

AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA Frequently Asked Questions

These are some Frequently Asked Questions about the [AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems program](#).

General Questions

- Who should I contact if I have question about my application?
- What are integrated projects?
- What are the eligibility requirements for projects submitted to the AFRI SAS program?
- What is a FASE grant and what are the eligibility requirements for FASE grants?
- Can I submit a proposal for a conference or workshop to the AFRI SAS program?
- Where can I find definitions of terms used in the AFRI SAS RFA?
- What resources are available on the systems approach request for AFRI SAS projects?
- Will the AFRI Challenge Area RFAs be offered this year?
- I submitted my proposal previously to AFRI SAS but was not funded. Can I resubmit to this SAS program?
- Can projects with smaller budgets apply to the AFRI SAS program?
- Are there examples of previously funded projects for the AFRI SAS Program?
- When will the next AFRI SAS RFA be posted?

Letter of Intent Questions

- Is a Letter of Intent (LOI) required to submit a full application?
- What information should be included in a Letter of Intent and what are the formatting guidelines?
- What is the deadline for LOIs?
- What information will be received after consideration of LOIs?

Application Questions

- What information is required to submit application to the AFRI SAS program?
 - Does the project team need to remain unchanged from the list submitted in our Letter of Intent?
 - What is the allowed length/duration of the awards?
 - Are indirect costs allowed?
 - Is a data management plan required?
 - Is a logic model required in my application and where can I find a template?
 - Can you give more specifics on the external evaluator required for our project?
 - What is the deadline for applications?
 - Do you have any general advice for applicants?
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General Questions

Who should I contact if I have question about my application?

General questions should be sent to afri-sas@nifa.usda.gov. All associated National Program Leaders (NPLs) listed in the RFA have access to the SAS email and can reply to questions. If you would like to discuss whether your potential project fits the program, please send a short summary of the project to the SAS email (above) to set up a time to discuss it. Additionally, applicants can contact the specific NPLs listed in the RFA.

What are integrated projects?

Under the AFRI SAS RFA, submitted projects must be “fully” integrated and address all three functions of agriculture knowledge (research, education, and extension). The functions should be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project, and no more than two-thirds of the project’s budget may focus on a single component. For additional information on submission of integrated project types, please see pages 3-5 of [AFRI Project Types](#).

What are the eligibility requirements for projects submitted to the AFRI SAS program?

The AFRI SAS program is requesting only integrated projects. Eligible applicants for integrated projects include: colleges and universities, 1994 land-grant institutions (tribal colleges), and Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities.

What is a FASE grant and what are the eligibility requirements for FASE grants?

Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) grants help institutions develop competitive projects and attract new scientists and educators to careers in high priority areas of national need in agriculture, food, and environmental sciences. FASE Grants have additional eligibility requirements; please see Part II, D of the RFA for details. Please note that only FASE Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural projects are being solicited. For more information, visit the [FASE Grants website](#).

Can I submit a proposal for a conference or workshop to the AFRI SAS program?

No, the AFRI SAS program is not accepting applications for conference grants or workshops.

Where can I find definitions of terms used in the AFRI SAS RFA?

Commonly used terms and acronyms are defined at the end of the RFA. For additional definitions, refer to the [SAS Glossary](#).

What resources are available on the systems approach request for AFRI SAS projects?

Applicants are encouraged to consult the definitions and examples of the food and agricultural systems in:

- National Academy of Sciences report on “[A Framework for Assessing Effects of the Food System](#),”
- the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [agricultural system definition](#),
- and the National Research Council [food system definition](#).

Will the AFRI Challenge Area RFAs be offered this year?

No. All previous Challenge Area RFAs have been combined into the SAS program. SAS was created from previous RFA concepts to transform the U.S. food and agricultural system by increasing production in sustainable ways as we approach a world population of 10 billion by 2050. The proposals should be in the context of diminishing land and water resources, changing climate and increasing frequency of

extreme weather events, threats of outbreaks of diseases and pests, and challenges to human health and well-being. Projects must address one or more of the goals listed in the RFA for that year.

I submitted my proposal previously to AFRI SAS but was not funded. Can I resubmit to this SAS program?

Resubmitted applications are allowed. Please see the instructions in Part II, B of the RFA which specify additional information needed in resubmitted applications. The SAS goals change from year to year, so you should ensure that your application appropriately covers goal(s) as outlined in Part I, C. Please read the RFA and associated instructions thoroughly.

Can projects with smaller budgets apply to the AFRI SAS program?

There is no minimum budget specified for project budgets, only a maximum budget of \$10,000,000. In order to ensure that you submit a competitive project, we urge all potential applicants to carefully read the complete RFA. Please keep in mind that AFRI SAS “is soliciting creative and visionary project applications that use transdisciplinary teams and integrated research, education, and extension activities to promote convergence of science and technology” to address one or more of the long-term goals listed in the RFA. The requested budgets should be sufficient to support such projects.

Are there examples of previously funded projects for the AFRI SAS Program?

The AFRI SAS Program funded eight projects in FY 2018, its initial year. You can read more about the selected projects in this [press release](#).

When will the next AFRI SAS RFA be posted?

We anticipate that there will be a request for applications for the AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems program in FY 2020. We cannot pre-release details of the FY 2020 request for applications before it is published. If you would like an idea of what potentially might be in the FY 2020 RFAs, please watch for the posting of the FY 2020 Budget Explanatory Notes [Budget Explanatory Notes on our website](#). If you’re interested in signing up for notifications from Grants.gov for AFRI RFA postings, there are [instructions on how to do so on our website](#).

Letter of Intent Questions

Is a Letter of Intent (LOI) required to submit a full application?

Yes, submission of an LOI prior to the LOI deadline is required for submission of a full proposal. Proposals that are submitted that did not submit a LOI will not be reviewed.

What information should be included in a Letter of Intent and what are the formatting guidelines?

Please see the instructions for the submission of a Letter of Intent (LOI) for Coordinated Agricultural Projects in the [AFRI Letter of Intent Instructions](#). LOIs should also include:

1. Description of the goal(s) addressed by the project, including short, medium, and long-term objectives within the “specific objectives” section of the LOI;
2. Description of the scope of systems and justification of components under investigation within the “approach” section of the LOI;
3. Clear descriptions and justification of the methods for the integrated and transdisciplinary approach to be used to achieve the desired goal(s) also within the “approach” section of the LOI;
4. Description of the benefits to the food and agricultural system within the “potential impact and expected outcomes” section of the LOI.

What is the deadline for LOIs?

The LOIs for the AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA should be emailed to afri-sas@nifa.usda.gov by Tuesday, June 4, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Late submissions will not be accepted.

What information will be received after consideration of LOIs?

Applicants will receive an email either encouraging or discouraging them from submitting a full application. You will not receive reviewer comments or suggestions on your LOI. Notifications of LOI determinations will not go out until after the LOI deadline.

Application Questions**What information is required to submit application to the AFRI SAS program?**

Please see the [AFRI SAS RFA Additional Information for Part IV C](#). It has information on page limits and other required documents for an application.

Does the project team need to remain unchanged from the list submitted in our Letter of Intent?

We recognize that the participants may change as you develop a full proposal. That is allowed for this program, especially if it will build a more transdisciplinary team. From the Letter of Intent to the proposal, the project title should remain the same as well as the goals/approach described in the LOI. Because an LOI is a requirement of this program, having the same title/planned project will allow us to identify your project as having submitted an associated LOI.

What is the allowed length/duration of the awards?

The duration of the award should be no more than five years and should be commensurate with the work proposed. Award duration can be less than five years.

Are indirect costs allowed?

AFRI limits indirect costs to 30% of the total Federal funds provided (or 42.857% of total direct costs) under each award. Indirect costs of subawards should be included when calculating indirect cost percentage of the application. When preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

Is a data management plan required?

Yes. For additional information, please see the [data management FAQs](#) page.

Is a logic model required in my application and where can I find a template?

Yes, a logic model is a required additional document for your proposal. For additional information on logic models, please see the [Logic Model Planning Process page](#).

Can you give more specifics on the external evaluator required for our project?

The external evaluator required for the AFRI SAS program refers to an evaluator who is external to the membership of the team listed on the proposal. Someone who is listed as a co-PD or investigator on the grant is not appropriate to serve as the external evaluator of the project. The external evaluator should have no role in the project, other than as the external evaluator. The external evaluator can be employed by a university participating on the proposal. For additional information, we also discussed

the external evaluator during the AFRI SAS webinar. You can find the [transcript of that webinar](#) on our website. A new webinar will be held in 2019 for SAS, please watch the [SAS program page](#) for updates.

What is the deadline for applications?

The applications to the AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA should be submitted by Thursday, September 26, 2019 by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time through the Grants.gov system. Applications for projects that did not successfully submit a letter of intent will not be reviewed.

Do you have any general advice for applicants?

- Read the RFA carefully to make sure your application covers the required information and fits the program.
- Applications must be for “fully” **integrated projects**, addressing **research, education and extension**, using either **standard or strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP) grants**. Applications for any other grant type will be returned without review.
- The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number is **10.310** and the CFDA title is Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). The Funding Opportunity Number (FON) is **USDA-NIFA-AFRI-006739**. The Program Code Name is **Sustainable Agricultural Systems** and the Program Code is **A9201**.
- **All documents in an application submission need to be saved as PDF**. We do not accept Word documents as part of applications. Submission of incorrect file formats will result in your proposal being returned without review.
- Reading through the Integrated Projects section (starting pg. 5) of the [AFRI Review Criteria](#) may be helpful in understanding what the peer review panel will be looking at.
- We advise that applications be submitted early in case of issues with Grants.gov, which can take some time to resolve.