



# Contracted Work: Seeding Solutions Program Evaluation

## *Request For Proposals*



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## About FFAR

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture (FFAR)'s mission is to build collaborative partnerships to support audacious science addressing today's food and agriculture challenges. To do so, FFAR has built a research investment model to fill critical knowledge gaps, develop solutions with momentous impact and prepare the scientific workforce to tackle impending challenges head on. FFAR's work requires significant collaboration across the food and agriculture system to foster multidisciplinary expertise, input from stakeholders and support from a range of funding partners. FFAR's convening capabilities and agile approach leverage public funds by building public-private partnerships — resulting in an average of \$1.4 in match to every \$1 of FFAR funding.

## About the Seeding Solutions Funding Program

Launched in 2017, [Seeding Solutions](#) is our annual grant program that funds audacious research supporting FFAR's Priority Areas, previously designated as Challenge Areas. This evaluation will consider awarded projects connected to FFAR's former Challenge Areas (2017 - 2024 program years). The pioneering science funded through this program enables the convening of novel partnerships spanning the food and agriculture sector to collaboratively solve bold challenges across geographic scales. FFAR annually awards approximately 10 grants through the Seeding Solutions program, ranging from \$300,000 to \$1 million per award. Grantees must provide matching funds from non-federal partners. Since inception, \$125M was awarded across 79 executed Seeding Solutions projects. Of those awarded funds, FFAR has provided \$58.7M in funding with \$66.5M in partner match funding.

### *Program Aims*

- 1) Accelerate radical, applied or re-imagined innovation and transformative research across FFAR's research areas.
- 2) Promote new and novel partnerships that extend beyond the project's lifespan by increasing the integration of industry, farmer, producer, and/or consumer stakeholder perspective in the development, planning, and data capture phase of projects.
- 3) Ensure research deliverables are scalable and applicable to U.S. food and agriculture systems

- 4) Serve the public good by making data open and accessible, and by contributing to food and agriculture workforce development.
- 5) Seek unique perspectives through participatory stakeholder engagement and developing results to serve the diverse stakeholders committed to addressing challenges related to food supply and agricultural sustainability.
- 6) Complement USDA research programs without duplicating efforts and investment

## Scope of Evaluation

FFAR seeks to evaluate the success of the Seedings Solutions program for 2017 to 2024 program cycles. The evaluator, in collaboration with FFAR, will define criteria and standards of success (i.e. metrics); FFAR has established relevant technology readiness levels (TRLs) that the evaluator will use to track innovation and compare projects. It is important for the evaluator to capture project outputs, outcomes and where available, impacts (including how project outputs have influenced the agriculture value chain and/or informed policy development).

We envision a dual formative and summative program evaluation to **assess process and implementation** (years 2017-2024), and to **assess outcomes and impacts** (years 2017 – 2023), as defined in the FFAR Program Evaluation FAQs. The Seeding Solutions program year refers to the year the RFA is released. Awards are typically made in the following year. Through the evaluation, we hope to better understand how efficiently and effectively the program is managed as well as uncover whether and how project deliverables are being used to date and contributing to the U.S. food and agriculture system. We foresee the evaluator conducting a cross-project comparative analysis for the 39 completed projects, using an agreed-upon set of metrics. Additionally, the evaluator will assess the operational aspects of funding for all 79 executed projects. Finally, we envision the evaluator creating 1-3 exemplar cases (i.e. detailed case studies) using a mixed methods approach, which includes quantitative analyses and qualitative analyses to calculate cost-effectiveness and counterfactuals. We expect all findings—and recommendations where applicable—to be evidence-based with references to supporting evaluation data (e.g., survey findings).

### *FFAR Will Provide*

- Contact information for grantees and project partners
- Contact information for relevant FFAR staff

- High-level budget information for Seeding Solutions projects
- High-level applicant demographics
- Annual and final reports submitted by grantees
- Project proposals for all grants (e.g., completed and still in progress)

#### *Evaluator Data Collection Expectations*

- Desk review of all FFAR project related documents
- Survey and/or interviews of project PIs, match partners, value chain next- and end-users and other experts in the field of study
- Other data mining as deemed necessary

#### *Evaluation Questions*

1. To what extent did funded projects accelerate innovation across FFAR research areas through development of new technologies/approaches, validation of existing technologies/approaches or adaptation of existing technologies/approaches?
2. To what extent were new or novel partnerships created and sustained?
3. To what extent did projects integrate industry, end-user, or other non-research team members and consult diverse stakeholders during project design, implementation or outreach?
4. To what extent did funded projects deliver scalable solutions to U.S. and/or global food and agriculture systems?
5. To what extent did funded projects contribute to food and agriculture workforce development?
6. To what extent did funded projects address gaps in federal research funding for food and agriculture?
7. To what extent is the Seeding Solutions program structure (e.g., type of research funded, funding amount, proposal turnaround time, match requirement, etc.) appropriate for accelerating innovation across FFAR research areas?

## Evaluation Timeline & Products

#### *Expected Products & Deliverables*

1. Standalone external-facing executive summary of findings (2-5 pages)
2. Cross-project comparison master spreadsheet with all compiled data
3. Slide deck presentation of preliminary findings
4. Process and Implementation Final Report (20 page maximum) describing:

- Evaluation background,
  - Methodology (as appendix item),
  - Strengths and weaknesses of the current structure and management of the Seeding Solutions program,
  - Assessment-related, evidence-based recommendations for structure and design modifications of future Seeding Solutions program
5. Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts Final report (30 page maximum) describing:
- Evaluation background,
  - Methodology (as appendix item),
  - Findings including data visualization, interpretations of findings,
    - i. final report findings and recommendations should be evidence-based with references to supporting evaluation data (e.g., survey findings, cross-project comparison table).
  - Conclusion.

### *Estimated Project Timeline*

- Anticipated contract execution date: Friday, March 7, 2025
- Define criteria and standards of success for process and implementation assessment and for outcomes and impact assessment completed: Friday, March 21, 2025
- Fully compiled cross-project comparison master spreadsheet: Monday, July 21, 2025
- Presentation of preliminary process and implementation findings: Friday, October 3, 2025
- Presentation of preliminary outcomes and impacts findings: Monday, November 10, 2025
- Draft final reports: Monday, December 1, 2025
- Final reports and all deliverables: Monday, December 22, 2025

### *Estimated Project Budget*

- \$100,000 to \$200,000 (USD)

## Proposal Guidelines

All proposals are to be submitted by Friday, February 21, 2025, 5:00 p.m. PT deadline. Proposals should be submitted as a Portable Document Format (PDF) via email to



[cgambino@foundationfar.org](mailto:cgambino@foundationfar.org) with the subject line "Seeding Solutions Program Evaluation Proposal".

FFAR welcomes individuals or teams with agriculture and food systems and evaluative methods expertise to apply. If beneficial to the success of the evaluation process, FFAR may match one or more individuals into a team. A successful team will include individuals with evaluative methods experience (especially in evaluating research investments) as well as individuals with sufficient technical depth and breadth in agriculture and food systems research to evaluate the success of individual projects across a range of subject areas.

### *Proposal Process Timeline*

- Submission deadline: Friday, February 28, 2025
- Finalist presentations and panel discussions: Monday, March 3 through Friday, March 7, 2025
- Client reference checks: Monday, March 10, 2025

### *Proposals Should Contain the Following Sections*

1. Applicant background/overview (1 page maximum), including an indication of relevant expertise
2. Previous experience(s) of research program evaluation work with a similar or related scope (2 pages maximum)
3. Description approach and evaluation plan (5 pages maximum)
  - a. Including relevant indicators to assess proposed evaluation questions
4. Project budget and budget justification (this evaluation does not require matching funds)
5. Evaluation timeline
6. Project key personnel including roles and responsibilities
7. Team members' CVs
8. Links to deliverables from past evaluation projects of a similar scope
9. Client references

### *Finalist Presentation Preparation*

FFAR will hold a 60-minute meeting (20-minutes presentation and 40-minute panel interview) with finalists via video conference. The presentation should highlight the applicant's approach, including the criteria and standards they envision being used to



measure the success of projects and the Seeding Solutions portfolio as a whole. Additionally, the presentation should include a brief explanation of methods, followed by a showcase of how collected data may be visualized.

The panel discussion may be used to clarify the methods used for collection and analysis of data. Additionally, the panel may inquire about past projects and previous client relations to ensure the applicant and FFAR are a good fit.