

UVM Food Systems Research Center Request for Proposals: Measuring Food System Sustainability

The Food Systems Research Center (FSRC) is announcing a request for proposals to measure, assess, and test a framework for food system sustainability in the Northeast U.S. The FSRC anticipates funding up to five proposals, for up to three years each, with a maximum budget of \$600,000 per team, inclusive of the costs of a two year post-doctorate fellow. Community partners are **required** to ensure the work will contribute to the needs of Northeast stakeholders and is grounded in the lived experiences of those in the food system.

Background: The FSRC strives to develop assessment tools to track regional food system sustainability by benchmarking the existing sustainability of food systems (the goal of this proposal), determine tradeoffs in the food system, and assess future food systems over time to inform food system sustainability, equity, resilience and transformation. The Center [has already embarked on this effort](#), in consultation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), to develop [a framework](#) consisting of a series of indicators and metrics across five dimensions of sustainability (production, economic, environmental, human, and social dimensions) that are relevant to measuring sustainability within a regional food system. After several years of initial funding in this space to develop a framework, the FSRC seeks to begin data collection, community engagement, and data integration across projects, scales, and sustainability dimensions to assess Northeast U.S. food system sustainability. We seek proposals that work across dimensions of sustainability, consider the cost, time, labor, and people impact of different metrics and measurements of sustainability, and make recommendations about the best strategies and metrics to measure food system sustainability. Successful proposal teams will engage in facilitated team discussions to learn from other projects and integrate results and lessons learned throughout the duration of the project. Team integration will be facilitated in part by post-doctorate fellows across the teams, who will serve as team liaisons and provide expertise in systems science.

Summary of Proposal Requests and Directions: Proposals are welcome from any team that was successfully funded under the Planning Grant for Measuring Food System Sustainability (due October 20, 2022). The FSRC anticipates funding 5 proposals, with a maximum budget for each proposal of \$600,000 each over three years (a total of up to \$3,000,000 is expected to be allocated for all funded projects over the next three years). These project expenses include the cost of a post-doctoral fellow for two years for each team, which will be hired by the PI and their teams with the FSRC providing minimal administrative support as needed. Hiring announcement for post-doctorates is expected for the Summer of 2023, with anticipated start dates for post-doctorates in the Fall 2023/Winter 2024.

Project proposals should utilize the [existing FSRC sustainability framework](#) as a starting place for their work, to build and test the framework and its components in their proposals. Proposals are expected to consider food system sustainability in a comprehensive manner that can accurately assess multiple sustainability dimensions and collect and analyze data across sustainability dimensions. Teams are expected to address **at least three of the five dimensions** of the sustainability framework, with priority given to teams that address all five dimensions in their proposal. Project proposals must also include **at least one** community partner (non-profit, Tribal, industry, farmer/farm, government agency, etc.) as evidenced by a letter of support, **AND** funding allocated to the partner for their time investment and expertise.

Eligible Teams and Project Personnel: Only teams that were selected for the sustainability metrics planning grants are eligible to apply. The majority of original team members must remain the same as the planning grant team (i.e. less than 50% of the team members may change). The PI must be an individual who was part of a planning grant team as either the PI or a Co-PI. A proposal may only have one PI and up to five

Co-PIs. USDA ARS scientists are allowed to serve as key personnel but may not serve as PIs or Co-PIs (and cannot receive salary).

Budget and Allowable Expenses: All reasonable research expenses are allowable under this RFP, except tuition and fees. Project start dates are July 1, 2023. Budgets may request no more than \$600,000 for the project duration, inclusive of two years of post-doctorate funding. **There is no overhead included in these requested costs.**

Salary: Principal Investigators (PI), Co-PIs, and key personnel may include both academic year and summer salary in these proposals. Minimum academic year salaries must be met before PIs and co-PIs can take summer salary. Minimum and maximum salaries are per proposal; individuals may be listed as key personnel or Co-PI on more than one proposal, but individuals may only be PI on one proposal.

Minimum salaries that must be included for all UVM faculty and staff are:

- 6% for academic year for 9-month lead PIs, 4% for 12 month PIs
- 3% for academic year 9-month co-PIs, 1% for 12 month co-PIs
- 1% for academic year 9 and 12-month key personnel within UVM

A maximum of one month summer salary can be included for any individual.

Other project personnel salary is allowable, including for project management and coordination. All budgets should include the appropriate fringe rates.

Students: Funding for undergraduate and graduate students is allowable, either as Graduate Research Assistants or student wages. All budgets should include the appropriate fringe rates. Please note that tuition is not allowed (see below).

Post-doctorates: Funding for two years of a post-doctorate **must** be included in the budget, with an estimated annual salary of \$56,000. Post-doctorate salaries should also include the appropriate fringe rates. Post-doctorate salaries will be adjusted based on the individual hired and their relevant experience.

Equipment: All equipment requests should follow UVM policy, and include price quotes, as relevant for equipment over price thresholds detailed by UVM: <https://www.uvm.edu/finance/quotes-bids>.

All Other Expenses: All other expenses, including materials and supplies, travel, computer services, human subject(s) costs, and consultant/lab services (including for community partners) should be detailed in the budget justification. Compensation for community partners for participation within research projects is required; compensation can occur through a variety of mechanisms (i.e. service agreements, human subject costs), and should follow university protocols relevant to how partners will participate in the project (e.g. as human subjects, as farmer advisors, etc.).

Subawards: In some cases, subawards may be necessary depending on the nature of community partner relationships. Subaward allowability will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Please contact Associate Director Meredith Niles if you are interested in a subaward. Please consult Sponsored Project Administration guidance on this: <https://www.uvm.edu/spa/distinguishing-between-subrecipient-supplier-or-consultant>.

Non-allowable Expenses: Tuition and fees for students

Proposal Description and Application:

The following materials are required for submission:

1. **Project Description** (Max 8 pages). The project description should include the following areas and additional components:
 - a. Proposed Project System and Measurements:
 - i. A proposed project scope - identification of a relevant food system, topic, and scale, including the proposed dimensions to be considered.
 - ii. Identification of existing and new/additional indices, indicators, and metrics the project intends to measure/test.
 - b. Data Collection and Assessment:
 - i. Proposed method for data collection of each metric and their aggregation to an indicator and/or indices.
 - ii. Tradeoffs: Known and anticipated potential tradeoffs of metrics with regards to their cost, labor intensity, accuracy, and impact/burden on people, animals, or systems. Proposals should identify standardized ways to assess these tradeoffs, and determine how tradeoffs influence the metrics that could be used in their project.
 - c. Data Analysis and Harmonization:
 - i. A description of the data types anticipated to be collected and proposed analyses to be conducted with the data collected.
 - ii. A process for developing a proposed data ontology, that describes the ways that disparate data types could be integrated within the project system and/or integrate with other projects or datasets.
 - d. Anticipated Impact, Use and Longevity:
 - i. Anticipated benchmarking and future opportunities for continued measurement in your system.
 - ii. A description of how the data can be useful and have impact for academic and non-academic audiences, including a proposed method for data availability and sharing.
 - e. Anticipated Challenges and Limitations
 - i. Most likely challenges and/or known limitations in the project and potential strategies to address them.
 - f. Timeline
 - i. A timeline for the project duration of up to three years, including all major activities.
2. **Community Engagement Narrative** (max one page) **and Letter(s)** (max one page for each partner, combine all into a single file):
 - a. The project team should submit a community engagement narrative to include:
 - i. Process for engaging the community partner(s) in writing and grant planning.
 - ii. Scope of work for the community partner(s) for the proposed project.
 - b. The project team should submit a letter(s) from the community partner(s) including:
 - i. Brief information about the community partner and their work.
 - ii. The role of their organization in the planning process and proposed project.
 - iii. The anticipated benefit of the project to the organization or its constituents.
3. **Team Science Statement and Key Personnel Document (max two pages):**
 - a. Identification of a PI, Co-PIs, and key personnel, including a brief description of each PI and Co-PI (no more than 3 sentences each) detailing their relevant expertise and area of focus.
 - b. Description of the proposed team management and team science approach to work across disciplines and dimensions within the team, as well as how the team could work with other funded projects to generate lessons learned, data ontologies, and data infrastructure for larger-scale analyses.
 - c. A description of proposed post-doctorate professional development and mentorship activities that will contribute to their success.

4. Budget, Budget Justification (max 2 pages), and Deans Approval

- a. Budgets and justifications should utilize the budget template provided on InfoReady
- b. You must work with your home college's pre-award support staff to develop your budgets, and submit a signed form from your Dean and/or Department Chair, indicating support and approval of the project budget.

5. PI and Co-PI Short CVs/Biosketches

- a. No specific format required. CVs should be limited to 2 pages for each individual.

Applications should be in a standard font, 11 point or larger. Margins should be at least 0.5". A list of references/bibliography should be included in the proposal and does NOT apply to the page limit.

Proposals should be submitted via InfoReady no later than March 1, 2022.

Proposal Rubric and Assessment: Proposals will be evaluated by a peer-review process. The following specific components will be assessed in review:

- **Project Expertise:** the extent to which the project personnel have the relevant expertise and background, as well as existing efforts, to accomplish the project.
- **Integration with existing framework:** extent to which the project addresses existing and new areas of food system sustainability, including at least 3/5 dimensions of sustainability in the project.
- **Methodological approach:** the rigor of the proposed method(s) and the ability to implement the approach. The attention given to data collection tradeoffs, including community engagement and data collection burden on people, animals, and/or systems.
- **Benchmarking and analysis:** Proposed likelihood of the data analysis to contribute to the benchmarking of a food system and provide insights about current and/or future sustainability.
- **Data harmonization and longevity:** Potential for the project to produce data that can integrate across dimensions and scales, with a data ontology, and with proposed data archiving and longevity.
- **Team science:** The extent to which the team integrates across dimensions, proposes to integrate with other teams, considers post-doctoral, graduate and undergraduate (as relevant) mentorship and leadership development.
- **Community engagement and need:** The likelihood of the project to contribute data, analysis, and lessons learned that is grounded in the needs of community partners. The extent to which community partners were consulted in the project development, project scope and budget.

If you have any questions about the funding proposal, please contact ARS Research and Outreach Manager, Chris Skinner: chris.skinner@uvm.edu or Associate Director, Meredith Niles: mtniles@uvm.edu.