

NEHA-FDA Retail Flexible Funding Model Grant Program

Advancing Conformance with the FDA Voluntary National Retail
Food Regulatory Program Standards

RFFM Comprehensive Application Guidance



Open Application Period: Closed

Application Due Date: February 12, 2026, 7:59 PM ET

Project Period: April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027

Interim Reports: Due October 15, 2026

Annual/Final Reports: Due May 14, 2027

Last Updated May 2026

www.neha.org/retailgrants

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Part I: Introduction

One of the central features of both the health enterprise and the work of most public health regulatory programs is retail food safety. However, regulatory programs often face a significant barrier to committing time and resources to build capacity and reinforce uniformity among retail food regulatory programs across the country. Ultimately, the goal of retail food safety programs is to reduce foodborne illness. To overcome this barrier, the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have partnered to offer financial support to advance conformance with the [Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards \(Retail Program Standards or RPS\)](#).

FDA's Retail Program Standards

The Retail Program Standards are a set of voluntary program requirements that serve as "Standards of Excellence for Continual Improvement" of retail food safety programs nationwide. They were developed and are recommended by FDA with input from regulatory officials at all levels, industry, trade associations, academia, and consumers.

Each Standard includes detailed steps on how state, local, tribal, and territorial food safety jurisdictions (SLTTs) can conform to consensus food safety best practices. The 9 Standards are described in full on FDA's website (see the link above), and include:

- Standard 1: Regulatory Foundation
- Standard 2: Trained Regulatory Staff
- Standard 3: Inspection Program Based on HACCP Principles
- Standard 4: Uniform Inspection Program
- Standard 5: Foodborne Illness and Food Defense Preparedness and Response
- Standard 6: Compliance and Enforcement
- Standard 7: Industry and Community Relations
- Standard 8: Program Support and Resources
- Standard 9: Program Assessment

FDA Retail Food Specialists

FDA Retail Food Specialists (RFSs) work with SLTT regulatory agencies throughout the United States and serve as the primary points of contact concerning the Retail Program Standards. They promote the enrollment and implementation of the RPS and the complete and uniform adoption of the Model Food Code. They assist in training and standardizing SLTT regulatory personnel in support of Standards 2 and 4 and provide guidance and technical assistance to SLTT retail food protection programs.

The FDA RFS assigned to your jurisdiction will be the person to whom you submit progress as you conform with specific Retail Program Standards milestones using [FDA Form 3958 | FDA](#). Although the RFSs do not manage the NEHA-FDA RFFFM Grant Program, they are a great resource for SLTTs beginning or continuing their Retail Program Standards conformance work. To find the FDA Retail Food Specialist (RFS) assigned to your jurisdiction, please visit: [Directory of FDA Retail Food Specialists | FDA](#).



NEHA-FDA Retail Flexible Funding Model (RFFM) Grant Program

The NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program has been designed to support SLTTs as they work to ensure they have a comprehensive and nationally uniform retail food safety regulatory program that is based on proven best practices. The program provides incentive funding and ongoing support for SLTT retail food safety programs achieve conformance with the Retail Program Standards, normally over a period of several years.

The NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program has three primary goals:

- 1 Support strategies that reduce the occurrence of foodborne illness risk factors.
- 2 Promote uniformity and a national Integrated Food Safety System (IFSS).
- 3 Leverage the expertise and capacity of SLTT retail food protection agencies to meet Retail Program Standards goals.

Building A Stronger Food Safety Program

The Retail Program Standards help State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial food regulatory agencies (SLTTs) improve how they regulate foodservice and retail food establishments. The 9 Standards promote effective, science-based food safety practices—empowering agencies to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

- Enrolling in and working to conform with the Retail Program Standards helps SLTTs:
- Identify the areas of food safety regulation with the greatest health impact
- Develop better risk-based intervention strategies
- Highlight gaps and opportunities for growth
- Justify program budget needs
- Foster consistency and innovation

Through the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program, SLTTs can access funding to conform with the Retail Program Standards over time and at their own pace. The program provides small and medium-sized grants that can be used to:

- Fund projects that strengthen food safety systems
- Train and support new staff
- Enable innovation and process improvements
- Boost preparedness for foodborne illness outbreaks
- Support Program Standards Mentorship (funding both Mentors and Mentees)



Part II: Grant Program Overview

Grant Program Eligibility

Any SLTT retail food safety regulatory program is welcome to enroll with FDA in the Retail Program Standards and apply for a grant through NEHA. See *Part III Application Guidance* for instructions on how to enroll.

Three Grant Tracks, Offering Base and Optional Funding

The NEHA-FDA RFFM grant program offers customizable approaches which enable retail regulatory agencies to design a plan that best suits their capacity to work on the Retail Program Standards.

Grants through the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program are offered in three “grant tracks,” each designed to serve SLTTs with specific needs, and each offering both required and optional funding components. The three grant tracks include:

Grant Track 1 is designed for jurisdictions beginning or restarting with the Retail Program Standards. Track 1 base grants offer funding via one combined application for:

- Completion of the first two required outcomes of the Retail Program Standards: a Self-Assessment of all 9 Standards (**SA9**) AND a Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan (**CSIP**).
- Mentee funding is offered as an Optional Add-On.
- Training funds are also offered as an Optional Add-On.

Grant Track 3 is designed for jurisdictions who have already met and audited at least 3 of the Retail Program Standards and are ready to make continued and significant RPS progress, including work on Standard 9. Track 3 base grants:

- Are open for new applications every three years (and are expected to be offered again for 2028-31, assuming continued federal funding).
- Provide 3 years of funding without the need to apply each year.
- Offer \$5,000 more funding each year than Track 2.
- Offer funding via one combined application for:
 - Work to meet, audit, and eventually maintain Standards 1 – 8 (required).
 - Work to meet, audit, and eventually maintain Standard 9 (required).
 - Updating the SA9 (optional)
 - Mentee funding is offered as an Optional Add-On.
 - Training funds are offered as an Optional Add-On.
 - Capacity Building / Network Support funding has been a Track 3 option in the past and may be considered for the 2028-31 Track 3 grant cycle (assuming continued and sufficient federal funding).

Optional Add-On Grants, applied for separately and offered in addition to the base grants listed above, have a specific focus and are usually limited to those applying in Track 2 or Track 3. Past Optional Add-On Grants have included:



- **Mentorship Mentor Grants**, allowing jurisdictions to become RPS Mentors for 1-5 other jurisdictions.
- **Special Projects Grants** designed to fund new and innovative ideas that may contribute to greater conformation with the Retail Program Standards.

All grantees must remain in compliance with grant program eligibility requirements throughout the entire grant period.

Grantees **must** complete approved **base grant** work to be eligible for reimbursement for add-on grant activities (such as Mentee, Training, and Capacity Building Optional Add-On funds) and Optional Add-On Grants (such as Mentorship Mentor and Special Projects).

Specific Support Offered Through the Grant Program

Following is information on the specific Retail Program Standards outcomes that are supported by the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program.

Support for Foundational Activities: The SA9, the CSIP, and the RSA Tool

Self-Assessment of All 9 Standards (SA9): The SA9 is a baseline self-assessment of an SLTT's retail food safety program against the 9 Standards and is funded as part of all Track 1 base grants. Completion of the SA9 is the first activity SLTTs complete after enrolling in the Retail Program Standards or reengaging after an interruption in conformance.

Updated SA9: The Retail Program Standards require that jurisdictions update their SA9 every 5 years to remain active. The grant program allows SLTTs to request funding to complete an updated SA9 when needed, with funding available as an optional outcome in Track 2 and Track 3 base grants.

Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan (CSIP): The CSIP is a planning document that serves as a multiyear roadmap for Retail Program Standards compliance.

For more information on the completion of a CSIP please visit [Completing A Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan](#).

The Retail Program Standards Assessment (RSA) Tool: To support the foundational work of the SA9 and the CSIP, NEHA has taken the FDA SAVA Gap Analysis Tool and created the online automated RSA Tool. The tool is designed to allow SLTTs to complete the SA9 and CSIP in one place and make it easier to track and assess RPS progress.

Using this new tool is required for grantees for the 2026-2027 Grant Year Final (end-of-year) reports for all grantees. NEHA will provide multiple training sessions and video recordings and welcomes feedback on the use of this tool.

For the latest information and access to the RSA Tool please visit [Retail Program Standards Assessment \(RSA\) Tool](#). Please contact rsatool@neha.org with any questions about the tool.



Support for Conformance Activities: Meeting, Auditing, and Maintaining Standards 1 - 9

Conforming with Standards 1-9: Although Track 1 grantees often find that they already conform with one or more Standards while completing their SA9 and CSIP, meeting, auditing, and then maintaining Standards becomes the core work of Track 2 and Track 3 grantees. Most new Track 2 grantees can meet and audit (i.e., achieve conformance with) 1 to 3 Standards in a single grant year, although some Standards take longer to achieve than others, and the work may take longer for very small jurisdictions. Entry into Track 3 requires conformance with multiple Standards, and the focus shifts to both maintaining Standards already met and working to conform with additional Standards.

Additional Information for Standard 9: In some ways working on Standard 9 is just like working on any other Standard. Because it focuses on assessment of a jurisdiction's entire retail food regulatory program, however, the work is more resource intensive and takes more time. For that reason, work on Standard 9 is a separately funded outcome in the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program - optional in Track 2 but required in Track 3.

For an overview of the key steps that must be accomplished in meeting this Standard, and aligning the work needed with a one-year Track 2, or a three-year Track 3 base grant, please visit [Work On Standard 9: Program Assessment](#).

Support for Optional Activities: Mentorship and Training

Support for Participation in the Mentorship Program: The goal of the NEHA-FDA RFFM Mentorship Program, managed in partnership with the National Association for County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), is to provide an opportunity for retail food regulatory jurisdictions to connect and learn from each other. Awarded Mentors work with 1-5 awarded Mentees, helping them to meet their Retail Program Standards conformance goals.

All Mentorship grants are 1-year awards, and the Mentee option is offered in all 3 grant tracks as an optional add-on. The Mentorship Mentor Grant is open only to Tracks 2 and 3.

Jurisdictions can apply for EITHER a stand-alone Mentorship Mentor Grant OR select the Mentee option in their base grant for a given grant year – not both. They are allowed, however, to switch roles in a future year. For example, a jurisdiction can serve as a Mentor for a year but may choose to be a Mentee during the next grant year (perhaps to work on a new Standard).

Support for Retail Food Safety Training, Workshops, and Conferences: Each track of the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program offers SLTTs the opportunity to request optional add-on funding for retail food safety training to support work to meet and maintain the requirements of Standard 2.

Track 1 grantees can use awarded training funds to attend an FDA Self-Assessment and Verification Audit Workshop (highly recommended), FDA Retail Food Protection Seminars, or attendance at the Conference for Food Protection (offered every other year).

Track 2 and Track 3 grantees can use awarded training funds to attend any retail food safety course, workshop, or conference with a significant retail food safety component.



A list of pre-approved retail food safety courses, including registration information and links as they become available, can be found on the [RFFM Resources](#) webpage.

Part III: Application Instructions

What to Expect This Cycle

For the 2026-27 Grant Year, the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program offers a streamlined application process for each available funding track. Our dedicated support team will continue to be available every step of the way. Support for 2026-2027 projects includes:

- A One-Year Grant Period for all 2026-27 grants: April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027.
- Four (4) Grant Applications for this cycle, including:
 - **Track 1 Development Base Grant**, designed for jurisdictions beginning their RPS journey or restarting the journey after personnel changes or other disruptions. Jurisdictions will be supported as they complete an initial or updated Self-Assessment of All Nine Standards (SA9) and a Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan (CSIP), with Mentee and Training options.
 - **Track 2 Development Base Grant**, designed for jurisdictions already working in the RPS. Requires a current SA9 and up-to-date CSIP at the time of application. Mentee and Training options are also offered in this track.
 - **Track 3 One-Year Optional Add-On Grant**, designed for current Track 3 grantees (2025-2028), offering Mentee and Training options through a single application.
 - **Mentorship/Mentor Optional Add-On Grant**, a separate grant for Track 2 applicants and current Track 3 grantees who choose this option instead of applying for the Mentee option.
- The **NEHA-FDA RFFM Mentorship Program** in collaboration with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO).
- The biennial **Retail Program Standards Symposium (RPSS or “the Symposium”)** to support advancement and conformance with the Retail Program Standards.
- **Fixed funding** in all awards and for most funding options (all except the Training Optional Add-On). Fixed funding allows grantees to expend funds as determined by their unique needs. The only requirement for payment of fixed funding deliverables is confirmation that each approved and funded deliverable has been met, significantly reducing both the application and reporting burdens.
- **Traditional Funding:** The only funding that requires budget details and reimbursement documentation is the Training Optional Add-On (Tracks 1, 2, and 3), and the Capacity Building Optional Add-On (existing Track 3 grantees).
- **Dedicated technical assistance, advisory, and retail food safety subject matter guidance** throughout the grant cycle, in partnership with FDA.

Application Period, Submission Deadline, and Application Webinars

The annual project period is April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027.



All applications must be submitted electronically using the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Portal:
https://retailgrants.fluxx.io/user_sessions/new.

- Grant applications will be available on **Monday, January 5, 2026**.
- All applications must be completed and submitted by **Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 7:59 P.M. ET**.
- Award notifications are anticipated to be made in late March 2026.

Consider participating in one of our informational webinars, offering an overview of annual grant opportunities, a walkthrough of the Grant Portal, and an opportunity to ask questions about the annual awards and the application process.

- Thursday, December 11, 2025, from 11 am – 12 pm MT
- Thursday January 22, 2026, from 11 am – 12 pm MT

Application Requirements

Technical Requirements

- A computer to access the Grant Portal.
- An internet connection and a compatible browser (Chrome, Edge). Users may access links to download these browsers at [RFFM Grant Program Compatible Browsers](#).

Application Checklist

- Confirm the date your jurisdiction enrolled in the FDA Retail Program Standards, either by:
 - Checking FDA's public [Listing of Jurisdictions Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards](#), OR
 - Gathering information from a recent enrollment with your FDA Retail Food Specialist (email address you sent confirmation to, date the email was sent).
 - **Enrollment is required for all 3 grant tracks.**
 - **If not yet enrolled, enrollment is easy and quick. "See Application Step 1" in the next section.**
- Confirm the status and date of your most recent Self-Assessment of All 9 Standards (SA9), and the number of Standards you have met and audited in the past 5 years by:
 - Checking the Listing of Jurisdictions Enrolled in the VNRFRPS, which also lists RPS progress data, OR
 - Gathering information recently sent to your FDA Retail Food Specialist (email address you sent information, details sent, date the email was sent).
 - **SA9 Status will determine eligibility for Track 1 vs. Track 2/3.**
 - **For years in which new Track 3 grants are offered, the number of Standards recently met and audited will determine eligibility for Track 3.**
- Have a recently updated Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan (CSIP).
 - **A CSIP must be completed and updated in NEHA's RSA Tool (See Part II of this Guidance, "Specific Support Offered Through the Grant Program").**
 - **A recent CSIP (within 3 months of the application due date) is required to apply in Tracks 2/3.**



- If applying for Training Optional Add-On funds, be sure to have details including budget and budget justification (names and locations of selected retail trainings, names and titles of attendees, estimated costs, budget narrative)
 - A list of pre-approved retail food safety courses can be found on the [RFFM Resources](#) webpage.

Application Steps

Step 1: Enroll with the FDA Retail Program Standards AND Register with the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program

Any SLTT jurisdiction that regulates retail food safety is eligible to enroll in the FDA Retail Program Standards, register for the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program, and apply for one or more grants.

Please note that enrollment in the FDA Retail Program Standards is different and separate from registering for an account with the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program. Both enrollment and registration only need to be completed once, without the need to re-enroll or re-register each year.

Enroll in the FDA Retail Program Standards: Jurisdictions that have never enrolled in FDA's Retail Program Standards must enroll before applying for a grant. **To enroll:**

1. Review the [FDA Retail Program Standards Guidance](#), and download and read the [Retail Program Standards Administrative Procedures](#).
2. Contact the [FDA Regional Retail Food Specialist](#) assigned to your geographic area and notify them of your intent to enroll.
3. Download the [FDA National Registry Report \(FDA Form 3958\)](#) (PDF – 1.22MB), complete, and submit to your FDA Retail Food Specialist.
4. NOTE: When filling out the FDA form, be sure to select "Please enroll this jurisdiction in the VNRFRPS" in Section 2.

Once you have contacted your FDA Retail Food Specialist and completed and submitted FDA Form 3958 to them via email, your jurisdiction is considered "enrolled" for the purposes of the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program and can register and apply for funding.

Your jurisdiction will eventually be added to the FDA [Listing of Jurisdictions Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards](#), but new enrollments can take up to 90 days to post. Recently enrolled jurisdictions do not need to be displayed on this list to register for the grant program and apply for a grant. **If you are unsure of your agency's enrollment status, check this list.**

Register for the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program: Once you are enrolled in the Retail Program Standards, register for the grant program (if you have not registered in the past). **To register:**

1. From <https://www.neha.org/retail-grants>, select button that reads "Grant Portal."
2. From the Grant Portal landing page, select "Create an Account Now" at the bottom right.
3. Complete the "Eligibility Questions" to open the Registration Form, complete the form, and submit.



Once you have submitted the Registration Form, your submission will be reviewed, and you will receive a Username and Password to access the system and apply for one or more grants (during the annual open application period).

If you have registered for the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant program in the past, you can access the system with your existing credentials. You can also recover your username and reset your password from the Grant Portal (see #1 above to access the Grant Portal).

Step 2: Determine Application Track and Grant(s)

The following table provides a quick overview of each grant type, including Track and Grant eligibility, required and optional outcomes and deliverables, and available funding. Review it to confirm which track matches your agency's current status and needs.

Grant Application Details for Each Funding Track

Table 1. Overview of grant types, eligibility, deliverables, and funding for the 2026-27 grant period.

Grant Type	Eligibility	Outcomes and Deliverables	Funding Amount
Track 1 Development Base (1-year) Best for new RPS enrollees	Enrolled in RPS	Required: Completion of SA9 and CSIP	\$5,000 Fixed Funding
		Mentee Optional Add-On (if funded): Achievement of RPS goals Site visit with Mentor Attendance at the end-of-year Mentorship Meeting	\$7,000 Fixed Funding
		Training Optional Add-On (if funded): Approved training completed within submitted budget, with expense documentation	\$3,500 Reimbursement-Based Funding
Track 2 Development Base (1-year)	Enrolled in RPS Current SA9 (within 5 years of specified date)	Required: Progress on at least one Standard (1-8)	\$5,000 Fixed Funding



Best for jurisdictions ready to begin work toward meeting and auditing Standards	Complete CSIP covering all 9 Standards	Optional: Work toward meeting or maintaining Standard 9 – Risk Factor Study (Level 1 or 2)	Option 1: Risk Factor Study Level 1 (Inspectional Data/File Study): \$5,000 Fixed Funding
			Option 2: Risk Factor Study Level 2 (Data Collection/Hybrid Approach): \$10,000 Fixed Funding
		Optional: Update SA9 if it expires within the <i>grant year</i>	\$3,000 Fixed Funding
		Mentee Optional Add-On (if funded): Achievement of RPS goals Site visit with Mentor Attendance at the end-of-year Mentorship Meeting	\$7,000 Fixed Funding
Track 3 One-Year Optional Add-Ons (1-year) Available for current Track 3 grantees only	Current Track 3 award in good standing	Training Optional Add-On (if funded): Approved training completed within submitted budget, with expense documentation	\$4,000 Reimbursement-Based Funding
		Mentee Optional Add-On (if funded): Achievement of RPS goals Site visit with Mentor Attendance at the end-of-year Mentorship Meeting	\$7,000 Fixed Funding



		Training Optional Add-On (if funded): Approved training completed within submitted budget, with expense documentation	\$4,000 Reimbursement-Based Funding
Mentorship - Mentor Optional Add-On (1-year) Separate application	Track 2 applicant or Track 3 current grantee	Required: Provide Mentorship support for 1-5 Mentees Site visit with Mentees Attendance at the end-of-year Mentorship Meeting	\$12,000 (1 Mentee) \$15,000 (2 Mentees) \$18,000 (3 Mentees) \$21,000 (4 Mentees) \$24,000 (5 Mentees) Fixed Funding

Additional 2026-27 Grant Application Information

- New Track 3 Maintenance and Advancement Base Grants (3-year awards), which include the Capacity Building option, are not open for applications for GY 2026-27.
- Special Projects grants are not open for applications for GY 2026-27.
- Please note that all listed funding amounts represent fixed funding for the specified deliverables met unless otherwise noted (i.e., Training Optional Add-On funding).
- Be sure to review the scoring rubrics for each grant type selected, found in Part IV of this guidance.

Step 3: Complete One or Two Applications

Review Best Practices and Pitfalls

Best Practices

- Draft longer responses offline in a Word document. Check the application template for word count limits.
- **Save** frequently and return to an application by clicking **Draft Applications** on the left panel.
- Do not click **Submit** until an application is complete.
- Contact the NEHA-FDA RFFM team if an already submitted application needs to be updated at retailgrants@neha.org.

Watch Out! Pitfalls to Avoid

- Submitting without meeting eligibility requirements for a track or grant (see Part II, Application Step 2).
- Failing to save often in the Grant Portal.
- Overlooking the fixed funding vs. reimbursement-based funding rules (see Part V, Fixed Funding vs. Traditional Reimbursement).



- Including Non-Allowable budget items in your Training Optional Add-On Budget (see Part V, Allowable Costs and Non-Allowable Costs).

Determine the Number of Applications Planned for Submission

Table 2. Available grant applications in 2026-27.

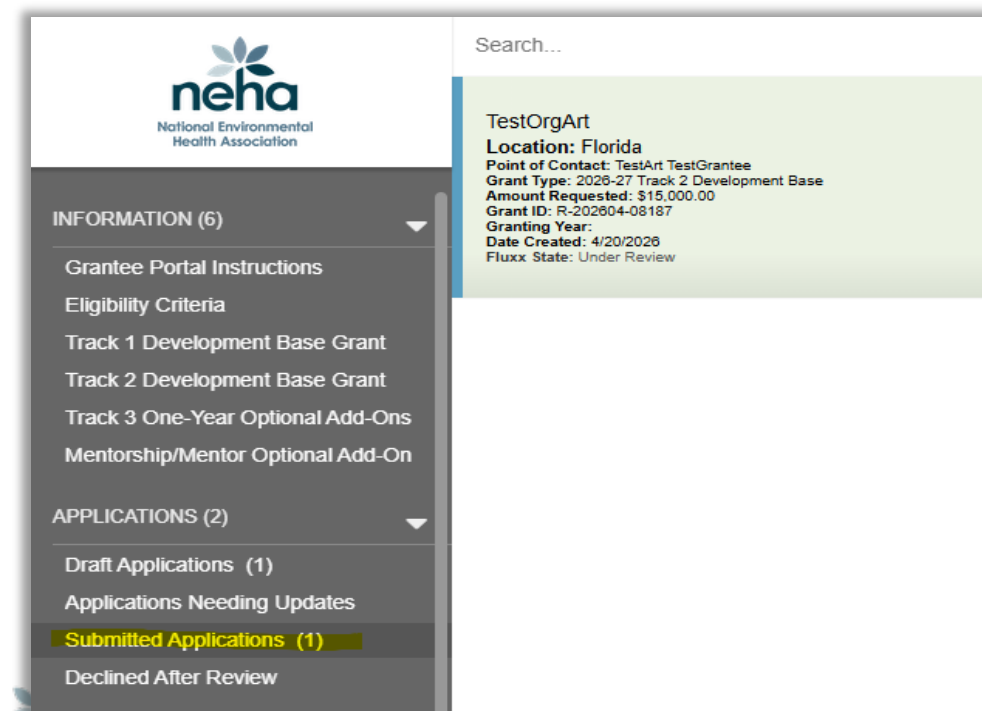
# of Apps	Track 1	Track 2	Track 3
Maximum Number of Applications in Each Grant Track	1 application: Track 1 Development Base Grant which includes the Mentee and Training Optional Add-Ons	Up to 2 applications: (1) Track 2 Development Base Grant , which includes the Mentee and Training Optional Add-Ons (2) Mentorship Mentor Optional Add-On Grant <u>instead</u> of selecting the Mentee option in the base grant	Up to 2 applications: (1) <u>Track 3 One-Year Optional Add-On Grant</u> including, Mentee, and Training options (2) Mentorship Mentor Optional Add-On Grant <u>instead</u> of selecting the Mentee option in the base grant

Access the Grant Portal

After registering for the grant program (Application Step 1), use the “Grant Portal” link at www.neha.org/retailgrants to log in. New accounts may take up to 24 hours to be connected. Returning grantees can log in with existing credentials.

Complete Selected Applications

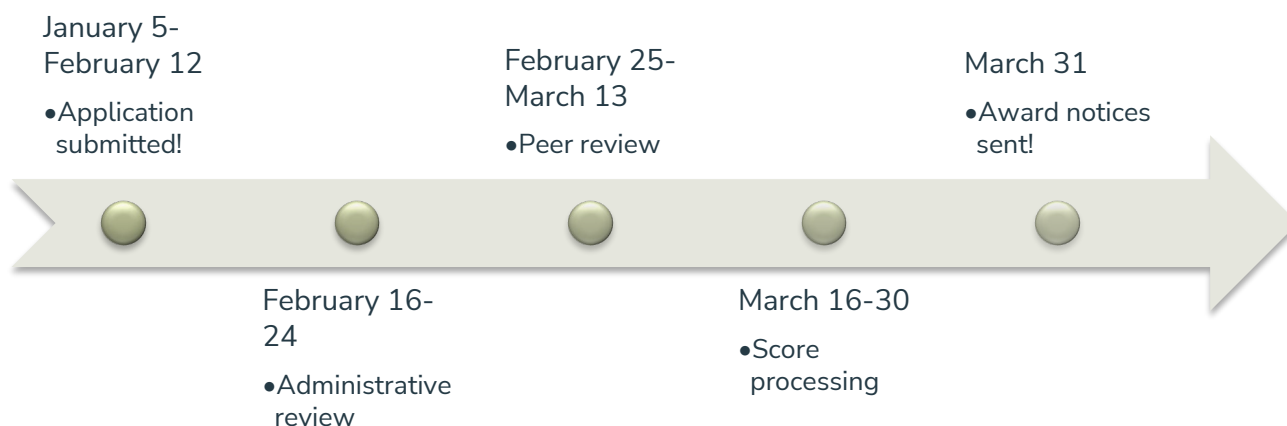
Be sure to complete only one (1) base or add-on grant application (Track 1, 2, or 3) and up to one (1) optional add-on application (Mentorship Mentor).



Step 4: Submit Application(s) and Confirm Submission

After submitting either one or two applications in the Grant Portal, give the system a moment to refresh (logging out and back in also works). If you are unable to verify that the application(s) you plan to submit have moved from Draft Applications to Submitted Applications, please contact the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team at retailgrants@neha.org or 1-833-575-2404 before the application deadline.

You've Submitted Your Application! Now What?



Part IV. Application Review and Selection

Administrative Review

Submitted applications will first be processed through the administrative review by NEHA staff and the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team.

If an application requires administrative clarification, the applicant will be notified via email. Each application needing clarification or revisions will be returned in the Grant Portal and accessible under ***Applications Needing Updates***. Details of application deficiencies will be included in the email notification and in the returned application. Once notified, the applicant will be given 7 business days to provide the requested revisions.

Applications identified during this process that are **not** in compliance with the ***Eligibility Requirements*** (Part II, Step 2) will **not** move forward.

Peer Review

Each base grant application that passes the administrative review will be scored by FDA and NEHA retail food advisors. Reviewers must acknowledge that they have no conflicts of interest before reviews begin.

Funding allocations will be determined by the NEHA-FDA RFFM Joint Advisory Group and will be based on federal funding levels and the number of quality applications.

Reminder: Per grant rules, applicants who are **not** awarded a base grant **cannot** be awarded any of the optional add-on grants.



Table 3. Scoring rubric for Track 1 Development Base application (with Mentee and Training options).

Scoring Section	Weighted Percentage	Scoring Description
Project Lead and Project Personnel	20%	Project roles are clearly defined for the project lead, project support team, and any “to be filled” positions. The qualifications and contributions of the key project team members are likely to lead the project to success and achievement of the outcomes in the Project Implementation Plan (PIP).
Project Implementation Plan (PIP)	80%	The PIP is clearly defined with a project completion plan and action steps that are measurable and achievable during the project period. The applicant links their project completion plan with measurable improvement in the Retail Program Standards. Considering the applicant’s history with the Retail Program Standards, the details in their PIP, and the personnel and resources requested and committed to the proposed project, the project is likely to succeed and achieve the outcomes described in the PIP.
Mentee Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will assign an <i>impact score</i>, which may be used to prioritize funding if needed. • High impact: First-time applicants with clear plans that will lead to measurable Retail Program Standards conformance. • Medium impact: Applicants who have participated in the Mentee program for one year in the recent past with clear plans. • Low impact: Applicants who have been a Mentee for more than two years in the recent past.
Training Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will include: • Confirmation that plans for staff to attend a SAVA workshop are clear and complete. • Confirmation that only allowable courses are included in the request. • Verification that the budget is appropriate. Funding amounts will be determined using the comprehensive base grant score.



Table 4. Scoring rubric for Track 2 Development Base application (with work on Standard 9, updated SA9, Mentee, and Training options).

Scoring Section	Weighted Percentage	Scoring Description
Project Lead and Project Personnel	20%	Project roles are clearly defined for the project lead, project support team, and any “to be filled” positions. The qualifications and contributions of the key project team members are likely to lead the project to success and achievement of the outcomes in the Project Implementation Plan (PIP).
Project Implementation Plan (PIP)	80%	The PIP is clearly defined with a project completion plan and action steps that are measurable and achievable during the project period. The applicant links their project completion plan with measurable improvement in the Retail Program Standards. Considering the applicant’s history with the Retail Program Standards, the details in their PIP, and the personnel and resources requested and committed to the proposed project, the project is likely to succeed and achieve the outcomes described in the PIP.
Optional Outcome: Work toward meeting or maintaining Standard 9	N/A	Administrative review to confirm plans for work toward meeting or maintaining Standard 9 are clear and complete. Selecting an optional deliverable will not increase the chance of being awarded a Track 2 grant.
Optional Outcome: Completion of an Updated SA9		Administrative review to confirm applicant is eligible for an updated SA9 during the grant period (an updated SA9 can be funded if the current SA9 date hits the 4-year mark during the annual grant period). Selecting an optional deliverable will not increase the chance of being awarded a Track 2 grant.
Mentee Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will assign an <i>impact score</i> , which may be used to prioritize funding if needed. • High impact: First-time applicants with clear plans that will lead to measurable Retail Program Standards conformance. • Medium impact: Applicants who have participated in the Mentee program for one year in the recent past with clear plans. • Low impact: Applicants who have been a Mentee for more than two years in the recent past.



Training Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will include: • Confirmation that plans for staff to attend retail food safety training courses, workshops, and conferences are clear and complete. • Confirmation that only allowable courses are included in the request. • Verification that the budget is appropriate. Funding amounts will be determined using the comprehensive base grant score.
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Table 5. Scoring rubric for Track 3 one-year optional add-on applications (Mentee and Training). Current Track 3 grantees can apply for Training and/or Mentee funds through a single, combined add-on application.

Scoring Section	Weighted Percentage	Scoring Description
Mentee Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will assign an <i>impact score</i>, which may be used to prioritize funding if needed. • High impact: First-time applicants with clear plans that will lead to measurable Retail Program Standards conformance. • Medium impact: Applicants who have participated in the Mentee program for one year in the recent past with clear plans. Low impact: Applicants who have been a Mentee for more than two years in the recent past.
Training Optional Add-On	N/A	A separate administrative review will include: • Confirmation that plans for staff to attend retail food safety training courses, workshops, and conferences are clear and complete. • Confirmation that only allowable courses are included in the request. • Verification that the budget is appropriate. Funding amounts will be determined using the comprehensive base grant score.



Table 6. Scoring rubric for Mentorship-Mentor optional add-on application. Since the Mentor application is separate from all base grant applications, it is scored separately. Only Track 2 applicants and current Track 3 grantees are eligible to apply to be a Mentor, instead of applying for the Mentee option.

Scoring Section	Weighted Percentage	Scoring Description
Project Lead and Project Personnel	20%	Project roles are clearly defined for the project lead, project support team, and any “to be filled” positions. The qualifications and contributions of the key project team members are likely to lead the project to success and achievement of the outcomes in the Project Implementation Plan (PIP).
Project Implementation Plan (PIP)	50%	The PIP is clearly defined with a project completion plan and action steps that are measurable and achievable during the project period. The applicant links their project completion plan with measurable improvement in the Retail Program Standards. Considering the applicant’s history with the Retail Program Standards, the details in their PIP, and the personnel and resources requested and committed to the proposed project, the project is likely to succeed and achieve the outcomes described in the PIP.
Mentor Program Plans	30%	The applicant demonstrates expertise in at least some of the specific steps required for progress through Retail Program Standards (SA9, CSIP, meeting Elements and Standards, verification audits). As a whole, the applicant appears to be prepared to serve as a Mentor.

Award Decisions

The NEHA-FDA RFFM Joint Advisory Group (JAG) uses discretion when making award decisions and may approve changes to the number of peer reviews, funding amounts, funding priorities, project period, and other aspects of grant awards to ensure this funding program meets FDA’s intended goals. Final award decisions are made by the FDA Project Officer for the Cooperative Agreement, considering both the scoring information and JAG recommendations. Applicants will be notified via a system-generated email regarding the status of each application, whether funded or declined. Reviewer feedback will be provided upon applicant request.

Part V: Funding Rules and Grantee Requirements

NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Rules and Requirements

Funding is available for state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) retail food regulatory programs, and can be used for specified activities that allow enrolled jurisdictions to achieve progress toward Retail Program Standards milestones.



Jurisdictions that applied for funding and/or were awarded funding through the RFFM or previous FDA Retail Program Standards funding programs ARE eligible to apply for grants in the current grant cycle. Work requested in new applications must be distinct and separate from past funded activities.

Retail Program Standards Enrollment: Jurisdictions must be enrolled in the Retail Program Standards to apply for any grants through this program (this is a separate step from registering for the RFFM Grant Program). For instructions on how to enroll in the Retail Program Standards, see Part III of this guidance, Application Step 1.

Current Self-Assessment of All 9 Standards (SA9): Other than Track 1, where completion of an initial or updated SA9 is a grant deliverable, Track 2 and Track 3 applicants are required to have a current SA9 at the time of application, and awarded applicants must maintain current SA9 status throughout the project year.

To meet the application eligibility requirement for Tracks 2 and 3, the most recent SA9 must have been completed on **February 12, 2021 or later**.

For awarded grantees in Tracks 2 and 3, please confirm when your SA9 will pass the five-year mark so you can complete the required update before expiration, to stay eligible for the program.

If your SA9 at time of application reaches the five-year mark during the GY 2026-27 grant period (SA9 dated from February 13, 2021 - March 31, 2022) be sure to request the Updated SA9 Optional Add-On and update your SA9 as an objective of your annual project period.

Unless an SA9 was completed or updated within the last 90 days, in most cases the date will be reflected on the FDA's [Listing of Jurisdictions Enrolled in the VNRFRPS](#).

Recent Comprehensive Strategic Improvement Plan: Other than Track 1, where completion of a CSIP is a grant deliverable, Track 2 and Track 3 applicants are required to have a completed CSIP (using any format) at the time of application.

Active Base Grant in Good Standing: Once awards have been made, all grantees must have an active base grant in place to remain eligible for optional funding and grants (Capacity Building, Mentorship Mentor, Updates SA9, and Training). During or after the annual project period, if a base grant is canceled for any reason, all optional funding and grants will also be canceled, and no grant payments will be made.

Grant Program Compatible Browser: For reasons of security and functionality, jurisdictions are required to complete all grant applications online using a modern, up-to-date browser. Users may access links to download these browsers at [RFFM Grant Program Compatible Browsers](#).

Submission by the Deadline: All applications must be made through the online NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Portal by the application deadline (**Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 7:59 P.M. ET**). All required fields in each application (including POC, organization, budget when required, and proposal information) must be clear and complete.



Reporting Requirements

As with the application process, the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Portal is used for project reporting, with the goal of keeping the reporting burden low for grantees. All reports must be submitted through the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Portal, accessed through the grant program website at <https://www.neha.org/retail-grants>.

NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program participants are required to complete an **Interim Progress Report (mid-year)** and a **Final or Annual Progress Report (end-of-year)**. Interim Project Reports are expected to be due 6 months after the grant period starts (**October 15, 2026**); Final and Annual Progress Reports are due 45 days after the grant period ends (**May 14, 2027**).

These reports require information on the status of your grant deliverables and are used as part of the documentation to provide payments. Failure to submit reports by the stated deadlines may delay payments. More information on specific reporting requirements will be outlined in your Notice of Award (NOA) and in the sections that follow.

Payment Requests

Funds under this program are generally awarded on a **reimbursement basis** after either an **Annual Progress Report (3-year grants)** or a **Final Progress Report (1-year grants)** is submitted by the grantee and then approved by the NEHA Finance Team.

Exceptions to reimbursement-based payments will be made based on the needs of the jurisdiction. **Advance Payment Requests** are permissible for immediate needs (such as funding to register and purchase airfare for approved training). **Interim Reimbursement Requests** can be submitted once at least one project deliverable is at least partially completed and expenses have been incurred, but before completion of the project (example: quarterly payment requests for an employee supported by Capacity Building funds). Please contact the Grant Program Support Team to have an Advance Payment Request or an Interim Reimbursement Request added to your Grant Portal.

Direct Deposit is available for payments to jurisdictions who choose to register for this option.

It is **not** necessary to register for eRA Commons nor with the Federal Payment Management System (PMS) to receive funds through this grant program. Payments will be made directly by NEHA to awarded jurisdictions.

Budget Updates and Changes to Project Scope

Any changes to project scope, tasks, deliverables, or expenses must be approved in advance and in writing by the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team. For the add-on options that use the Traditional Reimbursement process (Training and Capacity Building), if final expenditures vary from your latest approved budget, you will be required to list variances from the approved budget and provide a brief explanation for each variance.

All changes to the project scope or an approved budget must be submitted in advance of the actual expense to retailgrants@neha.org. **Note that changes to your scope or budget are not**



approved until you receive confirmation via email from the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team.

Allowable Costs

Fixed Funding Outcomes and Deliverables: Most of the funding offered through the NEHA-FDA RFFM grant program is offered as Fixed Funding, with payments contingent on the grantee meeting specific outcomes and deliverables. Payments are based on outcomes and deliverables completed during the project period. Expense documentation is **not** required for payment of fixed funding outcomes, and your actual spending does not need to directly support the deliverables met.

Fixed funds may be used according to your specific needs, with payment issued once each selected deliverable is confirmed as complete. *For audit purposes, however, please keep in mind that your spending must always adhere to all applicable federal subaward grant funding rules.*

For the specific outcomes and deliverables in each grant type that must be met for payment, see the chart found in Section III, Application Step 2 of this guidance.

Traditional Funding Outcomes and Deliverables: Funding awarded through a **Training Optional Add-On** (Tracks 1, 2, and 3) or a **Capacity Building Optional Add-On** (Track 3) is offered as Traditional Funding, with reimbursement-based payments that require a budget at time of application and expense documentation with payment requests.

Allowable cost categories for the Training and Capacity Building Optional Add-Ons include:

- Personnel costs, including the share of salaries and fringe benefits dedicated to an approved project are permissible for Capacity Building expenses (but **not** for Training Optional Add-On funding);
- Contractual and/or contractor costs;
- Training costs for local training of staff (for example – Standardization Training, or Training required to meet or maintain Standard 2 (including travel, registration fees, speaker fees, contractual fees, and audiovisual materials).
- **For online or in-person courses leading to a professional certification**, course fees and materials may be paid with grant funds (but please note that there are some exclusions for costs associated with this type of course, listed in the Non-Allowable Costs section below).
- Purchase/rental/maintenance/shipping of Supplies and Equipment; and
- Purchase and/or development of information technology equipment/software/support.
- Indirect costs are permissible for all grant categories based on a signed and current federal cost rate agreement, or at the updated de minimis rate of 15% (effective Oct 1, 2024).

Non-Allowable Costs

Certain expenses and cost categories are **not** allowable under either **Federal Rules** or **NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program** rules. The *Federal Rules* apply to all grants and options. The



remaining rules listed apply to new (2026-27) **Training** grants, and current **Capacity Building** grants. Please note the following restrictions:

- Vehicles: Costs associated with procurement of vehicles are **not** allowed. **(Federal Rule)**
- Construction: Costs for construction and/or remodeling of physical structures are **not** allowed. **(Federal Rule)**
- Food: Expenses for food, snacks, meals, beverages, and catering (other than per diem for travelers) are **not** permitted for any grant. **(Federal Rule)**
- Any expenses reimbursed under other cooperative agreements, grants, contracts, and/or other funding mechanisms must remain distinct and separate from any award of the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program. **(Federal Rule)**
- Funding from any RFFM grant **cannot** be used to fund positions with the primary purpose of performing retail food or other inspections **(Capacity Building)**.
- Uniforms: Uniforms and branded clothing are **not** allowed.
- Promotional items and costs are generally prohibited unless they provide a direct food safety benefit. Examples of prohibited items: gift bags, logo items (pens, note pads, shirts, hats), gift cards, etc.
- Personnel costs are **not** permissible for Training Optional Add On funding **(Training)**.
- For online or in-person courses leading to a professional certification, exam, test, credentialing, and/or certification fees may **not** be paid with grant funds.
- For example, the testing and certification fees to become a Certified Professional - Food Safety (CP-FS) are **not** allowable. However, as stated in the Allowable Costs section above, materials, registration fees, and online course fees for this type of training can be paid with grant funds.
- Membership fees for local, regional, or national organizations, even if such membership fees reduce the cost of training and/or conference fees, may **not** be paid with grant funds. One exception is for the Conference for Food Protection since registration for the biennial meeting automatically includes dues payment for the new biennium.

Travel Rules

If you are requesting **Training Optional Add-On** funds in any track, you must include a budget that includes associated travel costs in your application. **Travel costs** requested through a Training Optional Add-On must adhere to the following general guidelines (contact the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team with specific travel-related questions **not** covered below):

- Receipts are **required** for all travel expense paid with Training Optional Add-On funding, **except meals**, which will be reimbursed on a federal per diem basis (unless your agency has a different and required per diem policy). The General Services Agency (GSA) Meals and Incidental Expenses (M&IE) breakdown may be accessed at www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates/mie-breakdown.
- Hotels are reimbursed at room cost plus applicable tax during dates of travel, booked at the most economical rate practical. Incidental lodging expenses beyond room, parking, and tax (such as internet charges) will **not** be reimbursed.



- Air travel must be taken by the most economical domestic fare available. Upgrade fees for first, business, or comfort class air travel is **not** allowable. Tickets should be booked at the basic changeable fare, but booking a non-changeable, non-refundable ticket is **not** required).
- Baggage fees may be reimbursed with a receipt.
- Travel insurance, whether offered by an airline or a separate provider, is **not** reimbursable under this grant program.
- Reimbursement for use of a private automobile shall be at the prevailing federal rate for map mileage to and from the venue and shall **not** exceed the cost of advance purchase air travel to the destination.
- Reimbursement for a pool/company/government vehicle shall be at the prevailing federal rate for pool/company/government vehicles, reimbursed for map mileage to and from the venue, and shall **not** exceed the cost of advance purchase air travel to the destination.

Below is a list of expectations for **Training** paid with grant funding:

- Participants should plan to complete all course prerequisites and pre-course materials as required for each funded course.
- Travel plans should be scheduled to allow participants to arrive on time for each day of the course and to stay through the stated course end-time on the last day.
- Participants are expected to fully participate in and complete each course.
- Grantees may be responsible for travel costs when a participant:
 - Does **not** meet course prerequisites or complete pre-course assignments;
 - Arrives late for a course without prior permission and/or WITHOUT acceptable justification;
 - Does **not** fulfill all course requirements or fails to achieve satisfactory course completion; or
 - Leaves early without permission granted in advance by the course lead.
- Late arrivals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the course lead.

Award Terms and Conditions

By applying for and/or receiving funding through the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program, SLTT agencies who accept and expend grant funding assure that they will comply with all applicable federal statutes and regulations in effect during the grant period, including applicable parts of 45 CFR Parts 74 and 92. Awards will be based upon the submitted and approved project applications and are subject to the following conditions:

- The grantee must **complete the full scope of work**, and all tasks outlined in the approved grant application by the Project End Date entered on the grant application unless the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team grants a written exception for the grant award.
- Any changes to project scope, tasks, deliverables, or expenses must be approved in advance and in writing by the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team.
- An Annual or Final Progress Report must be submitted through the online Grant Portal no later than **45 days after the end of each year's project period**. The Annual or Final



Progress Report will provide a full account of Fixed Funding deliverables met and unmet, and all Traditional Funding expenditures made, with funds from each award. Traditional Funding expenditures must be accompanied by the documentation specified in the Reporting and Payment Instructions posted on the NEHA Retail Grants website.

Part VI: Resources and Support

NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Home Page: <https://www.neha.org/retail-grants> For the latest grant information, program updates, and access to the Grant Portal.

Direct Link to Grant Portal: https://retailgrants.fluxx.io/user_sessions/new

Technical Assistance: If you have questions or needs before or after application submittal, please reach out to the NEHA-FDA RFFM Grant Program Support Team at retailgrants@neha.org or 1-833-575-2404.

FDA Retail Program Standards Info: [FDA RPS page](#) This is a link to the official FDA site, with comprehensive information regarding the Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards [the Retail Program Standards].

Enrollment in the Retail Program Standards: [Enroll now](#) If your jurisdiction is **not** already registered, visit this site for information and links to register in the FDA Retail Program Standards. Registration is required to be eligible for this grant program and must be completed by February 12, 2026 to be eligible for this year's grant program. If you are **not** yet enrolled, consider enrolling today.

FDA Retail Food Specialists: [FDA RFS Directory](#) Find the name and contact information for the FDA Retail Food Specialist assigned to your geographic area. This person can assist your jurisdiction as you pursue conformance with the Retail Program Standards.

Download a Modern Browser: For reasons of security and functionality, jurisdictions are required to complete all grant applications online using a modern, up-to-date browser. Users may access links to download these browsers at [RFFM Grant Program Compatible Browsers](#). Contact your jurisdiction's information technology office for additional assistance if needed.

