

FFAR Program Evaluation: FAQs

1. *How does FFAR define assessment and evaluation?*

FFAR recognizes five domains of evaluation based on Rossi, Lipsey & Henry (2019), outlined below:

- Assessment of Need
 - *A needs assessment for a food and agriculture research program identifies and prioritizes the specific challenges, critical gaps and opportunities within the food system and agricultural sector that require research interventions. It helps stakeholders, including funders, policymakers, researchers, agricultural practitioners and the value chain, understand what areas of the system need innovation, scientific inquiry or technical solutions using real data. This assessment ensures that research funding is directed toward the most relevant, high-impact areas that address the needs of farmers, communities and ecosystems, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of investments in agricultural and food system research.*
- Assessment of Theory & Design
 - *A theory and design assessment of food and agriculture research funding evaluates the underlying logic, assumptions and structure guiding how funds are allocated, managed and directed toward specific research goals. This evaluation ensures that the underlying theory of change (or logic model) is strategically aligned with sectoral needs, global challenges and the potential for transformative impact in agriculture and food systems. It helps determine if the proposed funding model realistically connects desired outputs and outcomes, and whether the assumptions about how change will occur are credible and supported by evidence.*
- Assessment of Process & Implementation
 - *A process and implementation assessment of food and agriculture research funding evaluates how efficiently and effectively funding is managed, allocated, and utilized throughout the lifecycle of research projects. This type of assessment ensures that the operational aspects of funding—from grant allocation to project execution—are functioning as intended, delivering the desired outputs, and meeting the goals of the funding program, portfolio or consortium and helps explain why they are or are not.*

- Assessment of Outcomes & Impacts
 - *An outcomes and impact assessment of food and agriculture research funding evaluates the tangible results of funded projects and how these results contribute to broader societal, economic and environmental goals. This assessment determines whether the research investments led to measurable changes in agricultural practices, productivity, food security, sustainability and overall well-being of communities. These evaluations offer accountability to funders, stakeholders and beneficiaries by demonstrating the effectiveness, value and benefits generated, and they inform decisions about whether to continue, scale, modify or discontinue research programs.*
- Assessment of Efficiency & Cost
 - *An efficiency and cost assessment of food and agriculture research funding evaluates how well resources (funds, time, labor and materials) are utilized to achieve desired outcomes. This type of evaluation examines the relationship between the inputs (resources provided) and outputs (results achieved) or outcomes (changes created), ensuring that the funding is used in a manner that maximizes value for money while minimizing waste and delays. It helps identify ways to optimize the program's processes and improve cost-effectiveness.*

2. *What types of evaluations does FFAR contract?*

- We ask the evaluator(s) to systematically collect and analyze data about the work we've funded in a specific program area to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. We often ask for evaluators to assess the outcomes of programs with completed research grants. In these cases, we seek an understand the tangible results of research projects (i.e., deliverables) and how they have advanced fields of study and/or changed decision-maker attitudes or behavior (e.g., industry, farmers, producers, food supply chain actors, government, and/or consumers) and enhanced the scientific workforce's skills. For programs or funding portfolios that have very mature research projects (~7 years from completion date), we seek an assessment of their impact on agriculture, the environment and society and the cost-effectiveness of their solutions. At times we may ask an evaluator to assess other aspects of a research funding program including assessments of the process and implementation.

3. How do academics or issue experts fit in?

- Issue experts can play several roles in a program evaluation. While they may not have formal evaluative science training, issue experts are uniquely aware of the value of the research project deliverables under assessment. As such, experts can and should be part of evaluation team proposals. Another option is for an evaluation team to lean on an expert panel—in this case, the experts can provide expert opinion on deliverables without taking a larger role in the evaluation. For programs or portfolios with mature projects (~7 years or more since completion date) that have already been assessed for outcomes, experts like economists can play a key role in looking at the cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness of the outcomes.

4. Does a potential evaluator or evaluation team need to meet all the desired skills and experiences listed in the evaluation RFP?

- In most cases, FFAR prefers evaluation teams that can meet all the requirements listed. However, if you bring the appropriate skills and experience to excel at a portion of what is requested in an RFP, we invite you to apply and share how you would be the best person or group to take on that part of the work. Once all proposals are received, FFAR may partner evaluators based on their proposals or fund multiple proposals addressing different parts of the RFP.

5. Who should submit a proposal? How are program evaluation contracts written and executed?

- FFAR can contract with 1099s (independent contractors), for-profits and 501(c)(3) nonprofits. FFAR enters fixed priced contracts with payment based on deliverables. If necessary, based on the selected proposal's requirements, FFAR may consider time and material costs.

6. Does FFAR require a funding match for program evaluation proposals?

- No. Presently funds for program evaluations are made through FFAR's operating budget. Only funds tied to research grants require FFAR's 1:1 dollar match.

7. Does FFAR allow indirect costs in program evaluation budget proposals?

- In short, yes, we will consider proposals with indirect costs. Evaluations at FFAR are fee-for-service work, not grants, and various entities apply. Our priority is to get an evaluation that meets our needs and provides the most value for the money. Some



proposals from individuals or firms often contain expenses like indirect costs in a grant. While we will accept a proposal submitted by a university, high administrative costs may weaken the proposal's competitiveness.

8. Are FFAR program evaluations from federal funding agencies?

- No. FFAR is a 501(c)(3) and program evaluation contracts are paid solely through FFAR from our operating budget.