Spark Award
Request for Applications

USDA | LAKE MICHIGAN
SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM
INNOVATION HUB

Table of Contents

KEY DETAILS

Purpose
To support one-year projects that need funds for school food system and school meal product improvements, such as planning, product testing, or enhancing skill, knowledge, and resource sharing. For project ideas, visit the "Inspiration for Projects" page at InnovateSchoolFood.org/inspiration-for-projects.

Application Deadline
April 30, 2024 at 11:59 pm CST

Award Range
$10,000 to $75,000

Cost-sharing or matching funds are not required!

Project Timeline
One year, from August 1, 2024 to July 31, 2025, with optional 4-month, no cost extension period
Does your project need more time or funding?
Check out our Innovation Collaborative Awards!
InnovateSchoolFood.org/grants

KEY DATES

- Request For Applications Released: February 1, 2024
- Grant Application Opens: February 1, 2024
- Grant-Writing Webinar (Recorded): Available February 1, 2024
- Informational Webinar (Live and Recorded):
  Live on February 14, 2024, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST)
- Application Support Available: February 1 to April 30, 2024
- Pre-Screening Application Deadline: March 30, 2024
- Final Application Deadline: April 30, 2024
- Award Notification: June 30, 2024
- Awarded Application Project Start Date: August 1, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Do you have an innovative, community-driven project idea that would improve the local school food system or marketplace?

We want to hear from you!
The Lake Michigan School Food System Innovation Hub is a new, USDA-funded, grant-making initiative. We work across Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana to fuel change for our region's school food system. We are administered by the Illinois Public Health Institute and include organizations in each state of the Lake Michigan region.

The Innovation Hub supports projects that reimagine school meals in ways that nourish students, connect to local farms and businesses, and celebrate the region's cultures and communities. We offer funding, training and other help to collectives of people who are transforming our school food system to better serve our communities.

We aim to fund school food system and school meal product improvements that work toward our primary goals of:
1. Increasing the number of small food producers and local food businesses working in the school food system and Lake Michigan region.
2. Improving the amount or quality of nutritious and culturally relevant foods that align with the current USDA meal pattern requirements for school meals (see definitions on page 16 for more information).
3. Investing in our priority communities, which are communities that have experienced racism and discrimination and/or historically underserved communities, including any of the following populations:
   - Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color
   - People who live in rural areas
   - People with limited incomes

We are here to help!
Wonder if you have what it takes to go after this Spark Award funding? Don't hesitate! Your State Lead and the Innovation Hub team can support your application and help answer questions about eligibility, forming a partnership, financial procedures and more.

You can find state-specific contact information on page 7.

ELIGIBILITY

The following people and organizations involved in the school food system in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana are eligible to apply for Spark Awards:
- Farmers
- Food Producers
- Food Suppliers
- Food Distributors
- Other Food System Partners
- Schools and School Districts, including nonprofit private and charter schools, which operate the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Other organizations, including but not limited to community non-profit organizations, state and local governmental agencies, Tribes, Native American Tribal Organizations, institutions of higher education, and small businesses

Other eligibility considerations:
- Organizations that receive funding as the primary lead from the following USDA-funded projects are not eligible for this funding: Project SCALES (Supporting Community Agriculture and Local Education Systems) or Project PLANTS (Partnerships for Local Agriculture and Nutrition Transformation in Schools).
- Applicants may only submit one application per funding cycle with the Innovation Hub.
- Projects should address a school or school district's needs. All applications without a school partner on the project team should include a letter of support from a school, school district, or group of schools that shows the school's (or schools') interest in the project and willingness to support efforts to respond to students' dietary, cultural and religious needs and preferences.
- School applicants that use contracted food service must include a letter of support for their project from their contracted food service management company.
- Entities previously suspended or debarred from participation in Federal assistance programs or activities are ineligible to submit applications.

GRANT AND FISCAL COMPLIANCE

- All awardees must follow standard federal award financial practices and be in good financial standing. This is also known as compliance.
- All award finalists must participate in a Financial Assessment with the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) before an award is finalized. IPHI will evaluate each finalist to make sure that they comply with basic federal sub-grant standards and to understand how much financial monitoring and support they may need as a grantee.
- Any organization receiving federal funds must be registered in the System for Award Management government contracting system (SAM.gov) and have a current Unique Entity ID number. Registration may begin at the time of application and must be complete before an award is finalized. We can help you with this process.

If you have any questions about grant or fiscal compliance, please contact Mariela Medina at IPHI: mariela.medina@iphionline.org or (224) 347-4987.

You can also refer to the Lead Applicant Guidance document on page 19.

AWARD EXPECTATIONS

If awarded, grantees can expect:
- Grant funding aligned with requirements outlined in this application, including the Grant and Fiscal Compliance section above and OMB CFR Cost Principles.
- Ongoing, one-on-one project support from the Innovation Hub, including help developing progress reports and connecting to resources, as needed.
- Joining a tailored, regional learning community in order to share best practices, expand regional market development and accelerate innovation.

If awarded, grantees are expected to:
- Participate in tri-annual regional and local trainings supported by the Innovation Hub.
- Commit to connecting with students and families to better understand and respond to their dietary, cultural and religious needs and preferences. You do not need a comprehensive plan for this to apply. We'll provide student and family engagement training and support.
- Attend quarterly check-ins with a State Lead and provide information to inform reports, success stories and case studies. At least one check-in per year may be in-person and conducted by your State Lead and/or the Illinois Public Health Institute.
- Submit an annual report that summarizes major successes and lessons learned and contributes to regional evaluation measurements, also known as metrics. Metrics may include but are not limited to schools' purchase and use of new or improved products and student satisfaction with new products.
- Ensure federal grant and fiscal compliance. We are available to support you.

- Work to make progress on project goals as outlined in the application. In consultation with the Innovation Hub team, further develop and adhere to the project budget.

SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE!

The Innovation Hub offers grant applicants a variety of support in multiple languages. Here you'll find resources to help you submit a Spark Award grant application. You can also contact Innovation Hub leaders for one-on-one guidance.

Innovation Hub State Leads:
One-on-one, project-specific support

Contact your State Lead for help with project and application development.

Innovation Hub State Leads	
Illinois Organization: Seven Generations Ahead Contacts: Diane Chapeta: farmtoschool@sevengenerationsahead.org Colleen Feeny: colleen@sevengenerationsahead.org	**Indiana** Organization: Northwest Indiana Food Council Contacts: Virginia Pleasant: virginia@nwifoodcouncil.org Veronica Jalomo: veronica@nwifoodcouncil.org
Wisconsin Organizations: Kids Forward and HealthTIDE Network Contacts: Daithi Wolfe, Kids Forward: dwolfe@kidsforward.org Amy L. Korth, MS, RDN, HealthTIDE Network: healthTIDE.Wisconsin@gmail.com	**Michigan** Organization: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems Contact: Megan McManus: mcmanu60@msu.edu

Virtual Office Hours Application Support:
Online help for questions about completing
an application or writing a grant

Our team can help you understand the questions and requirements of the application. We will be hosting regular office hours to answer your questions or connect you with the right support. Visit the "How We Can Help" page at InnovateSchoolFood.org/support for more information.

Compliance Support:
Online help with federal grant qualifications

Mariela Medina with the Illinois Public Health Institute can help you:
- Register with the System for Award Management government contracting system (SAM.gov).
- Understand federal grant compliance.
- Ensure proper financial management practices.
- Fulfill other grant requirements.

From February 1 to April 30, 2024, Mariela offers office hours:

> Monday and Wednesday, 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST
> Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. CST

Help is available in both English and Spanish.

To schedule a different time, please contact Mariela at mariela.medina@iphionline.org or (224) 347-4987.

Visit the "How We Can Help" page at https://innovateschoolfood.org/support for the Compliance Office Hours link.

Other Support

The Innovation Hub website includes more resources, including a frequently asked questions page at InnovateSchoolFood.org/frequently-asked-questions. We also offer inspiration for potential grant projects (InnovateSchoolFood.org/inspiration-for-projects) and other ideas to consider (InnovateSchoolFood.org/ideas-to-consider).

Recorded webinars with information about grant-writing and Innovation Hub application requirements are available on the website: InnovateSchoolFood.org/videos.

APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

To apply for a Spark Award, you must register for an account by visiting the "Apply" page at InnovateSchoolFood.org/apply and submit your application through our application portal. We can help with this process.

Our online application uses Salesforce software. You may review the Salesforce Privacy Policy that describes how data is stored, distributed and managed.

For your application to be reviewed, it must be completed and received through the website on or before April 30, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. CST. Applicants will receive an email confirmation with the time and date of submission noted.

Late application submissions will not be reviewed. Revisions or additional materials and supporting documents will not be accepted after the deadline.

All applicants can choose to have their applications pre-screened for eligibility, completeness and allowable costs. **To be pre-screened, submit your application by March 30, 2024**. If any part of your application must be completed or adjusted to be considered, we will notify you by April 23, 2024. (Some of these changes could include adding any missing materials or information and/or addressing problems with meeting eligibility criteria.) If necessary, your application can be reopened with final submissions due by April 30, 2024.

Applications in Spanish will be accepted and reviewed in their original form. Audio files may be uploaded instead of written answers to application questions. Both written and audio files will be accepted and reviewed in their original form.

Application Checklist

Below is a checklist of the application process and materials, including details on how you can find additional support.

- ☐ **Contact Your State Lead for Support.** We are here to provide help tailored to your needs. Find contact information on page 7.
- ☐ **Review and Answer the Application Questions.** Application questions are listed on page 11. We encourage you to review key terms Definitions (page 16), Selection Criteria (page 13) and Allowable Costs (page 17) to help you plan your project and successfully answer the application questions.
- ☐ **Develop Your Budget and Budget Narrative.** The template linked on page 21 can help you plan your budget; it matches the budget fields you will complete in the application. You can also download the template at InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs
- ☐ **Gather Letter(s) of Support.** All applications without a school partner on the project team should include a letter of support from a school, school district or group of schools that shows the school's (or schools') interest in the project and willingness to support efforts to respond to students' dietary, cultural and religious needs and preferences. See the Letters of Support Templates and Guidance on page 21.
- ☐ **Register for a Unique Entity ID** if you do not have one. Visit the SAM.gov website to start this process before you submit your application. Contact Mariela Medina for help: mariela.medina@iphionline.org or (224) 347-4987.
- ☐ **Register for an Account on the Innovation Hub website.**
  Visit InnovateSchoolfFood.org/apply or work with your State Lead to create an account. Preview the online application on the website.
- ☐ **Submit Early (by March 30, 2024) to have your Application Pre-Screened.**
  A pre-screening can confirm project eligibility and application completeness.
  Find Application and Submission Information on page 9.
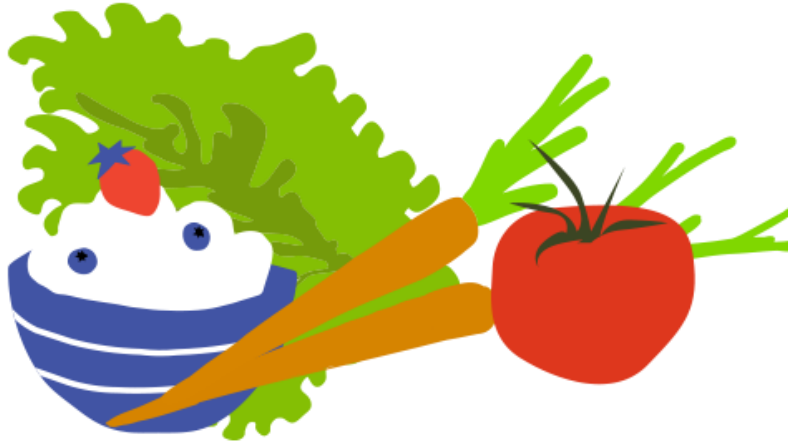
APPLICATION QUESTIONS

You can download the full application questions list as a Word document or a Google Doc at InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs. To apply, enter responses to the questions in the application portal on our website. Below is a list of application questions that require written or audio responses:

- Please provide a brief summary of your proposed project (what, where, why, who, when) and how you would spend your budget. *Suggested length: 1 short paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- Describe how your project meets the goals and local food system impacts (listed on page 4). *Suggested length: 2 paragraphs or 2 minutes of audio.*
- Provide the full name of the school(s) or school district(s) that your project intends to work with or benefit, as well as their address(es). If you are working with or intending to benefit a large number of schools, you may provide information for up to three schools or school districts that are representative of who you are impacting. Please note — the review team will look up public information for the school(s) you list to determine if it is considered a priority community, as described in the Benchmarks and Sources section on page 14.
- Describe how your project team aligns with or represents any of the priority communities listed above, including if any team members have firsthand experience being part of these communities. *Suggested length: 1-2 paragraphs or 1-2 minutes of audio.*
- Who is intended to benefit from this project? *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- Describe how your project helps to address an identified community need. How did you identify this need? *Suggested length: 2 paragraphs or 2 minutes of audio.*

- Describe how your project team is connected to the community your project intends to benefit, such as if any team members live, work or have previously worked with the community. *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- If awarded, one of the grant's required trainings is a student and family engagement training. It will cover ways to connect with students and families so you can be responsive to students' dietary cultural, and religious needs and preferences. What potential opportunities are there for students and families to inform your project? *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- Describe what your team views as the innovative aspects of your project. How would your innovation change the status quo in the school food system for the priority community you are serving? *Suggested length: 1-2 paragraphs or 1-2 minutes of audio.*
- How will the partnerships, systems and/or products that your project is working to develop be able to continue past the grant period, regardless of the outcome of your innovation? *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- How does your team structure fairly balance the needs of all partners involved? Please consider elements such as making sure everyone's voice is heard, maintaining communication and integrating new ideas. *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*
- What is your process for decision-making, and how will you ensure that all team members are included in the process — particularly any team members who have firsthand experience being part of a priority community? *Suggested length: 1 paragraph or 1 minute of audio.*

REVIEW PROCESS

The Innovation Hub team will review all eligible and complete applications submitted by the deadline. We will review applications in their original form (i.e., in English, in Spanish or as audio files). Each application will be reviewed separately by three reviewers, including at least one from the Innovation Hub administrative team at IPHI and at least one external reviewer with relevant content expertise. Each application will be scored as described in the Selection Criteria Section below. Each review team will discuss the applications they reviewed and come to agreement on their combined scores for each application.

In addition to scores, reviewers will also consider geographic distribution and diversity of projects when selecting finalists. The Innovation Hub partnership will make a decision on the proposed list of finalists. At least two applications per state will receive funding. Prior to selection of grantees, a list of finalists and recommended grantees will be presented to USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for review and discussion.

USDA, FNS will review the funding recommendations compiled by the Innovation Hub team, and they will make final decisions about grantee awards.

SELECTION CRITERIA

All applications will be reviewed according to the below selection criteria. Applications can receive a maximum of 44 points.

Priority Communities: *10 possible points*
- The project services a location/school population(s) that meets the following priority communities (see Benchmarks and Sources, below, for more information on what is considered a priority community):
  - Community of Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color (up to 2 points)
  - People who live in rural areas (up to 2 points)
  - People with limited incomes (up to 2 points)
- The project team includes lead partner(s)/collaborator(s) that represent the priority communities (up to 4 points)

Alignment with Goals: *8 possible points*
- The project aligns with the goal of increasing the number of local food businesses engaged in the Lake Michigan school food system (up to 2 points)
- The project aligns with the goal of increasing the number of small food producers engaged in the Lake Michigan school food system (up to 2 points)
- The project aligns with the goal of improving the amount or quality of culturally relevant foods (up to 2 points)
- The project works toward improving the amount or quality of nutritious foods that align with USDA meal pattern requirements for school meals (up to 2 points)

Innovation: *6 possible points*
- The project is innovative and demonstrates thoughtfulness and creativity in its conceptualization (up to 2 points)
- The project provides clear opportunities to build partnerships, systems and/or products that can be applied or used in the future, regardless of the outcome of the innovation (up to 2 points)
- The project involves more than one sector of the school food system (up to 2 points)

Community Connection: *6 possible points*
- The project indicates a comprehensive understanding of its community and food system needs, for example, including grassroots or first-hand identification of community needs (up to 2 points)
- The project team has a vested interest in the community being served, including having team members who live or work directly with the community (up to 2 points)
- The project describes opportunities for engaging with its target community audience (students, families, etc.) in a meaningful way and incorporating their input regarding needs and wants throughout the project (up to 2 points)

Team Collaboration: *6 possible points*
- The application includes a compelling partnership that represents diverse perspectives, geographies and/or experiences. Opportunities are included for skill, knowledge and resource sharing within the partnership, and the partnership shows promise to make impactful changes to the school food system (up to 2 points)
- The application describes efforts to ensure all partners are in equitable collaboration (up to 2 points)
- The scope of work amongst the project team seems adequate to meet the project goals (up to 2 points)

Feasibility and Accountability: 8 *possible points*
- The budget meets the following considerations: (up to 3 points)
  - The budget includes costs necessary to support the described plan for team collaboration, including compensating any team members with firsthand experience being part of a priority community
  - The budget amount adequately supports project goals
  - There are clear linkages between budget line items and activities or tasks needed to complete the project
- The plan shows that the project is realistic and has a solid rationale (up to 3 points)
- The team's combined experience and connections will support the project's successful completion (up to 2 points)

Benchmarks and Sources for Priority Communities

Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color populations: schools and school districts with at least 50 percent of their student population identified as Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other non-white demographic are considered as a priority community. Data made publicly available by the Illinois State Board of Education, Indiana Department of Education, Michigan Department of Education and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will be used to determine this.

Rural Area: Areas with a locality code of 41 (Rural-Fringe), 42 (Rural-Distant) or 43 (Rural-Remote), according to the National Center for Education Statistics locale classification tool, are considered priority communities. (nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries)

People with limited incomes: Schools or districts with at least 40 percent of students identifying as having a limited income, determined by at least 40 percent Identified Student Percentage, are considered a priority community. We use the Community Eligibility Provision database made available by the Food Research & Action Center to determine this.

FEDERAL AWARD INFORMATION

The following administrative information is required for all federal award opportunities:

Federal Awarding Agency Name: United States Department of Agriculture

Funding Opportunity Title: Healthy Meals Incentives for Schools - School Food System Transformation Challenge Sub-Grants

Announcement Type: Initial Announcement

Federal Domestic Assistance Number: 10.579

Terms and conditions for resulting awards: You can download the Terms and Conditions at InnovateSchoolFood.org/terms-conditions

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

USDA Meal Pattern Requirements for School Meals: Established by the United States Department of Agriculture for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Current USDA Meal Pattern guidance is available here. The Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium Final Rule may also be helpful.

If you would like support to make sure your project aligns with these meal pattern requirements, contact your State Lead (contact information can be found on page 7).

School Meal: A federally reimbursable meal that meets the meal pattern requirements for meals served in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

Culturally Relevant Food: Foods familiar to a community that celebrate a group's cultural and religious needs, preferences and traditions.

Nutritious Food: Foods that provide vitamins, minerals and other health-promoting components and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat and sodium. These foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat dairy.

Local Food: Food grown and processed in the Lake Michigan region (within Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana).

Priority Communities: Communities that have experienced racism and discrimination and/or historically underserved communities, including any of the following populations:
- Black or African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latine, Asian or Pacific Islander, or other people of color
- People who live in rural areas
- People with limited incomes

Underserved Communities: Populations that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social and civic life.

Small food producers: An operation with gross cash farm income under $250,000. (Source)

APPENDIX B: ALLOWABLE COSTS

USDA Innovation Hub Grant Allowable Costs

Allowable costs are charges related to your project that can be covered with your grant award. Unallowable costs are charges related to your project that cannot be covered or reimbursed by your grant award.

All requested costs must be allowable, allocable, necessary and reasonable in accordance with the OMB CFR Cost Principles including *2 CFR Part 200* and *2 CFR Part 400*.

Questions about allowable costs? Refer to the frequently asked questions at InnovateSchoolFood.org/frequently-asked-questions or contact Mariela Medina: mariela.medina@iphionline.org or (224) 347-4987.

Allowable Costs

- **Improving Food Quality and Nutrition**: Activities that aim to improve the quality, safety and nutritional value of food products. These may include but are not limited to product development, taste-testing events, food safety training and nutrition education.
- **Spending for Supplies**: Materials needed to support the project, such as meeting and office supplies (paper, notepads, easels, etc.), printed materials, food storage units, small kitchen and cafeteria supplies (such as educational posters, cookware and cutlery), and small equipment less than $5,000.
- **Personnel Costs**: Salary and benefits for key staff directly supporting the project for the percentage of time that the staff will be supporting the project.
- **Rental Costs**: This includes rental costs for space, utilities and facilities directly used for the project. Rental agreements should be reviewed regularly to make sure they are still the most cost-effective and efficient choices.
- **Leasing**: Leasing office space, equipment, vehicles or facilities needed for the project.
- **Technology**: The purchasing of technology, such as hardware (like computers, laptops or tablets) and/or software (like accounting systems or antivirus software), is allowed if it is specified and essential to the project.
- **Promotion Expenses**: Printing, duplication and distribution of materials to promote projects; development and distribution of materials and social media; and costs for developing and translating materials or adapting them to different formats.
- **Capacity Building**: Costs associated with activities that enhance the skills, knowledge and resources to better meet the objectives of a project. These activities are allowable if they directly support and are necessary to the project's goals. This includes costs associated with providing training, technical assistance (such as consultations and technology) and planning (such as adapting materials to other languages and for Section 508 accessibility standards, honorariums for guest speakers, etc.).
- **Travel**: As needed and justified.

Allowable Costs with Prior Approval From USDA

- **Equipment**: Equipment is defined as tangible, durable, personal property having a continual useful life of more than one year and a cost of $5,000 or more per unit.
    - Any large equipment purchases (over $5,000 per unit) will need to have prior approval by the USDA before they are allowed. If any equipment over $5,000 is included in your proposed budget, please provide a thorough overview of why it is needed and how you will ensure you get the best product for the price. The Innovation Hub team will work with you to coordinate approval with USDA and will suggest alternative options if your proposed equipment is not approved. Please note that all equipment over $5,000 has additional reporting and disposition requirements.
- **Improvements**: Costs related to fixing, improving or updating an existing building or space to make it better, look nicer and work properly will need prior approval by USDA before they are allowed. The work should directly contribute to the project's goals. For example, a drip structure for a moveable greenhouse is allowable with prior approval by the USDA.

Unallowable Costs

- **Food**: Funds used to purchase food intended primarily for consumption, such as for events, lunch or meal services, are not allowable.
- **Advertising/Public Relations Costs**: Using funds for general promotional activities or general public relations, which primarily serve a grantee's public image rather than the specific goals of the grant, are not allowable.
- **Marketing Items**: Promotional "swag" and "door prize" items. For example, blankets, candy, clothing, keychains and other items are not allowable.
- **Prizes**: Gift cards, cash and other monetary awards are not allowable. This includes vacations, spa packages, hotel stays or other, similar prizes.
- **Monetary expenses**: Loans, cash, etc., are not allowable.
- **Capital expenditures/Improvements**: Money spent to make significant, long-lasting enhancements or additions to property, equipment or facilities, such as permanent structure building (foundation, plumbing, electrical, etc.), is not allowable.
- **Lobbying**: Costs associated with seeking to influence government policies, actions or decisions are not allowable.
- **Costs Unrelated to the Project**: Any costs for personal items or services not related to the project's objectives, or expenses unnecessary for successful project implementation, are not allowable.
- **Fines and Penalties**: Costs arising from violations of laws and regulations, such as fines and penalties, are typically not allowable.
- **Equipment Fixes**: Costs for maintenance and repair of equipment are not allowable.

APPENDIX C: LEAD APPLICANT GUIDANCE

Lead Applicant Guidance

The information below is meant to help project teams select a lead applicant, who can meet financial and other requirements of a federal grant. (This is also known as compliance.) The Innovation Hub team can help project teams decide which partner is best suited to this role. We can also help lead applicants through unfamiliar processes.

From February 1 to April 30, 2024, Mariela Medina of IPHI will offer office hours:
    Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST
    Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. CST

Help is available in both English and Spanish. To schedule a different time, please contact Mariela at mariela.medina@iphionline.org or (224) 347-4987.

You can also visit InnovateSchoolFood.org/support for the Compliance Office Hours link.

Grant Requirements for Lead Applicants

Fiscal Responsibility: These are the financial requirements of a lead applicant.

- Budget Planning:
    - Carefully plan your budget, ensuring all expenses align with the grant's objectives and are in accordance with 2 CFR 200
    - Include all eligible costs and adhere to cost principles such as allowable, allocable and reasonable expenses

- Expense Tracking:
    - Implement robust financial tracking systems to monitor grant-related expenses
    - Keep records of all financial transactions, invoices and receipts

- Procurement (Acquiring Goods or Services):
    - Follow procurement procedures outlined in 2 CFR 200 when acquiring goods or services with grant funds
    - Maintain transparency and competitiveness in procurement

- Compliance Documentation:
    - Maintain documentation of compliance with federal grant regulations, including procurement records and financial reports

Reporting Requirements: These are documentation and communication expectations of a lead applicant.

- Timely Reporting:
    - Submit all required financial and programmatic reports according to the grant agreement and USDA guidelines
    - Ensure reports are accurate, complete and submitted by the specified deadlines

- Narrative Progress Reports:
    - Create a clear and concise annual report that highlights significant achievements and lessons learned. This report should also help track your progress in achieving grant objectives, which may involve metrics such as evaluating how well new products are used in schools and how satisfied students are with them.
    - Attend quarterly check-ins with a State Lead to share your accomplishments, any obstacles you've faced, your upcoming goals for the next reporting period, and more. This information helps inform reports, success stories and case studies.

- Financial Reports:
    - Prepare financial reports that detail the use of grant funds and expenses
    - Comply with format and content requirements as per USDA and 2 CFR 200

Grant Deliverables: Here is what is expected of all grantees throughout and by the end of the grant period.

- Project Implementation:
    - Execute the project in a way that follows the approved proposal and grant guidelines
    - Monitor progress and make adjustments as needed to achieve project goals

- Recordkeeping:
    - Maintain organized records of project activities, accomplishments and any necessary supporting documentation

- Evaluation and Documentation:
    - Evaluate the project's outcomes and ensure they align with the grant's objectives
    - Document the impact of the grant funds on your organization and the community

- Compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Guidelines:
    - Understand and follow IPHI's rules and expectations, which are aligned with the CFR. Make sure that all activities are conducted in accordance with IPHI's instructions to fulfill the grant's requirements.

APPENDIX D: BUDGET TEMPLATE

A budget template is available as a Microsoft Excel document and in Google Sheets. This template is sufficient for project application. The Innovation Hub team will work with selected applicants to further develop their budgets.

Download a Budget Template in Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets at InnovateSchoolFood.org/application-information/#docs.

APPENDIX E: LETTERS OF SUPPORT TEMPLATES AND GUIDANCE

Letters of Support are required for each Innovation Hub application. The purpose of a Letter of Support is to show that partners are committed to and invested in your project.

There are three different kinds of Letters of Support that may be required for your application and others that may be recommended. Please reach out to your State Lead with questions; State Lead contact information can be found at InnovateSchoolFood.org/connect. Here's what you need to know:

Always Required:
- **School Letter of Support.** All projects must benefit a school, school district or group of schools, so applications require at least one Letter of Support from a school or district. The template on page 23 includes different sections for schools to complete if they are on the project team or if they are supporting a project but are not on the project team.

Required IF you have one or more project partners in addition to the Lead Applicant on a Spark Award; Always Required for Innovation Collaborative Awards:
- **Project Team Letter of Support.** A Letter of Support is required from every organization listed in the Project Team Information section of the application (schools will complete the School Letter of Support, page 23). The template found on page 24 encompasses all necessary details.
  - For Spark Awards, additional project partners are not mandatory.
  - For Innovation Collaborative Awards, a minimum of one project partner, along with the Lead Applicant, is mandatory. At least one partner should be a farmer, food producer, food supplier, food distributor or other food system partner.

Required IF a school partner on the project team uses a contracted food service management company:

- **Food Service Management Company Letter of Support.** A Letter of Support from the food service management company, which indicates they are willing to cooperate with the project's food service goals, is required when working with schools that use contracted food service. The template on page 25 includes all information required.

Recommended for Innovation Collaborative Applications:

- **General Project Support Template**. Innovation Collaborative grant applications should promote systems-change in your school food system. Systems-change efforts are most successful with broad support from key organizations, legislators, school boards, superintendents and/or community members. Letters of Support from representatives whose support is important for the success of your project are recommended for Innovation Collaborative applications. The template on page 26 can be completed by key supporters who are not on your project team.

Other Tips

- You can pre-fill in much of the information, like your applicant organization name, project title, etc. before sending the template for partners to complete and sign.
- In the Project Team Letter of Support, the list of work the partner will perform for the project should match what is written in your application.
- For Innovation Collaborative applications, grant reviewers will consider if your application, including the Letters of Support, demonstrates that the project has the support needed from other organizations for successful completion. General Project Support Letters of Support are recommended to demonstrate broad support for and confidence in project implementation by key supporters.

TEMPLATE: School Letter of Support

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear Innovation Hub Team,

[School/District name] is pleased to submit this Letter of Support for the [Lead Applicant organization's] grant application for the Innovation Hub [Spark/Innovation Collaborative] Awards, [Project Title].

This project aligns with our goals of [list a few ways this aligns with your school nutrition, farm-to-school, nutrition education, local food procurement, etc. efforts]

[INCLUDE THIS SECTION HIGHLIGHTED IN BLUE ONLY IF THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT <u>IS</u> ON THE PROJECT TEAM: We are excited to participate in this innovative work to improve our school food system and marketplace. We commit to [list the work you will perform for this project].]

Here is some relevant administrative information:
- We use [self-operated food service OR contracted food service]. *Note: if the school uses contracted food service, a Letter of Support from their food service management company must also be included in your application.*
- Our School Food Authority Number is:]

If [Lead Applicant Organization] is awarded this grant, we look forward to supporting the project's efforts to respond to students' dietary, cultural and religious needs and preferences and learning from the project's innovations to improve our school food system and marketplace. [optional: list any ways the school/district can support this (e.g., hosting taste-testing events, focus groups)]

Sincerely,

[Signature]
School Administrator Name
School Administrator Title
Phone Number
Email

[INCLUDE THIS SECTION ONLY IF THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT <u>IS NOT</u> ON THE PROJECT TEAM: School Food Authority Number: _____

TEMPLATE: Project Team Letter of Support

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear Innovation Hub Team,

[Organization name] is pleased to submit this Letter of Support for the [Lead Applicant organization's] grant application for the Innovation Hub [Spark/Innovation Collaborative] Awards, [Project Title].

[Organization's] mission is to […]. This project aligns well with our other efforts to [list a few ways this aligns with your school nutrition, farm-to-school, nutrition education, local food procurement, etc. efforts]

We are excited to participate in this innovative work to improve our school food system and products. We commit to [list the work you will perform for this project].

We look forward to this partnership if [Lead Applicant Organization] is awarded this grant.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Name
Title
Phone Number
Email

TEMPLATE: Food Service Management Company Letter of Support

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear Innovation Hub Team,

[Company name] is pleased to submit this Letter of Support for the [Lead Applicant organization's] grant application for the Innovation Hub [Spark/Innovation Collaborative] Award, [Project Title].

We commit to cooperating with this project's food service goals and we look forward to learning about how our company can support innovations to improve the food system and products for [school/school district name].

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Name
Title
Phone Number
Email

TEMPLATE: General Project Support Letter of Support

[DATE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear Innovation Hub Team,

[I/Organization] [am/is] pleased to submit this Letter of Support for the [Lead Applicant organization's] grant application for the Innovation Hub [Spark/Innovation Collaborative] Awards, [Project Title].

[Please briefly describe your role in your local school food system and why it is important to you]

[I/We] think this project is important to fund because [describe a few ways you feel this project will benefit your local school food system].

[I/We] look forward to following this project if [Lead Applicant Organization] is awarded this grant and supporting it as needed [add any ways your organization would support this project if awarded].

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Name
Title
Phone Number
Email