

USDA

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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- Competitive grants from USDA are through NIFA
- <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/competitive-AFRI-nonAFRI>
- AFRI Priorities under the Farm Bill:
 - Plant health and production and plant products
 - Animal health and production and animal products
 - Food safety, nutrition, and health
 - Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
 - Agriculture systems and technology
 - Agriculture economics and rural communities

These areas go through some changes with every Farm Bill. Still operating under the 2018 Farm Bill, which "expired" in 2023. It has been extended every year since.

USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Foundational Programs

- AFRI Foundational Programs--six priority areas (these **can** change in Farm Bill renewals):
 - Plant health and production and plant products
 - Animal health and production and animal products
 - Food safety, nutrition, and health
 - Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
 - Agriculture systems and technology
 - Agriculture economics and rural communities
- Different 'Project Types', but the proposal must still relate to a **priority area**: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/AFRI-Project-Types-FY25.pdf>
 - Research ('Fundamental Research' or 'Applied Research')
 - Education (e.g. Proposal to for a postdoctoral project to develop plant production education programs for K-12 teachers)
 - Extension
 - Integrated (has Research, Education and Extension components)

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Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Foundational Programs

- Funding cutoff lines vary greatly across programs and sub-programs. They also vary from year-to-year.
- Check this page frequently—The Notices of Funding Opportunities now have an unfortunate acronym (NOFO)
 - <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/agriculture-food-research-initiative/afri-foundational-applied-science-program>
 - <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/agriculture-food-research-initiative/afri-funding-opportunities-resources>
- New NOFO for Education and Workforce Development posted Jan 20, 2026
 - <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/agriculture-food-research-initiative-education-workforce-development>
 - Funding opportunity USDA-NIFA-AFRI-011596
 - Click ‘Download the NOFO’. This is a pdf with full instructions.
 - You will also need to register for grants.gov Check in with Sponsored Research or the Grants Specialist in your dept/college.

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Pre-doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships Programs, 'Agriculture and Food Research Initiative - Education and Workforce Development (EWD)'

Program Goal--Prepare the next generation of scientists through fellowships for doctoral candidates & post-doctoral scholars

Websites:

- New NOFO for Education and Workforce Development posted Jan 20, 2026
 - <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/agriculture-food-research-initiative-education-workforce-development>
 - **Funding opportunity USDA-NIFA-AFRI-011596**
 - Also, frequently check updates on this page
<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/agriculture-food-research-initiative/afri-education-workforce-development>
 - Postdoctoral and Predoctoral are not the only types of grants in this RFA, so read carefully
 - **Postdoctoral (Program Code A7201) Deadline, April 30, 2026**
 - **Predoctoral (Program Code A7101) Deadline, April 16, 2026**

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- Fellowship applications must be in AFRI Priority Areas
- Unfortunately, must be US citizen or permanent resident (Green card holder)
- **Postdoctoral Fellowships (program code A7201), Deadline, April 30, 2026**
 - \$244,000 total over 2 years
 - Funds primarily for salary
 - Up to \$60,000 allowed for other expenditures: travel, supplies, etc.
 - Resubmission allowed (must include Response to Previous Review)
- **Predoctoral Fellowships (program code A7101), Deadline April 16, 2026**
 - \$180,000 total
 - 3 years
 - \$35,000 stipend per year
 - \$22,000 tuition, supplies, travel, etc. per year

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Application process logistics:

- All NIFA and AFRI applications are through grants.gov
 - **Contact the Grants Specialist in your department or FSU Sponsored Research** for help from the Authorized Organizational Representative in setting up with **grants.gov** through RAMP (Research Administration Management Portal)
 - **Ask your mentor who is the Grants Specialist in your department/college!!!**
 - You must do this in order to get access to the full application package
 - The Grants Specialist in your department/college will help you set up the application in the RAMP system
 - Unfortunately, must be a citizen, national or permanent resident of the US
- Check for updates to the NOFO up until the time of submission!!!! They can and will make substantial changes at the last minute!!!!

USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture NIFA/AFRI grant applications.

FSU RAMP interfaces with grants.gov

- Ask for help from your mentor, your department grants specialist or Sponsored Research
- Download the current **'Fact Sheet' from FSU's Sponsored Research website**—<https://www.research.fsu.edu/research-offices/sra/facts-sheet/>

The screenshot shows the RAMP Research Administration Management Portal. The header includes the RAMP logo and the text "RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT PORTAL". Below the header is a navigation bar with the following items: Dashboard, Agreements, COI, Export Control, Grants, IACUC, and IRB. Underneath the navigation bar, there are sub-links: Funding Proposal (with an upward-pointing triangle), Complex Projects, Awards, Reports, and Help Center. At the bottom left, there is a breadcrumb trail: "... > Grants > Funding Proposal".

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT PORTAL	Dashboard	Agreements	COI	Export Control	Grants	IACUC	IRB
	Funding Proposal ▲	Complex Projects	Awards	Reports	Help Center		
... > Grants > Funding Proposal							

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2026 NOFO

The info from the next few pages is from these pages

https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2026-02/FY%202026%20AFRI%20Education%20and%20Workforce%20Development%20NOFO%20Additional%20Information%20for%20Part%20IV%2C%20C%202.17.261_remediated.pdf

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/AFRI-Review-Criteria-FY26.pdf>

Both can be accessed from this page

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/afri-request-applications-resources>

Be sure to check for new versions at this Resources page!!!!

Check for changes up until the time you submit it.

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NIFA/AFRI grant application—guts of the proposal

- **Project Summary/Abstract, ~250 words**

- The summary should include the relevance of the project to the goals of AFRI EWD. With every new NOFO, there may be changes. Be sure you have the full application package, not just the NOFO description pdf.

- a) Names and institutions of the PD and Primary Mentor

- b) Predoctoral or Postdoctoral application

- c) Project type (research, education, extension, or integrated)

- d) Indicate the primary AFRI Farm Bill **priority area** focus of the project

- **Relevance of the project to the goals of pre- or post-doctoral program area**

- **Relevance of the project to the goals of AFRI Education and Workforce Development (EWD)**

- The Project Summary should be a short, concise description of the research, education, and/or extension project to be pursued in the applicant's proposed doctoral problem to be studied or postdoctoral training.

- How will project contribute to your training and skills for 'career agility'?

- **Make all of this explicit!!!** People who are very busy need to read the Project Summary quickly and route it appropriately. Make it clear and easy to read.

Also, these Project Summaries go to Congress for assessment at Farm Bill renewal time.

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NIFA/AFRI grant application—guts of the proposal

- Project Narrative— (10 pg 12-pt font for Postdoc, 6 pg for Predoc)
 - 1) Response to previous reviews (if a resubmission). Does not count for pg limit.
 - 2) **Training/Career Development Plan**
 - 3) **Mentoring Plan** (How will your mentor participate?) mentor will also submit a Letter of Commitment)
 - 4) **Project Plan**—for a Postdoctoral plan, should be ‘totally independent of the mentor’s’. **Explicitly** state how this is a new direction from the mentor’s work. ‘Avoid open-ended screens or undefined outcomes’.
 - Introduction: Background, goals, specific aims
 - Rationale & Significance, in addition to stating the rationale & the significance, **‘Clearly describe the specific relationship of the project’s objectives to one of the Program Area Priorities. The Program Area Priority(ies) must be specifically identified’**. (Predoctoral also discuss ‘proposed curricular activities’)
 - Approach—refer to instructions. Multiple ways to organize, but be sure to address: **What is the hypothesis? How will this approach address this hypothesis? What if it doesn’t work as planned? How will your results advance the field? Why will your results be significant? What are the Milestones, the Project Timeline and the plan for disseminating results?**
 - Evaluation Plan—This is separate from the Milestones and Timeline within the ‘Approach’. This is Evaluation of the Training/Career Development Plan, the Mentoring Plan and the Project Plan.

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It really helps the reviewers if you make your statements of relevance explicitly and clearly in the Narrative. If a reviewer finds your research plan exciting and wants to make a strong case for it to be funded, the statements on relevance will help them do that.

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NIFA/AFRI grant application—Other documents

This can change!!! Carefully read the NOFO for the year you apply!!!

- Bibliography and References Cited
- Facilities and Other Resources (ask your mentor for help with this and with 'Equipment'. He/she will have boilerplate for this.)
- Equipment
- Other attachments:
 - Key Personnel—roles and responsibilities of Project Director, collaborators, mentor, etc. (don't include Biographical Sketches here)
 - Mentor Letter, Reference Letters, and Documentation of Collaboration.
 - Primary Mentor Letter of Commitment
 - Collaborating Mentor Letters
 - Reference letters (3)—not primary or collaborating mentors
 - Academic standing—Postdoctoral: Documentation that all requirements for PhD have been satisfied. Predoctoral: letter from thesis committee asserting advancement to candidacy
- Logic Model—'Encouraged' for all types of projects (Narrative or Logic Model Chart) (Resource on how to plan this <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/data-science-food-agricultural-systems-dsfas/integrated-programs-logic-model-planning-process>)
- Management Plan—Required for Integrated Projects, 'Encouraged' for all project types
- Data Management Plan
- Documentation of Collaboration
- Pre-prints in press, if applicable. Must be in press at a peer-reviewed journal, with letter of acceptance.
- Expanded Key Personnel—Applicant is the sole Project Director (PD). Mentor will be in 'Other (Specify)'. Biographical Sketches attached here
- Current and pending support (For both PD and PD's mentor)
- Budget—standard grants.gov budget (ask your dept. Grants Specialist for help)—includes budget justification, any subcontractor information, etc. See guidelines on Matching Funds and Costsharing.
- Supplemental Info (See specifics of program to which you are applying. Conflict of Interest form)

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Review criteria for AFRI EWD applications:

- 1) Merit of the Application for Science Research, Education, and/or Extension**
- 2) Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management**
- 3) Project Relevance (to the 'specific Program Area Priorities identified in this RFA')**

Within each of these review criteria, there are lists of specific points for evaluation. Write with these in mind.

**They are not kidding about the review criteria.
Do not blow any of them off.
Address each point.**

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/AFRI-Review-Criteria.pdf>

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Review criteria and the **Reviewer's perspective**:

- Check for the most recent Review criteria document from the Resources page for this NOFO

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/agriculture-food-research-initiative/afri-funding-opportunities-resources>

- Also check for the most recent USDA reviewer guidelines here

https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/FY2021-FY2022-AFRI-Reviewer-Guidelines-011421-508_0.pdf

- This document gives reviewer criteria for assessing each of the 3 review criteria from the previous page
- By the time a reviewer is on the 15th proposal and it is the night that the reviews have to be uploaded, he/she really needs to be fed the most important information in bite-sized pieces.
- The substance has to be there along with the sound bites, but **do not make the reviewer dig for the main points!!!**
 - Try to connect back to hypotheses and goals at every transition!

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Other tips:

- **Don't go TOO broad in your Introduction.**
 - It should be a focused review for your research problem, not a review of your entire field.
 - Continually ask yourself if a piece of background information is necessary for the reviewer to understand the significance, the goals and the approach.
- **Do not underestimate the importance of considering potential pitfalls and alternative approaches.**
 - If you don't address at least a few of these, your proposal will probably not be funded.
 - It is very easy at this stage to assume that because your mentor thinks it will work, it will work. Not necessarily....
 - Tell them about the pitfalls that are obvious—they may be obvious to a reviewer in your field.
 - What are potential solutions and how will results from other Aims allow you to get around this Aim if it doesn't work?
 - Tell them about the non-obvious pitfalls for which you have a really clever solution.
 - This has a huge impact on the reviewer and their perception of your research sophistication.