

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement Grants

Frequently Asked Questions

For more information, see the [AFRI FASE & EPSCoR Program website](#).

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1. What is the purpose of AFRI Food and Agriculture Science Enhancement (FASE) grants?

The purpose of AFRI Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) grants is to strengthen science capabilities in research, education, and/or extension programs. FASE grants are designed to help institutions or states, that have been less successful receiving AFRI grants, and to attract new scientists, pre- and post-doctoral fellows, and educators into careers in high-priority areas of national need in agriculture, food, and environmental sciences.

2. How do you apply for a FASE grant?

FASE grant applications are solicited under the program area priorities of each AFRI Request for Applications (RFA). It is important to read each AFRI RFA to identify the appropriate program area priority description that is relevant to the focus of your application. Each RFA includes information on the types of FASE grants that are being solicited, the eligibility requirements, and instructions for the preparation and submission of a FASE application. See FAQ #3 and [Grant types](#) for information about FASE grant types.

3. What are the FASE grant types?

The FASE grant types are:

- Pre- and Post-doctoral Fellowship grants;
- New Investigator grants; and,
- [Grant types \(including Strengthening Grants\)](#):
 - Seed grants,
 - Sabbatical grants,
 - Equipment grants,
 - Strengthening standard grants,
 - Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project grants, and
 - Strengthening Conference grants.

4. The eligibility requirements for FASE grants are complex. Is there an easy way for me to determine eligibility?

Yes, a [flow chart](#) is at the end of each AFRI RFA to help determine eligibility for a FASE Strengthening grant.

5. I am a lead Project Director (PD) and my institution is eligible for FASE funding, but my Co-Project Directors' (Co-PDs) institutions are not. Can my proposal still be considered for FASE funding?

Yes, only the lead PD's institution must meet the eligibility criteria.

6. Is there any dedicated funding for FASE grants?

Yes, there are dedicated funds (FASE set-aside) for all the FASE grant types except the New Investigator grant type (see FAQ #9):

- 3.75% of the AFRI funds available for grants each year is allocated to Pre-and Post – doctoral fellowship grants.
- 11.25% of the AFRI funds available for grants each year is allocated to strengthening grants (see FAQ #3).

7. What is the eligibility for predoctoral fellowships grants?

The applicant must have advanced to candidacy, (as determined by the applicant's institutional requirements) by the application deadline. Applicants are expected to provide documentation from his or her institution (usually the applicant's advisor, department, or the institution's graduate programs office) by the application deadline. [The Agriculture and Food](#)

8. What is the eligibility for postdoctoral fellowships grants?

The applicant's doctoral degree must have been conferred no earlier than the date specified in the RFA (based upon the application deadline), and no later than the date specified in the Postdoctoral Fellowships Program in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative – Education and Workforce Development (AFRI-EWD) RFA. Please visit the [AFRI-EWD Program](#) for additional information.

9. What is the eligibility to apply as a New Investigator and how are they funded?

A New Investigator is a lead project director of an application to an AFRI program area priority who is beginning his/her career, does not have an extensive scientific publication record, and has less than five years of postgraduate, career-track experience. The new investigator may not have received competitively awarded Federal research funds with the exception of pre- or post-doctoral grants or USDA-AFRI Seed Grants. The applicant does not have to be a US citizen but the application must be submitted through a US institution.

There are no set-aside funds for New Investigators. Instead, general program funds can be used to fund a New Investigator application that was ranked meritorious by the peer panel, but fell below the funding line cut-off in a particular AFRI program area priority. In such a case, the last ranked proposal above the funding cut-off (to a non-new investigator) is skipped over to support a new investigator below the cut-off. The recommendation to fund a new investigator application below the original funding line cut-off is made by the program staff and approved by the senior leadership. Generally, the more meritorious new investigators above the funding line that are funded by a particular panel (e.g., applications from new investigators were meritorious and ranked above the funding line cut-off), the lower the likelihood of a new investigator's application below the funding line being recommended for funding.

10. I qualify as a New Investigator, but my co-PDs do not. Can my application still be considered as a New Investigator grant?

Yes, only the lead Project Director must qualify as a New Investigator.

11. How do I calculate how long I have been in a “career track position”? What is a career track position? Does receiving federal funding as a Co-PD make me ineligible to be a New Investigator?

To calculate your time in a career track position, you should use the application deadline for the Program Area Priority that you are applying to. This period must be five years or less in order to qualify as a New Investigator. For example:

- Began career track position October 2014; Program Deadline September 2019. ***Qualifies*** (not greater than 5 years).
- Began career track position June 2014; Program Deadline September 2019. ***Does NOT Qualify*** (greater than 5 years).

A **career track position** is one that is potentially a permanent position, such as a tenure-track position or, for government jobs, “career” or “career conditional” appointment. Sometimes a

“soft money” position at a university is converted into a tenure track position. If that happens, the 5-year clock starts from the date of that conversion to tenure track, even though the job may be at the same institution and involve essentially the same duties. However, if the applicant had a highly successful career in one or more soft money positions prior to getting a career track appointment, and has an extensive publication record, then he/she would not qualify as a New Investigator.

If a Project Director has less than 5 years in a career track position but has received federal funding as a Co-PD on a grant, he/she still qualifies as a New Investigator. Only federal funding received as a lead PD on a grant disqualifies the applicant as a New Investigator.

12. What is the eligibility for strengthening grants (Seed grants, Sabbatical grants, Equipment grants, Strengthening Standard grants, Strengthening Coordinated Agricultural Project grants and Strengthening Conference grants)?

Strengthening grants are limited to institutions that qualify as a 1) small and mid-sized or minority-serving institution that have had limited institutional success for receiving Federal funds or (2) State Agricultural Experiment Stations or degree-granting institutions eligible for USDA Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) funding.

13. What is a small and mid-sized institution?

A small and mid-sized institution is an academic institution with a current total enrollment of 17,500 or less including graduate and undergraduate and full- and part-time students. The institution must possess a significant degree of autonomy. Significant degree of autonomy is defined by being independently accredited as determined by reference to the current version of the *Higher Education Directory*, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042.

14. What is a minority–serving institution?

For the AFRI Program, minority-serving institution is defined by enrollment of minority group or combination of minority groups exceeds 50% of total enrollment.

15. What is limited institutional success?

Limited institutional success means institutions that are not among the 100 most successful universities and colleges for receiving Federal funds for science and engineering research. A list of the top 100 most successful institutions is provided in Table 1 in each AFRI RFA.

16. How does the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) relate to the FASE program?

The FASE program is considered an “EPSCoR-like program” because it aims to improve the research infrastructure and competitiveness of universities and colleges or state agricultural experiment stations in states that have historically received less AFRI research funding in order to spread the agricultural sciences and engineering efforts geographically. However, State Agricultural Experiment Stations or degree-granting institutions in an EPSCoR state are only one of the eligibility categories for FASE program. See FAQ #16 on how the USDA-EPSCoR States are determined each year.

17. How does USDA determine the EPSCoR States?

AFRI determines which states are eligible for EPSCoR funding annually by calculating those states that have had a funding level from AFRI no higher than the 38th percentile of all states, based on total funding for the previous 3-year period (excluding strengthening set-aside funds). As a result of this calculation, the bottom 19 states are the EPSCoR states for the applicable year in addition to DC and U.S. territories. The current EPSCoR states list is located on the [AFRI FASE & EPSCoR](#) website.