RFA-FD-25-024 Questions and Answers

1. **Will there be any webinars or Q&A sessions hosted?**

   No, FDA does not plan to host a Q&A session or webinar for this funding opportunity.

2. **Are universities eligible to apply, or is the funding limited to schools and districts?**

   Universities are generally ineligible to apply because they are not eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which provides funding for schools serving "high school grade or under." 42 U.S.C. 1760(d)(5). As published in Section III of RFA-FD-25-024, eligibility for this funding opportunity is limited to schools that actively participate in the NSLP. USDA has provided guidance on the eligibility of schools and institutions to participate in School Nutrition Programs.

3. **Can universities partner with one or multiple eligible schools?**

   Yes, a university with relevant experience and expertise in healthy school foods may partner with an eligible school. As published in Section I of RFA-FD-25-024, all recipients are required to partner with a qualified healthy school foods organization to collaboratively focus on strategies to reduce the presence of contaminants in school meals while building capacity to achieve measurable, lasting improvements in food safety and nutritional value.

   As published in Section V of RFA-FD-25-024, objective reviewers will assess and score applications based on 5 criteria including Partnership (30 points), which assesses partner qualifications and suitability to carry out the proposed project. See Section V for full details.

4. **Are there qualifications or criteria a healthy school foods organization must meet to serve as a partner?**

   The healthy school foods organization must be qualified and well-suited to carry out the proposed project. As published in Section I of RFA-FD-25-024, all recipients are required to partner with a qualified healthy school foods organization known as a partner or as published in Section IV provide a brief description of how program objectives would be met in the absence of a partner. In collaboration with these partners, schools will focus on strategies to reduce the presence of contaminants in school meals while building capacity to achieve measurable, lasting improvements in food safety and nutritional value.

   As published in Section V of RFA-FD-25-024, objective reviewers will assess and score applications based on 5 criteria including Partnership (30 points), which assesses partner qualifications and suitability to carry out the proposed project. See Section V for full details.

5. **How will schools or districts receive funding if awarded (e.g., direct funding, subawards)?**

As published in Section VI of RFA-FD-25-024, A Notice of Award (NoA) is the official authorizing document notifying the applicant that an award has been made and that funds may be requested from the designated HHS payment system or office.

The NoA is signed by the Grants Management Officer and emailed to the recipient's business official.

6. **Are subawards to schools and community partners allowed, and what is the processing timeline for them?**

   Applicants may propose subawards. As published in Section I of RFA-FD-25-024, recipients of funds awarded under this notice of funding opportunity announcement are expected to plan and execute the following project phases within a 12-month period:

   1. **Baseline Assessment:** Initial food sample submission and menu planning
   2. **Implementation Phase:** Begin meal transition and ongoing evaluation.
   3. **Full Menu Roll Out:** New meals fully deployed across participating recipients
   4. **Refinement:** Adjustments based on early results and challenges.
   5. **Post-Evaluation:** Final sampling, analysis, and data collection
   6. **Final Reporting:** Submission of findings and evaluation.

7. **Can the proposed project extend over two years with just one year of funding (e.g., use year 1 funds into year 2)?**

   As published in Section II of RFA-FD-24-025, the maximum project period is two (2) years. Application budgets should reflect the actual needs of the proposed project up to $250,000 per school not to exceed $2,000,000 per school district in maximum total costs (direct and indirect costs). Applicants should only include reasonable, allowable, allocable, and necessary costs in proposed application budgets. Note: Costs to procure foods commonly considered ultra-processed are **not** allowable under this funding opportunity announcement.

8. **Can the initial phase focus on planning, with implementation in the following school year?**

   No. As published in RFA-FD-25-024, recipients of funds awarded under this notice of funding opportunity announcement are expected to plan and execute the following project phases within a 12-month period:

   1. **Baseline Assessment:** Initial food sample submission and menu planning
   2. **Implementation Phase:** Begin meal transition and ongoing evaluation.
   3. **Full Menu Roll Out:** New meals fully deployed across participating recipients
   4. **Refinement:** Adjustments based on early results and challenges.
   5. **Post-Evaluation:** Final sampling, analysis, and data collection
   6. **Final Reporting:** Submission of findings and evaluation.

9. **Is the current one-year funding period flexible or extendable (given tight timelines for planning and implementation)?**

As published in RFA-FD-25-024, recipients of funds awarded under this notice of funding opportunity announcement are expected to plan and execute the following project phases within a 12-month period:

1. **Baseline Assessment:** Initial food sample submission and menu planning
2. **Implementation Phase:** Begin meal transition and ongoing evaluation.
3. **Full Menu Roll Out:** New meals fully deployed across participating recipients.
4. **Refinement:** Adjustments based on early results and challenges.
5. **Post-Evaluation:** Final sampling, analysis, and data collection
6. **Final Reporting:** Submission of findings and evaluation.

In accordance with HHS Grants Policy, recipients may request a no-cost extension to:

- complete the project,
- provide for an orderly shutdown, or
- in some cases, provide a bridge to the next award.

Extensions must be approved by FDA. There is no appeal process for denials.

10. Can you provide any additional information about the FDA Objective Review Process and page limits?

As published in Section V of RFA-FD-25-024, Applications will be evaluated for technical merit by an appropriate FDA Objective Review Committee using the stated review criteria.

Appeals of Objective Review will not be accepted for applications submitted in response to this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO).

As part of the objective review, all applications will receive a written critique.

Applications may undergo a selection process in which only those applications deemed to have the highest technical merit (generally the top half of applications under review) will be discussed and assigned an overall impact score.

Applications will compete for available funds with all other recommended applications submitted in response to this NOFO. The following will be considered in making funding decisions:

- Technical merit of the proposed project as determined by objective review.
- Availability of funds.
- Relevance of the proposed project to program priorities.

11. Is there any guidance or feedback available to help with preparing the application?

As published in RFA-FD-25-024, FDA encourages inquiries concerning this funding opportunity and welcomes the opportunity to answer questions from potential applicants. However, FDA does not provide guidance or feedback to help prepare applications.

12. What kind of support is available for the application process?

As published in Section VII of RFA-FD-25-024, the following application submission contacts are available to assist:

Application Submission Contacts
eRA Service Desk (Questions regarding ASSIST, eRA Commons, application errors and warnings, documenting system problems that threaten submission by the due date, and post-submission issues)

Finding Help Online: https://www.era.nih.gov/need-help (preferred method of contact)
Telephone: 301-402-7469 or 866-504-9552 (Toll Free)

Grants.gov Customer Support (Questions regarding Grants.gov registration and Workspace)
Contact Center Telephone: 800-518-4726
Email: support@grants.gov

13. What level of time/capacity will be required from schools or districts if awarded, particularly for reporting and paperwork?

As published in Section VI of RFA-FD-25-024, when multiple years are involved, recipients will be required to submit the Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR) annually and financial statements as required in the HHS Grants Policy Statement.

Recipients will be required to submit a mid-year progress report detailing activities, accomplishments, and challenges. FDA will provide the report template and instructions for all reporting requirements.

A final RPPR, invention statement, and the expenditure data portion of the Federal Financial Report are required for closeout of an award, as described in the HHS Grants Policy Statement. FDA NOFOs outline intended research goals and objectives. Post award, the FDA will review and measure performance based on the details and outcomes that are shared within the RPPR, as described at 2 CFR 200.301.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, as amended, includes a requirement for recipients of Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY2011 or later. All recipients of applicable FDA grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.fsrs.gov on all subawards over the threshold. See the HHS Grants Policy Statement for additional information on this reporting requirement.

In accordance with the regulatory requirements provided at 2 CFR 200.113 and Appendix XII to 2 CFR Part 200, recipients that have currently active Federal grants, cooperative agreements, and procurement contracts from all Federal awarding agencies with a cumulative total value greater than $10,000,000 for any period of time during the period of performance of a Federal award, must report and maintain the currency of information reported in the System for Award Management (SAM) about civil, criminal, and administrative proceedings in connection with the award or performance of a Federal award that reached final disposition within the most recent five-year period. The recipient must also make semiannual disclosures regarding such proceedings. Proceedings information will be made publicly available in the designated integrity and performance system (Responsibility/Qualification in SAM.gov, formerly FAPIIS). This is a

statutory requirement under section 872 of Public Law 110-417, as amended (41 U.S.C. 2313). As required by section 3010 of Public Law 111-212, all information posted in the designated integrity and performance system on or after April 15, 2011, except past performance reviews required for Federal procurement contracts, will be publicly available. Full reporting requirements and procedures are found in Appendix XII to 2 CFR Part 200 Award Term and Condition for Recipient Integrity and Performance Matters.

14. Where can we find guidance on budget requirements—what's allowed and how to structure it?

As published in Section II of RFA-FD-25-024, application budgets should reflect the actual needs of the proposed project up to $250,000 per school not to exceed $2,000,000 per school district in maximum total costs (direct and indirect costs). Applicants should only include reasonable, allowable, allocable, and necessary costs in proposed application budgets.

Note: Costs to procure foods commonly considered ultra-processed are **not** allowable under this funding opportunity announcement.

As published in Section IV of RFA-FD-25-024, All FDA awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the HHS Grants Policy Statement.

15. Are raw or minimally processed foods allowable for reimbursement or funding?

Yes, raw or minimally processed foods are allowable for reimbursement if part of the overall intervention.

16. Would costs related to heavy metal testing need to be included in the applicant's budget, or is it a shared resource?

No, applicants do not need to include heavy metal testing costs in their budget.

17. What are the "data collection and reporting requirements," and what operational capacity must applicants demonstrate?

FDA will be substantially involved in the coordination of food sampling, analysis, and data collection efforts. Food samples will be analyzed by FDA in FDA laboratories. As published in Section VI of RFA-FD-25-024, when multiple years are involved, recipients will be required to submit the Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR) annually and financial statements as required in the HHS Grants Policy Statement.

Recipients will be required to submit a mid-year progress report detailing activities, accomplishments, and challenges. FDA will provide the report template and instructions for all reporting requirements.

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18. Would food samples be submitted to the FDA or tested independently by applicants?

FDA will be substantially involved in the coordination of food sampling, analysis, and data collection efforts. Food samples will be analyzed by FDA in FDA laboratories.

19. Is there a required number (minimum/maximum) of menu items that must be tested?

No, there is not a required number (minimum/maximum) of menu items that must be tested.

20. Are student-level outcomes (e.g., dietary intake, academic performance) of interest, or is the focus solely on foods offered?

Student-level outcomes, such as dietary intake or academic performance, are not required and are not a focus of this funding opportunity.

21. What specific research questions or outcome areas is the FDA most interested in?

As published in Part 1 of RFA-FD-25-024, the purpose of this funding opportunity is to support a comprehensive, FDA-led initiative aimed at evaluating the toxicological safety and nutritional quality of meals served in schools that actively participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), including both public and nonprofit private schools. The grant may be used to support participation by a single school, multiple schools within a district, or entire school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program.

The goals of this funding opportunity are to:

1. Identify contaminants (e.g., heavy metals) present in school meals.
2. Promote whole food offerings and minimize the use of foods commonly considered ultra-processed,
3. Measure potential changes in contaminant levels and nutritional content pre- and post-intervention.