

25 Years of Food Security Measurement: Answered Questions and Further Research

2020 Request for Proposals
<https://sites.tufts.edu/foodsec25/>

IMPORTANT DATES

Request for proposals release:	November 16, 2020
Informational webinar for applicants:	December 17, 2020
Proposals due:	February 19, 2021
Award notification:	April 7, 2021
Funding period (19 months) begins:	May 1, 2021
Conference manuscripts due:	March 28, 2022
25 Years of Food Security Measurement Conference:	April 4, 2022
Manuscripts for journal special issue due:	August 22, 2022
Final manuscripts for journal special issue due:	November 11, 2022

OBJECTIVE

This Request for Proposals (RFP) seeks proposals for 6-8 research papers related to the past 25 years of U.S. household food security research and ideas for feasible evidence-based improvements looking forward. The research papers will be presented at a national conference in spring 2022 and compiled in a journal supplement.

OVERVIEW

December 2019 marked the 25th year of data collection with the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS). This anniversary offers an opportunity to take stock of where we have been and how we need to move forward improving and expanding USDA's U.S. food security data and research program. To mark this milestone, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA ERS) will fund a suite of competitive grants on food security measurement methods, data, and future research needs. The selection and coordination of the projects will be managed by an external cooperator, a collaboration between Tufts University (Dr. Parke Wilde) and the University of Missouri (Dr. Irma Arteaga). This RFP invites proposals for research projects funded up to \$50,000 (primarily small projects using secondary data or reviews of the existing research literature) and up to \$100,000 (larger projects including primary data collection and new analysis). We are open to new ideas, innovative approaches, and critical feedback to aid ERS in advancing food security measurement. The selected proposals may cover a variety of topics, but all selected proposals will demonstrate actionable items that ERS can pursue to improve or extend the food security measurement program.

With input from ERS staff, we have convened a five-member advisory board to serve as proposal reviewers and provide advice, input, and feedback to awardees: Judi Bartfeld (University of Wisconsin Madison), James Ziliak (University of Kentucky), Rafael Perez Escamilla (Yale University), Hilary Seligman (University of California San Francisco), and Mariana Chilton (Drexel University).

Each grantee will produce a written conference paper, present the paper at the conference in April 2022, and produce a manuscript for inclusion in a journal special issue with a draft manuscript due in August and final manuscript due in November 2022.

BACKGROUND RESOURCES

For U.S. household food security measurement, some high-profile sources or collections of sources include:

- The USDA/ERS topic area for U.S. household food security (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>);
- The USDA/FNS topic area for food security research (https://www.fns.usda.gov/data-research?f%5B0%5D=research_type%3A185);
- The 2000 Revised Guide to Measuring Household Food Security (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/FSGuide.pdf>);
- The USDA commemoration in 2015 of 20 years of household food security research (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015/october/commemorating-20-years-of-us-food-security-measurement/>);
- The 2006 consensus study report from the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies, titled, “Food Insecurity and Hunger in the United States: An Assessment of the Measure (2006)” (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/11578/food-insecurity-and-hunger-in-the-united-states-an-assessment>);
- The 2012 ERS study titled, “Assessing Potential Technical Enhancements to the U.S. Household Food Security Measures” (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=47606>);
- The 2013 workshop summary from the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies, titled, “Research Opportunities Concerning the Causes and Consequences of Child Food Insecurity and Hunger” (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/18504/research-opportunities-concerning-the-causes-and-consequences-of-child-food-insecurity-and-hunger>); and
- Background information on the September 2020 CPS-FSS split-panel test of a revised survey instrument (the test survey instrument and recommendations from Census cognitive testing can be found here: https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAViewIC?ref_nbr=202004-0536-001&icID=241357).

To aid grantees in development of their proposals, Dr. Wilde and Dr. Arteaga will produce a background manuscript with a larger collection of citations to food security research, identifying some promising themes for further research. The first version of this background manuscript will be available in December 2020, designed to be useful for grant proposals, and a revised version will be presented as one of the conference papers in April 2022. One purpose of this manuscript is to reduce the need for proposals and manuscripts to address shared background material,

thereby allowing the applicants more space to focus on contributions of their proposal that are more novel or distinctive.

A webinar will be held in December 2020, providing prospective applicants with an opportunity to learn more and ask questions about this grants program while preparing their proposals.

PRIORITY TOPIC AREAS

Proposals are sought on a diversity of topics that are important for understanding the history of U.S. food security measurement, the application of survey-based food security measures for program evaluation and national monitoring, and the potential for improvements to the measurement methods and data collections in the future. This program places a high priority on measurement approaches that are practical, realistic, and suitable for adoption in federal government program and policy uses.

Examples of topics include:

- Development and assessment of a short (1- to 2-item) food security measure and/or a discussion of available short alternative food adequacy measures and their strengths and drawbacks.
- Cognitive testing of existing and potential household food security items, with implications for expanding our understanding of food insecurity. Such work could include cognitive testing among specific subpopulations, in different languages, an assessment of intra-household food security and how respondents conceptualize the experiences of household members when answering items, or an assessment of mode effects.
- Practical approaches to scaling or item response theory (IRT) models, with opportunities for methodological improvements that prioritize ease of communication.
- Improvements in methods for using food security measures in evaluating federal nutrition assistance programs, noting the distinction between 12-month and 30-day instruments.
- Implications of using the existing Household Food Security Survey Module, either the 30-day or 12-month measure as the main outcome in interventions, especially when those interventions target specific individuals in households (e.g., interventions targeting children).
- Strengths, limitations, and opportunities for using food security measures in national goal setting and progress monitoring.
- An assessment of USDA's food security data investments including identifying gaps and opportunities and implications for research.
- Qualitative research on food security instruments that allows low-income Americans to express their experiences of food insecurity and hunger in their own voices, with a consideration of how these experiences relate to existing food security measures.
- Economic models of household food spending and food consumption decision-making, with a consideration of implications for food security research and measurement.
- Differences in household food security by region, geography, income strata, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, and/or gender, with implications for social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such work should include a consideration of how issues

of diversity, equity and inclusion affect food security measurement, research and data collections.

- Nutrition science and public health aspects of the association between food security and health outcomes, with implications for food security measurement methods.
- Psychological connections between stress, depression, and household food security, with implications for understanding measurement effects on household food security.

These topics are merely examples and are not listed in any order. Proposals in new areas we did not anticipate are welcome.

Proposals should present administratively feasible opportunities for improving household food security measurement for government uses. Research that primarily applies existing food security measurement tools, such as evaluations of food security impacts of nutrition programs, are highly valuable in their own right and rightly emphasized in other funding opportunities, but are not the main focus of this RFP.

TYPES OF STUDIES

Proposals may have budgets of up to \$100k. Budgets should be appropriate for the scope of work proposed. We anticipate:

- Proposals with budgets of up to \$100k including mixed methods approaches, new collection of qualitative data or cognitive testing data.
- Proposals with budgets of up to \$50k including new analysis of secondary data, meta-analysis, or analyses of particular specialized topics in food security measurement. For the smaller proposals, applications by Ph.D. students or postdoctoral researchers are welcomed, with budgets of \$10k to \$50k as suitable for the proposed work.

The larger and smaller grants are considered equally important and will have equal presentation time in the 2022 conference.

ELIGIBILITY

For All Award Types

- Applicant organizations must be accredited private or public institutions of higher education or non-profit research organizations.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Investigators must have completed appropriate education for the proposed research.

For Post-Doctoral and Pre-Doctoral Award Types

- Applicants must identify a mentor, research or dissertation advisor on the proposed project and provide evidence of their commitment to the project (e.g., letter of support, budget) and a mentor's biographical sketch.
- The proposal must discuss methods and realistic schedule for ensuring project completion in the event of graduation or position change.
- An applicant for a post-doctoral award must hold a doctorate or terminal degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD) at the time of the application.

- An applicant for a pre-doctoral award must have advanced to doctoral candidacy (as determined by the applicant’s institution) at the time of the application.

Diversity and Inclusion Commitment

We are committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in food security research. We wish to support a network of researchers whose work benefits all participants in the USDA programs and all U.S. residents at risk of food insecurity and hunger. We encourage applications from investigators of every race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, stage of career, and disability status. We value diversity in perspectives, region of the country, life experiences, and backgrounds that can help expand our understanding of challenges faced by households at risk of food insecurity and find innovative solutions to address them.

HOW TO APPLY

All applications in response to this RFP must be submitted as email attachment to FoodSec25@tufts.edu. Receipt will be acknowledged. The proposal should have (1) a summary (no more than 200 words), (2) a narrative with objectives or specific aims, significance or contribution to the literature, data and methods, staffing or project organization, and timeline; (3) sources cited, (4) brief vita or biosketch for key personnel (not to exceed 2 pages each), and (5) budget and budget justification. The budget should use the template provided, “FoodSec25Template.xls.” The narrative should be no greater than 8 pages single-spaced (exclusive of sources cited, biosketches, and budget and budget justification). The proposal should be submitted as Word or .pdf file with at least 1-inch margins, and at least 12-point font.

TERMS OF AWARDS

1. Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator’s institution. Budget amounts include indirect costs at the applicant’s institution, if required. As requested by USDA/ERS, the indirect cost rate established for this program is no greater than 40%. If your federally negotiated rate is less than 40%, please use your negotiated rate. Proposals with budgets exceeding the funding maximum, inclusive of indirect costs, will not be accepted.
2. Budget amounts must include expenses incurred for obligatory participation in the spring 2022 **Food Security Research Conference** (at USDA offices in Washington, DC). The Program will not separately pay grantee travel costs, which should be included as part of the grant budget.
3. Grantees are required to furnish the Tufts/Missouri Program (FoodSec25@tufts.edu) with quarterly progress reports, with an invoice for payment.
4. The conference paper manuscript, journal article manuscript, and revised journal article manuscript are due no later than the date indicated on p. 1 of this RFP. These deliverables should be submitted to FoodSec25@tufts.edu.
5. The award agreement with the grantee’s institution will stipulate that no more than 80% of the award amount should be invoiced prior to submission of the conference paper manuscript, and no more than 90% prior to submission of the journal article manuscript.

REVIEW PROCESS

The full proposals will be reviewed by advisory committee members, external referees, and staff at Tufts, University of Missouri, and USDA, using the following criteria.

Potential Impact on U.S. Household Food Security Research (35 points)

Is the proposal innovative? Does it offer insight into the 25-year history of food security measurement? Does the proposal offer promise for potential food security research improvements that are practical, realistic, and suitable for adoption in federal government program and policy uses?

Research Merit (30 points)

Does the proposed paper contribute to knowledge in food security research? Are the data and methods appropriate? Do the methods provide sufficient information to judge the most important research decisions, while avoiding unnecessary complexity? Is the project feasible and realistic? Will the project be completed as planned? Are limitations acknowledged and addressed?

Workplan, Budget, and Cost-Effectiveness (20 points)

Does the total budget adequately support the project? Is the budget cost-effective? Is there justification for any large or unusual expenditures? Is the workplan reasonable and sufficient to ensure timely implementation and completion of the study? Are personnel and facilities available? When achievement of the workplan requires collaboration, are participating partners committed (e.g., a letter of support or commitment from collaborators)? Do applicants provide evidence of securing access to necessary data prior to the start of the project (e.g., a letter of support or commitment from entities from whom they plan to obtain the data)?

Key Personnel (15 points)

Are the key personnel qualified to carry out the project? Are they available and committed for the work time budgeted? Does the proposal connect investigators with new or underrepresented skills or backgrounds with the field of food security research?

QUESTIONS

Responsible staff members at the Tufts/Missouri Program are:

- Parke Wilde, *Director*
- Irma Arteaga, *Associate Director*
- Ellen-Marie Bransfield, *Program Coordinator*
- Kim Wright, *Senior Research Administrator*

Please direct all questions to the Program Coordinator at the Program Email: FoodSec25@tufts.edu. For more information: <https://sites.tufts.edu/foodsec25/>.