

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE****Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Higher Education Challenge Grants Program for Fiscal Year 1998; Solicitation of Applications**

**AGENCY:** Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of request for proposals.

**SUMMARY:** The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) is announcing the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 1998. Proposals are hereby requested from eligible institutions as identified herein for competitive consideration of Challenge Grant awards.

**DATES:** Proposals must be received by February 23, 1998. Forms indicating intent to submit a proposal are due January 22, 1998.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Howard E. Sandberg, Ph.D., Higher Education Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2251; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2251; telephone: (202) 720-1973; e-mail: hsandberg@reeusda.gov.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This Program is subject to the provisions found at 7 CFR Part 3405, 62 FR 39316, July 22, 1997. These provisions set forth procedures to be followed when submitting grant proposals, rules governing the evaluation of proposals and the awarding of grants, and regulations relating to the post-award administration of grant projects.

**Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance**

This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under No. 10.217, Higher Education Challenge Grants Program.

**Authority**

The authority for this program is contained in section 1417(b)(1) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)(1)). Under this authority, subject to the availability of funds, the Secretary of Agriculture, who has delegated the authority to the Administrator of CSREES, may make competitive grants, for a period not to exceed 5 years, to land-grant colleges and universities, to colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of

food and agricultural sciences, and to other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences, to administer and conduct programs to respond to identified State, regional, national or international educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences.

**Purpose of the Program**

Grants will be made to U.S. colleges and universities to strengthen their teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences in the targeted need areas as described herein. The Higher Education Challenge Grants Program is designed to stimulate and enable colleges and universities to provide the quality of education necessary to produce baccalaureate or higher degree level graduates capable of strengthening the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional work force. It is intended that projects supported by the program will: (1) address a State, regional, national, or international educational need; (2) involve a creative or nontraditional approach toward addressing that need which can serve as a model to others; (3) encourage and facilitate better working relationships in the university science and education community, as well as between universities and the private sector, to enhance program quality and supplement available resources; and (4) result in benefits which will likely transcend the project duration and USDA support.

**Eligibility**

Proposals may be submitted by land-grant and other U.S. colleges and universities offering a baccalaureate or first professional degree in at least one discipline or area of the food and agricultural sciences. Each applicant must have a demonstrable capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of food and agricultural sciences generally and to the specific need and/or subject area(s) for which a grant is requested. In addition, a grantee institution must meet the definition of a college or university as defined in 7 CFR 3405.2(f), 62 FR 39316, July 22, 1997. An institution eligible to receive an award under this program includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university.

**Available Funds**

CSREES anticipates that the amount available for project grants under this program in FY 1998 will be approximately \$4,067,250. Awards will be based on merit evaluation of

proposals by peer review panels and internal staff review.

**Targeted Need Areas Supported**

For FY 1998, proposals must address one or more of the following targeted need areas: (1) Curricula Design and Materials Development; (2) Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching; (3) Instruction Delivery Systems; and (4) Student Experiential Learning. A description of these targeted need areas can be found in the Scope of Program section of 7 CFR 3405.6, 62 FR 39316, July 22, 1997. A proposal may address a single targeted need area or multiple targeted need areas, and may be focused on a single subject matter area or multiple subject matter areas, in any combination (e.g., curriculum development in horticulture; curriculum development, faculty enhancement, and student experiential learning in animal science; faculty enhancement in food science and agribusiness management; or instruction delivery systems and student experiential learning in plant science, horticulture, and entomology).

**Degree Levels Supported**

For FY 1998, proposals must be directed to undergraduate studies leading to a baccalaureate degree. For purposes of this program, proposals directed to the first professional degree in veterinary medicine also are allowable. Projects directed to the graduate level of study will not be supported.

**Proposal Submission Limitations**

There is no limit on the number of proposals any one institution may submit. In addition, there is no limit on the number of proposals which may be submitted on behalf of the same school, college, or equivalent administrative unit within an institution.

**Project Duration**

A regular, complementary, or joint project proposal may request funding for a project period of 18 months to three-years duration.

**Matching Requirement**

Each grant recipient under the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program is required to match the grant funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from a non-Federal source(s). The cash contributions toward matching from the institution should be identified in the column "Applicant Contributions to Matching Funds" of the Higher Education Budget, Form CSREES-713. The cash contributions of the institution and third parties as well as non-cash

contributions should be identified on Line N., as appropriate, of Form CSREES-713.

**Maximum Grant Amount**

For a regular or complementary project proposal, the maximum funds that may be requested from CSREES under this program to cover allowable costs during the project period are \$80,000. (The total Federal contribution to the budget for a regular or complementary project proposal may not exceed \$80,000.) For a joint project proposal, the maximum funds that may be requested from CSREES under this program to cover allowable costs during the project period are \$160,000. (The total Federal contribution to the budget for a joint project proposal may not exceed \$160,000). Please refer to the

Administrative Provisions for this program at 7 CFR 3405.2, 62 FR 39316, July 22, 1997, for the definitions of regular, complementary, and joint project proposals.

**Note:** These maximums are for the total duration of the project, not per year.

**Funding Limitations Per Institution**

The maximum total funds that may be awarded to an institution under this program in FY 1998 are \$200,000. Of funds awarded for either joint, complementary, or regular project proposals, only the grant funds retained by the grantee institution will count against the grantee institution's maximum of \$200,000. Funds awarded by lead institutions to other colleges and universities through subcontracts or subgrants will count against each

respective institution's maximum of \$200,000.

**Maximum Number of Grants Per Institution**

For FY 1998, a maximum of three grants may be awarded to any one institution under the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program.

**Evaluation Criteria**

For the FY 1998 competition, the peer review panel(s) will consider the following criteria and weights to evaluate proposals submitted for funding:

**Note:** In accordance with 7 CFR 3405.15, the evaluation criteria specified below differs from and takes precedence over the evaluation criteria in the administrative regulations.

Evaluation criterion	Weight
<p>(a) Potential for addressing a State, regional, national or international need .....                      This criterion assesses the potential of the project to add value by advancing the quality of food and agricultural sciences higher education and producing graduates capable of strengthening the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional work force. This criterion includes the following elements: impact, innovation, expected products and results, and continuation plans.</p> <p>(1) Impact—Does the project address a clearly documented State, regional, national, or international need? Will the benefits to be derived from the project transcend the applicant institution and/or the grant period?</p> <p>(2) Innovation—Is the project based on an innovative or a non-traditional approach toward solving a higher education problem.</p> <p>(3) Products and results—Are the expected products and/or results of the project clearly explained? Will the project contribute to an improvement in the quality or diversity of the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional expertise base?</p> <p>(4) Continuation plans—Are there plans for continuation or expansion of the project beyond USDA support? Are there indications of external, non-Federal support? Are there realistic plans for making the project self-supporting?</p>	65 points.
<p>(b) Potential of submitting institution(s) to successfully complete project objectives .....                      This criterion assesses the soundness of the proposed approach, the adequacy of human and physical resources available to carry out the project, the institution's commitment to the project, partnerships and collaborative efforts, its cost-effectiveness, and the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project.</p> <p>(1) Proposed approach—Are the objectives achievable, logical, and based on review of literature? Is the plan of operation managerially, educationally, and/or scientifically sound? Is the overall plan integrated with or does it expand upon other major efforts to improve the quality of food and agricultural sciences higher education? Is the timetable realistic?</p> <p>(2) Resources—Are there adequate institutional resources to carry out the project? Do the project personnel possess requisite expertise to complete successfully the project? Have personnel committed adequate effort to achieve stated objectives and anticipated outcomes? Will the project have adequate administrative support to carry out the proposed activities? Will the project have access to needed resources such as instrumentation, facilities, computer services, library, and other instruction support resources?</p> <p>(3) Institutional commitment—Is there evidence to substantiate that the institution has a long term commitment to support the result(s) and/or product(s) produced by this project, that it will help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives, or that the project is supported by the institution's strategic plans?</p> <p>(4) Partnerships and collaborative efforts— Will the project expand partnership ventures among disciplines at a university, between colleges and universities, or with the private sector? Will the arrangements for partner(s) and/or collaborator(s) enhance dissemination of the result(s) and/or product(s)?</p> <p>(5) Budget and cost-effectiveness—Is the budget request justifiable? Are costs reasonable and necessary? Will the total budget be adequate to carry out project activities? Are the source(s) and amount(s) of non-Federal matching support clearly identified and appropriately documented? For a joint project proposal, is the shared budget for three or more institutions explained clearly and in sufficient detail? Is the proposed project cost-effective? Does it demonstrate a creative use of limited resources, maximize educational value per dollar of USDA support, achieve economies of scale, leverage additional funds or have the potential to do so, focus expertise and activity on a targeted need area, or promote coalition building for current or future ventures?</p>	70 points.
<p>(c) Effectiveness of evaluation plan and potential for dissemination of the result(s) and/or products to other institutions and for utilization by other institutions.                      This criterion assesses the adequacy of the evaluation strategy, the quality of outcome measures, the expertise and availability of human resources to conduct the evaluation, the record of the key personnel in disseminating advancements in education, e.g., publishing educational articles in peer reviewed journals, the adequacy of the plan for dissemination, and the potential for utilization by other institutions.</p>	65 points.

Evaluation criterion	Weight
<p>(1) Evaluation—Does the proposal contain a well-designed plan to evaluate results of the project? Will this plan provide conclusions suitable for convincing a peer review audience of the accomplishment? Does it allow for continuous and/or frequent feedback during the life of the project? Does the evaluation plan contain outcome measures? Are the outcome measures capable of assessing the quality and usefulness of project results and products? Are the individuals involved in project evaluation skilled in evaluation strategies and procedures? Can the outcome measures provide an objective evaluation? Is the outcome assessment designed in such a way that it can assist faculty at other institutions in deciding whether to use project results or products?</p> <p>(2) Dissemination—Is there a commitment to submit the results of the project evaluation to peer review by the academic community in the food and agricultural sciences? Does the proposed project include clearly outlined and realistic mechanisms that will lead to widespread dissemination of project results, including national electronic communication systems, publications, presentations at professional conferences, and/or use by faculty development or research/teaching skills workshops?</p> <p>(3) Utilization—Is it probable that other institutions will adapt the result(s) and/or product(s) of this project for their own use? Can the project serve as a model for others? If successful, is the project likely to lead to education reform? Is the product(s) and/or result(s) likely to provide a significant contribution to the advancement of higher education in the food and agricultural sciences? Are partner(s) and/or collaborator(s) committed to utilize the product(s) and/or result(s)?</p>	

**Program Application Materials**

An application kit containing program application materials will be made available to eligible institutions upon request. These materials include the Administrative Provisions, forms, instructions, and other relevant information needed to prepare and submit grant applications. Copies of the application kit may be requested from Proposal Services Unit; Grants Management Branch; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2245; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2245. The telephone number is (202) 401-5048. When contacting the Proposal Services Unit, please indicate that you are requesting an application kit for the FY 1998 Challenge Grants Program.

Application materials may also be requested via Internet by sending a message with your name, mailing address (not e-mail), and telephone number to psb@reeusda.gov that states that you wish to receive a copy of the application kit for the FY 1998 Challenge Grants Program. The materials will then be mailed to you (not e-mailed) as quickly as possible.

**When and Where To Submit Proposals**

An original and seven (7) copies of a proposal must be submitted. Each copy of the proposal must be stapled securely in the upper left-hand corner (DO NOT BIND). All copies of the proposal must be submitted in one package. Proposals submitted through the mail must be received on or by February 23, 1998. Proposals submitted through the U.S. mail should be sent to the following address: Challenge Grants Program; Proposal Services Unit; Grants Management Branch; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2245; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2245. The telephone number is (202) 401-5048. Hand-delivered proposals (brought in person by the applicant or through a courier service) must be delivered on or by February 23, 1998, at the following address: Challenge Grants Program; c/o Proposal Services Unit; Grants Management Branch; Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Room 303, Aerospace Center; 901 D Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20024. Proposals transmitted via a facsimile (fax) machine will not be accepted.

**Intent To Submit a Proposal**

For the FY 1998 competition, Form CSREES-711, "Intent to Submit a Proposal," is requested for the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program and is due January 22, 1998. Send Form CSREES-711 to Higher Education Programs; Mail Stop 2251; USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2251. Form CSREES-711 also may be faxed to the Higher Education Programs office at (202) 720-2030.

**Program Contacts**

The Higher Education Challenge Grants Program is managed by the CSREES Higher Education Programs office. For further information concerning the FY 1998 program, contact Dr. Howard Sandberg, National Program Leader for Agricultural Sciences Education, CSREES, USDA, at (202) 720-1973; or via the Internet at: hsandberg@reeusda.gov.

Done at Washington, D.C., this 3rd day of December 1997.

**Colien Hefferan,**

*Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.*

[FR Doc. 97-32246 Filed 12-8-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-22-P