Farmland Partnership Program FY2026

Request for Responses (RFR)
Webinar 2 – Monday, March 31st at 10am

RFR ID: AGR-MFPP-FY26

Questions to: Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator

Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov by 4/11/2025 at 5pm

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

MDAR
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Agenda and how this webinar works

Agenda

❖ Grant Process Overview

❖ Some things to keep in mind

❖ Items to clarify based on Round 1 Q&A
  ❖ Partnering, collaboration, and limitations
  ❖ Time and budget
  ❖ Budget and Match
  ❖ Deliverables and expectations
  ❖ Priorities/ Scoring/ Evaluation Criteria
  ❖ Eligibility of proposals and allowable expenses

❖ Next Steps

❖ Additional Questions and Answers

Presentation – Approx 45 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 45 minutes

• Enter question in the Q&A area (not chatbox)

• Q&A responses will be included in the Round 2.2 Q&A document posted on the Farmland Partnership Webpage.

Grant Process Overview

- MDAR ensures that any money awarded complies with applicable federal and state laws
  - Grant awards are also subject to 815 CMR 2.00
  - All procurement, including grants, must also comply with all policies and guidance issued by OSD and the Comptroller.
  - The awarding of any money must be done through a fair, transparent, and open process.
  - When a grant opportunity is identified, MDAR will develop an RFR that complies with all applicable requirements.
    - The RFR also includes information about how to submit questions and any allowed engagement opportunities.
    - While the RFR is open, MDAR may not assist with the preparation of any response.
    - No one individual or entity can receive benefits or advantages not available to all.
    - Responses cannot be developed in a way that creates and unfair advantage for award during the review process (i.e., working together to develop multiple responses that when viewed together may result in the higher likelihood of award).

- Responses must comply with the terms of the RFR and all eligibility requirements must be met.
- Applicants must have the ability to contract with the Commonwealth and agree to all standard terms and conditions issued by OSD and the Comptroller.
- An evaluation team will review each response to determine whether eligibility has been met and rank proposals.
- Awards are made based on the evaluations team's review and contracts are subsequently awarded.

Some things to keep in mind

This is a new program
and may be different from what you are used to

But

❖ It is learning from other successful models and programs

❖ It is directly tied to implementing the Farmland Action Plan

Partnership and collaboration are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Plan

And therefore, they form the foundation for this new grant program, within the parameters of the Commonwealth's procurement procedures.
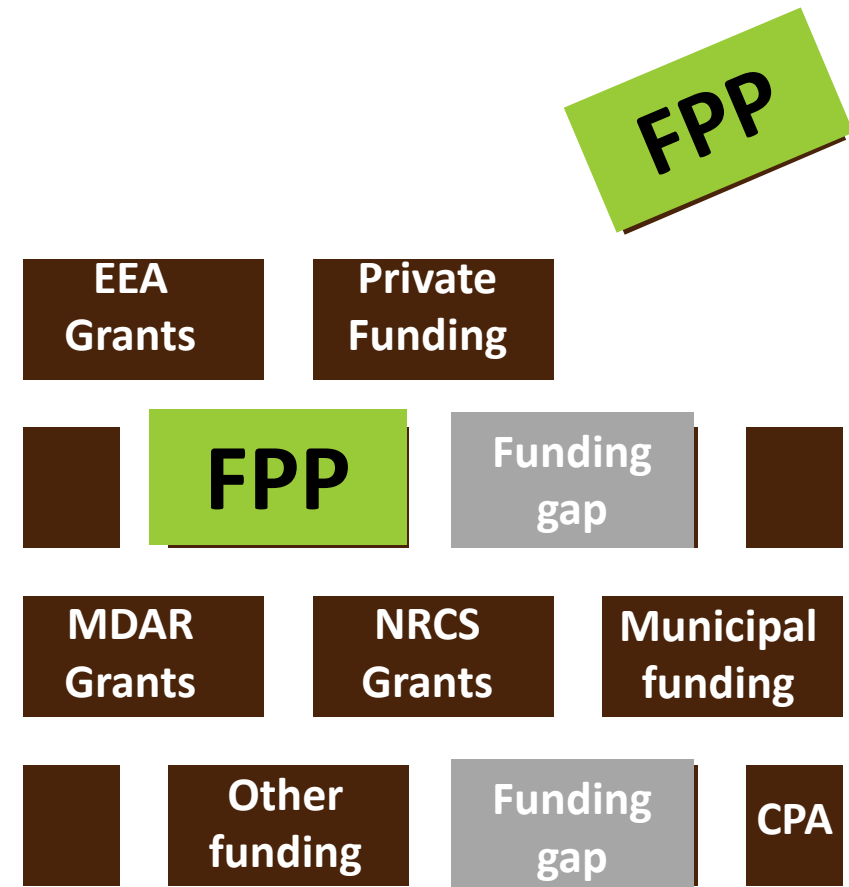
This program serves a unique purpose

We have to be strategic with finite funds and resources

So this program is focusing on filling some of the gaps in what is currently available

MDAR has a suite of grants and support for a wide range of partners, farmers and other entities. EEA and other entities also have grant programs.

FPP

| EEA Grants | Private Funding |
| | |

| | FPP | Funding gap | |

| MDAR Grants | NRCS Grants | Municipal funding |

| | Other funding | Funding gap | CPA |

This program is not about doing things the way they've always been done

Instead it's about reaching to do more

❖ Engaging more farmers and communities

❖ Coordinating and collaborating more

❖ Fostering system changes that benefit agriculture

❖ Helping to build foundations for future efforts

Most of what is outlined in the Farmland Action Plan is there because there is something that needs to be done that hasn't been easy to address in the past.

Getting your ducks in a row

There is a lot to get ready before the deadline.

We look forward to seeing your application!

Some may not be ready to apply this year

❖ But you can still participate in Plan implementation

❖ And prepare for a potential second round (as fiscal circumstances allow)

❖ And take time to work on new and deeper partnerships

You don't need funding from Farmland Partnership to be a lead implementer, potential other implementer and/or interested individual for a task in the Farmland Action Plan.

Looking back to webinar 1

This is the first round of a new grant program, and we plan to learn from this round.

The rules and procedures are there to facilitate a fair, competitive and open process for procurement/ submitting grant applications.

Notable Q&A so far

Round 1 posted on 3/27. Round 2.1 posted on 3/28.

www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program

All remaining Round 2 answers will be posted by 4/28 at 5pm

Q&A divided into categories

Over 100 questions and answers. Please review these documents!

Focus today on a just a few key topics and notable questions

- Logistics and contract admin details (L1 - L4)

- Funding (F1 - F5)

- Eligibility to apply (A1 - A2)

- Partnering, collaboration, and limitations (P1 - P29)

- Time commitment (T1 - T2)

- What to submit in the application (S1)

- Budget and Match (B1 – B11)

- Deliverables and expectations (D1 – D6)

- Calendar/ Timeline (C1)

- Priorities/ Scoring/ Evaluation Criteria (Y1 – Y9)

- Eligibility of proposals and allowable expenses (E1 - E37)

What are we going over today?

Very abbreviated answers to some questions

Please visit the relevant Q&A doc for more detailed responses, including references to specific sections of the RFR.

If you have follow up questions,

- Please read the full answer in the Q&A document before asking follow up question

- Please refer to the alpha-numeric code, so we know which question/ answer you are referring to

Partnering and collaboration, limitations

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

Limitation - not being a partner on more that 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

Next few slides will answer some of your questions on this topic.

P11 – Define collusion

P11. Can you define collusion?

- Collusion occurs when individuals or entities work together to prepare procurement proposals to increase their chances of being awarded.

- For example, two entities work together to put together two separate proposals but when reviewed together increase the odds of receiving funding.

P9, P10 and P22 – Additional clarification

P9. Can you be a partner in more than one application if you are not seeking any compensation through the grant program?

- No, you may only be named in a single application.

P10. In terms of collusion - what is the difference between discussing with other groups to see if they are going to apply, and if you should partner together, and collusion? We need to have the beginning conversations to determine if we will partner.

- It is the obligation of the applicant to ensure they are not engaging in any engagement or discussions with anyone other than those with whom they will be submitting a proposal to the extent that those discussions are connected to the development of any proposal.

P22. I am confused by the collaboration part- what if we work with a group but decide not to go forward, would this make us a collaborator on the final grant? Would we then be barred from doing a new grant- even though we did not go forward with the old one.

- Participation decisions should be made prior to the development of any proposal.

P8. Multiple "leads"

P8. Can an organization apply with multiple "lead implementers" as their partner? Or can organizations only in 1 proposal?

- There can only be one person should be identified as the "Lead Partner"/"Lead Applicant" who is responsible for managing all that is proposed in the application.

- That said, applications can apply to implement several different tasks in one application.

- Only one partner should be listed as the lead implementer for each task/ sub-activity.

- If there are multiple tasks in one application, that could mean a few different lead implementers for the tasks could be identified, depending on who is best suited to lead each task/ sub-activity.

See Round 1 document for more complete answer

P19 – Lead and other implementers

P19. Can partnering applicants be composed entirely of groups listed as the 'Potential Other Implementers' in the implementation matrix? Do any applicants need to be named as a 'Lead Implementer' in the matrix?

- Many partners reviewed the matrix to suggest appropriate implementers (lead and others)

- This list may not be complete and is open to refinement using the matrix feedback portal on the Farmland Action Plan Webpage

- Lead implementers
  - Identified where known, particularly if an MDAR team may be the lead.
  - Many places where "unassigned" because they are not yet identified.
  - Some "unassigned" lead implementers are expected to be identified in the coming months

See Round 1 document for more complete answer

Time and budget

T2 and B2 – Making accommodations

T2 and B2. The budget template highlights planning meetings, training and communications which are essential to successful projects. Are accommodations for language access considered parts of those categories? As they often require more time and consultant/translation efforts.

There are a few interpret this question from time and budget perspectives, so here are some things to understand:

- Paying for translation, interpretation and other accommodation services are an eligible expense. Applicants will need to include these costs in their budget under Sub-Activity 5.1 (General administration)

- Applicants will need to build time and resources into their budget to fulfil these types of requests.
  - Why? Once negotiated and finalized in the contract, there can be no changes to the scope or budget. Modification requests for new items, activities or objectives not included in the original proposal are not permitted.

See Round 1 document for more complete answer

B5, B6 and B10 - Cash match

B5. I understand that the match must directly related to the proposed project and tasks. As for sources, are both state and federal funds eligible match?

- State and federal funds are eligible match, as long as their requirements do not preclude being matched with these funds (state funds).

- Local and private funds could also be also eligible cash match

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

B6. Does staff time funded through other sources count as cash match, or is that ineligible in-kind match?

- This would be ineligible. Staff time funded through other sources is a type of in-kind match.

B10. Will MDAR allow pre-award cash match spending to be used toward this project if it helps advance the goals of the proposed project?

- As stated in Section 3F, Costs incurred prior to execution of the contract, including application preparation costs, will not be considered as part of the match requirement.

- *See Round 2.1 document for more complete answer*

B8 – Indirect rate

B8. Is there an indirect cost rate limitation for this proposal? I did not see one referenced in the RFR.

- For each partner organization/entity in the budget, provide the Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate if the organization/entity has one.

- If not, please provide justification for the selected indirect rate for each organization/entity

Deliverables and expectations

D1 – MDAR staff reviews and meetings

D1. Can you speak more to what the MDAR staff reviews & meetings with partners would be like? Are all partners required to participate in these reviews?

- MDAR will assign a staff person to be the point of contact for a specific project.

- MDAR reviews are important to ensure that materials being created align with the intent of the Farmland Action Plan.

- MDAR-partner check in meetings are important for coordination.

- Meetings with other partners is important. Partners are strongly encouraged to attend, participate in in events meetings or workshops that have overlap with area(s) of focus of their Program contract.

- Cohort meetings are intended to bring partners from all Farmland Partnership funded projects together.

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

D2 and D3 – Meetings online or in person

D2. Will the meetings be Zoom or hybrid to recognize the great geographic distances and travel times?

- MDAR-Partner check in meetings as outlined in Section 5A-3 will be held online, unless a site visit is needed

- Cohort meetings will be held either online or in person. Hybrid meetings will likely not be utilized.

- Meetings scheduled by partners as part of task implementation can be scheduled online, in person or hybrid.
  - Note: "A clear and reasonable strategy for engagement with participants, including Historically Underserved Farmers" is included as one of the evaluation criteria in Section 4C.

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

D3. Back to hybrid meetings (D2)- what if one of your staff works out of state remotely?

- It is expected for all partners involved in this project to attend meetings in person in Massachusetts as required, regardless of where their normal regular worksite is located.

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

Priorities/ Scoring/ Evaluation Criteria

Y5 – Regional versus statewide

Y5. To clarify - statewide partnerships are encouraged, but regional partnerships are also eligible?

- That is correct.

- Regional proposals are permitted but will likely not score as high given the scoring criteria and other guidance within the RFR.

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

Eligibility of proposals and allowable expenses

E22 – Creating small grants

E22. Could a proposal include a plan to offer small grants to build capacity for farmland protection — for example among [partner type]? i.e. where the specific grant recipients are not yet known?

- No. Farmland Partnership funds cannot be used to create new grant programs

E24, E31 and E32 – Costs associated with land already protected

E15, E24, E31 and others ask about how to interpret several tasks in light of the non-allowable expense "Costs associated with land already protected for any purpose under Article 97 or a CR, an APR, or a WPR." How is this type of non-eligible expense defined for the purpose of this grant?

- For the purpose of this grant, the non-allowable expense item is referring to ongoing costs related to specific protected lands, such as surveys, stewardship endowments, issues requiring legal input and similar activities.

- Tasks that work to support protection of more land are eligible, including sharing good practices

- Tasks that address farmer access to protected farmland are eligible.

- Program activities not related to land protection/ stewardship can take place on land protected by APRs, CRs, Private APRs and Covenants.

Also see E32, E33 and other questions.

See Round 1 document for more complete answer

E11 and E34 – Assisting farmers versus project management

E11. The grant can't be used for land protection acquisition costs or transaction costs. Can it be used to hire staff to do land protection projects, and/or pay existing staff to do more farmland protection projects?

- Farmland protection, including acquisition or transaction costs, are non-allowable expenses.

- Staff cannot be hired using Farmland Partnership funds.

- Farmland Partnership funds are to be used to pay staff on a reimbursement basis for completing specific activities associated with implementing a task. The staff needed to complete these activities may be existing or new. Some training can be eligible.

- *See Round 1 document for more complete answer*

E34. How to do you draw the line between "Consultations with and outreach to farmers and farm owners on needs related to farmland protection" and assisting landowners in the processing of applying for the APR Program?

- There is a limit to how much you can focus on specific properties when working with Farmland Partnership funds.

- When the work becomes too focused on specific farms and farm properties, the work is no longer eligible under Farmland Partnership.

- With this in mind, work to support a landowner with protection up to the point when due diligence starts is eligible to be funded under Activity 1 of the Farmland Partnership program

- *See Round 2.1 document for more complete answer, including answers specific to APRs and Private APRs*

Next steps

Timeline for RFR

Before application deadline

- **ALL REMAINING QUESTIONS DUE by Friday, April 11 at 5pm**

- MDAR post answers by Monday, April 28 at 5pm

- **APPLICATION DEADLINE – Monday, 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

Questions?

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

Deadline for questions that will have MDAR response before application deadline

- Friday, 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 deadline will not receive responses.