# Request for Application (RFA) for Full Grant Applications

**USDA Trade Safe (TraSa) Project**

Announcement Type: Request for Applications (RFA)

Funding Opportunity Number: TRASA-RFA-2024-01

Funding Opportunity Title: Cold Chain Solutions

Re-Issuance Date: March 05, 2024

Applications Submission Due Date: March 28, 2024

Maximum Grant Size: 1,127,000 Dominican Pesos (DOP) per grant

Dear Applicant:

You are invited to submit an application for implementation of cold chain infrastructure improvements to the terms of references contained herein. The grants will be awarded and implemented in accordance with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and US Government regulations governing grants, as deemed applicable by prime USDA, Prime Recipient Improving Economies for Stronger Communities (IESC), and the USDA TraSa Project’s internal grant management policies.

**A. OBJECTIVE**

The USDA TraSa Project is awarding grants to a traders, processors, exporters, cargo handlers, and ramp operators who handle perishable agricultural products to acquire, install, and use refrigerated storage equipment and technology. TraSa is seeking applications that demonstrate practical use within the applicant's business processes and properly sustained through safe storage, employee operational optimal functionality and long-term care maintenance and/or upgrades as applicable. Specifically, the focus is to enhance and maintain the cold chain for perishable produce by installing or strengthening rapid cooling systems used to handle perishable fruits and vegetables such as avocado, cucumber, eggplant, limes, papaya, peppers, pineapple, tomato, banana, cacao, mango, pitahaya, strawberries, and aromatic herbs, among other horticultural products, as well as poultry and pork. This will contribute to reducing operational costs and increasing products' safety and quality. The overall objective is to contribute to maintaining the quality and safety of perishable products throughout the marketing chain, from the field to the final market.

**B.** **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

**B.1 BACKGROUND**

The TraSa Project, implemented by IESC in the Dominican Republic (DR), is a project funded by USDA. The TraSa Project seeks the efficiency, coordination and transparency of trade and safety of food and agricultural products in the DR through support for science- and risk-based sanitary and phytosanitary measures, rules, and regulations. The TraSa Project aims to expand local, regional, and international trade in agricultural products, increasing agricultural productivity and improving consumer access to safe food.

**B.2 SCOPE OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

Handlers of perishable products need refrigeration equipment and technology that allows them to move products throughout the supply chain efficiently without affecting the quality and safety of the products they handle. Temperature is a key factor in reducing the rate of deterioration of perishable products. It is estimated that perishable products can lose up to a day of shelf life for every hour they are not stored in their optimal storage temperature. Therefore, the rapid removal of heat from the products is considered a good handling practice. Maintaining the cold chain ensures a longer shelf life with superior quality and safe consumer products.

The TraSa Project will award a limited number of small grants (up to 1,127,000 DOPs per grant) to eligible firms (identified above) to acquire, install, use, and maintain cold chain management equipment and technology. This may include but is not limited to the following: Outfitting cold rooms and/or installing refrigeration units, cold room humidity control equipment, automatic temperature recording tools, and temperature control equipment, or other relevant equipment, for increased quality control, food safety, and energy efficiency.

For each proposed activity, the Applicant will also propose target indicators chosen from the TraSa project’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning performance plan. The list of potential indicators are the following:

* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 4: Number of people in the agricultural system who have applied management practices or technologies with USDA assistance.
* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 13: Number of public-private partnerships formed as a result of USDA assistance. (not included in table)
* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 14: Value of New U.S. Aid and New U.S. and Private Sector Assistance Commitments Public and Private Sector Investment Leveraged by the USDA to Support Food Security and Nutrition.
* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 16: Total increase in installed storage capacity storage capacity (dry and cold) as a result of USDA aid.
* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 21: Number of people who have received short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training as a result of USDA aid.
* USDA FFPr Outcome Indicator 22: Number of individuals participating in USDA food safety programs.

Key elements of the approach are summarized as follows:

* Amount of perishable cargo handled annually (kg);
* Counterpart contribution of costs for the acquisition/maintenance of equipment or technology (%);
* Estimated time to install and operate the equipment or technology;
* Gender inclusion (number of female small producers and/or female-owned/managed firms and/or plans to increase the number of suppliers who are female); and
* Use of environmentally sustainable technology.

A key qualifying consideration will be the organization’s previous experience in implementing this or a similar model. Nevertheless, the USDA TraSa Project recognizes that some grantees may need technical assistance to more effectively carry out the model. Consequently, Applicants are encouraged to specify their needs for technical assistance and/or training in their application.

**C. INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS**

**C.1. Applicant Assessment**

All applicants are subject to a pre-award risk determination by USDA TraSa Project, to ascertain whether the organization has the minimum management capabilities required to manage US government funds. This self-assessment is a first step in the risk determination process. The applicant assessment is contained in **Annex 3- Pre-award Risk Questionnaire.**

To participate, companies must demonstrate a 3:1 match requirement,[[1]](#footnote-2) meaning the grantee demonstrates $3 contribution for every $1 received as part of the grant. In-kind contributions from the grant applicant could include the ability to support recurring costs, the full cost of equipment installation, maintenance, and training of associated personnel. In-kind contributions, such as office space, equipment, staff time, or other relevant efforts may be counted and the applicant must impute a reasonable and fair value to this contribution for it to be properly recognized. The fair value of volunteer labor and other in-kind contributions may also be considered based on TraSa's existing market information.

**C.2. Full Grant Application**

Templates for presentation of both the technical and budget aspects of the application are provided in **Annex 1 Grant Application Form and Annex 2 Grant Application Budget Forms**. Applicants must present their proposals in these formats.

The application elements and guidelines are summarized below:

**C.2.a. Technical Application:**

* **Section I (Basic Information).** TheApplicant provides basic contact information and information regarding the status of the organization.
* **Section II (Description of Cold Chain Solution).** The Applicant describes overarching project elements such as objective of the grant and the linkage to USDA TraSa Project’s objectives, results and indicators for measuring results, the activities’ beneficiaries, and plan for disseminating activity deliverables.
* **Section III (Project Implementation Plan).** This section covers information regarding program implementation, including proposed personnel and descriptions about each task. Each task must be as follows:
* Complete and sound
* Integrated and scheduled with dependent tasks
* Assigned to a responsible party
* Defined in terms of resources required
* Concluded with a viable milestone of achievement—milestones must be linked to results.

The tasks listed must show a logical, thoughtful approach to the overall implementation plan. Tasks should describe actions and be logically sequenced. Each task must contribute to the achievement of the activity objective.

The Applicant describes any relevant material assumptions made and/or conditions precedent required for the achievement of the grant objective.

* + **Sustainability** **-** The applicant discusses strategies for ensuring the sustainability of the proposed activity and organization, the expected program income generation (if any), and the third party leveraging of funds (if any). Program income is defined as gross income earned by the **grantee** that is directly generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of this **grant**, during the period of the **grant.**
* **Section IV (Experience and Capacity).** The Applicant describes previous or on-going experience implementing similar activities. This is a critical factor in assessing the capacity of the Grantee to implement the activity. The Applicant also provides contact information of references that can speak to the Applicant’s past performance and capabilities.

**C.2.b. Cost Application:**

Each Applicant must submit its cost application separately from its Merit Review Application. While there is no page limit for this portion, applicants should be as concise as possible, but still provide the necessary details. Applicants must submit their budget in accordance with **Annex 2 - Grant Application Budget Forms**. Proposed costs must represent cost efficiency and be reasonable and allowable per the federal cost principles, the full text of which can be found at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200>; further information on the federal cost principles is included in Section F of this RFA.

The Budget forms, when properly completed, reviewed, and approved, serve as the mutually agreed-upon “roadmap” for activity financial management. All activity costs must be identified. Cost data must be accurate and proposed amounts should be realistic. The Applicant must be able to provide backup/justification for cost to USDA TraSa Project if requested. If approved by the internal TraSa grants evaluation committee, the backup/justification of all costs must be submitted in order to be considered for final approval to USDA.

It is important that the budget clearly indicate where specific program funds are to come from (from USDA funds via the TraSa Project or co-funding by another entity, if any). Furthermore, contribution from another entity and Grantee’s resource commitment will be investigated and documented. The USDA TraSa Project will require full disclosure by all involved parties and will maintain contact with co-funders to verify their contributions.

Applicants must submit supplemental budget notes and must provide an accompanying narrative by line item, which explains in detail the basis for how the Applicant derived the individual line-item cost. The budget note must be sufficient to ensure that USDA TraSa Project can determine the purpose of every cost item proposed, as well as understand the basis for the cost estimate (units and unit cost).

All grant activity costs must be within the normal operating practices of the Applicant and in accordance with its written policies and procedures.

**C.2.c. Additional Application Instructions:**

The application (both the technical and cost portions) must be signed by an authorized agent of the Applicant.

Applications must be submitted in English. If not possible, applications may be submitted in Spanish and translated into English by TraSa upon selection. Award agreements will be written in English. TraSa will provide a Spanish translation as requested.

Applications should be submitted to the USDA TraSa Project via email to the address below. The TraSa Project will not accept hard copies.

USDA TraSa Project

Email: trasa.grants@iesc.org

In addition to the application forms, applicants should submit to USDA TraSa Project a copy of the Applicant’s valid legal registration, organizational charter, and corporate by-laws and a copy of their latest audited financial statements. These can be submitted as electronic copies. Applications (Technical and Budget proposals and supporting documentation) must be submitted no later than 5:00 pm local time, March 28, 2024. Applications received after the closing date and time may not be considered.

To assist applicants in preparation of proposals, the following checklist summarizes the documentation to include in a submission in response to this RFA:

* Grant Application Form (Annex 1)
* Grant Application Budget Form (Annex 2)
* Pre-award Risk Questionnaire (Annex 3)
* Required Certifications (Annex 4)
* Valid legal registration in the Dominican Republic, organizational charter, corporate by-laws
* Latest audited financial statements
* SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI): Applicant who do not yet have a UEI must visit [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov/content/home) to obtain a UEI number.
* Signed COBEC forms.

**D. MERIT REVIEW EVALUATION**

Applications received before the deadline and meeting all the requirements outlined in this RFA will undergo evaluation by the USDA TraSa Project's internal review panel. The recommendations resulting from this review may then be further examined by a larger group. Each application will be assessed and ranked individually based on the evaluation criteria provided below. The weight assigned to each criterion is specified in the second column. The internal review panel will consider the impact and clarity of the description for each criterion.

| **Evaluation Criteria** | **Total Weight** |
| --- | --- |
| Quality of the Technical Application | 25% |
| Company/Organization Profile | 15% |
| Gender and Youth Inclusion | 15% |
| Objective and Impact  | 15% |
| Implementation Plan | 15% |
| Applicant’s Contribution  | 15% |
| **Overall Weight** | **100%** |

These merit review criteria elements are described more fully below.

1. *Quality of Technical Application.* Evaluators will assess the clarity and comprehensiveness of the applicant’s responses in the attached Grant Application Form (Annex 1). Applications that provide the necessary information and deliver answers in a clear and concise manner will receive higher scores. Points may be deducted for responses that do not adequately address each question or request for information in a logical and transparent manner, as well as for unanswered or incorrectly answered questions.
2. *Company/Organization Profile.* Evaluators will assess the alignment of the company’s mission, structure, and objectives with the TraSa Project’s mission to enhance the production, safety, marketing, and export of agricultural products. Preference may be granted to entities involved in the handling of perishable fruits and vegetables, including but not limited to avocado, cucumber, eggplant, limes, papaya, peppers, pineapple, tomato, banana, cacao, mango, pitahaya, strawberries, and aromatic herbs, as well as poultry and pork products. Companies engaged in the export of such perishable products will be awarded additional points.
3. *Gender and Youth Inclusion.* Evaluators will look at the extent to which the funded activity includes a gender and/or youth component or represents a strong commitment to women and/or youth. This primarily examines the composition of the entity (owners, managers, employees), as well as those who supply and/or purchase from them.
4. *Objective and Impact.* Evaluators will assess and rate applications on the extent to which the proposed objective corresponds to the objectives of the TraSa project as described earlier in section “B.2 Scope of Program Activities” of this RFA and how it will directly benefit the DR’s cold chain infrastructure. This may include the size of the cold chain cooling area/storage space, estimated impact on sales volume and value, and/or ways the new equipment or supplies will prevent SPS risks (pests and disease), among other considerations.
5. *Plan of Implementation*. Evaluators will consider the quality and feasibility of the proposed implementation plan, which should include tasks related to the preparation of the space in which new equipment/supplies will be located, the installation of the new equipment/supplies, and the integration of the new equipment/supplies in the grantee’s operating procedures. Applicants are expected to describe the sequencing of tasks, as well as the time frame for each step or event. Furthermore, the evaluators will assess and rate the appropriateness of the proposed equipment and/or supplies requested by the applicant, as it must fit the needs and parameters of the applicant’s business, products, and overall cold chain. Proposed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation with objectively measurable indicators will also be appraised.

*Applicant’s Contribution.* Evaluators will review and assess the level of contributions proposed by the applicant for a successful grant project and sustainable use. These contributions may be covered through in-kind resources, co-financing (funding from donors other than the U.S. government), project income, or some combination of the three. The nature and amount of this contribution must be clearly defined in the grant application and grant agreement. The applicant must identify the means to verify this contribution. In their grant applications, applicants should distinguish between co-financing that is already committed and co-financing that is only planned.

Please note that funding from other USG programs/projects cannot be considered as an applicant or third-party contribution.

**E.**  **ELIGIBILITY**

**E.1 GRANTEES**

Applicants must be a company formally constituted, recognized by, and in good standing with appropriate Dominican authorities, and compliant with all applicable civil and fiscal regulations. Preference will be given for In-kind donations granted under this RFA to supply chain market players working in the value chains targeted by the project: avocado, cucumber, eggplant, limes, papaya, peppers, pineapple, tomato, banana, cacao, mango, pitahaya, strawberries, aromatic herbs, poultry, and pork. However, applications will be considered for other exportable perishable products that require cold chain management.

Faith-based and community groups will receive equal opportunity for funding in accordance with the mandated guidelines laid out in this RFA except for faith-based organizations whose objectives are for discriminatory and religious purposes, and whose main objective of the grant is of a religious nature.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate successful past performance in implementation of integrated development programs related to USDA TraSa Project priority areas.

Repeat applicants and past recipients of TraSa grants will be considered, but preference will be given to new applicants that have not received donations from USDA in the past.

Applicants must display sound management in the form of financial, administrative, and technical policies and procedures and present a system of internal controls that safeguard assets; protect against fraud, waste, and abuse; and support the achievement of program goals and objectives. USDA TraSa Project will asses this capability prior to awarding a grant.

Applicants must sign the following required certifications prior to receiving a grant. USDA TraSa Project will provide the certifications and review them with applicants.

* Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing
* Key Individual Certification Narcotics Offenses and Drug Trafficking
* Participant Certification Narcotics Offenses and Drug Trafficking
* Recipient Certification of Compliance
* Key Individual Certification Narcotics Offenses and Drug Trafficking
* Survey on Ensuring Equal Opportunity for Applicants (Completion of Survey is voluntary)

The certifications are located at **Annex 4 – Required Certifications**.

**E.2 INELIGIBLE EXPENSES**

In this type of grant, IESC will carry out all procurement of goods and services required in the grant budget, and no reimbursement will be provided to the grantee. Even so, USDA TraSa Project grant funds, nor organizational costs submitted as contributions, may not be utilized for the following:

* Construction activities (without the previous approval by USDA TraSa Project)
* Ceremonies, parties, celebrations, or “representation” expenses
* Purchases of goods or services from countries or suppliers as may be identified by the U.S. Government’s (USG) consolidated list of debarred, suspended, or ineligible subcontractors at [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)
* Any purchase or activity, which has already been made.
* Purchases or activities unnecessary to accomplish grant purposes as determined by the USDA TraSa Project.
* Prior obligations of and/or, debts, fines, and penalties imposed on the Grantee.
* Creation of endowments.
* Other costs unallowable under USDA and/or USG regulations, such as alcoholic beverages.

Grant funded activities must comply with USG law prohibiting human trafficking.

**F. FUNDING**

All grants will be negotiated, denominated, and funded in Dominican Pesos. No funds will be transferred from the TraSa Project to the grantee. The TraSa Project will submit funds for the approved in-kind grant directly to the approved vendor.

**G. AUTHORITY/GOVERNING REGULATIONS**

USDA TraSa Project grants to non-U.S. organizations adhere to federal guidance provided under:

2 CFR 200 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards” as detailed in the USDA Mandatory and Standard Provisions

Full text of this regulation can be found at <https://www.ecfr.gov/>. USDA is required to ensure that all organizations receiving USDA grant funds comply with the guidance found in these circulars, as applicable to the respective terms and conditions of their grant awards.

Please submit all questions concerning this request via email to trasa.grants@iesc.org. USDA TraSa Project will assist applicants in understanding the application process and can provide coaching in application development at the request of applicants.

Issuance of this RFA and assistance with application development do not constitute an award or commitment on the part of the TraSa Project, nor does it commit the TraSa Project to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of an application. Further, the TraSa Project reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications received.

**ANNEXES**

1. Annex 1 – Grant Application Form
2. Annex 2 – Grant Application Budget Form
3. Annex 3 – Pre-Award Risk Questionnaire
4. Annex 4 – Required Certifications
1. The TraSa Project may consider lower contribution ratios from applicants that are women-owned or youth-owned (those 35 years of age or younger). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)