

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)
Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement Grants
Frequently Asked Questions for New Investigators

These frequently asked questions are about Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) grants for New Investigators. For more information about all FASE grants, 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 (standard and seed grants); and,
- 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?

New Investigators may be eligible to have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application. A [flow chart](#) is available to help determine eligibility for a FASE Strengthening grant.

5. What is the eligibility to apply as a New Investigator?

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 as Project Director (PD) with the exception of pre- or post-doctoral grants and AFRI Seed Grants. Federal funding received by the applicant as Co-PD of previously awarded competitive grants does not count against New Investigator eligibility. The applicant does not have to be a U.S. citizen, but the application must be submitted through a U.S. institution.

6. What types of grants are available to New Investigators?

Starting in FY 2021, there are two types of New Investigator Grants available:

- The first is a Standard Grant (i.e., New Investigator Standard Grant), which is a Standard Grant application in all respects except that the Project Director meets the eligibility criteria described previously for New Investigators. These are reviewed with all other Standard Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority, with special consideration given by NIFA program staff to funding of New Investigator Standard Grant applications that fall below the funding line. In these cases, the New Investigator box must be checked under FASE on the AFRI Project Type form. New Investigator Standard Grants should adhere to the maximum budget guidelines of the program area priority under which the application is being submitted.
- Individuals qualifying as New Investigators are also eligible to apply for a Seed Grant regardless of institutional affiliation and eligibility for Strengthening Grants described subsequently. An individual applicant may submit only one Seed Grant as PD during the current fiscal year. New Investigators also may only receive one New Investigator Seed Grant as PD during their career. New Investigator Seed Grant applications will be reviewed with other Seed Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority with special consideration given to funding of New Investigator Seed Grant applications. In these cases, both the New Investigator and Seed Grant boxes should be checked under FASE on the AFRI Project Type form. Seed Grants are limited to a total of \$300,000 (including indirect costs) for up to 2-years in duration and are not renewable.

7. How are New Investigator grants funded?

There are no set-aside funds for New Investigators.

- For New Investigator Standard Grants, 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.
- In the case of New Investigator Seed Grants, all Seed Grant applications submitted to the respective program area priority will be reviewed together, with separate funding considerations given to Strengthening-eligible Seed Grants applications and New Investigator Seed Grant applications. Each program area priority will receive a funding allocation to support at least 30% of the eligible New Investigator seed grant applications.

8. Is there any dedicated funding for New Investigator grants?

There are no dedicated funds for New Investigator standard grants, but each program area priority is expected to fund one or more New Investigator standard grants above or below

the funding line. Each program area priority also will receive a funding allocation to support at least 30% of the eligible New Investigator seed grant applications.

9. 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.

New Investigator Grant applications do not need to adhere to the eligibility requirements described for Strengthening Grants unless they are applying under both grant types.

10. 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 2016; Program Deadline September 2021. ***Qualifies*** (not greater than 5 years).
- Began career track position June 2016; Program Deadline September 2021. ***Does NOT Qualify*** (greater than 5 years).

A **career track position** is one in which the applicant’s institution allows the individual to submit an application (beyond a fellowship grant application) as Project Director (PD). It may be a position that is potentially a permanent position, such as a tenure-track position or, for government jobs, “career” or “career conditional” appointment. Time in a postdoctoral training position typically does not count toward the first five years in a career track position because institutions typically do not allow postdoctoral scholars to submit an application (other than a fellowship grant application) as PD. 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, with the exception of pre- or post-doctoral grants and AFRI Seed Grants. Federal funding received by the applicant as Co-PD of previously awarded competitive grants does not count against New Investigator eligibility.

11. What is the eligibility for strengthening grants for New Investigators (Seed grants and Strengthening Standard 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. Please see the FAQs below for explanations of small and mid-sized institution, minority-serving institution, limited institutional success, and EPSCoR. A New Investigator from one of these

Strengthening-eligible types of institutions can have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application.

12. 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 for Strengthening Grants.

13. I qualify as a New Investigator and am also located at a strengthening-eligible institution described in FAQ #11. Can I submit two different seed grant applications to AFRI during the same fiscal year?

No, an applicant may only submit one seed grant application as PD to AFRI in a given fiscal year. However, if you are a New Investigator and are also at an institution eligible to submit strengthening grant applications, then your seed grant application will be considered as both a New Investigator Seed Grant application and a Strengthening Seed Grant application, which may increase the likelihood of it being funded.

14. I previously received an AFRI Strengthening Seed Grant. Am I eligible to submit another Seed Grant as a New Investigator?

No, you may not apply for another seed grant as a New Investigator. However, if you are at a strengthening-eligible institution described in FAQ #11, then you may submit another Strengthening Seed Grant application. You are also eligible to submit a New Investigator Standard Grant application.

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

New Investigators at small or mid-sized institution may be eligible to have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application. 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. Eligible small or mid-sized institutions must also have limited institutional success, as defined in FAQ #17 (except when located in an EPSCoR state, as defined in FAQ #18).

16. What is a minority-serving institution?

New Investigators at minority-serving institution may be eligible to have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application. For the AFRI Program, minority-serving institution is defined by enrollment of minority group or combination of minority groups exceeds 50% of total enrollment. Eligible minority-serving institutions must also have limited institutional success, as defined in FAQ #17 (except when located in an EPSCoR state, as defined in FAQ #18).

17. 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.

See the [AFRI RFA Resources page](#), “Table 1 Most Successful Institutions” in the attachments list.

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

New Investigators at degree-granting institutions or state agricultural experiment stations located in EPSCoR states may be eligible to have their application considered as both a New Investigator application and a Strengthening application. The strengthening component of 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 Strengthening grants in the FASE program. See FAQ #19 on how the USDA-EPSCoR States are determined each year.

19. 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.