

## **AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA Frequently Asked Questions**

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

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- 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 a question about my application?**

General questions should be sent to [afri-sas@usda.gov](mailto:afri-sas@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 for the Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201) program area priority must be “fully” integrated and address all three NIFA activity functions (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” in the attachments list located on the [AFRI RFA Resources page](#).

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

The Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201) program area priority is requesting only integrated project applications. Eligible applicants for integrated projects include colleges and universities, 1994 land-grant institutions (tribal colleges), and Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities.

The Sustainable Agricultural Systems Program Evaluation (A9211) program area priority is requesting only research project applications. This project type has broader applicant eligibility than integrated projects.

For both program area priorities, eligible institutions do not include foreign and international organizations. See Part III, C of the RFA for more information on eligibility, which is tied to project type requested in Part I, C of the RFA.

### **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. 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 economic, societal, and environmental attributes of sustainability. Projects submitted to a program area priority must address the requirements 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 for A9201, however, an LOI is still required for FY 2021. 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 projects, only a maximum budget as indicated in the RFA. 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 A9201 program area priority “is soliciting creative and visionary project applications developed by transdisciplinary teams that integrate research, education, and extension activities and effectively use a systems approach 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 has funded several projects in its first two years. You can read more about the selected projects in the [FY 2018](#) and the [FY 2019 press releases.](#)

### **What is the budget for the FY 2021 AFRI SAS RFA?**

The amount available for new grants in this FY 2021 SAS RFA is approximately \$150 million, for awards of up to \$10 million each.

The AFRI SAS RFA covers one grant review cycle in FY 2021 using funding from FY 2020 and FY 2021 budgets. The AFRI SAS RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2021. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or a full appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

**When will the next AFRI SAS RFA be posted?**

The [FY 2021 AFRI SAS RFA](#) has been posted. If you're interested in signing up for notifications from Grants.gov for all AFRI RFA postings including modifications to RFAs, there are [instructions on how to do so on our website](#).

**Will you be holding an informational webinar on the FY 2021 AFRI SAS RFA?**

A new webinar will be held in FY 2021 for SAS, please check the [SAS program page](#) for updates.

**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 in both program area priorities included in the AFRI SAS RFA. Proposals that are submitted that did not submit an LOI will not be reviewed.

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

For detailed guidance on LOI submission, see the [AFRI RFA Resources page](#) "AFRI Letter of Intent Instructions" in the attachments list).

LOIs for Coordinated Agricultural Projects (Sustainable Agricultural Systems A9201) 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@usda.gov](mailto:afri-sas@usda.gov).

Deadlines for LOIs is as follows:

- Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201): Thursday, January 7, 2021 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)
- Sustainable Agricultural Systems Program Evaluation (A9211): Thursday, March 4, 2021 (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**

### **Where are application requirements detailed?**

Application and submission information including page limits and narrative font sizes for AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA applications are available at [AFRI RFA Resources page](#) (“2021 Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA Additional Information for Part IV, C” in the attachments list), which is linked to from Part IV, C of the RFA.

### **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 for applications to A9201. From the LOI 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 for both AFRI SAS program area priorities and should be commensurate with the work proposed. The award duration may 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 the guidelines on preparation and inclusion of a data management plan (DMP) in your application, see [Data Management Plan for NIFA-Funded Research, Education and Extension Projects](#) on the NIFA website. Also included on the web page are FAQs and information about accessing examples of DMPs. In addition, general guidelines for Data Management Planning for USDA agencies are available at the [National Agricultural Library website](#).

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

A logic model is a required additional document for integrated project applications. 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 A9201 project?**

The external evaluator required for the Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201) program area priority refers to an evaluator who is external to the membership of the team listed on the proposal. Someone who is listed as a co-PI 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.

### **What is the deadline for applications?**

The deadlines for application submissions through the Grants.gov system to the AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems RFA are as follows:

- Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201): Thursday, April 1, 2021 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)
- Sustainable Agricultural Systems Program Evaluation (A9211): Thursday, July 1, 2021 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)

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 in A9201 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 in the Sustainable Agricultural Systems (A9201) program area priority 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-007892**. There are two separate program area priorities:
  - **Sustainable Agricultural Systems** Program Code Name uses Program Code **A9201**.
  - **Sustainable Agricultural Systems Program Evaluation** Program Code Name uses Program Code **A9211**.
- **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.
- Detailed AFRI evaluation criteria are found on the [AFRI RFA Resources page](#) (“AFRI Review Criteria” in the attachments list) which is linked from Part V, B of the RFA. In addition to the requirements in the program descriptions, the review criteria may be helpful in understanding what the peer review panel will be looking for:
  - A9201 applications, read through the Integrated Projects section.
  - A9211 applications, read through the Research Projects section.
- We advise that applications be submitted early in case of issues with Grants.gov, which can take some time to resolve.