

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

- 43) **Q. Page 4 - Relevant Solicitation Language: “USDA/FAS has removed country guidances.” In solicitations from prior years there was a Country Guidance annex which gave information on anticipated Project Award Value and Anticipated Operating Budget. Since the Country Guidance annex has been removed this year, could you provide any additional information about parameters for Commodity Credit Corporation Admin funding that applicants could expect to be available for start-up activities prior to monetization completion?**

A. Per 7 CFR 1499 on the use of CCC Admin funds: CCC-Admin funds are limited to costs related to the administration, monitoring, and evaluation of the activities under the agreement, including technical assistance related to the monetization of the donated commodities. Applicants should take into consideration the most efficient use of resources when preparing their proposal. Refer to pages 20-24 of the NOFO for more information on commodity management, monetization, and budget sections.

- 44) **Q. Page 28 - 6.2 Review Criteria. Relevant Solicitation Language: “There is no cost share or match requirement for this program. However, applications that include well-reasoned cost share contributions, as defined in 7 CFR 1499.2, may receive up to 2 bonus points. To be considered for bonus points, the cost share must be equivalent to one percent or more of the total operating budget. Inclusion of cost share does not guarantee bonus points. USDA/FAS will evaluate proposed cost share in terms of value to the project, the ability of the Applicant to provide and use the cost share, level of detail, sustainability, verifiability, and clarity of commitment.” Question: The NOFO notes that cost share is not required, but that inclusion of cost share equivalent to one percent or more of the total operating budget can result in the provision of bonus points. Since the decision to provide bonus points for cost share rests partially on the “level of detail, sustainability, verifiability, and clarity of commitment” could you clarify what type of detail you are looking for related to proposed cost share?**

A. Cost-share is not a requirement. For an applicant to be considered for the cost-share bonus points, the applicant should include strong and sufficient information on how the applicant will meet the proposed cost share commitment as this will be a binding requirement as part of the cooperative agreement. In addition, the applicant should showcase how the cost-share will strengthen the sustainability of the project objectives. Please refer to page 28 of the NOFO.

- 45) **Q. Solicitation Reference: 6.2, Table 2, Page 27 - Relevant Solicitation Language: “Strategic Analysis: USDA/FAS will evaluate Applicants on the...effectiveness of integration of cross-cutting topics into analysis and strategy, including the risk assessment and management strategy and measures to reduce fraud, waste, and misuse of U.S. provided resources.” Noting that in the first paragraph of 4.2.b. Strategic Analysis instructions on page 14, the last sentence about addressing cost effectiveness, fraud, waste, and abuse was deleted, would USDA/FAS similarly delete “including the risk assessment and management strategy and measures to reduce fraud, waste, and**

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

misuse of U.S. provided resources” from the Strategic Analysis review criteria on page 27 in order to ensure alignment between the instructions and the review criteria?

A. The last sentence about addressing cost effectiveness, fraud, waste, and abuse has been reinserted. The Strategic Analysis review criteria remain unmodified.

- 46) **Q. Page 8 - 2.4 Funding Restrictions, Compensation for Personal Services states “Post Hardship Differential and non-monetizable fringe benefits, such as health insurance coverage, are not included in this ceiling”: Would USDA please confirm whether other DSSR-aligned benefits, such as, housing, TQSA, HHE shipment, UAB, education allowance, storage, and others, may also be excluded from the cap when allowed under the implementing partner’s official policy?**

“Compensation for personal services: Employees, consultants, or other personnel, including those of subrecipients, and regardless of the method of engagement, may not exceed the pro-rata equivalent of GS-15, Step 10 on the 2025 General Schedule2 (for 2025, \$162,672 per year, \$623.60 per day, or \$77.95 per hour) Post Hardship Differential and non-monetizable fringe benefits, such as health insurance coverage, are not included in this ceiling.” Page 8 for consistency across all applicants, could the U.S. Government please define and itemize “monetizable fringe benefits?”

A. DSSR-aligned benefits would also not be included in this ceiling. For these benefits, applicants must still demonstrate its reasonability, allocability, and allowability. Benefits allowed under the implementer's official policy are not automatically considered allowable. Monetizable fringe benefits should be determined by each implementer's official policies and is not defined by the U.S. government.

- 47) **Q. Would USDA reconsider limiting subject matter experts providing short-term technical assistance to the GS-15, Step 10, compensation salary ceiling? Per the procurement standards in 2 CFR 200.319, Competition, “all procurement transactions under the Federal award must be conducted in a manner that provides full and open competition and is consistent with the standards of this section and 200.320.” As consultants are not employees but rather professional service providers operating in a competitive, market environment, restricting remuneration to a compensation ceiling limits the ability of applicants to conduct competitive procurements. Further, consultants typically earn higher base rates than employees as they independently finance fringe benefits such as health care, process their own taxes, etc. Could USDA please confirm that offerors can propose compensation for personal services that exceed the pro-rata equivalent of the GS-15 Step 10 rate of \$162,672? Could USDA please confirm that offerors should apply their established local compensation policies, even if they result in salary exceeding the GS-15 Step 10 rate of \$162,672?**

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. USDA/FAS is not considering revisions to the compensation ceiling at this time. As a general rule, proposed expenses should be cost effective and demonstrate responsible and efficient use of federal funds to achieve proposed project objectives.

- 48) **Q. For budgeting purposes, would USDA please confirm that an annual escalation may be provided for employees budgeted at the equivalent of GS-15 Step 10 on the 2025 General Schedule, which presumably adjusts upward annually to account for cost of living and inflation? If so, would USDA please advise if applicants are authorized to propose their own escalation or is there a standard USDA requirement?**

A. Any annual escalation rate must not lead to a salary that exceeds the equivalent of GS-15 Step 10 in any given year's general schedule. USDA does not have a standard escalation rate requirement.

- 49) **Q. Page 12, Section 4.1.b; Form of Application Submission, Required Content and Forms, and page 22 Section 4.2.g: Content Guidance, Budget: The NOFO limits the Budget Narrative to 15 pages, while also requiring detailed cost justifications, documentation (e.g., pricing data, salary history), cost principles (reasonableness, allowability, allocability), and interest calculations. Would USDA please consider that applicants do not submit budget notes by activity as it will require additional pages?**

A. Applicants should submit budget notes by activity.

- 50) **Q. Page 15, 4.2.d Organizational Capacity and Staffing: For subrecipients allocated 20% or more of the proposed operating budget, the NOFO instructs applicants to “provide details in the budget narrative...” Would USDA please clarify what details are required in the budget narrative – for example, should such subrecipients have a full budget narrative explaining costs embedded in the Prime Applicant’s own narrative?**

A. Applicants should provide comprehensive details of all proposed expenses. For subrecipients receiving a significant allocation of resources (20% +), Applicants should include sufficient information in the narrative to fully understand the rationale of these expenses. Refer to page 16 of the NOFO for more information.

- 51) **Q. Page 16, 4.2.d Organizational Capacity and Staffing, Subrecipient Letters of Commitment: Recognizing the requirement for Letters of Commitment from proposed subrecipients, would USDA please advise if Subrecipients require to partner exclusively with the Prime Applicant?**

A. USDA does not require subrecipients to partner exclusively with the Prime Applicant.

- 52) **Q. Page 16, 4.2.d Organizational Capacity and Staffing: Recognizing the changes to USAID staffing structure in 2025, many individuals with the appropriate title to provide references attesting to applicant performance are no longer employed by the**

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

Agency. Would USDA please confirm it is acceptable to name these individuals and provide their personal contact information, as opposed to Agency contact information? For Past Performance References, if a contracting/agreement officer or technical officer for a project is no longer employed by the US government, is it acceptable to request that the second section of the PPR be completed and submitted by that person?

A. Applicants may request a past performance review by any individual who currently or previously managed or was involved in a previous project and can attest sufficiently to the applicant's performance. The applicant should include in what capacity the former employee was involved in the previous project. Further, they can include personal contact information such as the referee's personal email.

- 53) Q. Page 32, 8.1 Administration and National Policy Requirements: Per National Policy Terms and Conditions, Subsection 36, Procurement of Goods and Services Outside the United States, “all goods and services procured or financed with US dollars which will be reimbursed under the award must meet the source and origin requirements specified in the award.” To ensure compliance in budgeting for goods/services required to implement the program, would USDA please advise what the approved source/origin requirements are for the various priority countries? To what extent does the U.S. Government, for the purposes of this grant, wish to see U.S. made materials used in this project?**

A. Applicants should refer to 2 CFR 200 and 7 CFR 1499 for source/origin requirements.

- 54) Q. Page 32, 8.1 Administration and National Policy Requirements: Per National Policy Terms and Conditions, Subsection 37, Prohibition on Certain Telecommunications and Video Surveillance Services or Equipment, “FAS recipients and subrecipients are prohibited from obligating or expending loan or grant funds... to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems that use covered telecommunications equipment or services...” Would USDA please advise if it holds any waivers for non-availability through the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), as some countries have state-controlled/single-option telecommunications platforms with no option for compliant systems to support internet access, phone lines, etc.?**

A. USDA cannot confirm if waivers for non-availability through the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) have been granted for projects in countries that have state-controlled/single-option telecommunication platforms. However, USDA will discuss the possibility of a waiver with the final selected applicant as awardee during the negotiations stage but cannot guarantee a waiver will be ultimately granted at this stage.

- 55) Q. Page 42–52, Appendix B – Budget Summary: The budget workbook already includes detailed, line-item costs by activity and funding source (e.g., Monetization, CCC, Cost Share). However, current narrative guidance requests re-stating many of these figures in narrative form. Would USDA please consider eliminating or reducing**

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

this duplication so the narrative can focus more on cost assumptions and rationale, rather than repeating figures that are already documented in the templates?

A. The budget narrative is not intended to repeat information but rather an opportunity to provide additional information such as rationale for why the costs are reasonable, allocable, allowable and necessary for project implementation. It should include the basis as well as formulas and assumptions used for proposed costs and should match the totals across all budget documents. Please refer to Appendix C, page 43 of the NOFO, for a sample Budget Narrative.

56) Q. In prior years, USDA released Country Guidance as an appendix. Without the country guidance applicants will design their applications based on their research. Given applications for the same country might differ in scope focus/sector, and value, would USDA please clarify how it is intended to evaluate applications submitted for the same country?

A. USDA/FAS will evaluate applications on their own merit based on Section 4, Application Contents and Formats; Section 5, Submission Requirements and Deadlines; using the point values specified in Table 2, page 28 of the NOFO.

57) Q. Is the funding for this award predicated on the sale of U.S. agricultural commodities?

A. Please refer to 3.1 Authorizing Statutes and Regulations on page 10 and f. Commodity Management on page 20 of the NOFO.

58) Q. Can you share guidance or examples of monetization price points at U.S. delivery and expected recovery rates? What are the typical ranges of local sale proceeds and USDA's cost-recovery targets (e.g., 70% threshold)?

A. Monetization price points are commodity and market dependent. Applicants should consider these aspects when deciding which commodity to propose. Commodities should be sold at a price equivalent to the full cost of the purchase and transport of commodities for use in monetization to maximize funds to meet project objectives. USDA has not established a minimum required cost recovery; however, cost recovery is a high-profile measurement of program efficiency. If the cost recovery is estimated to be (i) less than 70%, with 50% of the ocean freight moving via U.S. flag vessels, or (ii) less than 90% of the FOB cost of the commodity, then an alternative commodity should be considered. Applicants should include in their commodity management plans detailed information on the commodity proposed and how the Applicant plans to achieve at least a 70% cost recovery with its commodity monetization plan. If attaining at least a 70% cost recovery seems unlikely and no other alternatives exist, explain how the Applicant will adjust its commodity and freight finances and related project budget to account for that outcome.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity
Questions and Answers
July 9 - July 15, 2025

59) Q. Where can our organization track these solicitations once awarded?

A. USDA/FAS will notify Applicants of the status of their application/award by e-mail via FAIS. For more information on the award notice, please see page 32 of the NOFO.

60) Q. In the FY2025 NOFO, some of the previous years' requirements for the Commodity Management section were removed. Can USDA/FAS please confirm whether the FAIS will be updated accordingly, or whether Applicants should leave sections blank in completing the FAIS process?

A. Applications must be submitted through the Food Aid Information System and include all required forms and documents as defined in section 4 (Application Contents and Formats) and section 5 (Submission Requirements and Deadlines) by the posted deadline in order to be eligible. If an application does not include all documentation required by this notice of funding opportunity at the time of application due date and time, the application will be deemed ineligible. Please refer to page 24 of the NOFO, Submissions Requirements and Deadlines.

61) Q. In the process of selling the commodities to generate proceeds for program activities, would such transactions typically be subject to taxes or statutory charges such as import duties, VAT, or other levies in the recipient countries?

A. Monetization is an activity in which donated commodities are sold in a commercial fashion in local markets to generate cash resources for program implementation. As such, monetization sales may be taxed by the recipient country in line with commercial standards. Awardees may negotiate with host governments to permit the tax-free importation of commodities. However, USDA does not require tax-exemption for commodities being monetized.

62) Q. While we understand that Past Performance References are to be submitted directly by the reviewer via email to USDA using the APPENDIX E – Past Performance Review Template, could you clarify what is required under “past performance records” within the Organizational Capacity and Staffing section of the technical proposal?

A. Past Performance Records in Section 4.1b refers to the Past Performance Reviews that are submitted directly by the reviewer via email to USDA through ppded@usda.gov.

63) Q. Are we permitted to submit previously completed past performance references, or must all PPRs be newly developed for this submission?

A. Most recently completed past performance references may be submitted to PPDED by the reviewer in case newly developed past performance reviews are unavailable. An applicant

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

can request from PPDED a PPR from FY 2024 but this must be in advance and should be confirmed by PPDED.

- 64) **Q. Is the request to describe geography and target beneficiaries in both the Strategic Analysis and the Plan of Operation sections intentional? If so, should the content be duplicated in each section, or should each section present distinct content related to geography and target beneficiaries?**

A. The content for geography and target beneficiaries should not be a duplication in each section but should be described based on the purpose of the Strategic Analysis and Plan of Operation sections.

- 65) **Q. Could you please clarify whether proposed activities are expected to address all six objectives outlined in the program description, or if applicants may focus on a subset of these objectives?**

A. Applicants may propose interventions that address one or more of the six Food for Progress core objectives.

- 66) **Q. In the budget template provided by USDA and the budget narrative example in the NOFO, there is a section for 'Administration' expenses and 'Activity' expenses. Can you please clarify how applicants should determine which cost inputs should be included in the 'Administration' budget versus the 'Activity' budgets?**

A. Please review Answer to Question 43 on the limitation of the use of CCC Admin Funds. Costs that are related to the implementation of activities should be included under the relevant "Activity". Examples of such costs include beneficiary training, salary for technical staff, etc. Each applicant must evaluate their own proposed costs to determine the appropriate category.

- 67) **Q. Can USDA/FAS please confirm that applicants are also permitted to add a tab to contain all Excel parameters used in building the budget (e.g., allowance rates, inflation factors), provided this parameters tab does not include any information unrelated to the detailed budget tabs?**

A. Additional tabs may be added for activities only. Please refer to page 23 of the NOFO, g. Budget. Any additional explanatory information should be included in the budget narrative.

- 68) **Q. Appendix A of NOFO Mod. No. 001 (page 40) lists the requirement for Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) for the applicant and subrecipients separate from the requirements for the Organizational Capacity and Staffing Plan. However, Section 4.1, d, Organizational Capacity and Staffing (page 16) states that the UEI “for each subrecipient must be included in the description.” Can USDA/FAS confirm that**

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

applicants may include the Unique Entity Identifier for itself and subrecipients on the cover page in lieu of including it in the Organizational Capacity and Staffing section?

A. Applicants must include the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) in the description for the Organizational Capacity and Staffing section. If desired, Applicants may also include the UEI information on the cover page.

69) Q. Can USDA confirm if they have established an MOU with the counterpart Ministry that will facilitate project registration in the priority country applications, or should the bidders include that process in their timelines and planning?

Is there any specific in-country registration that we are required to provide as part of the submission?

A. If Applicants are not registered in the country, they should provide a plan and estimated timeline per section 4.2.d. USDA does not have MOUs with counterpart Ministries but will help, to the extent possible, in facilitating registration of the project. MOUs are not a requirement per the NOFO.

70) Q. Under Section 1(b), page 4, "New in FY 2025" where it is stated that "the subaward threshold for Modified Direct Costs has increased from \$25,000 to \$50,000," if a Recipient's NICRA contains the \$25,000 threshold will the \$50,000 threshold be allowed under any resulting award pending modification of the Recipient's NICRA?

A. The threshold change only applies to organizations using Modified Total Direct Costs to determine indirect costs. Organizations with a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) must follow their most recently approved agreement.

71) Q. Can USDA please confirm that standard indicators may count for more than one result? For example, FFPr indicator #17 (Number of policies, regulations...) maps to FFPr Result 2.4.2 and 2.1.1.1. Is using this indicator for both results sufficient, or may it only be used for one result and the other would require a custom indicator?

A. USDA confirms that some standard indicators map to more than one result and may be used to reflect more than one result in a proposal. A key consideration for proposing indicators is, as stated on page 18 of the NOFO, that "indicators should be sufficient to monitor the project's performance in achieving each result."

72) Q. For custom indicators, may proposals consider the use of indicators from former USG agencies, and should proposals indicate the source of custom indicators when used from those or other established expert sources?

A. Applicants may propose custom indicators that capture the specific results, and may consult publicly available, established indicator sets for ideas as relevant, including other USG standard indicator sets and validated indicators identified by relevant experts.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

Applicants should keep in mind how these indicators reflect the project's America First approach, as they think it applies to the proposed intervention. USDA/FAS will work with the selected awardees to finalize project performance indicators during the negotiation process.

73) Q. For indicators where it is not possible to establish a reasonable baseline estimate during the proposal stage; please confirm that the yearly targets can be based on percentage points increase (i.e. Y1: +5% over baseline, Y2: +7% over baseline, etc.)?

A. An estimated baseline value is preferred, but yearly targets showing percentage point changes absent a baseline value are allowed.

74) Q. Citations - preference for footnotes vs a separate attachment?

A. There is no preference as long as they are easy to follow and understand.

75) Q. Section 4.1.(a) Application Format states “Cite source information.” Could USDA please confirm that end notes do not count towards the page count.

A. End notes will not count toward the page count.

76) Q. Monitoring and Evaluation Budget (also included in Applicant's Budget Narrative) –Applicants must allocate, at a minimum, three percent (3%) of the total project operating budget (not the Federal award amount) towards monitoring and evaluation. If the Applicant is proposing to conduct an impact evaluation, USDA/FAS expects costs to range from five to ten percent (5% - 10%) of the total operating budget. Can the government please confirm that if an applicant proposes an impact evaluation, total M&E budget costs should be 5 - 10% of the project operating budget and not that the impact evaluation alone should reflect 5- 10% of the project operating budget?

A. If an impact evaluation is proposed, the total M&E budget costs should be 5 - 10% of the project operating budget.

77) Q. Section 4.2.e. Monitoring and Evaluation, hyperlinks to the “Monitoring and Evaluation Policy” and to the “standard FFPr program performance indicators” are not working. Could USDA please provide the links?

A. The links on page 19 of the NOFO to the Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and to the Standard FFPr program performance indicators work. The links are as follows:

Monitoring and Evaluation Policy: https://www.fas.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/fad_mande_policy_feb_2019.pdf.

Standard FFPr program performance indicators:

<https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/resources/guidance-food-aid-program-standard-indicators>.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

USDA/FAS will work with the selected awardees to finalize project performance indicators during the negotiation process.

78) Q. Section 4.1.(a) Application Format states “Number each page consecutively in the footer.” Could USDA please confirm that signed PDF documents (e.g., NICRA or subrecipient commitment letter) do not need to have page numbers?

A. Applicants should number each page consecutively in the footer unless it is feasible to number each page in separate PDF documents.

79) Q. Could USDA please confirm that a table of contents are not included in the page count.

A. A table of contents will not count against the page limit.

80) Q. Section 4.2 Content Guidance indicates that “(u)se of resources should ensure that at least 70% of the funding is used directly on program activities.” Could USDA please confirm that monetization associated costs are excluded from this calculation?

A. Monetization associated costs such as the monetization agent fees and post-monetization assessment are not considered program activities.

81) Q. Regarding Section 4.2.e Monitoring and Evaluation, could USDA please confirm that the 3% minimum required M&E allocation can include program income?

A. The 3% minimum requirement is for M&E associated expenses. The pool of funds in which the associated expenses are expended can be from the CCC Admin costs, monetization sales amount, and the interest income derived from the monetization sales.

82) Q. Can USDA/FAS please clarify C- templates.

A. The C-1 template refers to Appendix B - Budget Summary (page 42 of the NOFO). The C-2 template refers to Appendix C - Budget Narrative Example (page 43 of the NOFO). The C-3 template refers to the Detailed Budget, which can be found under the Related Documents tab in grants.gov: <https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/359897> and in FAIS: <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/fais/webapp/files/Budget%20Summary%20Detailed%20Budget%20Template%20July%202025.xlsx>.

83) Q. Can USDA please confirm that if an applicant doesn't elect to use a NICRA or the de minimis rate they can put forward an indirect cost rate proposal for consideration?

A. If the Applicant does not have a NICRA, or chooses not to use the de minimis rate, attach a brief note explaining the absence of this document. However, USDA/FAS will generally not consider an indirect cost rate proposal that is not a NICRA or the de minimis.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

84) Q. Section 4.2.f Commodity Management indicates a rate of return target minimum of 70%. Could USDA please confirm that the 70% minimum cost recovery threshold calculation includes administrative and internal handling costs?

A. The Food for Progress Act of 1985 provides that the rate of return shall be equal to the proportion that the proceeds from the monetization of the donated commodities bear to the cost to the Federal Government to procure and ship the commodities to the country where they are monetized (see 7 U.S.C. § 1736o(b)(10)).

85) Q. Regarding Section 4.2.g Budget, is there a standard interest rate assumption USDA recommends for calculating anticipated interest earnings?

A. USDA does not recommend a standard interest rate for calculating anticipated interest earnings.

86) Q. Regarding Section 4.2.g Budget, could USDA please confirm that there are no restrictions on how program income, including interest, may be allocated within the operating budget?

A. A recipient must use the donated commodities, any sale proceeds, CCC-provided funds, interest, and program income in accordance with the agreement. Program income defined under 7 CFR 1499 is not restricted in the administration or activity categories.

87) Q. Section 6.2 Review Criteria, Table 2 states “well-reasoned cost share contributions, as defined in 7 CFR 1499.2, may receive up to 2 bonus points.” Will USDA prioritize certain types of cost share (e.g., local private sector investment, waived fees, in-kind resources)?

A. USDA does not prioritize certain types of cost share in its review. USDA/FAS will follow the NOFO which mentions that the review will "evaluate proposed cost share in terms of value to the project, the ability of the Applicant to provide and use the cost share, level of detail, sustainability, verifiability, and clarity of commitment." Refer to page 29 of the NOFO.

88) Q. Could USDA please confirm that cost share can be partially sourced from anticipated program income?

A. Cost sharing or matching means the portion of project expenses, or necessary goods and services provided to carry out a project, not paid or acquired with Federal funds. The term may include cash or in-kind contributions provided by recipients, subrecipients, foreign public entities, foreign organizations, or private donors. Cost share is generally not derived from federal funds.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

89) Q. Could USDA please confirm that offerors are permitted to engage sub-awardees under firm-fixed price contracts?

A. Applicants should refer to 2 CFR 200.201.

90) Q. Is it important that the proposed project addresses both strategic objectives 1 and 2, or would USDA be favorable to a project that only focuses on strategic objective 2?

A. Applicants should design a project that takes into account the objectives of the Food for Progress project per Section 3 of the FY25 NOFO. Applicants will need to determine if a proposed project takes into account multiple strategic objectives and also consider USDA's priorities on foreign assistance.

91) Q. As part of customizing the results framework found in Appendix D, could USDA please confirm it is acceptable to modify the wording for existing results if this does not distort the core meaning but just clarifies the project's focus within that result? An example would be changing SO1 from "Increased Agricultural Productivity" to "Increased Quality and Reliability of Agricultural Production."

A. While changing the wording of results in the program-level framework is not prohibited, Applicants typically communicate the specific details or nuances of their proposed project in the brief activity descriptions that they align with program-level results.

92) Q. Can two entities form a partnership and have the partnership submit the grant, i.e., can that partnership submit the grant as a single entity? If so, does one entity need to be the grantee while the other a subgrantee?

A. Applicants should be registered in SAM.gov and have a UEI number at the time of application. In that case, it is likely a single entity registered in SAM and with UEI will submit. The partnership will determine if one entity is the prime or the major subrecipient.

93) Q. Is the main purpose of this grant to lift American productivity/products or African productivity/products?

A. Applicants should refer to Section 3 of the FY 2025 NOFO regarding the main purpose.

94) Q. How much detail do we need for the historic and environmental sections of the grant?

A. Applicants should include sufficient details to convey their objectives and meet the guidelines as outlined throughout the NOFO.

95) Q. Do independent agencies or experts need to be engaged to address the issues presented in the grants?

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. The Applicant should make this determination.

96) Q. Based on the Excel budget template and the example budget narrative on page 42, USDA expects that the total award be allocated to the "Activities" section, with the remainder categorized as "Administrative" costs. The USDA budget is organized into five main categories: Administrative, Activities, Commodity & Food, ITSH (Internal Transport, Storage, and Handling), and All Indirect Costs (ICR). Given that roles like the "Home Office Director of Agricultural Programs" (page 43) are described in the NOFO as part of both program activities and administrative costs, could USDA please clarify if salaries should be placed under Administrative costs or allocated directly under each activity?

A. Salaries can be placed either under Administrative costs and/or directly under each activity. The Applicant will need to make this determination.

97) Q. The work plan described on page 35: "Within 60 days after the agreement is signed, Recipients must provide a detailed work plan covering the entire life of project (LOP) for USDA/FAS's approval." Would USDA consider extending the due date of the work plan in order to ensure that information from the baseline survey can be incorporated?

A. The initial work plan is due within 60 days after the agreement is signed, and additional iterations can be submitted based on ongoing dialogue between the awarded applicant and USDA.

98) Q. On page 10, regarding key personnel, it states, "USDA...may disallow costs for specific individuals where required by statute or regulation." We understand that this may refer to federal statutes such as the Federal Appropriations Laws (e.g., restrictions on lobbying or partisan political activities), OMB Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200), and USDA-specific provisions, including those related to conflict of interest, debarment, or eligibility.

To ensure full compliance with applicable requirements, could USDA please clarify which specific statutes or regulations are being referenced when stating that costs for certain individuals "may be disallowed"?

A. The applicant must evaluate each staffing cost to ensure that each is in compliance with all applicable federal statutes and regulations.

99) Q. In addition to the baseline reports already posted, could USDA share any additional interim and/or final reports for current/recent Food for Progress projects in the target countries?

A. USDA has uploaded a sufficient number of reports for this NOFO. USDA will not post additional reports.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

100) Q. We are preparing our Past Performance Reference submission for the 2025 Food for Progress NOFO, but our proposal name is still being finalized. For Part 2 of Appendix E, which is submitted by the Reference Organization, would it be acceptable to use a descriptive placeholder (e.g., Applicant Organization, Country, FFPr FY25') in the subject line?

A. Yes, it is acceptable to use a descriptive placeholder for the project name on the subject line.

101) Q. Are there commodities or value chains USDA prefers for monetization?

A. The Applicant should conduct its own research to make a determination. Please refer to f. Commodity Management (pages 20-23) and Appendix F – Potential Available Commodities (page 58) of the NOFO.

102) Q. Are there restrictions or preferences in how monetization proceeds should be allocated?

A. Please refer to f. Commodity Management (pages 20-23), Appendix B – Budget Summary (page 42), and Appendix C – Budget Narrative Example (pages 43-53) of the NOFO, and the Detailed Budget template under Related Documents tab in grants.gov (<https://grants.gov/search-results-detail/359897>).

103) Q. An impact evaluation implies to build a counterfactual. As we are working with small farmers and in remote areas of the country, building a counterfactual might lift prices higher than 10% of the operating budget. Could we consider to increase up to a 15% depending on the design on the ground?

A. USDA/FAS can confirm that there is no upper limit on a project's percentage investment in M&E, so an Applicant can propose investing more than 10% if desired. Please note that impact evaluations are not required (pages 18-19 of the NOFO), and please review the M&E budget guidance on page 19 of the NOFO.

104) Q. Given the potential of public-private partnerships to create market connections, is co-investment from large value chain actors (e.g., FNC, exporters) encouraged?

A. Various sections in the NOFO, including Strategic Analysis and Plan of Operation, mention the inclusion of private sector actors in the design of the proposal. Applicants should consider how best to foster market connections.

105) Q. Are there priority departments or regions in Colombia USDA would like to see targeted for impact?

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity
Questions and Answers
July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. USDA is unable to answer this question.

106) Q. For each of the sections in Introduction, Program Administration List, Commodity Section, Activity Objective Section, as explained in the FAIS User Manual, I can see that in addition to the text boxes, there are also options to upload attachments. Are we supposed to upload the separate sections required by the NOFO (aligned with the form requirements) in Word format here? Or is that not required at all? The reason I am asking is that I see the NOFO has specific page requirements but in the FAIS User Manual, I am not seeing a clear option of uploading word documents. Or should we fill out the text boxes in each of the sections after having populated them in Microsoft Word, so that we can make sure that page requirements are being met? Or is filling out the text boxes only what is required, and the uploads are for additional supporting documents? And if yes, are there page limits for the uploads?

A. In addition to completing the required entries as detailed in the FAIS User Manual, applicants should upload as PDF documents the Required Content and Forms detailed starting on page 11 of the NOFO. Ensure each PDF attachment follows the page limit requirements.

107) Q. Is there a required or preferred cost-share percentage from lead or sub-awardees?

A. There is no required or preferred cost share from the lead or sub-awardees.

108) Q. Will USDA handle all aspects of commodity shipment and sale, or will implementers need to propose a monetization strategy and logistics plan?

A. Please refer to page 20 of the NOFO, Commodity Management section for all aspects related to the monetization process and the USDA Monetization Handbook on FAIS on specific information on managing the monetization of commodities from pages 19-21 of the NOFO. The link is here:
<https://apps.fas.usda.gov/fais/webapp/files/USDA%20Monetization%20Handbook%202023.pdf>.

109) Q. In terms of Monitoring costs, can we budget a central monitoring costs but also consider transferring some monitoring activities to grantees and include a small percentage of their budgets for M&E purposes?

A. USDA/FAS can confirm that subrecipients may be involved in project monitoring, and that the M&E costs by line item identified in the proposal should follow the guidance on page 19 of the NOFO.

110) Q. Is there a minimum amount of available funds or annual revenue for the firm required to be eligible for implementing a Food for Progress activity?

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. No, there is no minimum amount of available funds or annual revenue for a firm required to be eligible for implementing a Food for Progress activity.

111) Q. We would be grateful if you could clarify whether the donated U.S. agricultural commodities meet the relevant food safety and import regulatory requirements of the implementing countries - specifically Kenya and Ethiopia.

A. Applicants should identify market requirements and commodity specifications to meet the relevant import regulations of target countries. U.S. agricultural commodities are procured directly from the commercial market. Commodity requirements, certifications and specifications can be identified during procurement to ensure compliance with import requirements and buyer preference.

112) Q. In the FY25 NOFO, on page 21, USDA/FAS requires that applicants list and provide analysis on up to five specific countries within a region where monetization is likely to occur. However, FAIS does not allow applicants to select more than one country – or specific countries within a region – as the destination country for a selected commodity. Should applicants select the appropriate region on FAIS, with the understanding that the Commodity Management Plan narrative identifies and analyzes up to five specific countries within the region and adds context to the selection on FAIS? Or does USDA/FAS prefer applicants divide the commodity quantities across the selected specific countries within a region, with the understanding that actual quantities will change based on the open tender process?

A. Applicants should select the main country they intend to propose for monetization on FAIS and include the alternative options and their analysis in the commodity management plan narrative. Applicants may choose to propose a minimum of one country and up to a maximum of five countries. Please refer to pages 20-23 of the NOFO, Commodity Management and Monetization section.

113) Q. On page 17 of the NOFO, regarding Past Performance Reviews, can USDA confirm if applicants are allowed to include reviewers that are current USDA-employees?

A. Yes, current USDA employees may provide Past Performance Reviews.

114) Q. Do we have to create Participant Organizations for sub-recipients with Proposal Admins and Proposal Creators on FAIS? Or can we work on the proposal off-line and then have one person upload all the information, like as the Proposal Director?

A. No, the subrecipients would require their own participant organization account, and they will not be able to access the Prime/Applicant account. Applicants are free to work on the proposal off-line and then have one person upload the information if that makes most sense to them.

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

115) Q. For the Past Performance Review, I see that the form needs to be emailed. In case we are providing more than one reference, do we use a single table and add additional references for boxes 6-17? Or should we create separate tables in case we are submitting more than one reference?

A. In general, a Past Performance review is from one reference. Each referee should submit a past performance review. If more than one referee is giving a reference for the same project, please send separate past performance reviews.

116) Q. Are there any preferred or discouraged consortia models, such as prime/subcontractor arrangements versus co-applicant or joint venture partnerships?

A. No, there are no preferred or discouraged consortia models.

117) Q. To what extent is the use of digital tools (e.g., traceability platforms, digital extension services, market linkage apps) expected in the core technical approach?

A. Applicants should consider the inclusion of digital tools as way to augment services as applicable in the local context and/or proposed intervention and/or to improve oversight to avoid fraud, waste and abuse. Refer to page 14 of the NOFO, Use of ICT for examples utilized in previous projects.

118) Q. Will USDA/FAS require implementers to develop real-time dashboards or enable interoperability with host-country government data systems?

A. No, this is not a requirement.

119) Q. Does USDA/FAS expect implementers to deliver direct technical support to producers/firms or focus primarily on facilitation within the market system? Is USDA seeking deeper institutional reform support for policy systems/legal frameworks/phytosanitary laws, or more technical/training support for compliance and traceability?

A. Applicants should propose a technical approach that fits with their analysis and aligns with the overall goals of Food for Progress. Facilitation and direct delivery can both play a role depending on the respective technical approach chosen by the Applicant. Applicants must incorporate sustainable benefits and sector growth, with a focus on maximizing cost efficiency and minimizing fraud, waste and misuse of U.S. provided resources, while engaging a broader network of relevant actors to ensure a comprehensive approach. Please refer to page 15 of the NOFO, b. Strategic Analysis.

120) Q. How will the use of innovation and technology be scored or weighed in the technical evaluation criteria?

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Questions and Answers

July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. For information about scoring, please refer to section 6.2 Review Criteria.

121) Q. Are there national or regional data standards that USDA/FAS recommends aligning with, particularly those from Ministries of Agriculture or Statistics Bureaus?

A. To have an impact in the agriculture sector, Applicants are expected to closely consult with existing service providers, as well as national authorities in the country such as research institutes, universities, private sector stakeholders, and all other pertinent organizations. Applicants should also consider complementing efforts with the work of other international donors as well as other USG programs. The expected coordination efforts should integrate the project's agricultural approaches with existing private sector and government extension services in alignment with USDA priorities of advancing American agricultural interests while also advancing the priorities set forth in the country's national agricultural strategy.

122) Q. How does USDA/FAS define sustainability for digital or IT systems post-program? Are there expectations regarding government adoption or local vendor continuity?

A. The applicant should propose the most ideal solutions regarding sustainability.

123) Q. Are there any constraints or preferences regarding cloud-based hosting versus local data centers in FFPr implementation countries?

A. There are no preferences. The applicants should make this determination.

124) Q. Should applicants plan for third-party system security audits or system assessments as part of their implementation budgets?

A. The Applicant should make this determination.

125) Q. Can proposals include fintech or mobile money components? If so, are there special vetting or compliance steps required?

A. Applicants can include fintech or mobile money components. USDA adheres to the Secure Equipment Act of 2021 and the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019, which includes the prohibition of using telecommunications or video surveillance equipment or services from specific Chinese companies (including Huawei and ZTE) or their subsidiaries as a substantial component of any system. It also prohibits awardees from using such equipment or services.

126) Q. Can USDA please confirm that proposed subrecipients can be included as a line item in the budget with a brief description as outlined on page 53 of Appendix C of the NOFO?

Food for Progress FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity
Questions and Answers
July 9 - July 15, 2025

A. Proposed subrecipients can be included as a line item in the budget. Applicants are encouraged to use the budget narrative as guidance. Please refer to pages 43-53 of the NOFO.