

Supplemental Guidance – Form RME-1 May 2004

General

This supplemental guidance does not address all relevant requirements of the RFA. Complete requirements can be found only in the RFA.

This document provides you with supplemental guidance for the preparation of Form RME-1, entitled “Risk Management Education (RME) Program Narrative.” You are required to use Form RME-1 if you are applying for either of two agreement programs operated by the USDA Risk Management Agency dealing with risk management education. The two programs, with their respective Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) numbers, are:

- Commodity Partnerships for Risk Management Education (Commodity Partnerships), CFDA No. 10.457, and
- Crop Insurance Education in Targeted States (Targeted States), CFDA No. 10.458.

The Requests for Applications (RFA) for these two programs were published in the Federal Register on May 24, 2004; the announcement for the Commodity Partnership program begins on page 29486 and the announcement for the Targeted States program begins on page 29498.

The project you describe in Form RME-1 must be designed to accomplish the purposes of either the Commodity Partnerships or Targeted States programs. Although the two programs have a number of similarities, there are also some important differences. The Commodity Partnership program, for instance, allows education regarding financial management, crop insurance marketing contracts, and other existing and emerging risk management tools. But it requires an emphasis on the training of producers of “Priority Commodities,” which are defined in the RFA. The Targeted States program, on the other hand, seeks to reach producers of all commodities in fifteen Targeted States, which are listed in the RFA, but restricts the training and informational activities to crop insurance. You should read the RFA carefully to understand the particular features of the program for which you wish to apply for funding and ensure that your completed Form RME-1 and the other parts of your application reflects these features.

Part I, Title Page

After completing the basic project and contact information called for in Part I, you should complete a project summary statement of not more than 250 words. The statement should specify the geographical scope of your project and the features of the producers within that area you will target with education. It should summarize the key features of the project that address the evaluation criteria of the RFA: Project Benefits, Statement of Work, Partnering, and Project Management. The following is a sample of a summary statement of a hypothetical project, entitled “*Risk Management Education for Southeast Horseradish Growers*,” from a hypothetical grower group, “*The Southeast Horseradish Growers Association (SHGA)*.” It is provided simply to show how a summary statement might be constructed. Rather than duplicating the features of this sample, you should tailor your summary statement to the strengths of your proposed project.

“This project will focus on providing risk management education and information to horseradish producers in five southeastern states. As a result of this project, participating producers will be able to better employ crop insurance and marketing contracts as risk management tools. In addition, producers will learn techniques for water conservation, soil conservation, nutrients management, cover crops, human resources, and business plans. SHGA will provide these educational opportunities through two workshops directed to agribusiness professionals; 12 hands-on workshops directed to horseradish producers; an introductory seminar and workshops at the annual SHGA convention; and an extensive promotional effort of mailings, newsletter features, and news articles. SHGA will partner with local extension agents in 12 southeastern counties and two agricultural lenders to assist with the program. SHGA has the experience, resources, energy, and commitment to the economic stability of southeastern horseradish growers to lead the project and ensure its success.”

Part II, Written Narrative

(No more than 10 single-sided pages)

With respect to Part II, Written Narrative, the RFA instructs you to complete:

“A written narrative of no more than 10 single sided pages which will provide reviewers with sufficient information to effectively evaluate the merits of the application according to the evaluation criteria listed in this notice. Although a Statement of Work, which is the second evaluation criterion, is to be completed in detail in Form RME-2, applicants may wish to highlight certain unique features of the Statement of Work in Part II for the benefit of the evaluation panel.”

This written narrative provides you with an opportunity to describe your project in detail to the review panel. In the narrative, you will describe the benefits to producers from your project, your plan to reach farmers and ranchers in a specific geographical area, the groups you will partner with to reach those producers, and your capacity to conduct the project. A well-crafted narrative is important because:

- It will assist you in planning an effective project,
- It will assist the review panel in understanding the merits of your project, and
- It will help the partners with whom you will be working to understand the project and the specific roles of partners.

We have instructed the panel members to examine each application with an eye on the results that will likely be achieved if the project is funded, according to the evaluation criteria that are established in the *Federal Register* notice. To that end, we have asked the panel to disregard information in the narratives that does not directly contribute to an assessment of the application against the evaluation criteria. Therefore, your application’s chance will not improve by providing extraneous commentary.

The narrative is limited to ten single-sided pages. We ask that you number each page of the narrative and, because the proposal will need to be copied, that you avoid binding, stapling, printing with small font, printing on both sides of pages, and taking other steps that will detract from preparing your proposal for careful review by the panel.

We recommend that you refer often to the evaluation criteria in the *Federal Register* notice so that you have the criteria in mind as you construct your narrative. You should address each of the respective evaluation criteria directly. Therefore, in addition to any introductory information, your narrative should contain sections corresponding to each of the evaluation criterion: Project Benefits, Statement of Work, Partnering, and Project Management. The following suggestions for each of these sections may assist you further:

- **Project Benefits.** The criterion of Project Benefits is weighted heavily (35 points) and, as set forth in the RFA, is as follows:
“The applicant must demonstrate that the project benefits to farmers and ranchers warrant the funding requested. Applicants will be scored according to

the extent they can: (a) reasonably estimate the number of producers reached through the various educational activities described in the Statement of Work; (b) justify such estimates with clear specifics; (c) identify the actions producers will likely be able to take as a result of the activities described in the Statement of Work; and (d) identify the specific measures for evaluating results that will be employed in the project. Reviewers' scoring will be based on the scope and reasonableness of the applicant's estimates of producers reached through the project, clear descriptions of specific expected project benefits, and well-designed methods for measuring the project's results and effectiveness."

In this section, you should estimate and explain the likely benefits to farmers and ranchers from the project. Reviewers will be looking for information that will help them link the benefits received by farmers reached through the project with the Statement of Work that you complete in Form RME-2. Most importantly, reviewers will want information to help them evaluate the quality of the educational experiences in the project—that is, the likelihood that participating farmers will be better risk managers because of the project. Finally, reviewers will be looking for specific measurements you propose for determining the results of the project. Some of the items you will likely want to include:

- Define the geographical scope of your project and the characteristics of the farmers and ranchers you will serve.
 - Of these, estimate the number of farmers and ranchers you anticipate reaching through the various educational and informational methods employed in your project. Include the methodology for arriving at the estimate.
 - Describe the actions that farmers and ranchers will likely take as a direct result of your project.
 - Describe how you will verify the numbers of farmers and ranchers you reach through the project and how you will verify the impact your project will have on those farmers.
- **Statement of Work.** The criterion of Statement of Work is also weighted heavily (35 points). The RFA statement on the Statement of Work criterion is:

"The applicant must produce a clear and specific Statement of Work for the project. For each of the tasks contained in the Description of Agreement Award (refer to Section II Award Information), the applicant must identify and describe specific subtasks, responsible entities, expected completion dates, RMA roles, and deliverables that will further the purpose of this program. Applicants will obtain a higher score to the extent that the Statement of Work is specific, measurable, reasonable, has specific deadlines for the completion of subtasks, relates directly to the required activities and the program purpose described in this

announcement, and is sensitive to the needs of producers that are small, have limited resources, are minorities, or are beginning in a farming or ranching business. Applicants are required to submit this Statement of Work on Form RME-2.”

You will be providing a detailed Statement of Work when you complete Form RME-2, Statement of Work. The discussion in the narrative should not simply repeat the information in Form RME-2. It should, rather, highlight and explain the Statement of Work and the reasons why the project has been planned the way it has. Some of the items you will likely want to include are:

- Describe the key promotional methods you will use to attract producers to the educational activities of the project. Explain why those methods would be the most effective methods for reaching the targeted audience.
 - Describe the key educational opportunities you will offer to the targeted producers in the project. Explain why those activities would be the most effective ones for delivering education and information to the targeted audience.
 - Explain the relationship between the promotional methods and the educational activities planned for the project.
 - Describe the key deliverables that you are committed to achieving in the Statement of Work. Explain how achieving these deliverables relate to benefits for the targeted audience and the purpose of the program for which you are applying.
- **Partnering.** The criterion of Partnering is weighted 15 points and is described in the RFA as follows:

“The applicant must demonstrate experience and capacity to partner with and gain the support of grower organizations, agribusiness professionals, and agricultural leaders to carry out a local program of education and information in a designated RMA Region. Applicants will receive higher scores to the extent that they can document and demonstrate: (a) that partnership commitments are in place for the express purpose of delivering the program in this announcement; (b) that a broad group of farmers and ranchers will be reached within the RMA Region; and (c) that a substantial effort has been made to partner with organizations that can meet the needs of producers that are small, have limited resources, are minorities, or are beginning farmers and ranchers.”

In this section you can describe your efforts in mobilizing partners across the geographical area and the roles you expect these partners to play. You may document any commitments you have received from project partners by attaching copies of commitment letters as part of the appendix. Reviewers will be looking for you to

describe the roles these partners will play in reaching and influencing local farmers and ranchers. Some of the items you will likely want to include:

- Identify those organizations and individuals you will be partnering with in the project.
 - Explain the roles these partners will play in the project.
 - Explain the strengths these organizations bring to the project.
 - Explain how the combination of partners brings together the right strengths for effectively reaching the targeted audience.
- **Project Management.** The criterion of Project Management is weighted 15 points and is described in the RFA as follows:

“The applicant must demonstrate an ability to implement sound and effective project management practices. Higher scores will be awarded to applicants that can demonstrate organizational skills, leadership, and experience in delivering services or programs that assist agricultural producers in the respective RMA Region. If the applicant has been a recipient of other Federal or other government grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts, the applicant must also detail that they have consistently complied with financial and program reporting and auditing requirements. Applicants that will employ, or have access to, personnel who have experience in directing local educational programs that benefit agricultural producers will receive higher rankings.”

In this section you can introduce yourself to the review panel as the project leader along with the organization you represent and the geographical area for which you are seeking funding. If you have already assembled a project team that would manage the project if it receives funding, you might introduce the team members and briefly describe their experience. You may include a short resume from key project leaders in the appendix. Some of the items you will also likely want to include:

- Profile those individuals who will have the most responsibility for shaping the project, connecting with producers, and producing results. Focus on energy, capacity, and commitment.
- Describe the relationship the lead organization and its partners have with the target audience of the project.
- Identify the specific resources that the lead organization will contribute to the project that is critical for the project’s success.
- Describe the priority this project has for the lead organization.

Part III, Budget Narrative

Note: USDA regulations limit indirect costs for this program to 10 percent of direct costs. Only items or services that are necessary for the successful completion of the project will be funded, as permitted under the Federal Crop Insurance Act, the applicable Federal cost principles, and are not prohibited under any other Federal statute.

You must provide a budget narrative that relates to the information you provide on SF-424A, “Budget Information, Non-Construction Programs”. This information will be used by the panel to compare the likely benefits of the project to its costs. It will also be used by agreement monitors to determine whether the funding requested by you is reasonable for the effectiveness of the project and allowable under Federal regulations.

For each budget category on SF-424A, provide a detailed breakdown of all costs. Include explanations of any cost that may appear to be excessive. Salaries of project personnel should be requested in proportion to the effort that these personnel devote to the project. The following is a listing of the budget categories from SF-424A:

- Direct Charges
 - Personnel
 - Fringe Benefits
 - Travel
 - Equipment
 - Supplies
 - Contractual
 - Other
- Indirect Charges

The RFA lists some of the restrictions on funding for these programs:

- “Funding Restrictions: Partnership/cooperative agreement funds may not be used to:*
- a. Plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct a building or facility including a processing facility;*
 - b. Purchase, rent, or install fixed equipment;*
 - c. Repair or maintain privately owned vehicles;*
 - d. Pay for the preparation of the partnership or cooperative agreement application;*
 - e. Fund political activities;*
 - f. Pay costs incurred prior to receiving a partnership or cooperative agreement;*
 - g. Fund any activities prohibited in 7 CFR Parts 3015 and 3019, as applicable.”*

Part IV, Statement of Non-financial Benefits (Required for Commodity Partnerships only)

You must complete Part IV if you are applying under the Commodity Partnership program. If you are applying under the Targeted States program, this section does not apply. The RFA states the following:

“To be eligible, applicants must also be able to demonstrate that they will receive a non-financial benefit as a result of a partnership agreement. Non-financial benefits must accrue to the applicant and must include more than the ability to provide employment income to the applicant or for the applicant’s employees or the community. The applicant must demonstrate that performance under the partnership agreement will further the specific mission of the applicant (such as providing research or activities necessary for graduate or other students to complete their educational program).”

For instance, a Statement of Non-financial Benefits for the hypothetical organization “*The Southeast Horseradish Growers Association (SHGA)*” might be:

The Southeast Horseradish Growers Association (SHGA) will receive non-financial benefits as a result of this partnership agreement. By participating in this agreement, SHGA will have increased opportunities to communicate and interact with its own membership, with other agricultural producers, and with agribusiness professionals. These opportunities will assist SHGA in better assessing the needs of its members and improving its products and services. The educational elements of this partnership agreement will also increase the risk management knowledge base of participating producers and agribusiness professionals, including those customers served by SHGA. A better-informed membership will aid SHGA in achieving its mission, which is to “Foster the economic viability of horseradish production in the southeast U.S.”