

Transparency Report

Technical Assistance Provider - 2024 Funding Round

The Northeast USDA Regional Food Business Center received an overwhelming response of high-quality applications for the first funding round of technical assistance providers. One hundred twelve applications were submitted, with \$15 million in funding requested. The Center awarded around \$2 million in funding to 13 organizations for Track A and four organizations for Track B.

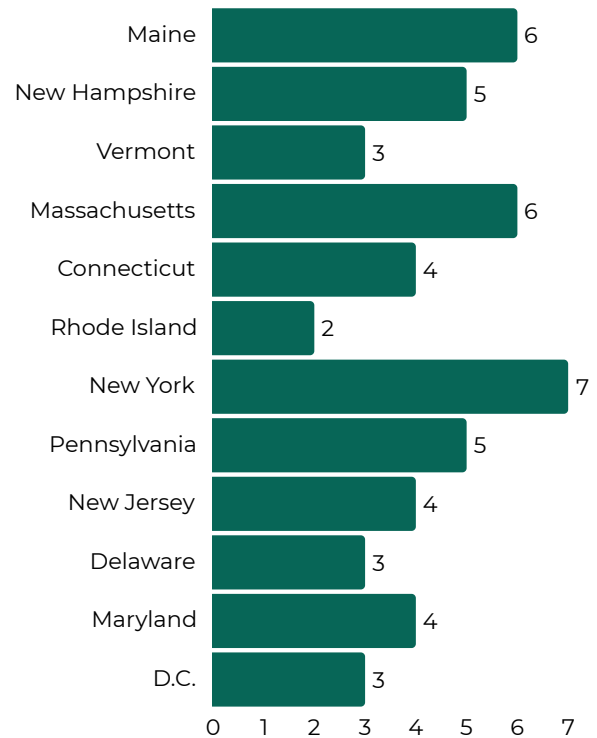
Track A offered funding to TA providers who give direct business TA to local producers and food and farm businesses. The minimum award value was \$50,000 and the maximum award was \$100,000. Track B offered funding to awardees who will create and coordinate regional networks of TA providers in the Northeast. The minimum award value was \$100,000, and the maximum award was \$200,000.

The Center is publishing this report to provide transparency in the award-making process and insight for all applicants and the public on the funding round's impact throughout the region. The Center staff welcomes all feedback on the first funding round and suggestions for subsequent rounds.

Geographic Distribution of Awards

The Northeast region is unique in its interconnectedness across state lines, cities and communities. In pursuit of a portfolio of awardees that reflects the geographic spread of producers, food businesses and TA providers throughout the region, the Center provided sub-awards to organizations that collectively deliver services across its 12-state and territory coverage area.

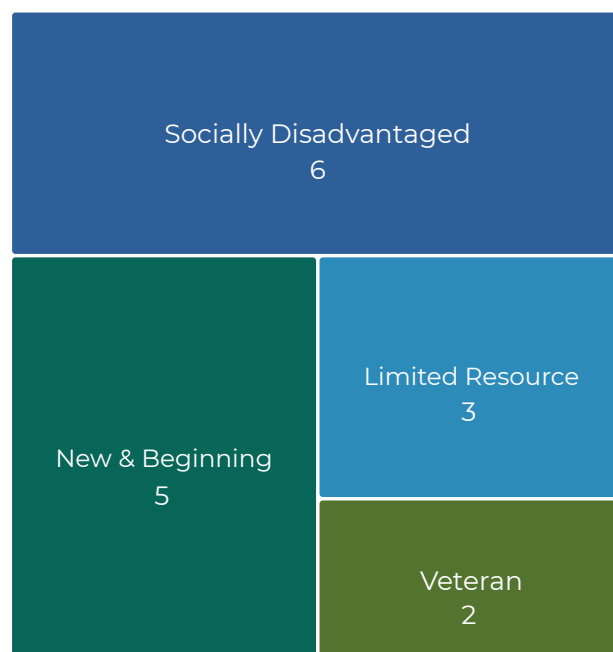
We recognize that supporting geographic distribution of awards is an ongoing effort that cannot be accomplished through a single funding round. The Center is committed to coordinating with state partners and similar USDA funding opportunities to continue building a resilient ecosystem of resources and services.



Emphasis on Historically Underserved Communities

The Center's grant process prioritized applicant organizations that serve historically underserved communities, including socially disadvantaged, limited-resource, beginning and veteran communities. The evaluation process prioritized proposals with clear, actionable strategies to tailor community-specific services in support of all producers and food businesses in the Northeast.

In prioritizing applicant organizations that have faced historical underinvestment by federal programs, we aim to increase the accessibility of USDA funding resources across all communities.



Technical Assistance Services Funded

The Center funded a wide range of TA services, including business TA (11), supply chain coordination (6), production expansion and new product development (7), market development (11) and financial resource navigation (6). These service areas were prioritized for funding based on insights gathered from informal interviews with producers about their needs, discussions with state and USDA partners, and feedback from TA providers regarding underfunded services.



Resources Offered to Applicants That Did Not Receive Funding

Applicants that did not receive funding could register for a 15-minute office hours session to discuss individual feedback. Those applicants are also encouraged to continue engaging with the Center, including registering for the regional TA provider directory and applying to future funding rounds. An additional \$4 million will be made available to providers before the program concludes in June 2028.



Community Engagement Process

The Center continues to emphasize accessibility in its grant-making process. During the open application period, the Center released a pre-recorded webinar that provided an overview on the funding opportunity's allowable activities, eligible entities and steps on how to apply. In subsequent weeks, the Center hosted three information sessions, which provided applicants with an opportunity to ask Center staff clarifying questions about the application process.

The Center's lead partner, the NASDA Foundation, advertised the funding round on its social media platforms, issued a press release and published a newsletter that focused on the funding round. The Center also distributed communication toolkits to its 125+ partner organizations, who in turn shared the funding opportunity with their networks through social media, website resource listings and webinars.

Decision-Making Process of Awards

The goal of the evaluation process was to create a final slate of proposals, based primarily on evaluators' scores, that serve a wide geography of the Northeast region and address federal and Center priorities of providing funding to projects impacting historically underserved communities.

The Center assembled a review panel of 20 individuals with expertise in food system coordination, TA services and work with historically underserved communities. Each application was evaluated by three of these external reviewers, who scored submissions based on the scoring rubric and guidance provided during a reviewer training session. Applications were then ranked by their average scores, and a minimum threshold was established to determine which applications proceeded to the internal review phase. The Center's Core Team then assessed the applications that advanced for allowable and unallowable costs. The finalists were then considered as a slate of organizations with regard to geographic service area and types of services offered.

Acknowledgements

This grant-making process would not have been possible without the guidance and support from our collaborative structure, including the heads of state departments of agriculture, Buffalo Go Green, Cornell University's Center for Regional Economic Advancement, New York Department of Agriculture and Markets, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, NASDA Foundation, state department of agriculture representatives, Community Advisory Councilmembers, DEI Councilmembers, Blume Theory Strategies, SAS Institute and Food Works Group.



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