



Request for Proposals

Project Name/Description of Purchase: Forever Green Initiative Strategic Plan

Background:

The Forever Green Initiative (<http://www.forevergreen.umn.edu/>) at the University of Minnesota is pursuing a unique market-driven strategy for clean water, soil health, and rural economic vitality. The strategy is based on augmenting current crop production systems with economically viable perennial and winter-annual crops. Such crops and systems enable agriculture to move toward continuous vegetative cover of soil across landscapes and watersheds, enhancing production of marketable agricultural commodities while also protecting soil, water, and wildlife, and building rural economies. Examples of novel Forever Green crops and systems include winter-hardy “cash cover crops,” such as pennycress, camelina, and winter barley, as well as perennial crops such as intermediate wheatgrass (Kernza®) and hybrid hazelnuts.

The Forever Green Initiative (FGI) is a unique research-and-scaling platform that is made up of a small core staff and a wide network of researchers from multiple disciplines. FGI collaborates with many major food manufacturers, entrepreneurs, and other private-sector partners in addition to numerous agencies and non-profit organizations at regional and national scales. FGI is committed to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in its own operations and through the supply chains and networks that it develops and engages in. It has an annual budget of approximately \$5 million.

As part of an intentional leadership transition, an Executive Committee (EC) was recently created to oversee the FGI. The EC is made up of six faculty members from a range of disciplines who were elected by a vote of the FGI faculty. The EC also includes the four FGI Directors (two Co-Directors, the Associate Director, and the Director of Adoption and Scaling).

The EC has decided that its first priority for advancing FGI is to develop a strategic plan. This plan will refine and build on strategies developed over 30+ years of doing related work, some of which are informal and some of which have been formalized on our website, in prospectus documents, and in peer-reviewed publications. The EC is seeking an experienced individual, firm, or collaborative to facilitate the development of this plan. The desired scope of work, timeline, and deliverables are laid out below.

Scope of Work:

The overall goal of the strategic planning process is to make FGI more effective at achieving its aims. We need to clearly articulate those aims and how we are working toward them. We also need to address pressing organizational issues that have strategic implications. Our goal is to do this in an efficient yet reflective way that incorporates feedback from key stakeholders.



Ultimately, we need a strategic plan that guides our operations—a “compass” for the short and medium term. We would also like to produce a document that highlights our unique vision and value proposition to potential partners and supporters.

The EC is envisioning a two-stage strategic planning process in which we address the highest priority needs in the short term, and then turn to lower priority and more detailed questions in the longer term. We would like to complete stage one over the course of ~9-10 months, and then complete stage two over the following 12 months. This RFP covers only stage one; stage two would be covered by a new contract.

Desired outcomes from stage one of the strategic planning process include:

- Improved and mutually agreed statements of FGI’s mission, vision, and values
- Articulation of our overall goals and key strategies to achieve those goals
- Definition of our scope of work (disciplinary, geographic, temporal, etc.) including the roles of research, outreach, and education
- A plan for our future institutional structure (status quo vs. becoming a Center, Institute, etc.)
- A plan for our future leadership and staffing

To inform this planning process, we would like our facilitator to lead a stakeholder engagement process with the following groups:

- Industry: small and large companies that are or could be partners; commodity groups that represent mainline agriculture
- Farmers: current partners who are growing our crops as well as other influential and innovative farmers
- Peers: scientists and other staff from universities and non-profits doing similar work
- Community groups: rural and urban stakeholders with an interest in food systems, sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, and related topics, including those from historically marginalized communities
- Scientific partners: staff researchers, graduate students, and postdocs working on FGI crops.

The goal of this stakeholder engagement will be to gain feedback on the challenges facing FGI, strategies for addressing those challenges, and what each group needs to more effectively support the FGI mission.

We expect that the following items will be included in stage two of the process:

- Identification of more specific and time-bounded goals (e.g. 3-5 year goals)
- Identification of strategies and resource needs to meet those goals
- A detailed fundraising plan



- A detailed communications plan

We welcome proposals that offer alternative approaches to strategic planning that do not directly align with the details laid out above, as long as they are in line with the spirit of this scope of work.

Timeline:

The following bullets outline a rough desired timeline. We are open to altering the sequencing to align with your proposed approach. However, we would like the process to be complete by the end of March, 2024, at the latest.

- **June-August 2023**
 - Note: The EC will not meet regularly over the summer and will have limited capacity. The Directors will be available for meetings and email discussions.
 - Initiate the process
 - Detailed discussions with FGI Directors
 - Review existing documents that address FGI's mission, vision, values, and operations
 - Conduct stakeholder outreach
- **September-December 2023**
 - Lead strategic planning process with full EC
 - Develop written draft of strategic plan materials for review by EC members
- **January-March 2024**
 - EC members provide feedback by late January
 - Final draft of materials complete by late March

Deliverables

- Summary of findings from the stakeholder engagement process.
- Detailed written plan addressing all elements outlined above. This document should be aimed at internal audiences and close stakeholders, e.g., FGI researchers and staff; leadership of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences; members of the Forever Green Partnership; existing funders; etc. This document should meet professional standards but does not require extensive design.
- Short, attractive, professionally designed document summarizing the main elements of the plan for external audiences.



Proposal Format (please complete in no more than 5 single-spaced pages)

1. Please describe the goals and objectives of this project and your ability to execute the projects/tasks.
2. Please briefly summarize why you are interested in facilitating this strategic planning process and how it fits with your interests, expertise, and mission.
3. Please describe your team as a whole and each team member's relevant qualifications (skills, years in the field, education, etc.).
4. Please describe your team's experience leading strategic planning processes, especially with organizations working in academia, agriculture, sustainability, research, innovation, and social change.
5. Please use the scope of work and timeline we have provided above to outline a brief 1-2 page plan of how you propose to meet these deliverables. Include tasks, proposed date of completion, necessary participants and any additional information you think would be useful for us to evaluate your ability to meet these deliverables. Where your approach would diverge from the scope of work and/or timeline outlined above, please explain why you suggest taking a different approach. We welcome your new ideas!
6. Please provide examples of strategic plans you have facilitated with other organizations. You may provide links to online documents or electronic files.
7. Collaboration across diverse groups and communities is highly important to the work of the Forever Green Initiative. Please include a statement that reflects your team's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Evaluation Criteria

- Total cost - 20%
- Commitment to diversity and inclusion - 10%
- Respondent's expressed understanding of the project - 15%
- Respondent's documented relevant qualifications & experience - 25%
- Response to specific deliverables - 25%
- Respondent's financial stability and capacity to perform - 5%