



**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
STATE TRADE EXPANSION PROGRAM
REQUEST FOR APPLICATION**

COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

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Please read all materials before preparing and submitting the application. Failure to follow the instructions and requirements described in this Request for Application (RFA) may result in the disqualification of the application.

**NOTICE REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF CONFIDENTIAL,
PROPRIETARY, TRADE SECRET OR PRIVILEGED
INFORMATION IN AN APPLICATION**

Please take notice of the following:

If it is necessary for Respondent to include proprietary or otherwise confidential information in its application or other submitted information, Respondent must clearly mark and label all confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged material in 14 point or higher bold font on each page as it appears, and identify the specific exception to disclosure in the Texas Public Information Act (PIA) for each specific piece of confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged information. Additionally, all confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged information must be segregated in a separate and discrete section of the application, which must be able to be conveniently separated and detached from the other sections of the application. Failure to properly label, identify and segregate any confidential, proprietary, trade secret or other privileged information in the application may result in all such information or material being disclosed as public information. Merely making a blanket claim that the entire application is protected from disclosure because it contains any amount of confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged information is not acceptable, and shall make the entire application subject to release under the PIA. In order to initiate the process of seeking an Attorney General opinion on the release of confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged information, the specific provisions of the application that are considered by Respondent to be confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged and confidential must be clearly labeled and segregated as described above. Any information which is not clearly identified as confidential, proprietary, trade secret or privileged shall be deemed to be subject to disclosure pursuant to the PIA.



STATE TRADE EXPANSION PROGRAM REQUEST FOR APPLICATION

COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Pursuant to the Texas Agriculture Code, Sections 12.002 and 12.027, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) hereby requests applications for the Texas State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) to receive assistance related to export training, consulting, participation in foreign trade missions and trade shows, and other eligible export activities that support foreign market entry. The purpose of the Program is to increase the number of eligible small businesses that are exporting and increase the dollar value of exports for small businesses in Texas.

PROGRAM AUTHORITY

Public Law No. 111 – 240 (the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010) authorized the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to establish the STEP Program, to make cooperative agreement awards to states, or the equivalent thereof, and to carry out export programs that will assist an Eligible Small Business Concerns (ESBC). The objectives of this Program, the duration of which was extended by the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015 (HR 644), are to increase the number of small businesses that are exporting and to increase the dollar value of exports for those small businesses that export.

Through a cooperative agreement, Texas has been allocated funds to provide assistance to small businesses under the STEP Program to fund activities related to export training, export activities, state sponsored trade show participation, and state sponsored trade missions.

ELIGIBILITY

The applicant must be a Texas-based business that: 1) meets SBA “Small Business Concern” size guidelines; 2) is not debarred from federal funding; 3) has a product/service manufactured, produced, processed or value-added in Texas; 4) has been in business for at least one year; and 5) has demonstrated understanding of the costs associated with exporting.

New-to-Export (NTE) and Market Expansion (ME) small business concerns are eligible to participate in the STEP Program.

FUNDING PARAMETERS

Applications must be complete and have all required documentation to be considered. Applications missing documentation or otherwise deemed incomplete will not be considered for funding until sufficient information has been received by TDA within a timeframe set forth by the agency during the administrative review process.

Projects may be funded at varying levels depending on the nature of the project. TDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications submitted. TDA is under no legal or other obligation to make an award on the basis of a response submitted to this RFA. TDA shall not pay for any costs incurred by any entity in responding to this RFA.

Written notifications will be made to all applicants. Favorable decisions will indicate the amount of award, duration of the award, and any special conditions associated with the project.

STATE TRADE EXPANSION PROMOTION PROGRAM COSTS

Allowable Costs	Unallowable Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airfare (consistent with Fly America Act Guidelines) • Ground transportation fees • Baggage fees • Parking fees • Lodging (based on GSA/Department of State per diem rates) • Registration fees and booth space for trade shows • Trade mission fees • Currency exchange fees • Other associated and allowable travel expenses • Fees for shipping sample products (capped at \$2,000) • Cost of compliance testing and existing product for entry into an export market (capped at \$2,000) • Applicant export research tool subscription used to assist with market research (capped at \$1,000) • Website translation into foreign language, search engine optimization, localization services (capped at \$3,000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport or visa fees • Immunizations • Expenses related to entertaining current or prospective clients or government officials • New product development or alteration of existing product(s) • Cellphones and cellphone charges

TDA will provide reimbursement up to 75 percent per eligible activity commensurate with statute, up to a maximum total assistance of \$5,000 per ESBC through the Small Business Stipend Assistance Program.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applications will be accepted beginning October 2016, and must be submitted on the form provided by TDA. Application materials are available on TDA’s website at www.TexasAgriculture.gov, under

the “Grants & Services” tab, STEP Program web page, or available upon request from TDA by calling (512) 463-4406.

SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS.

As a condition of receipt of funds under this Program the Applicant will be required to execute an award agreement with the Texas Department of Agriculture, and further acknowledges that failure to timely execute the award agreement will result in withdrawal of any funds awarded, and those funds will be redistributed to other qualified applicants in accordance with state law and TDA rules.

Selected applicants will be required to submit performance reports. Reporting timelines will be provided in the award agreement.

EVALUATION AND SELECTION INFORMATION

TDA will determine whether the applicant was responsive to the requirements of this RFA. Applications may be shared with other entities for review and determination of export capabilities. Such other entities include the Governor’s Economic Development and Tourism Office, US Department of Commerce, and the Small Business Development Center – International Trade Center.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF RESPONSES

Applicants must submit one complete, signed application. **Applications will be accepted on a first come, first served basis depending on selected activity and eligibility.** *See the application for specific information regarding the State Coordinated Export Events.* It is the applicant’s responsibility to submit all materials necessary early enough to ensure timely delivery. Applications may be submitted electronically, hand-delivered or mailed. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

For questions regarding submission of the proposal and/or TDA requirements, please contact TDA’s Grants Office at (512) 463-4406, or by email at Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov.

There are 3 options for submission: email, online and mail. Please only use ONE method.

1. [Online Form](#) – Preferred.

The online system will date and time-stamp the submission for receipt documentation purposes.

An automated receipt email will be sent from the online system indicating the application has been received. TDA staff will also send a separate email as soon as administratively possible with an application ID number.

2. Email submission of complete application packet:
Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov

The e-mail subject line must reference the RFA title and applicant (Ex: 2017 STEP Program – ABC Producer Co.). The applicant is solely responsible for ensuring that its complete application, regardless of method of delivery, is sent to, and actually received by, TDA in a timely manner and at the proper destination server. TDA will send a confirmation email after the application has been received.

IMPORTANT NOTE: TDA recommends a limit on the attachments to 10MB each. This may require applicants to submit one application in multiple e-mails, so that all required attachments may be submitted without exceeding TDA's 10 MB attachment limit. Applicants must make sure that each email subject line references the RFA title and applicant. Unreadable submissions may be deemed unresponsive and will not be reviewed for funding consideration.

TDA takes no responsibility for electronic submissions that are captured, blocked, filtered, quarantined or otherwise prevented from reaching the proper destination server by any TDA anti-virus or other security software.

TDA staff will send an email receipt acknowledged receipt of the application as soon as administratively possible with an application ID number.

3. Hard copy submissions.

Hard copy applications will be documented with a date/time stamp for receipt documentation purposes.

Applications may be sent to TDA at either of the following addresses:

By U.S. Mail:

Texas Department of Agriculture
Trade & Business Development- Grants
P.O. Box 12847
Austin, TX 78711

By Overnight or Hand Delivery

Texas Department of Agriculture
Trade & Business Development- Grants
1700 North Congress, 11th Floor
Austin, Texas 78701

TDA staff will send an email acknowledging receipt of the application as soon as administratively possible with an application ID number.

GENERAL INFORMATION

All Program awards are subject to the availability of appropriations to the SBA or TDA.

Right to Amend or Terminate Program

TDA reserves the right to alter, amend, or clarify any provisions, terms, or conditions of this Program or any award, or to terminate this Program at any time prior to the execution of an agreement, if TDA deems any

such action to be in the best interest of TDA and of the State of Texas. The decision of TDA will be administratively final in this regard.

Proprietary Information/Public Information

The Applicant is responsible for clearly identifying any portion of the application that contains proprietary or trade secret information and must state the reason(s) the information is designated as such. Merely making a blanket claim the entire application is protected from disclosure because it contains proprietary or trade secret information is not acceptable, and may make the entire application subject to release under the Texas Public Information Act, Chapter 552 of the Government Cod.

In the event that a public information request for the application is received, TDA shall process such request in accordance with §552.305 of the Texas Government Code. Applicants are advised to consult with their legal counsel regarding disclosure issues and to take appropriate precautions to safeguard trade secrets or any other proprietary information.

All applications submitted under this Program are subject to release as public information, unless the application or specific parts of any such application can be shown to be exempt from disclosure under the PIA.

Conflict of Interest

The Applicant is required to disclose any existing or potential conflicts of interest relative to this Program. Failure to disclose any such relationship may result in the Applicant's disqualification or termination of agreement.

GENERAL COMPLIANCE INFORMATION

1. Recipient must comply with TDA's reporting requirements and financial procedures outlined in the award agreement. Any delegation by Recipient to a subcontractor regarding any duties and responsibilities imposed by the award must be approved in advance by TDA and shall not relieve Recipient of its responsibilities to TDA for its performance.
2. All awards are subject to the availability of funds appropriated and authorized by the Texas Legislature.
3. Recipient must remain in full compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. Non-compliance may result in termination of the award or ineligibility for reimbursement of expenses.
4. Recipient must keep separate records and a bookkeeping account (with a complete record of all expenditures) for a project. Records shall be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years after the completion of the project, or as otherwise agreed upon with TDA. If any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit or other action is initiated prior to the expiration of the three-year retention period, then all records and accounts must be retained until their destruction is authorized by TDA. TDA and the Texas State Auditor's Office (SAO) reserve the right to examine all books, documents, records, and accounts relating to the project, including all electronic records, at any time throughout the duration of the agreement until all litigation is finalized including exhaustion of all appeals, all claims, negotiations, audits or other action pertaining to an award are resolved, or until the expiration of the three-year retention period, whichever is longer. TDA and the SAO shall have access to: all electronic data or records pertaining to a project; the physical location where records are stored; and all locations related to project activities.
5. If Recipient has a financial audit performed during the time Recipient is receiving funds from TDA, upon request, TDA shall have access to information about the audit, including the audit transmittal letter, management letter, any schedules, and the final report or result of such audit.
6. Recipient must comply with Texas Government Code, Chapter 783, Uniform Grant and Contract Management, the Texas Uniform Grant Management Standards (UGMS), and 2 CFR Part 200, as applicable.

