

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

These are some frequently asked questions about the [Agriculture and Food Research Initiative](#) (AFRI). The answers may or may not apply to other non-AFRI NIFA grant programs.

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Applicant Questions

How can I find out about newly posted or modified AFRI Requests for Applications?

Getting email notices about newly posted or modified Agriculture and Food Research Initiative grant opportunities from Grants.gov requires an account. To sign up to receive notices about AFRI, follow these instructions:

1. If you do not have a Grants.gov account, you can register for free by clicking the Register link in the top-right corner of the [Grants.gov page](#). (Go to Step 6 if you already have an account.)
2. Click the **Get Registered Now** button on the Register page and complete both the Contact Information and Account Details sections. All fields with a red asterisk (*) are required.
3. Click the **Continue** button and then click the **Send Temporary Code** button.
4. Access your email account to access the temporary code, enter the temporary code you received into the Temporary Code field and click the **Continue** button.
5. Decide if you would like to add a profile to your Grants.gov account (not required for subscribing to alerts) or click the **Continue** button to log in.
6. Go to the [Subscribe to Saved Searches](#) page. (You will need to log into your account if you are not already logged in.)
7. Click on the **Add Saved Search >>** button.
8. Fill-in the **Saved Search Name** with anything you'd like such as AFRI and under BASIC SEARCH CRITERIA for **CFDA** fill-in "10.310" (without the quotes). You can leave the rest of the fields as they are and click on the **Save** button at the bottom.
9. Your saved search subscription will now be listed under "My Saved Opportunity Searches." If there are any newly posted AFRI opportunities, you will receive an email notice from "DoNotReply@grants.gov" sometime after midnight of the day it is posted. If you wish to unsubscribe in the future, login to Grants.gov, go to the Subscribe to Saved Searches page, and click on the "Delete" link for your AFRI search.

This will get you email notification of all AFRI RFAs being posted, both new postings and modifications of existing ones. The RFAs and their program area priorities may change from year to year, so reading through Part I, C of the RFA is always advisable for figuring out what area your project may fit into.

We also keep the [AFRI Request for Applications](#) page updated with information on upcoming RFAs and their expected or actual publishing dates as information becomes available.

What happened to the Challenge Area RFAs?

Challenge Area RFAs have not been offered since 2018. All previous Challenge Area RFAs have been combined into a new RFA, [AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems](#) (SAS). SAS was created from previous RFA concepts to transform the U.S. food and agricultural system by increasing production in sustainable ways as the world population approaches 10 billion by 2050.

What kind of projects do AFRI grants fund?

Generally, AFRI seeks to fund agriculture and food research, education and extension projects. Each of the [AFRI Requests for Applications](#) may contain multiple programs, each with their own descriptions, which are described in Part I, C of the RFA. The AFRI Foundational and Applied Science Program contains the most topics with numerous program area priorities in six AFRI priority areas specified in the 2018 Farm Bill, as well as some crosscutting programs that cover more than one priority area:

- Plant health, and production and plant products
- Animal health, and production and animal products
- Food safety, nutrition, and health
- Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
- Agriculture systems and technology
- Agriculture economics and rural communities

How do I navigate an AFRI Request for Applications?

AFRI RFAs are organized in a consistent fashion. While all information in the RFA may be relevant to submitting an application, the following guidance may be helpful to applicants unfamiliar with AFRI RFAs:

In order to determine what program(s) might be a fit for your project, you'll need to read through the Program Area Descriptions in Part I, C of the RFA. Each of the program area priorities listed in that section will have vital information including what subjects are covered, specific deadlines for applications/letters of intent (not all programs require letters of intent), maximum project duration, and maximum budget(s) for the specific program. There are also NIFA contacts listed for each program area priority if you have questions on fit to program.

Applicant eligibility is linked to project type (listed in Part I, C of the RFA for each program area priority). You will need to look at eligibility information listed in Part III, A of the RFA. In general, single-function projects (research, education, or extension) have the broadest eligibility.

Once you have determined both eligibility and fit for your application, application and submission information is found in Part IV of the RFA, which may link to separate documents and reference the [NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide](#). While developing your application, you should keep in mind the evaluation criteria in Part V, B of the RFA that is used in the NIFA-AFRI peer review process by reviewers.

Please keep in mind that RFA modifications may be posted to correct or add information, following the instructions to subscribe to AFRI postings on Grants.gov (first question of this FAQ) will keep you updated if a modification is posted.

Who should I contact about a particular program?

[AFRI Requests for Applications](#) (RFAs) may contain multiple programs area priorities described in Part I, C of the RFA. Each program area priority will have information on its specific funding priorities as well as provide Program Area Priority Contacts. Those contacts can answer your questions about the program area priority and its requirements. They can provide advice on general suitability of a proposed topic for the specific program area priority but cannot review your project or application.

Who is eligible to apply for AFRI grants?

Eligibility for applying to AFRI grants is linked to requested project type(s) for each program area. You can find the project type listed for each program in the program area descriptions by reading through Part I, C of [AFRI Requests for Applications](#). Using that information, you can determine your eligibility using the information in Part III, A of the RFA. In general, single-function projects (research, education, or extension) have the broadest eligibility.

Are there any special grants available for small or mid-sized institutions, minority-serving institutions, and institutions in Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) areas?

Strengthening Grants are types of AFRI Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants which are designed to help institutions develop competitive projects and to attract new scientists and educators into careers in high-priority areas of national need in agriculture and food sciences. See the [AFRI FASE and EPSCoR webpage](#) for more information including the [AFRI FASE FAQ](#).

Are there any special grants available for New Investigators?

Included among the AFRI FASE Grants are Standard Grant and Seed Grant opportunities specific for New Investigators. Eligibility criteria and description of New investigator Grant types are

included in the AFRI Foundational and Applied Science RFA. See the [AFRI FASE and EPSCoR webpage](#) for more information including the [AFRI New Investigator FAQ](#).

What do I need to include in my Letter of Intent?

Information on what is required in a Letter of Intent can be found in the AFRI Letter of Intent Instructions (found in the Attachment list on [AFRI RFA Resources](#)). These instructions are only relevant to specific program areas that require a letter of intent as specified in the description for each program area priority in Part I, C of [AFRI Requests for Applications](#). The RFA for your particular program area may have additional information about what the LOI should contain.

Can I be Project Director or Co-Project Director on more than one project?

We generally give this advice on being a Project Director for more than one application:

While it is not prohibited to do so (either in a specific program priority area or for specific AFRI RFAs as a whole), AFRI programs discourage the same individual from submitting more than one application as lead/first Project Director. Because of the competitive nature of the AFRI program, it is often best to select one project and put the time into writing the strongest application that you can. However, there is similarly no prohibition against more than one grant being given to a single project director, but some program area priorities do have a limit on the number of grants an institution may receive.

For Co-PDs and collaborators, there is also no prohibition on being on more than one project.

All Co-PDs and PDs need remember to include all the pending applications in their Current & Pending form to confirm that they would have enough time to work on all of them if all the listed applications receive awards.

What do I need to include in my application?

Information on what is required in an application is found in Part IV of [AFRI Requests for Applications](#) which may link to separate documents and reference the [NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide](#). While developing your application, you should keep in mind the evaluation criteria in Part V, B of the RFA that is used in the NIFA-AFRI peer review process by reviewers.

Do I need to do anything special when applying for conference grants?

Not all program area priorities allow conference grant applications, please consult Part I, C of the RFA to determine if a particular program allows them. Letters of Intent are required for all Conference Grants prior to submission of applications. The conference grant LOI must be submitted to the program area priority contact(s) a minimum of 195 days before the conference begins. Applications should be submitted after receiving an LOI decision response and must be submitted a minimum of 150 days before the conference begins. Please see [AFRI Requests for Applications](#) and [AFRI RFA Resources](#) (“AFRI Grant Types” and “AFRI Letter of Intent Instructions in the Attachment list”) for more information. Additionally, there may be

special instructions for conference grants included in the grant application instructions and specific conference grant evaluation criteria listed in the AFRI Review Criteria (found in the Attachment list on [AFRI RFA Resources](#)).

If my project addresses a commodity board topic, do I list the commodity board co-funding as non-federal funds in my budget?

Although the commodity board would provide half the funds for the award, the funds will be coming from NIFA as the granting institution and should be included in your budget as federal funds.

Do I need to do anything special if my project addresses a commodity board topic?

Beyond following the instructions for applications included in [AFRI Requests for Applications](#), if your project addresses a commodity board topic you will need to request a letter of support for co-funding from the associated commodity board. In order to do this, you should contact the commodity board representative specified in the description for the program area priority with the topic (Part I, C of the RFA) to request the letter. The commodity board will need a copy of your application in order to assess your request; you can submit a request for a PDF of your entire application from the NIFA staff for that program. It may be beneficial to contact the commodity board earlier in order to find out if they have additional information relevant to your application development.

If you receive one, you should include the letter of support in your application on Grants.gov when it is received before submitting your application or send it to the National Program Leader(s) associated with the program within 60 calendar days after the application submission deadline (when it is received after submitting your application).

When are the Letter of Intent and application deadlines for the current AFRI RFAs?

The [AFRI Deadlines](#) page lists that information for all program area priorities for the current [AFRI Requests for Applications](#). The list does not include interagency programs that may have RFAs published by the partnering agencies.

You can also find deadlines in the RFAs in the Program Area Descriptions (Part I, C of the RFA). Each program area will have information on its deadline(s) in that section for the included priorities.

If the RFA covers multiple years, make sure to check for updates for a particular year as specified on the cover page and funding opportunity number section of the RFA.

What can you tell me about the review process for applications?

AFRI uses a peer review process for its grants. You can find general information about peer review at NIFA in this [fact sheet](#) and information specific to AFRI peer review guidelines is found in the AFRI Review Criteria (found in the Attachment list on [AFRI RFA Resources](#)).

The budget limits for Standard Grants in most program area priorities of the Foundational and Applied Science RFA have increased for 2021. How will this affect funding success rates in those program area priorities?

For the FY 2021 and FY 2022 Foundational and Applied Science RFA, NIFA intends to use 3 years of appropriated funding over two review cycles with 1.5 years of appropriated funding being used in each year.

- For the 2021 review cycle, NIFA will use all of the FY 2021 appropriated funding and 50% of the FY 2022 appropriated funding.
- For the 2022 review cycle, NIFA will use 50% of the FY 2022 appropriated funding and all of the FY 2023 appropriated funding.

Due to this, each program area priority will have approximately 50% greater funding allocated to it than in FY 2020. We expect this to completely offset the approximate 30% increase in grant size and any increase in submission rate that may occur.

The time between most AFRI Foundational and Applied Science RFA application submission deadlines for 2020, 2021 and 2022 is about 14-15 months. Does NIFA plan to continue this trend into the future?

No, this approach was taken to shift application submission deadlines to be near the very beginning of the fiscal year for the appropriations supporting that funding cycle. Thus, the deadlines published for the 2022 application submission cycle will be the *approximate* dates for submission in future years. This will allow NIFA to complete the entire application submission, peer review, and grant awarding cycle within the same fiscal year for which funding was appropriated.

Panelist Questions

What should I write in the text of my review?

When reviewing an application, please refer to the guidelines in AFRI Review Criteria (found in the Attachment list on [AFRI RFA Resources](#)). For format, you can either use each criterion as a heading or use free-form narrative, making sure that all the criteria are addressed. Panelists should consider the review from the perspective of the applicant and ensure that they provide ample constructive feedback. This is especially useful for applicants whose applications are not chosen for funding that may wish to improve on their projects.

AFRI has some [general guidance](#) for reviewers including a list of criteria for different project types. Some programs may have a specific format or provide additional guidance, so you should always defer to the instructions given by your Panel Manager and NIFA staff for the program.

What if I am having issues with PRS?

If you have issues accessing PRS or other question, please contact the NIFA staff for the program or the Panel Manager.

What happens to my review?

It is NIFA policy to edit the reviews to remove inappropriate language, identification of panel members, score/rating, and language that indicates the application should be funded. After award determinations are made by the program, the panel summary (for non-triage applications) and reviews for that application are shared with the application's Project Director. This information can serve as helpful feedback for improvement of a project or increase an applicant's understanding of good applications.

Project Director Questions

How do I submit the project initiation report?

The instructions for doing a project initiation report will be emailed to the Project Director listed for your application. This email will come from REEport@nifa.usda.gov with a subject line of "NIFA Grant Proposal - Action Required in REEport: GRANTXXXXXXXX" where the GRANT number is the one associated with your application. Please check your spam folder in case the email was filtered there.

You can consult the [REEport Guide for Project Directors](#) for what you should see on your screen and how to use the system.

I've received my project initiation notice and logged into REEport, but my project is not listed there.

In cases where multiple organizations share the same identification number for a university system, you may receive an email with the subject "Alert More Information Required for New Project Initiation in REEport" that you need to respond to so that the project can be assigned correctly. When you reply, please send the information to electronic@usda.gov.

You can find more information about this and other common issues in the [REEport Troubleshooting Guide](#).

Can I announce my project as soon as I know I'm receiving an award?

The Secretary of Agriculture has requested that all NIFA awardees and their institutions refrain from doing any form of publicity on their award recommendation until the Secretary's office has had a chance to make a press release first or until your office receives official notification of this award from our Awards Management Division. This applies to announcements in all forms of institutional and departmental newsletters, campus newspapers, and local, regional, and national news media outlets. Failure to adhere to this request will put your award recommendation at risk and may make it subject to withdrawal.

How do I acknowledge my AFRI award in publications and presentations?

Proper acknowledgment of your USDA-NIFA funding in published manuscripts, presentations, press releases, and other communications is critical for the success of our agency's programs. Grantees must use the following acknowledgement for all grants supported by AFRI:

"This work is supported by Agricultural and Food Research Initiative grant no. XXXX-XXXXX-XXXXX from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture."

(Award documents from when your project was funded will have your award number on them.)

Whenever practical, NIFA also expects that grantees use NIFA's [official identifier](#) in publications, posters, websites and presentations resulting from their award.

Please alert us to significant findings, publications, news releases, and other media coverage of your work. With your permission, we may highlight your project in a national impact story or news release. If your research is featured on the cover of a scientific journal, we can showcase the cover as well.

Links to Other AFRI FAQs

The following specific programs have their own frequently asked questions:

- [AFRI Education and Workforce Development](#)
 - Research and Extension Experiences for Undergraduates Program (REEU) FAQ
 - Predoctoral & Postdoctoral Fellowships FAQ
- [AFRI Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement \(FASE\) and Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research \(EPSCoR\) Program](#)
 - FASE & EPSCoR FAQ
 - FASE New Investigators FAQ
- [AFRI Food and Agriculture Cyberinformatics and Tools Initiative \(FACT\)](#)
- [AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems](#)
- [Centers of Excellence](#)