

Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP)

Request for Proposals

Growing Rural Opportunities for Wellness – Orchards and Food Forests (GROW-OFF) Grant Program

Applications Due: Rolling deadline

I. INTRODUCTION

The Forest Service has awarded funds to the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP) to sub-award grants of \$40,000-\$60,000 to eight to ten Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)-designated [disadvantaged](#) Alaska communities, with the purpose of establishing and maintaining community orchards and food forests. RurAL CAP's Growing Rural Opportunities for Wellness (GROW) Program requests proposals for the GROW-OFF (Orchards and Food Forests) Grant Program from eligible applicants to plant and maintain community orchards or food forests in their communities. GROW-OFF aims to enhance food security, foster community engagement, create economic opportunities, and promote community wellness and environmental sustainability.

RurAL CAP has sub-awarded the majority of these funds through a first round of applications. **\$97,331 in funds remain to be sub-awarded.**

Awarding Agency and Program Overview:

Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service has awarded more than \$1 billion in competitive grants to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature in cities, towns, and suburbs where more than 84% of Americans live, work, and play. Communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. Territories and Tribal Nations are receiving funding, part of the Justice40 Initiative and made possible by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act – the largest climate investment in history. The Forest Service selected 385 grant proposals from organizations working to increase equitable access to trees and nature, and the benefits they provide for cooling cities, improving air quality, and promoting food security, public health, and safety.

RurAL CAP's Growing Rural Opportunities for Wellness (GROW) Program is thrilled to be selected as an awardee for pass-through funding in addition to a direct project to conduct training and establish orchards at supportive housing facilities in Anchorage. RurAL CAP, founded in 1965, is a private, statewide, nonprofit organization working to improve the quality of life for low-income Alaskans. The GROW Program began in 2021 in response to growing concerns about food security in rural Alaska during the COVID-19 pandemic, and offers training; technical assistance; and funding opportunities for rural Alaska community gardens and local food projects. For more information on past and current community partnerships throughout Alaska, please see this [Story Map](#). GROW also administers a Farm to School program for several Title I schools in Anchorage and provides virtual and in-person training in collaboration with the UAF Cooperative Extension through the [Alaska Tribes Extension Program](#).

II. BASIC AWARD INFORMATION

RurAL CAP anticipates funding eight to ten projects of \$40,000 to \$60,000 each. Seven sub-awardees have already been selected. We anticipate funding two more projects with the remaining \$97,331.

Total amount to be awarded: \$97,331

Match: No match required.

a. TIMELINE FOR PROPOSAL

Rolling deadline. Applicants will be contacted within a week of receipt of their application.

b. PROJECT PERIOD

Start date is fall 2024 or later, dependent on completion of mandatory training (online) and Grant Agreement, with grant period ending on **October 30, 2028**.

c. REPORTING

- i. Performance reports: Semi-annual program reports will be due on June 15th and December 15th each year of the grant period. Reports will include individuals involved, tasks accomplished and volunteer/work hours completed. Photographs of planting and operations are encouraged. Reports may be submitted by email to grow@ruralcap.org.
- ii. Financial reports: Grant funds may be dispersed as reimbursement or paid in advance upon request. Requests for reimbursement must be submitted no more than monthly and no less than semi-annually. Requests for Advance Payment must not exceed the minimum amount needed or the amount needed for a 30-day period, whichever is less.
 1. Financial reports must be accompanied by either:
 - a. A virtual check-in with GROW staff (phone or video call) during which the grantee discusses project activities conducted during the period for which funds are being requested.
 - b. A progress report detailing activities conducted during the period for which funds are being requested.
 - iii. Semi-annual posting of geotagged photos of trees planted to the [Greenstand](#) platform

d. TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - GROW staff and contracted community orchard/food forest experts will provide continuous support to grantees throughout the project period.

- i. Virtual assistance – GROW staff and contractors can help with the design of the orchard or food forest and the selection of plants. We will also help connect awardees to resources, additional funding, experts, and peers. Grantees are expected to attend virtual check-ins weekly to quarterly depending on need.

- ii. Site visits – Upon request, GROW staff and training and technical assistance contractors will travel to awarded communities to provide onsite assistance and training.
- iii. Annual training – During each growing season of the project period, there will be hands-on training hosted in Anchorage to teach relevant skills to awardees and other community food foresters/orchardists, such as: how to plant a tree, pruning, grafting, planning, garden design, and more. *Grantees are required to attend the training at least twice during the grant period: once in 2024 and once in a future year.*

e. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

1) Applicants must conduct program activities in communities that are designated as “disadvantaged” or “distressed” according to at least **ONE** of the following:

- [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#)
 - Note: All federally recognized Tribes, including Alaska Native villages, are designated as “disadvantaged” although they may not be within Census tracts that are designated as such. Please email grow@ruralcap.org if you have questions regarding your community’s designation.
- [Denali Commission 2020 Distressed Communities Report](#)
- Title 1 Schools

2) Applicants must be a federally recognized Tribe, non-profit organization, school or public organization.

3) Non-profit organizations described in Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code that engage in lobbying activities as defined in Section 3 of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 are not eligible to apply.

f. ELIGIBLE LANDS

1) Eligible applicants may apply for funding for a project to be conducted on non-Federal lands such as:

- State and local government
- Homeowner associations
- Private lands
- Tribal/Alaska Native corporation (includes Trust lands)

2) Lands owned or administered by the federal government are *not* eligible for this funding opportunity except for lands held in trust for Native American Tribes and individuals (hereinafter Trust lands).

III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The GROW-OFF Grant Program seeks to fund projects that establish and maintain community orchards and/or food forests, defined below:

Community orchard - Land planted with perennial fruit and/or nut trees to benefit the community. The orchard is designed to provide nutrition, promote community engagement, and to advance long-term food security and sustainability.

Food forest - A primarily perennial food garden that seeks to function like a natural ecosystem, incorporating a wide variety of edible trees, plants, and other supporting elements to provide a sustainable and productive environment.

Preference will be given to projects that promote the following objectives:

1. Food Security - Establish sustainable community orchards and food forests to enhance local food security and access to fresh produce.
2. Community Engagement - Foster community involvement through volunteer opportunities, educational programs, and participatory decision-making in the planning and maintenance of orchards and food forests.
3. Sustainability - Implement climate-adapted practices that promote ecological balance, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture within the community orchards and food forests. Plan for sustainability of projects after the 5-year grant period.
4. Economic Empowerment - Explore opportunities for local economic and workforce development through initiatives such as farmers' markets, value-added products, and skill-building programs.

V. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Interested parties must submit a comprehensive proposal including the following: Project Narrative, Timeline, Budget and Budget Narrative, and Attachments.

Project Narrative – Please describe the Project Team, Project Vision, and Project Implementation in 1,000 words or less.

1. Project Team: Please name the person(s) responsible for financial management, program reporting, and a project champion. One person may fulfill more than one role. Please list relevant qualifications for team members, as well as training needs.

- Financial management– Manage budget and submit financial reports and receipts.
- Program reporting – Collect, record, and submit annual program activity reports.
- Project champion - Lead planning, implementation, and community engagement with the community orchard/food forest. *Note: this role must be a paid position funded by either this grant or another funding source.*

2. Project Vision: Provide a detailed description of the **vision** for the community orchard or food forests, which addresses the following:

- Property – Please describe the land on which the community orchard or food forest will be planted. What are existing soil conditions, how much sun is available? What is the water source? Are there other site constraints that could affect plant growth? See under “Attachments” for documentation of land and land ownership.

- Community context – Please describe your community (e.g., history, ecology, culture(s), major events, food security needs and resources). How do you expect the community to help plan, interact with and support the garden? What partnerships will be leveraged within your community?
- Mission and target audience – Who will the community orchard/food forest serve? Why is a community orchard/food forest the best solution for the community it will serve?
- Scope – What are the limits of the project? Please identify what the project can address, as well as what it cannot address.
- Feasibility – What risks are present that may threaten the success of the project? E.g., participant turnover, weather, etc.

3. Project Implementation: Outline a clear plan for the implementation of the project over the grant period, detailing key milestones, activities, and responsible parties for the following stages of the project:

- Planning – What is your approach and timeline for planning? What strategies will you use to engage the local community in the planning process? How will you incorporate knowledge from experts? Please note: GROW staff and TTA contractors will offer assistance with the design of the orchard or food forest and the selection of plants.
- Establishment – When will you plant the orchard/food forest? What is your plan for engaging community members in this stage? How will you communicate between volunteers, members of the Project Team and GROW staff?
- Monitoring and maintenance – Who will coordinate monitoring and maintenance of the orchard or food forest? Describe strategies for engaging the local community in the enjoyment and maintenance of the orchards or food forest.
- Long term sustainability - Detail plans for the long-term sustainability of the orchards and food forests beyond the grant period. How will you maintain financial and community support for the project? Projects that demonstrate potential for community engagement and food production beyond the grant period will be prioritized.

Timeline – Please submit a timeline for all planned activities using the provided worksheet or by providing the same information in your own format.

Budget and Budget Narrative – Please submit a budget and budget narrative using the provided budget worksheet or by providing the same information in your own format.

1. Budget: Provide a detailed budget with a breakdown of expenses. You may use the provided spreadsheet or use your own format with the same line items, as applicable (Personnel & Fringe Benefits; Travel; Supplies; Contractual; Other; Indirect Expenses)
 - a. Budget requirements:
 - i. Please include any additional anticipated and secured funding sources used for this project. Please note that match or leveraged funding is not required and ability to provide match/leveraged funding will not affect application's competitiveness.
 - ii. The amount of grant funds allocated to fencing should be no more than twice the amount allocated for purchasing trees and other plants. If the cost of fencing must exceed this 2:1 ratio, please explain.

- iii. Budget must allocate funds, either from this grant or another source, to pay the Project Champion.
 - iv. Budget must allocate funds for travel for at least one person to attend the required training at least twice during the grant period.
 - v. Equipment is an ineligible expense for this funding. Equipment means tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$5,000. However, fencing and high tunnels are considered supplies and would be allowable expenses if they were directly related to the project and needed to sustain trees/ensure project success. Permanent structures/construction are ineligible expenses (i.e. building a nursery facility or greenhouse) but temporary fabric or plastic high tunnel is allowable.
2. Budget Narrative: Please provide narrative explanation and itemized breakdown of all budget items in a separate document.

Attachments

1. Documentation of organization status: 501 (c) (3), Tribal organization or educational institution.
2. Letters of support from community members and leaders.
3. Letter from landowners guaranteeing use of the land for at least the project period. Prefer guaranteed land use for longer amounts of time extending beyond the end of the grant period.
4. Photographs of the land (can be from Google maps) - plat, as-built or aerial showing project boundaries.

Submit proposals by email to grow@ruralcap.org.

VIII. SELECTION PROCESS

Please see the Evaluation Matrix document for reference.

IX. CONTACT INFORMATION

For inquiries or to submit proposals, please contact the GROW Program at grow@ruralcap.org.

X. NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, and American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at

<https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

(1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

(2) Fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.