

applicant does not receive an acknowledgement within 15 days of the submission deadline, the applicant should contact Marie Buchanan at (202) 690-2686.

Part V—Review Process

A. General

Each application will be evaluated using a two-part process. First, each application will be screened by RMA personnel to ensure that it meets the requirements in this announcement. Applications that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or are incomplete will not receive further consideration.

Second, a review panel will consider the merits of all applications that meet the requirements in the announcement. The evaluation of each application will be conducted by a panel of not less than three independent reviewers. Reviewers will be drawn from USDA, other federal agencies, and others representing public and private organizations, as needed. The narrative and any appendixes provided by each applicant will be used by the review panel to evaluate the merits of the project that is being proposed for funding. The panel will examine and score applications based on the "Evaluation Criteria and Weights" contained in this paragraph B of this part.

Applications will be evaluated and scored in each of the four criteria listed below. The panel will be looking for the specific elements listed with each criterion when evaluating the applications and scoring them. For each application, panel members will assign a point value up to the maximum for each criterion. After all reviewers have evaluated and scored each of the applications, the scores for the entire panel will be averaged to determine an application's final score.

After assigning points upon those criteria, applications will be listed in initial rank order and presented, along with funding level recommendations, to the Manager of FCIC, who will make the final decision on awarding of a partnership agreement. Applications will then be funded in final rank order until all available funds have been expended. Applicants must score 50 points or more during the first round to be considered for funding. Unused remaining funds from the first round of competition will be allocated to the second round of competition. Unless the applicant withdraws their proposal, eligible, but unfunded, proposals from the first competition will be considered in the second competition, with or without a revision by the applicant.

An organization, or group of organizations in partnership, may apply for funding under other FCIC or RMA programs, in addition to the programs described in this announcement. However, if the Manager of FCIC determines that an application recommended for funding under this announcement is sufficiently similar to a project that has been funded or has been recommended to be funded under another FCIC or RMA education or outreach program, then the Manager may elect to not fund that application in whole or in part.

B. Evaluation Criteria and Weights

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Project Management—Maximum 20 Points

The applicant must demonstrate an ability to implement sound and effective project management practices. Higher scores will be awarded to applicants that can demonstrate organizational skills, leadership, and experience in delivering services or programs that assist women, limited resource, socially disadvantaged and other traditionally underserved producers. If the applicant has been a recipient of other Federal or other government grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts, the applicant must also detail that they have consistently complied with financial and program reporting and auditing requirements. Applicants that will employ, or have access to, personnel who have experience in directing agricultural programs or providing outreach programs that benefit producers will receive higher rankings.

2. Collaborative Partnering—Maximum 50 Points

The applicant must demonstrate experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of other agencies, grower organizations, agribusiness professionals, and agricultural leaders to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the program. Applicants will receive higher scores to the extent that they can document and demonstrate: (a) That partnership commitments are in place for the express purpose of delivering the program in this announcement; (b) that a broad and diverse group of farmers and ranchers will be reached; and (c) that a substantial effort has been made to partner with organizations that can meet the needs of producers that are women, limited resource, socially disadvantaged and other traditionally under-served farmers and ranchers.

3. Delivery Plan—Maximum 15 Points

The applicant must demonstrate that its program delivery plan is clear and specific. For each of the applicant's responsibilities contained in the description of the program, the applicant must demonstrate that it can identify specific tasks and provide reasonable time lines that further the purpose of this program. Applicants will obtain a higher score to the extent that the tasks of the project are specific, measurable, and reasonable, have specific time frames for completion, and relate directly to the required activities and program objectives described in this announcement. For guidance on a delivery plan format, applicants are encouraged to refer to the table in the appendix of this notice.

4. Project Benefits—Maximum 15 Points

The applicant must demonstrate that the project benefits to women, limited resource, socially disadvantaged and other traditionally underserved producers warrant the funding requested. Applicants will be scored according to the extent they can: (a) Reasonably estimate the number of producers reached through the project; (b) justify the estimates with clear specifics related to the delivery plan; (c) identify the actions producers will likely be able to take as a result of the project; and (d) identify specific measures for evaluating the success of the project. Reviewers' scoring will be based on the scope and reasonableness of the applicants' estimates of producers reached through the project, clear descriptions of specific expected project benefits for producers, and well-constructed plans for measuring the project's effectiveness.

5. Diversity—Maximum 20 Points

Applicant must identify the geographic areas to be served. After applications have been evaluated and awarded points under the first four criteria, applications that promote the broadest geographic diversity will receive the highest score.

C. Confidentiality

The names of applicants, the names of individuals identified in the applications, the content of applications, and the panel evaluations of applications will all be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of review panel members will remain confidential throughout the entire review process and will not be released to applicants. At the end of the fiscal year, names of panel members