



# Contracted Work: Tipping Points 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 Tipping Points Funding Program

The [Tipping Points Program](#) explores the intricate dynamics of regional food systems, focusing on critical research questions that investigate why existing food system interventions—such as those centered solely on food access and affordability—have not resulted in substantial improvements in food security and health. The program aims to identify systems-level leverage points that, when targeted, could drive transformational change in reducing food insecurity, enhancing health outcomes, and strengthening economic resilience.

Through collaboration with communities and organizations in U.S. cities, program-funded researchers developed models of regional food systems to assess the interactions among key system components and how these interactions influence broader outcomes. FFAR challenged grantees to examine multiple food-system interventions and external factors—including connections to housing, transportation, and other regional systems—to better understand the collective impacts of these elements. The research is guided by foundational questions, including:

- 1) How do different components of the food system influence one another, and what are cascading effects?
- 2) Which policy and program interventions work best in specific contexts?
- 3) How can interventions be adjusted or combined to optimize their impact on the food system, community health and the economy?



By addressing these research questions, the Tipping Points Program has awarded \$11.1 million across 5 executed projects to generate data-driven insights that inform future food system strategies. Of those awarded funds, FFAR has provided \$5.6M in funding with \$5.5M in partner match funding from 42 co-funders spanning academic institutions, community organizations, non-profits and more.

### *Program Aims*

- 1) Increase understanding of complex systems through participatory computational modeling involving community stakeholders.
- 2) Identify leverage points within the system where investments can lead to transformational change.

## Scope of Evaluation

FFAR seeks to evaluate the success of the Tipping Points program. The evaluator, in collaboration with FFAR, will define criteria and standards of success (i.e. metrics). 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 summative program evaluation to **assess outcomes and impacts**, as defined in the [FFAR Program Evaluation FAQs](#). Through the evaluation, we hope to 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 5 completed projects, using an agreed-upon set of metrics. Finally, we envision the evaluator creating 1-2 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 Tipping Points 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 increase our understanding of complex systems and dynamics affecting regional food systems?
2. To what extent did funded projects effectively utilize community or stakeholder participation in modeling?
3. To what extent did funded projects identify leverage points within the system where investments (within or outside of a regional food system) can lead to transformational change?
4. To what extent did funded projects identify interventions different from what was standard practice in communities at the time the RFA was released in 2017?
5. To what extent have new solutions or interventions developed as a result of these projects reduced food insecurity, improved health or enhanced economic outcomes?

## Evaluation Timeline & Products

#### *Expected Products & Deliverables*

1. Standalone external-facing executive summary of findings (2-5 pages)
  - It should overview the methodological rigor, highlight outputs and outcomes of the program backed by evidence of project success.
2. Cross-project comparison master spreadsheet with all compiled data
3. Slide deck presentation of preliminary findings
4. 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: Monday, April 14, 2025
- Define criteria and standards of success for outcomes and impact assessment completed: Friday, May 2, 2025
- Fully compiled cross-project comparison master spreadsheet: Monday, August 18, 2025
- Presentation of preliminary outcomes and impacts findings: Monday, October 6, 2025
- Draft final report: Monday, December 1, 2025
- Final report and all deliverables: Monday, December 22, 2025

### *Estimated Project Budget*

- \$80,000 to \$130,000 (USD)

## Proposal Guidelines

All proposals are to be submitted by Monday, March 31, 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 "Tipping Points Program Evaluation Proposal".

FFAR welcomes individuals or teams with social science, systems science, 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 social science, system science and food systems research to evaluate the success of individual projects that focused on participatory modeling efforts and novel stakeholder engagement approaches to study system interactions.

### *Proposal Process Timeline*

- Submission deadline: Monday, March 31, 2025

- Finalist presentations and panel discussions: Monday, April 7 through Friday, April 11, 2025
- Client reference checks: Monday, April 7 through Friday, April 11, 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 Tipping Points 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.