

Farmland Partnership Program FY2026

Request for Responses (RFR)

Webinar 1 - Tuesday, March 11th at 1pm

RFR ID: AGR-MFPP-FY26

Questions to: Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator

Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

Note: A separate recorded version of this webinar presentation, and written Q&A, will be posted to www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program.



Agenda and how this webinar works

Agenda

- ❖ Context from Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ Farmland Partnership Program
 - ❖ Introduction
 - ❖ Eligible Activities
 - ❖ Money and timeline
 - ❖ Scoring criteria
 - ❖ Tips, tricks and other important info
 - ❖ Next steps
- ❖ Question and Answers

Presentation – Approx 60 minutes

- Can enter questions in the Q&A area (not chatbox) during the presentation, but they will not be answered until the Q&A portion
- A separate recording of this webinar will be posted on the Farmland Partnership Webpage.

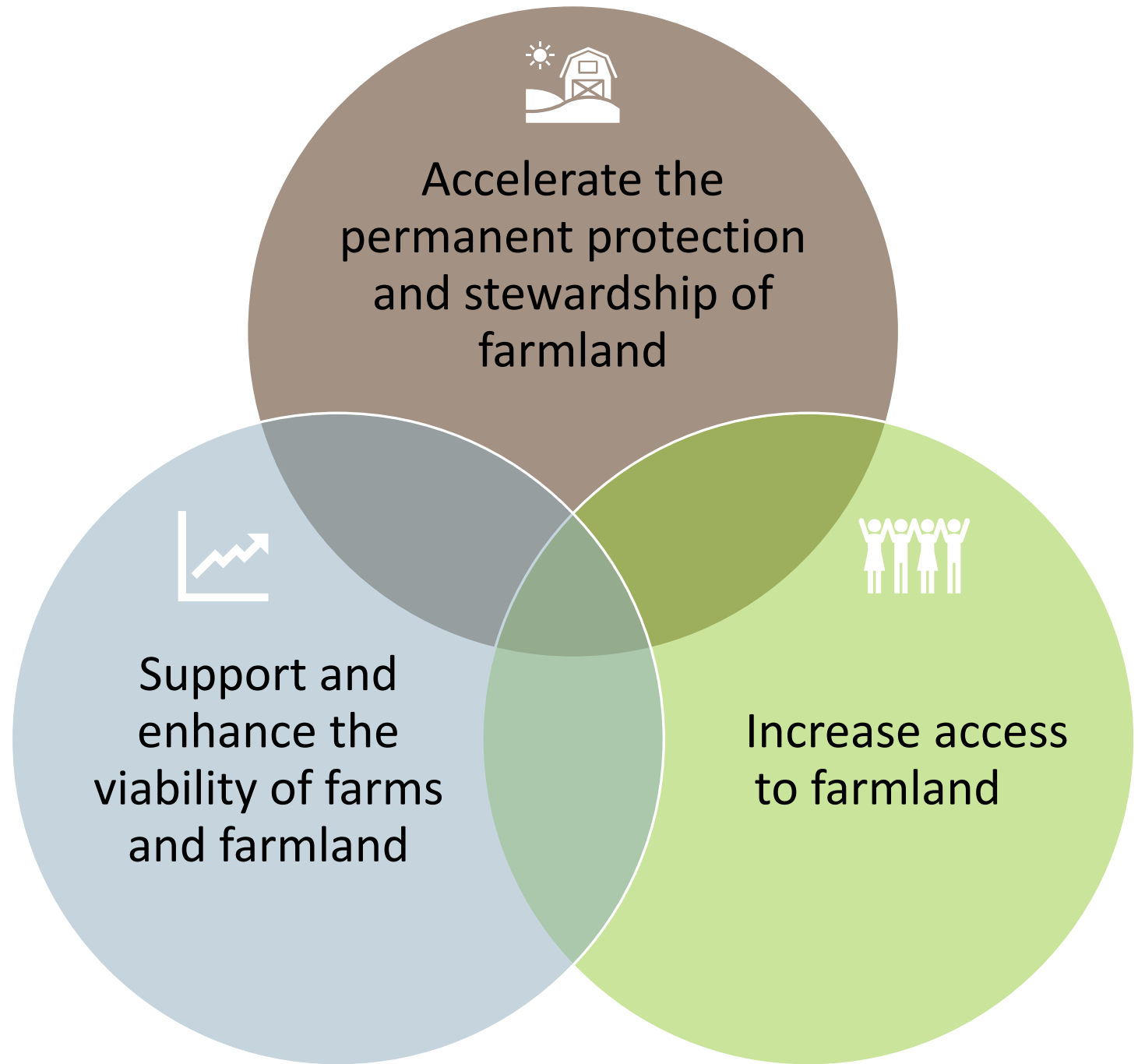
Q&A portion – Approx 30 minutes

- Enter question in the Q&A area (not chatbox)
- Or, raise hand to ask a question orally
- Q&A responses will be included in the Round 1 Q&A document posted on the Farmland Partnership Webpage.

Context from the Farmland Action Plan

What is the Farmland Action Plan?

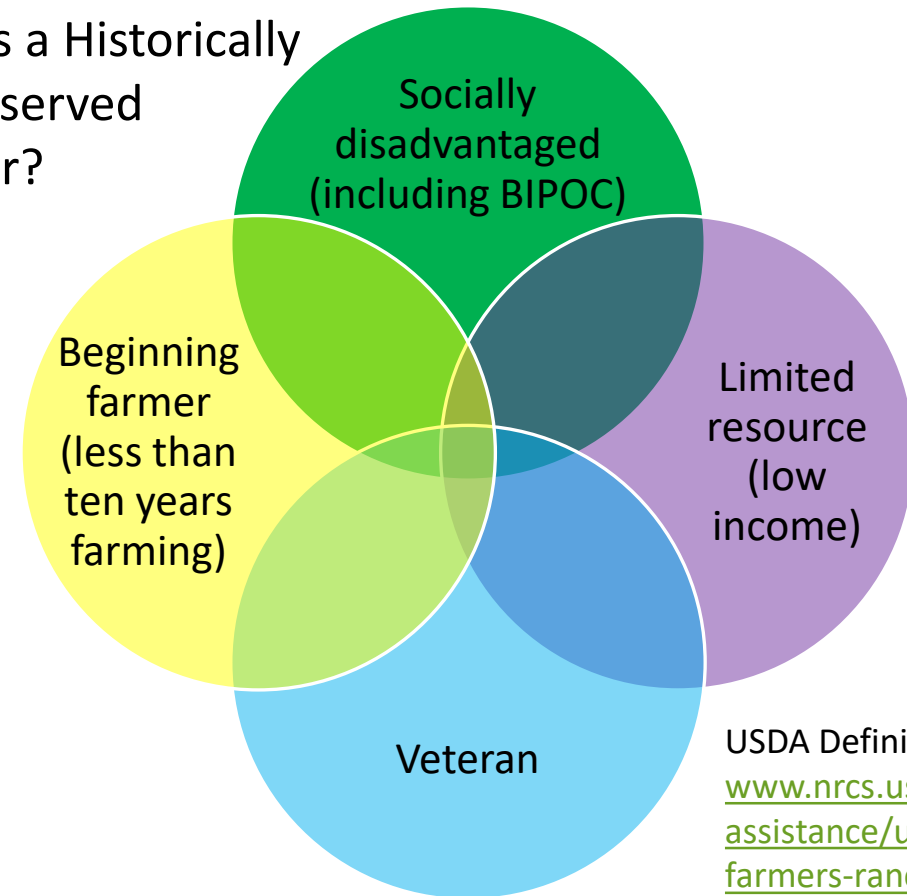
- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan



Implementing for all farmers

- All stages of farmer – beginning through retiring
- All areas of the state
- Variety of farm types – dairy, fruit, vegetables, nurseries, maple, etc.
- Urban and rural farming
- Historically Underserved Farmers (see graphic)
- Many other characteristics

Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?



USDA Definition
www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

Overview of the matrix

Goals – what the plan hopes to achieve.

Strategy – clarify what aspects of each Goal will be addressed

Action – direct how each strategy will be advanced.

Task – details on how each action will be achieved

4-digit unique ID number



Implementation matrix

The matrix is a living document that tracks

- what partners have done, and
- what partners plan to do.

Matrix is published online at

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

New versions will be published online periodically with the next update anticipated summer 2025.

Tips and tricks

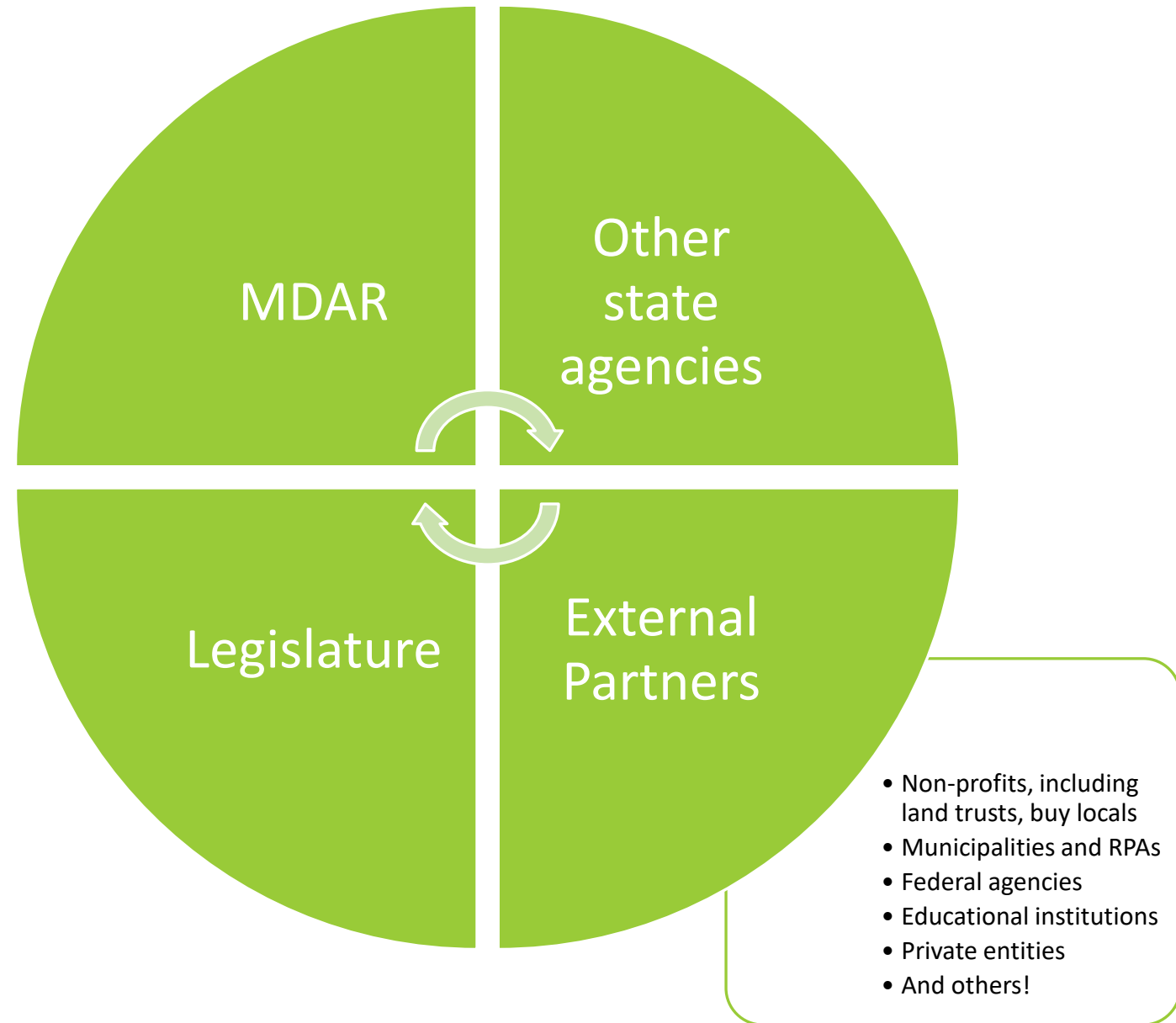
- 4-digit ID number
- Search for keywords – eg “incubator”, “municipality”, “policy”
- “About the Matrix” document explains how it works and gives definitions

Applicants MUST refer to the matrix in their response

Who will implement the Plan?

This is a plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

MDAR is promoting, monitoring and facilitating implementation of the Plan, building momentum from existing programs and initiatives.



How can I get involved?

Depending on the task you could be:

- **Lead implementer** – Partner who is the champion/ energy behind implementing a task
- **Other potential implementer** – Other partners who could be key for implementing a task, bringing specific expertise or insights that may shape implementation
- **Other interested entities and individuals** who may have useful information to share to inform the task, may be part of the solution, or are interested in the task outcome.

Lead implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Key features for implementation

Already started

- Foster partnerships and collaboration
- Learn from feedback on previous processes, including plan creation
- Encourage wider engagement and implementation

Going forwards

- Focus on topics or even specific tasks not the entire plan
 - Lead implementer role
 - Could involve meetings, listening sessions, working groups, etc
- Better understanding of equitable engagement and feedback mechanisms
- Build trusted relationships
- Capacity building, including funding for partners to help with implementation

Learning about implementation so far

2024 Progress Report

- Released December 2024
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan
- Explains how implementation is starting
- Shares more about what has happened so far
- 10 Highlights – Work in progress or starting soon

Resources by topic

- Created for specific audiences for many meetings with potential partners in 2024
- Presentations, meeting notes and other resources www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Farmland Partnership Program

Goals – Farmland Partnership Program

Grant program to help implement the Farmland Action Plan at the local, regional or statewide level.

The goal of the Program is to **build networks of Partners who work together collaboratively and in coordination** to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland.

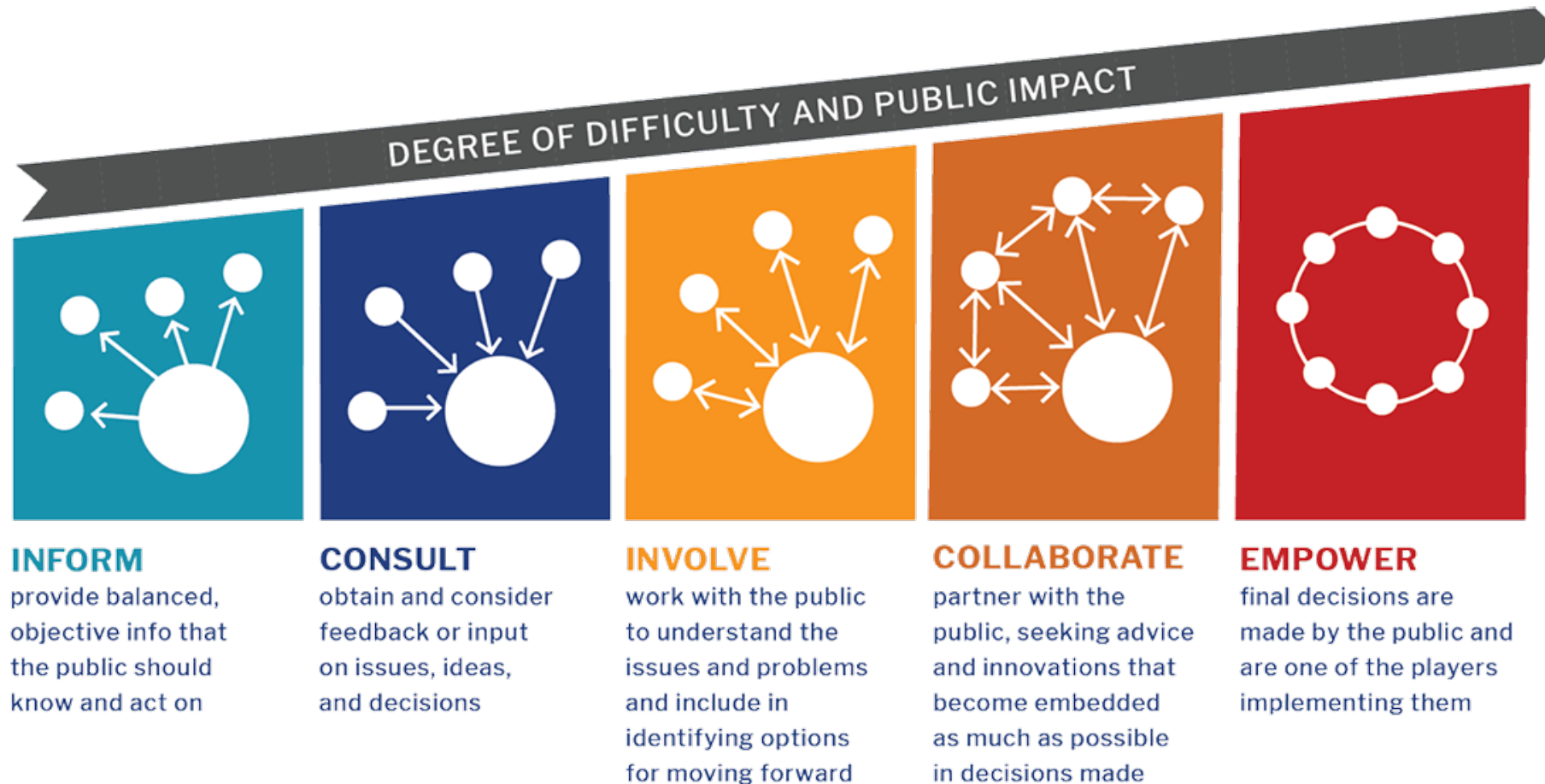
This is achieved by **providing funding to eligible Partners** to work with farmers, farmland owners, agricultural service providers, municipalities and other organizations/entities to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland.

Eligible Applicants

- Municipalities
- Regional Planning agencies
- Conservation districts
- Tribal governments or qualifying tribal entities
- Land trusts
- Other non-profits
- Other ag service providers, including for-profits

For more detail see [Section 1A of the RFR](#)

Partnerships built on collaboration



Eligible activities

For more details see Section 2 and other parts of RFR

What can applicants do?

Note:

Some admin and training costs that are directly related to proposed scope can be covered (Activity 5 Admin)

Activity 1 – Farmland Protection

- FLI designation
- Incorporating ag into regional and municipal plans
- Promote tools at a local level that do not result in loss of farmland
- Assist farmers with needs related to farmland protection

Activity 2 – Farmland Access

- Assist farmers with needs related to farm and farmland transfer
- Expand awareness of programs that assist farmers to access land
- Encourage the use of publicly owned land for agricultural production

Activity 3 – Farm Viability

- Network of navigators to assist existing or aspiring farmers with farming enterprise
- Assist farmers with needs related to farm viability
- Expand awareness of programs that assist farmers to farm viability

Activity 4 – All Goals

- Build public support and educate public
- Support organizing, engagement and participation by Historically Underserved Farmers

These are some brief examples from the RFR. For details, see Section 2 in the RFR.

Projects that focus on other tasks within the matrix will be considered.

IMPORTANT – Reference the Matrix

- All proposed activities must be clearly tied to a specific task(s) in the MFAP.
- Tasks must be referred to by their 4-digit ID number as shared in the MFAP matrix
- A specific process should be outlined to address each task individually.
- Important - The activity cannot just be inspired by a strategy or action
 - It must be aligned with a specific task, which includes following the intent of the specific action and strategy under which the task is listed.

Implementation matrix online at www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Allowable and non-allowable expenditures

Examples of allowable expenditures

- Activities associated with development and administration of Farmland Partnership Program as identified in Section 2
- Build staff capacity and training to directly support Program activities specified within contract workplan.
- Services such as business planning, conservation planning, transfer planning, and grant writing.
- Meeting-related expenses
- Reimburse participants

Examples of non-allowable expenditures

- Costs incurred outside of the scope and time period for a contract with MDAR.
- Lobbying activities.
- Legal expenses or any costs associated with legal services.
- Purchase or protection of land.
- Cost directly associated with the drafting of any regulation, bylaw, ordinance, or other similar activities.
- Travel and training costs for activities outside Massachusetts
- Costs associated with land within a designated priority development area

For additional expenditure types and more details, see Sections 3B and 3C in the RFR

Expectations of all awardees

Check ins

- Bi-monthly for first year
- Quarterly after that

Coordination

- Cohort meetings/ events
- Attend meetings and workshops that overlap with their topic area
- Coordination with organization that serves Historically Underserved Farmers

Reporting

- Performance Indicators
- Written summary of work annually – short blurb and 1-2 page summary

Materials reviewed

- MDAR staff review drafts

Money and timeline

Grant awards

- Up to \$1,000,000 per awardee. If a single partner the maximum is \$300,000
- Minimum award is \$100,000
- Reimbursement based on quarterly basis. (Monthly may be authorized upon request)
- Match expected – At least 5%, but can be less with justification related to financial need

All contracts shall be subject to available funding.

For more details, see Sections 3, 5 and 7 in the RFR

Two year grant

- Estimated start date November 2025.
- **All work must be completed by October 31, 2027**

Match

- A cash match is required.
- At least 5% match is recommended for all activities. Lower match is acceptable with justification related to financial need.
- Adequate match will be considered as part of the evaluation process.
- Projects successfully awarded other state funding are eligible for additional assistance through this grant program, as long as those state funding sources do not prohibit such pairing of funding.
- In-kind match will not be considered to reach Match requirements.

For more details, see Sections 3F in the RFR

Can I use these funds with other grants?

It depends

- This program is not intended to replace existing funding sources and programs that focus on specific needs.
- Instead, this Program is intended to connect between these distinct programs and foster new initiatives as needed.
- It focuses on capacity building and intentionally incorporating agriculture into existing and new initiatives.
- It could also be used to expand and foster an existing initiative in another part of the state or statewide to the extent permitted by this RFR.

[See Section 2 and 3B for more detail](#)

Note: It is not MDAR's decision regarding the terms for other grants/funding.

Budget template

A budget template is provided in Attachment G and is required to be used.

All tables in the budget require breakdown by activity and sub-activities (which align with tasks).

Important Info

- Tips for a successful budget
- Information to help fill out the budget

Table 1 – Budget Overview

- Grant Requested and Match

Table 2 – Budget by Year

- Start and end dates
- Breakdown by fiscal year

Table 3 – Budget by Expense Category

- Labor costs, Fringe and indirect costs
- Direct expenses and costs

Table 4 – Budget by Year and Expense Category

- Expense categories by Fiscal Year

Dividing the budget into different categories

The budget must be broken down into the following activities:

- Activity 1 – Farmland Protection,
- Activity 2 – Farmland Access.
- Activity 3 – Farm Viability.
- Activity 4 – All Goals.
- Activity 5 – Admin

The budget must include a breakdown that estimates the funds that will be spent for each fiscal year by activity.

- FY26 – July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026
- FY27 – July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027
- FY28 – July 1, 2027 through contract end (October 31, 2027)

For more details, see Sections 2, 3E and the budget template in the RFR

Tips for a successful budget

General tips

- Please see RFR for detailed information about what activities belong in which task, particularly Sections 2 and 3.
- The budget is broken into four tables. All tables are required.

Potential Problems

- Errors in calculations when deleting or adding rows that affect formulas
- Budget not detailed enough
- Totals between tables do not match
- Remember to estimate consultant hours, not just staff hours

Sub-activities for Activity 5 - Admin

What does this include?

Admin, including contract check-in meetings, contract administration, reporting, training for staff and reimbursement for participants.

See “Important Info” tab in budget template for more detail

- Sub-Activity 5.1 - General administration: All costs associated with administering the grant not otherwise specified in Activity 5
- Sub-Activity 5.2 - Travel and training
- Sub-Activity 5.3 - Kick off meeting and check ins
- Sub-Activity 5.4 - Cohort meetings/ events
- Sub-Activity 5.5 – Reporting
- Sub-Activity 5.6 - Participant reimbursement and expenses

Scoring criteria

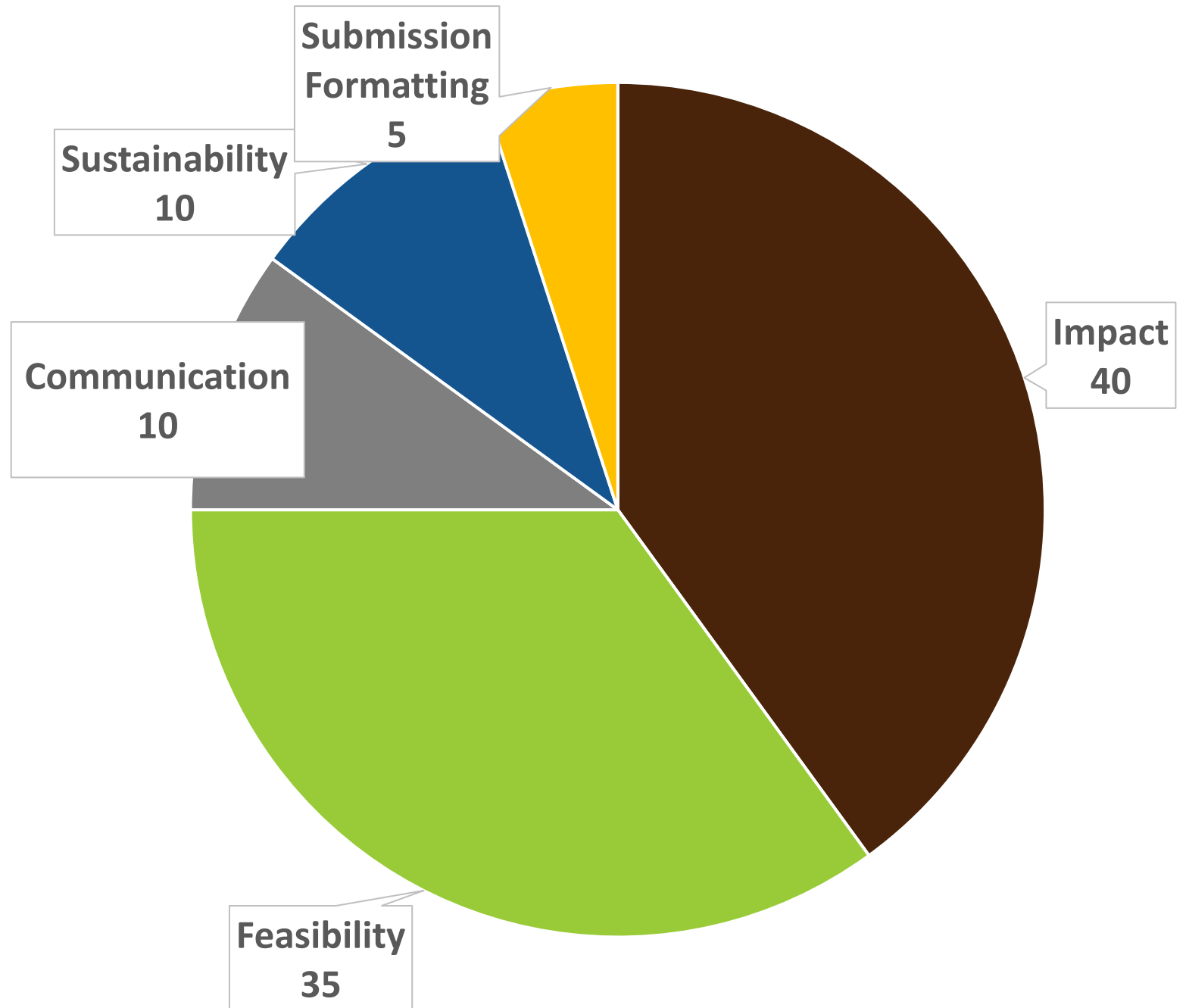
Scoring criteria

Project impact and feasibility account for 75% of the score (75 points).

Good applications will include:

- Clear connection to Actions and Tasks in the Farmland Action Plan
- Strong collaborative approach
- Reasonable budget and timeline
- Qualified staff and consultants
- Intentional participation strategy
- And more!

For more details see Section 4C of RFR



Impact Score – 40 points

How will the project address a need and solution outlined in the Farmland Action Plan?

Scoring looks at the extent to which the proposal:

- Clearly implements the goals, strategies, actions and tasks of the MFAP.
- Clear link between project proposal outcomes, and proposed performance indicators, reporting and deliverables
- Includes multiple partners in a single proposal, supporting approaches that provide coordinated outreach, engagement and services across the entire Commonwealth, or significant portion of the Commonwealth (multi-region/multi-county level).
- Clear and reasonable strategy for engagement with participants, including Historically Underserved Farmers.
- Addresses Environmental Justice and disparities in access to resources and land for Historically Underserved Farmers as outlined in the MFAP and considers Historically Underserved Farmer perspectives in shaping solutions and decisions.
- Advances climate resilience

Feasibility Score – 35 points

How likely is the project to be successful?

Scoring looks at:

- Qualifications of key personnel
- Demonstrated ability of the Partner to successfully implement and complete similar projects/initiatives
- Demonstrated past and ongoing collaboration between and knowledge of relevant state, federal, and local agency programs, policies, and other resources to implement agricultural protection, access or viability projects
- If applicable, the qualifications of the lead Partner to manage similar projects with multiple subcontractors
- If applicable, the feasibility of the relationship between the lead Partner and any subcontractors who are included application.
- The feasibility of the timeline
- The feasibility and appropriateness of the budget
- The level of match

Other criteria – 25 points

Communication – 10 points

How will the project share project information and project impacts?

- Extent to which the proposal demonstrates a plan for sharing project impacts and information.
- Clearly defined proposed performance indicators, reporting and deliverables.

Submission Formatting – 5 points

Does the submission include all required information and convey details clearly?

- The proposal is complete, including a budget.
- Support documentation is provided.

Sustainability – 10 points

How will the project continue beyond grant funding and/or be replicable in other areas?

- Applicant provides a plan for continuation beyond grant funding, particularly as relates to sustaining partnerships.
- Approach is replicable in other regions of the Commonwealth.

Deliverables

Expectations of all awardees

Check ins

- Bi-monthly for first year
- Quarterly after that

Coordination

- Cohort meetings/ events
- Attend meetings and workshops that overlap with their topic area
- Coordination with organization that serves Historically Underserved Farmers

Reporting

- Performance Indicators
- Written summary of work annually – short blurb and 1-2 page summary

Materials reviewed

- MDAR staff review drafts

Coordination and check ins

Importance of coordination between partners and MDAR staff.

- Contractors are strongly encouraged to attend, participate in in events meetings or workshops that have overlap with area(s) of focus of their Program contract. Contractors may also be hosting and/or facilitating these events, meetings or workshops.
- If possible, partners who intend to work on the same tasks in different parts of the state are strongly encouraged to submit one combined application. *In no event, however, may applicants work together to submit separate proposals.*

Regular check in with MDAR staff

- Bi-monthly in first year. Quarterly in second year if no staffing or performance issues.

Coordination with Historically Underserved Farmers

- If work involves significant engagement with Historically Underserved Farmers it is expected that coordination with an organization that has deep connections to Historically Underserved Farmers is integrated into the proposal, including being part of the project team with funding allocated in the budget.

[See Section 5A-3 for more detail](#)

Cohort meetings

- All partners – lead applicants and subcontracts – expected to attend
- Up to 4 meetings/ events per year
- Develop a cohort partnership network between different expertise's and geographic areas.

Why?

The goal of the Program is to build networks of Partners who work together collaboratively and in coordination to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland.

[See Section 5A-4 for more detail](#)

Performance indicators

- To be suggested by the applicant and negotiated as part of the contract.
- Can be quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (narratives)

Why?

- Important to be accountable for use of public funds

See Section 5A-2 for more detail, including indicators to be used as a starting point

Other reporting and deliverable requirements

Quarterly reports with invoices

At least one written summary annually of work completed

- suitable for distribution in a public-facing newsletter and on a website
- including a short blurb and 1-2 page summary
- summary of work and how it fits into MFAP.

Contractors are also encouraged to use other methods of communication to share information about their work, including webinars, podcasts, event presentations, etc.

[See Section 5A-1 for more detail, including indicators to be used as a starting point](#)

Other important info

Should I apply with other people?

MDAR encourages collaborative applications that involve partnerships among multiple entities/individuals. [See Section 3B for more detail](#)

If possible, partners who intend to work on the same tasks in different parts of the state are strongly encouraged to submit one combined application. [See Section 5A-3 for more detail](#)

Evaluation criteria include

- Points for collaborative applications
- Points for collaboration between programs, policies and resources
- Points for other criteria that would be best served with collaborative approaches (eg strategy for engaging historically underserved farmers, qualifications of key personnel)

[See Section 4C for more detail](#)

Remember you cannot be a partner on more than one application!

See next slide on collusion

Collusion and not being a partner on more than one application

MDAR encourages collaborative applications that involve partnerships among multiple entities/ individuals, but **respondents must ensure that no collusion occurs in the preparation of any proposals submitted under this RFR.**

Partnership proposals must be submitted as a single application and potential applicants may not work with any other entity or individual if they intend to submit a separate proposal for funding.

Each partner may only be included in one submitted proposal and may not be included, or receive a financial benefit from, any other proposal.

[See Section 3B for more detail](#)

Actions and tasks

Can I just focus on an Action?

- No
- The activity cannot just be inspired by a strategy or action
- The activity must be aligned with a specific task, which includes following the intent of the specific action and strategy under which the task is listed.

What if there is overlap between tasks?

- A specific process should be outlined to address each task individually
- Costs must be allocated to specific sub-activities, that align with MFAP tasks

Engaging with all farmers

MDAR is committed to working with Historically Underserved Farmers and communities as outlined in the EJ Strategy and Farmland Action Plan.

Evaluation criteria include

- Points for clear and reasonable strategy for engagement with participants, including Historically Underserved Farmers
- Points for addressing EJ and disparities in access to resources and land for Historically Underserved Farmers, and considering Historically Underserved Farmer perspectives in shaping solutions and decisions

[See Section 4C for more detail](#)

If work involves significant engagement with Historically Underserved Farmers it is expected that coordination with an organization that has deep connections to Historically Underserved Farmers is integrated into the proposal, including being part of the project team with funding allocated in the budget.

[See Section 5A-3 for more detail](#)

Important for

- Authentic involvement
- Sustaining partnerships beyond life of grant

Reimbursing participants

Allowable expense for this RFR - Costs for reimbursing participants for their time and facilitating their participation (e.g. travel expenses).

A policy that outlines how this will occur needs prior approval from MDAR.

Can the scope, budget or timeline change?

Final contact is subject to successful negotiation of a final scope of services.

Modification requests for new items, activities or objectives not included in the original proposal are not permitted and non-compliance may result in termination of funding.

Applicants should

- give specifics within their proposed scope that show clear intent and direction for how they intend to implement activities.
- give enough information to cover the range of next steps that may be pursued to achieve the deliverable and goal if there may be diverging options on how to proceed based on first steps

For more details see section 5C of the RFR

Using Farmland Partnership funds to replace lost funding

As explained in Section 3B of the RFR:

This program is not intended to replace existing funding sources and programs that focus on specific needs, including, but not limited to, MDAR programs, EEA grant programs, NRCS programs and privately funded initiatives.

Instead, this Program is intended to connect between these distinct programs and foster new initiatives as needed.

Next steps

Timeline for RFR

Before application deadline

- Questions due (Round 1) by 3/17 at 5pm
- MDAR post answers by 3/27 at 5pm
- Webinar 2 – 3/31 at 10am
- Questions due (Round 2) by 4/11 at 5pm
- MDAR post answers by 4/28 at 5pm
- **Application deadline – May 19 at 5pm**

After applications are received

- Applications reviewed
- Estimated award date – September 2025
- Estimated contract effective date – November 2025
- Work must be completed by October 31, 2027

Application submission

**Applications must be received by Monday,
May 19, 2025 at 5pm**

Applications by email to
MDARfarmlandpartnership@mass.gov

For additional details and requirements see
section 6A of RFR

Project proposals MUST include

- An application cover letter.
- Completed Attachment A- Page 1.
- Project Narrative
- Project Budget
- Resumes for team members
- Most recent audited or otherwise completed financial statement.

For additional details and requirements see
section 6A of RFR

Project Narrative

- A. Background
- B. Goals, Objectives and Impacts
- C. Activities and sub-activities
- D. Timeline
- E. Budget
- F. Staff
- G. Collaboration
- H. Performance Indicators and Deliverables
- I. Communication/ Sustainability
- J. Geographic Location and Participation

For more details see Attachment B in the RFR

Questions?



For any questions after today, please email them to Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

Deadlines for questions that will have MDAR response before application deadline

- March 17th at 5pm
- April 11th at 5pm

MDAR will publish responses to questions received by these deadlines at www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program

Any questions received after the last deadline will not receive responses.