



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF **AGRICULTURE**

ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Program

FAQ

November 2021

Updated 12/2/2021

For deadline postings, go to the ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Grant webpage at
<https://agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants>

Refer Any Questions to:

ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Program

1-844-406-ARPA(2772)

<https://montana.servicenowservices.com/arpa>

Legal Authority:

H.R.1319 - American Rescue Plan
Act of 2021



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

**State of Montana
Department of Agriculture
ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Program**

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Overview

The ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Program (ARPA AIG) will strengthen Montana's agricultural industry through grants to assist the development of innovative agricultural business improvements in order to keep pace with a transforming agricultural industry and to create new jobs and expand business opportunities.

Program Intent

The intent of the ARPA AIG is to advance Montana's agricultural industry through targeted investments in value-added agriculture projects across the state. Grants will assist with the development of innovative agricultural business improvements to keep pace with a transforming agricultural industry, create new jobs, and expand business opportunities.

Funding Criteria

An applicant may be eligible for an award if the proposal meets the goals of ARPA AIG and:

- 1) primarily adds value to Montana's agricultural products,
- 2) has the prospects for commercial success given current personnel, experience and resources of the applicant,
- 3) has the prospects to create and/or retain jobs in Montana,
- 4) has the management structure to comply with ongoing reporting and monitoring activities.

Timeline

March 11, 2021: Expenses must have been incurred after this date to be allowable

Nov 8, 2021: Call for concept papers

Dec 15, 2021: Concept paper deadline 5:00 PM MST

Dec 27, 2021: Invite selected applicants to submit full proposals

February 28, 2022: Full application deadline 5:00 PM MST

March 25, 2022: Provide award recommendations to Commission

December 31, 2024: final day to incur expenses

Proposals will be accepted from

- Individuals
- Businesses and Industry Organizations
- Public and Private Agencies and Organizations
- Educational Institutions
- Local Governments

Where to Apply

All Concept Papers and applications must be submitted through the State of Montana Amplifund Portal at: <https://mt.amplifund.com/Public/Opportunities/Details/25baf510-781c-469f-bf7c-018f9bc651c8>

Funding Guidelines

Funds Available

Total funds available for grant awards are \$7.5 million. \$3.75 million will be reserved for projects requesting more than \$150,000. No proposal may request more than \$450,000.

Eligible Costs

Eligible costs under the ARPA AIG include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment
- Facilities Upgrades
- Consultant Services (professional, technical, operational)
- Advertising and Promotion
- Supplies and Materials

Notes on Some Cost Items

Salaries, wages and entertainment	These costs are not likely to be considered eligible.
Food and Commodity Purchases	Not Allowable.
Payment of institutional overhead or other indirect costs	Not Allowable.
Political purposes	In no case can funds be used for the intent of influencing elected officials or legislation.

*****Note*****

If you are applying on the behalf of a local government for irrigation projects, please visit <https://arpa-mtdnrc.hub.arcgis.com/pages/irrigation-grant-program> for the Irrigation Grant Program.

Matching Funds

Matching funds are required on all awards. Matching funds must be used toward completing the proposed project and may not come from another Federal grant award.

- The purpose of matching funds is to assure commitment and buy-in from the grant recipient.
- The concept of matching funds is the same as sharing costs.
- All matching funds must directly contribute to the project.

Match Requirement

- Awards equal to or less than \$150,000 must be matched at \$1 to \$1
- Awards from \$150,001 to \$300,000 must be matched at \$2 to \$1
- Awards from \$300,001 to \$450,000 must be matched at \$3 to \$1

12/2/21 Update

For matching funds, if you are requesting up to \$150,000 in grant funds you must match with an equal amount of match dollars. Requests greater than \$150,000 will be matched at a higher rate i.e.:

- a. \$2 match for \$1 grant funds up to \$300,000 and

b. \$3 match to \$1 grant funds up to \$450,000.

EXAMPLES:

Total amount of award requested = \$27,000; matching funds required =\$27,000

Total amount of award requested = \$275,000; matching funds required =\$550,000

Total amount of award requested = \$450,000; matching funds required =\$1,350,000

Eligibility of Matching Funds

Costs paid by the applicant with money that is on-hand, dedicated to the project.
Loan funding provided to the recipient and used toward the project.
No state or federal grant funds may be used as match.
Expenses incurred since March 11, 2021.
Cash match used toward normal day-to-day operation of your business may not be used as match.

For Application Assistance

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Food and Agriculture Development Center Network (www.foodandag.mt.gov) the Small Business Development Center Network (www.sbdc.mt.gov) and/or their local economic development organization (<https://www.eda.gov/resources/economic-development-directory/states/mt.htm>) as resources in developing their application.

These organizations can assist with the application as well as required financial projections, key financial assumptions, business and marketing plans. Templates for business plans, financial projections and financial assumptions are available on the ARPA AIG website at <https://agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants>.

How the Program Works

Application instructions and procedures are posted online at <https://agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants>.

Public and private entities and organizations, business and industry, educational institutions, local governments and individuals are eligible to submit applications for funding.

Generally, to qualify for consideration, proposals must have practical, near-term application involving new or alternative technologies, practices or organizational arrangements that will stimulate expanded agricultural development, economic activity, and employment growth.

Requirements for Applications

Business Registration Required

To be eligible to receive funding your business must be registered with the Montana Secretary of State's office (www.sos.mt.gov). If your business is not registered we encourage you to begin that process prior to submitting an application.

Request a DUNS Number

All entities wishing to apply for these funds must have a unique entity identifier (UEI). Currently, the DUNS number, which is a unique nine-character identification number provided by Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) free of charge, is the official UEI. D&B assigns UEI (DUNS) for each physical location of a business. Requesting a UEI (DUNS) takes about 10 minutes. Receiving a UEI (DUNS) takes 1–2 business days (under normal circumstances) when using the D&B web form.

Apply for a DUNS number here: <https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/>
Once you have a DUNS number you must register your business at SAM.gov

Debarment & Suspension

Organizations or individuals that are suspended, debarred, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from eligibility for covered transactions by any Federal department or agency cannot, during the period of suspension, debarment, or exclusion, receive grants or be paid from grant funds, whether under an award, subaward, or contract. Regulations published in [2 CFR part 180](#), as adopted and supplemented by USDA at [2 CFR part 417](#); describe the government-wide debarment and suspension requirements.

You are required to disclose if any of the following conditions apply to Subrecipient or principals, including all key grant management personnel:

- Within the 3-year period preceding the application, the Applicant or its principals have been convicted of, or had a civil judgment rendered against them, for:
 - fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (Federal, State, or local) transaction or contract under a public transaction;
 - violation of a Federal or State antitrust statute;
 - embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification, or destruction of records; or
 - false statements or receipt of stolen property.
- The Applicant or its principals are presently indicted or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity (Federal, State, or local) with commission of any of the offenses enumerated above.
- Within a 3-year period preceding the application, the Applicant or its principals had any public transaction (Federal, State, or local) terminated for cause or default.

A variety of “lower-tier” covered transactions are also subject to these requirements. Contracts (including individual consultants) under grants (where the contract requires the provision of goods or services that will equal or exceed \$25,000) and all subawards also are subject to these suspension and debarment rules. The requirements of [Subpart C of 2 CFR part 180](#) provide Subrecipient’s responsibilities when entering into a lower-tier transaction.

Delinquency on Federal Debt

Any organization or individual that is indebted to the United States and has a judgment lien filed against it for a debt to the United States, is ineligible to receive a Federal grant. Applicants are required to inform MDA if they are delinquent on any Federal debt. If an applicant discloses a delinquency, MDA may not award a grant until the debt is satisfied or satisfactory arrangements are made with the agency to which the debt is owed.

Anyone who has been judged to be in default on a Federal debt and who has had a judgment lien filed against him or her should not be a participant in an application for a grant until the judgment is paid in full or is otherwise satisfied. No funds may be re-budgeted following an award to pay such an individual. MDA will disallow costs charged to awards that provide funds to individuals in violation of this requirement.

Past Performance

An applicant may be removed from competition in the screening stage if they previously received funding from MDA and failed to adequately deliver on the conditions of that funding. Failure to perform may include, but is not limited to:

- Inability to responsibly manage funds
- Inability to adhere to reporting requirements
- Failure to provide agreed upon deliverables

Personal Guarantee Required

Recipients of ARPA AIG grant are required to name a personal guarantee, unless otherwise specified. This is the person to guarantee that the terms of the grant will be met at the risk of personal and financial responsibility.

How Projects are Selected

Pre-Application/Concept Paper

The first step in the application process will be the submission of a Concept paper. Concept papers are intended to briefly outline the applicant's proposal prior to the submittal of a full application. All concept papers must be submitted at: <https://mt.amplifund.com/Public/Opportunities/Details/25baf510-781c-469f-bf7c-018f9bc651c8>. Applications received outside of the Amplifund system will not be considered

A panel of reviewers will be assembled by Montana Department of Agriculture to review Concept papers and select those showing the greatest potential to impact Montana's agriculture economy.

Applicants selected from the Concept paper phase will be asked to complete a full application.

Full application

Applicants reaching the full application phase will be sent a link to the [Amplifund](#) system to fill out the application and upload additional materials. Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact a the Food and Agriculture Development Center Network (www.foodandag.mt.gov) the Small Business Development Center Network (www.sbdc.mt.gov) and/or their local economic development organization (<https://www.eda.gov/resources/economic-development-directory/states/mt.htm>) as resources in developing their application.

Selection Criteria

Selection of successful projects is a competitive process. All applications will be evaluated based on the degree to which each application addresses the General Application Review Criteria for funding listed in Attachment A.

In addition, all proposals must include sufficient information to allow the above factors to be judged. This includes providing documentation of adequate cash matching funds to complete the project. Only those proposals that furnish complete information will be considered for evaluation.

No partial or incomplete proposals will be considered.

Scoring

Applications will be reviewed and ranked on a scale from low (1) to high (6) funding priority.

Priority ranking will be based on the below listed considerations (defined in the General Application Review Criteria for funding listed in Attachment A).

- Basic Business Considerations
- Agriculture Impact
- Economic Impact
- Potential for Success
- Innovation/Originality
- Geographic Considerations

Award Process

Applicants selected for funding will be notified approximately two weeks after decisions are finalized. If the funding award is accepted by the applicant, a contract will be developed issued to define all project terms, conditions and responsibilities of the applicant. The contract will clarify all legal patents and proprietary rights that will result from the proposed activity and will incorporate the successful application among its provisions. Once the contract is reviewed and signed by all applicable parties, the recipient will be able to request reimbursement for eligible costs incurred as outlined by the terms of the funding award.

Selected projects must comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, licensing and regulations for funds to be awarded. Evidence of such compliance may be required before the grant or loan check is issued.

Applications not selected to continue the application process will be notified in writing within 30 days.

Reporting Requirements for Funded Projects

Reporting is a condition of receiving program funding. Reporting is completed online and the Department reserves the right to determine the extent of reporting requirements, subject to modification over the course of the project. Interim reporting requirements will be based on the cost, duration and nature of the project. Typically, award recipients are required to submit completed semi-annual report forms that address both the project activities and expenditures for the preceding six (6) months. Also, recipients are required to submit a completed final report form that summarizes the impacts of the project. The Department and staff will be responsible for monitoring each funded project.

Other Considerations

Ownership and Publication of Materials

All information and materials generated by the proposed activity may become the joint property of the State of Montana and the recipient. The award recipient will retain the right to utilize, reprint and distribute all said information and materials.

Liability

The Department will not be held liable for any costs incurred by any firm for work performed in the preparation of and production of a proposal or for any works performed prior to the formal execution of a contract.

Confidentiality

All written materials developed for the project as a result of a grant and /or documents submitted to the Department, shall be considered public except any information in which there is a privacy interest and that interest and the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure of the personal, financial, and business information contained therein. If an applicant/funding recipient deems a document to be confidential, please contact program staff to discuss.

Requests for Reconsideration

Applicants who wish to have the results of Screening or Evaluation reconsidered may make such request based on substantive issues of fact concerning bias, discrimination, conflicts of interest and/or non-compliance with procedures described in this Funding Notice.

The request for reconsideration must be submitted in writing to the Department of Agriculture Grants Manager within 7 days following notification of the Screening or Evaluation results.

Requests for reconsideration must describe the substantive fact(s) concerning bias, discrimination, conflict of interest, or noncompliance that affected the screening or evaluation of their proposal.

MDA Legal Counsel and/or their designee will review the request for reconsideration to determine whether the claims made are substantiated and likely to have resulted in an inaccurate, inconsistent or unfair assessment of their proposal.

The applicant will be notified of the results of Legal Counsel's review within 7 days of the receipt of their request.

Should MDA Legal Counsel find that claims are substantiated, all application materials and the accompanying request for reconsideration will be provided to the Director of Montana Department of Agriculture.

Attachment A – General Application Review Guidelines

General Application Review Guidelines

The following are general guidelines used by application reviewers:

Scoring #	Funding Priority	
1	Low	Shows significant deficiencies. Does not demonstrate a need for the project or does not provide a compelling plan to address a need. Does not show the ability to execute the proposed plan
2		
3	Medium	Demonstrates a need and a plan to address the need. Responds to all questions.
4		
5	High	Illustrates and meets a compelling need in the State and demonstrates the ability to execute a high quality project
6		

Basic business considerations

- Does the applicant completely and clearly address knowledge of the industry and barriers to entry that may exist?
- Does the applicant demonstrate basic understanding of the laws and regulations of the business considered
 - Land, lease, rail access issues addressed as applicable
 - Food safety and/or certification requirements (HACCP, GAP)
 - Contacted County Sanitarian, Department of Livestock, Department of Environmental Quality, as applicable
- Are all necessary agreements in place? If not, is there a reasonable plan to secure within a timeframe to allow the project to move forward as scheduled?

Level of Impact to Montana Agriculture relatively sufficient for level of investment

- Did applicant completely and clearly address the level of agricultural impact of their project?
- Does the applicant, or will they potentially process or add value to Montana's agricultural products.
- Specific producers identified that will be purchased from (if applicable)?
- Relative amount of value added to Montana's agricultural products as a result of the proposed project
 - Example – project using 10 lbs of Montana-grown produce would likely be less impactful than a project using 10,000 lbs of Montana-grown produce
 - Example – project using 1,000 lbs of meat requesting \$10,000 would likely be more impactful than a project using 1,000 lbs of meat requesting \$50,000

Level of Economic Impact relatively sufficient for level of investment

- Did applicant completely and clearly address the level of economic impact of their project?
- The potential job creation/retention as a result of the activity relatively sufficient for investment
- Projected level of income for owners and employees
- Project will be significantly profitable within a few years
- Amount of hard assets/infrastructure placed in the state
- Has project received program funding previously?
- Was previously funded project successful? If yes:
 - Did previously funded project create jobs and agricultural impact as projected?
 - Was prior reporting completed in a timely manner?
 - Was prior repayment timely if applicable?
 - Is new project going to significantly create additional economic impact?

Potential for the proposed activity to provide for agricultural/economic development success

- Stage of planning/business life cycle sufficient for immediate investment
- Project has the prospects for commercial success given current personnel, experience and resources of the applicant
 - Are financial projections and key financial assumptions well prepared?
 - Are cashflow projections positive & reasonable?
 - Sales projections reasonable and profitable?
 - Provide reasonable financial benefit to owners to ensure active engagement in project and ongoing business entity?
- Other financial investments needed to complete the project are secured or will be secured in the near term
 - Financial Investors have been identified, secured or will be secured within near term
- Project readiness to proceed immediately upon notification of award (proper licenses, trained staff, and various permits already in place for example)
- Project has the management structure to allow the Department to reasonably conclude that the applicant will comply with ongoing reporting, repayment and monitoring activities.

Innovation/Project Originality

- Does project assist the development of:
 - Innovative agricultural business?
 - Organizational improvements?
 - The commercialization and marketing of new agricultural products?

Geographic considerations

- What impact would the project have on the local community & greater geographic region?
 - A project in a small rural community may be more impactful than the same project in a larger community.
- Local participation and commitment demonstrated with matching funds?

Attachment B – Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) **Match** – Match can be counted from March 11, 2021
 - **Types and make up of match** – Please reference the program guidelines. Below is a list of some examples of how match can be proposed. It is not all inclusive, but encompasses most of the ways that match could be requested.
- 2) **Will partial awards be considered?** Yes.
- 3) **If I am awarded funds may I request reimbursement before matching funds are spent?** No, funds will not be disbursed until it is demonstrated that matching funds are in place.
- 4) **If I am awarded funds, will I be sent a check right away?** No, funds are only available on a reimbursement basis. If an applicant is successful in applying for funds, an award letter and then a contract will be sent for review and signature. Once the contract is signed by both parties, the successful award recipient can submit requests for reimbursement with the required receipts, invoices or other required documentation.
- 5) **Can I spend \$20,000 and then be cut a check for \$20,000 to buy equipment with the funds?** No, funds can only be distributed on a reimbursement basis. Applicants should plan with this requirement in mind to cashflow their project activities. Reimbursement typically takes 2-3 weeks, but during high volume times can take up to 30 days to process.
- 6) **If I have match expenditure after 3/11/2021, do I have to attach all the invoices for those matching costs to the application?** Yes, it is highly recommended to attach the actual invoices or receipts for activities that are being requested to meet match requirements that have already been spent. Successful recipients will be required to submit copies of all invoices, receipts and other documentation before reimbursement is provided.
- 7) **How soon can I get funds? Reimbursement Timing** – Standard timing is 2-3 weeks for reimbursement requests. Award recipients are encouraged to submit requests for payment as soon as possible. If award recipients wait several weeks to submit claim for reimbursement, keep in mind that it will be at least 2-3 weeks after it is submitted before the Department will be able to review and complete the payment process. This is due to the volume of accounting requests the Department processes on a daily basis and the required steps of program and accounting approval required for the release of state funds.
- 8) **May we use staff at Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) as a resource in preparing our grant application?** (see answer to next question)

9) Will MDA staff review my application prior to submittal?

MDA staff involved in reviewing and managing the grant may only provide responses to applicant's technical questions with application and process compliance.

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Food and Agriculture Development Center Network (www.foodandag.mt.gov) the Small Business Development Center Network (www.sbdm.mt.gov) and/or their local economic development organization (<https://www.eda.gov/resources/economic-development-directory/states/mt.htm>) as resources in developing their application.

10) Is there a scoring system for the program?

Yes. This is addressed in the program manual. The areas of consideration are also listed in the grant manual.

11) Can we get a review of our grant before the deadline?

No applications will be reviewed before the deadline and no feedback will be provided.

12) Where is the link located to update my password?

<https://mt.amplifund.com/account/forgotpassword>

13) May in-kind funds be used for match

No, in-kind match will not be accepted on these awards.

14) Does a business need to be working with Montana commodities to be eligible to apply?

Per page three of the [ARPA AIG Guidance](#) a proposal must primarily add value to a Montana's Agricultural Products to be eligible to receive funds.

15) Is a DUNS number required for the December 15 deadline?

No, the DUNS number will only be required for recipients invited to submit a full application.

16) What should be entered in the Total Amount requested field of the application?

17) What is the required match on my grant?

- The *Total Amount of Award Requested* field should be the amount of grant funds you are requesting. This does not include match.
- The total cost of your project should be the *Total Amount of Award Requested* plus the *Match Funds Amount*.
- For matching funds, if you are requesting up to \$150,000 in grant funds you must match with an equal amount of match dollars. Requests greater than \$150,000 will be matched at a higher rate i.e.:
 - \$2 match for \$1 grant funds up to \$300,000 and
 - \$3 match to \$1 grant funds up to \$450,000.

EXAMPLES:

Total amount of award requested = \$27,000; matching funds required = \$27,000

Total amount of award requested = \$275,000; matching funds required = \$550,000

Total amount of award requested = \$450,000; matching funds required = \$1,350,000