



FACTSHEET

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IMPLEMENTATION FOR NIFA COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAMS

The **Agricultural Act of 2014** requires the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to recognize Centers of Excellence for food and agricultural research, education, and extension beginning in fiscal year 2015. Applicants who meet the requirements of designated funding opportunities are also eligible to apply for Center of Excellence designation as part of their grant application. If so designated, a Center of Excellence application receives priority consideration during the peer review process. NIFA is not establishing Centers of Excellence, but recognizing them and providing applicants who meet the eligibility requirements with priority consideration during the peer review process.

In July 2014, NIFA held listening sessions and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA's implementation of the centers of excellence provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input gathered are available on NIFA's website at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/legis/cntr_ex_webinar_documents.html.

ELIGIBILITY

To be considered, one or more of the following entities has to provide financial or in-kind support to a center being proposed, as described in the grant application: The following programs will be offering Centers of Excellence opportunities in fiscal year 2015:

- State agricultural experiment stations
- Colleges and universities
- University research foundations
- Other research institutions and organizations
- Federal agencies
- National laboratories
- Private organizations, foundations, or corporations
- Individuals
- A group consisting of two or more of the entities described above

The following programs will be offering Centers of Excellence opportunities in fiscal year 2015

- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative - Foundational Program and Challenge Areas
- Aquaculture Research
- Biomass Research and Development Initiative
- Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants Program
- Children, Youth, and Families at Risk
- Crop Protection/Pest Management
- Farm Business Management and Benchmarking
- Farm Safety and Youth Farm Safety Education and Certification
- Methyl Bromide Transition
- Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative
- Organic Transition Program
- Rural Health and Safety Program
- Specialty Crop Research Initiative

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PRIORITY CONSIDERATION

Priority in funding will be provided after all eligible applicants have been competitively peer reviewed, and ranked in accordance with program's standard evaluation criteria. Applications that rank highly meritorious and request consideration as Centers of Excellence will be further evaluated by peer panels to determine whether they have met the standards to be centers described above.

In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with applications of non-Centers of Excellence, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the center of excellence criteria. NIFA will effectively use the center of excellence prioritization as a "tie breaker."

Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a center of excellence or who are not deemed to have met the Centers of Excellence standards may still receive funding.

Applicant's Notice of Award will reflect that, for that particular grant program, the applicant meets all of the requirements of a center of excellence. Entities recognized as centers of excellence will maintain that distinction for the duration of their award or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

APPLICATIONS REQUIREMENTS

In fiscal year 2015, each request for applications describes the type of grant applications and the criteria applicants must meet to be considered as a Center of Excellence. Applicants must justify the following as it relates to the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in the application:

- The ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension.
- In addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the federal government. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award.
- The planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities
- The ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues.
- Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture, and schools of veterinary medicine).
- This brief justification statement is to be included as part of and within the page limits of their project narratives.