Purpose Of The WAMS 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). Congress created NIFA through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.

What Is The Purpose Of The WAMS Grant Program?

The purpose of the WAMS Grant Program is to support competitive research and extension grants that increase participation of women and minorities from rural areas in: (i) Promotion of a safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply for all Americans and for people around the world; (ii) Sustainable agricultural policies that foster economic viability for small and mid-sized farms and rural businesses, protect natural resources, and promote value added agriculture; (iii) national leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation; (iv) Building a modern workplace with a modern workforce; and (v) Support for 21st century rural communities. See the Request for Applications (RFA) for details.

What Are The Expectations For Funded WAMS Projects For Fiscal Year (FY) 2010?

Any funded WAMS grant project is to support research and extension activities that: Provide STEM knowledge, skills and competencies to women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas with successful placement: (a) in the workforce in STEM fields, or (b) as innovators and entrepreneurs adding value to the STEM fields in areas that have relevancy to the USDA Secretary’s priorities of Sustainable Energy; Climate Change; Food Safety; Nutrition and Childhood Obesity; and Global Food Security and Hunger.

Initiatives that WAMS might support include, but are not limited to:

- Implementing multi-track technology career advancement training programs and providing related services to engage and encourage participation by women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM fields;

- Developing and administering training programs for educators, career counselors, and industry representatives in recruitment and retention strategies to increase and retain women and underrepresented minority students and job entrants into STEM fields; and

- Supporting education-to-workforce programs for women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas to provide counseling, job shadowing, mentoring, and entrepreneurial internship opportunities to guide participants in the academic, training, and work experience needed for STEM careers.

See RFA for more information.

Can Eligible Applicants Collaborate On WAMS Projects

Priority will be given to those grant proposals, found in the peer review process to be scientifically meritorious, that involve cooperation of multiple entities. Eligible applicants should develop robust
collaborations to develop WAMS projects that will ensure successful placement of WAMS participants in STEM fields that address USDA mission science.

**WAMS Grant Support**

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

**Single Applicant Projects**

In a **Single Applicant Project** application, the applicant proposes to conduct the research and extension project with one eligible institution as the principal. There are no restrictions on the number of sub-awards an eligible applicant may enter for additional FY 2010 WAMS projects. Applicants may request between $75,000 and $150,000 total (including indirect costs), not per year.

**Joint Applicant Projects**

Applicants may request up to $300,000 total (including indirect costs), not per year. In a **Joint Applicant Project** application, a minimum of three entities, with no more than two in the same domain, will propose to execute the research and extension project as part of a collaborative arrangement. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, the applicant institution/organization submitting a joint project proposal must retain at least 30 percent of the awarded funds, and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds. The fourteen (14) WAMS referenced domains for FY 2010 are: (i) Education, 4- Year Post-secondary; (ii) Education, 2-Year Post-secondary; (iii) Education, Grades 10 – 12; (iv) Education, Grades 7 – 9; (v) Education, Grades 4 – 6; (vi) Education, Grades 1 – 3; (vii) Education, Home-School Associations; Virtual STEM Education; Pre-K – K; (viii) Informal Education incl. Science Museums, Zoos, Botanical Gardens, etc.; (ix) Government – State; City; Local; Region; Tribal Nations; (x) Government – Federal Agency incl. U.S. Small Business Administration; (xi) Non-Profit: Private or Public (incl. Regional Centers); (xii) For-Profit: Private or Public; (xiii) Professional Group: Society, Trade Groups, etc.; and (xiv) Foundations and Community Groups. See RFA for details.

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

Grant recipients are required to match the USDA funds awarded on dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and in-kind contributions (see RFA, Part IV, B. 6. for details).

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if NIFA determines that:

(a) the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or

(b) the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

**What Are WAMS Funding Restrictions?**

Funding restrictions include WAMS Program funds may only be used for research and extension activities in the training, outreach and mentoring of rural women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM fields relevant to USDA mission. Funds made available for grants in this program shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion,
remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees). See RFA for a complete description of funding restrictions.

What is the Duration of the WAMS Award?

Project periods for any WAMS project may range from 18 to 36 months. Recipients may be eligible for no-cost extensions, but no carry over or extension is permitted for these projects beyond five years. Any unexpended funds must be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Eligibility Requirements

Who is eligible to apply for a WAMS Grant?

The eligibility requirements state that applicants must be: (a) State agricultural experiment stations; (b) colleges and universities; (c) university research foundations; (d) other research institutions and organizations; (e) Federal agencies; (f) national laboratories; (g) private organizations or corporations; (h) individuals; or (i) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (a) through (h).

Eligible applicants may be a collaborative state, tribal, local, or regionally based network or partnership of public or private entities. Priority will be given to eligible institutions that carry out continuing programs funded by the Secretary. Applicants must have demonstrated success in preparing and developing a robust and diverse food and agricultural STEM workforce that is highly competent in the application of STEM knowledge and skills, with increased participation of women and minorities from rural areas across a broad spectrum of rural, local, state or national communities.

Will I be Eligible to Apply for a WAMS Grant if I Have An Active Award with NIFA Through Another Program?

Having a current award does not prevent you from applying. The objectives of your application to the WAMS Grant Program must be different from your current award.

Who is eligible to receive WAMS Support?

Award Beneficiary Eligibility for WAMS 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 are from rural areas and must be: (i) Women and/or (ii) Underrepresented minorities.

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.

Application Process

How Do I Apply For A WAMS Grant?
Applicants submit their WAMS 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 WAMS Program?**

Eligible applicants may submit any number of application but only one application as the Principal Investigator (Project Director).

**Is There A Limit To The Number Of Applications An Institution Can Submit To The FY 2010 WAMS Program?**

A single eligible applicant (Project Director) may receive only one award. A single institution may receive ONLY one award.

**When Are The WAMS Applications Due To NIFA?**

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on June 7, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time).

**What If I Miss The Deadline?**

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

**Evaluation Process**

**What Is The Administrative Review?**

WAMS Grants Program team conducts an initial administrative review of WAMS 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 WAMS applications from eligible institutions undergo a peer review by a panel of scientific experts in the areas of study related to the WAMS Grant Program. WAMS 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 WAMS 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 are evaluated by a review panel on the following criteria:

1. Relevancy (20%)
2. Technical Merit (35%)
3. Achievability (15%)
4. Key Personnel (10%)
5. Adequacy of Available or Obtainable personnel, Facilities, and Instrumentation (10%)
6. Adequacy of Plans for Management of the proposed Project (10%)

Following the completion of a peer review process for WAMS grant proposals, those grant proposals, found in the peer review process to be scientifically meritorious, will be given priority when they involve the cooperation of multiple entities [see 7 U.S.C. § 5925(d)]. See RFA for details.

**Selection Process**

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

WAMS will not review applications or supporting materials received after the deadline date. Applications and materials that are received after June 7, 2010, 5:00 P.M. [EASTERN] will be deemed ineligible. WAMS 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.

**WAMS Program Grantees**

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

WAMS 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.

**What Are The Responsibilities Of A WAMS Beneficiary?**

Beneficiaries must be engaged in a cross-section of disciplines relevant to USDA mission areas. The WAMS award enables WAMS beneficiaries – rural women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas, in STEM fields – to develop new knowledge and acquire skills to increase their participation in the STEM work force, in areas relevant to USDA mission.

**How Can I Be A Peer Reviewer For This WAMS Grant Program?**
If you are not submitting an application, you may submit your curriculum vita and explain in an e-Mail [WAMS@nifa.usda.gov] 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 WAMS Applications?

No.

How Can I Get Answers About My WAMS Application?

The Request for Applications on NIFA’s website has contact information for program questions. Look on NIFA’s website for the RFA which has the contact number for the national program leader. For NIFA (Electronic Application Process Issues) questions: call 202- 401- 5048 OR electronic@nifa.usda.gov. For Submission Issues in www.grants.gov seek assistance by e-mail: 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 WAMS Grant Program application package.