



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Foreign Agricultural Service

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY **FY2024 Scientific Cooperation Research Program**

Application Submission Deadline: March 25, 2024

Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, Fellowship Programs, announces this funding opportunity to support the Scientific Cooperation and Research Program by issuing a new award(s). This opportunity is available to State cooperative institutions or other colleges and universities in the United States, as defined at 7 USC 3103 and is intended to support applied research, extension, and education collaborations between U.S. researchers and their foreign counterparts from selected emerging market economies.

A. Program Description

USDA's FAS administers the SCRP. This program has historically supported up to 12 collaborative research programs annually. All applications must include foreign collaborations, and project timelines should not exceed two years. Funding may be allocated to foreign collaborators through subawards.

The SCRP supports FAS's strategic goals by mobilizing the scientific community's accumulated knowledge and technologies through the funding of joint research, extension, and education projects. These projects are between U.S. researchers and researchers from selected emerging market economies, last up to two years, and address issues including but not limited to agricultural trade and market access, animal and plant health, biotechnology, food safety and security, climate smart agriculture, and sustainable natural resource management. Since 1980, the program has supported hundreds of projects to enhance the technical skills of agricultural professionals and help beneficiary countries further develop their relationships with the U.S. agriculture sector.

In the 2024 program cycle, the SCRP will support applied research, extension, and education projects between U.S. researchers and their foreign counterparts from selected emerging market economies (as defined at 7 USC § 5623(d)(1), *generally including countries listed in the low- and middle-income groups by the World Bank*) who seek to create practical solutions to challenges faced by farmers and build regional or global agricultural trade capacities in target countries.

In general, applications must support one or more of the following strategies of the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (Public Law No: 114-195):

1. Accelerate inclusive, agricultural-led economic growth that reduces global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, particularly among women and children.
2. Increase the productivity, incomes, and livelihoods of small-scale producers, especially

women, by working across agricultural value chains, enhancing local capacity to manage agricultural resources effectively, and expanding producer access to local and international markets.

3. Build resilience to food shocks among vulnerable populations and households while reducing reliance upon emergency food assistance.
4. Create an enabling environment for agricultural growth and investment, including through the promotion of secure and transparent property rights.
5. Improve the nutritional status of women and children, with a focus on reducing child stunting, including through the promotion of highly nutritious foods, diet diversification, and nutritional behaviors that improve maternal and child health.
6. Align with and leverage broader United States strategies and investments in trade, economic growth, science and technology, agricultural research and extension, maternal and child health, nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Previous Fellows and Mentors of the following USDA/FAS Fellowship Programs who maintain ongoing collaborations are encouraged to apply:

- The Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellowship Program
- The Faculty Exchange Program
- The Scientific Exchange Program

Funding Opportunity Number

USDA-FAS-10961-0700-10-24-0001

Assistance Listing Number

10.961 Scientific Cooperation and Research

Authorizing Legislation

National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, PL 95-113, as amended, 7 USC §§ 3291 and 3319a

B. Federal Award Information

Total Available Federal Funding: Up to \$600,000 total, up to \$50,000 per award
Subject to availability of funding

Anticipated Number of Awards: Up to 12

Cost Share/Match Requirement: None/Not Required

Projected Period of Performance Start: August 1, 2024

Projected Period of Performance End: July 31, 2026

Extensions to this program are permitted, subject to approval.

Type of Assistance Instrument:

USDA/FAS anticipates that a Cost-Reimbursable Agreement will be funded pursuant to this funding opportunity.

This type of agreement allows for a collaborative relationship between USDA/FAS, the selected recipient, and other collaborating partners. The particular scope and depth of this collaboration may vary throughout performance, depending on the needs of the activity and the desires of the participants.

Additional Awards

USDA/FAS reserves the right to make additional awards under this solicitation, consistent with Agency policy and guidance, if additional funding becomes available after the original selections are made. Any additional selections for awards will be made no later than 6 months after the original selection decisions.

No Awards

USDA/FAS reserves the right to make no awards under this competition.

C. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants: State cooperative institutions or other colleges and universities in the United States, as defined at 7 USC 3103

All applicants must have an active registration in the U.S. Government System for Award Management (www.sam.gov) before the application submission deadline 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, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, if you have questions about this requirement. 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, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, if you have questions about this requirement.

Cost Share/Match Requirement: None/Not Required

Ineligible activities: If an application is submitted that includes any ineligible tasks or activities, that portion of the application will be ineligible for funding and may, depending on the extent to which it affects the application, render the entire application ineligible for funding.

Application packages submitted on expired/inactive standard forms could be deemed ineligible. Applicants should ensure they are utilizing the active/nonexpired forms available on grants.gov.

Multiple Applications/Awards

An individual applicant may submit more than one application in response to this NOFO, and may be offered more than one award.

Substantial Compliance

All applications will be reviewed for eligibility and must meet the eligibility requirements described in Section C to be considered eligible. Applicants deemed ineligible for funding consideration as a result of the threshold eligibility review will be notified within seven calendar days of the ineligibility determination.

Applications must substantially comply with the application submission instructions and requirements set forth in Section D of this solicitation or else they will be rejected. However, where a page limit is expressed in Section D with respect to the application, or parts thereof, pages in excess of the page limitation will not be reviewed. Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.

Evidence of Eligibility

Applicants are responsible for including documentation, if necessary, establishing that they meet the stated eligibility requirements, when it is not immediately obvious. Applicants should not presume that USDA/FAS is sufficiently familiar with their organization that this is unnecessary, and USDA/FAS will not make assumptions as to the nature of the applicant's organization.

D. Application and Submission Information

This announcement contains all information necessary to apply to this funding opportunity.

Applicants may submit questions about this funding opportunity to the Section G contact.

Deadline for Question Submission: March 18, 2024

Submission Dates and Times

Application Submission Deadline: March 25, 2024 at 11:59pm EDT (UTC -04:00)
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 computer problems.

Anticipated Award Date: May 31, 2024

Content and Form of Application Submission

A complete application package must include:

- Standard Form SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance, showing the Unique Entity Identifier, and signed by the applicant
- Standard Form SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs, 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 a determination of ineligibility but may delay approval and/or adversely impact the application's evaluation scoring.
- A detailed budget and narrative, in which cost items are quantified and described in sufficient detail to enable USDA/FAS to independently determine that the proposed costs are reasonable and allowable for the project and consistent with applicable regulations.

- Indirect costs are statutorily capped at 10% for cost reimbursable agreements.
- A detailed project narrative or plan of operation that addresses the following (there is no page limit or requirement, but narratives from 7 – 10 pages in length are expected):
 - Provide a proposal summary/abstract that includes a description of what is being proposed, how it will be conducted, and what the intended results will be
 - Justify the significance of the research as it relates to the interests of both the United States and the collaborating country
 - Provide a detailed tentative research plan, including topics to be covered, possible field visits, and other intended activities
 - Include a narrative description of the proposed research to explain how it would further collaborations between the participant country, the U.S host university, and USDA, and how the proposed activities might help to advance the knowledge and understanding of the topic for farmers in the target country
 - Include an explanation of how the proposed research supports one or more of the Global Food Security Act of 2016 strategies (Public Law No: 114-195) as explained in Section A
 - Include a narrative description of how the program will be administered and the roles of the university faculty and support staff, including clear identification of who will serve as Mentor (U.S.-based researcher/scientist) and who will serve as Fellow (researcher/scientist based internationally)
 - Briefly describe the expertise and international experience of the applicant in the field of interest and country of focus
 - Demonstrate understanding of the cultural context and needs of the beneficiary country/institution(s)
 - Identify the expected skills or knowledge to be gained by the end of the program, including how this research and associated activities will enhance agricultural infrastructure (e.g., information sharing, collaboration, partnerships, and networks) and be of benefit to the larger society
 - Identify a dissemination plan for enhancing scientific and technological understanding about the proposed agricultural practices/technologies
 - Explain the institution's ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances and be flexible in response to potential program changes
 - Include a quality assurance plan explaining how unforeseen problems that might arise will be addressed and the roles of those involved in addressing them
 - Ensure the project narrative or plan of operation is organized, written in English, is free of excessive grammatical and spelling errors, contains any source information properly cited, and is submitted in PDF format
 - Applicants are advised that readability is of paramount importance and should take precedence in application format, including selecting a legible font type and size for use in the application.
- Standard Form SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, if applicable to the applicant

Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant is required to:

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

SAM.gov Registration Instructions

Organizations applying to this funding opportunity must have an active SAM.gov registration. If you have never done business with the Federal Government, you will need to register your organization in SAM.gov. If you do not have a SAM.gov account, then you will create an account using login.gov¹ to complete your SAM.gov registration. SAM.gov registration is FREE. The process for entity registrations includes obtaining Unique Entity ID (UEI), a 12-character alphanumeric ID assigned an entity by SAM.gov, and requires assertions, representations and certifications, and other information about your organization. Please review the [Entity Registration Checklist](#) for details on this process.

Entities outside the United States (defined at 2 CFR 200.1 as “[foreign organizations](#)” and “[foreign public entities](#)”) must obtain a NATO Commercial and Government Entity (NCAGE) Code prior to SAM.gov registration. An NCAGE is required for all foreign entities prior to registering in SAM.gov. You can complete the registration once you enter the NCAGE. You can submit your request for an NCAGE Code by going to the NATO Support Activity (NSPA) NCAGE Request Tool at [CAGE/NCAGE Code Request](#) which contains detailed instructions.

If you have done business with the Federal Government previously, you can check your entity status using your government issued UEI to determine if your registration is active. SAM.gov requires you renew your registration every 365 days to keep it active.

Please note that SAM.gov registration is different than obtaining a UEI only. Obtaining an UEI only validates your organization’s legal business name and address. Please review the [Frequently Asked Question](#) on the difference for additional details.

Organizations should ensure that their SAM.gov registration includes a current e-Business (EBiz) point of contact name and email address. The EBiz point of contact is critical for Grants.gov Registration and system functionality.

Contact the [Federal Service Desk](#) for help with your SAM.gov account, to resolve technical issues or chat with a help desk agent: (866) 606-8220. The Federal Service desk hours of operation are Monday – Friday 8am – 8pm ET.

Intergovernmental Review

Not applicable.

¹ Login.gov a secure sign in service used by the public to sign into Federal Agency systems including SAM.gov and Grants.gov. For help with login.gov accounts you should visit [http://login.gov/help](https://login.gov/help).

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 any program-specific regulations identified in Section A. 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 2024, \$159,950 per year, \$612.84 per day, or \$76.60 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.

Other Submission Information

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

Applicants who require assistance with any USDA-managed computer system should reach out to the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, at least 5 business days in advance of the application submission deadline. Applicants should provide as much detail as possible to facilitate resolution of the issue.

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:

- 1) the application was submitted on time as specified in this announcement (See Section D. Application and Submission Information);
- 2) the applicant is eligible (see Section C. Eligibility Information);

3) all the required forms and documents are submitted no later than the Application Submission Deadline specified in Section D. Application and Submission Information, Content and Form of Application Submission.

If an applicant is determined to be ineligible or an application is determined to be incomplete, the agency will notify the applicant prior to commencing with evaluation of applications, usually within five business days of the Application Submission Deadline. An applicant that feels such a determination is made in error may request reconsideration, highlighting evidence supporting their claim, by email to the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact, within 3 business days of notification.

The agency will convene a review panel, which may include both federal and non-federal reviewers, to review the eligible applications against the evaluation criteria described below. The reviewers will ensure that the applicant 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 below. 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, or congressional directive. Selection 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 subaward, 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

Applicants will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate that they have the capabilities, staff, resources, and equipment to successfully perform the project as described in the following factors. Scoring will also be based on the level of detail and how clearly the applicant's capacities to address these factors are outlined in the proposal.

Factor 1: Intellectual merit and applicability of the proposed activities (30 Pts)

The applicant will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which they demonstrate the intellectual merit of the research collaboration and proposed activities including:

- Applicability and Connection to the USDA-FAS strategic goals (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's consideration of how the proposed activities would further collaborations between the participant country, the U.S host university, and USDA, and how the proposed activities might help to advance the knowledge and understanding of the topic for farmers in the target country.
- Support of one or more strategies of the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's explanation of the extent to which this research and associated activities will support one or more strategies of the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (Public Law No: 114-195) as explained in Section A.

Factor 2: Impact of the proposed activities (30 Pts)

The applicant will be evaluated on the extent and quality to which they explain the potential impacts resulting from the research collaboration and proposed activities including:

- Agricultural Impacts Defined and Detailed (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's explanation of the extent to which this research and associated activities will enhance agricultural infrastructure (e.g., information sharing, collaboration, partnerships, and networks) and be of benefit to the larger society.
- Dissemination Plan Included (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's explanation of the plan to disseminate the results and findings of the research and how it can enhance scientific and technological understanding about the proposed agricultural practices/technologies.

Factor 3: Professional detailed budget and budget narrative (30 Pts)

The applicant will be evaluated on the reasonableness, cost-effectiveness, and adequacy of the proposed budget to accomplish the project, along with the extent to which the budget documents are detailed, organized, in-scope, and appropriate, including:

- Appropriate and Detailed Content Included (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's demonstration that the proposed budget is appropriate for the number of participating Fellows and the length of the program;
 - Applicant's use of a detailed budget table that utilizes cost item categories and includes appropriate cost savings where available.
 - Applicant's explanation of proposed staff, including their role in the program.
- Budget Narrative and Budget Table Included (15 Pts)
 - Applicant's use of a clear budget narrative accompanying the budget table to address each line item therein;
 - Applicant's demonstration of successful rounding and calculating with final budget narrative numbers exactly matching the budget line items, rounded to the penny.

Factor 4: Professional formatting, spelling, and grammar (10 Pts)

The applicant will be evaluated on the extent to which their budget documents are detailed, organized, in-scope, and appropriate including:

- Professional Formatting, Spelling, and Grammar Utilized (10 Pts)
 - Applicant's demonstration of professional organization and formatting throughout the project narrative and supporting documents with limited spelling and grammatical errors.

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: (1) financial stability; (2) quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards; (3) history of performance in managing federal award; (4) reports and findings from audits; and (5) ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements.

Conflict of Interest

The Applicant's Conflict of Interest (COI) Point of Contact as defined in USDA/FAS Conflict of Interest Policy must notify the USDA/FAS contact identified in Section G of this solicitation of any actual or potential conflict of interest that they are aware of that may provide the Applicant with an unfair competitive advantage in competing for USDA/FAS financial assistance awards within 10 calendar days of becoming aware of the conflict of interest. Examples of an unfair competitive advantage include but are not limited to situations in which an USDA/FAS employee reviewed and commented on or drafted all or part of an applicant's application. Note that USDA/FAS does not generally consider receiving information from an USDA/FAS employee limited to whether the applicant or the applicant's proposed project is eligible to compete for funding to confer an unfair competitive advantage. In addition, assistance agreements made under this solicitation will include a term and condition notifying recipients of their COI disclosure obligations and responsibilities under the award including the need to have systems in place to address, resolve and disclose COIs to USDA/FAS.

F. Federal Award Administration Information

Federal Award Notices

Successful applicants will be notified of the status of their application/award by email. This notification is not authorization to proceed, and such notification should be construed as provisional.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

All successful applicants for all grant and cooperative agreements are required to comply with the applicable General Administrative Terms and Conditions, which can be found at https://www.fas.usda.gov/grants/general_terms_and_conditions/default.asp. The applicant is presumed to have read, understood, and accepted these terms when accepting a USDA/FAS award. Applicants with questions about the applicable terms should contact the program officer(s) listed in Section G, Federal Awarding Agency Contact.

The applicable Terms and Conditions will be for the last year specified at that URL.

Before accepting an award, the applicant should carefully read the award package for instructions on administering the 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.

Subaward and Executive Compensation Reporting

Applicants must ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the subaward and executive total compensation reporting requirements established at [2 CFR](#)

[170](#), unless they qualify for an exception from the requirements, should they be selected for funding.

Mandatory Disclosures

As required by [2 CFR 200.113](#), non-federal entities or applicants for a Federal award must disclose, in a timely manner, in writing to the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity all violations of Federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the Federal award. Failure to make required disclosures can result in any of the remedies described in [2 CFR 200.339](#) including suspension and debarment.

Reporting

Financial Reports, using form SF-425, Federal Financial Report (FFR), 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) A comparison of actual accomplishments to those projected for the period;
- b) The reasons why established goals were not met, if appropriate; and
- c) 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

USDA/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, USDA/FAS will review recipients' files related to the program.

As part of any monitoring and program evaluation activities, grant recipients must permit USDA/FAS, upon reasonable notice, to review assistance agreement-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 the program.

Closeout

Within 120 days after the end of the period of performance, 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 inquiries, contact:

Chris Biles

christine.biles@usda.gov

Hours of Operation: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Eastern Time

1400 Independence Ave SW

Washington, DC 20250

H. Other Information

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.

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 USDA/FAS Program Manager to explain how that development occurred, as part of their request for guidance and/or approval. 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.

Electronic Signatures

Consistent with the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (ESIGN Act), USDA/FAS uses and accepts electronic signatures for application and award documents. USDA/FAS will neither solicit nor send physical copies of documents.