



## 2025 Request for Applications Overview

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## **Introduction and Background**

Welcome to the Native American Agriculture Fund’s (NAAF) grant application process for 2025. The information below describes projects and ideas for which NAAF seeks applications and provides details about submission requirements and clarification of expectations applying to all applicants seeking funding.

NAAF was created from *cy pres* funds attributable to the settlement of the *Keepseagle v. Vilsack* litigation. A history of the litigation leading to the creation of NAAF can be found on the NAAF website at [NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/about/](https://NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/about/). The final Court approval of the amended settlement in the case occurred in 2018, and in late July 2018, the Trustees of NAAF executed the NAAF Trust Agreement. A copy of the Trust Agreement that launched NAAF into existence can also be found on the NAAF website at [NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/trust-agreement/](https://NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/trust-agreement/). We strongly recommend reading the Trust Agreement before starting an application for funding.

NAAF seeks applications that align with a variety of programmatic areas. These areas are informed by strategic planning activities, grantmaking outcomes and online survey responses. For the 2025 funding cycle, applications are sought across a wide variety of projects across several topical areas.

NAAF is directed to fund grant projects for a total of twenty (20) years until the year 2038, and in so doing, hopes to make a significant impact across as many Native communities as possible. This 2025 RFA represents the sixth (7<sup>th</sup>) funding cycle for NAAF. Ongoing input about the needs of Native farmers and ranchers from eligible entities is extremely valuable. We encourage all applicants and stakeholders to start a dialogue with NAAF via the [NAAF survey instrument](#) to achieve the promise provided by the creation of NAAF.

## **Allowable Use of Funds**

The Trust Agreement ([NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/trust-agreement/](https://NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org/trust-agreement/)) governing NAAF controls the eligible uses and eligible entities for NAAF grant funding. In particular, The Trust Agreement prohibits NAAF from providing grant or loan funding directly to individual Native farmers and ranchers, so we will not accept applications directly from individuals. We are required to only provide grants to entities specifically outlined in the Trust Agreement. In addition, no funds may be sought for litigation or direct lobbying purposes. However, NAAF is allowed to fund eligible entities that can then, in turn, fund grants and loans to Native farmers and ranchers, provided that those individuals are not explicitly named in the NAAF application.

The key focus areas for which funding is allowed under the Trust Agreement are broadly described as: *business assistance, agricultural education, technical support and advocacy services*. Eligible entities are described more specifically below (see page 5).

Funds may be used for projects that are either 12 or 24 months in duration. Funds may be used for project support, general organizational support, scholarships, re-grants, lending programs or capital expenditures. All applications must contain clear descriptions of the project activities and the populations targeted for such support, and budget narratives must clearly show how funds will be used. Use of all NAAF-provided templates within the application are required.

The terms “farmer” and “rancher” should be interpreted in the broadest context possible and are meant to include farmers of all types of food and fiber products and ranchers of all types of livestock, as well as those engaged in fisheries, aquaculture or forest products. Farmers and ranchers can also be interpreted to mean those engaged in community-based agriculture such as hunting and gathering for food production purposes, community supported food systems, and other means that individuals and communities in Indian Country engage in through the process of feeding their communities. Young, beginning, and new farmers and ranchers are a key constituency and any reference to farmers and ranchers should also be interpreted to include people seeking to start agricultural production and related activities. Value-added agriculture is meant broadly to include all types of processes by which value is added to raw agricultural products or raw hunted or gathered products that would result in a product used to feed those within or outside Native communities and which can be used to engage in markets outside our communities.

We encourage applicants to combine focus areas into one project, such as combining business assistance with technical support or agricultural education with business assistance. Projects that focus only on research or only on curriculum development are not as high of a priority for funding as those projects that use existing research or existing curriculum to assist Native producers unless the curriculum is based on new approaches or application of Tribal knowledge. NAAF is looking for projects that deliver developed content with practical application to the success of Native farmers and ranchers or that take research and assist individuals in applying the results of that research to improve their operations.

With regard to advocacy services, NAAF will not fund lobbying efforts of any kind but will fund educational or technical support projects that deliver public information to those supporting Native farmers and ranchers or educational projects that ensure that those

advocating on behalf of or developing policies that affect Native farmers and ranchers are provided with the best possible content relevant to Native agriculture.

For educational organizations that seek to provide educational opportunities or degree programs for Native students, recipients of this support must be directly involved in agriculture (in the broadest context possible). Funding for cultural or indigenous studies must be targeted towards food and agriculture.

Factors that will be considered in assessing applications for funding include:

- The scope and nature of services previously provided to Native farmers and ranchers and the specific services you plan to provide with award funds;
- How your requested award amount fits within the overall budget for your organization;
- How your work integrates community accountability and Native leadership;
- Steps you will take to ensure the funds will be used for the purposes stated in the award proposal;
- Whether your organization is based in a Native community that you are serving and whether you are provide services to Native farmers and ranchers in that community;
- Whether, if your organization is not Native-led, you have a dedicated Native programming effort;
- Whether your organization has a strong set of leaders and board members who are representative of the community and are accountable to the Native community served;

Other evaluation criteria identified later in this RFA (see pages 22-24).

## Eligible Entities

As required by the Trust Agreement, eligible applicants include:

- Nonprofit organizations with IRS Section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, or if such status has not yet been achieved, such organizations may apply for funding through a Fiscal Sponsor that has received such 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status;
- Educational organizations described in Section 170(b)(1)(A)(ii) of the Internal Revenue Code; Tribally controlled or Bureau operated schools, as well as schools operated by an Indian Tribe or Tribal organization, align with the language in Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code, qualifying them as eligible educational institutions for the Native American Agriculture Funds (NAAF) grant. This eligibility stems from their adherence to the definition outlined in Section 170(b)(1)(A)(ii).

As per this section, educational organizations are primarily engaged in formal instruction, maintain regular faculty and curriculum, and have a consistently enrolled body of students attending their educational activities. Tribally controlled or Bureau operated schools, granted under the Tribally Controlled Schools Act or deemed eligible by section 5205, fall within this category. Similarly, schools operated by Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations that enroll K-12 students, including pre-school, also meet these eligibility criteria. By fulfilling these requirements, both types of tribal schools align with the definition provided in the Internal Revenue Code, making them eligible for the NAAF grant as recognized educational institutions.
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), including Certified Native CDFIs and Emerging Native CDFIs, provided however that such CDFI is a tax-exempt organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and
- An instrumentality of a state or federally recognized Tribe, including a non-profit organization chartered under the Tribal law of a state or federally recognized Tribe, that furnishes assistance designed to further Native American farming or ranching activities, provided, however, that 1) the use of any grant funds by such grant recipient shall be restricted exclusively to charitable and educational purposes; 2) the grant recipient shall annually provide NAAF with audited financial statements and reports as required by NAAF; 3) if the grant recipient is a governmental entity, it shall agree to a limited waiver of sovereign immunity with respect to NAAF's right to enforce the terms of the grant (i.e., the amount of funding awarded); and 4) if the grant recipient agrees to comply with all expenditure responsibility requirements designed by NAAF.

Applicants eligible to receive funding from NAAF should discuss their organization's track record (or key personnel record of accomplishment) of providing business assistance, agriculture education, technical support, or advocacy services to Native farmers and ranchers. If the applicant is a start-up organization, NAAF will expect the organization to involve others in the project as consultants or advisers who can speed up the process of reaching audiences and achieving effectiveness in their work. NAAF encourages start-up nonprofit organizations that have applied for 501(c)(3) status from the IRS but have not yet received a favorable

determination to apply through a Fiscal Sponsor who can also provide important technical support for proposed project activities. If Fiscal Sponsors are used, the Fiscal Sponsor must be an eligible 501(c)(3) organization and should follow the guidance in NAAF's [Fiscal Sponsor Information](#).

The applicant shall provide proof that it clearly falls within one or more of the four types of eligible applicants listed above. Due to the variation in organizations that exist within Indian Country, and because there is no central registry of the various types of entities that could be eligible under the Trust Agreement, NAAF requires each applicant to provide proof of its inclusion within the allowable types of eligible entities. Proof of eligible status can be provided through: IRS documentation reflecting status as an eligible 501(c)(3) non-profit entity; proof that the organization meets the federal definition of an educational institution; proof of certification as a CDFI or Native CDFI that is also a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization; or a Tribal government resolution on government letterhead executed by an official authorized to make such representations that the entity is an instrumentality or non-profit organization chartered under Tribal law of a state or federally recognized Tribe. When interpreting the scope of this RFA in light of the language in the NAAF Trust Agreement, we are not allowed to consider applications by entities that are community-based organizations without 501(c)(3) designation.

IRS letters recognizing the assignment of an EIN to the applicant organization are not sufficient proof of eligibility. Similarly, Tribal laws providing a blanket waiver of immunity for certain entities are not sufficient for purposes of the specific limited waiver of sovereign immunity required by NAAF's Trust Agreement. Applicants must include a letter or resolution from the Tribal office or official seeking NAAF funding. Please request further guidance from NAAF if you have additional questions.

#### *Note to Educational Organizations*

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) are clearly within the definition of educational organizations and are encouraged to apply for funding. The term "educational organizations," as defined within the Trust Agreement, is broader than Tribal Colleges and Universities. Native-serving educational institutions, certified as such, are encouraged to apply as well. For purposes of this funding opportunity, educational organizations that are **not** recognized as Native-serving institutions must provide clear evidence as to their history of serving Native farmers and ranchers by discussing their experience in providing business assistance, agricultural education, technical support, or advocacy services to and for Native farmers and ranchers.

In projects involving TCUs and other types of educational organizations, NAAF encourages meaningful partnerships as indicated by delineated responsibilities and budgetary considerations. Overhead/administrative expense limitations apply to all educational organizations, including non-Native-serving educational institutions, as discussed above. If an educational organization has Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) faculty on staff, the organization is allowed to apply but is required to include FRTEP faculty as significant participants in the delivery of the project.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) operated schools are allowed to apply for funding.

### Note to Tribal Governments

All Tribal governments provided funding through NAAF are required by the Trust Agreement to provide NAAF a limited waiver of sovereign immunity for the amount of funding provided to the Tribe covering the period of the grant. This is a non-negotiable term of the NAAF Trust Agreement and will be required for grants across all categories with no exceptions. A sample limited waiver is available here: [NAAF's 2025 Limited Waiver](#).

The final limited waiver of sovereign immunity will not be required when the application is submitted; instead, applicants will acknowledge and affirm that they and their Tribal leadership are aware of the requirement and are willing to provide a limited waiver in a timely manner after notification of the award. Waivers must be submitted prior to award funds distribution. NAAF will assist Tribal government staff in ensuring that appropriate documentation is secured. NAAF recommends Tribal governments submitting proposals in 2025 to begin the process of obtaining waiver pre-approval as soon as possible to ensure final waivers are in place so funds can be expeditiously released to successful applicants. If a Tribal government is notified that they have been selected for an award but does not provide their limited waiver of sovereign immunity within a reasonable period of time, NAAF reserves the right to reallocate those funds to another Tribal government.

Instrumentalities of Tribes (of state or federally recognized Tribes) can mean any number of things such as Tribal departments of agriculture, food authorities or even food processing or food marketing entities. Tribal governments have the latitude to determine which entities are instrumentalities of their governments; NAAF only needs proper documentation as to that status. If an organization has eligible status as an educational institution or a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, for instance, but wishes to be considered as an instrumentality of a Tribal government, the organization must secure and submit an authorizing document from their Tribal government to that specific effect. A statement from an organization other than a Tribal government will not suffice for this purpose.

In the context of tribal sovereignty, an instrumentality refers to entities or organizations that act as an extension of a Native American tribe and are established by the tribe to carry out specific functions or services. These instrumentalities are created to exercise tribal authority and promote the tribe's self-governance.

Examples of instrumentalities within Native American tribes in the United States include health or educational departments, utilities, or other infrastructure cooperatives. In addition, Tribes in the United States have established corporations under Section 17 of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Section 17 corporations are entities authorized by the federal government to engage in commercial activities, such as agriculture, forestry, and business ventures, on behalf of the tribe.

Moreover, the Internal Revenue Code Section 7871 provides special treatment for certain tribal instrumentalities regarding their status as a state. Under this provision, tribal instrumentalities that meet specific criteria can be treated as states for certain federal tax purposes.

These provisions, such as Section 17 corporations and the treatment as a state under Section 7871, further illustrate how tribes establish instrumentalities to exercise their tribal sovereignty and promote self-governance. Some of these entities have collaborated with other Tribes to create consortiums. A Tribal Consortia can be established on regional, state, or national levels, depending on the specific scope and objectives of the collaboration. These consortia often focus on healthcare, education, economic development, natural resource management, cultural preservation, or advocacy for tribal rights and interests.

When a Tribal consortium is established, various forms of origination can generally be located. For instance, section 17 must provide their original request, and depending on when they sought this status, a document from Congress, the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, or their regional BIA official. NAAF needs origination documents provided when either entity is applying for our funding. This is especially true if the entity has the authority to bind the tribe without seeking a waiver of immunity from the Tribal Government.

**Please make sure to include these types of documents in your application. Just stating you are an entity or instrumentality of a Tribe is not sufficient; origination documents are required.**



### Note on Eligibility of Previous Grantees

Organizations funded in 2016 as Fast Track grantees and previous NAAF grantees are not prohibited from applying for funding through this 2025 RFA. Their application will not receive special consideration over first-time applicants to the NAAF grant process. Fast Track grantees and previously awarded NAAF grantees may still be in the midst of their funded projects. If organizations from these cohorts choose to apply for funding in this 2025 RFA, they must clearly delineate how the funds they are seeking will be used for a project focused on 1) a new activity, or 2) a new aspect of or continuation of completed activities related to their previously funded activities. **To ensure accountability and timely reporting, grantees who are not in compliance, such as those behind on quarterly, annual, and final reporting and updates relating to past grant awards and projects, will be ineligible to apply for 2025 funding. If you have questions about your eligibility due to late reporting, please contact NAAF via your grant inbox (i.e., Tribes@, Edu@).**

### **Addressing Access to Capital**

**Because the central issues in the litigation that led to NAAF's creation involved access to capital, NAAF requires all applicants to incorporate strategies that will improve access to capital by Native farmers and ranchers in their proposed activities. Access to capital can be shown by any of the following types of activities: business planning or market planning training; financial education; credit education for scholastic students; record keeping; credit repair activities; targeted credit application training or technical support; or risk analysis and related activities to prepare Native farmers and ranchers as they seek capital to support their enterprises. Capital is always needed in agriculture enterprises and will always be relevant to those involved in food and agriculture. NAAF has increased the weight we apply to this evaluation criteria as we review all applications. Applications absent any discussion of access to capital or management of agricultural risk will not be considered for funding. We encourage you to view our [video on access to capital](#) and the Evaluation Criteria section on pages 22-24 for more information.**

### **Cost Sharing or Matching Funds**

NAAF does **not** require cost sharing, in-kind or matching funds to be included within the project budget for which funding is sought. However, those entities seeking funding that can demonstrate or are willing to offer cost-sharing, in-kind, or matching funds to augment their work will receive additional consideration during the review process. If cost-sharing, in-kind, or matching funds are provided, those funds can be from any available source. All applicants are strongly encouraged to find every opportunity possible to augment their work with other activities in which they are already involved or with other partners important to their work. As a reminder to all applicants, if selected for funding, the funds provided by NAAF are not considered federal in nature and, therefore, can be used as a federal match.

### **Collaborators, Cooperators and Leveraging**

While not specifically required, additional consideration will be given to any application for funding that has identified collaborators, or cooperators, or supporters of the work

contemplated. Applicants are strongly encouraged to reach out to others who may have done similar work and to learn from others. Support letters are not required but may be included with the application if the applicant believes the support letters strengthen the narrative or project description in some way. Intertribal projects that have broad impact beyond just one Tribe, community or region will receive additional consideration, and any project with clear replicability will also receive additional consideration during the review process.

NAAF is seeking, from each applicant, a clear indication of whether the applicant is interested in working directly with NAAF to find additional leveraging opportunities from other funding sources. NAAF will request a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer during your application completion to indicate whether you are willing to work with NAAF to leverage additional resources.

### **Limitation on Indirect Costs**

Project budgets are divided into two broad categories: direct costs and indirect costs. Direct costs include but are not limited to, salaries, travel, equipment, and supplies directly benefiting the grant-supported project or activity. Indirect costs are expenses incurred for common or joint activities that cannot be identified with a particular activity within line items. Examples of indirect costs include budget for operating offices or administrative tasks performed by staff within the organization that provide supportive services to those involved directly with the grant (such as financial or accounting office staff). **All applicants will be limited to no more than 15% allowed indirect costs applied on personnel and direct costs.** Grantees may not assess indirect costs on intermediary funds used for loans, re-grants, or scholarships. A detailed explanation of how to calculate indirect costs for your budget request is included in NAAF’s 2025 RFA Budget and Budget Narrative Guidelines. NAAF reserves the right to increase or decrease limitations on indirect costs in future RFAs.

### **Unallowable Use of Funds**

The following types of applicants or uses of funds are **NOT** eligible under this 2025 Request for Applications:

- Entities that do not provide business assistance, agriculture education, technical support, or advocacy services to Native farmers and ranchers;
- Work based outside the United States or its territories;
- Projects that do not provide assistance and/or resources designed to impact and further assist in the success of Native farmers and ranchers;
- Projects that seek funding predominately to provide outreach on USDA programs and services; resources for those types of activities are already provided by USDA, therefore use of NAAF funds to provide redundant activity support is unallowable;
- Projects that assist individual Native farmers and ranchers, but the services are not agriculture-related;

- Projects that identify an individual or individuals who will be served by the proposed grant activities. References to those in the service population should not include personally identifiable information;
- Use of funds that are not restricted exclusively to charitable and educational purposes described in IRS Section 170(c)(2)(B);
- Use of funds for litigation. However, the offering of legal services important to Native farmers and ranchers is allowable and can include (but isn't limited to): estate planning, land purchase agreements, understanding of legal rights, contract negotiation, assistance with administrative appeals, and other typical legal or advisory services important to those engaged in agriculture;
- Use of funds for lobbying, political activity or influencing legislation as defined by the IRS (other forms of public issues education and public issues advocacy may be eligible activities).

**Note:** Only Tribal governments may apply for industrial hemp project funding. All applications including requests for industrial hemp support are required to strictly follow the guidance on page 17 and may only be used to fund feasibility studies or market studies. Non-profit, educational or CDFI organizations are not allowed to submit proposals for funding in this subject matter area. Applicants will need to provide documentation of their ability to engage in hemp production.

Additional information and specific examples can be found in NAAF's 2025 Hemp Guidelines.

### **The Application Process and Deadlines**

There is **NO** Letter of Intent step for the 2025 RFA.

Only those applicant organizations that submit an application by the time and date deadline indicated below will be considered for funding. All applications must be submitted through the online process used by NAAF. Strict adherence to the application deadlines described below will be followed and all applications received **AFTER** the deadline will **NOT** be considered for review or funding in this grant cycle.

Any applicant with a question as to eligibility should contact NAAF offices as soon as possible by e-mailing inquiries to [grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org](mailto:grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org) or by calling our office at 479-445-6226.

If a submitted application is not chosen for funding, the applicant may have a chance to discuss their grant projects upon receiving a denial letter from NAAF.

#### **Important Note on Initial Review on Eligibility**

All applications received will be initially reviewed for eligible entity status. If an applicant is not deemed eligible (see the list of eligible entities above) their application will not be

reviewed for potential funding. It is the applicant's burden to prove, through proper documentation, their eligibility as an entity for funding. The Trust Agreement controlling NAAF specifically identifies the four types of eligible entities that may be considered for and receive grant funding through NAAF. NAAF's Trust Agreement must control our actions, thus it is incumbent on the applicant to provide the documentation necessary to provide eligibility to receive funding.

### **Key Dates**

**MARCH 1, 2025:** The 2025 RFA General and Youth will open for application submission.

**MAY 1, 2025:** The 2025 RFA General and Youth will close at **11:59 p.m. CT.**

### **Webinars**

NAAF will host 2025 RFA Webinars on the following four (4) dates. Each webinar will start with a one-hour overview of the application process and then transition to a question-and-answer period. Webinars will offer technical assistance to applicants and provide clarification concerning applicant eligibility or focus areas for applications during this grant cycle. All webinar recordings will be posted and archived on the NAAF website. Registration is required to participate.

Register for the webinars by clicking below

[Webinars](#)

- Thursday, March 20 at 2 – 4 pm CT (General and Youth Programming)
- Thursday, March 27 at 2 – 4 pm CT (Q&A Session)
- Thursday, April 3 at 2 – 4 pm CT (Q&A Session)
- Thursday, April 10 at 2 – 4 pm CT (Q&A Session)

Please email [grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org](mailto:grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org) or visit the NAAF website to receive details about the webinars described above or for information about the webinar schedule.

## **Electronic Submission of Applications**

If incomplete applications are received and the deadlines for submission have passed, there will be no opportunity to further supplement the application. This requirement will be strictly enforced. If the application is date stamped within the online application system at or before the deadline for submission described above, the application will be reviewed for potential funding.

If applicants wait until the last minute to prepare their application, they may risk missing the deadline. Please note the deadlines on your calendars, participate in the RFA webinars offered, begin your planning and gathering of documents early and reach out to NAAF with any questions or concerns you may have concerning requirements or the submission process.

## **Key Topics for Which Funding is Allowed in the 2025 RFA Cycle**

Funding areas for the 2025 RFA were determined through strategic planning conducted by NAAF, are informed by the requirements of the Trust Agreement and input from the public. NAAF's Trust Agreement guides the four broad subject areas that are at the heart of our work (business assistance, technical support, agricultural education, and advocacy services). The Trust Agreement also provides specific requirements for what types of entities are eligible to apply for funding (nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, CDFIs, and Tribal governments).

Native communities continue to face food access challenges and impacts to Native farmers and ranchers and their businesses. There are continuing real-time impacts across our health systems, governance systems, education systems, economic development efforts and beyond. As such, we hope applicants will consider submitting projects that support any of the following: planning activities to regionalize/localize food systems supporting Native communities; economic analysis to determine impacts to and solutions for the food system as a result of national disruptions; resiliency and contingency planning for emergency/disaster situations; response plans for coordinated food production and distribution; intertribal agriculture infrastructure planning projects; and other projects aiming to boost Native food systems.

NAAF strongly believes in the importance of Tribal food sovereignty which increases and improves Tribal authority over its food system, from farm to fork. Tribal food sovereignty includes the development and adoption of policies to implement sovereign authority over food and agriculture. It includes traditional practices, large-scale production, and everything in between in size and scope.

## Targeted Projects

A total of **\$10,000,000 is being made available for 2025 funding**. Identify which type(s) of funding your entity is eligible to receive, then identify which specific focus area(s) your project(s) will focus on. All funding entity types may apply for youth funding, as described below.

Each eligible entity may apply for specific general focus and special focus areas. Some entities are eligible to apply for several types of projects; other entities are eligible to apply for fewer. In 2025, we have reduced the amount of duplicative information in relation to focused or special emphasis areas. For instance, if you are a Tribe applying for an additional special emphasis area, such as infrastructure and climate resilience, you will only need one all-inclusive budget that includes a specific section for any special emphasis areas. Each eligible entity has a general focus area described below. Special focus areas are described in a unique section below that.

## General Focus

### For 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

General Focus: Business Assistance, Agricultural Education, Technical Support and/or Advocacy Services

Special Focus: Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Available Pool: \$1,000,000

Minimum Request Per Focus: \$100,000

Maximum Request Per Focus: \$250,000

Funding applications are sought from eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. These organizations may seek funding for any type of project that includes business assistance, agricultural education, technical support, or advocacy services that is allowable under the framework of this RFA. Nonprofit organizations must provide proof that they serve Native farmers and ranchers. NAAF is only interested in funding projects that can directly show their project will benefit and build activities that will improve the success of Native farmers and ranchers. Project impacts may include agricultural communities having greater knowledge of business assistance and agricultural education; lending, financial, technical, or legal knowledge; and increased knowledge on risk and related issues facing such farmers and ranchers. If a nonprofit organization does not have a staff person who has direct knowledge of business assistance and technical issues important to the success of Native farmers and ranchers, they must include someone within their project team who has that knowledge.

Food sovereignty projects provided by 501(c)(3) organizations should assist a community, region or intertribal group to garner greater authority or control over their food system by connecting Native producers and consumers strategically within Indian Country's food systems. Food sovereignty projects should discuss how their work is tied to Tribal government policies that support Tribal food sovereignty and specifically assist and build towards the success of Native farmers and ranchers. All general food sovereignty projects must include specific efforts that support business assistance, technical support, agricultural education or

advocacy services. If the project does not include any of the four mission areas of NAAF, it will not likely score highly enough to be funded.

If the applicant is a start-up nonprofit organization that has applied for 501(c)(3) status but has not yet received a favorable determination, the applicant may apply through a Fiscal Sponsor. The Fiscal Sponsor must be an eligible 501(c)(3) organization and is required to provide proof of service to Indian Country and/or the Native farming and ranching community and answer key questions concerning whether it is a Native-led organization. Specific rules apply to Fiscal Sponsors (see page 5).

#### For Educational Organizations

General Focus: Business Assistance, Agricultural Education, Technical Support and/or Advocacy Services

Special Focus: Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Available Pool: \$500,000

Minimum Request Per Focus: \$75,000

Maximum Request Per Focus: \$150,000

Funding applications are sought from eligible educational organizations recognized as such by the IRS, that currently provide food and agriculture-related classroom training, classroom education programs, agriculture programs and/or professional or certificate programs in ag law, veterinary, engineering, or related areas; scholarships; curriculum development; and applied research in topics important to the success of Native farmers and ranchers, including career technical training. Projects must focus on building success among Native farmers and ranchers. The training, educational activities or technical support should be made available to Native students of the educational organization and can be provided as a certificate program or a degree-seeking program. If the project includes a FRTEP faculty member, such faculty member must be significantly involved in the project delivery. Funding will not be provided to proposed projects in this category if those being served in the classroom or the certificate program (online or in person) are not majority Native producers. The applicant should also be prepared to answer key questions concerning whether the educational organization is Native led.

#### For CDFIs

General Focus: Loan Capital, Re-granting Capital & Technical Assistance/Business Assistance

Special Focus: Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Available Pool: \$5,500,000

Minimum Request Per Focus: N/A

Maximum Request Per Focus: N/A; applicants may not request the full available pool.

Funding applications are sought from CDFIs or Native CDFIs that meet the definition of eligible entities and currently provide agricultural lending to Native farmers and ranchers. These entities are not required to provide any specific percentage of their available pool for lending to Native farmers and ranchers but should have demonstrated activity or need in the agriculture lending area. Eligible entities need to provide proof of a current agriculture lending portfolio or a demonstrated need through public input from their service area that such lending opportunities are needed by Native farmers and ranchers they serve.

There is no set limit on the maximum amount of funding a single CDFI or Native CDFI may seek, but no CDFI may request the full amount of available funding (\$4,500,000) in this pool. Please moderate your request so that as many CDFIs as possible may be funded. Please understand that if applicants seek a majority of the available funding in this pool, they will be asked for a budget modification and to adjust their goals and deliverables prior to an award.

NAAF requests that each CDFI provide a short sentence of the total amount of perceived need for loan products in their service area, regardless of how much funding the applicant seeks. Additional consideration will be given to those applicants that seek to serve the broadest number of potential Native farmers and ranchers within the scope of their request. Technical assistance activities provided by the CDFI are acceptable project activities. NAAF seeks to fund multiple projects in this category; overhead limitations apply to direct project expenses but not to the amounts that will be offered as loan or re-granting activities.

*For Tribal Governments and Instrumentalities*

General Focus: Business Assistance, Agricultural Education, Technical Support and/or Advocacy Services

Special Focus: Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Available Pool: \$1,000,000

Minimum Request Per Focus: \$100,000

Maximum Request Per Focus: \$250,000

Applications for value-added agriculture enterprise development and regionalized/localized intertribal food systems development are also sought. Activities can also include feasibility studies, market studies or the securing of architectural, engineering, legal or other technical advisors for future value-added agriculture enterprises; and drafting or implementing Tribal policies or sovereign authority over the food system. All projects must clearly indicate how the work will specifically support the success of Native farmers and ranchers.

Funding sought in this category can be used for preliminary construction activities, feasibility studies, marketing studies, ascertainment of labeling and marketing characteristics of foods, or other activities related to product development. Funding can also be used for shovel-ready projects, technology-based resources that support infrastructure development, website development or specialized marketing activities.

***NOTE: Tribal governments are required to provide a limited waiver of sovereign immunity and if the waiver is not provided within 2-3 months upon being notified that they are selected for funding, NAAF will withdraw our offer of funding and provide resources to other Tribal governments willing to expedite the limited waiver of sovereign immunity. There are no exceptions to this policy. More information concerning limited waivers and the application process is found on page 6.***

*Note: Industrial Hemp Guidelines*

NAAF will only provide funding to Tribal governments for projects related to industrial hemp. NAAF will also only provide funding for feasibility studies or market studies. Tribal governments are the only body that may seek hemp production regulatory approval from the federal government. A nonprofit or other eligible entity may not apply for industrial hemp



project funding on behalf of a Tribe. NAAF will not entertain feasibility funding for production activities unless they are explicitly for the growth and production of hemp for food, fiber, and/or biocomposite materials. CBD-related production or medicinal or recreational marijuana production as the regulatory environment at this point in time is still too premature and uncertain, and the emerging medical and labeling regulatory issues are complex. Any application including such activities will not be reviewed. Tribes may seek funding for projects that examine business or market potential for investment in developing industrial hemp production systems; project feasibility and market analysis for emerging industrial hemp production and value-added industrial hemp product manufacturing; analysis of transportation, testing, self-regulation, and regulatory planning; and development of Tribal regulatory plans authorized under the 2018 Farm Bill. Applicants will need to provide documentation of their ability to engage in hemp production.

[Special Focus Areas on next page]

## Special Focus Areas:

### Special Focus:

NAAF funding is designed to support community-driven agricultural development and infrastructure projects. Importantly, funds cannot be used to directly benefit individuals or private enterprises.

### Eligible Entities and Use of Funds:

- Educational Entities and Nonprofits: These entities are not eligible for land acquisition funding. However, these entities may apply for infrastructure funding provided their proposed projects serve a public purpose, not individual or private enrichment.
- Tribal Governments and Tribal Colleges: These entities are eligible for funding related to infrastructure procurement and land acquisition, as long as it is for the development or expansion of agricultural projects that benefit their communities or regions.

### Examples for Clarification:

- Acceptable: Funding a community kitchen available to a Tribal cooperative or Tribal members.
- Not Acceptable: Funding a kitchen exclusively for an individual or family farm.
- Distinction = NAAF cannot fund or enrich individuals, however, Eligible NAAF grantees can provide funding and services to individuals.

### Special Focus: Infrastructure and Climate Resilience

Eligible Entities: Tribes, 501(c)(3)s, CDFIs, Edu Orgs

Available Pool: \$1,000,000

Minimum Request Per Focus: \$150, 000

Maximum Request Per Focus: \$500,000

The Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) focuses on bolstering infrastructure and climate resilience for Native farmers and ranchers, addressing pressing climate-related issues such as unpredictable weather, water scarcity, and increased wildfire risks that threaten food production and agricultural sustainability. In response, NAAF seeks applications for projects that develop cost-sharing funds for regenerative agriculture, provide educational initiatives benefiting multiple Native communities, and promote climate-smart agriculture techniques among Native producers.

To further support sustainable Native food systems, NAAF invites proposals for agricultural infrastructure projects, covering essential areas such as land acquisition, construction, transportation, irrigation, energy development, logistics, storage, and related activities. Tribal governments play a key role in these initiatives, whether independently, in collaboration with other Tribal entities, or through partnerships with external organizations. Potential projects include establishing processing plants, food hubs, and storage facilities; developing packing houses, grain terminals, and distribution systems; and investing in land purchases and technology that advance Native food sovereignty and security.

By prioritizing projects that enhance infrastructure and climate resilience, NAAF seeks to strengthen Native food systems and empower Native producers to adapt to ongoing climate challenges

## Youth Programming

### How to Apply:

Eligible Entities: All types of eligible entities may apply

Available Pool: \$1,000,000

Minimum Request: \$20,000

Maximum Request: \$200,000

NAAF also believes Native youth (broadly defined as early childhood to 18 years old) are critical to the continued growth of Native food systems and to that end seeks projects that focus on support of the next generation. Youth engagement in agriculture can occur in many ways: K-12 classroom activities, community youth gardens, community youth ag policy councils, FFA (Future Farmers of America) or 4-H, youth food summits or mobilizing Native youth to take on more roles in food systems and food production development activities. Because we seek to draw special focus on youth programs, all types of eligible entities may apply for Youth programming.

### Projects can include:

- hands-on food production
- support for 4-H, FFA or other youth groups in the community or school
- youth-led community projects
- youth ag councils
- scholarships, including those that allow Native youth to participate in agriculture training or leadership programs outside their own community or connect with other Native youth in agriculture programs
- online youth agriculture and food related activities
- national disruption response activities impacting food and agriculture production

### **NOTE: Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools.**

The Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) actively seeks investment opportunities in programs that provide valuable information and guidance to Native youth interested in pursuing careers in food and agriculture. NAAF specifically targets Native students attending BIE federally operated schools or Tribally-supported or controlled schools. Grants are available this year for BIE operated schools, which may also collaborate with eligible organizations to explore funding opportunities. Tribal supported or controlled schools or those receiving federal grants or contracts are eligible for funding based on their organizational status, which can be categorized as a Tribal government instrumentality, a 501(c)(3) organization, or an educational organization as defined by federal law. If you have questions about eligibility, please reach out to the provided email address. For timely response, it is recommended to ask questions in advance of the closing date as the availability to answer questions on the submission date cannot be guaranteed.

### **Outcome/Results Based Projects**

All projects should identify at least two (2) and no more than five (5) specific, measurable, realistic, and timely objectives, activities, and milestones for the funded activities and discuss the

results or outcomes that are expected. NAAF intends to fund, a body of work that can demonstrate specific progress towards several interlocking objectives with which funded projects should align. These objectives are:

- the success of Native farmers and ranchers;
- improved access to capital for Native farmers and ranchers;
- improved food systems in Indian Country;
- improved delivery of services to Native farmers and ranchers;
- improved knowledge of Native farmers and ranchers on key issues relevant to their success;
- enhanced food sovereignty within Native communities;
- progress towards the building of value-added foods capable of accessing new or existing markets that will improve the agricultural economies and general economies of Native communities;
- an increase in the number of Native professionals involved in or serving Native agriculture; and
- the overarching important goal of ensuring Native youth and beginning producers are prepared for careers in agriculture and that Native farming, ranching and food businesses are successfully transitioned to the next generation.

Please be specific and identify clearly what your project design and activities will seek to accomplish, how they will be accomplished, and on what timeline.

### **Progress Reporting and Compliance**

NAAF's Trust Agreement specifically requires fiscal responsibility on the part of all NAAF grantees and to that end NAAF will conduct compliance reviews from time to time. In addition, the Trust Agreement requires that NAAF ensure the funds provided to successful applicants are used for the purposes intended. Therefore, all successful applicants must provide reasonable periodic progress reports through a simple online system. Failure to complete reporting requirements will result in delayed funding for additional phases of projects. All funds awarded will be provided to the applicants in reasonable increments depending on the type of project contemplated and may differ between successful applicants due to the difference in project type.

### **Grantee Meeting**

The preferred manner of meeting with all selected grantees is an in-person convening. Please include at least \$1000 in your project budget to cover the cost of at least one (1) project staff person attending the grantee meeting. If situations exist that prevent an in-person meeting, the funds will be released for general project activities. NAAF will provide funding for hotel accommodations and conference meals associated with the annual grantee meeting, but NAAF grantees are expected to cover the travel (airfare, mileage, etc.) associated with transporting project personnel to the grantee meeting. If an in-person meeting is not possible, all applicants will need to periodically engage with NAAF in teleconference, video conference or webinar activities with other successful applicants and NAAF staff.

### **Unsuccessful Applicants**

NAAF anticipates that all rounds of funding during the life of NAAF will be highly competitive. If an applicant is not successful in this round of funding, the applicant may have the opportunity to discuss their grant projects upon receiving a denial letter from NAAF.

### **Cover Letters**

All applications must include a cover letter from the senior project official or authorized representative of the organization (signed and dated) that specifically discusses the project for which funding is sought. Clear commitment to the project must be expressed in the cover letter/letter of commitment. Tribes and instrumentalities must include an authorization statement of their willingness to submit a limited waiver of sovereign immunity in a timely manner if awarded a grant.

### **Resume of Key Personnel**

Biographical sketches or short resumes (no more than three (3) paragraphs in length) are required for all key personnel (project leader(s), trainers, etc.) included in the project. This requirement is necessary to demonstrate experience, capacity or training necessary to provide the services outlined in the project narrative.

### **Maximum and Minimum Narrative Pages**

All projects will have as much available space as possible within our online system to describe the project in detail. However, if your project needs additional space to describe your project, please advise NAAF as quickly as possible for alternative means to submit additional materials. Keep in mind, no additional points will be awarded to longer applications; brevity is appreciated.

### **Budget and Budget Narrative**

NAAF provides a budget template and budget guidance for the application. You must use the provided NAAF template when applying for a grant. The budget form and the full RFA are on our website. Any questions pertaining to how budget categories should be reflected on the form can be posed at any time to NAAF staff. The webinars describing the application process will discuss budget forms and requirements. All applicants are encouraged to attend or review archived webinar content to seek answers to their questions. If an eligible entity is seeking funding for multiple focus areas (e.g., two general focus areas, a general focus area and a special focus area, or two special focus areas), the entity will need to submit multiple budget forms and discuss the project budgets separately. During review, it should be clear what funds are being used for each effort.

A budget narrative providing justification of the budget is required for each budget category for which funding is sought. Budget narratives are not limited but are usually no more than 1-2 pages. A budget narrative must accompany each unique budget. If you need additional guidance on budget documents and budget justifications, please contact NAAF staff.

NAAF reserves the right to negotiate budgets with all applicants selected for funding and will require all successful applicants to execute a grant agreement with NAAF that will contain specific terms and conditions of the award.

## **Review of Applications**

NAAF staff and leadership, along with experts selected as needed to advise NAAF staff to review applications received, will review all applications not disqualified. Disqualifications may occur due to one of three reasons: 1) failure to prove eligible entity status; 2) failure to include all required forms and information required in the application; or 3) failure to submit by the closing deadline.

All applications cleared for review will be reviewed using the same criteria regardless of project focus.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

NAAF application reviewers must use identified evaluation criteria for review of all applications. Six criteria are weighted in relative importance to the overall quality of the application and the project's potential for success. Applications are evaluated based on the quality of responses to the RFA. The criteria for review are as follows:

- **Impact on Access to Capital (25% weight).** NAAF is interested in projects that address the access to capital issues facing Native farmers and ranchers. All applicants need to identify how and to what extent the project focuses on core access to capital issues of Native farmers and ranchers. All applicants should also discuss the impact their project will have on improving access to capital for Native farmers and ranchers. Organizations that do not provide loans should focus on discussing how their project activities will improve the ability of individual Native farmers and ranchers to access capital and/or technical support needed for their enterprises.
- **Proposed Results/Outcomes (25% weight).** When reviewing applications, NAAF will examine the project approach and will look for identified results/outcomes of the work. When approaching this area, take care to provide or discuss:
  - clear statements of what the applicant anticipates farmers and ranchers will understand, analyze, develop, decide, or implement through participation in the project;
  - how realistic and attainable is the estimated number of farmers and ranchers to be reached; and
  - the degree to which the anticipated results speak to NAAF priorities.

As for CDFI applicants, discuss the amount and number of potential loans, re-grants and/or technical assistance provided to Native farmers and ranchers. For educational organizations or education-focused projects, discuss the number of students and/or future Native farmers and ranchers to be served and the proposed benefits students will experience by engaging with the project. For Tribal governments, discuss the anticipated impact(s) on the community to be served.

- **Farmer and Rancher Demand (20% weight).** The applicant should discuss the demand for the proposed activities that exist within the farmer and rancher community they seek to serve. They should also describe farmers and ranchers' willingness to participate in the activities proposed and the indicators (if any) that reflect interest in the proposed project activities. Identification of the intended audience is required, as is the identification of the location of the intended audience. Project narratives should also discuss how the audience will be recruited for the project. As for CDFI applicants, please discuss the demand for loans among an identified target audience. As to educational organizations or education-focused projects, discuss the demand or need for the content being delivered and project the number of anticipated participants. For Tribal governments, discuss the farmers and ranchers who will be affected by and served through the funded project. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use USDA NASS data to describe the farmer and rancher community they seek to serve.
- **Team/Organizational Capacity and Collaborators (10% weight).** NAAF is interested in understanding the skills, knowledge and experience of the project team and organization to effectively deliver on the project activities as proposed. NAAF is also interested in encouraging and supporting effective collaborations that will increase the likelihood of farmer and rancher success and participation in the project. Effectiveness is demonstrated by skills, knowledge and experience in the area and access to farmers and ranchers. The applicant should identify the relative qualifications and experience of primary project personnel and any identified partners or collaborators.
- **Evaluation (10% weight).** The effectiveness of the plan for evaluating and tracking farmer and rancher success or participation outcomes or results is required. NAAF will examine whether the proposed results are measurable and whether there is a good plan for tracking the proposed results.
- **Innovation and Replicability (10% weight).** NAAF will evaluate the extent to which the project employs innovative approaches to develop or deliver assistance, technical support, education or advocacy services and the materials or tools to do so. NAAF will also review how well the applicant proposes to build upon existing knowledge in the field and/or collaborate with others so that broader dissemination of knowledge can occur, and more efficient use of tools can be achieved. NAAF is interested in the extent to which the proposed project might have a wider application, allow for adaptation to specialized audiences, improve marketing and promotion techniques, encourage new methodologies, or have intertribal application and replicability. NAAF acknowledges that some projects are not replicable, but nonetheless encourages all applicants to consider and discuss potential replicability and sustainability in the future.

## Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

NAAF staff and all NAAF Trustees have signed Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality statements and are pledged to ensure that all applications and related information are received and reviewed in compliance with NAAF Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality requirements. NAAF takes seriously its responsibilities in these two key areas and will take all precautions

necessary to ensure that there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest among staff, reviewers or Trustees when reviewing and making final determinations on projects selected for funding. NAAF also takes seriously its responsibilities for keeping all materials received by NAAF as confidential. Additionally, a question is asked within the application to identify those applicants who are interested in having NAAF seek additional resource funding on their behalf from other private philanthropic or public funding sources.

If a project is selected for funding, all project directors and project entities are required to allow public discussion and highlighting of project work by, through and in coordination with NAAF in order that the work supported by NAAF and the important work being done by project entities in support of Native farming and ranching can be publicly highlighted and others can learn from the project activities. All successful applicants will be encouraged to use the NAAF logo in publicity related to their project activities or outcomes. All materials and resources developed using NAAF funds must use the NAAF logo.

Information submitted by applicants related to the financial condition or audit results of the eligible applicant will be held in the strictest of confidence. NAAF tests the security of its online systems and internal records retention systems frequently. NAAF will not release sensitive information related to the financial condition or audit results related to applicants.

## **Questions**

Applicants are encouraged to attend 2025 RFA webinars and may seek answers to any questions they have by contacting NAAF's Grant Team using the information below.

Native American Agriculture Fund, Attn: Grants  
P.O. Box 1427  
Fayetteville, AR, 72702

479-445-6226

E-mail: [grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org](mailto:grants@NativeAmericanAgricultureFund.org)