

CNIP (CalFresh) 2026 RFP Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility Questions

Q: We noticed that the eligibility for this year specifies that we, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, would need to apply “on behalf of” a certified farmers’ market, CSA, etc. If we are applying with multiple certified farmers’ market partners with the incentive vouchers being redeemed at these partnering markets, would that be eligible?

A: **Yes, a non-profit can apply on behalf of a single market or multiple markets.**

Q: Can you clarify if any documents are needed for the application to demonstrate that a nonprofit is applying on behalf of an eligible market/vendor? Do our partners need to provide any documentation showing their eligibility?

A: **Yes, applicants must submit a letter of support/commitment from the market/retailer. The exception is current grantees that already have MOUs in place with CDFA and the market/retailer, which already detail that support.**

Q: Can you please clarify what documentation is required to demonstrate that a partner is a small business?

A: **We accept documentation including small business certification, if applicable, audit documentation/overview, tax return overview, etc. Please note: Small business documentation is only needed for retail/brick and mortar stores. Direct Marketing sites (e.g. Certified Farmers Markets, CSAs, and Farm Stands) do not need to submit documentation.**

Q: Can you explain more about the small business requirement? We are a non-profit CSA program and food hub, which works exclusively with small farms, and are authorized to accept snap. Do we qualify as the small business ourselves, or do we need to get letters from the farms that are in the food hub?

A: **The small business requirement is for retail sites (brick and mortar stores) not direct marketing outlets. CSAs, farm stands, certified mobile markets and Certified Farmers Markets do NOT need to demonstrate that they are small businesses.**

Q: As a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), we would like to partner with a Farmers Market and provide nutrition education through either a Food is Medicine, or Prescription Produce clinical model. Can participation be limited to referred patients, or must incentives be available to all eligible CalFresh shoppers?

A: You can limit the shoppers to prior enrollment but note that the shoppers must make a CalFresh purchase to qualify, so would require the prescription produce shoppers to make an actual purchase with their CalFresh benefits and receive the incentive at the point of sale.

Q: For the small business 100-employee limit, are full-time, part-time and seasonal employees all counted as individual employees rather than full-time equivalents?

A: Following the California Government Code Section 14837 (d) (1) (A), which includes “affiliates”, part-time and seasonal employees are counted individually in the 100-employee count. Read more:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=14837.&lawCode=GOV

Q: If multiple grocery locations collectively exceed \$15 million in annual gross receipts and employ more than 100 people, could the stores participate as retail host sites under a proposal submitted by an eligible nonprofit or other qualified organization?

A: “‘Small business’ means an independently owned and operated business that is not dominant in its field of operation, the principal office of which is located in California, the officers of which are domiciled in California, and which, together with affiliates, has 100 or fewer employees, and average annual gross receipts of fifteen million dollars (\$15,000,000) or less over the previous three years, or is a manufacturer, as defined in subdivision (c), with 100 or fewer employees.” If the collective grocery locations are independently owned, and are independently over this threshold, you would not qualify as a direct applicant under “small business” but can participate as retail host sites under an eligible nonprofit or other qualified organization.

Q: If we operate through two affiliated entities: a for-profit California benefit corporation and a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Both are involved in our food-access initiatives. Is there any preference, scoring advantage, or other consideration for applying under one entity versus the other for CNIP funding?

A: Applying as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit would be advised in this case as they are a listed eligible entity.

Q: If we are applying as a nonprofit, would we essentially be providing "grant funds" to our partners for incentive purposes?

A: Yes, if you are applying as a nonprofit on behalf of participating sites, the grantee (in this case you, the non-profit), is responsible for the financial oversight and tracking. Typically, in this case the grantee will require the sites to submit tracking logs and

reimbursement requests and then submit that information as part of the invoice to CDFA. CDFA then reimburses the grantee who then reimburses the site.

Q: As a Cal State nutrition/healthy eating research center who partners with local community nonprofits on various programs ...can we apply on behalf of two certified farmers' markets we partner with - one on campus, run by the associated student body, and the other at a local health clinic?

A: Yes, you can apply on behalf of the two Certified Farmers' Markets

Q: Can you clarify eligibility and the distinction between the SNAP and WIC grant opportunities? As a nonprofit, SNAP transactions are processed our POS system. We also partner with a vendor who processes WIC transactions through his own POS system. While the vendor accepts SNAP at his location, the SNAP Marketplace and point-of-sale system associated with our program are operated through our non-profit. Would we be eligible for both the CNIP and CNIP Expansion opportunities?

A: For the CNIP program (matching SNAP/CalFresh), it sounds like you would be eligible as the participating vendor accepts SNAP even if it is through your non-profit. For example, we have had Farmers Markets participate in the program when the SNAP POS is operated by a non-profit (separate from the Market Manager/organization).

Matching WIC transactions is not eligible under this grant opportunity but is eligible under the CNIP-Expansion grant opportunity at Certified Farmers Markets, which should be opening up soon. Organizations can apply for both opportunities – you can only submit one grant application per RFP but can submit one to the CNIP-CalFresh and one to the CNIP-Expansion. If there is any overlap in activities, the organization must clearly delineate between funding sources and separate track the activities and expenses to each grant.

Application Questions

Q: Will this grant being more competitive, do you anticipate partially funding more projects or will it be fully funded projects only?

A: CNIP is typically quite competitive and this round probably even more so, but we won't be sure until the applications are submitted. CDFA reserves the right to offer partial funding.

Q: How should we interpret the "Unified State Application & Federal Competitiveness" criterion? What are some ways an individual proposal can demonstrate that it

complements and strengthens California's overall CNIP portfolio, beyond simply expanding geographic reach?

A: Federal priorities are listed on the NIFA GusNIP website:

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-program-gusnip/ni>

Q: In the workplan template, Locations table – what is the difference between the column “Start and End date” and “Months of Operation”?

A: “Months of Operation” typically refers to a farmers’ markets, CSA or farm stands that operate seasonally, ex: April-October. Start and End date is if that site will only participate for a portion of the grant period. Because this grant is only for 1 year, those will typically be the same. (Previous grants that spanned more than one year might see a retailer/market only join the second year of the program, etc.)

Q: Would rural access barriers justify a higher incentive match?

A: Yes, just make sure to detail in your application that a higher match ratio is requested because of the rural area and the more limited trips shoppers might make, etc.

Q: What funding sources and in-kind contributions qualify as cost share? Specifically, can other federal funding that supports complementary activities at participating sites, such as nutrition education, count toward cost share, and what documentation is required to demonstrate that the costs are allowable and not duplicative?

A: Because cost-share is encouraged but not required, you can use different types of cost share including federal funds. You do need to note the source of the funds (e.g. Federal Grant - USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program) as well as the activities that it supports. Documentation can include a letter of support or award.

Q: Can you explain the incentive expiration policy? I believe this is new this year.

A: If your incentives expire - e.g. you distribute coupons or vouchers, but they must be spent within 3 months, etc. you need to describe that. If they don't expire, then explain that as well and how the organization will be able to honor them past the grant duration.

Q: Template formatting questions: The template shows the first page (sections A, B, and C) as page 0 – does this page count toward the 15-page limit? To stay within the 15-page limit, can we remove the provided descriptions of each section in the template? Section F does

not have a character limit. Is section G (Incentive Program Design) intended to be a subsection of F?

A: Sections A, B, and C are included in the page limit, but you can use just the headings and not the full description for the sections. And yes, G is a subsection of F.

Q: Can you confirm the deadline?

A: The deadline is November 3rd at 5pm. Applications must be submitted via the CDFA's Grant Opportunity and Administration and Tracking System ([GOATS](#)).

Q: Since the date range is Feb 1, 2027- June 30, 2028, is it possible to have a project duration longer than a year?

A: Unfortunately, with the limited funding this year projects are limited to one year.

Budget Questions

Q: Can grant funds be used to reimburse farmers for mileage when they travel to remote neighborhoods in food deserts?

A: Mileage is a reimbursable/allowable expense if it can be demonstrated to be needed for the project's success

Q: For current grantees, is spending down the current award a prerequisite, or is the new application evaluated based on its proposed scope and budget? Can you overlap grants—such as finish up current grant budget line items such as salary and indirect but use the incentive on the new grant?

A: If an organization has two separate active awards, they must be able to demonstrate that each award is separate and that the organization's accounting system can track each award separately. For current grantees, the prior grant ideally would be spent down prior to a new one starting. We can work with current grantees to shift funds from salary/indirect to incentives to complete the prior grant first.

Q: To confirm, the grant is 100% reimbursement? No percentage of the grant is awarded up front?

A: The grant is typically reimbursement based only. In limited cases CDFA can offer advanced payment, but because the advance is only a portion of the project and must be fully liquidated before another one can be requested, grantees can face a larger gap in payment between the first and second advance rather than being on a reimbursement cycle. The invoicing team takes cash flow into account and tries to prioritize reimbursements on a faster turnaround for organizations facing hardship.

Q: Are incentives taxable?

A: **No, they are for fresh produce and meet the sales tax exception.**

Q: Are we required to collect any demographic information from beneficiaries? For example, do we need to collect names and addresses?

A: **You do not need to collect demographic information. You do need to collect information to demonstrate the distributed and redeemed incentives to ensure that you are meeting your proposed limits. For example, a farmers' market might typically collect names (first initial, last name, maybe phone number) to ensure that the same shopper does not come back 5 times in one day. Those shopper logs are then submitted as documentation for invoicing as well. Retail stores might submit receipts or POS system printouts. No EBT numbers in part or in whole may be collected.**

Q: For the demographic survey, is that about whoever is completing the application?

A: **For the GOATS survey, yes - that would either be the applicant or the organizational leadership.**

Q: Is there a list of required fields in the GOATS application can refer to so we know what we are required to fill in? Will required/option fields be indicated on the application? Will the items not required to fill out be identified as such?

A: **Unfortunately, the system does not yet allow us to show what is required/not, but you can check on the "GOATS application guidelines" on the CNIP website:**

https://cafarmtofork.cdfa.ca.gov/farm_to_fork/grants/cnip.html

Q: Are there certain naming conventions we should follow for files uploaded to GOATS?

A: **Proposal: "2026 CNIP Proposal_Organization Name"**

Budget sheet: "2026 CNIP Budget Sheet_Organization Name"