

Transcript of Web-Based Listening Session – 7/17/2014 on NIFA Implementation of Centers of Excellence Provision in 2014 Farm Bill.

Hello, for those of you on the phone, we will start the session in just a few minutes. You are all currently placed on listen only mode. You are unable to speak via the conference call but we will explain how you can comment, once we start. Thank you.

We have two webinars, taking public input on how we are going to implement section 7214 of the 2014 Farm Bill. We are looking forward to hearing from all of you for the best way to identify and offer priority in competitive funding to Centers of Excellence. The session will start with a brief slide presentation which will be recorded and made available on the NIFA website, followed by comments from anyone who requested the opportunity to provide comments prior to the call. Also, for those joining us in Adobe, want to offer you the opportunity to use the chat window to request the opportunity to comment at any time during the call. We ask that you put down your name and any affiliation you have in that request. We will be taking these comments in the order requested and for a maximum of 5 min. each.

I am going to start at the beginning today. My name is Erin Daly I'm a Policy Advisor at USDA NIFA. It is our job in policy to implement the Farm Bill regulations that came to us in February. I am going to walk you through some slides that describe one section of the farm bill that we are working towards implementing and we really do feel like you guys have some insight you can provide us on how to do this in the best way possible.

I am an ex teacher which means I will begin by telling you what I'm going to tell you. I know there are many topics to be covered today. We are going to start off with why you would have centers of excellence, we will move on to who can be a Center of Excellence. And we will spend a little bit of time on how those Centers of Excellence could be selected -- that includes how NIFA might identify the Centers, as well as what it means to provide priority consideration for funding the Centers.

Why have centers of excellence? The short answer to that is because the Farm Bill says we are going to. Section 7214 of the Farm Bill requires that the Secretary of Agriculture, in this case acting through NIFA, is going to identify or as the language says, recognize Centers of Excellence. While there were several versions of this language, the first bullet that you see on this slide is the broad language that was adopted in the Farm Bill. These are Centers of Excellence for food and agriculture research, extension and education activities. In other words, the whole portfolio of things that NIFA funds. This is how it was adopted in the Farm Bill.

The purpose of the Centers and recognizing them is to provide priority consideration when selecting recipients for any of the Agency's research or extension competitive grant programs. We know that depending on what competitive grant program an applicant might apply for, sometimes we will have, in addition to regular evaluation criteria, we will have priority considerations. The legislation tells us to give that type of priority consideration to Centers of Excellence. However, it leaves us with a lot of room to determine how that is going to happen, and at what point during the process.

We will start off discussing who can be a Center. In this respect, Congress didn't give us a lot of direction. If you take a look at the eligibility, it is extremely broad. A Center can include one or more of any of the following, you can see the Ag Experiment Stations, colleges and universities (it is the broadest definition), university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal

agencies, national labs, private organizations or corporations, and in fact you could be a Center of Excellence as an individual. What we learned from the legislation was that we are not to limit eligibility on the front end for the Centers of Excellence.

One of the questions we have been grappling with and we would like your assistance with, is how are we're going to select a Center of Excellence. We know that according to the Manager's Notes from Congress, being a Center of Excellence is considered a way of leveraging funds and that it is in fact supposed to improve overall program effectiveness. These Manager's Notes go on to talk about how multiple institutions and organizations participate in projects of similar interest and that, this, the Centers of Excellence, is a way of incentivizing the formation of formal partnerships.

Here we have the criteria as they appear in the legislation. Again, not only is the eligibility for Centers of Excellence extremely broad, but you can see that the criteria for recognition include not only cost-effectiveness and coordination, but also leveraging resources by using public-private partnerships.

I'm going to move to the criteria as they appear in the legislation. There is a challenge here, because we are going to get to a point where we have to determine whether applicants are going to build a case that they are a Center of Excellence or whether there is going to be some separate process. Here you have the first two criteria for being recognized as a Center of Excellence. There are in fact three more. A Center of Excellence has to implement teaching initiatives that increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions -- they are giving a value to extension in that criterion; increase economic returns to rural communities, and the very last of the criteria that you will see here is one that is not a requirement as much as it is, we are being asked where practicable to give credit to applicants who include efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities.

Some of the terminology that appears in the criteria should be familiar to NIFA stakeholders. In fact, we would probably say that the majority of our stakeholders do, to some extent, each one of these things, especially when we start talking broadly about extension and capacity building.

The next slide here talks about how we might go about selecting a Center of Excellence. Earlier I talked about the fact that we are required to recognize Centers of Excellence. We have been given some very broad criteria. The next question for the agency is, what process we use to recognize these and really there are multiple ways we could go about doing this but I have highlighted here two of what I would consider the easier ways to go about selecting Centers of Excellence. One of them is to have grant applicants as they draft their competitive grant applications, self-identify as a Center for Excellence and, using the criteria in the legislation, they would write a justification that could be considered by the Agency and, in fact, could be considered by a peer review panel. The status, the Center of Excellence status in this case, would have to be specific to an application. On the other end of the spectrum, it is possible that we could create a separate designation process for Centers of Excellence. In this case, we would have an applicant request consideration to be designated and they would write a justification we imagine for a specific area of science. One of the potential benefits about going this route would be that Center of Excellence status might be able to be applied to more than one competitive grant program based on that area of science.

I am going to talk now about what it means to provide priority. In our solicitations, we sometimes will talk about priority status and usually what we are doing is talking about something that gets applied prior to the evaluation criteria. For instance, we might have a program where priority status is given to small and midsized institutions, for example. If that is the case, we provide that priority prior to the

evaluations. In other words, that application rises to the top of the stack early in the competitive process. When we saw the language in the legislation about providing priority for funding, to the Centers of Excellence, it raised the question that, what does it mean to get priority? Is it, in fact, going to be something where if an applicant has been designated as a Center of Excellence, once that application comes into the agency, we provide priority at that point? Does that application rise to the top of the stack early in the process? Or, alternatively, do we have consideration of an applicant-written justification as part of the peer review process. That is another way we could go about providing priority. If that were the case, we could, for instance, consider a point value being assigned to Centers of Excellence status.

The third bullet that you will see here is the lowest level of priority. We could consider Center of Excellence status only in a tiebreaker relative to peer panel rankings. It would really only come into the play if this were the case that two applications had the same peer review ranking and a tiebreaker was needed, then the Center of Excellence status would give someone the advantage competitively. What I'm talking about here are the various directions we could take this language from the legislation. Again, we will be interested to hear what you all think about how this priority should best be applied.

This is the last prepared slide that I have for you today. It just describes the other opportunities that there are to provide input. I know this was a fairly short turnaround in terms of when the Federal Register Notice came out and when we had the first of these web based listening sessions. It looks like turnout has been very good; however, we are encouraging folks to share with their colleagues the next webinar opportunity which is July 31 from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM, Eastern Time. The slides will be up on our website and we have included here the link as well as the call-in information. The last bullet on the slide also indicates that we are really hopeful we're going to get some written comments and we have given folks until the 31st to submit those. Once you have had time to consider what has been discussed here, talk with your colleagues, maybe there is a discussion that goes on as soon as we're done with the slides. We are really hoping that will spur some conversation that will be helpful for us to consider as we put a process in place to recognize the Centers of Excellence.

That is all of the prepared material that I have for you today. What I'd like to do now is open it up for comments. I believe we are going to start with anybody who registered ahead of time. I have some colleagues here with me that are going to assist us with the question and answer, as well.

If you would like to provide a comment via the conference call, or make a verbal comment, then you will have to unmute yourself when I call your name. For those of you who have been making comments in the Adobe Connect webinar, I will plan to read those comments for the verbal recording, but you're also welcome to make a comment as part of the conference call. Jean Mari Peltier, if you are present please press star six -- if you are present, please press star 6 to unmute yourself and then you will be able to speak. Jean Mari?

Jean Mari Peltier: I sent a PowerPoint presentation; do not know if it is possible for that to be brought up as part of this presentation?

Erin Daly: It is not, but we are happy to have your verbal comments and I did receive it.

Jean Mari Peltier: Okay, if you will give me half a second I would like to pull it out but let me first introduce myself. My name is Jean Mari Peltier and I am the President of the National Grape and Wine Initiative and was the Chair of the National Ag Research Board in 2010 and 2011. I see this conversation on Centers of Excellence as a continuation of comments that have been made and questions that have

been raised for a number of years, really maybe starting at the time when Congress made the decision to eliminate earmarks.

Perhaps, really going before that comes the National Grape and Wine Initiative is an organization consisting of representatives of all kinds of grape products. Wine, which is a word that a lot of people comment on or connect with immediately, but also table grapes and juice grapes. We have representation from across the United States.

We were set up as a result of activities that took place with the Agricultural Research Service and NIFA, actually CSREES at the time, which was originally to prepare for the 2008 Farm Bill. The idea was that we would create one organization that brings together all forms of grapes across the United States with a specific purpose of doing many of the things that are entered, outlined in the Center of Excellence. It is this fostering atmosphere of collaboration to nurture a community of grape and grape product researchers, to really try to focus on widespread researchable issues and really promoting a change in culture to an industry-driven research agenda. As part of my work within the Ag Research Board, in March of 2011, we brought together a broad cross-section and studied a broad cross-section of industry agency collaborations -- looking at everything from the Department of Defense, the Environmental Protection Agency, and, in particular, a program that was in place from the US Forest Service, another branch of the Department of Agriculture.

As a result of that review, the Ag Research Board recommended that the Secretary of Agriculture and Congress work to encourage public-private partnerships and research collaboration where there would be a two-way street in developing the research priorities and then carrying those priorities out. From the perspective of a longer-term look at what was one of the driving factors that led to the development of the Centers of Excellence language, I would say from our perspective it is to encourage organizations like ours to enter into a two-way dialogue with the Agency on research priorities.

I would point out that in 2012 the NAREEEAB board made a recommendation to NIFA to allocate a certain percentage of funds to be used for pilot projects on the public-private cooperative agreements or as we might call them, Centers of Excellence. At that point, NIFA decided not to do that, but I would just say from our perspective, we think the next step that NIFA should take is that the structure for Centers of Excellence should include collaborative initiatives, including the National Grape and Wine Initiative, and that the best way to approach this would be to run some pilot projects. I think there are others participating on this call, and I will not speak on their behalf, but they have been structured as initiatives were previously, and there had been ARS funds or other funds that had been allocated. Some of them are bricks and mortar like you might expect and some are virtual centers like the National Grape and Wine Initiative. We think that the best way to approach this is to allocate a specific amount of funds from AFRI specifically for this and to run pilot projects in the first year. That concludes my remarks, I appreciate the opportunity.

Facilitator: Thank you. If you could please press star six again to mute yourself. We had a hand raised in Adobe Connect. John Cardina, if you are there and would like to make a verbal comment, you are our next registered commenter. If you would please press star 6 to unmute yourself, John Cardina. John Cardina, if you are there, please press star six so you can unmute yourself. If John is not there, we will move on. If you would like to make a comment, a verbal comment, please call into the conference line, the number is up in the notes window in the top right. Otherwise, we will have these, I have been reading the chat window and I will read these comments for the recording. At the beginning, Louisa -- Louisa Hooven -- sorry about that. I will read the comments that came into the chat window. Louisa Hooven from Oregon State University wrote, when Centers of Excellence self-assemble and funding is

prioritized to them, will this encourage cliques of established researchers? How will new ideas and diverse stakeholders/researchers be included?

Erin Daly: I think it is an interesting point, and you will note that the eligibility to be a Center of Excellence does not really require that level of collaboration; however, when you read the criteria, you can certainly see that that is the direction the criteria seems to be moving so I think it is something we will need to keep in mind.

Facilitator: The next, was from Mike Harrington of the Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors. He says, what is the intent or meant by reducing duplication?

Erin Daly: Mike, reducing duplication is a term that we at the Agency hear from Capitol Hill on a regular basis. This is a goal that we should have. I think what it generally refers to on our end, is that we want to be very cautious about funding two people to do work that is essentially the same or may have the same impact. When you turn that around, on the applicant side, I think when we talk about reducing duplication, there is a concern on Capitol Hill that NIFA and other Agencies may fund work that is very similar so the Center of Excellence idea, one of the goals is to bring together people that are doing similar work together, so that we are not funding two grants, for instance, to do the same type of work.

Jane Schuchardt, Executive Director, Cooperative Extension/ECOP: While it is terrific to have Cooperative Extension specifically referenced, why is a Cooperative Extension Service not eligible as a Center?

Erin Daly: Jane, it is a good question. I think we would have to take it up with someone who drafted the legislation. You will see that it encourages folks to work together, so I do not think they have ruled out the inclusion of Cooperative Extension. I may actually for a moment return to that eligibility slide. They certainly are not called out as a specific eligible entity but maybe the goal here would be to incorporate their participation in a Center through partnership with someone else. It is a good question.

Facilitator: For the record, Ross Love and Joan Dusky had similar questions and comments to Jane's. Then, Louisa Hooven from Oregon State University asks, how will priority for Centers compete with other parties, such as for new investigators?

Erin Daly: Again, that is a good question. Because the Center of Excellence priority goes across competitive grant programs, it would not compete in the sense that certain programs have a set-aside within them for, for instance, integrated projects or new investigators. They would not compete in that way. I think it would be applied across the entire program and could, in effect, be applied along with the set-asides. In that sense, I don't think we are subtracting from the overall program budget the way an earmark might.

Facilitator: We have a statement from Melora Park at Oregon State University. How are the Centers of Excellence related to Innovation Institutes? Are these the same or different lines of funding?

Erin Daly: They are not, in fact, a line of funding. There is no money that came with the Center of Excellence provision. It is more a way of considering how we evaluate applicants to all of our competitive grants. In that way, the Innovation Institutes are, in fact, separate funding entities, separate funding requests. The Center of Excellence is not in fact a funding line at all -- it is more of a way at looking at how we evaluate applicants for all of our competitive grant programs, if that makes sense.

Facilitator: At this time, we do not have further comments. Again, if you would like to make a verbal comment over the conference line, you can see the phone number up in the top right window. You can let us know that you would like to make a comment via the chat window or you can simply type your comment into the chat window.

Jean Mari Peltier: There isn't a restriction for interpretation of this language as allowing a set-aside of funding for the Centers, correct?

Erin Daly: We haven't really looked for that kind of interpretation at this point. Priority in funding for us has not been interpreted in the past, as something that is, in fact, a set-aside. Could it be looked at that way? It is a good question. I think we would have to bring in General Counsel.

Facilitator: Mike Harrington asks, how does one determine what exactly "unnecessarily duplicative" efforts are?

Erin Daly: Again, it is a good question, Mike. I think what we would do, if, for example, we went the route where an applicant pleads their case to be a Center of Excellence as part of an application. They might, for instance, talk about a partnership where both partners are doing similar work and use that as their case to say that funding them as a Center of Excellence might contribute to avoiding unnecessarily duplicative efforts, not complementary, I guess, would be another way to look at it. That is something that we can consider as well, how we would define unnecessarily duplicative.

Facilitator: Bethany Johns of the American Society of Agronomy, the Crop Science Society of America and the Soil Science Society of America writes, how do we insure the peer review process is not set aside and the best science is prioritized?

Erin Daly: Again, it may be good for folks to comment on at what point in the process they think we should apply such a priority and that might, in fact, give us something to discuss related to ensuring that the peer-reviewed process is prioritizing the best science. Again, I'm going to flip it back to the slide, for those of you on Adobe, flip back to the slide where we talk about the different points in the review process, for instance, when we could apply priority for a Center of Excellence and it may be that this could contribute to protecting, as she was describing, the best science being prioritized.

Facilitator: Wes Berger from Mississippi State University, AES writes, that we seem to view Centers of Excellence as single institution's requests. What about multi-institutional teams such as exist for multistate projects or SRPs?

Erin Daly: That is an interesting point and, in fact, if you look at the Manager's Notes that is probably only something someone like me does, to look at the manager notes that came along with the farm bill, in there is discussion of the fact that, Centers of Excellence are really a way of leveraging funds. They go on to talk about similar interests, and talking about creating incentives for partnerships. When I read creating incentives for formal partnerships, what that says to me is that there would be a goal here that could be served by having a Center of Excellence include more than one institution. Again, comments along those lines I think are helpful to us because the actual legislation does not require that level of partnership. You saw how broad the eligibility language is, but I can't imagine that these comments in the Manager's Notes, in addition to comments we have received from the public -- there could be value

and certainly we should consider whether a Center of Excellence having more than one institution is a particularly good thing.

Facilitator: Louisa Hooven is adding to the last question, how do you envision corporations being involved?

Erin Daly: The short answer is I do not think we have envisioned this. I think we see them as separate entities and we would be interested to see how they would be incorporated into, for instance, partnerships.

Facilitator: That is the last of the comments that I have so far. Actually I need to go back, the first, they skipped over is from Mike Harrington and he says, the purpose statement makes no sense whatsoever. It strongly suggests that lower ranking proposals could be funded over higher ranking ones. Again, if you have comments, you can put them into the chat window and I will read that out loud for the recording and if Erin wants to answer...

Erin Daly: I actually might review the purpose statement. I'm going to go back to the slide. We did not spend a lot of time on it. I will begin by saying I did not come up with the purpose statement. The purpose in the legislation is that priority considerations should be given to the Centers of Excellence. It doesn't relate to our science review in any meaningful way either, in the legislation or really in the Manager's Notes either. That's not to say we don't have some context, and I appreciate some of the earlier commenters giving us more background, but there is quite a bit of background I think on the discussion that surrounds the Centers of Excellence. However, the actual legislative language, while you may not think it is entirely clear, and it never is, does tell us that priority consideration could be interpreted in a lot of different ways and it is to be applied very broadly to all of our grant programs.

Facilitator: We will wait for more comments to come in. Wes Berger asked, will these questions and comments offered in the listening session be included as part of the record, or do comments need to be formally submitted to the Federal Register request for public comments?

Erin Daly: Our plan is to have a transcript and recording of the session available. Someone had asked me about the slides, which my plan is to have the slides up on the NIFA website today. The transcript will take a little bit more time. Can I give you an exact time? No, but I am hoping in the next week we would have the transcript. The transcript would include the comments that are coming in for the webinar so you do not need to separately submit those as written comments. We would be incorporating those.

Jean Mari Peltier: I submitted a PowerPoint presentation outlining how our organization brings together large-scale multi-institutional projects which always include a cooperative extension element as a key component. Will my PowerPoint presentation become part of the record?

Erin Daly: Absolutely.

Facilitator: If there is anyone on the phone who would like to make a comment, you are welcome to press\*6 to unmute your line. \* 6 to unmute line. For those on the conference call and just with the Adobe Connect, you can put your question in the chat window.

Erin Daly: This is Erin. I would like to throw out there, or point out to folks one of her things that was mentioned in the Federal Register Notice for those of you who heard about it some other way. The Centers of Excellence term is something that has been used by other federal agencies. To the extent that any of their models might prove helpful to us, we would be happy to receive any comments on the strengths or weaknesses of those models. We are looking at those internally, as well, but I would be curious to hear people's opinions on whether there is something we can learn or apply from another federal Center of Excellence concept to what we are doing here at NIFA.

Facilitator: I am going to read some comments sent by John. He writes, suggestions regarding Centers of Excellence

1. Centers need not be single facilities, but can be virtual centers wherein collaborations among multiple labs or facilities across the US and world are linked digitally.
2. Centers should not be given priority in funding. The range of proposals that represent the best ideas and fit into an established Centers domain should be funded, with an incentive to join the relevant center.
3. Defining the scope of a Center should be less the organizers of the Centers doing a proposal. So be merely focused on others brought, depending on the subject matter and relevant science. It could be developed for any of the regular calls for proposals, or through a separate call for development of a Center for a specific topic that is determined to be a priority.
4. The fourth and last suggestion, one area where a Center would be especially useful is in domestication and development of new crops that cannot normally secure NIFA funding because the species are not yet recognized as crops and never will be without some research funding which actuates the cycle that maintains the low diversity in our agricultural landscape in the US and impedes economic opportunity. Those were suggestions from John Cardina at Ohio State University.

Facilitator: I have a comment in the chat window from, I'm going to try to say the name, Qijing Zhang. Does a Center of Excellence have to be in place before an application is submitted? Can investigators propose to establish a Center of Excellence in the submitted application?

Erin Daly: I appreciate those questions. We talked about taking this in a couple of different questions and again we are early in imagining the possibilities with the Centers of Excellence and one of them is the process for recognizing them so I am bringing back up a slide that we discussed earlier. There are a couple of different directions we could go and this is not an exhaustive list, but two that we have considered would be, as you described, having grant applicants self-identify a Center of Excellence and justify, especially if they are a collaboration, justify how that meets the criteria that are in the legislation. Another consideration would be to do a designation process that is separate from the application process. In fact, the comments that were just read described one where we would solicit for a Center of Excellence in a particular area. That is another interesting idea that would allow folks to suggest to us what some of the best models might be. I don't think we are closed to any of those ideas, especially not looking at the legislative language.

Facilitator: We have got a comment from Bethany Johns, could the bill language be interpreted to be like NSF's broader impacts, which are written into each individual NSF grant?

Erin Daly: There have certainly been discussions as to whether there could be similarities here. Comments in that direction, especially from those who are familiar with strengths and weaknesses of that model, would be really appreciated.

Facilitator: And from Vivek Kapur at Penn State. The National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy or Education, not sure which, and DHS' Centers of Excellence could be interesting models to examine.

Erin Daly: Thank you.

Facilitator: And from William Baird at Michigan State University. Might the Center of Excellence concept be a reaction to the removal of a requirement for industry match on NIFA proposals in order to encourage financial support from industry, e.g. as a measure of industries' commitment to the Center of Excellence proposed projects?

Erin Daly: That is a very interesting point. I never suppose what Congress was thinking before the fact. However, I did read you a little piece from the Manager's Notes which talked about the leveraging of funds and certainly there are folks who have supposed that there is a relationship to some of what you're speaking about.

Facilitator: Julie Svetlik of Texas A&M AgriLife Research's Corporate Relations says she has concerns about corporations. We work extensively with private industry partners who might have concerns related to intellectual property, etc. Would designation as a Center of Excellence affect or negate our existing agreements with private partners?

Erin Daly: I wouldn't think they would have to, and yet if you have concerns in that direction we should know about them so that we can avoid that kind of problem, if at all possible. I hear what you're saying about the corporations but you saw that they are an eligible entity, and perhaps the types of partnerships that you already have might be the sort that would do well in this kind of competition.

Facilitator: From Wes Berger, on July 15, 2014, a solicitation for supplemental nutrition assistance program and expanded food and nutrition educational program, SNAP and EFNEP, Regional Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Centers of Excellence was posted. Is the Center of Excellence referenced in this RFP the same type of Center of Excellence currently discussed or a different designation?

Erin Daly: If I understand it, that is a different designation, although I can certainly imagine the confusion it might have caused. This Center of Excellence provision, the one that is coming out of the new Farm Bill, we have been asked to get some processes in place by the beginning of the new Fiscal Year, which would be October 1 to get some processes in place by the beginning of the new fiscal year which would be October 1, 2014. As we look at our Fiscal Year 2015 RFAs, which start coming out in the next 1 to 2 months, what we would like to do is start putting expectations related to the Centers of Excellence, that type of language, into the solicitations so that applicants are clear on what direction we are taking. But the stakeholder input that we get in the next month or two will really help us shape what that language looks like.

Facilitator: We had a comment submitted by Dr. X.J. Meng from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. He or she says, I would like to suggest a Center of Excellence in Livestock human Zoonotic Diseases Research and one in vaccine research of infectious diseases in food animals. Thank you.

If there is any one on the conference line who would like to make a comment, we encourage you to do so. You can press\*6 to unmute.\*Six and you will unmute your line and you can make a comment. Going back to the chat window in Adobe Connect, John states that another agency program to look into for comparison is NSF's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research.

I have a comment from Qijiing Zhang, Center of Excellence activities require funding at a much larger scale than traditional individual projects. Is NIFA considering increasing the funding level for applications submitted by Centers of Excellence?

Erin Daly: That is a helpful suggestion, I don't think we've gotten far enough along in the process to have considered that, but certainly many of our programs provide larger awards for multi-institutional projects, so I don't think we would rule that out in any way. That is very helpful.

Facilitator: Are there any commenters on the conference call who would like to make a comment verbally? If so, please press \*6. Louisa Hooven comments, will graduate student training be an element of the teaching initiatives?

Erin Daly: I think it could be. I don't know. Education it is often broader than just graduate student training, but some of the criteria do give credit for education, and also capacity and infrastructure, and I think what you are describing could be a piece of either of those criteria.

Facilitator: Please press\*6, to unmute yourself.

Jean Mari: Hello, this is Jean Mari, I would just suggest that it would be helpful for NIFA to look at the report that was submitted by the NAREEEAB board that looked at this exact issue. I just pulled up a copy of the March 30, 2011 and March 31, 2011 agenda of the NAREEEAB board and there was a roundtable on the Farm Bill first, and then in the afternoon there was a review of cooperative research models involving industries and federal agencies. Among the people who were on that were folks from the National Science Foundation, the Center for Advanced Forestry, and ARS in this discussion on the way it has worked with CRA DA s Also environmental security technology certification programs at EPA and cooperative programs for the Department of Energy. There is a full record that evaluated these kinds of working arrangements in other areas of the federal government and then a formal recommendation from the National Ag Research Board of the subject. I think it would be helpful to review.

Erin Daly: Thank you. That may even be something we may want to make available. We will put out resources for folks to consider relative to the comments that they are submitting. Thank you.

Facilitator: Are there any other comments? You can put your comments into the Adobe connect chat window or we would encourage you to speak to us over the conference line, you can press\*6 to unmute your line and make a comment.

Wes Berger writes, does NIFA anticipate dedicated funding for creation and support of Centers of Excellence or will designation as a Center of Excellence simply provide priority for funding for proposals coming from Centers of Excellence?

Erin Daly: Wes, I would say the second piece at this point, I have seen nothing related to separate lines of funding specific to Centers of Excellence.

Facilitator: Louisa Hooven writes, will there be limited numbers of Centers of Excellence and can any one entity belong to multiple Centers formed under a similar theme?

Erin Daly: These are things we will need to consider for sure. A limit to the overall number of Centers of Excellence, an interesting question when I saw some of the written comments coming in that were looking for Centers of Excellence in very specific areas of science, one of the questions we didn't raise in the Federal Register Notice was whether we should create -- predetermining what areas of science we will fund Centers of Excellence in versus allowing them across our competitive grants -- and in any areas of science we find. I do not think we have determined which direction we will go. If we went with predetermination, in a sense we would be limiting the overall number of Centers of Excellence. The idea of one entity belonging to multiple Centers, I would hope we would not fund them under a similar theme. Such a thing could be problematic, but again since we are just looking at some of the big decisions related to the model, I don't think we've gotten far enough along to consider that, but certainly that would be helpful for us to consider at some point.

Based on the number of comments that are coming in and the level of participation I think we will give this another 5 or 10 min. and what I have on the slide here is information about the second web-based listening session, and also an invitation to submit written comments which are not due until July 31st. This would be a good time to pipe up if there is something you would like to contribute as part of this call.

Facilitator: Again, if you like to make a comment via the phone, please press\*6, to unmute your line. In the chat window, we have a few more comments, Vivek Kapur writes, are there discussions with other agencies regarding potential to jointly support Centers of Excellence?

Erin Daly: There have not been any yet. One of the questions that we asked in the Federal Register Notice about looking at other folks' models is any similarity with which we develop our Centers of Excellence -- that may mean more or less opportunities to do that type of joint funding, so I appreciate those comments coming in about other folks and how they've determined their Centers of Excellence should be distinguished. We are doing our own homework. It helps to have the experience of the applicants on what works and what doesn't work.

Facilitator: Sam Jeyaseelan asks, what about the budget?

Erin Daly: Yes, it is an unfortunate thing to revisit that on this comment for sure. There is no separate funding line for Centers of Excellence. Basically, what Congress has asked us to do in the Farm Bill is to look across our competitive grant programs and use this type of recognition as a Center of Excellence as an incentive to motivate people to be strong in the areas that are addressed by the criteria to leverage funds, for instance, and to recognize the value of formal partnerships. Those types of things are, we are being asked to recognize those as having value but we are not being given a separate pile of funds to support the Centers of Excellence. That would come out of the budget of each and every competitive grant program.

Facilitator: Julie Svetlik asks, what are the next steps after written comments are due July 31?

Erin Daly: Great, Julie is bringing us to a crescendo at the end of the conference call. Thank you, Julie. The next steps, written comments are going to come in by July 31. We have been asked to develop a process based on the comments that come in. That process is going to have to be vetted

via regulation. We have a set of regulations that apply across our competitive grant programs. We would have to do revisions to that regulation that would be put out there. Even if it is put out in final form, we would still be inviting comments. There are several opportunities here for folks to weigh in. Our goal, based on the fact that we have been asked to implement this in the coming Fiscal Year, is to develop some language that is agreed upon, and to include that language in solicitations for FY 15 so you would expect to see in FY 15 solicitations language about either a process for Centers of Excellence that has applicants include that type of information within their applications or, to point out a separate processes and instructions for how applicants would seek that designation, outside of a particular grant program. Hopefully, that helps. We will be putting up all of the comments, the transcript, the slides, and the entire record of public input. It will be available on the NIFA website in the coming weeks.

I appreciate all of the good input and feedback that we have gotten today. I also hope that we have given you some things to think about, and we will look forward to receiving more comments at the web-based listening session on July 31 and also in the written comments that are submitted to the Agency. Thank you so much for your participation.

Facilitator: That concludes this session so we will be closing out the meeting. Thank you so much.