

***Input provided by agInnovation. For questions regarding these recommendations, please contact Dr. Jeanette Thurston ([Jthurston@ksu.edu](mailto:Jthurston@ksu.edu)).***

- Per the Public Law 119-21, Research Facilities Act, proposal submission and funding eligibility should be limited to LGUs that receive capacity funding. Secondly, consideration should be given to a limited number of public institutions with established colleges of agriculture.
- Prioritize proposals that clearly articulate alignment with long-term institutional goals to ensure that RFA-funded projects are relevant, community-informed, address state and regional agricultural needs, and deliver the greatest return on investment for U.S. agriculture.
- Proposals should be evaluated based on each institution’s specific needs, capacity, and history of prior awards—not solely on geographic location. If one institution has received substantial RFA funding, other institutions in that state should not be disadvantaged; each proposal should be assessed independently on its own merits, readiness, and potential contributions.
- For the FY2026 and future RFA program cycles, institutions should be eligible to apply for new funding once a prior award period has concluded. However, institutions that received smaller RFA awards in previous years (prior to FY2026) should not be disadvantaged in subsequent competitions and allowed to apply, particularly given that those awards were capped at \$500,000 and provided limited support. At the same time, appropriate guardrails should be established to ensure that sequential funding does not unintentionally compromise equity, geographic balance, or fairness within the overall grants process.
- Establish “planning grants” as an eligible grant type in each NOFO. Planning grants should support universities in defining project scope, costs, and feasibility, enabling the development of stronger and more competitive full proposals. While the majority of RFA Program funds should be directed to new construction and renovation projects, a small portion should be set aside specifically for planning grants to support early project development and readiness.
- “Shovel-ready” projects should not be prioritized as a primary evaluation criterion unless the term is clearly and consistently defined. Because regulatory requirements, approval processes, and funding constraints vary

widely across states and institutions—and in some cases planning cannot begin until funding is secured—a rigid definition risks disadvantaging smaller states and institutions. If considered, “shovel-ready” status should be guided by transparent criteria and sufficient flexibility to account for state- and institution-specific constraints.

- Do not exclude historic building renovations from eligibility; however, applicants should be required to provide a compelling justification for why RFA investment in a historic facility is warranted. A clear and transparent evaluation process should be established to ensure that historic renovation projects are assessed fairly and consistently relative to new construction and lower-cost (non-historic) renovation projects.
- While maintaining a primary focus on research infrastructure, allow research-adjacent projects to be eligible when there is clear and compelling evidence that the investment will generate long-term agricultural research, education, and outreach benefits. Eligibility should consider the potential for broader institutional and community impact. Proposals should receive higher priority when research-focused infrastructure investments also deliver substantial benefits to other components of the university’s mission—particularly Extension and educational programs—thereby amplifying institutional impact and community engagement.
- Define the RFP broadly to encompass a wide range of infrastructure needs related to agricultural, food, and ecological systems, while maintaining clear boundaries to avoid ambiguity or institutional drift. The evaluation process should prioritize proposals that demonstrate how the infrastructure investment addresses local and regional priorities while aligning with long-term institutional goals. RFP language should explicitly include off-campus Experiment Station and research facilities, not solely projects located on main campuses, to ensure equitable consideration of infrastructure essential to agricultural research across diverse settings.
- Recognizing that the statute caps funding per project at no more than 25 percent of the total funds available, we recommend offering a range of award size categories, including a dedicated portion of funds for planning grants. Providing multiple award tiers or funding levels would enable broader participation and allow USDA to invest strategically across a diverse set of eligible institutions and facility types.
- Project evaluation criteria should be detailed and clear and specify whether letters of support will be permitted or required and identify any expectations regarding letters from specific entities or stakeholders.