

2017 Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant Program CFDA#10.170

Request for Proposals (RFP) and Grant Manual

This packet includes:

- General grant information
- Application instructions and requirements
- Grant award process and reporting requirements
- Scoring criteria/Evaluator score sheet

Apply online at:

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx>

Application Due Date:

4:00 pm CST, Thursday, April 27, 2017. Late proposals will not be accepted. All applicants will receive confirmation when we receive their application.

Questions/Contact:

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651-201-6500

We will post responses to all questions on the FAQ section of the Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant website:
<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty/scgfaqs.aspx>.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Request for Proposals (RFP) and Grant Manual	1
Table of Contents	2
2017 Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant Program	3
General Information	3
A. Background	3
B. Available Funds and Project Duration	3
C. Eligible Projects – Funding Priorities	4
D. Eligible Specialty Crops	4
E. Eligible Applicants	4
F. Eligible Expenses	5
G. Ineligible Project Expenses	5
H. General Compliance	6
I. Record Requirements	6
J. Monitoring	6
K. Liability	6
L. Open Records	6
M. Reporting Executive Compensation	7
N. Other Considerations	7
O. Amendments	7
P. Bidding Requirements	8
Q. Audits	8
R. Financial Review Process	8
Application Instructions and Requirements	9
A. Required Application Format	9
B. Application Requirements	9
Grant Awards Process and Reporting	15
A. How We Evaluate Applications	15
B. Notification of Award	15
C. Award Agreement and Payment	15
D. Reporting Requirements & Compliance	15
Minnesota 2017 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Application Evaluation Criteria	16

2017 Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

General Information

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is announcing a competitive solicitation process to award funds anticipated to be granted from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG), for projects that enhance the competitiveness of Minnesota's specialty crop industries. Applications that are selected for funding will be included with Minnesota's state plan which is submitted to USDA for final approval.

A. Background

The USDA distributes block grant funds to state departments of agriculture, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

B. Available Funds and Project Duration

The MDA will award grants for projects that enhance the competitiveness of Minnesota specialty crops in local, regional, national and export markets. The MDA distributes the bulk of our block grant through a competitive review process, which starts with this RFP. An outside panel of people who have knowledge and experience producing, researching and marketing specialty crops will review and rank applications for funding under this RFP. We will award grants of \$10,000 to 100,000 for projects that can last up to two years and eight months. Applications that build on a previously funded SCBG project are allowed. In such cases, you must clearly indicate how the project complements previous work.

Organizations may submit more than one application. Any organization that submits or endorses multiple applications may be asked to prioritize those projects. Projects may be submitted by a single organization or for collaborative specialty crop research and development efforts.

RFP released	February 2017
Applications due to the MDA	April 27, 2017, 4:00 pm CST
Grant Review Process	May 2017
MDA notifies successful applicants	May 2017
MDA submits state plan to USDA	June 2017
USDA approval (anticipated)	September 2017
MDA issues approval letters to successful applicants/initiates contracting	October–November 2017
Project work can start (anticipated)	November–December 2017
Projects must conclude no later than	September 29, 2020

C. Eligible Projects – Funding Priorities

To be eligible, project(s) must solely enhance the competitiveness of a Minnesota specialty crop, as defined by the USDA. These are not business startup or farm expansion grants, and there are significant restrictions on the use of SCBG funds for equipment purchase. You can find a list of projects funded in the previous year at <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty/scgawardees.aspx>. Projects must include an outreach plan to share results with a broad audience that could benefit from the information.

USDA and the MDA encourage projects that benefit beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, and projects that address problems or opportunities that cross state boundaries (multi-state). A socially disadvantaged group is one whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, and/or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

MDA SCBG Funding Priorities (extra points awarded for projects that fit at least one):

- Innovation in production, aggregation, processing, packaging
- Improving operational efficiency, reducing costs or other barriers, and increasing access to distribution systems and new markets for specialty crops
- Increasing the demand for and supply of locally produced specialty crops
- Pest and disease control, and variety improvement
- Research on practices that encourage conservation and environmental stewardship in specialty crop production (including organic)

D. Eligible Specialty Crops

The Farm Bill defined specialty crops as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture.” You can find a more comprehensive list of eligible and ineligible specialty crops at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop>.

E. Eligible Applicants

Nonprofit organizations, producer organizations, government agencies, universities, and other organizations involved in Minnesota agriculture are eligible to apply. Projects proposed by individual producers, for-profit businesses, or commercial entities are only eligible only if they demonstrate a significant benefit to the specialty crop industry (or a segment of the industry). Each project must include a plan to share results with a wider audience of beneficiaries. Proposals may involve collaborations or partnerships between producers, industry, academia or agricultural organizations. Applicants may cooperate with any public or private organization.

All applicants must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. This is a nine-digit number established and assigned by Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. (D&B) to uniquely identify business entities (it is not your EIN). You can get or update a DUNS number by calling 866-705-5711 or at <https://iupdate.dnb.com/iUpdate/>.

All applicants must also register with the federal System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) and provide updates as needed. Registering allows you to do business with the Federal government and ensures that federal funds are not paid to organizations that that have been suspended or disbarred.

F. Eligible Expenses

All costs must be associated with project activities that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. State, local or Indian tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities can find further guidance on cost principles in [2 CFR 200 Subpart E](#). For-profit organizations can find further guidance in [48 CFR Subpart 31.2](#). You can also contact the SCBG Program Administrator with questions about expense-related questions.

Eligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Compensation for personnel services
 - » Salaries, wages and fringe benefits
- Consultant services or subcontractors
 - » Costs of professional and consultant services rendered by persons who are members of a particular profession or possess a special skill
- Materials and supplies
 - » Costs incurred for materials, supplies, and fabricated parts necessary to carry out the grant project. Purchased materials and supplies must be charged at their actual prices, net of applicable credits.
- Equipment
 - » Lease/rental of general purpose equipment
 - » Special purpose equipment (with prior USDA approval).
 - » Capital expenditures for special purpose equipment (with prior USDA approval)
- Travel Costs
 - » Expenses for airfare, lodging, meals, mileage, parking, etc. are allowable if directly related-to, and necessary-for grant activities, and accounted-for in the budget. Grantees must follow State of Minnesota contractual cost limits for travel. Other State agencies and educational institutions should contact the SCBG Program Administrator for details on travel cost-accounting.
- Health and Nutrition messaging – when health and nutrition information complies with regulations and policies of the Federal Trade Commission and US Food and Drug Administration
- Other miscellaneous costs
 - » e.g., telephone, meetings, publications, etc.

G. Ineligible Project Expenses

Ineligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Costs incurred prior to award
- Costs associated with preparing the application
- Capital expenditures for general purpose equipment, buildings, and land
- Construction and renovation of buildings and structures
- Bad debt
- Lobbying, political and other governmental activities
- Entertainment and alcohol
 - » Alcoholic beverages expenses are allowed only when the costs are associated with enhancing the competitiveness of wine grapes and prior approval is given from the MDA.
 - » No amusement, diversion, or social activity costs are allowed (such as tickets to shows or sports events, or meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, or gratuities connected with attending entertainment events)

- Indirect costs (administrative support)
- Tuition for grantees
- Contributions to a contingency reserve or any similar provision
- Fines, penalties, damages, and other settlements resulting from violations (or alleged violations) of, or failure to comply with, Federal, State, local, or Indian tribal laws and regulations
- Organized fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions – regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used
- Costs of goods or services for personal use of the employees – regardless of whether the cost is reported as taxable income to the employees
- Information technology systems that have a useful life of more than one year and that exceed \$5,000
- Costs of investment counsel and staff and other expenses incurred to enhance income from investments
- Political activities in accordance with provisions of the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. 1501-1508 and 7324-7326)

H. General Compliance

All grant recipients must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and the terms of the grant award. You can more find information about specific federal requirements at [2 CFR 200](#). Each applicant is responsible for identifying and complying with all circulars relevant your organization-type.

I. Record Requirements

Grantees must set up and maintain a project file that contains all records of correspondence with MDA, receipts, invoices and copies of all reports and documents associated with the project. This file and any other data or other records relating to the project must be retained for a period of three years after MDA submits the final report to USDA. Upon request, the grantee shall produce a legible copy of any or all such records.

J. Monitoring

MDA may monitor grantees to ensure that work is progressing within the required time frame and that fiscal procedures are followed accurately and appropriately. Monitoring can include review of financial and program information (called “desk audits”), as well as site visits.

K. Liability

The MDA will not be held liable for any costs incurred by any firm for work performed in the preparation and production of a proposal, nor for any work performed prior to the formal execution of the contract.

L. Open Records

While the proposals are being received and reviewed, only people with a need to access your data in support of your 2017 Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant proposal will have the authority to access the data you provide here unless you give the MDA informed consent to release the data, a court orders the release of the data, or a legislative auditor requests to review the data.

After all the proposals have been reviewed and the grantees determined, all the information in the proposal will become public data unless otherwise protected by law.

M. Reporting Executive Compensation

If you meet both of the criteria listed below, upon receipt of your grant contract, you will be required to report the names and total compensation of each of the five most highly compensated executives of your organization/business for the preceding completed fiscal year.

In your preceding fiscal year, your entity received

- 80 percent or more of the organization's annual gross revenues come from Federal procurement contracts (and subcontracts) and Federal financial assistance subject to the Transparency Act, as defined at 2 CFR 170.320; and
- \$25,000,000 or more in annual gross revenues from Federal procurement contracts (and subcontracts), and Federal financial assistance subject to the Transparency Act (and sub-awards).

The public does not have access to this information about the compensation of executives.

N. Other Considerations

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP become the property of MDA. MDA reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, otherwise use, and to authorize others to use materials produced under this grant agreement.

MDA also reserves the right to:

- Post funded proposals or final reports to the MDA website
- Reject any or all proposals received
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in proposals received after prior notification and agreement of applicant
- Use any or all ideas submitted unless those ideas are covered by legal patent or proprietary rights
- Clarify the scope of this program, within the RFP requirement and with appropriate notice to potential applicants, to best serve the interests of the State of Minnesota
- Amend program specifications after their release, with appropriate written notice to potential applicants
- Require a good faith effort on the part of the project sponsor to work with MDA subsequent to project completion to develop or implement project results
- Withhold any payments when contract conditions are not met

O. Amendments

We realize that some changes may become necessary during the course of your project. Please contact the MDA Grants Administrator with any project changes. Changes that alter the scope of a project require prior approval by the MDA and USDA.

P. Bidding Requirements

For Non-governmental organizations:

- Any services and/or materials that are expected to cost \$25,000 or more must undergo a formal notice and bidding process. Grantees must include supporting documentation about this process in their financial records.
- Any services and/or materials that are expected to cost between \$10,000 and \$24,999 must be scoped out in writing and offered to a minimum of three (3) bidders. Grantees must include supporting documentation about this process in their financial records.
- Any services and/or materials that are expected to cost between \$5,000 and \$9,999 must be competitively based on a minimum of three (3) verbal quotes. Grantees must include supporting documentation about this process in their financial records.

For Municipalities:

- If the amount of the contract is estimated to exceed \$100,000, the grantee must conduct a formal notice and bidding process in which sealed bids are solicited by public notice.
- If the amount of the contract is estimated to exceed \$25,000 but not \$100,000 the grantee does not have to conduct a competitive bidding process. Instead, they can execute a subcontract either upon sealed bids or by direct negotiation after obtaining two or more quotations for the purchase or sale when possible. Grantees must keep all quotations on file for a period of at least one year after receipt thereof.
- If the amount of the contract is estimated to be \$25,000 or less, the contract may be made either upon quotation or in the open market, in the discretion of the governing body. If the contract is made upon quotation it shall be based, so far as practicable, on at least two quotations which shall be kept on file for a period of at least one year after their receipt.

Q. Audits

Per [Minn. Stat. §16B.98 Subd. 8](#), the grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

R. Financial Review Process

All Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) applying for grants from the State of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to a grant award made of \$25,000 or more. In order to comply with State Policy on the [Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations](#), please submit one of the following documents, as appropriate, with your application. Please note this requirement applies only to applicants that are nongovernmental organizations.

Applicant Organization's Total Annual Revenue	What to submit
Less than \$50,000 (or if the organization has not been in existence long enough to have completed an IRS Form 990)	The organization's most recent board-approved financial statement.
Between \$50,001 and \$750,000	Most recent IRS Form 990
More than \$750,000	Most recent certified financial audit

Application Instructions & Requirements

A. Required Application Format

You must submit your application using the MDA's online application portal. You will find a link to it at <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/specialty.aspx>. If you cannot access the site or have trouble with the application, please contact the SCBG Program Administrator at David.Weinand@state.mn.us or 651-201-6500.

B. Application Requirements

Items found in the MDA's Online Grants Module:

1. Project Description/Summary

Include a project summary of 250 words or less suitable for dissemination to the public. A Project Summary provides a very brief, (one sentence, if possible) description of your project. A project summary includes:

- » The applicant organization name that if awarded a grant will establish an agreement with the MDA to lead and execute the project.
- » A concise outline of the project's outcome(s).
- » A description of the general tasks to be completed during the project period to fulfill this goal.

2. Project Purpose

Clearly state the specific issue, problem, interest or need that your proposed project addresses:

- » List the objectives that this project aims to achieve.
- » Estimate the number of people who will benefit from the project (Include a one to two word descriptor, e.g., 500 consumers, 20 producers.)
- » If the project is a continuation of a previously approved SCBG project:
- » Describe how this project will differ from and build on previous efforts.
- » Provide a summary (3-5 sentences) of the outcomes of the previous efforts.
- » Provide lessons learned on potential project improvements:
- » What did you learn from the previous project, including potential improvements?
- » How are you incorporating these lessons improvements into the project you are proposing now?
- » Describe the likelihood that this project will become self-sustaining and not indefinitely depend grant funds.
- » Indicate whether you or your partners have submitted this project (or one that is very similar) to another grant program. If you have, identify the funding source.

3. External Project Support

Project Commitment

Provide letters of commitment from all project partners and collaborators. A partner/partnership is a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project. A collaborator is a person or organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project, but is not immediately connected to the management of the project. Only letters that are signed and dated and provided prior to MDA's application deadline will be considered by grant reviewers.

Letters of Support

Letters of support from specialty crop growers and other non-partner/collaborator stakeholders are also encouraged. These must be submitted with the application. Only letters that are signed and dated and provided prior to MDA's application deadline will be considered by grant reviewers.

4. Expected Measurable Outcomes

Please read carefully.

Each application must include at least one of the following eight outcomes, and at least one of the indicators listed underneath the selected outcome. If there are multiple sub-indicators listed under the indicator, select at least one. If the indicator(s) are not relevant to the project, you can develop a project-specific indicator(s) that is subject to approval by USDA. You will have to report on each indicator(s) in annual and final reports.

- **Outcome 1:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased sales (required for marketing projects).
 - * Indicator: Sales increased from \$_____ to \$_____ and by _____ percent, as a result of marketing and/or promotion activities.
 - An established baseline of sales in dollars must already exist. If it does not, then one of the objectives of your project must be to determine a baseline.

- **Outcome 2:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased consumption.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

 - * Of the [total number] of children and youth reached,
 - The number that gained knowledge about eating more specialty crops
 - The number that reported an intention to eat more specialty crops
 - The number that reporting eating more specialty crops
 - * Of the [total number] of adults reached,
 - The number that gained knowledge about eating more specialty crops
 - The number that reported an intention to eat more specialty crops
 - The number that reported eating more specialty crops
 - * Number of new and improved technologies and processes to enhance the nutritional value and consumer acceptance of specialty crops (excluding patents)
 - * Number of new specialty crops and/or specialty crop products introduced to consumers

- **Outcome 3:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased access and awareness.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

 - * Of the [total number] of consumers or wholesale buyers reached,
 - The number that gained knowledge about how to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - The number that reported an intention to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - The number that reported supplementing their diets with specialty crops that they produced/preserved/obtained/prepared
 - * Of the [total number] of individuals (culinary professionals, institutional kitchens, specialty crop entrepreneurs such as kitchen incubators/shared-use kitchens, etc.) reached,
 - The number that gained knowledge about how to access/produce/prepare/preserve specialty crops
 - The number that reported an intention to access/produce/prepare/preserve/specialty crops
 - The number that reported supplementing their diets with specialty crops that they produced/prepared/preserved/obtained

- * Number of existing delivery systems/access points of those reached that expanded and/or improved offerings of specialty crops:
 - farmers markets
 - produce at corner stores
 - school food programs and other food options (vending machines, school events, etc.)
 - grocery stores
 - wholesale markets
 - food hubs that process, aggregate, distribute, or store specialty crops
 - home improvement centers with lawn and garden centers
 - lawn and garden centers
 - other systems/access points, not noted
 - total (if not reported above)
- * Number of new delivery systems/access points offering specialty crops:
 - farmers markets
 - produce at corner stores
 - school food programs and other food options (vending machines, school events, etc.)
 - grocery stores
 - wholesale markets
 - food hubs that process, aggregate, distribute, or store specialty crops
 - home improvement centers with lawn and garden centers
 - lawn and garden centers
 - other systems/access points, not noted
 - total (if not reported above)
- **Outcome 4:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through greater capacity of sustainable practices of specialty crop production resulting in increased yield, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and/or conservation of resources.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

- * Numbers of plant/seed releases (i.e., drought-tolerant, organic, enhanced nutritional composition, etc.)
- * Adoption of best practices and technologies resulting in increased yields, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and conservation of resources (select at least one below):
 - Number of growers/producers indicating adoption of recommended practices
 - Number of growers/producers reporting reduction in pesticides, fertilizer, water used/acre
 - Number of growers/producers reporting increased dollar returns per acre or reduced costs per acre
 - Number of acres in conservation tillage or acres in other best management practices
- * Number of habitat acres established and maintained for the mutual benefit of pollinators and specialty crops

- **Outcome 5:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through more sustainable, diverse, and resilient specialty crop systems.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

- * Number of new or improved innovation models (biological, economic, business, management, etc.), technologies, networks, products, processes, etc. developed for specialty crop entities including producers, processors, distributors, etc.
- * Number of innovations adopted
- * Number of specialty crop growers/producers (and other members of the specialty crop supply chain) that have increased revenue
- * Number of new diagnostic systems analyzing specialty crop pests and diseases (diagnostic systems may be labs, networks, procedures, access points, etc.)
- * Number of new diagnostic technologies available for detecting plant pests and diseases
- * Number of first responders trained in early detection and rapid response to combat plant pests and diseases
- * Number of viable technologies/processes developed or modified that will increase specialty crop distribution and/or production
- * Number of growers/producers that gained knowledge about science-based tools through outreach and education programs

- **Outcome 6:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increasing the number of viable technologies to improve food safety.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

- * Number of viable technologies developed or modified for the detection and characterization of specialty crop supply contamination from foodborne threats
- * Number of viable prevention, control and intervention strategies for all specialty crop production scales for foodborne threats along the production continuum
- * Number of individuals who learn about prevention, detection, control, and intervention food safety practices, and number of those individuals who increase their food safety skills and knowledge
- * Number of improved prevention, detection, control, and intervention technologies
- * Number of reported changes in prevention, detection, control, and intervention strategies

- **Outcome 7:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through increased understanding of the ecology of threats to food safety from microbial and chemical sources.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

- * Increased understanding of fecal indicators or pathogens
- * Increased safety of all inputs into the specialty crop chain
- * Increased understanding of the roles of humans, plants, and animals as vectors
- * Increased understanding of pre-harvest and postharvest process impacts on microbial and chemical threats
- * Number of growers or producers who obtain on-farm food safety certifications (such as Good Agricultural Practices or Good Handling Practices)

- **Outcome 8:** Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through enhancing or improving the economy as a result of specialty crop development.

Possible Indicators (you must include at least one):

- * Number of new rural careers created
- * Number of new urban careers created
- * Number of jobs maintained/created
- * Number of small businesses maintained/created
- * Increased revenue/increased savings/one-time capital purchases [in dollars]
- * Number of new beginning farmers who went into specialty crop production
- * Number of socially disadvantaged farmers who went into specialty crop production

5. Work Plan

Include the following information in this section:

- » What activities are necessary to accomplish the project objectives?
- » Include timelines for accomplishing each activity. Make sure to include the month and year the project is scheduled to begin and conclude. Also include the name or title of the responsible individual.
- » Your outreach/dissemination plan for sharing the project results.

Note: The work plan section may be in any format you choose as long as it

6. Budget Table and Narrative

This section must include a budget summary table and a detailed explanation for each item.

» Personnel

List people employed by the grantee or sub grantee to work on the project. The duties must be directly related to the project application. For each person you list, include her/his title, percent of full time equivalents (FTE), and corresponding salary.

» Fringe Benefits

Provide the rate of fringe benefits for each project participant's salary described in the personnel section.

» Equipment

For this program, equipment means items of property that have a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more. If the cost is under \$5,000, then include these items under supplies. General purpose equipment may only be rented/leased, not purchased. Special Purpose Equipment may be purchased provided that prior approval is received. It may also be rented or leased. Special Purpose means it can only be used research, scientific, or other technical activities.

» Supplies

These are items that cost less than \$5,000. This includes anything from office supplies and software to educational or field supplies. For non-typical materials and supply items, include a brief description about why you need the items for your project.

For Example:

- * Office supplies (pens, paper, toner, etc.) – \$500
- * Gardening supplies (potting soil and fertilizer) – \$500

» **Contractual**

Provide a short description of the services each contract covers and include the flat rate fee OR the total hourly rate fee for each contract. Note: federal rules may limit the hourly rate for contracts that are not specified as “flat-rate”.

- * Compensation for contractor/consultant services should be reasonable and consistent with that paid for similar services in the marketplace. Contractor/consultant rates must not exceed \$500 per eight-hour day.
- * Procurement standards for goods and services – grantees must use their own documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable State and local laws and regulations, provided that the requirements conform to applicable Federal law and the standards found in 2 CFR 200.318-326.
- * Any subcontract must be a written agreement between the grantee and the third party. The contract must, as appropriate, state:
 - * The activities to be performed;
 - * The time schedule;
 - * The policies and requirements that apply to the contractor, including those required by 2 CFR 200.326 and other terms and conditions of the grant (these may be incorporated by reference);
 - * The maximum amount of money for which the grantee may become liable to the third party under the agreement; and
 - * The cost principles to be used in determining allowable costs in the case of cost-type contracts.

7. Travel

Provide details associated with any project-related travel

8. Other

Provide a detailed description of all other direct costs such as:

- » Conferences/Meetings (including facility rental)
- » Communications – Postage, express mail, faxes, and telephone long distance charges
- » Speaker/Trainer Fees – Provide the cost per speaker and a description of the services speakers are providing
- » Publication Costs – Provide the estimated cost of printing of brochures and other program materials or page charges for scientific or technical journals
- » Data Collection – Provide the estimated cost of collecting performance data to measure the project outcome measures (unless this is included under Personnel or Contractual)

9. Project Income

Indicate the nature or source of program income (e.g. registration fees), estimated amount, and how the income will be used to further enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

10. Matching Funds (Optional)

Matching funds are not required for this program and may not confer any advantage to applicants that include them. Optional matching funds may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions for direct project related expenses. Identify the budget categories you are matching and the nature and amount of the match.

Grant Awards Process and Reporting

A. How We Evaluate Applications

All eligible applications will be reviewed by MDA staff and an external review committee. External reviewers may include growers, private industry members, university faculty or staff, public agency staff and representatives from nonprofits who have interest and expertise in specialty crops, research, food marketing and/or agricultural systems. Applications are evaluated on the merits of the proposals based on the scoring criteria listed on the last page of the RFP. Final funding decisions may include other factors such as funding priorities, total funds requested, and past performance with Specialty Crop Block Grants.

During the review process, we will notify applicants if adjustments to your scope of work and/or project budgets are requested. Proposals that are recommended by reviewers and approved by the MDA will be included in the Minnesota State Plan which will be submitted to USDA in June 2017 for approval. All applicants will be notified after the review process about whether or not their proposal was selected for submission to USDA.

B. Notification of Award

Once USDA approves Minnesota's state plan, we will notify successful applicants and send them a grant award contract agreement. We expect to be able to notify successful applicants and start writing grant contracts in early fall of 2017, with projected project start dates of November 2017.

C. Grant Award Agreement and Payment

Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, each successful applicant must sign a grant award agreement with the MDA indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks, report results, and authorizing the MDA to monitor the progress of the proposed project. MDA cannot pay for any activity/project expenses incurred before all parties have signed (executed) the agreement.

Recipients may request 10% of the grant award up front if necessary to get a project started. You must then submit requests for reimbursement at least semi-annually (but no more often than quarterly) upon approval of an itemized invoice, progress report and receipts/supporting documentation. The MDA may retain up to 25 percent of the total award pending receipt of an acceptable and timely final report, in a format specified by the MDA.

D. Reporting Requirements

The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the course of the project. All progress and final reports must be submitted in a format specified by the MDA.

a. Progress Reports

Annual reports are required for projects that last longer than one year.

b. Final Reports

You must submit a final performance report in a format designated by the MDA, within 60 days of the grant agreement end date. Report may be posted to the MDA and USDA websites in order to share project findings with Federal and State agencies and with the public.

In addition to the final project report, the MDA reserves the right to conduct a follow-up survey of funded projects in order to determine long-term impacts.

c. Reporting Compliance

Applicants who do not submit progress and annual reports on time, and/or submit incomplete reports, may be required to return previously disbursed funds to the MDA, and may be removed from consideration for future funding.

Minnesota 2017 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Application Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points
1. Quality of Proposal	
Is the project well organized and easy to understand? Has the applicant submitted all the required information?	10
2. Project Purpose	
How well does the applicant define the need for and purpose of the project? Are the objectives clear and appropriate? Is the project purpose important and timely?	15
3. Potential Impact & Commitment	
Does the project have the potential to have a positive impact on the competitiveness of a specialty crop industry/segment in Minnesota? Do stakeholders support the project? Does the project stand to impact a large number of beneficiaries?	20
4. Measurable Outcomes	
Does the project include measurable outcomes that directly support the project's purpose? Are they important to intended beneficiaries? Do they meet USDA's requirements? Is there a plan for monitoring performance toward meeting each outcome?	20
5. Work Plan	
Is the work plan complete and feasible? Is the timeline reasonable? Do the tasks relate to the project objectives and expected measurable outcomes?	10
6. Budget and Narrative	
Is the total grant amount requested reasonable and appropriate? Are line items reasonable and appropriate, including compensation/personnel rates? Does the budget narrative adequately explain the budget line items?	15
7. Funding Priority(ies) and Reaching Beginning or Socially Disadvantaged Farmers	
<p>Does the project address at least one of the MDA funding priorities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in production, aggregation, processing, packaging • Improving operational efficiency, reducing costs or other barriers, • and increasing access to distribution systems and new markets for specialty crops • Increasing the demand-for and supply-of locally produced specialty crops • Pest and disease control, and variety improvement • Research into practices that encourage conservation and environmental stewardship, (including organic) <p>Does the project make an effort to reach beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers?</p>	10
Total	100