



Technical Assistance for Rural Cooperatives Program

CDF invites qualified technical assistance providers to apply for inclusion in our Technical Assistance for Rural Cooperatives Program under CDF's USDA-funded Rural Cooperative Development Grant (RCDG) initiative.

CDF seeks experienced practitioners capable of delivering short- to mid-term technical assistance engagements that strengthen rural cooperative enterprises, businesses, and community-based economic initiatives. Engagements are designed to respond to local momentum, opportunities, and challenges across rural communities in the United States.

While this solicitation is open to a broad range of cooperative development activities, preference will be given to projects supporting food and agriculture-related enterprises and projects serving Persistent Poverty Counties.

Purpose: CDF seeks to identify and contract with experienced technical assistance providers who can support rural cooperative development and rural economic resilience. Selected partners will provide specialized assistance through time-limited engagements aligned with CDF and USDA RCDG objectives.

Eligible Geography: All activities must take place in USDA-defined rural areas. Projects or programs that are located in, or primarily benefit, USDA-designated Persistent Poverty Counties or Underserved and Economically Distressed Areas will receive bonus points during application review. Serving Persistent Poverty Counties or Underserved and Economically Distressed Areas is not a requirement for eligibility.

Eligible Organizations: This solicitation is open to:

- Cooperative Development Centers (CDCs), or
- Nonprofit organizations, mission-aligned firms, or consultants with a demonstrated track record of providing cooperative development or technical assistance in USDA-defined rural areas.

To ensure complementary coverage and avoid duplication of effort, organizations that are currently direct recipients or sub-awardees under CDF's 2025 – 2026 USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grant are not eligible to apply under this solicitation.

Eligible Activities: Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Cooperative development and startup support
- Feasibility studies and opportunity assessments
- Business planning and financial analysis
- Governance, leadership, and financial training
- Market development and value-chain support
- Convenings, workshops, or peer-learning events that strengthen rural economic ecosystems

Activity Preference: Projects that support food and agriculture-related cooperatives or enterprises will receive bonus points during evaluation but are not required.

Ineligible Activities: Housing-related activities are not eligible under this solicitation.

Award Size and Duration: Typical awards range from \$20,000–\$30,000. Engagements will last approximately 8–10 months.

Organizations must demonstrate the capacity to deliver an 8 – 10-month technical assistance engagement and to track and report outcomes aligned with CDF and USDA performance metrics.

Application Timeline:

- Application opens: January 23
- Application closes: February 23
- Questions accepted through: February 13

All questions and answers will be posted publicly on the CDF website.

Performance Metrics and Evaluation: Applicants must describe how proposed activities will contribute to CDF's USDA RCDG performance measures, which include:

- Number of rural groups assisted
- Number of cooperatives assisted
- Number of mutually owned businesses assisted
- Number of businesses assisted
- Number of business plans developed
- Number of feasibility studies completed
- Number of cooperatives incorporated

- Number of conferences or convenings held
- Number of economic stabilization or avoided financial loss

Depending on the project, applicants need not have targets for all metrics.

Evaluation Criteria: Applications will be evaluated based on:

- Alignment with rural economic and cooperative development goals
- Anticipated contribution to CDF and USDA performance metrics
- Experience working in rural communities
- Quality, feasibility, and clarity of the proposed workplan
- Cost effectiveness
- Capacity to track, document, and report outcomes

Bonus points will be awarded for:

- Projects serving Persistent Poverty Counties or Underserved and Economically Distressed Areas
- Projects supporting food and agriculture-related enterprises

Reporting Expectations: Selected vendors must provide periodic reports aligned with CDF and USDA reporting requirements.

How to Apply: Application instructions and submission details are available on the CDF website. All applications must be submitted through CDF's grant portal.

Application Preview:

- Part I – Organization
 - Address
 - Tax ID Number
 - Project/Performance Site Congressional District
- Part II – Key Personnel Involved
 - One paragraph bio
 - Resume
- Part III – Project Details
 - Describe the need/opportunity
 - Amount requested
 - Detailed description of technical assistance to be provided
 - Breakdown of estimated project costs
 - Specific timeframe corresponding to activities
 - Zip code for each organization being assisted

- Part IV – Target Performance Metrics
 - Number of rural groups assisted
 - Number of cooperatives assisted
 - Number of cooperatives jobs created/saved
 - Number of cooperative jobs created/saved in underserved and economically distressed areas
 - Number of mutually owned businesses assisted
 - Number of jobs created/saved from mutually owned businesses assisted
 - Number of jobs created/saved from mutually owned businesses assisted in underserved and economically distressed areas
 - Number of businesses assisted
 - Number of jobs created/saved from businesses assisted
 - Number of jobs created/saved from businesses assisted in underserved and economically distressed areas
 - Number of business plans developed
 - Number of cooperatives incorporated
 - Number of feasibility studies completed
 - Number of conferences held
 - Number of conferences conducted with other Cooperative Development Centers
 - Number of conferences conducted with other organizations
 - Number of people with access to goods and services (for consumer – grocery, retail, etc.)
 - Financial loss avoided as a result of ‘no-go’ decision in Co-op Development process