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Research Planning Grants To Support Application of Behavioral Economics in USDA's Child Nutrition Programs

Fiscal 2010

Request for Applications



Economic Research That Informs Food and Nutrition Assistance Policy



**Food Assistance & Nutrition
Research Program**

Abstract

The Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) of USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) announce the availability of funds and a request for applications for planning grants to promote new research in methods to improve children's eating habits through USDA's child nutrition programs. The planning grants will focus on developing research capacity in behavioral economic strategies and interventions that can be applied to child nutrition programs to improve children's food choices and reduce the prevalence of obesity. The activities that the planning grants will support include fostering research relationships between researchers and State or local implementing agencies, testing concepts and methods in small-scale pilots, developing and testing data collection methodologies, and sponsoring workshops to improve understanding of an understudied aspect of the application of behavioral economics to child nutrition programs. FANRP will accept proposals under this program for funding levels of up to \$30,000 for a period not to exceed 15 months. Total funding available for this research is approximately \$250,000. The deadline for proposal submission is May 17, 2010.

Keywords: Food assistance programs, behavioral economics, healthy eating, child nutrition programs, obesity, ERS, FANRP, USDA

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CHECKLIST

All proposals submitted under the Research Planning Grants To Support Application of Behavioral Economics in USDA's Child Nutrition Programs must contain the applicable elements described in this announcement, and must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov by midnight on May 17, 2010. The following checklist has been prepared to assist in ensuring that the proposal is complete and in the proper order prior to sending:

- ✓ Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424)
 - Is all required information accurate and complete?
 - Is the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number: 10.253?
 - Has the authorized organizational representative signed SF-424?
 - Is the CFDA Title: "Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program"?
 - Is the Funding Opportunity Title: "Research Planning Grants To Support Application of Behavioral Economics in USDA's Child Nutrition Programs"?
 - Have you included a telephone number, fax number, and/or e-mail address where a message may be left for you?
 - Have you included the requested total funding amount from the budget form?
- ✓ Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (form SF-424A)
 - Are budget items complete?
 - Does the budget include travel to ERS workshop?
 - Is the summary budget included?
 - Is the requested funding within the stated limit of \$30,000?
 - Is the budget duration within the stated limit of 15 months?
- ✓ Proposal and all attachments are in PDF format.
- ✓ Project Summary Page
 - Is the project title listed at the top?
 - Has the Project Summary been included?
 - Does the summary include research objectives?
 - Is the summary no more than 250 words?
 - Do the name and institution of the Principal Investigator, co-investigators, and subcontractors appear on the page?
 - Does the page include the total amount requested?
 - Does the page include the start and end date?
- ✓ Project Description
 - Does the proposal include all the necessary components?
 - Does the proposal adhere to the format and page limitations as specified?
- ✓ Is the budget and staffing narrative included?
- ✓ Documentation from Collaborator(s), or Host Institution (where appropriate)
- ✓ Vitae and Publications List(s)
 - Are vitae included for the Principal Investigator and co-investigators, senior associates, and other key project personnel (including subcontractors—see instructions)?
 - Are the vitae limited to 2 pages each?
 - Are the publications lists complete and limited to the last 5 years?
- ✓ Indirect Cost Rate Schedule
 - For reimbursement of indirect costs, is a copy included of the applicant's indirect cost rate schedule that reports the applicant's federally negotiated audited rate?

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Overview

Applications are invited for planning grants that support the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Behavioral Economics and Child Nutrition Initiative (USDA-BE/CNI). The initiative is a cooperative effort of three USDA agencies: the Economic Research Service (ERS), the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). This document provides background on the research areas of interest to USDA, application procedures, deadlines for submission, and guidance for the application process.

The Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) at USDA-ERS, with support from FNS, announces the availability of funds and a request for applications for planning grants to promote new research in methods to improve children's eating habits through USDA's child nutrition programs. The planning grants will focus on developing research capacity in behavioral economic strategies and interventions that can be applied to child nutrition programs to improve children's food choices and reduce the prevalence of obesity. The activities that the planning grants will support include fostering research relationships between researchers and State or local implementing agencies, testing concepts and methods in small-scale pilots, developing and testing data collection methodologies, and sponsoring workshops to improve understanding of an understudied aspect of the application of behavioral economics to child nutrition programs. FANRP will accept proposals under this program for funding levels of up to \$30,000 for a period not to exceed 15 months. Total funding available for this research is approximately \$250,000. The deadline for proposal submission is May 17, 2010. The most promising submissions selected for funding will be announced by September 30, 2010.

Applications for this program must be submitted electronically through the Grants.gov website at www.grants.gov. The Grants.gov website is the single access point to electronically find and apply for competitive Federal funding opportunities and manage grants from all Federal grant-making agencies.

First-time users of Grants.gov should go to the "Apply for Grants" tab on the website and carefully read and follow the steps listed in order to apply. Your organization will need to be registered with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) at www.ccr.gov. Your organization also will need a Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number. A DUNS number is a unique nine-character identification number provided by the commercial company, Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). To investigate if your organization already has a DUNS number or to obtain a DUNS number, contact Dun & Bradstreet at 1-866-705-5711. Be sure to complete the Marketing Partner ID (MPIN) and Electronic Business Primary Point of Contact fields during the CCR registration process. These are mandatory fields that are required when submitting grant applications through www.grants.gov.

Authority

The Authority for this program is contained in 7 U.S.C. 292, 411, 427, 1441a, 1621-1627, 1704, 1761-68, 2201, 2202, 3103, 3291, 3311, 3504; 22 U.S.C. 3101; 42 U.S.C. 1891-93; 44 U.S.C. 3501-11; 50 U.S.C. 2061 et seq, 2251 et seq. Under this program, subject to the availability of funds, the Secretary of Agriculture may award competitive grants and cooperative agreements

for the support of research projects to further USDA food and nutrition assistance programs. Proposals may be submitted by any State agricultural experiment station, college, university, other research institution or organization, Federal agency, private organization, corporation, or individual.

Applicable Federal Statutes, Regulations, and Guidelines

Applicable Federal statutes, regulations, and guidelines include the following: (a) guidelines to be followed when submitting grant proposals and cooperative agreements and rules governing the evaluation of proposals; (b) the USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations, 7 CFR Part 3019; (c) the USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, 7 CFR Part 3015; (d) the USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments, and 7 CFR Part 3016.

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for this program is 10.253. The CFDA Title is Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program.

Background

USDA's domestic food and nutrition assistance programs, administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), affect the daily lives of millions of people. About one in four Americans participates in at least one food and nutrition assistance program at some point during the year. Although many of these programs include nutrition education components designed to support healthy food choices, the reality is that many Americans continue to make poor food choices, which contribute to the growing prevalence of obesity and premature onset of chronic diseases.

The USDA Child nutrition programs are specifically directed at improving the well-being of the Nation's children. Among these programs are the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. During fiscal year (FY) 2009, more than 31 million children participated in the National School Lunch Program on a typical school day, while 11 million received breakfast through the School Breakfast Program. Total Federal spending on the child nutrition programs exceeded \$15.5 billion, representing a substantial investment in the nutrition and health of the Nation's children. Further descriptions of USDA's child nutrition programs are available at www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/ChildNutrition.

USDA child nutrition programs seek to promote healthy diets by requiring that meals and snacks meet nutrition standards. These standards address adequacy – that is, provision of sufficient amounts of protein, vitamins, and minerals – as well as avoidance of excess fat and saturated fat. Findings from USDA's third School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA-III), conducted in the 2004-05 school year, indicate that most schools serve lunches and breakfasts that meet nutrition standards for protein, vitamins, and minerals, but fewer meet standards for total fat and saturated fat. The sodium content of meals is also high, compared with the recommendations of the

Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These findings indicate that the child nutrition programs leave room for improvement. However, providing, selecting, and consuming healthy foods depend on the behavior and choices made by both providers (such as the school food authorities) and consumers (in this case, the children participating in USDA child nutrition programs).

Food providers seeking to offer nutritionally improved meals face conflicting incentives as they strive to balance costs, revenues, and participation. Changing how food is purchased, meals are prepared, and menus are developed in a way that cost effectively meets nutritional goals while maintaining student participation requires complex decisions. To the extent that behavioral economics can shed light on strategies to simplify and improve decisions and better align incentives, behavioral economics can be used to develop strategies to assist child nutrition programs in providing children with healthier meals and snacks.

Merely offering healthier meals is not enough; children must also select them and eat them. This may present a considerable challenge as many of the recommended changes in school meals are at variance from the typical American child's diet. Previous research conducted by ERS and others suggests that insights from behavioral economics – which uses social, cognitive, and emotional factors to understand the economic decisions of consumers – have the potential to help students make healthier food choices, especially in settings that offer a great degree of control over both how the food is presented and the environment in which the food is chosen and consumed. Research suggests that changing small factors within the choice architecture may influence children's food choices and lead to healthier eating. For example, use of simple rules of thumb, such as being more likely to choose a default option, may influence food choices. Similarly, decreasing the number of students seated at each table, providing brighter lighting in school, and changing the shape of serving bowls and drinking glasses may impact how much students eat. Other factors that may impact students' food choices include giving greater prominence to more healthful foods, such as placing them at the beginning of the cafeteria lines or on a level that is easily accessible, and allowing individuals to preselect (Mancino and Guthrie, 2009).

Major challenges to testing behavioral economics interventions in USDA child nutrition program settings include gaining access to the school or child care setting to conduct experiments, collecting data in the program setting, and working within the constraints of the program environment. Successful projects will need to involve the implementing agency or agencies and develop partnerships and commitments from them. To develop working relationships with implementing agencies and to obtain their approval and support takes time. These planning grants are intended to foster the development of these relationships while exploring what types of interventions might be feasible to test in USDA child nutrition program settings.

Proposals may also include conducting small-scale pilots, developing and testing data collection methodology, and sponsoring workshops that bring together members of the interested research community to identify research needs, update information, or advance an area of research recognized as an integral part of the research effort.

Review of Applications and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by review panels consisting of experts from USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In addition to reviewers' comments, the selection process will also consider overlap among proposals and program needs.

During the evaluation process, care will be taken to prevent any actual or potential conflicts of interest that may have an impact on review or evaluation. Proposal content and peer evaluations will be kept confidential.

All applicants will be notified in writing by September 30, 2010, as to whether their proposal has been accepted for an award by FANRP.

Evaluation Factors and Criteria

The evaluation criteria and weights are detailed below:

1. Research Merit – suggested work has relevance to USDA child nutrition programs and policies (25%)
2. Overall Approach – suggested work is consistent with behavioral economics theory (30%)
3. Feasibility – overall approach is reasonable and appropriate (30%)
4. Staffing and Budget – staffing and budget are adequate and appropriate (15%)

How To Obtain Application Material

FANRP is using the Internet for primary distribution of information and application materials for these planning grants. All applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. Applicants may submit paper-copy applications under extenuating circumstances, such as outages of the Grants.gov website that can be substantiated by a valid case number with the Grants.gov support center. If you have questions, contact:

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FANRP/ERS
1800 M Street, NW, Room N2136
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Application Process

Overview

The guidelines below are provided to assist you in preparing a proposal. Please read these guidelines carefully before preparing your submission.

A checklist is provided at the beginning of this document to help you provide the necessary information for completing a proposal. An Application for Federal Domestic Assistance form (SF-424) and a budget form (SF-424A) are required for the proposal. These forms (from the Short Organizational family of forms) are included in the application package, downloadable from www.grants.gov.

Submission Requirements

The purpose of a grant proposal is to persuade FANRP and members of the review panel that the proposed project is important, methodologically sound, and worthy of support under the evaluation criteria listed above. The application should be self-contained, clearly present the merits of the proposed project, and be written with care and thoroughness. It is important that all the essential information for a comprehensive review be included. Omissions often result in processing delays and may jeopardize funding opportunities.

In preparing the proposal, applicants are urged to ensure that the name of the Principal Investigator and, where applicable, the name of the submitting institution are included on the Application for Federal Domestic Assistance form (SF-424).

Format and Content of Proposals

For electronic submissions through Grants.gov, the proposal and all attachments must be submitted in portable document format (pdf). Using pdf allows applicants to preserve the formatting of their documents. In order to save a document as a pdf, the applicant will need to use pdf generator software. Grants.gov has published the following web page on tools and software that the applicant can use: www.grants.gov/applicants/resources.jsp

Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424)

The submission through Grants.gov must contain an Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424), including authorized electronic signatures from your organization.

Table 1. Specific Instructions for Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424)

Item	Specific Instruction
1. Name of Federal Agency	Enter "Economic Research Service, USDA"
2. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	Enter "10.253"
CDFA Title	Enter "Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program"
3. Date Received	Leave blank
4. Funding Opportunity Number	Enter "FANRP2010003"
Funding Opportunity Title	Enter "Research Planning Grants To Support Application of Behavioral Economics in USDA's Child Nutrition Programs"
5a-g. Applicant Information	Enter requested information
6a. Project Title	Enter title of project proposal
6b-c.	Leave blank
7. Do not include social security number	Enter other project director information
8-9.	Enter requested information

Budget Information for Non-Construction Program (SF-424A)

A summary budget is required detailing requested support for the duration of the project, which is not to exceed 15 months. Funding levels accepted are up to \$30,000, inclusive of indirect costs where applicable.

Funds may be requested under any of the budget categories listed, provided that the item or service requested is identified as necessary for successful conduct of the proposed project, allowable under applicable Federal cost principles, and not prohibited under any applicable Federal statute or regulation.

Budget items include:

- Personnel
- Fringe benefits
- Travel
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual items
- Other direct costs
- Indirect charges

Salaries of faculty members and other personnel who will be working on the project may be requested in proportion to the effort they will devote to the project.

Indirect costs are limited by Federal statute to the federally recognized audited rate for the institution.

Electronic copies of the standard budget form and general instructions are available at www.grants.gov as part of the application package. Specific instructions for completing the proposal budget form are found below.

Table 2. Specific instructions for Budget Information for Non-Construction Program (SF-424A)

Item	Specific Instruction
1(a). Grant Program Function or Activity	Enter "FANRP"
1(b). Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	Enter "10.253"
1(c), (d), (f).	Leave blank
1(e), (g).	Enter amount of Federal funds requested
2-4.	Leave blank
5(b),(c),(d),(f).	Leave blank
5(e),(g).	Enter amount of Federal funds requested (same as item 1)
6(a-k) (columns 1 and 5).	Allocate Federal funds to appropriate budget categories
6(a-k) (columns 2-4).	Leave blank
7-20.	Leave blank
21-23.	Optional

Project Summary Page

The proposal must start with a Project Summary Page that includes:

- the title of the project;
- the names and institutions of the Principal Investigator, co-investigators, and subcontractors, and complete contact information for the Principal Investigator;
- the total amount of funding requested;
- the project start and end dates; and
- a project summary of no more than 250 words.

The summary is not intended for the general reader; consequently, it may contain technical language comprehensible by persons in disciplines relating to behavioral economics and nutrition. The project summary should be a self-contained, specific description of the activity to be undertaken and should focus on overall project goal(s), supporting objectives, and plans to accomplish project goal(s).

Project Description

The project description may not exceed 3 pages of text and may not exceed a total of 10 pages including figures, tables, and attachments. All proposals are to be formatted for standard 8½” x 11” paper. Margins must be at least 1 inch, type size must be 12 point, there should be no more than 6 lines per inch, and there should be no page reductions. The project description should include the following:

- *Project Activity* – a clear description of the activity to be undertaken, including where, when, and how.
- *Rationale and Significance* – the rationale behind the idea being proposed, how does it relate to behavioral economics theory, and what is the anticipated impact on child eating patterns and the development of obesity.
- *Relationships to be established* – to the extent that the proposal requires collaboration with State or local implementing agency or agencies (such as a school system or a child care center), include the names of the relevant implementing agency or agencies and a description of the actions that will be taken to establish a working relationship. For workshops, the proposal should provide a preliminary list of the types of people that would be invited to participate.
- *Deliverable* – what type of deliverable will be submitted at the end of the project?
- *Dissemination of findings*— Grant recipients are expected to attend a workshop at ERS approximately 15 months after receipt of the grant award. The purpose will be to discuss findings and accomplishments that resulted from the planning grant. Grant funding may be used to cover travel expenses and other expenses associated with attending this workshop.

Note: The sections detailed below are not included in the page limitations for the Project Description section.

Citations to Project Description

All references cited should be complete, including titles and all co-authors, and should conform to an accepted journal format.

Budget and Staffing Narrative

To assist reviewers in determining whether the budget and staffing are adequate and appropriate, the narrative should be brief but include sufficient detail so that reviewers can ascertain the roles and level of involvement of assigned staff. The budget narrative should briefly describe how the requested funds will be spent, including specifics on travel, equipment, and personnel. Budget should include costs of travel to the ERS workshop at which grant recipients will discuss findings and accomplishments that resulted from the planning grant.

Vitae and Publications List

To assist reviewers in assessing the competence and experience of the proposed project staff, the proposal must also include a short curriculum vitae and publication list of the Principal Investigator and any other individual who expects to work on the project in a significant fashion, whether or not funds are sought for their support. Vitae are limited to two pages for each individual and the publications list should focus on the past 5 years.

Indirect Cost Rate Schedule

For reimbursement of indirect costs, the applicant must include with the application a copy of its indirect cost rate schedule that reports the applicant's federally negotiated audited rate.

Current and Pending Support

The proposal must list any other current public or private research support (including in-house support) to the Principal Investigator or co-investigators, whether or not salary support for the person(s) involved is included in the budget.

Analogous information must be provided for any pending proposals, including this proposal, that are now being considered by, or that will be submitted in the near future to, other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs or agencies. Note that this proposal must be listed as Pending.

Investigators also should include a brief statement of research objectives or project summaries for all projects listed in Current and Pending Support. Concurrent submission of identical or similar proposals to other possible sponsors will not prejudice proposal review or evaluation. However, a proposal that duplicates or overlaps substantially with a proposal already reviewed and funded (or that will be funded) by ERS will not be funded under this program.

Please include the following information under the heading "Current and Pending Support":

- Record information for active and pending projects in separate sections by name, supporting agency, total funding amount, effective and expiration dates, percentage of time committed, and title of project.
- All current research to which the Principal Investigator, co-investigators, and other senior personnel have committed a portion of their time must be listed, whether or not salary for the person involved is included in the budgets of the various projects.

What/When/Where To Submit

All applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. Applicants may submit paper-copy applications under extenuating circumstances, such as outages of the Grants.gov website that can be substantiated by a valid case number with the Grants.gov support center.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the proposal contains all pertinent information when originally submitted. Prior to submitting, it is urged that the application be compared with the checklist on the inside front cover of this announcement.

Late proposals will not be considered unless extenuating circumstances are documented with Grants.gov.

Reminder: Applications must be submitted by midnight May 17, 2010

Award Administration

FANRP reserves the right to negotiate with the Principal Investigator and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions or funding level prior to recommending any project for funding.

A proposal may be withdrawn by the Principal Investigator at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the proposal; however, withdrawn proposals normally will not be returned. One copy of each proposal that is not selected for funding (including those that are withdrawn) will be retained by FANRP for a period of one (1) year. The remaining copies will be destroyed.

Duration of Awards

The total period for which a grant is awarded may not exceed 15 months.

Notice of Award

A competitive grant award document, containing the budget, terms and conditions of the award, and other necessary information, will be prepared and forwarded to each grantee, along with a Notice of Competitive Grant Award, by the Administrative and Financial Management, ARS, USDA.

Management Information

Once a grant has been reviewed and recommended for funding, specific management and organizational information relating to the applicant shall be requested on a one-time basis prior to the award. Copies of forms needed in fulfilling the requirements will be provided by the FANRP office.

Authorization to make changes in approved project plans, budget, period of support, etc., will be governed largely by the terms and conditions of the competitive grant award agreement. Among other things, these terms and conditions will set forth the kinds of post-award changes that may be made by the awardee and the kinds of changes that are reserved to the FANRP Office. It is urged that all key project personnel and authorized organizational representatives read them carefully.

Financial Obligations

For any competitive grant awarded, the maximum financial obligation of ERS shall be the amount of funds authorized for the award. This amount will be stated on the award instrument and on the approved budget. However, in the event an erroneous amount is stated on the grant award instrument, the approved budget, or any supporting document, ERS reserves the unilateral right to make the correction and to make an appropriate adjustment in the amount of the award to align with the authorized amount.

Nothing in these guidelines or any program announcement shall obligate ERS, the Department, or the United States to take favorable action on any application received in response to any announcement, or to support any project at a particular level. Further, neither the approval of any application nor the award of any project grant shall commit or obligate the United States in any

way to make any renewal, supplemental, continuation, or other award with respect to any approved application or portion of an approved application.

Awardees will be required to ensure that all funds are expended in accordance with the terms and conditions of grant award, Departmental regulations, and the applicable Federal cost principles in effect on the date of the award. Responsibility for the use and expenditure of grant funds may not be transferred or delegated in whole or in part to another party (even if a grantee enters into a contractual relationship with that party), unless the grant agreement itself is transferred in whole or in part to another party by ERS.

Release of Information

ERS receives grant agreement proposals in confidence and will protect the confidentiality of their contents to the extent permitted by law. When a proposal results in a grant agreement, however, it becomes part of the public record and is available to the public upon written request. Copies of proposals (including excerpts from proposals) that are not funded will not be released. Information regarding funded projects will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, and implementing USDA regulations.

Requests to obtain authorized information (and fee schedule relating to the handling of this information) or to obtain information regarding procedures related to release of grantor cooperative agreement information should be directed to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Coordinator, ARS Information Staff, 5601 Sunnyside Ave., Bldg. 1, Rm. 2248, Mail Stop 5128, Beltsville, MD 20705-5128; telephone (301) 504-1640.

References

Mancino, L, and J. Guthrie. "When Nudging in the Lunch Line Might be a Good Thing." *AmberWaves*, March 2009.