

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

FY 2022 Scientific Exchanges Program

Deadline: June 6, 2022

A. Program Description

The Scientific Exchange Program (SEP) leverages the latest developments in cross-cutting agricultural priorities, research, and technologies to educate a new generation of agricultural scientist to promote trade, trade policy, trade capacity building, and food security. The collaborative nature of the SEP training and research programs improves agricultural productivity, systems, and processes in partnering emerging market economies through the transfer of new science and agricultural technologies. USDA may also use the program as a market development tool to assist in opening markets and decreasing or eliminating trade barriers in low to middle income countries, which ultimately increases and creates new trade opportunities for U.S. agricultural exports.

SEP focuses on a cohort of Fellows who will spend up to 12 weeks at the U.S. academic institution and work directly with U.S. scientists in their fields. Each Fellow must hold a minimum of a Master's-level degree, be in the early or middle stage of their career, and represent a university, government agency, or research entity in their home country. Mentors coordinate the training program in the United States. Upon the Fellow's return home, the mentor travels to the Fellows country to follow-up. SEP is administered by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, Global Programs, Fellowship Programs.

Objectives

USDA is seeking proposal submissions to focus on climate-smart agriculture (CSA) and food systems innovation. CSA is an approach that helps guide actions to transform agri-food systems towards green and climate resilient practices. USDA will make up to three regional awards focused on understanding CSA to enhance productivity, curb greenhouse gas emissions associated with growing food, build soil health, sequester carbon, and other initiatives that help to mitigate the impacts of climate change. USDA is seeking proposal submissions that includes low to middle income economies (as defined by The World Bank) in the African, Asian, and Central American/Latin American Regions. USDA envisions for fellows to participate as a cohesive geographical cohort, rather than at individual times or several geographical regions on one award, and applicants should prepare their approach accordingly. Additionally, the award will provide a platform for researchers of the same cohort to share ideas and foster collaboration to lead to better regional and intraregional coordination on food safety issues and develop practical applied climate-smart outcomes for agricultural communities.

Each program plan should incorporate elements of leadership and science communication to empower Fellows to advocate for sound policy to peers, decision-makers, and the public. In addition, plans should contribute to the strategic goals and objectives of individual Fellows, the host institutions and USDA, as well as provide an opportunity for the application of research

agendas that can have a direct impact on international trade, food security and economic growth in emerging economies.

Programs are expected to include collaboration with and input from relevant stakeholders, such as U.S. regulatory agencies and the Office of the United States Trade Representative. Ideally, Fellows and host institutions will share the knowledge gained through these endeavors in their classroom and extension work with their faculty, students, extension officers, constituents, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the international agricultural marketplace; and that they will continue to maintain professional contacts with the Fellows after their departure from the United States. After recipient(s) are awarded, a project workplan will also be required.

PLACE OF PERFORMANCE

- After recipient(s) are awarded, they will be expected to work to help identify and propose fellows from low to middle income economies (as defined by The World Bank) from either of the three region they applied for to USDA for final concurrence.
- The applicant is expected to host 8-10 fellows per region, per award at a research facility on their campus in the United States for up to 12 weeks, with orienting visits to U.S. government regulatory agency in Washington, DC or elsewhere; and field visits as appropriate.
- Programs should include time at the USDA in Washington, DC at the commencement and at the end of their fellowship program to brief and debrief with key USDA officers. The selected awardees will coordinate with the USDA program manager. Programs should also include virtual meetings, outreach, and other activities.
- Each Fellow's one-on-one mentor is expected to make a reciprocal visit of up to two weeks to the Fellow's home institution.
- Projects should not exceed two years.

NOFO Number

USDA-FAS-10620-0762-10.-22-0001

Assistance Listing *(formerly Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance)*

10.620 Scientific Exchanges Program

Authorizing Legislation

Section 1458 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended, 7 USC § 3291.

Announcement Type

New Agreement

B. Federal Award Information

Total Available Federal Funding:

Up to \$1,500,000 total (est. up to \$500,000 per award), *subject to funding availability*

Anticipated Number of Awards: up to 3

Cost Share/Match Requirement: None/Not Required

Projected Period of Performance Start: September 1, 2022

Projected Period of Performance End: August 31, 2024

Extensions to this program are permitted, subject to approval. Refer to Section H for additional information.

Type of Assistance Instrument: Cost-Reimbursable Agreement

C. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants:

U.S. State Cooperative Institutions or other colleges and universities in the United States.

Eligibility Criteria:

All applicants must have an active registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) by the closing date of the announcement; applicants with inactive, expired, pending, or excluded listings will be deemed ineligible. Exceptions, waivers, or extensions will not be considered. Please contact the program officer(s) listed in Section G if you have questions about this requirement.

Cost Share/Match: Not required.

D. Application and Submission Information

This announcement contains all information necessary to apply.

Submission Dates and Times June 6, 2022 at 11:59pm EDT

Applications received after this time will not be accepted. Applicants are advised to make their submissions 1-2 days before this deadline in case of technical problems.

Anticipated Funding Selection Date: June 30, 2022

Anticipated Award Date: August 15, 2022

Content and Form of Application Submission

A complete application package must include:

- Form SF-424, showing the Unique Entity Identifier, and signed by the applicant
- Form SF-424A, showing the budget categorization. Applicants are advised to consult 2 CFR 200 Subpart E for guidance on proper categorization of cost items. An improper categorization will not itself be grounds for denial of the application, but may delay approval and/or adversely impact the application's scoring.

- A detailed illustrative budget, in which cost items are described in sufficient detail to enable FAS to determine that the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable for the project and consistent with applicable regulations.
 - If indirect costs are included in the budget, attach a copy of the latest indirect cost rate agreement negotiated with a cognizant federal agency. If an agreement does not exist, please attach a description of the basis for the indirect cost calculation. More information on indirect costs is provided in the guidance for cost categories.
- A detailed project narrative or plan of operation
 - Indicate the research topic and how it relates to climate-smart agriculture;
 - Justify the significance of the research as it relates to climate change and the interests of both the United States and the collaborating country;
 - Provide a tentative research plan based on the training interests listed in the statement of work, including topics to be covered, possible field visits and other activities;
 - Include a narrative description of the proposed research, how it will be administered and the role of the university faculty and support staff;
 - Briefly describe the expertise and international experience of the recipient in the field of interest and various countries;
 - Demonstrate understanding of cultural context and needs of the recipient country;
 - Identify the expected skills or knowledge to be gained at the end of the program;
 - Briefly demonstrate flexibility in training plan to account for potential program changes and the ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances;
 - Include a quality assurance plan. This should include information on how unforeseen problems that can arise will be addressed;
 - Use professional spelling, grammar, and formatting;
 - The layout should include a description of what is being proposed, how it will be conducted, and what is the desired result.
- Form SF-LLL, if applicable to the applicant

Note: Several standard forms were discontinued as of January 1, 2020, and are no longer required, including the SF-424B, AD-1047, AD-1048, AD-1049, AD-1050, and AD-1052.

Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant is required to:

- Be registered in SAM before submitting its application;
- Have assented to the federal assistance certifications in the SAM platform;
- Provide a valid Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) in its application; and
- Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times when it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

The Federal awarding agency may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the Federal awarding agency is ready to make a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency may determine that the

applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant.

Intergovernmental Review

For state and local government entities, including public universities, an intergovernmental review may be required pursuant to [Executive Order 12372](#). Applicants requiring an intergovernmental review must contact their state's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the state's process.

Funding Restrictions

Generally, funds may not be used in any manner that is prohibited by applicable regulations, including 2 CFR Part 200, 2 CFR Part 400, and the program-specific regulations identified in Section A (if any). Awards issued pursuant to this notice of funding opportunity may only be used for the purpose set forth in the award, consistent with the statutory authority for the award. Capital expenses, such as the purchase of equipment, not entirely attributable to this award, must be pro-rated.

For example, agreement funds and other support may not be used for matching contributions for other federal grants or cooperative agreements, lobbying, or intervention in federal regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings. Federal employees are prohibited from acting as an agent of the applicant in any capacity (paid or unpaid) on any proposal submitted under this program. Also, federal funds may not be used to sue the Federal Government or any other government entity.

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 on the General Schedule (for 2021, \$143,598 per year, \$550 per day, or \$68.77 per hour). Non-monetizable fringe benefits, such as health insurance coverage, are not included to this ceiling.

Indirect Costs: In general, costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective but not readily assignable to specific awards, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved, are considered indirect costs. These may include facilities not specific to individual projects, enterprise-wide services such as IT, and enterprise management. For cost-reimbursable agreements, indirect costs may not exceed 10% of direct costs, as stipulated at 7 USC 3319a.

Pre-Award Costs: Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the Federal award, directly pursuant to the negotiation and in anticipation of the Federal award, and where such costs are necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of work, are not allowable.

Other Submission Requirements

Applications should be submitted through the ezFedGrants system at <https://grants.fms.usda.gov/>

Applicants who require technical assistance should reach out to the program officer(s) listed in Section G at least 5 business days in advance of the application deadline. Applicants should provide as much detail as possible to facilitate resolution of the issue.

Applicants should supply an application that follows formatting guidelines and has limited spelling and grammatical errors.

E. Application Review Information

Review and Selection Process

In all cases, the agency will conduct an initial responsiveness review of all applications submitted to determine:

- The application was submitted on time as specified in this announcement (See Section D. Application and Submission Information);
- The applicant is eligible (see Section C. Eligibility Information);
- All the required forms and documents are submitted timely as outlined (See Section D. Application and Submission Information, Content and Form of Application Submission).

Application Guidelines

The application is expected to follow professional guidelines for submission. Those guidelines include the following:

- Clearly outline all aspects of the program plan – what is planned, how this will be conducted, and the anticipated results;
- Be written in English and free of excessive grammatical and spelling errors;
- Be written using Times New Roman, 12-point font; tables and graphs may have a smaller font as appropriate, all other text font and size should be consistent throughout the application;
- Be typed on standard 8.5” x 11” sized paper with 1-inch margins;
- Be paginated with each page consecutively numbered;
- Cite source information and/or provide an explanation of the analysis undertaken;
- Be submitted in PDF.

If an applicant is determined to be ineligible or an application is determined to be incomplete, the agency will notify the applicant. An applicant that feels such a determination is made in error may request reconsideration, highlighting evidence supporting their claim.

The agency will appoint a review panel, which may include both federal and non-federal reviewers, to review the eligible applications against the evaluation criteria described. The reviewers will ensure that the organization is capable of delivering the programs/activities as described in the announcement based on the applicant’s project narrative and assign a score and provide summary comments based on the evaluation criteria identified above. The review panel will make a recommendation list to the selecting official, who is not a member of the panel.

The selecting official may select applications out of rank order in consideration of strategic program priorities, such as geographical distribution, incorporation of minority-serving

institutions, congressional directive, or other documented considerations. These determinations are final and cannot be appealed.

Prior to selection, the agency may contact the highest-ranking applicants to seek clarification and to negotiate technical and programmatic aspects of the application. If an application includes a sub-awardee, FAS may request to speak with all parties included in the application to ensure sufficient planning and coordination has taken place prior to making an award.

Evaluation Criteria

Intellectual merit of the proposed activities (30 Pts)

- a. Do the proposed activities promote climate-smart agriculture applications?
- b. How important are the proposed activities to advancing the knowledge and understanding of farmers in climate-smart agriculture?

Impact of the proposed activities (30 Pts)

- a. To what extent will it enhance agricultural infrastructure (e.g. information sharing, collaboration, partnerships, and networks)?
- b. Can the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding about climate-smart agriculture?
- c. What are potential benefits of the proposed activities to the larger society?

Professional detailed budget and budget narrative (30 Pts)

- a. Is the proposed budget appropriate for the number of fellows and length of the program, and does it clearly outline all program-related costs?
- b. Does the budget include appropriate cost savings (where available) and a detailed budget narrative that addresses each line item of the budget with associated justification? For example, does every budget line item easily correlate to the budget narrative for a clear review of where, why, and how funds will be utilized?

Does the proposal demonstrate professional formatting, spelling, and grammar? (10 Pts)

- a. Does the project proposal follow FAS guidelines for a project narrative, with limited spelling and grammatical errors?

The Agency conducts an initial review of applications to determine the responsiveness of the application. If an applicant is determined to be ineligible (see Section C. Eligibility Information) or an application is determined to be non-responsive, FAS will notify the applicant. All responsive and eligible applications will be reviewed as described below:

1. FAS will assemble reviewers which may include both federal and non-federal reviewers to review the eligible applications. Reviews of submitted applications will be conducted either on site or by remote review. Technical reviewers will review each eligible

application against the evaluation criteria. The reviewers will assign a score and provide summary comments based on the evaluation criteria identified above. Evaluation Criteria: the evaluation criteria must be directly related to key aspects of the project. The criteria must be measurable with an associated point range. From the scoring process, the reviewers will recommend one or more selections.

2. An application may be selected for a post-review quality control and possible rescoring if it received significantly diverging scores and comments from reviewers.
3. The second part of the application review process includes an internal review panel consisting of FAS management, which will review the recommendation list which will display the highest ranked applications. From this list this internal review panel will make final funding selection. The internal review panel may take applications out of rank order in consideration of strategic program priorities, such as:
 - Geographic Distribution
 - Incorporation of minority serving institutions
 - Institutional capability to host foreign fellows
4. FAS will perform an additional review of the applicant organization which may include reviewing any and/or its key personnel. This review will include reviewing audit reports, publicly available materials and/or government databases and may have a bearing on award outcome. FAS may request additional materials from the applicant as part of this review, including:
 - The summary letter from the applicant's most recent audit report; and
 - Documentation of previous grant award completion that includes the name of the grantor, amount awarded, and whether the grant recipient sufficiently completed the requirements of the grant award (e.g., a final close-out report, certification of grant award completion, etc.)
5. After the technical review and before making final funding decisions, FAS may contact the highest-ranking applicants to seek clarification and to negotiate technical and programmatic aspects of the application. If an application includes a sub-awardee, FAS may request to speak with all parties included in the application to ensure sufficient planning and coordination has taken place prior to making an award.

Integrity in Performance

Prior to making a Federal award, the Federal awarding agency is required by [31 USC 3321](#) and [41 USC 2313](#) to review information available through any OMB-designated repositories of government-wide eligibility qualification or financial integrity information. Therefore, application evaluation criteria may include the following risk-based considerations of the applicant:

- Financial stability;
- Quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards;
- History of performance in managing federal awards;
- Reports and findings from audits; and
- Ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements.

Prior to making a Federal award with a total amount of Federal share greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, currently \$250,000, the federal agency is required to review and consider

any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (currently FAPIIS).

- An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM.
- The Federal awarding agency will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in [§ 200.206](#)

F. Federal Award Administration Information

Federal Award Notices

Applicants will be notified of the status of their application by email. This notification is not authorization to proceed, and such notification should be construed as provisional until the agreement is formally signed by both the implementing institution and the USDA.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All successful applicants for all grant and cooperative agreements are required to comply with the applicable Standard Administrative Terms and Conditions, which can be found at the link below. The applicant is presumed to have read, understood, and accepted these terms.

Applicants with questions about the applicable terms should contact the program officer(s) listed in Section G.

https://www.fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions/default.asp

The applicable Standard Administrative Terms and Conditions will be for the last year specified at that URL, unless the application is to continue an award first awarded in an earlier year. In that event, the terms and conditions that apply will be those in effect for the year in which the award was originally made unless explicitly stated otherwise in subsequent mutually agreed amendments to the award.

Before accepting the award, the potential awardee should carefully read the award package for instructions on administering the grant award and the terms and conditions associated with responsibilities under Federal Awards. Recipients must accept all conditions in this NOFO as well as any Special Terms and Conditions in the Notice of Award to receive an award under this program.

Requests for Payment

Requests for payment shall be submitted Semi-Annually on the Standard Form SF-270, Request for Advance or Reimbursement. In no case shall the Cooperator/Recipient submit an invoice more than monthly or less frequently than annually (when work was performed within that fiscal year). Payment requests must comply or otherwise be consistent with OMB, USDA, and FAS regulations, and award terms and conditions. Failure to provide timely interim and

final reports may result in a delayed payment. The Cooperator/Recipient must retain adequate documentation supporting the payment request, e.g. contracts, timesheets, invoices, etc., and provide upon FAS' or its designee's request.

Requests should be submitted through the ezFedGrants portal at <https://grants.fms.usda.gov>. However, in cases where the cooperator/recipient does not have access to the portal, a signed PDF of the SF-270 along with a detailed breakdown by expense category may be submitted to SF-270InvoicesMailbox@usda.gov cc'ing the current program manager.

Reporting

Financial Reports, using form SF-425, must be submitted semi-annually, within 30 days of the end of the reporting period. A final financial report must be submitted within 120 days of the end date of the agreement.

Performance Progress Reports must be submitted semi-annually, within 30 days of the end of the reporting period. A final performance progress report must be submitted within 120 days of the end date of the agreement. The recipient may use any appropriate format for performance progress reports, provided the report includes:

- A comparison of actual accomplishments to the for the period;
- The reasons why established goals were not met, if appropriate; and
- Additional pertinent information including, when appropriate, analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs.

Recipients are encouraged to include photographs and other supplemental material in performance progress reports. For awards in which the total lifetime value exceeds \$500,000, additional reporting may be required as described in [Appendix XII to 2 CFR 200](#).

Monitoring

FAS through its authorized representatives, has the right, at all reasonable times, to make site visits to review project accomplishments and management control systems, and to provide such technical assistance as may be required. During site visits, FAS will review grant recipients' files related to the grant-funded program.

As part of any monitoring and program evaluation activities, grant recipients must permit FAS, upon reasonable notice, to review grant-related records and to interview the organization's staff and clients regarding the program, and to respond in a timely and accurate manner to FAS requests for information relating to their grant program.

Close Out

Within 120 days after the end of the period of performance, or after an amendment has been issued to close out a grant, whichever comes first, recipients must submit a final FFR and final progress report detailing all accomplishments and a qualitative summary of the impact of those accomplishments throughout the period of performance. After final reports have been reviewed and approved by the agency, and any residual amount due to the recipient or due to be returned to the agency, the award is subject to closeout. Acceptance of final reports by the agency constitutes a closeout of the award with no further notice or obligation to either party. This

acceptance will indicate the period of performance has expired, and any remaining funds will be deobligated. Records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the final reports are submitted.

G. Federal Awarding Agency Contact

For all general questions, contact: Cara Conley, Cara.Conley@usda.gov
Hours of Operation: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM EDT
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Inquiries will be returned within 24 working hours (3 business days). All questions must be received no later than 16 working hours (2 business days) prior to submission deadline. The point of contact will confirm receipt of proposals upon request.

*Please identify the program to which you are applying in your email correspondence.

H. Other Information

Extensions

Extensions to this program are allowed. Under certain circumstances, applicants may request a no-cost extension to complete all project activities. The request must be submitted 60 days prior to the expiration of the performance period. Requests for extensions are subject to agency approval.

Budget Revisions

Transfers of funds between direct cost categories in the approved budget, when such cumulative transfers among those direct cost categories exceed ten percent of the total budget approved in this award, require written approval from the agency. The total budget amount may not be increased without a bilaterally executed amendment to the award.

The recipient is not authorized at any time to transfer amounts budgeted for direct costs to the indirect costs line item or vice versa, without prior written approval of the agency.

Post-award program income

In the event program income becomes available to the recipient post-award, it is the recipient's responsibility to notify the FAS Program Manager to explain how that development occurred, as part of their request for guidance and/or approval. The Program Manager will review approval requests for program income on a case-by-case basis; approval is not automatic. Consistent with the policy and processes outlined in 2 C.F.R. Part 200, pertinent guidance and options, as determined by the type of recipient and circumstances involved, may be approved by the Grant Officer. If approval is granted, an award modification will be issued with an explanatory note in the remarks section of the face page concerning guidance and/or options pertaining to the recipient's approved request. All instances of program income shall be listed in the progress and financial reports.