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(6) Need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

(d) *Confidentiality*. The identities of reviewers will remain confidential to the maximum extent possible. Therefore, the names of reviewers will not be released to applicants. If it is possible to reveal the names of reviewers in such a way that they cannot be identified with the review of any particular application, this will be done at the end of the fiscal year or as requested. Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. Reviewers are expected to be in compliance with NIFA Confidentiality Guidelines. Reviewers provide this assurance through PRS.

(e) *Conflicts of interest*. During the evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined. Reviewers are expected to be in compliance with NIFA Conflict-of-Interest Guidelines. Reviewers provide this assurance through PRS.

§ 3430.34 Evaluation criteria.

(a) *General*. To ensure any project receiving funds from NIFA is consistent with the broad goals of the funding program, the content of each proposal/application submitted to NIFA will be evaluated based on a pre-determined set of review criteria. It is the responsibility of the Program Officer to develop, adopt, adapt, or otherwise establish the criteria by which proposals are to be evaluated. It may be appropriate for the Program Officer to involve other scientists or stakeholders in the development of criteria, or to extract criteria from legislative authority or appropriations language. The review criteria are described in the RFA and shall not include criteria concerning any cost sharing or matching requirements per section 103(a)(3) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7613(a)(3)).

(b) *Guidance for reviewers*. In order that all potential applicants for a program have similar opportunities to compete for funds, all reviewers will receive from the Program Officer a description of the review criteria. Reviewers are instructed to use those same evaluation criteria, and only those criteria, to judge the merit of the proposals they review.

§ 3430.35 Review of noncompetitive applications.

(a) *General*. Some projects are directed by either authorizing legislation and/or appropriations to specifically support a designated institution or set of institutions for particular research, education, or extension topics of importance to the nation, a State, or a region. Although these projects may be awarded noncompetitively, these projects or activities are subject to the same application process, award terms and conditions, Federal assistance laws and regulations, reporting and monitoring requirements, and post-award administration and closeout policies and procedures as competitive Federal assistance programs. The only difference is these applications are not subject to a competitive peer or merit review process at the Agency level.

(b) *Requirements*. All noncompetitive applications recommended for funding are required to be reviewed by the program officer and, as required, other Departmental and NIFA officials; and the review documented by the NIFA program officer. For awards recommended for funding at or greater than $10,000, an independent review and a unit review by program officials are required.

§ 3430.36 Procedures to minimize or eliminate duplication of effort.

NIFA may implement appropriate business processes to minimize or eliminate the awarding of NIFA Federal assistance that unnecessarily duplicates activities already being sponsored under other awards, including awards made by other Federal agencies. Business processes may include the review of the Current and Pending Support Form; documented CRIS searches prior to award; the conduct of PD workshops, conferences, meetings,