

FY 2003, we now recognize that it is not likely that a final rule will be published in time to obligate FY 2003 funds under terms and conditions established in a final rule. Accordingly, we are publishing this NOFA now in order to be able to implement this program before the end of FY 2003.

The Advance RFP advised the public that in order to fund AIC grants for FY 2003 there would be an extremely short deadline for the submission of applications. In the Advance RFP interested parties were offered the opportunity of receiving notice of the timing for submission of applications via electronic mail. All parties who requested such electronic notification are receiving an electronic version of this notice.

The policies and procedures incorporated in this NOFA are the same as those outlined in the Advance RFP published on August 1, 2003; the only differences that pertain to this NOFA are that the deadline is firmly established for the receipt of applications and the paperwork burden associated with this program has been approved by OMB.

In the event the RBS is not able to timely obligate FY 2003 funds, applications received will be held for consideration for FY 2004 funding if and when funding is available and after a Final Rule is published. Applicants will then be allowed to revise their applications if the requirements of the Final Rule are different from the policies and procedures outlined for FY 2003 in this NOFA.

Restrictions on Awards

1. RBS will not award more than ten grants for FY 2003.

2. RBS will not make a grant to more than one entity in any one State.

3. A grant award may not exceed the lesser of \$1,000,000 or twice the dollar amount (in cash or in kind) of the resources committed to the Center's operations apart from the program grant funds.

Application

Applicants must file an original and one copy of the required forms and a proposal.

(1) *Required forms.* The following forms must be completed, signed and submitted as part of the application package.

(a) "Application for Federal Assistance."

(b) "Budget Information/Non-Construction Programs."

(c) "Assurances/Non-Construction Programs."

(2) *Proposal.* Each proposal must contain the following elements.

(a) Title Page.

(b) Table of Contents.

(c) Executive Summary. A summary of the proposal should briefly describe the project including goals, tasks to be completed and other relevant information that provides a general overview of the project and the amount requested.

(d) Eligibility. A detailed discussion describing how the applicant meets the eligibility requirements.

(e) Proposal Narrative. The narrative portion of the proposal must include, but is not limited to, the following:

(i) Project Title. The title of the proposed project must be brief, not to exceed 75 characters, yet describe the essentials of the project.

(ii) Information Sheet. A separate one page information sheet listing each of the evaluation criteria followed by the page numbers of all relevant material and documentation contained in the proposal that address or support the criteria.

(iii) Goals of the Project. The first part of this section should list each Provider Service to be offered by the Center. The second part of this section should list one or more specific goals relating to increasing and improving the ability of identified local agricultural producers to develop a market or process for value-added agricultural commodities or products.

(iv) Work Plan. Actions that must be taken in order for the Provider Services to be available from the Center. Each action listed should include a target date by which it will be completed. General start up tasks should be listed, followed by specific tasks listed for each Provider Service to be offered, as well as tasks associated with the start of operations. The tasks associated with the start of operations should include a focused marketing and delivery plan directed to the local agricultural producers that were identified in paragraph (2)(e)(iii) above. The actions to be taken should include steps for identifying customers, acquiring personnel and contracting for services to the Center, including arrangements for strategic alliances.

(v) Performance Evaluation Criteria. Performance criteria suggested by the applicant for incorporation in the grant award in the event the proposal receives grant funding under this subpart. These suggested criteria are not binding on USDA.

(vi) Agricultural Community Support. Evidence of support from the local agricultural community should be included in this section. Letters in

support should reflect that the writer is familiar with the provisions of the Plan for the Center, including the stated goals. Evidence of support can take the form of making employees available to the Center, service as a board member and other in-kind contributions.

(vii) Strategic Coordination and Alliances. Describe arrangements in place or planned with end users (processing and distribution companies and regional grocers) as well as arrangements with entities having technical research capabilities, broad support from the agricultural community in the state or region, significant coordination with end users (processing and distribution companies and regional grocers), strategic alliances with entities having technical research capabilities and a focused delivery plan for reaching out to the producer community. (viii) Capacity. Evidence of the ability of the grantee(s) to successfully establish and operate a Center. A description of the grantee's track record in providing services similar to those listed for Producer Services or evidence that the entity has the capability to provide Producer Services. Resumes of key personnel should be included in this section. Past successes should be described in detail, with a focus on lessons learned, best practices, familiarity with producer problems in value-added ventures, and how these barriers are best overcome should be elaborated on in this section. For every challenge identified, the applicant should demonstrate how they are addressed in the Work Plan (see paragraph (2)(e)(iv) above). All successes should include a monetary estimate of the value-added achieved.

(ix) Legal structure. Provide a description of the legal relationship between the grantee(s) and the proposed Center. If the Center is to be an independent corporate entity, provide copies of the corporate charter, bylaws and other relevant organizational documents. Describe how funds for the Center will be handled and include copies of the agreements documenting the legal relationships between the Center and related parties. If the Center is not to be an independent legal entity, provide copies of the corporate governance documents that describe how members of the Board of Directors for the Center are to be determined.

(x) Evaluation Criteria. Each of the evaluation criteria referenced below must be specifically and individually addressed in narrative form. Supporting documentation, as applicable, should be included in this section, or a cross reference to other sections in the