

## **Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program (MSP) Applicant Guide**

### **Purpose Of The MSP Grant Program**

#### **MSP Grant Support**

#### **More Information**

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

#### **Application Process**

#### **Evaluation Process**

#### **Selection Process**

#### **MSP Program Grantees**

### **Purpose Of The MSP Grant Program**

#### **What Is NIFA And What Is NIFA's mission?**

Established in 2009, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture is a federal science agency within the United States Department of Agriculture ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)). Congress created NIFA through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.

#### **What Is The Purpose Of The MSP Grant Program?**

The purpose of the MSP Grant Program is to support competitive education training grants that increase undergraduate scholarship programs to meet national and international needs for training food and agricultural scientists and professionals, or professionals in rural economic, community, and business development. Specifically, MSP student traineeship projects must be proposed for: (1) Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.) and/or undergraduate level degree in food and agricultural sciences; and (2) for Special Experiential Learning (SEL) opportunities for eligible USDA Higher Education Multicultural Scholars. See the [Request for Applications \(RFA\)](#) for details.

#### **What Is The Goal Of The MSP Grant Program?**

The goal of the MSP Grant Program is to increase the multicultural, next generation work force with 21st century skills in USDA mission areas that include STEM disciplines and social sciences. MSP awards support training for baccalaureate degrees within the food and agricultural sciences disciplines and/or the D.V.M. degree with MSP scholarships and SEL awards, as applicable.

#### **What Are The Specific Expectations For Funded MSP Projects For Fiscal Year (FY) 2010?**

Any funded MSP grant project is to support student traineeship activities that have relevancy to the USDA Secretary's priorities (Sustainable Energy; Climate Change; Food Safety; Nutrition and Childhood Obesity; and Global Food Security and Hunger). Special emphasis is placed on training that will address the changing demographics of the nation and the development of 21st century skills in USDA mission areas. The next generation workforce in USDA mission sciences will be multicultural, and as for all Americans, their educational development will need to provide success tools to learn, thrive, and

creatively and innovatively contribute to their area(s) of emphasis, profession, and U.S. global competitiveness.

### **What Are The Specific Expectations For MSP Beneficiaries Supported Under MSP Awards?**

MSP Scholars must maintain their eligibility through: (1) continuing full-time enrollment; (2) maintaining good academic standing and satisfactory degree progress; and (3) through Education Outreach activities be engaged in service learning projects, with populations from groups traditionally underrepresented in STEM disciplines. See RFA for details.

### **What Are The Specific Expectations For Funded MSP Projects For Fiscal Year (FY) 2010?**

MSP projects will have:

- focus on student learning, e.g., academic preparation, social support structure (tutoring, mentoring, experiential opportunities in research and study abroad), and professional mentoring to ensure matriculation and entry into food and agricultural sciences areas of graduate education or the workforce;
- unique capabilities for developing highly competent graduates and achieving representation of diverse populations, addressing the substantial higher education gap between multicultural groups in the USDA mission areas; and
- opportunities through partnerships with food and agricultural research programs at other academic institutions, and cooperate with public and private entities, to ensure Scholars are provided with an increase in exposure to a wide spectrum of careers in the food and agricultural sciences.

See RFA for more information.

### **Can Eligible Applicants Collaborate On MSP Projects For Fiscal Year (FY) 2010?**

Eligible applicants should develop robust collaborations for MSP projects to ensure success of MSP beneficiaries in their baccalaureate or Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree training.

### **Are There Areas Of Emphasis For MSP Projects?**

FY 2010 MSP Program Areas of Emphasis are:

- (1) **Veterinary Medicine (First Professional Degree in Veterinary Medicine i.e., D.V.M.);**
- (2) **Agricultural Sciences and Engineering Training;**
- (3) **Natural Resource Sciences Training;**

(4) **Human Sciences Training;**

(5) **Food Science and Human Nutrition Training;** and

(6) **Agrosecurity Science Training.**

See RFA for more information.

[Top](#)

## **MSP Grant Support**

### **What Types Of Applications Are Expected For The MSP Grant Program?**

#### **Single Applicant Projects**

Applicants may request up to \$248,000 total, not per year, in an application. See RFA for details.

#### **Multi-Institutional Training Projects**

A proposal that has participation of a minimum of three (3) eligible applicants may request up to \$560,000 total, not per year, in the application. See RFA for details.

#### **Student Experiential Learning (SEL) Projects**

Applicants may request up to \$20,000 in SEL support per application. A onetime \$4,500 can be requested as SEL support for an eligible USDA MSP Scholar and may be used by eligible MSP Scholar over the active period of the award. See RFA for details.

### **Is There A Limit To The Number Of Applications That An Institution May Submit?**

There is no limit to the number of applications an eligible institution may submit; however, a single institution may only receive support up to a maximum of \$400,000 in awards including MSP Scholarship and SEL support.

### **Is There A Cost Sharing Or Matching Requirement for MSP Grant Projects?**

There are no matching requirements for the MSP and SEL project effective in FY 2009 and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

### **What is the Duration of the MSP award?**

Project periods for any MSP awards may not exceed five (5) years.

### **If I Have A Current MSP Award Can I Apply For SEL Support for Eligible MSP Scholars?**

Project Directors with active MSP awards may apply for SEL for current eligible MSP Scholars, using Award Category No. 3.

### **If I Have A current MSP Award Can I Apply For A New MSP Award?**

Project Directors with active MSP award(s) may apply in any year the MSP Grant Program is announced.

### **Specifically, What Can Funds From An MSP Award Be Used For In A Student Traineeship Project?**

Scholarship: MSP awards \$6,500 per student per year for up to four years, as scholarship. The funds are to be used as outlined in the RFA.

Cost of Education Allowance: In lieu of indirect costs, for each award, **there is a \$2,500 per student per year** cost-of-education allowance for the institution.

SEL: Student Experiential Learning activities, as applicable, is supported with \$4,000 per eligible USDA MSP Scholar.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

#### **Who is eligible to apply for a MSP Grant?**

Applicants should be institutions that confer a D.V.M. degree or an undergraduate degree in at least one of the disciplines in the food and agricultural sciences. The eligibility requirements state that applicants must be:

- (1) land-grant institutions,
- (2) colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences, and
- (3) other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food, and agricultural sciences. Research foundations maintained by an eligible college or university are eligible to submit undergraduate and/or D.V.M. training proposals under this RFA.

#### **Who Is Eligible To Receive MSP Support?**

Award Beneficiary Eligibility for MSP Support – It is the responsibility of the grantee institution to support only persons who meet the eligibility requirements provided in the Request for Applications (RFA). Eligible beneficiaries must be:

(i) be citizens or nationals of the United States as determined in accordance with Federal law (see RFA – Part VIII, E, Definitions);

(ii) have been accepted for enrollment, or be enrolled, at an institution awarded a project grant under this program, or at a two-year institution which has entered into an articulation agreement, bridging agreement, or other type of collaborative arrangement with a baccalaureate-level institution that has been awarded a project grant under this program;

(iii) be newly enrolled in a course of study leading to a baccalaureate degree, or to a DVM degree, in the food and agricultural sciences;

(iv) not have been enrolled previously in an academic program in the food and agricultural sciences at the same degree level; and

(v) have a strong interest, as judged by the institution, in pursuing a baccalaureate degree, in the food and agricultural sciences, or DVM degree, and in a career as a food or agricultural scientist or professional.

### **I Am A Student – Can I Apply For An MSP Scholarship?**

Students cannot apply directly to USDA/NIFA for scholarships. Awards to scholars are made by eligible institutions (grantees) receiving funds under this program.

### **What Does Underrepresented Minority Mean?**

Underrepresented minority means any ethnic group – African American, Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or any other group – whose representation among food and agricultural professionals in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields is disproportionately less than their proportion in the general population as indicated in standard statistical references, or as documented on a case-by-case basis by national survey data submitted to and accepted by the Secretary.

### **What Does First Generation Mean?**

First generation means an individual neither of whose parents completed a baccalaureate degree, or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.

## **Application Process**

### **How Do I Apply For A MSP Grant?**

Applicants submit their MSP application through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) portal. Applicants are advised to prepare their material early and pass the complete package through their institution's Grants Office for submission by 5:00 P.M (EASTERN) on the due date.

### **What Must I Submit To Apply?**

Application package as identified in the published Request for Applications (RFA).

### **Can I Submit More Than One Application As The Principal Investigator (Project Director) To The FY 2010 MSP Program?**

Eligible applicants may submit any number of applications but only one application as the Project Director.

### **When Are The MSP Applications Due To NIFA?**

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by 5:00 P.M. [EASTERN] on the due date, July 28, 2010.

### **What If I Miss The Deadline?**

You may apply when the MSP program publishes a call for application, in the next cycle. The MSP application submission deadline is adhered to rigorously.

## **Evaluation Process**

### **What Is The Administrative Review?**

MSP Grants Program team conducts an initial administrative review of MSP applications to determine compliance with requirements and complete content of applications. Only complete applications that meet all eligibility requirements, project requirements, and supporting documents described in the RFA will be considered for a merit review. Applications identified as incomplete or that do not meet the eligibility or complete application package requirements will be deemed ineligible.

### **What Is The Merit Review?**

All complete MSP applications from eligible institutions undergo a peer review by a panel of scientific experts in the areas of study related to the MSP Grant Program. MSP proposal will be evaluated using a peer review process to find win-win matches between the proposed work, capabilities of applicant organization(s), and the MSP grant program purpose, priorities and goals. Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, and managers/operators in STEM fields) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to

maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application. Panel members rate applications based on the evaluation criteria described below.

### **How Will My Application Be Evaluated?**

Applications for **Baccalaureate or D.V.M. Training** are evaluated by a review panel on the following criteria:

1. Educational Quality and Merit (40%)
2. Relevancy (20%)
3. Adequacy of Plans for Evaluation, Dissemination and Management of Proposed Project (20%)
4. Institutional Support (10%)
5. Key Personnel (10%)

Applications for Special Experiential Learning (SEL) support are evaluated by a review panel on the following criteria:

1. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education (10%)
2. Proposed Approach (40%)
3. Institutional Commitment and Resources (20%)
4. Key Personnel (10%)
5. Impacts for Broader Contexts (20%)

Following the completion of a peer review process for MSP grant proposals, those grant proposals, found in the peer review process to be meritorious, will be funded with available monies for MSP grants. See RFA for details.

### **Selection Process**

#### **When Will I Be Notified With A Decision?**

MSP will not review applications or supporting materials received after the deadline date. Applications and materials that are received after 5:00 P.M. [EASTERN] on the due date will be deemed ineligible. MSP Grant Program adheres strictly to the application deadline date.

#### **Can I Receive My Scores And The Review Panel's Comments?**

Panel consensus comments are sent to each applicant after awards have been made.

## **MSP Program Grantees**

### **What Happens Once I Am Selected As A Potential MSP Award Recipient?**

MSP Grant Program staff submits an offer of funding letter and requests responses to clarifying questions raised in the peer panel meeting. Applicants respond to all issues and queries.

### **How Can I Be A Peer Reviewer For This MSP Grant Program?**

If you are not submitting an application, you may submit your curriculum vita and explain in an e-Mail your interest to serve as a reviewer. The selection of reviewers will be confirmed after the deadline for submission of applications.

### **Are There Restrictions Or Conflicts That Apply To Serving As Reviewer?**

Yes. If any of the following apply as a relationship with any of the key personnel on a proposal, you are ineligible to serve as a peer reviewer for the proposal:

- (i) Co-author on any publication (print or digital), within the past three (3) years;
- (ii) Collaborator on teaching, research and/or extension projects, within the past three (3) years, or pending/planned future collaborations;
- (iii) Consulting arrangement, financial arrangement or any other conflict or interest, within the past three (3) years;
- (iv) Advisee/advisor on thesis, or dissertation, or postdoctoral training. There is a lifetime conflict for a major professor-advisee relationship. There is a three-year conflict for service on graduate committees, or as academic or professional mentor, including postdoctoral mentor; and
- (v) Belonging to same institution. If you have moved from an institution, there is a one-year institutional conflict. Additionally, the above restrictions (i - iv) apply.

### **If I Am An Applicant, Can I Serve As A Reviewer For FY 2010 MSP Applications?**

No.

### **How Can I Get Answers About My MSP Application?**

For Program Office (Programmatic Technical Issues) in Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Grant Program: [MSP@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:MSP@nifa.usda.gov), or 202-720-1973.

For NIFA (Electronic Application Process Issues) questions: call 202- 401- 5048 OR [electronic@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov).

For Submission Issues in [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) seek assistance by e-mail: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov) or phone: 1-800-518-4726. Hours of Operation: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Disclaimer:** This FAQ document is **not a substitute for reading the published Request for Applications** and providing the information requested for a complete MSP Grant Program application package.

The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.