

# **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2011 Progress Report**

The Land Stewardship Project  
December 2011

## **BFRDP Background**

In the 2002 Farm Bill, with the urging and support of sustainable agriculture organizations, Congress created the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP). Unfortunately, USDA did not request funding for the program and congressional appropriators did not provide any funds the program, so in the 2008 Farm Bill Congress reacted and provided \$75 million in direct farm bill (mandatory) funding for fiscal years 2009-2012 for this innovative program. The upcoming 2012 Farm Bill will determine how much funding is available for the program over the next five years.

At USDA, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is the agency responsible for administering BFRDP. The Office of Advocacy and Outreach's Small and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers office also coordinates between overall USDA beginning farmer initiatives and BFRDP.

## **Progress Report**

This report provides an analysis of BFRDP's administrative and programmatic strengths and weaknesses based on feedback from FY 2011 grant recipients. In addition, it will evaluate trends over the past three years that demonstrate changes NIFA has advanced in an attempt to respond to stakeholder input, maximize program effectiveness, and ensure congressional intent is fulfilled.

The progress report will also include a summary and recommendations for strengthening BFRDP based on historical trends and data from FY 2011. The progress report will not address the issue of merit or value of granted projects. Though beyond the scope of this report, evaluation of merit and the individual, as well as the collective effectiveness of awarded projects is something stakeholders and agency personnel should aim to assess as the third year of funding comes to completion for many projects.

We are hopeful this progress report and previous reports along with NIFA's own program review<sup>1</sup> will continue to improve and ensure BFRDP is successful in assisting and

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program 2010 Outcomes Report. Available on NIFA's website at [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/bfrdp/pdfs/bfrdp\\_2010\\_outcomes.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/bfrdp/pdfs/bfrdp_2010_outcomes.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Analysis and Recommendations for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program*, The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

<sup>3</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2010 Progress Report and Recommendations*, The

supporting the next generation of American farmers. With program demand the past three years far exceeding available resources, understanding how to better administer, offer and target this program is of great value.

## Methodology

Following the announcement of FY 2011 BFRDP grant awardees on September 30, 2011, representatives from the Land Stewardship Project and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition conducted the research for this progress report. Data was collected from two sources: project briefs posted on NIFA's website and phone or email interviews with principal investigators or representatives from the FY 2011 BFRDP grantees. Phone interviews were conducted with 32 of the 36 grantees and three grantees responded by email. The International Rescue Committee was the only grantee who opted out of the interview process. The methodology of data collection is consistent and similar in scope with the reviews published for FY 2009<sup>2</sup> and FY 2010.<sup>3</sup>

## Quantitative Analysis of 2011 BFRDP Awards

According to the national program leader, NIFA accepted a total of 108 proposals for funding consideration in FY 2011. This is consistent with past years in which NIFA received 105 and 117 applications for 2009 and 2010, respectively. The total request for funding in 2011 was \$59 million, down slightly from past years (see Table I below).

**Table I: BFRDP Funding and Demand for FY 09, 10, and 11**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Grant Recipients</b>	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Funding Awarded</b>
2009	29	117	\$17,185,504
2010	40	105	\$18,140,803
2011	36	108	\$18,154,513
Total	105	330	\$53,480,820

Of the 108 applications received in FY 2011, 36 were funded for a total of \$18,154,513.

Of the organizations that were funded (see Table II):

- 22 (61%) were awarded projects led by community-based organizations (CBO) or non-governmental organizations (NGO);
- 13 (36%) were awarded to projects led by universities/colleges or other academic institutions; and
- One grant (3%) was awarded to a project led by a trade association.

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<sup>2</sup> *Analysis and Recommendations for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program*, The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

<sup>3</sup> *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: 2010 Progress Report and Recommendations*, The Land Stewardship Project, February 2011.

Of the \$18,154,513 in awarded grants:

- \$9,767,709 (54%) were to projects led by CBOs/NGOs;
- \$7,711,695 (42%) were to projects led by universities/colleges or other academic institutions; and
- \$675,109 (4%) was to projects led by a trade association.

**Table II: Historical Distribution of Grants by Institution Type**

<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>FY 2011</b>	<b>FY 2010</b>	<b>FY 2009</b>
CBOs/NGOs	61%	62.5%	38%
Univ/colleges or academic institutions	36%	37.5%	59%
Trade Associations	3%	-	-
Federal Agencies	-	-	3%

\*See Appendix 1 for historical pie charts

**Table III: Historical Distribution of Grant Funding by Institution Type**

<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>FY 2011</b>	<b>FY 2010</b>	<b>FY 2009</b>
CBOs/NGOs	54%	50%	34%
Univ/colleges or academic institutions	42%	50%	57%
Trade Associations	4%	-	-
Federal Agencies	-	-	9%

\*See Appendix 2 for historical pie charts

Further review of the university/college or other academic institutions category found that 9 of the grantees were 1862 land grant universities, two 1890 land grant institutions, one tribal community college, and one publicly funded non-land grant university.

Of the 36 grant recipients, five were reported receiving development grants, three received educational enhancement grants, and 28 reported standard grants (See Appendix 3, Chart I for grant distribution by type).

All grants awarded were three years in duration except the five development grants, which were all one year in duration. Two development grants from 2010 were awarded as more comprehensive standard grants in 2011 and one, two-year standard grant offered in 2009 was renewed in the 2011 round.

In terms of grant size distribution, 23 of the grant projects and over 82% of funding (\$15,056,332) was awarded to grants greater in size than \$500,000. Examination of the spread of awards in the three top percentiles by the grant types, NGO/CBO and universities/college or academic institutions, found a relatively equal distribution (See Table IV).

**Table IV: Grant Distribution by Range**

<b>Dollar range</b>	<b># of Grants</b>	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>% of Funding</b>	<b>CBO/NGO compared to Univ/Academic to Trade Associations</b>
Up to \$100,000	4	\$277,582	1.5%	1 to 0
\$100-\$200,000	2	\$252,553	1.4%	2 to 0
\$200-\$300,000	2	\$438,281	2.4%	2 to 0
\$300-\$400,000	2	\$733,924	4.0%	0 to 2
\$400-\$500,000	3	\$1,398,680	7.7%	2 to 1
\$500-\$600,000	6	\$3,295,841	18.2%	3 to 3
\$600-\$700,000	10	\$6,636,360	36.6%	4 to 5 to 1
\$700-\$750,000	7	\$5,121,292	28.2%	5 to 2
Total	36	\$18,154,513	100%	

### **Partnerships and Collaboration:**

Partnerships<sup>4</sup> and collaborations<sup>5</sup>, while distinctly different but related, are an important element of BFRDP and outlined in statute and specifically defined in the FY 2011 RFA. The additional guidance below was also provided in the RFA for determining priority in grant making as it relates to partnerships and collaborations.

***Partnerships and Collaborations:*** Priority will be given to partnerships and collaborations that are led by or include NGOs and CBOs with expertise in new agricultural producer training and outreach. Only applications with a minimum of 25 percent of the Federal budget allocated to these partner organizations (i.e., NGOs and CBOs) will be given this priority. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners to be given this priority.

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<sup>4</sup> "Partnership" means a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project. 2011 BFRDP RFA Part VIII – OTHER INFORMATION

<sup>5</sup> "Collaborator" means the person or an organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project but is not immediately connected to the management of the project. 2011 BFRDP RFA Part VIII – OTHER INFORMATION

In interviews, grantees were asked a series of questions in regard to the partnerships associated with their projects. Questions included: 1) number of partners, 2) names of partners, 3) degree to which partners are participating (low, medium, and high), and 4) percentage of funding partners will receive while participating in the project.

While these questions were asked of each grant recipient, varied responses and the unique nature of each awarded project makes analysis of the role of partners difficult to quantify and assess. Below is the best characterization of the information gathered.

In review and interviews with 35 grant recipients, we found that most projects included partnerships. Partners represented a wide range of types of organizations. Table V shows partnerships by type.

**Table V: Partnership by Type**

<b>Primary Grantee</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Number</b>
Univ/Coll or Academic	NGO/CBO	5
Univ/Coll or Academic	NGO/CBO and Univ/Coll or Academic	6
Univ/Coll or Academic	Academic	2
NGO/CBO	NGO/CBO	9
NGO/CBO	NGO/CBO and Univ/Coll or Academic	6
NGO/CBO	Agency and or Univ/Coll or Academic	3
Trade Organization	NGO/CBO	1
Total		32

Overall, when universities, colleges or academic institutions were the primary grantee they were most likely to partner with an NGO/CBO or NGO/CBO and another academic institution.

Only two universities, colleges or academic institutions reported not having partnerships with NGO/CBOs.

When projects were lead by NGO/CBOs, they typically included a more diverse set of partnership arrangements. The most common type of partnership arrangement was with another NGO/CBO, but also common was a partnership arrangement hybrid of NGO/CBO and universities, colleges or academic institutions (See Table V).

A small number of recipients specified that no partners existed; these included three NGO/CBOs, one of which was a development grant.

### **Degree of Engagement with Partners**

Of the 32 respondents that mentioned partners, 17 rated the participation of their partners as high. 13 respondents rated their partnership involvement as medium and one as low. 23 of the respondents estimated that their partners in total received at least 25% of the grant. Seven estimated that their partners received less than 25% and five were unsure or did not report.

**Table VI: Reported Levels of Partnership and Sub-Grantee<sup>6</sup> Involvement**

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Grantee response</b>
High	17
Medium	14
Low	1
Total	32

The role of collaborators was even more difficult to assess and ranged so significantly that we were unable to make any coherent conclusions from the data. Under the “Qualitative Aspects” section of this report, we do provide some additional feedback regarding partnerships and collaborations that grant recipients articulated during interviews.

### **Socially Disadvantaged and Limited Resource Farmers**

The authorizing language for BFRDP stipulates that at least 25% of funds must be designated for projects benefiting limited resource beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers (SDA), and farm workers desiring to become farmers or ranchers.<sup>7</sup> Evaluations of posted briefs and interviews quantified how many grants assisted these targeted populations and the degree of focus these projects had with socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers.

Seventeen of the projects targeted outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers. The large majority (15 of 17) focused at least 75% of efforts on those

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<sup>6</sup> Note: Previous BFRDP progress reports used the terms partnership and sub-grantees interchangeably.

<sup>7</sup> FCEA 2008, Public Law 110-246, Section 7410

“Not less than 25 percent of funds used to carry out this subsection for a fiscal year shall be used to support programs and services that address the needs of—

(A) limited resource beginning farmers or ranchers (as defined by the Secretary);  
(B) socially disadvantaged beginning farmers or ranchers (as defined in section 355(e) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 2003(e)); and  
(C) farmworkers desiring to become farmers or ranchers.”

select constituencies. If you include the two additional grant projects that focused 50 to 74% of their efforts on socially disadvantaged producers and limited resource producers, it accounts for \$8,408,331 of funding or an estimated 46% of BFRDP funds for 2011.

**Table VII: Number of grants and resources that support SDA groups**

	<b>50 to 75%</b>	<b>75 to 99%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number of grants</b>	2	8	7	17
<b>Total Resources</b>	\$949,730	\$4,376,171	\$3,082,430	\$8,408,331

### **Reflections on the Application Process**

Grant recipients were asked to provide input on the application process itself. 22 respondents reported that the BFRDP application process is more difficult compared to other programs of similar nature and 11 respondents said it was similar compared to other programs. Three grantees provided no input.

A number of respondents did reflect that NIFA grants overall are typically more difficult than most USDA agency granting processes. The number of hours estimated in the grant application process has ranged greatly -- from 16 to 1000 hours -- over the three grant years to date. This in part reflects a range of proposal writing capacity and administrative support across applicants. The estimated average for grantees to develop and submit an application was 213 hours per grant.

### **Regional Distribution**

The regional distribution for grants and funding for FY 2011 can be found in Table VIII below. Overall the West received the greatest number and funding for BFRDP in 2011.

**Table VIII: FY 2011 Regional Distribution of Grants and Resources**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of grants</b>	<b>Funding allocation</b>	<b>Percent of grants</b>	<b>Percent of funding</b>
South	8	\$4,415,431	22%	24%
Midwest	5	\$2,900,098	14%	16%
West	13	\$6,881,407	36%	38%
Northeast	10	\$3,957,577	28%	22%
Total	36	\$18,154,513	100%	100%

See Appendix 4 for a map displaying the distribution of BFRDP grants by state for fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011.

## **Service Area**

Grant awardees were asked to define the service area of their projects. While receiving substantial variation, service areas generally broke down into four groupings:

- 2 Nationwide;
- 19 Statewide or multi-states;
- 7 County or numerous counties; and
- 7 Localized regions including metropolitan areas, cities, or reservations.

## **Qualitative Comments**

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions. First, respondents were asked, “Is there anything you think is particularly strong about BFRDP?”

There was a wide range of responses to this question. Twelve respondents referenced the flexibility of BFRDP as a strength. It can be adapted to different contexts, reach different populations, and train farmers in a variety of different production methods.

Three respondents referenced that BFRDP allows their organization to reach non-traditional agriculture producers.

Six respondents mentioned how BFRDP is addressing the aging farmer crisis in the U.S.

Five respondents thought the amount of funding an organization can be awarded is significant. In addition, the 3-year funding period allows for projects to really develop and be implemented well.

Four respondents referenced that the mandatory funding of BFRDP is a strength.

Five respondents also mentioned the focus on SDA as a strength of BFRDP.

Finally, two respondents from universities/colleges or academic institutions referenced the priority status given to organizations with CBO/NGO partnerships receiving at least 25% of the funding. One respondent said, “I also like that it dictated that a portion of the funds go to the farmer organizations. In previous times it was something I would like to do. But because the grant didn't require it, the University’s administrators wouldn't like that. Our farmer organizations are limited resource and socially disadvantaged. This will help them to build capacity. I am very pleased about that.”

Second, respondents were asked, “What suggestions for improvements do you have?”

Most of the recommendations for improvement were directed towards the application and review process at NIFA.



Eleven respondents indicated that the review process needed to be improved. These respondents found both processes unnecessarily burdensome, especially the grants.gov website.

Several respondents noted being asked to repeat work in the review process that they previously completed and submitted to NIFA.

## **Summary**

From our analysis we found the FY 2011 BFRDP outcomes to be markedly similar to the previous year's [FY 2010] results. Increased consistency in the RFAs has provided for a more clear and effective delivery and focus of the program. This has led to the funding of stronger more relevant projects as well as satisfying many of statutory aims of BFRDP related to:

- Regional balance;
- Priority in grant making; and,
- Set-asides for socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers.

Additionally the responsiveness of USDA and NIFA personnel, primarily through the national program team and leader, to stakeholder input has allowed the program to evolve in order to meet challenges that any nationwide applicable competitive grants program faces. For example, guidance on determining the role and thresholds for partners and collaborators, the orientation of grant awards across standard and educational enhancement grant types, and how development grants can be used and maximized has led to a more capable and successful program.

In 2011, CBO/NGO grant awardees received 61 percent of the total grants and slightly over half of the total funding. University/colleges and academic institutions' grantees essentially made up the remainder of the difference indicating a fairly equitable distribution across these grant groupings.

While there was modest growth in the number of development grants issued in 2011, standard grants again were the most common grant type issued. Also in 2011, like past years, grants were most likely to be 3 years in duration with the greatest number and allocation of funds to grants over \$500,000.

The assessment of partners found a strong collaborative nature in most grants both for CBO/NGOs and university/college or academic institutions. While all CBO/NGOs met the priority in grant making as defined in statute,<sup>8</sup> there were two university/college or academic institutions that did not partner with a CBO/NGO. We can only surmise these

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<sup>8</sup>FCEA 2008, Public Law 110-246, Section 7410 "PRIORITY — In making grants under this subsection, the secretary shall give priority to partnerships and collaborations that are led by or include non-governmental and community-based organizations with expertise in new agricultural producer training and outreach."

grant projects must have been determined in the review process to have extremely high merit.

In 2011 the implementation of the socially disadvantaged and limited resource producer funding focus exceeded the 25% set-aside as detailed in law. Our estimates show that nearly 46% of entire funding targeted those constituencies.

Many grant recipients (22 of the 36) characterized the application process as difficult. The estimated average amount of time for grantees to develop and submit an application varied considerably but on average was 213 hours per grant. This is a considerable jump when compared to 2010 which was estimated at 105 hours per grant.

No irregularity or biases were found in evaluating the regional distribution of grants, but subtle changes are noticeable such as the decrease in funding in the Midwest as compared to 2009 and 2010 when it was one of the highest funded regions, both in terms of grants and resources. The two states that have received the greatest number of grants over the past three years are California with nine and New York with eight.

By approaching this analysis with a more purposeful set of questions this year, the review of the service area provided more useful information. We were able to clump grant responses into four groupings: nationwide, state and multi state, counties and numerous counties, and localized regions. Fifty-three percent of grants described their service areas as state and multi-state.

The most identified critique provided by grantees of BFRDP was aimed squarely at the application process and administrative aspects. Consistent feedback was received describing the cumbersome, often failing and nebulous nature of grants.gov. Additionally, numerous grantees felt that after the awarding of grants the often duplicative and short notice and established timelines for submission of supplementary information was overbearing and stressful for all parties involved.

## **Recommendations**

Agriculture is a growing and vibrant sector of our nation's economy. Within agriculture great opportunities exist, as demonstrated by the use and demand of programs like BFRDP with more individuals and families considering farming or ranching as a career choice.

The recommendations below are developed with the intent to assist USDA personnel, congressional leaders, and stakeholders who have a vested stake in seeing BFRDP succeed and be an effective program in assisting beginning farmers and ranchers. The following recommendations were developed from the 2011 analysis and operation of BFRDP in 2010 and 2011.

Programmatic: We urge a similar programmatic approach for BFRDP as to that executed in FY 2011. Below is additional emphasis on specific aims that will strengthen and make BFRDP more effective.

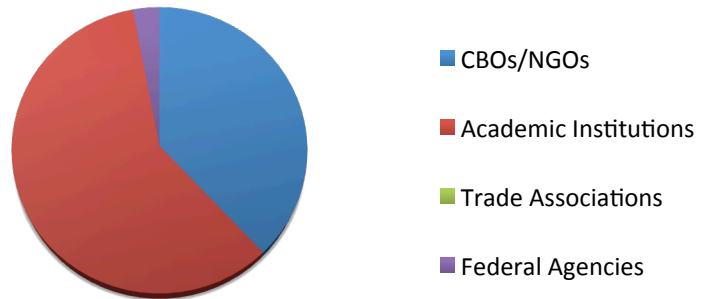
1. ***Sustain and further enhance the awarding of total grants and funding to CBO and NGO grantees to 65 percent by both measures.*** BFRDP is trending this way as exemplified in the review of the past three grant cycles and will ensure priority statutory aims are confidently realized when this measure is achieved.
2. ***Continue the current distribution across the grant types standard, educational enhancement and development, with standard grants as the most common and primary grant type.*** Additionally, continued use of development grants is encouraged.
3. ***Maintain the partnership and collaboration guidance as established in the FY 2011 RFA.***

Administrative:

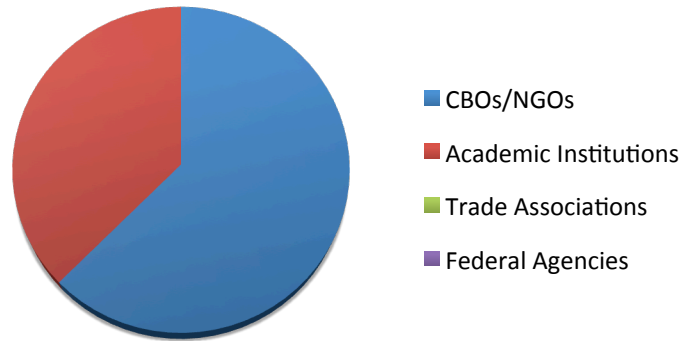
1. ***Prompt notification of stakeholders as Request for Applications (RFA) are posted or released.*** USDA should develop a more comprehensive press and outreach protocol for quickly notifying interested parties once an RFA is posted, especially considering the typically 60-day window to submit an application notifying stakeholders in a timely fashion is crucial. Relying on tweets or a mere posting on the website without a larger coordinated outreach strategy is inadequate. Unfortunately this problem persisted upon release of the FY 2012 RFA in late September of 2011.
2. ***Establish a consistent process and expectations for supplementary information needed from grant recipients once they have been notified of grant awards.*** NIFA should consider convening a workgroup of past awardees to develop a more instructive and consistent process for the additional information needed after an applicant is awarded a grant.

## Appendix 1: Historical Distribution of Grants by Institution Type

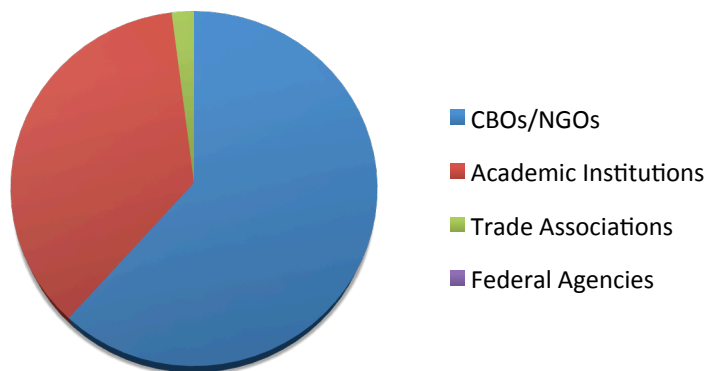
**FY 2009**



**FY 2010**

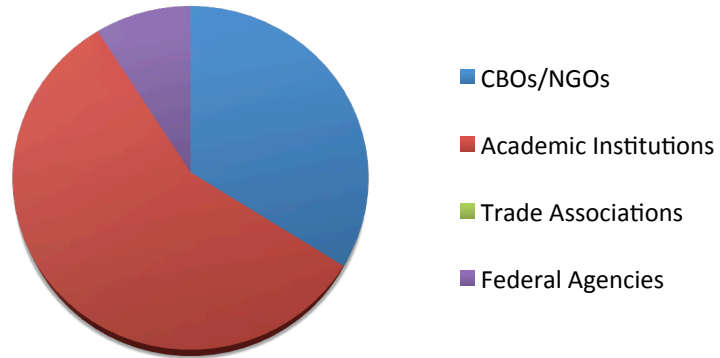


**FY 2011**

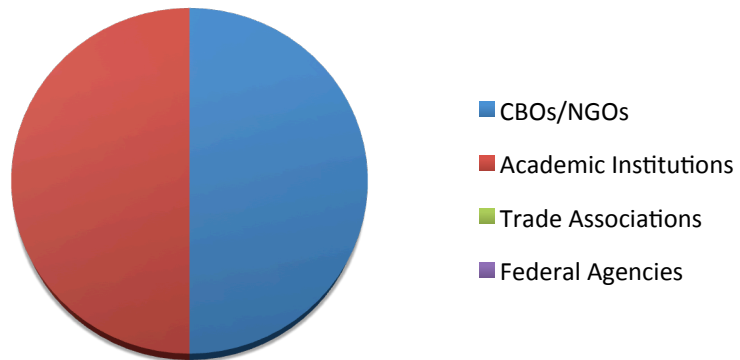


## Appendix 2: Historical Distribution of Funding by Institution Type

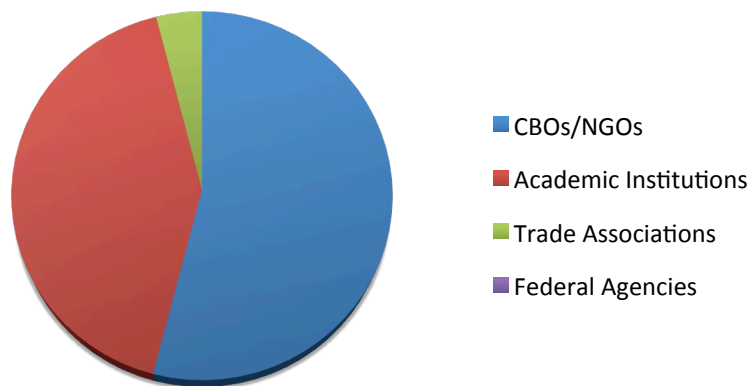
**FY 2009**



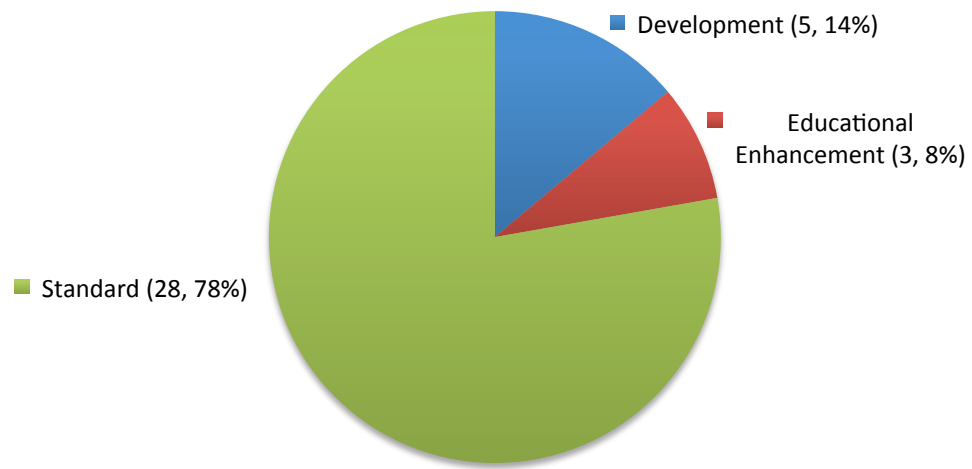
**FY 2010**



**FY 2011**



### Appendix 3: Chart I: Grant distribution by type.



## Appendix 4: Regional Distribution of BFRDP Grants by State FY 2009-2011

Distribution of BFRDP Grants by State

