

E-Commerce and Digital Marketing Audit (EDMA) – Technical Assistance Grant

2021 Request for Proposals

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Grant Summary

Application and Award Details

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Ag Marketing and Development Division is offering grant funds to one or more providers who are qualified to provide 1:1 technical assistance **in e-commerce and digital marketing strategy** to small Minnesota food and beverage makers with branded food or beverage products.

Although there are many trainings and presentations available that focus on different aspects of e-commerce and digital marketing, a 1:1 audit is assumed to have value because it can be customized for each company. The grantee will be expected to document the support provided, resulting in case studies detailing e-commerce and digital strategies of different types and sizes of food and beverage companies. These reports will be posted on the MDA's website to help educate a larger number of Minnesota companies.

We anticipate awarding up to \$70,000 total, between one or more entities, using a competitive review process. Eligibility and application requirements are detailed in this request for proposals (RFP).

Your application must be received by 4:00 p.m. Central Time (CT) on June 1, 2021 to be included. Once we receive your completed application through our online system, we will send you an email confirmation.

Applicants must submit proposals through our [online application system](#).

EDMA Background and Program Goals

Some small food and beverage companies seem to struggle with e-commerce and digital marketing strategy, yet those are very important business planning elements. The EDMA was established help provide competitive advantage to small Minnesota food and beverage companies by providing financial support for 1:1 e-commerce and digital marketing strategy consulting.

COVID-19 has accelerated food shopper conversion to online shopping, creating new market channel opportunities for savvy companies. The challenge is that there are myriad e-commerce marketplace platforms, and platforms available to communicate brand value and buying opportunities with individual consumers, and with wholesale buyers. Similarly, there are myriad strategies to communicate with and market-to, individual and wholesale buyers/consumers on digital formats.

Contact Information

Direct questions about the grant program, completing the application, or additional accommodations to:

Brian Erickson
brian.j.erickson@state.mn.us
Minnesota Department of Agriculture
625 Robert St N
St. Paul, MN 55155-2538

Eligibility and Application Instructions

Eligible Applicants

For-profit marketing and branding agencies and consultants, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations and public agencies, who demonstrate experience and success assisting small farm or food and beverage companies, are invited to apply. Minnesota-based accelerator programs who demonstrate this proficiency are also eligible to apply.

Applicants should have (or demonstrate the ability to develop and offer) a broad understanding of e-commerce platforms and strategy, as well as demonstrated expertise growing “owned” audience (email collection and marketing), including Facebook advertising, Google SEO, Amazon strategy and advertising, Instacart, etc. They will be expected to bring ideas of how to implement the strategies they recommend.

All applicants must be in good standing with the State of Minnesota (no back taxes owed, no defaults on Minnesota State-backed financing for the last seven years, acceptable performance on past MDA grants, and in compliance with current State regulations).

Multi-organization applications are acceptable, but the applicant should clearly indicate the lead organization that will take responsibility for the contract and financial management.

Eligible Projects and Process

E-Commerce and Digital Marketing Audit (EDMA) Technical Assistance Grants are intended to support technical assistance providers (providers) in working 1:1 with the MDA and small Minnesota food and beverage makers with branded food or beverage products (recipients) to:

1. create an on-boarding application form that can be used to recruit eligible farms and food companies (this form may include a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) at the discretion of each participating recipient),
2. recruit small food and beverage companies to participate in this technical assistance process, using the on-boarding application form, with the MDA’s direction,
3. select applicants (recipients) for participation, based on potential for that particular provider to impact recipient e-commerce and digital effectiveness, and other predetermined criteria,
4. meet 1:1 with selected recipients as an “intake” meeting (with the MDA),
5. audit recipient e-commerce and digital marketing strategy,
6. create a list of recommendations, including an implementation strategy, for those companies to help position them for e-commerce and digital marketing success,
7. meet with recipients to present and discuss results (with the MDA), and
8. create and submit a brief report that details each project, for publication online as a case study by the MDA.

Applicants should specify and make the case that they are capable of setting up a process to recruit and audit as many eligible entities as they deem possible within the timeline and their proposed budget (see [Technical Assistance Recipients](#) for details on eligibility).

Technical Assistance Recipients

Recipients of technical assistance should be small Minnesota-registered food or beverage makers who sell a branded food or beverage product. For the purposes of this grant program, the MDA defines “small” as having annual gross sales revenue of less than \$10 million during the latest full year of IRS reporting.

The MDA will work with the provider(s) to recruit food and beverage companies of different sizes and from different segments of the industry. During the selection process the MDA and provider(s) may also look for companies that:

- **manufacture** branded products in Minnesota (or have their products made by a Minnesota copacker),
- support Minnesota agriculture by purchasing Minnesota farm ingredients,
- demonstrate sustainable/renewable environmental practices and awareness,
- have some traction in the marketplace (recipients who are “pre-revenue” are ineligible),
- invest-in and manage e-commerce and digital marketing platforms, or
- support diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Recipients of technical assistance must agree to the following conditions:

- Cooperate with data collection and 1:1 meetings, providing timely and thoughtful responses to providers, and
- Agree to have their e-commerce and digital marketing report and strategy published as a model for other small Minnesota food makers to learn-from. (Sensitive company data, such as sales revenue, customer lists or specific market channel strategy, which may be shared under the NDA between the provider and recipients, would not be shared with the MDA, and therefore would not be reported.)

Funding

Funding Availability

The MDA anticipates awarding up to \$70,000 total. Approximately one to three grants will be awarded. The final number of awarded grants will be determined by the size of each award. The maximum grant award is \$70,000; the minimum award is \$10,000. Grants may cover up to 75% of eligible expenses. That means the technical assistance provider must contribute 25% of the total costs. The MDA reserves the right to not award any grants through this competitive RFP.

Eligible expenses may only be incurred during the effective dates of the grant contract. Applicants should anticipate that grant contracts will have an end date of December 31, 2021. At the discretion and permission of the MDA, grant contracts may be amended to extend until one year after the start date of the contract (but no later than June 30, 2022).

Matching Funds

Matching funds may include non-state funds (funds that were not obtained through the budgeting process of the Minnesota Legislature or granted by a State agency) in the form of cash, loans, other grants, or liquid

capital assets dedicated to the project. They may also come from in-kind contributions from technical assistance providers.

For example, if you provide ten hours of work per project and normally charge a rate of \$100 per hour (\$1,000 total per project cost), up to \$750 may be paid for by the grant (and billed to the MDA) and the remaining \$250 would be the provider match. Another way to “pay” the match, in this scenario, would be for the provider to provide 2.5 hours of their time without charge to the recipient or the grant.

We see that it’s possible to have dual strategies here: it’s possible that one provider could plan/apply for this grant to cover the entire cost of working with ten very small food companies, by providing a basic consulting service at very low or no cost; and, it’s possible another provider may make the case that they are qualified to work with three larger companies with more complex strategic needs, requiring a larger time commitment.

Particularly with the latter example, it may make sense to charge a subsidized fee to recipients, which will stretch the impacts of this grant. You will need to demonstrate how these costs are allotted/budgeted regardless of how your budget is structured.

Eligible Expenses

Eligible expenses include:

- Wages and associated fringe for time spent directly on the grant project (provide justification for the hourly rate);
- Consultant fees (provide justification for the hourly rate);
- Project-related travel at the State of Minnesota’s travel policy rates (must be documented); and
- Postage, printing, computing, and phone expenses related to the project.

Ineligible Expenses

The following expenses may not be paid with grant or matching funds:

- Costs incurred prior to execution of grant contract with the MDA;
- Equipment other than those items specifically included in Eligible Expenses;
- Advertising and public relations;
- Bad debts – including uncollectible accounts and other claims, related collection costs, and related legal costs;
- Entertainment, amusement, diversion, and social activities, or any costs directly associated with such costs (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, alcohol, and gratuities);
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expense resulting from violations (or alleged violations) of, or failure of the applicant to comply with, Federal, State, local, or Indian tribal laws and regulations;
- Fundraising – including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions – regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used;

- Indirect costs (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 of proposal related activities);
- Investment management costs, including costs of investment counsel and staff, and similar expenses incurred to enhance income from investments;
- Land and building purchases;
- Lobbying – including costs of membership in organizations substantially engaged in lobbying; and
- Political activities.

Application Review Process and Timeline

A review committee, composed of MDA staff and external reviewers, evaluates all eligible applications. Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding of a project. The commissioner of agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and is responsible for award decisions. The commissioner may also use geographic distribution, services to special populations, and the applicant’s history as a state grantee and capacity to perform work in the final decision process. We will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing, within three weeks after the proposal deadline. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

RFP posted on the MDA website.....	May 11, 2021
Questions due by 4:00 pm Central Time.....	May 21, 2021
Applications due by 4:00 pm Central Time.....	June 1, 2021
Applicants notified of decisions; grant agreement forwarded to awardee(s).....	June 15, 2021

Application Instructions

Grant applicants are required to submit proposals through our [online application system](#).

All applications must be received by 4:00 p.m. Central Time, on Tuesday, June 1, 2021. Late applications will not be considered. The MDA is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems causing an application to be received late. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that submission is received by the MDA before the deadline.

Application Guidelines

- Write for reviewers who are generally knowledgeable but may not have a thorough or deep understanding of your proposed area of technical assistance or region. Use plain, easily understood language.
- Answer all questions completely within the character or page limits specified in the grant application. Use 12-point font, single spacing.
- The Project Evaluation Profile included in this document will be used to score and compare the grant applications.

Data Privacy Notice

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under the EDMA. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Data Practices Act as private or non public, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or non public data is limited by law to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant or by a valid court order, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement and the Minnesota Office of the Attorney General.

Per [Minn. Stat. 13.599](#):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once all application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed.
- Trade secret information (as defined in [Minn. Stat. 13.37](#)) is classified as private or nonpublic. In order for an applicant to protect data submitted as part of this application as trade secret information, the applicant must identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant wishes to protect, provide an explanation of the economic value of keeping the data from being generally known to other persons, and describe previous steps taken by the applicant to maintain the data's secrecy. Determining what constitutes trade secret information is ultimately the responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data marked by an applicant as trade secret information or marked "confidential" will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, that data will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

Conflicts of Interest

The State will take steps to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers per [Minn. Stat. 16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making \(PDF\)](#).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.

- A grantee’s or applicant’s objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.
- In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Questions

Questions must be submitted in writing via email to brian.j.erickson@state.mn.us with “EDMA Technical Assistance” in the subject line by 4:00 p.m. CST on May 21, 2021. Answers will be posted on the [EDMA Technical Assistance Grant](#) webpage. Questions should not be submitted through other means. Other MDA employees are not authorized to provide guidance.

Requirements for Projects Receiving Grant Funds

Pre-Award Financial Review

All NGOs applying for grants from the State of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to a grant award made of \$25,000 and higher. The University of Minnesota is excluded from this requirement.

One of the following documents will be requested, based on the following criteria:

- Grant applicants with annual income of under \$50,000, or who have not been in existence long enough to have a completed IRS Form 990 or audit should submit their most recent board-reviewed financial statements.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of \$50,000 or more and less than \$750,000 should submit their most recent IRS Form 990.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of over \$750,000 should submit their most recent certified financial audit.

Grant Award Agreement and Payments

Grantees must provide an IRS Form W-9 and any other requested documentation within seven days of request. Grantees must sign and return grant award agreements to the MDA within seven days of being sent to the grantee. Failure to do so may jeopardize the award. Grantees may not begin working on the project before the grant award agreement is fully executed; any work performed beforehand will not be eligible for reimbursement.

Grant funds are dispersed as a reimbursement. All grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget. To receive grant payments, grantees must provide a progress report, proof that grant project work has been done by submitting details of each purchase on receipts or invoices, and proof that vendors or sub-contractors have been paid. Upon completion of the grant project, submission and approval of a final progress report will be required to receive the final payment.

Site Visits and Financial Reconciliations

The grant agreement allows the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The MDA will perform a monitoring visit or desk review for all grantees with awards of \$25,000 or more before a final payment is approved. Other grantees may receive monitoring visits at the discretion of the MDA.

The MDA will perform a financial reconciliation of at least one invoice on grants of \$50,000 and higher. For this purpose, the grantee must make expense receipts, employee timesheets, invoices, and any other supporting documents available upon request by the state.

Reporting Requirements

In addition to creating onboarding/application forms, selecting recipients with the MDA, and working 1:1 with small food and beverage companies to help them evaluate and strategize around their digital marketing and e-commerce activity, grantees will also be required to create and submit to the MDA a report for each recipient that is suitable to publish online as a demonstration designed to help other small

food companies with their own digital and e-commerce strategy. The MDA envisions a brief 2-3 page “before and after” report that details each company’s digital activity prior to the project, along with a list of action items or recommendations made by the grantee. Reports are a deliverable of this grant agreement.

The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the course of the project. Information submitted in any report is a public record. If the grant recipient considers any information in the report to be trade-secret protected, the grant recipient may request that trade-secret information be kept confidential and must specifically label that information. The MDA shall notify the grant recipient if a public records request is made for the information claimed as protected by the grant recipient.

Bidding Requirements

All funded applicants are required to abide by the state’s bidding requirements for larger purchases. See a detailed list of the state’s [bidding requirements](#) for details.

Affirmative Action and Non-Discrimination Policy

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. [Minn. Stat. 363A.02](#). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship. [Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Audits of Project

Per [Minn. Stat. 16B.98, subdivision 8](#), the grantee’s books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Voter Registration Requirement

The grantee will comply with [Minn. Stat. 201.162](#) by providing voter registration services for its employees.

Project Evaluation Profile

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Score
Demonstrates organizational and staff/individual experience and capacity to successfully consult and work with small to medium sized food and beverage makers	20
Demonstrates specific expertise around food and beverage e-commerce and digital marketing, including a broad understanding of e-commerce platforms and strategy and growing “owned” audience (Facebook advertising, Google SEO, Amazon strategy & advertising, Instacart, etc.)	20
Demonstrates understanding of this grant process and expresses commitment to the MDA’s program goals and processes	20
Budgetary approach maximizes program impact, and applicant clearly explains source of grant match	20
Demonstrates experience and commitment to working with diverse and underserved business owners, including women, veterans, persons with disabilities, Native American/Alaskan Native, communities of color, and LGBTQ+	15
Includes a strong letter of support from at least one client who could receive technical assistance under this grant	5
Total	100

Application Questions

These questions are provided for your convenience. You will answer these questions in the [Online Application System](#).

Contact Information

- Name of Contact Person
- Name of Organization
- Address
- City
- State
- Zip
- Email Address
- Phone

Eligibility

Please answer each of the following questions.

- Applicant has the capacity to provide technical assistance/consulting in the food and beverage segment.
- I have the authority to apply for this grant based on my relationship with the applicant organization.
- Applicant agrees that no work has started on the proposed project nor will start until a grant contract is fully executed.
- Applicant is in good standing with the State of Minnesota (no back taxes owed, no defaults on Minnesota State backed financing for the last seven years, in compliance with current State regulations, and acceptable performance on past MDA grants).

Program Publicity

How did you hear about the EDMA Technical Assistance Grant Program? Please check all that apply.

- MDA website
- Word of mouth
- Notification from another organization
- Press release
- Email notification from the MDA
- Other (please list)

Overview

Executive Summary

Include a description of the project and goals to be accomplished. The executive summary of this proposed project must be suitable for dissemination to the public. *(maximum 1,200 characters, including spaces)*

- Project Start Date
- Project End Date
- Project Name
- Total Project Costs
- Amount Requested
- Applicant Match

Business/Organization Overview

Describe the business or organization's capacity to implement the project. Include information such as years of experience providing technical assistance to small businesses, including food and beverage makers, track record of working with diverse communities, organizational strengths, and any other information to demonstrate your organization's understanding of the MDA's goals, and your ability to execute the project. *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Key Project Partners

Provide an overview of any project partners and key participants (such as staff and contractors) that will be involved in carrying out this project. Include a description of the relevant experience each will bring and what they will contribute. *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Geographic Area

Describe the areas that you anticipate providing service through this grant opportunity. At minimum, list the Minnesota counties where service may be provided. You may be more specific (e.g., Ramsey County with a focus on the Frogtown neighborhood of St. Paul). *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Project Proposal

Approach

Describe the approach that your organization will take in providing services to small food and beverage companies through this grant opportunity. *(maximum 5,000 characters, including spaces)*

Diverse Community Outreach

Describe past experience working with diverse clients, and how you intend to reach a diverse audience with this opportunity. *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Case Study Report Delivery

Please attach any examples of previous case study reporting, or similar work, or create a draft case study report template in MS Word that demonstrates an understanding of how you plan to present case study information to a broader audience. The MDA is advising that a basic 1-3-page case study format would be effective. *(maximum 5,000 characters, including spaces, or attach sample)*

Increased Capacity & Budgeting

Explain how your approach to this grant funding will enable your organization to maximize the impacts of this funding. *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Objectives, Activities, and Timeline

Clearly state project objectives: use statements that specifically describe the number of food companies that you expect to serve, what you hope to accomplish, deadlines for accomplishing each activity, and responsible parties. Your project timeline should start between June 20 and June 30, 2021. *(maximum 10,000 characters, including spaces)*

(Example)

Objective 1: Submit on-boarding/application form to the MDA for review.

- **Activity:** Assemble form internally, prioritizing collection of necessary information and with ease of use in mind
- **Who:** Sarah Johnson, MBA
- **When:** By June 30, 2021

Objective 2: Recruit 10 Minnesota food companies to participate as recipients.

- **Activity:** Work with the MDA to post on-boarding/application online, on social formats including Facebook and LinkedIn, our website, the MDA's website, by posting to sustag and other sites, sharing with Grow North MN, AURI, and other food and ag business development ecosystem partners
- **Who:** Tamara Wright, Business Transitions Specialist
- **When:** By July 15, 2021
- **Activity:** Work with the MDA to select 10 recipients, in following with our strategy to recruit diverse applicants, half with annual gross revenue under \$100,000 per year, and half with annual gross revenue between \$100,000 and \$5 million/year
- **Who:** Sarah Johnson, Business Transitions Specialist
- **When:** By August 15, 2021

Budget

Budget Summary

Complete the following tables to outline the expected costs of your project. See [Budget Definitions](#) for detailed descriptions. Payroll records will be required to substantiate all personnel costs and invoices and

proofs of payment will be required for all non-personnel costs. Your grant award may be no more than 75% of your total eligible costs.

Category	Total Costs (\$)	Match (\$)	Grant Request (\$)
Personnel: Salaries			
Personnel: Fringe Benefits			
Non-Personnel: Supplies			
Non-Personnel: Contracted Services			
Non-Personnel: Travel			
Non-Personnel: Communications			
Non-Personnel: Other			
Total Project Budget			

Budget Narrative

Provide a narrative describing your budget request. *(maximum 6,000 characters, including spaces)*

The narrative should:

- Provide detail and justify expenditures in each budget category. Categories are explained in the [Budget Definitions](#) section.
- Explain how the budget items connect to the project’s results.
- Explain how you arrived at the budget estimates.
- Detail the source(s) of current or pending cash match.

Evaluation and Learning

Describe what you anticipate learning about small food e-commerce and digital strategy consulting through this project and how you could use this information to build future capacity around Minnesota food and beverage business development. *(maximum 2,400 characters, including spaces)*

Letters of Support

Applicants must include at least one letter of support from an eligible recipient who could receive technical assistance if the applicant is awarded a grant. Letters of support may also be included from key partners such as national, regional, and community partners that affirm the applicant’s ability to successfully implement the project or to validate their partnership in the delivery of technical assistance.

Definitions

Budget Definitions

Matching Funds: a fungible contribution made by the grant recipient to expand the breadth of this project

In-Kind Match: non-cash donated good(s) or service(s) with an associated monetary value. In-kind “matching” is allowed under this program. Grantees are required to document match commitments, whether they are in-kind or cash or staff time.

Personnel: names and titles of project leaders who will receive a salary from this project.

Supplies: a general list of types of supplies. Justify the purchase of electronic supplies such as phones, computers, and tablets.

Contractual Services: any entities outside your organization that will be retained on a temporary basis to work the project or provide a specific service. Include contractor’s name and a short description of services to be provided. Provide the flat rate fee or total hourly rate for each contract.

Travel: include anticipated destination, number of trips, purpose of trips, mode of travel, and anticipated cost per trip. Base cost on the current federal rate. Provide justification for out-of-state travel.

Communication: list type of expenses and estimated costs.

Other: eligible expenses that don’t fit any of the budget categories.