

Sun Grant Program

Fiscal Year 2014 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: July 9, 2014



U.S. Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

Sun Grant Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.320.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on July 9, 2014.** 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 to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or 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 Sun Grant Program RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Sun Grant Program (SGP) for fiscal year (FY) 2014 to enhance national energy security through the development, distribution, and implementation of biobased energy technologies; to promote diversification in, and the environmental sustainability of, agricultural production in the United States through biobased energy and product technologies; to promote economic diversification in rural areas of the United States through biobased energy and product technologies; and to enhance the efficiency of bioenergy and biomass research and development programs through improved coordination and collaboration among the Department of Agriculture; other appropriate Federal agencies (as determined by the Secretary); and Land Grant Institutions. The amount available for support of this solicitation in FY 2014 is approximately \$2.5 million.

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

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The authority for this program is contained in section 7526 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 8114), as amended and reauthorized by section 7516 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (HR 2642).

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of this program is to provide a consortium of universities made up of a university from each of the sun grant regions and subcenter region (see Part III, A for regions) with a grant to support a North-Central, Southeastern, South-Central, Western, and Northeastern Sun Grant Center and a Western Insular Pacific Subcenter. A Sun Grant Center or Subcenter will use 75 percent of grant funds to provide competitive grants within each region that are multi-institutional and integrated, multistate research, extension, and education programs on technology development and technology implementation and address bioenergy, biomass, or bioproducts research priorities.

The consortium must describe the efforts of Centers they fund, and their Regional Competitive Grants programs will target specific elements of the priorities set forth in the legislation, implementing national priorities in the context of regional scale biogeographic and climatic conditions.

Each application submitted in response to this solicitation must demonstrate how core competencies among scientific disciplines will be maximized to include research, education and outreach on regional production of biobased energy feedstocks, and the elements that determine the sustainability of a range of possible feedstocks will be investigated.

SGP encourages projects that develop content and programs suitable for delivery through the Cooperative Extension System's eXtension Initiative. You may use funds to contribute to existing Communities of Practice (CoP) focused on biomass, bioenergy, or biobased product technologies. Projects must align with the eXtension vision, mission, and values. You must have a letter of acknowledgement from eXtension; you may also need a letter of support from one or more of the Communities of Practice. For detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension, go to <http://create.extension.org/node/2057>.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY 2014 is approximately \$2.5 million. The assistance instrument used will be grants only. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application. USDA intends to competitively review and select a single consortium of universities made up of a university from each of the sun grant regions and subcenter region (see Part III, V for regions) to implement the Sun Grant Program through FY 2018.

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 Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2014, only new applications may be submitted to the Sun Grant Program.

(1) New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the Sun Grant 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

NIFA anticipates selecting a consortium that will fund five (5) Centers which will contribute to research, education and outreach regarding the regional production of biobased energy feedstocks, and the elements that determine the sustainability of possible feedstocks. The total amount of funds available is approximately \$2,500,000. The project period shall not exceed 5 years.

1. Implementation of competitive grant programs.

Implementation of the Sun Grant regional competitive research, extension, and educational grant programs (75 percent Funding Allocation) will be conducted as follows:

- Develop regional RFAs with guidance from regional advisory panels, which include representation from academia, the national laboratories, federal and state agencies, the private sector, and public interest groups - all with appropriate expertise and experience in the areas of biomass and bioenergy.
- Each region will announce RFAs and solicit proposals. These proposals must be peer reviewed, by panels made up of appropriate academics with possible representation from appropriate federal and state laboratories, the national laboratories, and possibly private and public interest groups, as appropriate.
- Provide USDA the regional RFAs that will be used to solicit proposals.

2. Administrative requirements for competitive grants.

Funded projects need not be initiated on the award effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds awarded must be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are awarded in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (*i.e.*, parts 3015, 3016, and 3019 of 7 C.F.R.). Indirect Costs are **unallowable** for funds allocated to each of the five Centers for regional competitive research, extension, and educational grant programs. The following competitive procedures must be clearly demonstrated in each application submitted by the Centers to NIFA:

1. The Sun Grant Centers and Subcenter must seek, accept, competitively review, and award proposals for grants. **PLEASE NOTE: A grant awarded by a Center or Subcenter shall have a period of performance from FY 2015 to FY 2018.**
2. Peer and Merit Review
 - a. Guiding principles to be taken into consideration when preparing the plan:
The guiding principle for Federal assistance application review and evaluation is to ensure that each proposal is treated in a consistent and fair manner. After the evaluation process by the review panel, the program officer must ensure that applicants receive appropriate feedback and comments on their proposals, and process the awards in as timely a manner as possible.
 - b. Preliminary application review.
Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made of all applications for responsiveness to the administrative requirements set forth in the RFA. Applications that do not meet the administrative requirements may be eliminated from program competition. However, the Sun Grant Center or Subcenter retains the right to conduct discussions with applicants to resolve technical and/or budget issues, as deemed necessary.

Reviews are undertaken to ensure that projects supported by the Sun Grant Program are awarded on the basis of merit, quality, and relevance to advancing the purposes of and are consistent with the goals and requirements of the funding program. Applications submitted must undergo a programmatic evaluation to determine the worthiness of Federal support.

- c. Selection of reviewers.
The scientific peer review is performed by peer reviewers.
 - i. Relevant training and experience. Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields taking into account the following factors:
 - A. Level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, and extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities.

- B. Need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, and extension fields.
 - C. 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. Need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, State and Federal agencies, private profit and nonprofit organizations) from within the region, and/or with the appropriate level of documented expertise.
 - E. Need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.
 - F. Need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.
- ii. 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 compliant with a standardized set of Confidentiality Guidelines.
 - iii. 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 using the Higher Education Directory. Reviewers are expected to be in compliance with standardized set Conflict-of-Interest Guidelines.
- d. Evaluation criteria.
 - i. General. To ensure any project receiving funds is consistent with the broad goals of the funding program, the content of each proposal/application submitted will be evaluated based on a pre-determined set of review criteria as published in the RFAs. It is the responsibility of the project director (PD) or principle investigator (PI) to develop, adopt, adapt, or otherwise establish the criteria by which proposals are to be evaluated. It may be appropriate for the PD to involve other scientists or stakeholders in the development of criteria, or to extract criteria from legislative authority or appropriations language. The review criteria must be described in the RFA and shall not include criteria concerning any cost sharing or matching.
 - ii. 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 PD 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.
 - e. Procedures to minimize or eliminate duplication of effort.

- i. The Sun Grant Center or Subcenter may implement appropriate business processes to minimize or eliminate the awarding of Federal assistance that unnecessarily duplicates activities already being sponsored under other awards, including awards made by other Federal agencies.
- f. Matching.
 - i. For subawards made by the Sun Grant Centers or Subcenter through the competitive grants process, not less than 20 percent of the cost of an activity must be matched with funds, including in-kind contributions, from a non-Federal source. However, this matching requirement shall not apply to fundamental research conducted by subawardees. Fundamental research means research that increases knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and has the potential for broad application; and has an effect on agriculture, food, nutrition, or the environment. As a part of each application for a subaward, the Sun Grant Centers or Subcenter must require a budget narrative that documents matching funds. The budget narrative should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind 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 representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation (the budget narrative must describe how the cash donation will be used on the project); and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period; and
 - B. For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (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 third party in kind contribution and a description of how the fair market value was determined; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.
 - C. The sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution should be summarized on a separate page and placed in the proposal as part of the Budget Narrative. All pledge agreements must be placed in the proposal immediately following the summary of matching support.
 - D. The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circular A-21 (2 C.F.R. Part 220), Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs. **All contributions, including cash and**

third party in-kind, must meet the criteria included in section 23 of 7 C.F.R. 3019, “Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-profit Organizations.”

3. Implementation of the Sun Grant research, extension, and educational activities (remaining funds estimated 21 percent):

- Activities conducted at the five Sun Grant Centers and Subcenter will support multi-institutional and integrated, multistate research, extension, and education programs on technology development and technology implementation.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, we consider education in RCR essential to the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 CFR Part 3022, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

Note that the training referred to herein shall be either on-campus or off-campus training. The general content of the ethics training will, at a minimum, emphasize three key areas of research ethics: authorship and plagiarism, data and research integration, and reporting misconduct. Each institution will be responsible for developing its own training system, as schools will need flexibility to develop training tailored to their specific student needs. Grantees should consider the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program for RCR (<https://www.citiprogram.org/rcrpage.asp>). Typically this RCR education addresses the topics of: Data Acquisition and Management - collection, accuracy, security, access; Authorship and Publication; Peer Review; Mentor/Trainee Responsibilities; Collaboration; Conflict of Interest; Research Misconduct; Human Subject Research; and Use of Animals in Research.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

1. Eligible applicants must represent a consortium of 1862, 1890 and 1994 land-grant universities made up of one university from each of the sun grant regions and subregion.

North-Central Region –Composed of the States of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Northeastern Region – A northeastern sun grant center for the region composed of the States of Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Southeastern Region – Composed of the States of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands.

South-Central Region – Composed of the States of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Western Region – Composed of the States of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington

Western Insular Pacific Subcenter Region – Composed of Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau.

2. Eligible applicants for competitively awarded projects within the respective regions of the individual Sun Grant Centers and Subcenter are:

State agricultural experiment stations; colleges and universities; university research foundations; other research institutions and organizations; Federal agencies; national laboratories; private organizations or corporations; individuals; or any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in this paragraph.

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

Sun Grant Centers and the Subcenter are not required to match Federal Funds.

For subwards made by the Sun Grant Centers or Subcenter through the competitive grants process, not less than 20 percent of the cost of an activity must be matched with funds, including in-kind contributions, from a non-federal source. (See Part II,C.f.i. of this RFA for more detailed instructions). However, this matching requirement shall not apply to fundamental research conducted by subawardees. Fundamental research means research that increases knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and has the potential for board application; and has an effect on agriculture, food, nutrition, or the environment.

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 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.** Item 2. below mentions the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains additional explanatory language regarding the registration process.

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-SGP-004543** 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: 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

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

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. 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. 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).

Grants.gov provides online tools to assist if you do not own PDF-generating software. You will find PDF conversion software at <http://test.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/pdf-conversion-software.html>.

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 the Sun Grant Program. 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 4 additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (24 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

- (1) Timeline for issuing RFAs and making subawards, reporting requirements for subawardees, and describe a process for documenting evidence of jointly developing the proposals submitted to the Sun Grant Program.
- (2) Objectives. Clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statement(s) of the specific aims of the proposed effort to the segment of the time critical research activities contained in the proposal must be included in all applications.
- (3) Procedures. The procedures or methodology to be applied to the proposed effort should be explicitly stated. This section should include but not necessarily be limited to: (i) a description of the proposed implementation of the competitive program for identifying priorities, developing RFAs, making subawards, and overseeing compliance with reporting requirements; (ii) administrative techniques to be employed for the competitive subaward program; (iii) means by which subaward proposals for the competitive subaward program will be reviewed and awarded; (iv) a description of the proposed implementation of the research, extension, and education activities to be conducted at the Sun Grant Centers; (v) pitfalls which might be encountered in the competitive subaward program and the activities to be conducted at the Sun Grant Centers; (vi) limitations to proposed procedures utilized in administering the competitive subaward program and the activities to be conducted at the Sun Grant Centers; and (vii) kinds of results expected from the competitive subaward program and the activities to be conducted at the Sun Grant Centers.
- (4) Literature Review. A summary of pertinent publications with emphasis on their relationship to the effort being proposed should be provided and should include all important and recent

publications from other institutions, as well as those from your institution. The citations themselves should be accurate, complete, and written in an acceptable journal format.

(5) **Current Work.** Current unpublished institutional activities to date in the program area under which the application is being submitted should be described.

(6) **Comprehensive Project Timetable.** The application should outline all important phases of both required project types as a function of time for the entire project period.

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 “SGP”) and the program code (i.e., enter “SGP”).
- 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

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 Eastern Time on July 9, 2014.** 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

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.

In accordance with 7 U.S.C. section 7526(c)(1)(D)(vi) of the FCEA, Sun Grant Centers and the Subcenter may not use grant funds for indirect costs of awarding grants under the competitive grant program. However, up to 4 percent of the total funds received by each of the five Centers and the Subcenter may be budgeted for administrative costs incurred in awarding competitive grants.

Indirect Costs are allowable for the remainder (estimated 21 percent of total available Sun Grant Funding) of the funds awarded to the Center or the Subcenter to be used for multi-institutional and multistate research, extension, and educational programs on technology development; and integrated research, extension, and educational programs on technology implementation. Section 716 of the Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2014, limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of the funds that are budgeted to remain at the Center or Subcenter.

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 review panel will technically evaluate applications that meet these 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 to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

In accordance with §3430.1010, panel reviewers conducting merit reviews on proposals submitted by the Centers will be instructed to ensure that proposals adequately address the plan developed in accordance with §3430.1007 for consideration of the relevance and merit of proposals. As amended by the Agricultural Act of 2014, gasification is no longer a research priority.

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

- Clear statement of long-term goals and supporting objectives to support the Sun Grant Center.
- Preliminary data/pertinent information that demonstrates an understanding of regional biomass, bioenergy, biobased products and the environmental, economic, and social impacts.
- Demonstrated experience in managing regional competitive grant programs for research and education programs that support the development of bioenergy, biomass feedstocks, and biobased products; with sufficient infrastructure in place.
- Means by which data produced by research will be communicated to relevant stakeholders.
- Demonstration of how consortium will work collaboratively to enhance national energy security through the development, distribution, and implementation of biobased energy technologies; to promote diversification in, and the environmental sustainability of agricultural production, to promote economic diversification in rural areas; and to

enhance the efficiency of bioenergy and biomass research and development programs through improved coordination and collaboration among the Department of Agriculture; other appropriate Federal agencies; and Land Grant Institutions.

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. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, we determine the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 555, Reston, VA, 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, are kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process, to the extent permitted by law; therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

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).

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 (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), 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 whom 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 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://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> 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:

2 CFR Part 220—Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225—Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Part 230—Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

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 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122, now codified at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225 and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016—USDA Implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3022—Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

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.

7 CFR 3430, subpart O – Sun Grant Program.

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).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Daniel Cassidy
National Program Leader
Division of Bioenergy
(202) 401-6444
dcassidy@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contact –

Adriene Woodin
Branch Chief
Awards Management Division
(202) 401-4320
awoodin@nifa.usda.gov

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. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

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. Changes in Project Plans

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 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), 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](#) and [Subpart O – Sun Grant Program](#) for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.