



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR RFBC REPORTING

How are activities categorized?

Activities are defined in 3 categories:

1. Coordination activities
2. Technical assistance
3. Capacity building/Business Builder subawards

What are these different types of activities?

Coordination activities: occur between Center personnel and an organization, business or other partner. Can consist of networking, general communication about the Center, responding to requests for information, marketing (sending out newsletters, announcements). These new relationships can be informal (networking, conversations about the Center) or formal relationships that involve a contract, memorandum of understanding, payment of stipends.

- Collaborative activities: involve working on something together such as protocols to connect your teams, an asset map or a TA program and may represent a significant share of your work over the first 6 months
- Partnerships:
 - a. New partnership is with a new set of people while a new collaboration might be with an established set of people working on new initiative or activity. This could be working on a new TA or grant program.
 - b. Ongoing partnership can be new activities with current/already established partner/organization, such as creating new events to connect the food community. Note: even if you are talking with some of the same partners you have worked with for years, if you are meeting or presenting to them on the new funding and TA opportunities, you can report that as coordination efforts for the Center.
- We have started to compile some of the new contacts you are connecting with the Center, so tell us if you need that list of people from your state/theme.

Technical assistance: Guidance, support, advice, assessment and/or customized training provided to a beneficiary on behalf of the Center aimed at building capacity for that beneficiary to access new markets, increase viability, or increase business acumen. Some examples are business planning, market channel analysis, and recipe development.

- Activities include those that take place along the supply chain from the farm-gate and include direct to consumer markets as well as intermediated markets for individual businesses and aggregators (i.e., food hubs).



- Activities can include content development, updating, review, repackaging and delivery. If you are doing any needs/gap analysis of TA needs, you can also share that in this category (or above in coordination), but we will let you decide what makes most sense.

Capacity building/Business Builder subawards

At this point, there should be little or no activity for this topic besides from the OSU team and their advisory committee. But, if you have been sharing information about the program, you can note those connections here, or in the Coordination category above.

Who does the reporting for a team?

- Your own activities: Report on an activity if you had a role in the coordination or collaboration.
- Activities of program participants: Tracking participant outcomes from involvement in TA or a capacity building program will occur through your team coordinator or lead who will track pre-determined outcomes.
- Outcomes: whomever has the key contact will be in charge of tracking outcomes. For example, if you have someone in a short course, you would be in charge of tracking results from the course, but when they graduate if they go on to get a Biz builder grant, Lauren's team will track those outcomes for the participants.

For example, you have an MOU or contract with a partner organization to carry out some work,

1. Under coordination, you report the MOU or contract then,
2. Any evaluation would take place under the programming they provide/support and their role in that should be clearly laid out in the MOU
3. Lastly, the relationship will likely be captured in the Social Network Analysis as well.

How do I report contacts? You can report contacts you made at an event or meeting under coordination activities. For example, the number of new partnerships or collaborations (contacts) established by meeting with attendees at the Colorado Food Summit. They likely haven't been formalized by an MOU or contract but the outcome would be *Outcome 1: Expand and strengthen regional food systems networks and partnerships in response to hardships and vulnerabilities exposed by recent national emergencies, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Note that 5 or more contact hours with a partner or business will require an evaluation plan as we move forward but, with the exception of some early work by theme teams, we do not believe formal evaluation should be started at this stage.

How are you at the Center tracking all the contacts that come into theme teams and to the state teams? All of the contacts are collected in a spreadsheet, so if you would like a summary or a downloaded copy of the contacts for your specific team, just email Matt McFadden



(mmcfadd@gmail.com) or contact him via Slack. You can also request these at set intervals (monthly, every six months) for your tracking purposes.

How are we tracking technical assistance across all Center activities? We haven't quite figured this out yet but are leaning toward a more centralized system as a default, but allowing for TA programs with already established evaluation questionnaires/processes to continue on when it makes sense.

I have ongoing activities, how do I report them? You can use an "anticipated end date" for an activity so you don't need to keep reporting on it. This will allow you to check on the progression of the activity, without entering information each month. When there is a change in that activity, such as the TA program ends or is extended, you can update that entry with a new line item and begin to share outcomes from those who participated in collaboration with the evaluation team.

Will I be double-counting if my team members report on the same activity or interaction with a business? We will look for incidents of double-counting and try to eliminate them when we report to USDA. In addition, you can view online or download the reporting information submitted by all teams [here](#).

Under Outcome 1, USDA asks about partnerships/collaborations developed through Regional Food Business Center activities (Question 5 – Coordinating activities), the number of partnerships that reported:

- a. Increased sales/purchasing of regional food products
- b. Coordinated communication or marketing campaigns
- c. More efficient and coordinated use of resources
- d. Additional funding secured as a result of partnership
- e. Collaborative activities to achieve shared goals (please specify)
- f. Other reported outcomes of collaboration (please specify)

What does this refer to? This can mean how a partnership to provide marketing training resulted in 3 food businesses having more "coordinated communication or marketing campaigns" (so at an individual business level). However, mostly this seeks the results of activities that have systemic and supply chain outcomes (for example, a regional market, or food hub or a new farm to school program) because of targeted investments or new collaborations across the food system community of the region.

How will we be evaluating our programs and activities to provide these data to USDA? Our evaluation team is working on developing tools for you to use. In the meantime, if you have an evaluation tool you



already use, you can employ it. Contact [Audrey](#) if you need help identifying a tool or method of evaluation for any of your programming.

Do we need to track our hours as Center employees or contractors? No, at this time you do not need to track your hours dedicated to Center work, but your activities will need to reflect the amount of time you are being compensated for.

DEFINITIONS (note there are more definitions provided by USDA [here](#)):

Underinvested communities: populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

We are including military veterans in our Center's definition of underinvested communities.

Priority audience: This term may appear in some of our grant documents, but we will prioritize underinvested communities. USDA has tasked all regional food business centers with focusing on specific target audiences (categories of businesses such as small and mid-scale farm and food businesses and supply chain businesses needed to sell into local and regional markets) and prioritizing "underinvested" communities, by which they mean historically underserved and excluded.

Minor business development: activities including creating a website for sales, rethinking pricing levels and strategy, starting a social media strategy, adopting Square or online financial software.

Stakeholder: Person or entity receiving benefits from and/or engaging with the USDA Regional Food Business Center(s).

REPORTING RESOURCES:

Reporting [webinar](#) link

USDA Reporting [Guidance](#)

Copy of USDA Semiannual Performance [Progress Report](#)

Tyler's awesome [tracking form](#) (download a copy)