

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

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## A Mini-Grant Initiative of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Project

**2024-2025**

The “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” project is co-led by Virginia Tech and Virginia State University with funding provided by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund.



# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

## A Mini-Grant Initiative of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Project

**DEADLINE: August 19, 2024 (5 PM Eastern Time)**

### Summary

The “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” project is co-led by Virginia Tech and Virginia State University with funding provided by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund.

The “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” team is pleased to announce the availability of mini-grant funds and request proposals for projects that will strengthen urban agriculture in Virginia. The funding range for all mini-grant proposals is from \$5,000-\$15,000. The period of performance for these projects is no more than 12 months.

The goal of mini grant funding is to build the capacity of existing urban agriculture work in Virginia. This funding opportunity aligns with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to define urban agriculture broadly to include farming and growing activity in an urban area. These funds are aimed to assist those individuals, organizations, and/or community-based groups already active in urban agriculture. Successful projects must fill a perceived need and also align with the aims of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative.

### Timeline

- Request for Proposals Opens— **June 17, 2024**
- Virtual Meeting Q&A (Zoom link via VT CFSCT listserv & website) — **June 20, 2024**
- Virtual Meeting Q & A (Zoom link via VT CFSCT listserv & website) — **July 26, 2024**
- Proposal Deadline— **August 19, 2024 (5 PM Eastern Time)**
- Proposals Reviewed by Project Team — **September 2024**
- Proposals Reviewed by USDA FSA — **September 2024**
- Awardees to be Notified — **October 1, 2024**
- Period of Performance — **October 14, 2024 – November 13, 2025\***
- Deadline to submit final report, financial report, and project data – **December 15, 2025**

**\*Please note:** Once the RFP is closed and applications are received, the Project Team will go through the applications and ensure that they are complete as to the requirements set in the RFP. The Applications will then be reviewed and rated by the Project Team, to include Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and the advisory committee. All awards will be made on the merit of the proposed project. Selected proposals will then be reviewed by USDA FSA. All successful proposal applicants will need to fulfill funding requirements through the USDA FSA and the Virginia Tech Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP). The Virginia Tech Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation will provide administrative assistance to fulfill legitimate payment requirements. **The timeline is dependent on the USDA review process.**

## ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

### A Mini-Grant Initiative of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Project

The goal of mini grant funding is to directly build upon existing project work or programming in support of urban agriculture and food systems in Virginia. These funds are aimed to assist those individuals, organizations, and/or community-based groups already active in urban agriculture through educational, technical assistance, outreach, and networking opportunities. Successful projects must fill a perceived need of the applicant(s) and also align with the programmatic aims of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative (see page 3). These are one-time-funds for short-term urban agriculture-enhancing projects.

#### **Checklist**

- ✓ The proposal will be submitted by a non-profit organization, community-based organization, Tribal entity, or an urban agricultural farmer (for-profit or not-for-profit).
- ✓ The proposed work will enhance and build the capacity of current urban agriculture activities in Virginia.
- ✓ The proposed work will only take place in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- ✓ The proposal clearly identifies a need to support urban agriculture and food systems activity.
- ✓ The proposal focuses on supporting urban agricultural issues and needs that align with the goals of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative.
- ✓ The project will be completed within 12 months (October 14, 2024 – November 13, 2025).
- ✓ The budget does not include equipment costs more than \$5,000.
- ✓ The budget does not include costs for the purchasing of land or for the repayment of loans.
- ✓ The total funding request is between \$5,000 and \$15,000.
- ✓ The applicant is prepared to participate in all project reporting efforts.
- ✓ If awarded, the applicant is able to receive funding as a contractual service through Virginia Tech. This requires a W-9 form. This also includes the ability to receive an advance payment of 50% of the proposed budget and final 50% at the end of the project with an invoice.

*Late and incomplete submissions will not be accepted.*



# The Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia Initiative

The “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative emerged from a national call from the USDA to understand, invest in, and support the needs of urban agricultural producers and helping urban producers access USDA programs and resources. Funding for this Initiative is provided through the USDA FSA Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund. Through a Cooperative Agreement between Virginia Tech and Virginia State University with USDA FSA, the Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative has five objectives:

- Build organizational, farmer, and agency capacity to assist Virginia urban farmers.
- Increase understanding of urban agriculture in Virginia.
- Increase knowledge, awareness, and participation in FSA and NRCS programs and services associated with growing food in an urban area.
- Assist farmers with expanding farming operations, accessing land, and implementing climate-friendly practices in urban areas.
- Increase access and participation of underserved farmers in FSA and NRCS programs and services in urban areas.

## **Mini-Grants**

A fundamental component of this Initiative is to provide support for urban farmers and growers to strengthen urban agriculture across Virginia. This support includes the dissemination of mini-grants to eligible non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, Tribal entities, and urban agricultural farmers *to enhance and build the capacity of* their current urban agriculture activities. Successful mini-grant projects should fill a perceived need of the applicant and their communities of interest. All successful proposals should also focus on supporting urban agricultural issues and needs that align with the goals of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative. **Priority will be given to proposals that give attention to underserved farmers in urban communities (see page 11 for USDA definition of underserved farmers). Specifically, priority will be given to those urban agriculture projects that aim to:**

- 1. Increase underserved farmer capacity for growing food, expanding operations, implementing climate-friendly practices, and building on-farm sustainability.**
- 2. Increase the technical support of underserved farmers to provide healthy food in their local urban communities.**
- 3. Improve urban agriculture community capacity to actively meet equity goals.**
- 4. Advance current agricultural activity in urban areas in Virginia.**

The following are *example topics* that mini-grant projects may include (but are not limited to):

- Community farming or gardening in low wealth urban communities
- Urban agriculture land access programming, policy, and/or outreach
- Equity-based urban agriculture and food systems improvements
- Building urban agriculture resilience to a changing climate
- Urban agricultural marketing, networking, and awareness-building
- Technical assistance to increase healthy urban food production and dissemination.

## Funding

- Funding will be allocated for a period of performance of no more than 12 months with the estimated dates of **October 14, 2024 – November 13, 2025**.
- Awards will range from **\$5,000 to \$15,000**.
- Funding will be set up as a **contractual agreement with Virginia Tech**. With a contractual agreement, Virginia Tech can provide an advance payment of 50% up front based on proposal budget and 50% at the end of the project with a final invoice. Otherwise, the full payment will be reimbursed at the end of the project with an invoice.

## Funding Restrictions

Funds **may not** be used to buy land or for the repayment of loans. Equipment costs are allowable but must be capped at \$5,000. Funds can only be used for activities directly related to the project.

## Deliverables

- A 2-page Progress Report is due 6 months from the start of the project. This will include a budget update. A template will be provided. A scheduled meeting may be an alternative option for the Progress Report if requested, inclusive of a budget update.
- The Final Report, not to exceed 2 single-spaced pages, is due 30 days after the completion of the project. The Final Report should provide a complete overview of highlights of successes, progress towards each objective, and a final budget update. Images and stories are strongly encouraged. A template will be provided.
- Potential project presentations to be delivered at “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” project related meetings.
- Scheduled site visits will be conducted by members of the Project Team to meet stakeholders and build capacity.
- An FSA Farm Number will be expected by the end of the project if it is not already established by the awardee.
- All awardees will be expected to sign a Funding Agreement that stipulates these deliverables and funding expectations.

## Eligibility

- Only one proposal can be submitted by an entity.
- Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, Tribal entities, and urban agricultural farmers (for-profit or not-for-profit).
- Proposals are allowed to include multiple sites of project activity under one application.
- Funding may only be used for projects within the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Awardees will be expected to follow Virginia Tech budgeting and reporting policies.
- Projects must meet Virginia Cooperative Extension’s commitment to Civil Rights: “Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S.D.A., and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.”

# Proposal Requirements

## Format

- Proposals should be single-spaced and use a 12-point font and 1” margins.
- Cover sheet (1-page, format provided)
- Summary (300 words) (to be included on the Cover Sheet)
- Narrative (3-page max) (template provided)
- Budget (format provided)
- Budget narrative (1-page max)
- Resume of project leads (2-page max each)
- Optional: Document of collaboration with other partners (e.g., letters of support indicating collaboration only if appropriate)

## Additional Information

- **Cover Sheet (format provided)**
  - Please complete using the format provided.
- **Summary (format provided)**
  - This 300-word description should clearly state the purpose, aims, audience, location, and overall approach of the project. Please complete using the format provided.
- **Narrative (3-page limit), please include (template provided):**
  1. Statement of goal(s) and supporting objectives.
  2. Demonstrated need for the proposed project.
  3. Identified urban farmer audience and community the project will focus on.
  4. Explanation of how the project will enhance existing urban agriculture activity in Virginia.
  5. Explanation of how the project aligns with the goals of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative. Include priority areas, if applicable (see page 3).
  6. Description of the approach to be used in carrying out the proposed project.
  7. Description of expected outcomes of project activities.
  8. Statement of how progress toward achieving project objectives will be monitored.
- **Budget (format provided) and Budget Justification**
  - Please use the budget format provided.
  - Include a separate budget justification document that describes each budget category.
- **Document of Collaboration**
  - If appropriate, provide letter(s) of support from other organization(s) that have agreed to collaborate on the project.

## Review Process

Each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the basic and administrative requirements as set forth in this RFP. All applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel. This review panel will make a recommendation for awarding funding using the criteria stated below.

### **Criteria used in the evaluation of project proposals will include the following:**

- **Target Locality:** Virginia
- **Relevancy Toward Goals:** A clear explanation of how the project will enhance already existing urban agriculture and food systems activity in Virginia.
- **Relevancy Toward Priorities:** Priority will be given to proposals that give attention to underserved urban producers and projects which impact underserved urban agricultural communities in Virginia.
- **Relevancy Toward Community Need:** Applicants clearly demonstrate the need for the project within the community.
- **Achievability:** Probability of success to complete project aims by the end of the project.
- **Funding Need:** Applicants demonstrate financial need for the project.
- **Qualifications of Applicant(s):** Applicants demonstrate experience and ability in serving the proposed urban agriculture stakeholder community.
- **Applicant Priority:** Applicant is explicitly addressing an underserved farmer population(s) identified in the narrative and clearly demonstrates cultural competence and experience in serving the needs of the underserved farmer community identified.
- **Project Management:** Applicant is prepared for the administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, budgeting, and reporting, efforts.
- **Budget:** Clear rationale and feasible plan to spend funds in order to achieve project goals.

**Each category will be evaluated using the following scoring:  
1= lowest, 5=highest (Total points possible =100)**

**Exceeds:** The applicant provides specific and comprehensive information, and provides complete, detailed, and clearly articulated responses to address the questions. The description is well conceived, and the ideas are fully developed. (4-5)

**Meets Expectations :** The applicant provides general but sufficient detail, adequately addresses the criteria questions, however some areas are not fully explained and/or questions remain. The application has some minor inconsistencies and weaknesses. (2-3)

**Does Not Meet Expectations :** The applicant omitted a very large portion of the requested information, fails to provide information, provides inaccurate information, or provides information that is hard to understand. (1-2)

### **USDA Environmental Review Process:**

Proposals that are selected to be recommended for an award by the Project Team will submit proposal materials to the USDA for a required review process. This includes:

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the implementing regulations in 40 CFR Parts 1500 – 1508, and FSA’s NEPA implementing Regulations in 7 CFR Part 799 for cooperative agreements entered under the FSA Urban and Innovative Agriculture Community-Based Organization Fund. After review at the programmatic level, USDA determined that, in general, cooperative agreements entered under Section 1001 of the Build Back Better Act, Food Systems Transformation Effort do not have the potential for significant impacts to the human environment. FSA has determined that the following categories of activities are categorically excluded from further review under the National Environmental Policy Act, per 7 CFR § 799.31:

- Educational or informational (i.e., outreach) activities; and
- Procurement actions for goods and services conducted in accordance with Executive Orders.

However, a site-specific review will be needed for activities funded through the cooperative agreement, or subsequent micro-grant programs, if any of the following conditions are true:

1. Disturb ground to a level that has not been previously disturbed, remove any trees, remove any tree roots, or use mechanical means to remove damaged fencing or debris that will impact below the level of previous disturbance.
2. Place a farm storage or other facility on a farm eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places and would have a visual impact to the historic character of the farm.
3. Modify, renovate, or remove a structure or building that is 50 years old or older.
4. Involve an activity including new land clearing, impacts to any water body, wetland, floodplain, riparian buffer, threatened or endangered species, their critical habitat, or cultural resources that would otherwise require consultation.
5. Result in any extraordinary circumstances in accordance with Handbook 1-EQ (Rev. 3) Par. 25.
6. Change the existing land use or remove the land from agricultural use.
7. Involve FSA actions or programs not specified in this P-850, not approved in that municipality, or for which an individual site-specific FSA-850 or environmental assessment is required.

For micro-grants, the grantee must satisfy any site-specific NEPA requirements identified by FSA prior to drawing down funds or incurring expenses related to the micro-grant. Once these conditions have been successfully completed, FSA will notify the grantee that the review is complete. At that time, the distribution and expenditure of micro-grant funds will be authorized. Before the NEPA process is completed, Federal regulations specify acceptable actions in 40 CFR § 1506.1.



## How to Apply?

- Applicants should submit the completed proposal by email to [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) no later than **5 PM on August 19, 2024. Or postmarked and mailed to:**

VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation  
282 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

- Email submissions should be compiled and saved as **one PDF file.**
- For accessibility and language assistance, please contact [stephaniejzhu@vt.edu](mailto:stephaniejzhu@vt.edu) at least thirty days prior to the deadline.
- *Late and incomplete submissions will not be accepted.*

## Notification of Awards

Within the limit of funds available for this RFP, the Virginia Tech and Virginia State University management team will make awards to those eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFP.

**Applications will be notified by October 1, 2024. The timeline is contingent on the USDA review process.**

## Address questions about this Request for Proposals to:

Kim Niewolny  
Director, [Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation](#)  
282 Litton-Reaves Hall  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
tel: 540.231.5784 (o)

**Feedback to shape the content and parameters of the Mini-Grant RFP was solicited from the project team and advisory group, which include:**

- Cameron Terry (Garden Variety Harvests and Lick Run Community Farm)
- Duron Chavis (Happily Natural Day and Sankofa Garden)
- Herbert Brown (USDA- Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, Virginia)
- Jeanette Abi-Nader (Cultivate Charlottesville and Piedmont Housing Alliance)
- Kathryn Strong (Virginia Cooperative Extension, Fairfax County)
- Morgan Bradley (Appalachian Sustainable Development)
- Renee Foster (USDA FSA Urban County Executive Director, Virginia)
- Sharon Manana (Work Program Architects and Hampton Roads Urban Agriculture)
- Tatiana Gil (Urban Ag Conservationist, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service)
- Tyrone Cherry (Petersburg Oasis Youth Farm)
- Briana Stevenson (Virginia State University and National Urban Agriculture Initiative)
- Nadine Jackson (Virginia State University)
- William Crutchfield (Virginia State University)
- Eric Bendfeldt (Virginia Tech)
- Katie Trozzo (Virginia Tech)
- Stephanie Zhu (Virginia Tech)
- Kim Niewolny (Virginia Tech)



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S.D.A., and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

## **Definition of Historically Underserved Farmer:**

According to the USDA, some groups of people are identified in Farm Bill legislation and in USDA policy as being Historically Underserved (HU). Members of these communities have been historically underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs. Four groups are defined by USDA as “Historically Underserved,” including farmers or ranchers who are: 1) Beginning; 2) Socially Disadvantaged; 3) Veterans; and 4) Limited Resource:

- **Beginning Farmer or Rancher (BFR)**

An individual who has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 cumulative years.

- **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher (SDFR)**

Members of a group who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of that group without regard to their individual qualities. Includes the following groups:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or another Pacific Islander group
- Hispanic
- Women

- **Veteran Farmer or Rancher (VFR)**

An individual who has served in the armed forces, including a reserve component, and was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and:

- qualifies as BFR; or
- first obtained veteran status during the last 10 years.

- **Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher (LRF)**

An individual who has direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years, and:

- has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four in each of the previous 2 years; or
- has a total household income less than 50 percent of the county median household income in each of the previous 2 years.

To determine if you qualify as LRF, USDA provides an online self-determination tool at [www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov](http://www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov).

**To learn more about USDA definitions and resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers, please visit: <https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/04/Get-Started-Guide.pdf>**

## Proposal Cover Sheet

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### A Mini-Grant Initiative of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Project

- **Project Title:**
- **Total Amount Requested (\$5,000-\$15,000):**
- **Name of Applicant (e.g., Organization, Farm Business, Tribe Entity, or Individual):**
- **501(c)(3) Status, if applicable (yes or no):**
- **Applicant Lead (Name and Title):**
- **Project Contact, if different from Applicant Lead (list one person as primary contact):**
  - **Name:**
  - **Address:**
  - **Phone:**
  - **E-mail:**
  - **Website (if applicable):**
  
- **Which of the following ethnicity (ies) are explicitly accounted for in the Applicant(s) Urban Population (regarding USDA Socially Disadvantaged Farmer status):**
  - American Indians or Alaskan Natives
  - Asian American
  - Blacks or African Americans
  - Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
  - Hispanics
  - White
  - Prefer not to say
  
- **Which of the following gender(s) are explicitly accounted for in the Applicant(s) Urban Population (regarding USDA Socially Disadvantaged Farmer status):**
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
  - Short answer: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Prefer not to say
  
- **Which USDA historically underserved groups (other than Socially Disadvantaged Farmers) are explicitly accounted for in the Applicant(s) Urban Population:**
  - Beginning Farmers
  - Military Veteran Farmers
  - Limited Resource Farmers
  - Prefer not to say

**Summary (300 word maximum):**

*In 300 words or less, provide a very brief description of the project. A Project Summary includes the following: 1) clearly state the purpose, 2) aims, 3) audience, 4) location, and 5) overall approach with activities of the project. Also include the name of the individual applicant or applicant organization. If awarded a grant, the identified applicant will establish an agreement or contractual relationship with the USDA Urban Agriculture*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the applicant to write their project summary. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document.

## **Proposal Narrative Template (3-page maximum)**

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**By addressing each of these sections in your proposal, you'll provide a comprehensive overview of your project and its potential impact on urban agriculture in Virginia. Please see pages 7-8 for more details pertaining to these sections and overall review criteria.**

- 1. Statement of goal(s) and supporting objectives:**
- 2. Demonstrated need for the proposed project:**
- 3. Urban farmer audience and community in Virginia:**
- 4. How will the project enhance existing urban agriculture activity in Virginia?**
- 5. Alignment with the goals of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Initiative:**
- 6. Description of the approach to be used:**
- 7. Description of expected outcomes:**
- 8. Statement of how progress will be monitored:**

## Proposal Budget

### A Mini-Grant Initiative of the “Advancing Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Food Systems in Virginia” Project

*Total expenses must be a minimum of \$5000 and cannot exceed \$15,000.*

Category	Year Request	Total Request
<b>Salaries and Wages</b>	Year 1	Total
<b>Total</b>		
<b>Fringe Benefits</b>		
<b>Total</b>		
<b>Materials and Supplies ("equipment" under \$5000 to be include here)</b>		
<b>Travel</b>		
<b>Other Direct Costs</b>		
<b>Total</b>		

**Note: Include a separate budget justification document that describes each budget category across entire period of performance.**