

**2023-2024 Equipment Grant Processing**  
**Texas Dept of Agriculture (TDA)–Food & Nutrition Division**

- I. Texas has an award amount of \$3,745,223. TDA intends to have the equipment grant awards announced by October 2024.
- II. TDA will use an internally designed on-line application within the Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDA) agency website for grant applications. TDA will email invitations to apply for the grants to all Superintendents and Child Nutrition Directors of eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs). The Word document "Application Design" is a mock-up of the grant application flow for applicants.
- III. TDA will process grant payments through its CAPPs Financial system after the SFA has completed the purchase and installation of approved equipment. To request reimbursement, SFAs will provide the following forms and information to TDA:
  - a. TDA Claim Cover Sheet & the purchasing invoice.
  - b. Form 74-176 "Vendor Direct Deposit Authorization," for TDA if necessary.
  - c. An active Unique Entity ID (UEI) issued by SAM.gov. To register with SAM.gov, the CE must go to <https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration>.
- IV. Memo SP 18-2023 dated August 3, 2023, from USDA defines the minimum threshold for the purchase of equipment at \$1,000, as specified by Congress<sup>1</sup>. Based on this memo, equipment requests with a "per unit value" of less than \$1,000 will be ineligible.
- V. TDA will not limit the award amount to any single SFA. The initial selection will be based on the evaluation score and a \$100,000 award limit. TDA may adjust the \$100,000 threshold based on equipment necessity.
- VI. TDA will only award 2023-2024 equipment grants to SFA sites that have not received one in a prior year.
- VII. Per the USDA guidance regarding the Equipment Grants, TDA will score requests based on the following criteria:
  - a. TDA will provide additional points to schools with limited access to other financial resources. SFAs must provide TDA their 2022-2023 fund balance as of August 31, 2023. SFAs with more than a 3-month average fund balance will be ineligible.
  - b. TDA will provide additional points for higher free and reduced-price percentages/CEP designations. TDA will preload this information based on the October 2023 NSLP and SBP claim data into its application database.
  - c. TDA will prioritize awards to school sites in SFAs where no other sites have received prior year awards.
  - d. TDA has pre-scored all eligible equipment to allow expedited application processing. The attached scoring spreadsheet demonstrates how applications and eligible equipment meet USDA requirements to:
    - 1) Improve the safety of the food served in school meals.
    - 2) Improve overall nutrition and food quality.
    - 3) Improve or expand participation in NSLP/SBP programs.
    - 4) Improve the availability of healthier food choices.
    - 5) Improve overall student convenience and appeal.
  - e. TDA will require SFAs to report the existing equipment's age to be replaced with the grant funds. Scoring will give priority to older or non-existent equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> Congress.gov. "Text - S.4661 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2023." July 28, 2022. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4661/text>.

- f. SFAs must indicate whether the equipment requested will be used to expand the School Breakfast Program (SBP). This serves only to highlight the approach requested in USDA memo SP 18-2023<sup>2</sup> and will not be considered in the application scoring.
- VIII. Application scoring will be based on a total of 100 points. See spreadsheet for the specific scoring criteria.
- IX. Tie-breaker process: TDA will use the following tiebreaker schematic if needed:
- a. If a site is already receiving one or more awards from the current award process (as in they submitted a request for multiple items and their 2nd, 3rd, or more requests is in the tie breaker)–TDA will exclude those request(s) that fell into the tie breaker.
  - b. If a tiebreaker remains after the first process, TDA will rank requests in order of free and reduced percentages / CEP claiming percentage. The highest percentage wins.
  - c. If a tiebreaker remains after the second process, TDA will rank the SFAs on the ratio of available funds. A lower ratio indicates a lower fund balance available. The lowest available funds ratio wins.
  - d. If a tiebreaker exists after the third process, TDA will use equipment age. The oldest or non-existent equipment would be awarded.
  - e. For ties within a single CE, the CE’s chosen priority would dictate the winner. If the CE has not specified a priority, TDA will award the site with the highest enrollment so that more students may benefit from the grant award.
- X. For grant year 2023, SFAs operating Seamless Summer Option in school year 2023 – 2024 are eligible to apply.
- XI. Deadlines, performance period, and links to governing CFRs will be posted on TDA’s squaremeals.org website and linked on the FAQs posted online and emailed to sub awardees.
- XII. TDA Compliance will assess equipment awards use during the Administrative Review process.
- XIII. Per USDA memo SP 18-2023, sub awardees that have not submitted reimbursement requests or proof of fund obligation by January 15, 2025, will forfeit their awards.
- a. Award recipients will be instructed to upload proof of obligation to a Smartsheet tool by the deadline.
  - b. Instructions will be included with award letters and in FAQs. Reminder emails to meet this obligation will be sent at the beginning of October, November, and December 2024, and January 2025.
- XIV. Other Requirements:
1. Quarterly and Final FNS–425 financial report for the grant – 30 days after each quarter's end and 120 days after the performance end date.
  2. Reporting for the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) once awarded.
  3. A Final FNS-908 Performance Progress Report will be submitted to USDA.
  4. Preliminary Timeline:
    - a. 06/03/24 – USDA approval scoring methodology
    - b. 09/11/24– Announce upcoming grants application to SFAs.
    - c. 09/11/24 – Open application process for SFAs to submit requests.
    - d. 10/11/24 – Close application process for SFAs (11:59pm)
    - e. 10/13/24 – 10/26/24 – Scoring of application and preparing award letters and documents.
    - f. 10/30/24 – Announce awards via USPS mailed award letter and email to both Superintendent and Child Nutrition Director.

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<sup>2</sup>“...to purchase equipment, with a value of greater than \$1,000, needed to serve healthier meals, improve food safety, and to help support the establishment, maintenance, or expansion of the School Breakfast Program.”