

use of limited resources by generating a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on a targeted need area(s), increasing cost-effectiveness through achieving economies of scale, strengthening the scope and quality of a project's impact, and promoting coalition building likely to transcend the project's lifetime and lead to future ventures.

§ 3405.8 Complementary project proposals.

Institutions may submit proposals that are complementary in nature as defined in §3405.2(g). Such complementary project proposals may be submitted by the same or by different eligible institutions.

§ 3405.9 Use of funds for facilities.

Under the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program, the use of grant funds to plan, acquire, or construct a building or facility is not allowed. With prior approval, in accordance with the cost principles set forth in OMB Circular No. A-21, some grant funds may be used for minor alterations, renovations, or repairs deemed necessary to retrofit existing teaching 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 incidental to the major purpose for which a grant is made.

Subpart C—Preparation of a Proposal

§ 3405.10 Program application materials.

Program application materials in an application package will be made available to eligible institutions upon request. These materials include the program announcement, the administrative provisions for the program, and the forms needed to prepare and submit grant applications under the program.

§ 3405.11 Content of a proposal.

(a) *Proposal cover page.* (1) Form NIFA-712, "Higher Education Proposal Cover Page," must be completed in its entirety. Note that providing a Social Security Number is voluntary, but is an integral part of the NIFA informa-

tion system and will assist in the processing of the proposal.

(2) One copy of the Form NIFA-712 must contain the pen-and-ink signatures of the Project Director(s) and authorized organizational representative for the applicant institution.

(3) The title of the project shown on the "Higher Education Proposal Cover Page" must be brief (80-character maximum) yet represent the major thrust of the project. This information will be used by the Department to provide information to the Congress and other interested parties.

(4) In block 7. of Form NIFA-712, enter "Higher Education Challenge Grants Program."

(5) In block 8.a. of Form NIFA-712, enter "Teaching." In block 8.b. identify the code for the targeted need area(s) as found on the reverse of the form. If a proposal focuses on multiple targeted need areas, enter each code associated with the project and place an asterisk (*) immediately following the code for the primary targeted need area. In block 8.c. identify the major area(s) of emphasis as found on the reverse of the form. If a proposal focuses on multiple areas of emphasis, enter each code associated with the project. This information will be used by program staff for the proper assignment of proposals to peer reviewers.

(6) In block 9. of Form NIFA-712, indicate if the proposal is a complementary project proposal or a joint project proposal as defined in §3405.2(g) and §3405.2(m), respectively, of this part. If it is not a complementary project proposal or a joint project proposal, identify it as a regular project proposal.

(7) In block 13. of Form NIFA-712, indicate if the proposal is a new, first-time submission or if the proposal is a resubmission of a proposal that has been submitted to, but not funded under, the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program in a previous competition.

(b) *Table of contents.* For ease in locating information, each proposal must contain a detailed table of contents just after the Proposal Cover Page. The Table of Contents should include page numbers for each component of the

proposal. Pagination should begin immediately following the Table of Contents.

(c) *Project summary.* (1) A Project Summary should immediately follow the Table of Contents. The information provided in the Project Summary may be used by the program staff for a variety of purposes, including the proper assignment of proposals to peer reviewers and providing information to peer reviewers prior to the peer panel meeting. The name of the institution, the targeted need area(s), and the title of the proposal must be identified exactly as shown on the “Higher Education Proposal Cover Page.”

(2) If the proposal is a complementary project proposal, as defined in §3405.2(g) of this part, indicate such and identify the other complementary project(s) by citing the name of the submitting institution, the title of the project, the project director, and the grant number (if funded in a previous year) exactly as shown on the cover page of the complementary project so that appropriate consideration can be given to the interrelatedness of the proposals in the evaluation process.

(3) If the proposal is a joint project proposal, as defined in §3405.2(m) of this part, indicate such and identify the other participating institutions and the key faculty member or other individual responsible for coordinating the project at each institution.

(4) The Project Summary should be a concise description of the proposed activity suitable for publication by the Department to inform the general public about awards under the program. The text must not exceed one page, single-spaced. The Project Summary should be a self-contained description of the activity which would result if the proposal is funded by USDA. It should include: The objectives of the project; a synopsis of the plan of operation; a description of how the project will strengthen higher education in the food and agricultural sciences in the United States; and the plans for disseminating project results. The Project Summary should be written so that a technically literate reader can evaluate the use of Federal funds in support of the project.

(d) *Resubmission of a proposal*—(1) *Resubmission of previously unfunded proposals.* If a proposal has been submitted previously, but was not funded, such should be indicated in block 13. on Form NIFA-712, “Higher Education Proposal Cover Page,” and the following information should be included in the proposal: The fiscal year(s) in which the proposal was submitted previously; a summary of the peer reviewers’ comments; and how these comments have been addressed in the current proposal, including the page numbers in the current proposal where the peer reviewers’ comments have been addressed. This information may be provided as a section of the proposal following the Project Summary and preceding the proposal narrative or it may be placed in the Appendix (see §3405.11(i)). In either case, the location of this information should be indicated in the Table of Contents. Further, when possible, the information should be presented in tabular format. Applicants who choose to resubmit proposals that were previously submitted, but not funded, should note that resubmitted proposals must compete equally with newly submitted proposals. Submitting a proposal that has been revised based on a previous peer review panel’s critique of the proposal does not guarantee the success of the resubmitted proposal.

(2) *Resubmission of previously funded proposals.* The Higher Education Challenge Grants Program is not designed to support activities that essentially are repetitive in nature over multiple grant awards. Project directors who have had their projects funded previously are discouraged from resubmitting relatively identical proposals for further funding. Proposals that are sequential continuations or new stages of previously funded Challenge Grants Program projects must compete with first-time proposals. Therefore, project directors should thoroughly demonstrate how the project proposed in the current application expands substantially upon a previously funded project (*i.e.*, demonstrate how the new project will advance the former project to the next level of attainment or will achieve expanded goals). The proposal must also show the degree to which the

new phase promotes innovativeness and creativity beyond the scope of the previously funded project.

(e) *Narrative of a proposal.* The narrative portion of the proposal is limited to 20 pages in length. The one-page Project Summary is not included in the 20-page limitation. The narrative must be typed on one side of the page only, using a font no smaller than 12 point, and double-spaced. All margins must be at least one inch. All pages following the Table of Contents must be paginated. It should be noted that peer reviewers will not be required to read beyond 20 pages of the narrative to evaluate the proposal. The narrative should contain the following sections:

(1) *Potential for advancing the quality of education—(i) Impact.* (A) Identify the targeted need area(s).

(B) Clearly state the specific instructional problem or opportunity to be addressed.

(C) Describe how and by whom the focus and scope of the project were determined. Summarize the body of knowledge which substantiates the need for the proposed project.

(D) Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project for which previous funding was received under this program.

(E) Discuss how the project will be of value at the State, regional, national, or international level(s).

(F) Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution or the grant period. Also discuss the probabilities of the project being adapted by other institutions. For example, can the project serve as a model for others?

(ii) *Continuation plans.* Discuss the likelihood of, or plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond USDA support. For example, does the institution's long-range budget or academic plan provide for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the end of the grant period, are plans for eventual self-support built into the project, are plans being made to institutionalize the program if it meets with success, and are there indications of other continuing non-Federal support?

(iii) *Innovation.* Describe the degree to which the proposal reflects an innovative or non-traditional approach to solving a higher education problem or strengthening the quality of higher education in the food and agricultural sciences.

(iv) *Products and results.* Explain the expected products and results and their potential impact on strengthening food and agricultural sciences higher education in the United States.

(2) *Overall approach and cooperative linkages—(i) Proposed approach—(A) Objectives.* Cite and discuss the specific objectives to be accomplished under the project.

(B) *Plan of operation.* (1) Describe procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project.

(2) Describe plans for management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration.

(3) Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.

(C) *Timetable.* Provide a timetable for conducting the project. Identify all important project milestones and dates as they relate to project start-up, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and close-out.

(ii) *Evaluation plans.* (A) Provide a plan for evaluating the accomplishment of stated objectives during the conduct of the project. Indicate the criteria, and corresponding weight of each, to be used in the evaluation process, describe any data to be collected and analyzed, and explain the methodology that will be used to determine the extent to which the needs underlying the project are met.

(B) Provide a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the end results upon conclusion of the project. Include the same kinds of information requested in § 3405.11(e)(2)(ii)(A).

(iii) *Dissemination plans.* Discuss plans to disseminate project results and products. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication.

(iv) *Partnerships and collaborative efforts.* (A) Explain how the project will maximize partnership ventures and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences higher education (e.g., involvement of faculty in

related disciplines at the same institution, joint projects with other colleges or universities, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Also explain how it will stimulate academia, the States, or the private sector to join with the Federal partner in enhancing food and agricultural sciences higher education.

(B) Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved, that arrangements necessary for collaborative partnerships or joint initiatives have been discussed and realistically can be expected to come to fruition, or actually have been finalized contingent on an award under this program. Letters must be signed by an official who has the authority to commit the resources of the organization. Such letters should be referenced in the plan of operation, but the actual letters should be included in the Appendix section of the proposal. Any potential conflict(s) of interest that might result from the proposed collaborative arrangements must be discussed in detail.

(3) *Institutional commitment and resources*—(i) *Institutional commitment*. Discuss the institution's commitment to the project. For example, substantiate that the institution attributes a high priority to the project, discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the institution's long-term (five-to ten-year) goals, explain how the project will help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives, or show how this project is linked to and supported by the institution's strategic plan.

(ii) *Institutional resources*. Document the commitment of institutional resources to the project, and show that the institutional resources to be made available to the project, when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project. Discuss institutional facilities, equipment, computer services, and other appropriate resources available to the project.

(f) *Key personnel*. A Form NIFA-708, "Summary Vita—Teaching Proposal," should be included for each key person associated with the project.

(g) *Budget and cost-effectiveness*—(1) *Budget form*. (i) Prepare Form NIFA-713, "Higher Education Budget," in ac-

cordance with instructions provided with the form. Proposals may request support for a period to be identified in each year's program announcement. A budget form is required for each year of requested support. In addition, a summary budget is required detailing the requested total support for the overall project period. Form NIFA-713 may be reproduced as needed by proposers. Funds may be requested under any of the categories listed on the form, provided that the item or service for which support is requested is allowable under the authorizing legislation, the applicable Federal cost principles, and these administrative provisions, and can be justified as necessary for the successful conduct of the proposed project.

(ii) The approved negotiated instruction rate or the rate allowed by law should be used when computing indirect costs. If a reduced rate of indirect costs is voluntarily requested from USDA, the remaining allowable indirect costs may be used as matching funds.

(2) *Matching funds*. When documenting matching contributions, use the following guidelines:

(i) When preparing the column of Form NIFA-713 entitled "Applicant Contributions to Matching Funds," only those costs to be contributed by the applicant for the purposes of matching should be shown. The total amount of this column should be indicated in item M.

(ii) In item N of Form NIFA-713, show a total dollar amount for Cash Contributions from both the applicant and any third parties; also show a total dollar amount (based on current fair market value) for Non-cash Contributions from both the applicant and any third parties.

(iii) To be counted toward the matching requirements stated in §3405.5 of this part, proposals must include written verification of any actual commitments of matching support (including both cash and non-cash contributions) from third parties. Written verification means—

(A) For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the

authorized organizational representative(s) of the donor organization and the applicant institution, which must include:

(1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor;

(2) The name of the applicant institution;

(3) The title of the project for which the donation is made;

(4) The dollar amount of the cash donation; and

(5) A statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period; and

(B) For any third party non-cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational representative(s) of the donor organization and the applicant institution, which must include:

(1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor;

(2) The name of the applicant institution;

(3) The title of the project for which the donation is made;

(4) A good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the non-cash contribution; and

(5) A statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

(iv) All pledge agreements referenced in §3405.11(g)(2)(iii) (A) and (B) must be placed in the proposal immediately following Form NIFA-713. The sources and amounts of all matching support from outside the applicant institution should be summarized in the Budget Narrative section of the proposal.

(v) Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars A-110, "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Non-profit Organizations," and A-21, "Cost Principles for Educational Institutions," for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

(3) *Chart on shared budget for joint project proposal.* For a joint project proposal, a plan must be provided indicating how funds will be distributed to the participating institutions. The budget section of a joint project proposal should include a chart indicating:

The names of the participating institutions; the amount of funds to be disbursed to those institutions; and the way in which such funds will be used in accordance with items A through L of Form NIFA-713, "Higher Education Budget." If a proposal is not for a joint project, such a chart is not required.

(4) *Budget narrative.* (i) Discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff, travel, equipment, etc., are essential to achieving project objectives.

(ii) Justify that the total budget, including funds requested from USDA and any matching support provided, will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project. Provide a summary of sources and amounts of all third party matching support.

(iii) Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on a targeted need area, or to promote coalition building that could lead to future ventures.

(iv) Include the percentage of time key personnel will work on the project, both during the academic year and summer. When salaries of university personnel will be paid by a combination of USDA and institutional funds, the total compensation must not exceed the faculty member's regular annual compensation. In addition, the total commitment of time devoted to the project, when combined with time for teaching and research duties, other sponsored agreements, and other employment obligations to the institution, must not exceed 100 percent of the normal workload for which the employee is compensated, in accordance with established university policies and applicable Federal cost principles.

(v) If the proposal addresses more than one targeted need area (e.g., student experiential learning and instruction delivery systems), estimate the proportion of the funds requested from

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USDA that will support each respective targeted need area.

(h) *Current and pending support.* Each applicant must complete Form NIFA-663, "Current and Pending Support," identifying any other current public- or private-sponsored projects, in addition to the proposed project, to which key personnel listed in the proposal under consideration have committed portions of their time, whether or not salary support for the person(s) involved is included in the budgets of the various projects. This information should also be provided for any pending proposals which are currently being considered by, or which will be submitted in the near future to other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs or agencies. Concurrent submission of identical or similar projects to other possible sponsors will not prejudice the review or evaluation of a project under this program.

(i) *Appendix.* Each project narrative is expected to be complete in itself and to meet the 20-page limitation. Inclusion of material in an Appendix should not be used to circumvent the 20-page limitation of the proposal narrative. However, in those instances where inclusion of supplemental information is necessary to guarantee the peer review panel's complete understanding of a proposal or to illustrate the integrity of the design or a main thesis of the proposal, such information may be included in an Appendix. Examples of supplemental material are photographs, journal reprints, brochures and other pertinent materials which are deemed to be illustrative of major points in the narrative but unsuitable for inclusion in the proposal narrative itself. Information on previously submitted proposals may also be presented in the Appendix (refer to §3405.11(d)). When possible, information in the Appendix should be presented in tabular format. A complete set of the Appendix material must be attached to each copy of the grant application submitted. The Appendix must be identified with the title of the project as it appears on Form NIFA-712 of the proposal and the name(s) of the project director(s). The Appendix must be referenced in the proposal narrative.

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Subpart D—Submission of a Proposal

§ 3405.12 Intent to submit a proposal.

To assist NIFA in preparing for the review of proposals, institutions planning to submit proposals may be requested to complete Form NIFA-711, "Intent to Submit a Proposal," provided in the application package. NIFA will determine each year if Intent to Submit a Proposal forms will be requested and provide such information in the program announcement. If Intent to Submit a Proposal forms are required, one form should be completed and returned for each proposal an institution anticipates submitting. Submitting this form does not commit an institution to any course of action, nor does failure to send this form prohibit an institution from submitting a proposal.

§ 3405.13 When and where to submit a proposal.

The program announcement will provide the deadline date for submitting a proposal, the number of copies of each proposal that must be submitted, and the address to which proposals must be submitted.

Subpart E—Proposal Review and Evaluation

§ 3405.14 Proposal review.

The proposal evaluation process includes both internal staff review and merit evaluation by peer review panels comprised of scientists, educators, business representatives, and Government officials. Peer review panels will be selected and structured to provide optimum expertise and objective judgment in the evaluation of proposals.

§ 3405.15 Evaluation criteria.

The maximum score a proposal can receive is 200 points. Unless otherwise stated in the annual solicitation published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, the peer review panel will consider the following criteria and weights to evaluate proposals submitted: