

Date December 6, 2024

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Research Projects on Farm to School (FTS) Programs

Funded by Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools, with Award from the USDA

Background and Purpose

The Farm to School (FTS) movement is more than connecting students with local food systems—it's also about using FTS as an integrated educational opportunity to improve student well-being, facilitate social-emotional learning, and embed educational values that foster sustainability, social responsibility, and community engagement.

This Request for Proposals is supported by funding from a recent USDA award to Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools, which aims to explore the reach and impact of Farm to School programs. In light of this funding, we seek two distinct but complementary research studies that would explore how FTS programs influence students' success across different populations, time scales and regions. Proposals may be submitted for one or both studies, however If you submit multiple proposals, each study should be submitted separately. The findings from these studies will provide essential insights to guide future policy, program development, and educational practices.

Study 1: Evaluating Benefits and Gaps in FTS Programs Using Existing Data

Objective:

This study will evaluate the social-emotional learning (SEL) benefits of FTS programs, along with other outcomes such as life skills, community engagement, and gaps in access and participation. Existing data sources can be used, such as the USDA Farm to School Census, demographic and geographic data, youth risk behavior surveys, and other relevant datasets to assess the benefits and identify gaps in Farm to School (FTS) programs.

Key Research Questions:

- What measurable impact do FTS programs provide in terms of youth behaviors related to social emotional learning (eg. empathy, self-efficacy), life-long skills, engagement, sense of community and more?
- Which communities benefit from the current FTS effort? Do gaps exist in terms of program access, participation, and long-term effectiveness across different demographics?

Study Design:

- Utilizing existing data sources such as USDA Farm to School Census, federal, state and local demographic data, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), and additional relevant datasets proposed by the research team.
- Applicants are encouraged to propose a combination of various quantitative and qualitative methods.

Deliverables:

- Peer-Reviewed Publication: At least one study published in an academic journal focused on education, child development, education for sustainability, public health, or related fields.
- Comprehensive Report: A detailed report outlining the study's findings, accompanied by actionable recommendations for addressing gaps and enhancing FTS program outcomes.
- Executive Summary: A concise summary of key findings and recommendations, intended for policymakers and stakeholders.

Funding:

For this project, up to \$100,000 to support personnel, data analysis, and dissemination of findings through publication and reports. Indirect costs are allowed up to a maximum of 10% of the total budget (as part of the \$100,000). Capital expenses are not eligible. Applicants should propose budgets that align with the scope of the proposed study.

This research is supported by funding from the US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services and must comply with standard terms and conditions. All publications and outputs must include the appropriate USDA acknowledgment statement.

Study 2: Retrospective Study on the Long-Term Impact of FTS Programs on Students**Objective:**

This retrospective study will explore the long-term impact of participation in FTS programs on students, particularly in terms of educational value, social-emotional learning (SEL), and career or life choices. The study will investigate how involvement in FTS programs has influenced former students' personal development and community engagement over time. Proposals should specify the types, duration, and intensity of participation they intend to examine.

Key Research Questions:

- How have FTS programs influenced students' long-term educational outcomes and SEL?
- What career paths or community roles have former FTS participants pursued, and how do they relate to their experiences in FTS programs?
- How do former students reflect on both the personal and community benefits of participating in FTS programs, including lifelong knowledge and skills?

Study Design:

- Retrospective qualitative and quantitative analysis, using interviews, surveys, and secondary data to capture long-term impacts.
- Targeting former FTS participants from diverse educational and geographic backgrounds to ensure a broad perspective.
- Regional (multi-state areas) or national-level studies will be prioritized.

Deliverables:

- Peer-Reviewed Publication: At least one study published in an academic journal focused on education, child development, education for sustainability, public health, or related fields
- Comprehensive Report: A thorough report that outlines the retrospective study's insights, with recommendations for enhancing the long-term impact of FTS programs.
- Executive Summary: A brief summary designed for educational institutions and policymakers, highlighting key outcomes and practical implications. We encourage creative formats for a high-level summary.

Funding:

For this project, up to \$200,000 to support personnel, data analysis, and dissemination of findings through publication and reports. Indirect costs are allowed up to a maximum of 10% of the total budget (as part of the \$200,000). Capital expenses are not eligible. Applicants should propose budgets that align with the scope of the proposed study.

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* Both projects preferably focus on a broad geographic area at a regional or national level.

* Each study should apply an equity lens to examine disparities in access, participation, and program outcomes in the context of demographics, such as race, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

Submission Instructions

- Eligible applicants include non-profits, academic institutions, and independent consulting firms. If you are not sure if your organization is eligible or not, please contact us.
- Proposals should be submitted electronically through [this form](#) by **January 31, 2025**. The decision and initial contacts will be made in March. The final products should be delivered by July, 2027 (with the exception of in-progress peer-reviewing for journal publication).
- Proposals should not exceed ten pages (excluding appendices and references) and include the following:
 - Title that indicates the intended project
 - Background information, including study scope, brief description of the rationale, and proposed project outline

- Proposed methodology
- Equity considerations
- Deliverables
- Team qualifications, including information on primary investigators and similar projects completed by the team previously, if applicable.
- Contact information of all team members (name, position, organization, email, and work phone number)
- Proposals should include contact information (name, position, phone number, and email) of two references.
- Timeline
- Project budget
- **Submit all materials in one single PDF. If multiple proposals are submitted, each proposal should be in a separate document.**

Proposal Evaluation:

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Relevance and clarity of research questions
- Methodological rigor
- Team expertise
- Budget justification
- Equity considerations

If you have any questions about the submission process, please email Qing Ren (qren@shelburnefarms.org) and Betsy Rosenbluth (brosenbluth@shelburnefarms.org). Please make sure emails are cc'd to both addresses.

About Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools

The Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools serves as a hub for professional learning, providing resources and training for PreK-12 educators.

Through professional development, curriculum design, and policy advocacy, Shelburne Farms Institute for Sustainable Schools' Farm to School work empowers educators, schools, and communities to create whole-school FTS programs that support student learning, improve access to local food, and strengthen local food systems. Our Farm to School work serves the mission to inspire and cultivate learning for a sustainable future. shelburnefarms.org/institute