

Tapping Into Funding: A Practical Guide to Grant Writing

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Agenda

Grants 101

What can you do right now?

Questions & Discussion



Grant Writing for Farm & Food Entrepreneurs

Self-Paced Online Course



In the course participants will:

- Develop a better understanding of and appreciation for whether grant writing is the best option for their business needs/goals
- Learn how to find, write, and apply for grants which are relevant to their food business and its future funding needs
- Write a complete grant proposal template/outline which can be edited/alterd for different grant funding opportunities in the future

Participation in this course is free and takes place on MSU's Desire 2 Learn (D2L) platform. Participants will receive a certificate upon successful completion of all course requirements

Scan the QR code for registration information:



Getting your Ducks in a Row

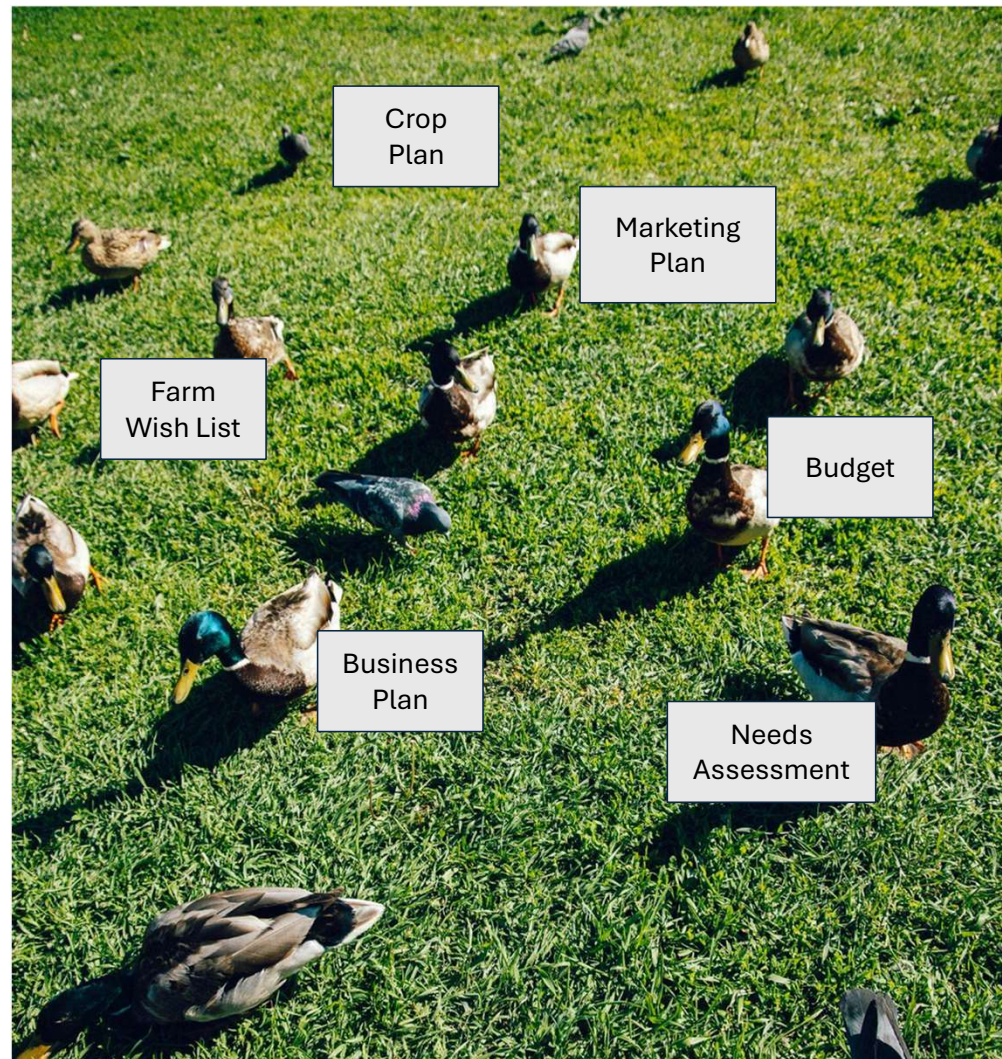


Photo by Roman Odintsov



Grants 101: What can Grants Fund

A grant is...

a way to fund a specific project or portion of your farm business.

A grant is not...

the way to fully-fund your farm business!
start-up funding for your farm business.

always the best solution to your
equipment, technology or labor problems.

Other Farm Funding Sources:

Crowdfunding

Loans

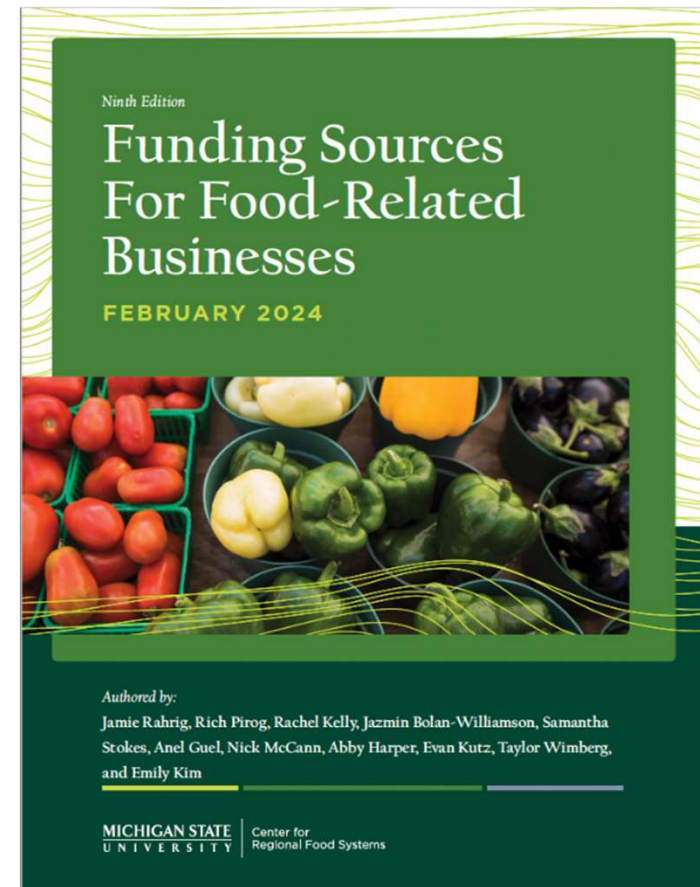
Direct Fundraising

Sponsorships



Grants 101: Finding Funders

- Foundations
- Governments
- Corporations
- Non-Profits



Grants 101: Finding Funders

A “grant application” has a few names:

- Request for Proposals
- Grant Application
- Call for Proposals
- Request for Applications
- Grant Guidelines
- Notice of Funding Available
- Notice of Solicitation of Applications

Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development Underserved, Value-Added, and Regional Food Systems Grant Program

2025 Program Guidelines

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) is offering a grant opportunity to promote the expansion of value-added agriculture production, processing, develop food systems, healthy food access, and underserved business development within the state to enhance Michigan’s food and agriculture industry.

MDARD will accept proposals that are intended to establish, retain, expand, attract and/or develop value-added agricultural processing and underserved development in Michigan; expand or develop regional food systems; or expand access to healthy food, including farm markets, flower markets, urban & rural agriculture, and hoop houses.

Process:

Proposal	
Release Request for Proposals	April 23, 2025
Proposals Due	June 11, 2025, by 5 p.m. (EST)
JEC	
JEC Received Proposals for Scoring	July/August 2025
JEC Meeting	August/September 2025
Award	
Announce Award Funding	September 2025

An informational webinar will be held on April 30, 2025, from 10 – 11:30 a.m. via Microsoft Teams. You can join the webinar at the following [link](#). The link is also available on the general [website page](#).

Funding Areas:

Funding will be focused on the following types of projects:

- Urban agriculture
- Farm markets, flower markets, and hoop houses
- Food hub development
- Food access and education, including access to fresh/nutritional foods
- Value-added food processing and agro-tourism



Grants 101: Know Your Grant

- Am I an eligible applicant?
- Will the grant fund the type of project I want to undertake?
- Will grant funds pay for the type of expenses that my project will include?
- Is there a portion of the total budget I must contribute? In other terms, is there a 'match' that I will need to secure in order to receive grant funds?
- Is this a reimbursable grant?
- Does your business have the necessary registrations?



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Funding Areas:

Funding will be focused on the following types of projects:

- Urban agriculture
- Farm markets, flower markets, and hoop houses
- Food hub development
- Food access and education, including access to fresh/nutritional foods
- Value-added food processing and agro-tourism

Is there a portion of the total budget I must contribute?

Applicants must provide a minimum 30% match or a reduced 15% match available for underserved entities (self-certification required).

Is this a reimbursable grant?

This grant is a **cost-reimbursement** program. Grantees are responsible for costs until proper reports/invoices/receipts are received and reviewed.

Grantees will be eligible for reimbursement up to three (3) times at specified dates, during the 18-month grant cycle, with the final reimbursement provided at the completion of the project and final site visit.

Does your business have the necessary registrations?

All grantees must be registered and in good standing with the LARA Corporations Division, register here [Corporations Division - Login Page](https://cofs.lara.state.mi.us/corpweb/LoginSystem/ExternalLogin.aspx) <https://cofs.lara.state.mi.us/corpweb/LoginSystem/ExternalLogin.aspx>.

Will grant funds pay for the type of expenses that my project will include?

Grant funds **can** be used to pay for:

- Kits for movable growing structures including Hoop Houses
- Walk-in cooler
- Display coolers
- Work benches
- Baking equipment
- Shelving
- Signage

Grant funds **cannot** be used to pay for:

- Land acquisition
- Purchase of a building or facility
- Structural repair of building or facility
- Purchase of livestock
- Fuel
- Insurance
- Indirect costs are **not** allowed under this grant program. Indirect costs are defined as the expenses of doing business that are not readily identified within the project but are necessary for the general operation of the organization and the implementation proposal related activities.
- Salaries, wages, and benefits
- Equipment installed outside of the State of Michigan
- Acquisition costs of general-purpose equipment or lease agreements to own (i.e., lease-to-own, or rent-to-own). **General Purpose Equipment** means equipment that is not limited to technical activities. Examples include office equipment and

furnishings, modular offices, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicles not identified as special use.
Travel costs



Many Support Resources Avail. from MSU CRFS!

Demystifying Grant Terms

DOWNLOAD

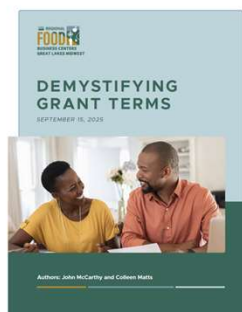
December 5, 2025 - [John McCarthy](#) and [Colleen Matts](#)

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Understanding grant terminology is essential for farmers, food producers, and business owners seeking funding. However, the language used in grant applications and announcements can be confusing, especially when funders use similar terms in different ways. This guide was created to help you make sense of common grant-related terms so you can approach funding opportunities with clarity and confidence.

Whether you're applying for your first grant or refining your strategy for future applications, this resource will help you decode the language and better understand the process by walking through the following topics:

- Grant Announcements
- Types of Grants
- Types of Awards
- Eligibility
- Applicant Requirements
- Typical Application Elements
- Budget and Financial Management



Loan Readiness Toolbox for Food and Farm Businesses

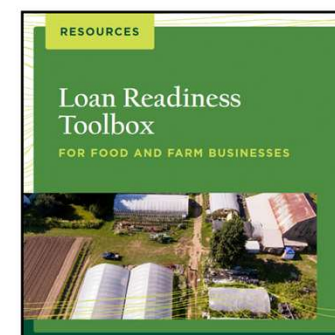
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February 12, 2026 - [Jamie Rahrig](#), [Jazmin Bolan-Williamson](#), [Sam Stokes](#) & [Julia Lower](#), [Jonathan LaPorte](#)

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Running a farm or food business can be extremely rewarding, and yet, at times can be overwhelming. On top of that, applying for financing can be an intimidating process. Understanding your business financials and having a strong, up-to-date business plan can help provide peace of mind and ensure you are ready to apply for a loan when the time comes. The resources included in the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems [Loan Readiness Toolbox for Food and Farm Businesses](#) provides the steps needed to confidently apply for financing.

The *Loan Readiness Toolbox for Food and Farm Businesses* was developed by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems with support from Dr. Dan McCole with the [MSU Department of Community Sustainability](#). Specifically designed for food and farm businesses, the *Toolbox* includes resources for consumer-packaged goods manufacturers, caterers, restaurants, kitchen incubators, food trucks, and farmers who are ready to monitor and track their financial records and access financing in the next 18 – 24 months.



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal

- Introduction to your farm business
- Needs Assessment / Problem Statement
- Goals, Objectives, or Expected Outcomes
- Project Description, Narrative, or Methods
- Timeline
- Budget
- Letters of Support



Photo: MI CSA Network



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Introduction to Your Business

- What type of food company or farm are you?
- How long have you been in business?
- What is your purpose or mission?
- What is the expertise of the owners and/or key personnel?
- What are some of your company's principles or priorities?
- What special populations (if any) do you serve?
- Where is your company located?
- What past successes have propelled you to this point?
- **What makes your company unique?**



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Needs Assessment / Problem Statement

- **Why** do you need grant funding?
- What specific gap/problem/need will this funding meet?
- Support with data, customer feedback, statistics
- Connect to your farm goals and goals of funder



Photo: MI CSA Network



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Goals, Objectives, Expected Outcomes

- **What** will you accomplish?
- Examples:
 - We will reduce food waste in Sample County to below the national average by 2030.
 - By 2026, we will construct a commercially licensed kitchen in Sample County.
 - Food production capacity at XYZ Food Co. will increase threefold by Dec 31,2026
 - Food production capacity growth at XYZ FoodCo will create a 30% expansion in profits for our business.



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Project Description, Narrative, or Methods

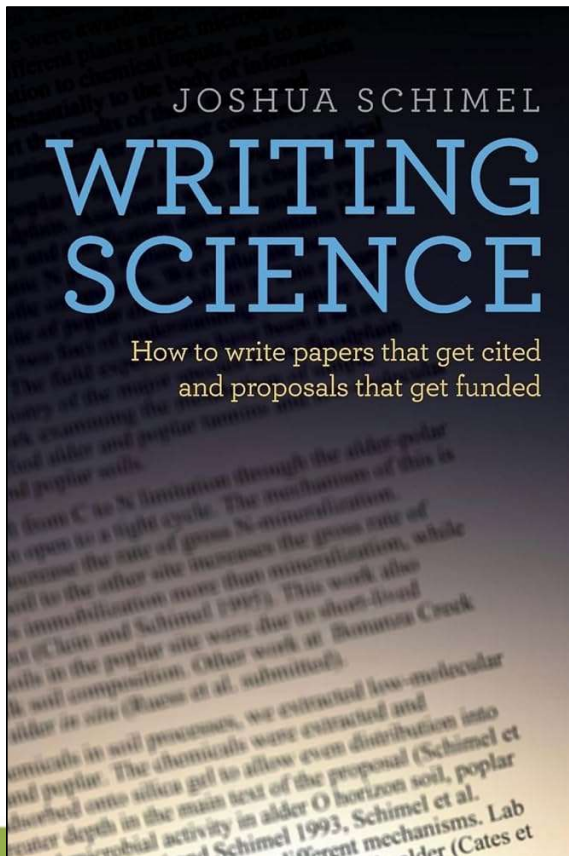
How will you accomplish your goal?

Setting SMART goals BiteSize Learning

				
Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Timely
The goal is concrete and tangible - everyone knows what it looks like.	The goal has an objective measure of success that everyone can understand.	The goal is challenging, but should be achievable with the resources available.	The goal meaningfully contributes to larger objectives like the overall mission.	This goal has a deadline or, better yet, a timeline of progress milestones.



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Project Description, Narrative, or Methods



How will you tell a compelling story about your project?

1. **O**pening
2. **C**hallenge
3. **A**ction
4. **R**esolution

Schimel's *Writing Science* In a Sheet: Quotes and Reference Guide

<p>Ch1: Writing in Science As a scientist, you are a professional writer. It is the author's job to make the reader's job easy. If you are going to be a successful writer, learn to embrace the pain and enjoy the process.</p>	<p>Ch2: Science Writing as Storytelling Scientists feel their job is simply to "present the work," and so do a poor job of highlighting the story. Data → Information → Knowledge → UNDERSTANDING Develop your story from the bottom up (data); tell it from the top down (understanding).</p>	<p>Ch3: Making a Story Sticky S: Simple = the core essence U: Unexpected = the unknown, a gap C: Concrete = data vs. abstract ideas C: Credible = ground ideas in lit. E: Emotional = engage curiosity S: Stories = integrated smaller units <i>Your job is to find what is novel and highlight the unexpected elements.</i></p>
<p>Ch4: Story Structure OCAR: Opening, Challenge, Action, Resolution; slow ABDCE: Action, Background, Development, Climax, Ending; frontloaded structure, use in proposals LDR: Lead, Development, Resolution; fast, as in <i>Nature</i> LD: L and D; fastest story, all up front <i>Introduction 3 Sections</i>: Opening, Background, Challenge <i>Methods & Results</i>: the action – what did you do and find? <i>Discussion</i>: Climax and Resolution. What did it all mean?</p>	<p>Ch5: The Opening Three Goals: identify the problem, introduce your characters, target an audience Bad openings create either misdirection or no direction Be aware of the schemas held by your audience Engage a broader audience 2 steps: open with a wide-appeal issue and modulate the idea to your focus area To write well, you need to learn how to the power of the opening (pawn-pushes vs. queen launches).</p>	
<p>Ch6: The Funnel, Connecting O & C When you frame the knowledge gap, you provide the background information...to understand the story. Frame the gap with SUCCEES, esp. U/E Intros state a problem and question Introductions ≠ Literature Reviews, Intros identify boundaries of knowledge and synthesize it into HOLES</p>	<p>Ch7: The Challenge Challenges focus on knowledge gained. If you don't have a question, you're not <i>doing good science</i>. Make your question explicit. State the challenge after the question (e.g., to learn X, we did Y). Objectives focus on the information collected, resulting in weak story telling.</p>	<p>Ch8: Action Action = Methods, Results, Discussion <i>You are not just presenting your results, you're telling a story.</i> Methods – brief overview before details Results – murder your darlings; use LD structure; stats are not stories Discussion – the critical act of creativity use LDR structure; build to Resolution</p>
<p>Ch9: The Resolution The Resolution is your take home message, your strongest and most memorable words. Good resolutions shows how understanding is advanced, connecting to the opening problem. Bad resolutions are <i>weak, distracting or undermine</i> conclusions; resolutions are not the place for <i>uncertainty</i>. <i>Condense</i> your resolution to: (1) synthesize key results, (2) synthesize those results, (3) contribute to fixing a problem.</p>	<p>Ch10: Internal Structure Tension is the emotional drive (curiosity) to keep reading. <i>Build and reward</i> curiosity through story arcs; create a series of nested arcs from sentences to the whole paper. In each paragraph or section, ask: (1) Is there a single, clear point? (2) Are linkages within section paragraphs clear? (3) Are there any extraneous words that break serial arcs? (4) Does each new topic have a resolution? (5) Is every unit defined by sub-heads or clear opening text?</p>	

Image: <https://www.bitesizelearning.co.uk/>



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Timeline

- **When** will key actions take place?
- Format: Narrative, Table, Fillable Template

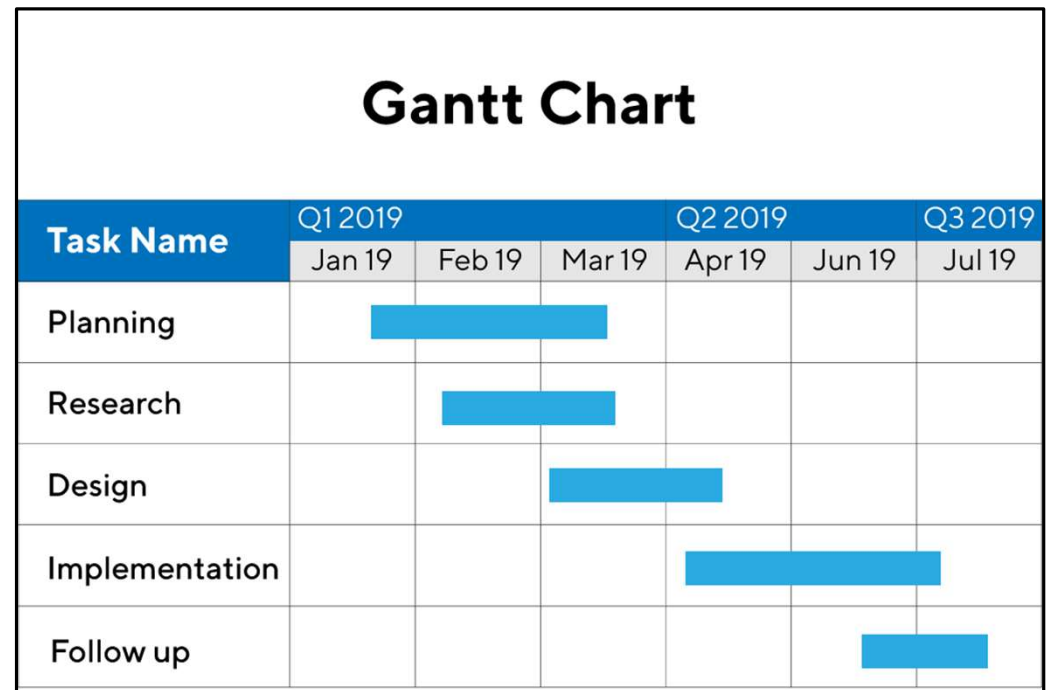


Image: productplan.com



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Budget

- What will you spend grant funds on?

Item	Cost	Total
Farmer Time	150 hours x \$30 / hour	\$4500
Contracted Marketing Services	\$4650	\$4650
Printing and Mailing	\$850	\$850
TOTAL		\$10,000



Common Elements of a Grant Proposal: Letters of Support

- The best Letters of Support are from an entity that has knowledge of the needs that your proposal is addressing;
 - Acts as 'verification' of the situation described in your proposal
- This may be someone in your industry, a business advisor, or other subject expert.
- For any grant projects done in partnership, you will want a letter of support from named partners
- Double check grant requirements!!!!
- Make sure letter writers have enough time to complete



Grants 101: Editing, Reviewing, Submitting

Make sure you're answering all questions and including all materials asked for in the request for proposals.

Be sure you're following guidelines for page limits, word/character counts, formatting.

Have multiple people read and review your application

- Friends, family, an MSU Product Center Counselor

You can use AI to help proofread your proposal.



Grants for 101: Grant Review and Decisions

- Watch your email closely!
- Partial funding offers are possible
- Rejection is common, but still tough



Photo by Quốc Bảo:



What can you do right now?

Complete Grant Writing
for Food and Farm
Entrepreneurs Course

Finalize your Business
Plans and
Recordkeeping

Get Quotes from
Vendors or
Contractors

Explore Open &
Upcoming Grant
Opportunities



Grant Writing for Farm & Food Entrepreneurs

Self-Paced Online Course



In the course participants will:

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Scan the QR code for registration information:



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Food • Ag • Bio

Grant Writer Resource List

Applying for grants can be a time consuming process, especially for rural communities that have limited staff capacity. This resource provides a list of grant writers with expertise to assist communities with funding research and applications. The writers can be hired on a contract basis and fees will differ depending on the length and complexity of the project. All writers listed in this resource are accepting new clients at the time of publication (any known geographic limitations are noted).

Agency/Organization	Contact	Expertise
AGO Grant Consulting	AGO Grant Consulting Frank Shimerdla Earling, IA 402.620.0209 frank@aogrants.com aogrants.com	Services: Grant development from proposal to submission, grant reports, technical writing, white papers, newsletters, press releases, website documentation Specialties: Economic and workforce development and education Accomplishments: 15 years of experience with more than \$40 million in funded grants
Acton Grant Consulting, LLC	Acton Grant Consulting, LLC Amanda Acton, GPC, Founder and Chief Dot Connector 515.360.7023 amanda@actonconsulting.net actonconsulting.net	Services: Grant writing, data management, and research Specialties: Rural, health, mental and behavioral health, and homelessness projects, U.S. Department of Agriculture programs Accomplishments: Grant professional certified and more than 20 years in grants and fundraising experience
Ag Visions Enterprises, LLC	Ag Visions Enterprises, LLC Jim Venner Breda, IA 712.830.8381 venner@win-4-u.net	Services: Grant writing Specialties: U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Energy for America Program, and solar and energy efficiency projects
Agriculture Grant Solutions	Agriculture Grant Solutions Alex Freeman, Owner & Grant Manager 650 S. Prairie View Dr. #125, West Des Moines, IA 50266 515.346.8488 info@agriculturegrantsolutions.com agriculturegrantsolutions.com	Services: Grant writing, feasibility studies Specialties: Food and agriculture programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture grants, state programs, and local incentives Entities Served: Agriculture, manufacturing, food processing, municipalities, regional governments, food processors, fuel retailers, and more
Amy Sue Alesch	Amy Sue Alesch amyalesch@gmail.com 515.829.9955	Services: Grant writing Specialties: Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department Agriculture-National Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the Iowa Economic Development Authority Accomplishments: More than 20 years of experience

Get Quotes from Vendors or Contractors



Marketing Recommendations

Old McDonald's Farm

Focus of Work: Updated website with eCommerce and a full marketing plan to reach more local and regional customers they can sell and ship their products to.

Primary Partner: Jane McDonald

TLD Project Lead Contact: Erika Tebbens

Outline of Services + Costs Associated

To learn more about the services outlined below, find more details on our website:

- [Custom Websites](#)
- [eCommerce](#)
- [Graphic Design & Brand Strategy](#)

Templated Informational Website

\$2,100

- Informational website built on Squarespace
 - Client is responsible for [platform fees](#)
- Uses a templated design, customized with brand colors, fonts and logo. No custom design or custom page layouts included.
- Includes up to five pages of content (ex: homepage, about, contact, products, where to buy, FAQ, etc)
- Client provides key content points, final copy written by TLD
- Email sign-up form included
- Includes training to keep website updated

4

eCommerce Store Setup \$1,350

- eCommerce store built on the platform of your choice
 - Client responsible for platform costs
- Can be built as an add-on to a website package, or as a stand-alone store.
- Includes product setup and organization into categories for up to 10 products
- Customization of shipping/pickup/delivery options
- Build in customer email notifications customized to the brand, as platform allows
- Training to use platform, manage inventory, and process orders.

Basic Marketing Plan \$1,200

- Basic plan to market your business, including outline of channels to focus on
- Creative strategies for connecting with your community
- Includes basic strategy for success on each channel
- Final meeting to review the plan

Total Cost of Services \$4,650

Timeline Expectations:

Project is projected to be completed by July 2025.

Payment Terms & Method

- For projects under \$2,500, full payment is required to begin project work.
- For projects over \$2,500, a 50% deposit is required to begin project work, the remaining will be invoiced and due upon completion.
- Pricing outlined in this contract is good for 30 days.
- Contract must be signed and payment made within 7 days to secure the estimated project completion timeline. Any information, content or approvals requested by TLD must be completed by the client in a timely manner in order to maintain the estimated completion date.
- Initial meeting will be scheduled within 2 weeks from date of the signed contract unless otherwise agreed.
- Payment is available online through ACH transfer, by check or by credit card with a 3.1% processing fee.
- Full contract to be provided upon acceptance of proposal

Be prepared for any funding opportunity by getting your proposal prepared in advance.



Finalize Your Business Plans and Recordkeeping

Business Structure

Limited Liability Company (LLC) ~ Sole Proprietorship ~ B Corporation ~ Non-profit ~ Cooperative

Recordkeeping: Common Grant Submission Requirements

- Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) (for government grants)
 - This replaced the DUNS number in 2022
 - Register through SAM.gov
- 501(c)3 Determination letter (for non-profits)
- IRS Forms 990 for the past 2 fiscal years (for nonprofits)
- IRS Form W-9
- Annual budget from past 2 years
- Current operating budget



Explore Open & Upcoming Grant Opportunities

Open now:

- MDARD Underserved, Value-Added, and Regional Food Systems Grant (due April 15, 2026)
- MDARD Wastewater Infrastructure Fund Grants (rolling)
- Community Funded Grant Programs - Community Foundations

Coming soon:

- MDARD Rural Development Fund Grants
- MDARD Farm to Family Programs
- MSU Center for Regional Food Systems & Great Lakes Partnership for Food and Farm Development





What you Need to Know: Loan Readiness for First Time Borrowers Webinar

June 4, 2025, 2:00 PM EST | 1:00 PM CST

Register: <https://bit.ly/LoanReadiness>

Join the [Great Lakes Midwest Regional Food Business Center](#) for a webinar on Wednesday, June 4, 2025 to help prepare food and farm businesses new to the lending process.



THANK YOU
SO MUCH

Kelly McClelland, Wendy Wieland
Michigan State University Extension

