New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) Program Competitive RFA

2015 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: July 20, 2015

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA

USDA United States Department of Agriculture   National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE)

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.500.**

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on **July 20, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **New Technologies for Ag Extension** RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) Program for fiscal year (FY) 2015 to 1862 land-grant institutions, 1890 land-grant institutions, including Central State University, Tuskegee University, West Virginia State University, the University of the District of Columbia, and the Cooperative Extension System (CES) in furthering "Electronic Extension (E²) " a national web-based information and education delivery system. Both the land-grant institutions and the CES work to provide objective, scientific information to the public to answer questions and guide decisions. By creating web-based access to high-quality, non-duplicative, research-based information, E² can help them better serve the needs of their anywhere-anytime generation of users and reach new audiences. In FY 2015, NIFA plans to support "Electronic Extension's (E²)," strategic direction in providing leadership for innovation and technology that advances education through the promotion of CES growth and competencies. The appropriated amount available for support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately **$1,550,000.**

This notice identifies the objectives for **NTAE** projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a NTAE grant.

Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Funding for New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) Program is authorized under section 3(d) of the Smith-Lever Act of May 8, 1914, as amended (7 U.S.C. 341, et seq.). Section 7403 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (FCEA) of 2008 amends section 3(d) of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 (7 U.S.C. 343(d)) in regards to eligibility.

To learn more about the history of eXtension and current activities, see http://about.extension.org/. Interested applicants are strongly encouraged to review the eXtension Strategic Framework (http://bit.ly/InnovStratFrame) that outlines governance, collaboration and organization, a toolkit of delivery models, and an entrepreneurial resource base.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the NTAE Program is to increase the capacity of the Cooperative Extension System (CES) to adopt new and innovative technology applications for delivering science-based educational resources from land-grant and other partner institutions about matters of high importance to the general public. Applications are being solicited for the NTAE to deliver state of the art technology and software applications, high quality leaders and staff, training for an exceptional CES workforce, legally binding contractual and financial instruments, and comprehensive evaluation, communications and marketing activities.

The NTAE Program is aligned with the USDA Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan (http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan), and while informing nearly every goal, specifically addresses Goal 7 – Rural and Urban Interdependence, by strengthening and building partnerships that address the needs of underserved and non-traditional populations, supporting information and technology transfer and translational research, and adapting outreach strategies that efficiently and effectively address the needs of citizens while enabling and supporting vibrant and resilient communities in both rural and urban areas.

The NTAE is further aligned with the NIFA Strategic Plan FY2014-2018 (http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat_plan_2014.pdf), and informs Strategic Goal 1 (Science), most broadly by ensuring the development of human capital, communities, and a diverse workforce through research, education, extension and engagement programs in food and agricultural sciences to support a sustainable agriculture system (Subgoal 1.7).

C. Program Area Description

NIFA encourages the development of information and educational content using new, emerging, and innovative technologies that advance the widespread adoption of research-based practices and technologies by agricultural producers and other end users.

In FY 2015, NIFA plans to support the ongoing deployment of Electronic Extension (E²) and enable a technology-conscious nation to make use of the valuable information and education that the CES has to offer. NTAE funds complement, enhance, and accelerate the implementation of E² by building upon the eXtension infrastructure, to include the hardware, software, staffing, training, business agreements, and communication and evaluation activities. The successful applicant will demonstrate the ability to work within the context of the eXtension Strategic Framework (http://bit.ly/InnovStratFrame).

The FY 2015 applicant is expected to continue to build upon the competitive advantages of CES such as being customer-focused, a trusted and impartial brand, and community-based by: 1) Fostering opportunities for innovation by connecting CES personnel with new and innovative technologies that engage a wide array of learners; 2) Providing professional development opportunities that promote use of open networked learning and other forms of online-based teaching resources; 3) Building capacity within and across the CES to effectively engage strategic partners so more customers and end users can be reached across multiple platforms in real-time with science/researched-based content; 4) Update existing and develop necessary new policies to support the business aspects of Electronic Extension (E²); and 5) Developing and implementing a comprehensive evaluation, and communications and marketing effort for Electronic Extension (E²).

Specifically, the applicant is expected to meet each of the following NTAE objectives within the context of the stated goals above:

1. Foster opportunities for innovation by connecting CES personnel with new and innovative technologies that engage a wide array of learners.

The successful applicant should:

(a) Enhance and upgrade existing functionalities;
(b) Provide customer support, including help-desk staffing, web hosting, training, and software licenses for Electronic Extension (E²); and
(c) Provide infrastructure support for technical and architectural standards.

Funds will be used to support the core infrastructure, (i.e., data architecture, protocols, processes, and content management and learning management systems). This includes system engineering, content integration and standardization, data management, system security, usability testing, performance benchmarking, search optimization, and monitoring system performance and scalability to meet both current and future demands. Funds will be used to enhance the collaborative work environment and ways to connect people with similar interests across flexible online platforms to support Learning Networks (LNs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs) in their development of educational content, learning modules, events, news articles, and multimedia information products, (i.e., apps, video, audio, and hybrid technologies). Such tools provide educational opportunities for the public, and may include the curation, filtering technologies, and functionality in Ask an Expert, Learn, and People applications to make content more publically discoverable and more easily shared. To expand CES content so that it reaches a

broader range of learners, funds will be used annually to identify priority program areas based on technology advancements, learner needs, and innovation. Funds will further be used to develop educational programs on how to apply emerging technologies to CES programmatic efforts and monitor and evaluate the Extension System's adoption and use of these new technologies. Explore making content more easily accessible through handheld devices and related applications (apps), while also considering how dedicated landing pages for populations with limited English proficiency access might increase access to information translated in their native languages.

2. Provide professional development opportunities that promote use of open networked learning and other forms of online-based teaching resources.

NIFA anticipates supporting strategies to develop an effective 21st Century CES workforce that engages customers through social networks and in formats of the customer's choosing. Funds will be used to develop a full complement of professional development opportunities designed to prepare CES to work with customers interested in online, as well as traditional learning opportunities. Such professional development opportunities may include mastery of technologies, program and content development, andragogy and pedagogy, effective collaboration and teamwork, and legal and policy considerations of working in online environments. Funds will be used to help develop and measure the effectiveness of hybrid learning opportunities designed to reach a broader audience, and engage more leaders and innovators. Examples include research-led LNs that contribute to the advancement of NIFA Science and related priorities, engage project directors administering other competitive funding awarded by NIFA and other federal agencies, and including an outreach component provides a particular example. Funds will be used to engage the CES on important technology and subject matter topics, and enlist federal and state partners, institutional teams, CoPs, and others to contribute to training programs and new professional development resources using http://campus.extension.org/ or similar.

3. Build capacity within and across the CES to effectively engage strategic partners so more customers can be reached across multiple platforms in real-time with science/researched-based content.

E² will employ innovative and highly skilled people to lead this initiative in areas such as administration, content and instructional development, development of LNs and CoPs, network and software engineering, communications and marketing, evaluation, professional development, strategic partnerships, and network literacy. By staying abreast of the most current trends and digital innovations, the CES staff will become more proficient in using Electronic Extension (E²) by blending the electronic availability of education and expertise with their traditional ways of working. Similarly, increasing awareness of how to effectively develop broad-based, strategic partnership opportunities, including regional approaches, which include federal and state government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector has the potential to increase the reach and adoption of CES evidence-based practices in advancing shared mission interests. Funds will be used to reach the public with LN and CoP content by developing and training extension faculty and staff on the use of new and traditional media for content dissemination. By refining performance metrics that are shared with the CES, and developing

evaluation strategies and tools for documenting social media reach and engagement with partners, customers and CoPs working in learning networks, the successful applicant should demonstrate proficiency in the evaluation of Electronic Extension (E²) products and services to ensure competitiveness in the marketplace.

Funds will also be used to support a "NIFA National Electronic Extension (E²) Fellowship Program" for faculty interested in using sabbatical or other leave to contribute to the initiative. The work of the Fellows' might support applied and developmental research in electronic delivery of educational programs, studying the effects of Electronic Extension (E²) on the transformation of the CES and its partners, or assisting in evaluating the efficacy of blending electronic and traditional ways of working on the quality of life for citizens. The successful applicant will use these funds to form, manage, and administer advisory and working groups in such areas as technology and innovation, content management, editorial functions, diversity and limited English proficiency audiences, institutional teams, evaluation, end users, internal and external partners, and futuring.

4. Update existing and develop necessary new policies to support the business aspects of Electronic Extension (E²).

The successful applicant will update existing and develop necessary new policies to manage and operate Electronic Extension (E²) in close alignment with the eXtension Foundation and/or other sponsoring organization(s). Key policies include, but are not limited to:
1) Rules of Operation;
2) Contributor and Business Agreements for both institutions and individuals;
3) Terms of Use;
4) Community of Practice Business Agreements;
5) Policy for Non-Payment of Institutional Investment;
6) Policy for Institutional Branding and Searching;
7) Privacy;
8) Disclaimers;
9) Community of Practice Policies;
10) Content Sharing Policy;
11) Non-discrimination;
12) Grievance Procedures and Removal of Content;
13) Data Collection and Services;
14) Community of Practice Leadership Policy;
15) Collaboration, Intellectual Property and Publishing Guidelines;
16) Sponsorship Agreements;
17) Partnership Policy;
18) State Affiliate Membership;
19) Sponsorship Policy & Sponsorship Recognition Levels;
20) Ask an Expert;
21) Social Media Guidelines;
22) Prospective Partnership Agreements;
23) Partner and Member Institution Grants and Contracts Agreements; and

24) 501c3 Non-Profit Organization Sponsorship.

5. Develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation, and communications and marketing effort for Electronic Extension (E²).

Funds will support the general evaluation aimed at assessing the products and services of Electronic Extension (E²) against the criteria of: 1) competitiveness in the information and education marketplace; 2) the design of new and exceptional curricula for traditional and expanded audiences; and 3) alignment with NIFA Science Priorities (http://nifa.usda.gov/research), NIFA Strategic Plan (http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018), and REE Action Plan (http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan), where appropriate. Evaluations will include the design of appropriate performance metrics with expected outcomes and impacts, and will align with the NIFA budget performance integration process. Funds will be used to maintain and implement a comprehensive communications and marketing plan for Electronic Extension (E²) as a whole and that supports LNs, CoPs, strategic partners for analyzing potential markets, initial characterization of audience need for product and services, and for effectively marketing products and services to targeted users.

Applicants should note that Electronic Extension (E²) is a Federal-State-Local partnership that includes land-grant institutions, State and county partners, the CES as a whole, and NIFA. The grantee is required to coordinate E² activities on behalf of all CES partners in the context of the eXtension Strategic Framework.

NTAE applications typically will include funds to support core functions (e.g., community development, content development, travel, technology support, communication, evaluation, etc.) and development of project-specific deliverables for integration into Electronic Extension (E²).

The application must demonstrate an understanding and application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term impacts and outcomes.

NTAE applications will have a project period of up to five years.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The appropriated amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY **2015** is approximately **$1,550,000.** The funds will be awarded through a cooperative agreement. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. NIFA will continue to be involved with the funded project and with Electronic Extension (E²) in general, through its representation on the eXtension Governing Committee (ex-officio and non-voting member), Advisory Committees, and various task forces, and through its liaisons with LNs and CoPs.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://fms.treas.gov/index1.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2015, only new applications may be submitted to the NTAE Program:

New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the NTAE Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Project Types

In FY 2015, applications should be submitted for a 4-year project period as NIFA anticipates making this award as a continuation grant to reduce the administrative burden to the grant applicants. A continuation grant is an award for which an application is approved, but funds are awarded on an annual basis, subject to the availability of annual appropriations and satisfactory progress of the project.

The award made in FY 2015 will provide approximately $1,550,000 in funds for the first year of this 4-year continuation project.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may be submitted by Extension Directors of 1862 land-grant institutions and 1890 land-grant institutions, including Central State University, Tuskegee University, West Virginia State University, and the University of the District of Columbia. Only these institutions are eligible to submit an application and receive a NTAE award. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package
Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed **PRIOR** to submitting an application. It can take as long as 2 weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **"Register" in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to** http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html**) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer item 2. below to locate the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide".

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:
1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html. Under Step 1 click on "Download a Grant Application Package," and enter the:

   Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-OP-005255

   in the appropriate box and click "Download Package." From the search results, click "Download" to access the application package.

   Contained within the application package is the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide." This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information

about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application,** refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

> Grants.gov customer support
> 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
> Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on federal holidays.
> Email: support@grants.gov

> Grants.gov iPortal (see https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants): Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

> Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:
> - Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
> - Name of agency you are applying to
> - Specific area of concern

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. <u>ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW.</u> Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or that attachments are in PDF format; see Part III section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:
- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of **NTAE**. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **20** pages of written text regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced and up to **10** additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (**20** pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(1) Introduction: Describe past and current involvement with eXtension or similar electronic/online capacity.

(2) Objectives and Procedures: Discuss planned procedures for achieving each NTAE objective (listed in Part I, B.). For each task, identify key personnel involved, and timelines for achieving milestones. Where appropriate, describe how planned procedures align with the eXtension Strategic Framework (http://bit.ly/InnovStratFrame), the NIFA Strategic Plan, and the REE Action Plan.

(3) Collaborators: List partner institutions and contacts' names, addresses, phone numbers, and E-mail addresses.

(4) Evaluation: Provide a plan for evaluating accomplishments and outcomes that meet each NTAE objective (listed in Part I B.).

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the Guide includes information about the people who require a Senior/Key Person Profile, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support, including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

7. Supplemental Information Form
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "New Technologies for Ag Extension") and the program code (i.e., enter "AA-R"). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.

b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List**. See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, it is strongly recommended that an administrative review be conducted to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on July 20, 2015.** Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel.**

Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.

D. Funding Restrictions

Pursuant to Section 1473 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended, 7 U.S.C. 3319, indirect costs are not allowable costs under section 3(d) projects, and no funds will be approved for this purpose. Further, costs that are a part of an institution's indirect cost pool (e.g., administrative or clerical salaries) may not be reclassified as direct costs for the purpose of making them allowable.

NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

The use of grant funds to plan, acquire, or construct a building or facility is not allowed under this program. With prior approval, and in accordance with the cost principles set forth in 2 CFR part 220, some grant funds may be used for minor alterations, renovations, or repairs deemed necessary to retrofit existing teaching or research spaces in order to carry out a funded project. However, requests to use grant funds for such purposes must demonstrate that the alterations, renovations, or repairs are essential to achieving the major purpose of the project. Grant funds may not be used for endowment investing.

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, section 1.9 in the document entitled "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III., section 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

We evaluate each application in a 2-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a technical review panel will evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their 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, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) 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, and 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 of each application to producers and the general public.

When each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of NTAE will recommend that the project: (a) be approved for support from currently available funds or (b) be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NTAE reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

B. Evaluation Criteria

We will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Planned procedures align with the eXtension Strategic Framework (http://bit.ly/InnovStratFrame), NIFA Science Priorities, NIFA Strategic Plan, and REE Action Plan, where appropriate. Historical documents include the eXtension Business Case, the 2008 - 2011 eXtension Long-Range Implementation Plan, and the 2011-2014 eXtension Strategic Management Roadmap published at http://about.extension.org/wiki/Planning **(30%)**;

2. Objectives, procedures, and budget focus on Electronic Extension (E²) infrastructure priorities stipulated in Part I, B. of this RFA **(30%)**;

3. Evidence concerning inclusive partnerships with the institutions and State Extension Services currently participating in eXtension **(20%)**; and

4. Capacity of staff to manage proposed project, including subcontracts, and deliver proposed outcomes according to the timelines provided and within the budget requested **(20%)**.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by NTAE for a period of three years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum:

(1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to which the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;

(2) Title of project;

(3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;

(4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA;

(5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;

(6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;

(7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;

(8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;

(9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see http://nifa.usda.gov/terms-and-conditions to view NIFA award terms and conditions);

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to the ones listed below.

2 CFR Part 25, "Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration"

2 CFR Part 170, "Reporting Subaward and Executive Compensation Information"

2 CFR Part 175, "Award Term for Trafficking in Persons"

2 CFR Part 180, "OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement)"

2 CFR Part 182, "Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)"

2 CFR Part 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"

2 CFR Part 400, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"

2 CFR Part 415, "General Program Administrative Regulations"

2 CFR Part 416, "General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments"

2 CFR Part 417, "Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension"

2 CFR Part 418, "New Restrictions on Lobbying"

2 CFR Part 421, "Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3407—USDA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs-- General Award Administrative Provisions.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide—a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in federally-assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in federally-assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

44 U.S.C. 3541 et seq. (Pub. L. 107-347) - Federal Information System Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA), to improve computer and network security within the Federal Government. Applies to awardees if it will collect, store, process, transmit, or use information on behalf of NIFA.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

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PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

We will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. <u>Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility</u>

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. <u>Changes in Project Plans</u>

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved goals or objectives prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes that are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel, prior to effecting such changes.

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not federal funds are involved, prior to instituting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the

ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR part 415, subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions, for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.