

**Guidance for Preparing Planning Project Proposals for the  
2012 Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program**

Provided by the  
Community Food Security Coalition  
September 2011

This document was developed by the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) to help Community Food Projects (CFP) grant applicants understand the Planning Projects requirements and expectations, and develop appropriate submissions.

The CFSC's role is to help applicants develop more effective proposals based on our experiences with the CFP program and interpretations of the Request for Applications (RFA). We have done our best to assure the accuracy of the information provided, including verifying information with staff of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). However, this Guidance does not represent official USDA policy, nor is it a substitute for guidelines from NIFA concerning the CFP Program.

Please use this guide only in conjunction with the Community Food Projects Fiscal Year 2012 RFA, and consult that RFA for complete instructions for submission of a Planning Projects proposal. The RFA is available at:

<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>.

Companion Guidance: For additional guidance with preparing a full CFP proposal, see the Community Food Projects Planning Guide, also posted on the CFSC website at:

[http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfp\\_help.html#cfp\\_guide](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfp_help.html#cfp_guide).

**1. Basic information**

For 2012, the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFPCGP) again includes an opportunity to submit proposals for stand-alone Planning Projects (PP). The maximum funding amount per project is \$25,000. In recent years, about half of the applications submitted for Planning Projects have been funded.

**2. RFA language specifications for Planning Projects**

The RFA includes the following language concerning Planning Project grants on page 6:

*The purpose of a Planning Project (PP) is to complete a plan toward the improvement of community food security in keeping with the primary goals of the CFPCGP. PPs are to focus on a defined community and describe in detail the activities and outcomes of the planning activity. Preference will be given to PPs designed to plan for:*

- (i) *Connections between two or more sectors of the food system;*
- (ii) *The development of entrepreneurial projects;*
- (iii) *Innovative connections between the for-profit and nonprofit food sectors; and/or*
- (iv) *Long-term activities and multi-system, interagency approaches with collaborations from multiple stakeholders that build the long-term capacity of communities to address the food and agricultural problems of the community, such as food policy councils and food planning associations.*

*Examples of PP projects may include, but are not limited to, community food assessments, coordination of collaboration development, GIS analysis, food sovereignty study, farm-to-institution exploration, and other projects.*

### **3. Types of Planning Projects**

Planning projects offer a unique opportunity for some communities and organizations that was not previously available through regular CFP proposals; that is, to receive a limited amount of funding exclusively for planning types of activities. The program emphasizes Planning Projects that engage low-income residents in the process, carry out community-based assessments, and refine a planning perspective by determining the overall idea, the partners, and multi-sector collaborations. Projects should have inclusive organizing processes even at the initial stages of CFP project development.

- A. Broad-based community food planning not linked to a pre-defined Community Food Project.

One example of this is a community food assessment (CFA), which involves members of a community working together to examine conditions, needs, assets, and opportunities for improving community food security. Another example of community food planning is in policy-making, when a group of stakeholders is considering a food policy council (FPC) or a similar type of coalition to develop and advance a policy or advocacy agenda to improve food security.

- B. Project-linked planning to develop or improve the design and implementation of an emerging Community Food Project.

In this situation, a planning process is already underway, but the organizers and their partners have not figured out the project in sufficient detail to develop a regular CFP grant proposal. They may not have fully heard from the community to be served or identified which constituencies will participate. They may not have lined up all the players, agreed to the goals or desired outcomes, determined how to carry it out, secured

matching funds, and other necessary steps. In this case, some additional time and resources could help ensure that the project is well planned, and able to compete successfully for a regular CFP grant.

These efforts can be either “open-ended” or “focused” endeavors. With an “open-ended” CFA, for example, the process of inquiry starts broadly and then gets narrowed down. By contrast, a more “focused” CFA or FPC starts with a more defined agenda that expedites planning and progress toward action. For example, the community members have decided that local food production is a priority, but they still need to do more work to determine the who, what, where, and how of it all.

#### **4. Planning Project Proposal Options**

Applicants should be aware of the “one-time infusion” provision when applying for Planning Projects. This is an extremely important consideration in determining whether to opt for a Planning Project grant. The RFA states in several places that: *“The purpose of the CFP is to support the development of projects with a one-time infusion of Federal dollars to make such projects self-sustaining.”* Therefore, if an award is made for a Planning Project, the applicant cannot subsequently receive a regular CFP grant for the same initiative. A regular CFP grant may follow-up on priorities identified through the implementation of a Planning Project but may not be funded to repeat the planning process itself.

Example: A community wants to develop a project that involves community gardens, a community kitchen, some local marketing, and nutrition education classes. The specifics are vague. The organizers plan to submit a Planning Project application to get the nuts and bolts worked out, and then submit a full proposal for the next round of funding. Unfortunately, this could be considered as funding the same initiative twice. The Planning Project must start out much less focused if submission of a regular CFP proposal based on its outcomes is anticipated in the future.

##### **A. Planning Project grants for project-linked planning**

This type of planning is done when a community is still in the initial stages of planning a specific project. There may be some good initial ideas proposed, but most of the work to prepare a solid plan is yet to be carried out. The potential applicant may need to find more partners, get more community input, work out priorities and logistics, etc. In this situation, a PP grant can support such work for a year or so. Assuming the intention is to submit a regular proposal at a later point, an important factor to consider is that the Planning Project proposal should not be that carefully defined in terms of the resulting initiative. There may indeed be connections between an original PP grant and a subsequent regular CFP proposal, but they must be sufficiently different that the legislative intent of a “one-time infusion” is maintained.

## B. Planning as part of a regular CFP proposal

An alternative for project organizers who already have a somewhat well-defined project idea is to incorporate a planning phase into a regular CFP proposal. This is allowed and, in fact, encouraged by program guidelines. For example, an applicant may submit a three-year application, with the first six to twelve months used to complete some of the critical planning aspects. This assumes that the core ideas and players are already in place, as are the designated target populations, and matching funds. However, some design and implementation pieces still need to be completed and this would be carried out in the initial planning phase of the overall proposal. Using this approach, the applicant can finish the planning phase up front and also have funding available to implement the CFP project in the remaining time.

Some regular CFP applications in recent years have even incorporated a community food assessment, policy planning, or similar initiatives. In such proposals, these planning initiatives need to be much more focused – i.e., linked to the rest of the project – so as to be part of an integrated project. This planning will also need to be completed in a tighter time frame that makes sense within an overall project (e.g., a few months or at most a year). This approach is not appropriate for a more open-ended and less-defined planning effort.

## C. Stand-alone assessment and planning initiatives

Planning Project proposals can be very appropriate for stand-alone community food assessments and food policy initiatives. NIFA CFP staff has indicated that both “open” or broad-based and more focused types of food planning initiatives are appropriate to this type of funding. A follow-up regular CFP proposal is not necessarily the outcome of these Planning Projects. However, if the outcomes of the community food planning process include new initiatives, they can be incorporated into a regular CFP proposal that is eligible for funding consideration.

## 5. Planning Project Narrative

Because the Planning Project narrative is limited to ten pages, applicants are advised to follow the recommended page length parameters included in the RFA. In addition, use of outcome language is strongly encouraged. Guidance on how to incorporate outcome language and additional perspectives on preparing a CFP narrative are provided in CFSC’s 2012 CFP Planning Guide, also posted on the Coalition’s website.

## 6. Other Important Considerations

In deciding whether to submit for a Planning Project versus a regular CFP grant,

applicants should consider the following points:

- **Funding level:** Planning Project grant awards have a \$25,000 limit, no matter how long they last. By comparison, a regular CFP application may request up to \$300,000.
- **Match:** Both PP and regular CFP grants must be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis with non-federal resources. However, applicants can usually assume that the value of the time and effort contributed by other stakeholders involved in the planning process will make it possible to match this level. Matching funds must be documented in a PP application.
- **One-time infusion:** PP grants are for a one-time initiative. If a subsequent regular CFP proposal is expected to result from it, such a proposal must be sufficiently distinct from the content and focus of any funded PP work plan. PP grants should be used for more initial planning or organizing, or for a standalone planning effort that will not necessarily result in a full CFP proposal later on.
- **CFP review criteria:** In many respects, Planning Project and regular CFP applications are expected to address similar CFP priorities. A key distinction for Planning Project grants is in the process that is to be incorporated; PPs should be designed to involve the community in the planning process, for including low-income constituents is important. Some type of community food assessment is similarly expected as part of this effort – examining conditions, needs, opportunities, assets – whether it is open-ended or more focused in its design.
- **Time frames:** Planning Project grants can be proposed for a few months or for up to three years. If an applicant expects that a full CFP proposal will be an outcome, formal implementation schedules are important. CFP grants are usually not awarded until late summer, with a likely start date of October 1. Consequently, the next RFA may be out before a newly-funded Planning Project has time to get off the ground. So unless a very short-term planning initiative is anticipated, an application for a regular CFP may have to wait another year.
- **Effort:** The application process for a Planning Project grant is almost the same as that for a regular CFP proposal, though much less money is at stake.

## **7. Multiple submissions**

An applicant may submit more than one proposal – both a Planning Project and a regular CFP application – as long as they are for different purposes. Remember, however, that the application process is about as involved for either type of proposal, so applicants considering two submissions should be sure they have adequate time to organize, prepare, complete, and submit both applications.

## **8. Summary perspectives**

Planning Project grants are really designed to support community assessment and comprehensive planning around community needs, and to engage low-income stakeholders in the process. They are most appropriate for more early-stage community food security planning – be it for assessments, policy, or more targeted food security initiatives. They are not really designed to help an organization or a collaboration of groups plan a regular Community Food Project independent of these processes. This type of planning can be done as part of a regular proposal, as mentioned above.

PP funds can provide some seed money to develop great ideas and promote better planning of CFP projects – something that is vital to initiatives that purport to be successful and sustainable. Although Planning Projects are funded at much lower levels than regular CFP awards, they can involve about the same amount of work to prepare. Still, they are a welcome vehicle to promote community organizing, and to facilitate significant involvement of low-income community members in food projects.