automatically generated and viewable in SAM.gov's workspace. If your entity is registered in SAM.gov today, your UEI has already been assigned and is viewable in SAM.gov. This includes inactive registrations. The UEI is located on your entity registration record. The UEI replaces the DUNS number previously used when doing business with the federal government.

## **D. Reporting Requirements**

The following reporting requirements will apply to awards provided under this RFA. ERME reserves the right to revise the schedule and format of reporting requirements as necessary in the subaward agreement.

Award recipients must submit their reports online via the Results Verification System website – the same system where the Application was submitted. The Proposed Outcomes and Project Steps sections of the Application are auto-populated in the online reporting system. The RVS system will use the quantitative text fields to answer the following questions:

1. How many producers did you help understand the FSA loan application process and available FSA Farm Loan Program credit products?
2. How many producers did you help understand what FSA farm programs are available and may be a good fit with their disaster, conservation, and safety net needs?
3. How many producers better understand FSA loan eligibility as a result of your efforts?
4. How many of the producers you assisted used the online tool to help determine loan eligibility?
5. How many producers did you help prepare application documents (including for applications that were ultimately not submitted)?
6. How many of the producers you assisted submitted loan requests?
7. How many of the producers you assisted submitted a loan request with the online loan application tool?
8. How many of the producers you assisted were first-time FSA loan applicants?
9. How many producers did you help develop financial statements (ex. Balance sheet, cash flow)?
10. How many producers did you provide record-keeping training?
11. How many producers did you help develop a business plan?

12. How many group training and development sessions did you host?
13. Describe any applicable reasons customers experienced withdrawals/rejections.
14. Describe the initial challenges and barriers faced by applicants in dealing with FSA.
15. Describe the types of technical assistance that were most successful in leading to an approved application.
16. Describe any challenges or barriers that could not be solved with technical assistance.
17. Describe any additional tools and resources that FLP and Farm Programs can provide to support producers.

A complete set of reporting instructions is provided in the RVS.

1. **Quarterly Progress Reports:** Quarterly Progress Reports are due on the dates specified by the Southern ERME Center, consistent with the Western ERME Center. Additional progress reports may be submitted or report information entered at any time throughout the project period.
2. **Invoices (Financial Reports):** Invoices must be submitted quarterly but may be submitted monthly.
3. **Final Report:** The Final Report is due within the time frame directed by the Southern ERME Center and must demonstrate that producers achieved the TAPN objectives and outcomes identified in the Application. After the Final Report has been approved by the Southern ERME Center, it becomes a public document available for viewing through the national ERME website: <http://www.ExtensionRME.org>.
4. **Final Invoice:** A Final Invoice must be submitted to the Southern ERME Center within the time frame directed by the Center. Final payment may be withheld until all reporting requirements are met.

## VII. Program Contacts

### [Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center](#)

#### **University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture**

Ron Rainey, Director

2301 South University Ave

Little Rock, AR 72204

Contacts: Erica B. Fields at 501-671-2146 or [efields@uada.edu](mailto:efields@uada.edu)

Ron Rainey at 501-671-2175 or [rrainey@uada.edu](mailto:rrainey@uada.edu)

## Appendix A

### *Extension Risk Management Education Competitive Grants Program*

#### **BUDGET AND BUDGET NARRATIVE INSTRUCTIONS**

The Extension Risk Management Education Centers review proposed project costs to make certain those costs are reasonable to the project and allowable per the following federal statutes and regulations that apply to project grants awarded under this program. The statutes include but are not limited to:

- **2 CFR, Part 200** – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

**Copies of the applicable Code of Federal Regulations and USDA Federal Assistance Regulations may be found at the following website: <https://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>**

To assist in this review, as well as to expedite the award process, applications are required to have both a budget and budget narrative detailing the various line items. The categories listed below are examples of some of the more common items found in project budgets. All items should be described in the narrative in sufficient detail to enable the Centers to determine that the costs are reasonable and allowable for the project per the regulations.

#### **BUDGET SECTIONS A & B:**

**Salaries** – Show the number of work months that will be charged to the project for which salary is paid by USDA [e.g., two project directors on a 12 month project – one will spend 100% of time (12 months) and one will spend 50% of time (6 Months); total work months would be 18 months]. List the funded months in either Academic and Summer or Calendar months depending on the academic appointment of the person. Non-academic institutions would report salary months under the Calendar category.

Profit and Non-Profit organizations salary rates of pay should not exceed an Executive Level IV salary range (\$183,500/year or \$88.00/hour, effective January 2023). This rate does not include any fringe benefits, G&A, overhead, or other expenses. Rates exceeding this amount must be documented and justified as to why the person or persons command a higher salary rate. Information on future Executive Level IV salary rates may be found at the Office of Personnel Management website: <http://opm.gov>. Click on “Policy”, “Pay & Leave”, then “Salaries and Wages”.

Please note that only persons employed by the recipient organization should be listed in this category. Those employed elsewhere would be listed as subcontractors or consultants in the “Other Direct Costs” (ODC) category.

Secretarial and Clerical Salaries – The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect (F&A) costs. Direct charging of these costs may be appropriate only if all of the following conditions are met: 1) Administrative or clerical services are integral

to a project or activity; 2) Individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity; 3) Such costs are explicitly included in the budget or have the prior written approval of the Federal awarding agency; and 4) The costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.

**Fringe Benefits** – Show the total of allowable fringe benefits.

#### **BUDGET SECTION C:**

**Equipment** – The purchase of equipment is not allowed under the program. Equipment is defined as an article of equipment equal to or in excess of \$5,000 and having a useful life of more than one year. See Budget Section F.6. for possible alternatives.

#### **BUDGET SECTION D:**

**Travel** – Domestic travel (includes Canada, Mexico and U.S. Possessions). Provide information used in estimating the cost such as: the destination if known, purpose, number of travelers, and estimated cost per trip (e.g., St. Louis, Missouri to attend a conference, 2 persons - \$1,000 ea.). This includes all travel paid directly by the grantee organization.

Use the GSA Domestic Per Diem Rate Schedule if you are unsure of the maximum rates allowable for specific locations. Travel and subsistence should be in accordance with organizational policy. Regardless of the organizational policy, allowances for airfare will not normally exceed round trip jet economy air accommodations.

#### **BUDGET SECTION E:**

**Participant/Trainee Support Costs** – If you are conducting a train-the-trainer project and/or your project has a train-the-trainer component, please consult with your regional Center to determine how these and other similar type costs should be listed.

#### **BUDGET SECTION F:**

**Other Direct Costs** (ODC) are those anticipated direct project charges not included in other budget categories. A description and cost must be included in the budget narrative for each item. Items in ODC should be listed with the corresponding dollar amounts, along with an explanation of the costs provided in the Budget Narrative. Examples of items are:

**1. Materials and Supplies** – List project specific materials and supplies with estimated costs. This could include items such as educational or field supplies, software, or office supplies. For items that are not typical materials & supplies, a detailed narrative of how the item fits the program must be included. If you are requesting funds for generic or bulk office materials and supplies, these would normally be considered as organizational F&A costs and not treated as Direct Costs.

**2. Publication Costs** – This line is associated with costs related to the publishing of articles in a scientific or technical journal or other type of field/program related publication and is not allowed under this program. Printing of program materials should

be included under “Materials and Supplies”. Photocopying costs should be included under the “Other” category.

**3. Consultants** – A consultant is someone who renders expert advice in his/her field. The consultant should not be affiliated with the performing organization. This line item in the applicant budget narrative should include the name of the consultant and his/her organization, and a breakdown of the amount being charged to the project (e.g., number of days of service, rate of pay per hour, travel, per diem, etc.). See Sections A&B, Salaries for allowable rates of pay. Each consultant must provide the following documentation to be uploaded as part of the application: 1) Signed Letter of Commitment that also outlines their Scope of Work, rate of pay, # of hours to be paid, travel, etc.; and 2) An abbreviated resume or vita no more than 2 pages in length. These documents should be combined into a complete package and uploaded as a PDF in the Project Team or Project Collaborators section of the application.

**4. Computer (ADP) Services** – Computer services are not allowed under the program. This represents the charges associated with the organization’s shared computer system (i.e., line charges or computer processing usage costs). Charges for Internet access may be included in this category. Equipment purchases should be listed under “Materials and Supplies” as appropriate.

**5. Subawards/Consortium/Contractual Costs** – When a portion of the work proposed will be performed by outside sources, funding may be used to provide subawards not to exceed 49 percent of the total funds awarded. All sub-awardees must comply with applicable requirements for subawards. The level of detail required for the subaward budget is the same as the applicant organization. See Sections A&B, Salaries for allowable rates of pay. Please note that any limitation or prohibition of indirect costs on the Program also applies to the subawards. This line item in the budget narrative of the applicant organization should list the total amount of funding that will go to the subaward. The subaward organization must provide the following documentation to be uploaded as part of the application: 1) Letter of Commitment signed by the authorizing representative that also includes a clear Scope of Work outlining their portion of the work to be completed; 2) Separate Budget for their portion of the funding; and 3) A detailed Budget Narrative supporting their portion of the budget. These documents should be combined into a complete package and uploaded as a PDF in the Project Team or Project Collaborators section of the application.

**6. Equipment/Facility Rentals/User Fees** –

a. **Equipment Rental** – When there is a need to rent equipment for use on the project, provide information regarding the type of equipment to be rented, the purpose or use on the project, the length of time needed, and the rental rate.

b. **Facility** – When it is necessary to rent office or other facility spaces for project implementation, and the space(s) are located off-site from the organization’s main facility in space not owned by the recipient organization, the cost of the rent may

be charged against the award if the space is used specifically for the project. The budget narrative should provide details on the normal monthly rental charge and how the rent is pro-rated to the project.

**7. Alterations/Renovations** – Alterations/Renovations are not allowed under the program.

**8. Other** – For other costs not specifically listed above. Identify and provide details of the costs involved. Some of the more common items included in this category are:

a. **Communications** – Mailings, postage, express mail, faxes, and telephone long distance charges. Specific dollar amounts are not required.

b. **Photocopying** – In-house photocopying of materials associated with the program. Photocopying should not be confused with Publications/Page Charges which are costs related to publishing in a journal or commercial printing of brochures and other materials. Specific dollar amounts may not be required.

c. **Service or Maintenance Contracts** – Costs should be in direct correlation to the use of the equipment for the project (i.e., if a particular machine is used 50% of the time for the project, the project should only be charged 50% of the service/maintenance costs). Provide details of the type of equipment and the amount of the service contract to be paid from Federal funds.

d. **Conferences/Meetings** – Costs of holding a conference or meeting are included in this category. Some examples are the rental of facilities and equipment for the meeting, honorariums or fees for trainers or guest speakers, and travel and per diem for participants and speakers. Details of costs for each conference or meeting should be broken out and provided in the budget narrative.

Meals may not be charged as project costs when individuals decide to go to breakfast, lunch, or dinner together when no need exists for continuity of a meeting. Such activity is considered to be an entertainment cost. In contrast, it is NIFA policy that a formal group meeting being conducted in a business atmosphere may charge meals to the project if such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants. Breakfast meals are generally not allowable because no continuity of the meeting exists.

e. **Speaker/Trainer Fees** – Information on speakers should include the fee and a description of the services they are providing.

f. **Honorariums** – Honorariums to persons providing a service are allowable. Provide information regarding the honorarium amount (rate of pay) and a brief statement regarding what the person is doing to earn the honorarium.

## **BUDGET SECTION H:**

**Indirect Costs** – Indirect costs on awards supported by USDA/NIFA under this program may not exceed the lesser of the institution’s official federally negotiated indirect cost rate or 30% of the total Federal funds awarded. If your organization does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate, an F&A rate of 10% Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) will be allowed. The budget narrative should identify the percentage rate used when calculating the total indirect costs.

### **Other Items of Note:**

**Cost Sharing/Matching** – ERME does **not** allow matching support, that includes in-kind services, for this program.

## **UNALLOWABLE COSTS**

The following is a list of selected items of costs which are usually unallowable. This list is not all inclusive. For more information on whether costs are allowable, please refer to 2 CFR 200.420-475 General Provisions for Selected Items of Cost, in the Uniform Guidance:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/part-200/subpart-e>

- Alcoholic beverages
- Entertainment costs
- Promotional give away items such as tote bags, coffee mugs, t-shirts, etc.
- Incentives such as gift certificates, cash, etc. given to entice participation in meetings, surveys, and other events.
- Rent for grantee owned facilities
- Award ceremonies
- Receptions
- Application writing costs
- Meals –

Meals are allowable when they are part of the cost of meetings and conferences, the primary purpose of which is the dissemination of technical information (in such instances the cost of transportation, rental of facilities, speakers’ fees, and other items incidental to such meetings or conferences are also allowable). On the other hand, business meals may not be charged as project costs when individuals decide to go to breakfast, lunch, or dinner together when no need exists for continuity of a meeting. Such activity is considered to be an entertainment cost.

Note: Meals consumed while in official travel status do not fall in this category. They are considered to be per diem expenses and should be reimbursed in accordance with the organization’s established travel policies subject to statutory limitations.

## Appendix B

### APPLICATION PACKAGE CHECKLIST

**1. Content of Application Package** - Each section of the application in the RVS should be completed relevant to the specific program area, to include:

- Technical Assistance Provider Network**
  - a. Project Information
  - b. Project People
  - c. Project Overview
  - d. Audience
  - e. Proposed Outcomes
  - f. Project Narrative
  - g. Project Steps
  - h. Organizational Capacity
  - i. Project Team
  - j. Project Collaborators
  - k. Technical Assistance
  - l. Budget/Amount Requested
  - m. Budget Narrative
  - n. Required Documents
  
- 2. ERME Budget Form** – upload as PDF under Required Documents and confirm that the file uploads correctly.
  
- 3. Signed ERME Cover Sheet (SF-424)** – upload as PDF under Required Documents and confirm that the file uploads correctly.
  
- 4. Collaborator Letters of Commitment** (Letters not required for Exploratory Projects)
  - a. A letter is required from each listed Project Collaborator that clearly states their contributing role, expertise, and/or knowledge that will support the delivery of proposed outcomes (upload as PDF under Project Collaborators).
  
- 5. IF the Project Includes Consultants**
  - a. Letter of Commitment from each consultant outlining role, hours and rate of pay.
  - b. Abbreviated (2-page maximum) Resume or Curriculum Vitae for each consultant.
  - c. Upload complete package as PDF under Project Team or Project Collaborators.
  
- 6. IF the Project Includes a Subaward**
  - a. Subaward Budget Form.
  - b. Separate detailed Budget Narrative.
  - c. Letter of Commitment from the subaward organization outlining the statement of work for that organization.
  - d. Upload complete package as PDF under Project Team or Project Collaborators.

**SUBMIT your application prior to the deadline specified in your region's RFA.**