

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE****Cooperative State Research,  
Education, and Extension Service**

*Request for Proposals (RFP):* Fund for Rural America Program.

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

**ACTION:** Announcement of availability of grant funds and request for proposals for The Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program.

**SUMMARY:** The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 established an account in the Treasury of the United States to provide funds for rural development programs and a competitive grant program to support research, education, and extension activities.

This notice pertains only to the competitive grant program for research, education, and extension telecommunications activities. It identifies eligible participants in the program, the program areas to be supported, and the funding levels for each area; provides instructions for preparing and submitting proposals; and describes the selection process and evaluation criteria to be used to make funding decisions. To obtain program application materials, please contact the 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; Telephone: (202) 401-5048. When calling the Proposal Services Unit, please indicate that you are requesting materials for The Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program. These materials may also be requested via Internet by sending a message with your name, mailing address (not e-mail) and phone number to [psb@reeusda.gov](mailto:psb@reeusda.gov) which states that you want a copy of the application materials for the Fiscal Year 1997 Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program. The materials will then be mailed to you (not e-mailed) as quickly as possible.

**DATES:** Project grant applications must be received on or before September 29, 1997. Proposals received after September 29, 1997, will not be considered for funding.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Cathy Bridwell, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 2207, 1400 Independence

Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-2207; telephone (202) 720-6084.

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**Part I. General Information***A. Legislative Authority*

The Fund for Rural America (The Fund), authorized under section 793 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (FAIR Act) (7 U.S.C. 2204(f)), provides \$100 million annually for the next three years. One-third of the fund is available for research, education, and extension grants. These grants will be awarded on a competitive basis and are not targeted to specific priorities. One-third of the fund is available for rural development and must be administered through existing rural development programs. One-third of the fund is available either for research, education, and extension or rural development, or both at the Secretary's discretion. Note that the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, Pub. L. No. 105-18, rescinded \$20 million of The Fund in Fiscal Year 1997. As a result of this rescission, research and rural development will each sustain a reduction of \$10 million. The \$10 million reduction of the research component of The Fund will be applied proportionately across all areas of the component.

On January 29, 1997, the program solicited proposals for two initiatives: The Fund Core Initiative and The

Secretary's Initiative. The Fund Core Initiative was funded from the one-third of the fund dedicated to research, education, and extension. The Secretary's Initiative was funded from the one-third of the fund to be used at the Secretary's discretion. While the Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program also is being funded from the discretionary funds, it is separate from the solicitation of January 29, 1997.

This portion of the discretionary monies will be used for telecommunications research to provide the same economic opportunity for those living in small towns and rural areas as for those living in cities. To help achieve this goal, approximately \$2.1 million in competitive grants will be awarded through this separate request for proposals (RFP). If an applicant submitted a proposal to The Fund under the January 29, 1997, RFP which relates to telecommunications research, they also may submit the proposal under this RFP so long as the proposal conforms to the guidelines contained in this RFP.

These funds are to be competitively awarded as grants on the basis of merit, quality, and relevance to advancing the purposes of federally supported agricultural research, extension, and education provided in Section 1402 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended (7 U.S.C. 3101). Section 1402 identifies the following purposes:

"(1) Enhance the competitiveness of the United States agriculture and food industry in an increasingly competitive world environment;

(2) Increase the long-term productivity of the United States agriculture and food industry while maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base on which rural America and the United States agricultural economy depend;

(3) Develop new uses and new products for agricultural commodities, such as alternative fuels, and develop new crops;

(4) Support agricultural research and extension to promote economic opportunity in rural communities and to meet the increasing demand for information and technology transfer throughout the United States agriculture industry;

(5) Improve risk management in the United States agriculture industry;

(6) Improve the safe production and processing of, and adding of value to, United States food and fiber resources using methods that maintain the balance

between yield and environmental soundness;

(7) Support higher education in agriculture to give the next generation of Americans the knowledge, technology, and applications necessary to enhance the competitiveness of United States agriculture; and

(8) Maintain an adequate, nutritious, and safe supply of food to meet human nutritional needs and requirements."

This program has the capability of addressing each of the purposes through the use of telecommunications; however, the specific purposes to be addressed is dependent on the funded projects.

Section 793(c)(2)(A) of the FAIR Act authorizes the Secretary to use The Fund for competitive research, education, and extension grants to:

- "(i) Increase international competitiveness, efficiency, and farm profitability;
- (ii) Reduce economic and health risks;
- (iii) Conserve and enhance natural resources;
- (iv) Develop new crops, new crop uses, and new agricultural applications of biotechnology;
- (v) Enhance animal agricultural resources;
- (vi) Preserve plant and animal germplasm;
- (vii) Increase economic opportunities in farming and rural communities; and
- (viii) Expand locally-owned, value-added processing."

#### B. General Definitions

For the purpose of awarding grants under this program, the following definitions are applicable:

(1) *Administrator* means the Administrator of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) and any other officer or employee of the Department to whom the authority involved may be delegated.

(2) *Authorized departmental officer* means the Secretary or any employee of the Department who has the authority to issue or modify grant instruments on behalf of the Secretary.

(3) *Authorized organizational representative* means the president or chief executive officer of the applicant organization or the official, designated by the president or chief executive officer of the applicant organization, who has the authority to commit the resources of the organization.

(4) *Budget period* means the interval of time (usually 12 months) into which the project period is divided for budgetary and reporting purposes.

(5) *College or university* means an educational institution in any State

which admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate, is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education, provides an educational program for which an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded, is a public or other nonprofit institution, and is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

(6) *Communities of interest* means interests which bond individuals together for the purpose of achieving a common goal. Communities of interest may coalesce around common locations, commodity or production interests, environmental concerns, economic development opportunities, or other shared commitments.

(7) *Core initiative* means the programs encompassing the one-third of The Fund designated for research, education, and extension activities.

(8) *Department or USDA* means the United States Department of Agriculture.

(9) *End users* means the intended audience or beneficiary of the program or project.

(10) *Grant* means the award by the Secretary of funds to a Federal research agency, a national laboratory, a college or university or a research foundation maintained by a college or university, or a private research organization to assist in meeting the costs of conducting, for the benefit of the public, an identified project which is intended and designed to accomplish the purpose of the program as identified in these guidelines.

(11) *Grantee* means the organization designated in the grant award document as the responsible legal entity to which a grant is awarded.

(12) *The National Information Infrastructure (NII)* includes, but is not limited to, the physical facilities used to transmit, store, process, and display voice, data, and images, as well as a wide range and ever-expanding range of equipment including cameras, scanners, keyboards, telephones, fax machines, computers, switches, compact disks, video and audio tape, cable, wire, satellites, optical fiber transmission lines, microwave nets, switches, televisions, monitors, and printers.

(13) *Partners* are defined as all those who will collaborate on and have a substantial role and interest in the project.

(14) *Peer review panel* means a group of experts qualified by training and

experience in particular fields to give expert advice on the merit of grant applications in such fields, who evaluate eligible proposals submitted to this program in their personal area(s) of expertise.

(15) *Prior approval* means written approval evidencing prior consent by an authorized departmental officer as defined in (2) above.

(16) *Private research organization* means any non-governmental corporation, partnership, proprietorship, trust, or other organization with an established and demonstrated capacity to perform research or technology transfer which (1) conducts any systematic study directed toward new or fuller knowledge and understanding of the subject studied, or (2) systematically relates or applies the findings of research or scientific experimentation to the application of new approaches to problem solving, technologies, or management practices; and (3) has facilities, qualified personnel, independent funding, and prior projects and accomplishments in research or technology transfer.

(17) *Project* means the particular activity within the scope of the program supported by a grant award.

(18) *Project director* means the single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application and approved by the Secretary who is responsible for the direction and management of the project.

(19) *Project period* means the period, as stated in the award document and modifications thereto, if any, during which Federal sponsorship begins and ends.

(20) *Secretary* means the Secretary of Agriculture and any other officer or employee of the Department to whom the authority involved may be delegated.

(21) *Secretary's initiative* means the programs encompassing the one-third of The Fund for rural development and/or research, education, and extension activities according to the Secretary's discretion.

(22) *Smaller institution* means a college or university or a research foundation maintained by a college or university that ranks in the lower one-third of such institutions on the basis of Federal research funds received (excepting monies received under the Fund).

(23) *Stakeholder* means those who have a substantial interest in the project, but are not the intended audience of the program or project.

(24) *The Fund* means the Fund for Rural America.

### C. Eligibility

Proposals may be submitted by Federal research agencies, national laboratories, colleges or universities or research foundations maintained by a college or university, or private research organizations. National laboratories include Federal laboratories that are government-owned contractor-operated or government-owned government-operated. If the applicant is a private organization, documentation must be submitted establishing that the private organization has an established and demonstrated capacity to perform research or technology transfer. A programmatic decision on the eligibility status of the private organization will be made based on the information submitted.

### D. Available Funds and Award Limitations

Under this program, subject to the availability of funds, the Secretary may award competitive grants, for periods not to exceed five years, for the support of research, education, and extension projects to further the programs of the USDA. The first allocation to The Fund from the U.S. Treasury is \$100,000,000 on January 1, 1997. No less than one-third of the amount must be used for rural development and competitively awarded research, education, and extension grants according to the Secretary's discretion. Funds for the competitive grants program are available to the Department for award during a two-year period. Note that the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, Pub. L. No. 105-18, rescinded \$20 million of The Fund in Fiscal Year 1997. As a result of this rescission, research and rural development will each sustain a reduction of \$10 million. The \$10 million reduction of the research component of The Fund will be applied proportionately across all areas of the component. The Department expects to award approximately \$2.1 million as grants to meritorious eligible applicants under this request for proposals (RFP).

Not less than 15 percent of the total funds awarded by CSREES under The Fund for research, education, and extension activities will be used for grants to colleges, universities, or research foundations maintained by a college or university that rank in the lowest one-third of such entities based on Federal research funds received (excepting monies received under The Fund).

Funds awarded under this RFP may not be used for the construction of a new building or the acquisition,

expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building.

## Part II. Program Description

### A. Purpose of the Program

The ability of rural Americans to access and use rural and agriculturally based information is critical to ensuring equal opportunity for economic growth. The purpose of the program is to examine ways to improve delivery of rural economic, community development and agricultural knowledge to rural communities in order to provide the same economic opportunity for those living in small towns and rural areas as for those living in cities.

### B. Scope of the Program

Proposals must address which purposes described in Section 1402 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended (7 U.S.C. 3101) will be incorporated in the application of the proposed telecommunications. In Fiscal Year 1997, the Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program will support projects in three program categories: (1) Rural Telecommunications Technologies and Systems; (2) Information Infrastructure; and (3) Human Capacity Building. Applicants must clearly state to which category they are applying; each proposal will be rated against other proposals in that category; and applicants may not submit identical proposals to more than one category.

#### 1. Rural Telecommunications Technologies and Systems

Applicants may submit a proposal in the Rural Telecommunications Technologies and Systems category to examine the special needs, limitations, applicability, and use of existing and cutting-edge telecommunications technologies and systems in rural America. Proposals in this category must clearly target the telecommunications infrastructure needs of rural citizens not currently connected to the National Information Infrastructure (NII) and must substantiate the choice of technology in relation to the needs of the rural citizens targeted by the project. Examples might include, but are not limited to, application of technology to solve the education needs of a particular community, or implementation of technology systems to link citizens to information, two-way interactive communications and/or formal or non-formal educational opportunities.

#### 2. Information Infrastructure

Applicants may submit a proposal in the Information Infrastructure category to examine ways to build the information infrastructure to further the education of rural Americans and to improve access to research and extension tools/sources. Proposals in this category must clearly target the development of the informative and educational content of the NII specifically relating to rural and agricultural research, education and extension. Proposals must seek to enhance the applicability and usefulness of this content to rural citizens. Examples include, but are not limited to, development of interactive non-formal and formal distance education opportunities and the digitization and organization of subject matter information for rural citizens.

#### 3. Human Capacity Building

Applicants may submit a proposal to the Human Capacity category to examine the interaction among people, technology, and knowledge. Proposals in this category must clearly target the human interface to technology, as well as to information and formal and non-formal education made available through telecommunications. Examples include, but are not limited to, development of new and more user friendly applications of the information and the technology and programs designed to remove barriers to adoption and use of technology by citizens of rural America.

The Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program will not fund the following types of projects:

*Hardware or Software Development Projects.* While some hardware or software development may be required to implement a project, it may not be a major emphasis of any project.

*Internal Projects.* While some internal training and infrastructure may be required to implement a project, this program will not support projects whose primary emphasis is on the internal education, technology, or information needs of an organization.

*Replacement or Upgrade of Existing Facilities.* This program will not support any projects whose primary emphasis is the upgrade or replacement of existing facilities.

*Planning Projects.* While planning is an appropriate and encouraged activity as a component of a project, this program will not support projects whose sole emphasis is on planning.

### C. Proposal Narrative

The narrative should contain the following sections set in the context of

the category under which funding is requested:

#### 1. Introduction

Include a clear statement of the goal(s) and objective(s) of the project. The problem should be set within the context of work that has been previously done in the category applied for, as well as in the context of the present-day situation. Summarize the body of knowledge which substantiates the need for the proposed project. Preliminary information pertinent to the proposed work should also be cited.

#### 2. Rationale and Significance

Substantiate the need for the proposed project. Describe the impact of the project on the end user. Describe the project's specific relationship to the purposes of The Fund and to the identified need to be addressed.

#### 3. Objectives and Approach

Cite and discuss the specific objective(s) to be accomplished under the project. A detailed description of the approach must include:

- Techniques and/or procedures used to carry out the proposed activities and for accomplishing the objectives
- The results expected
- Limitations
- Time table

#### 4. Evaluation

Provide a plan for assessing and evaluating the accomplishments of the stated objectives during the conduct of the project and describe ways to determine the effectiveness of the end results upon conclusion of the project.

#### 5. Relationship to Partners, Communities of Interest, Stakeholders, and End Users

Describe how the project will involve partners and communities of interest. Describe how and by whom the focus and scope of the project were determined, how partners will be involved during the course of the project, and how end users will be impacted by results. Evidence must be provided via letters by the parties involved that arrangements necessary for collaborative partnerships have been discussed with the parties involved and can realistically be expected to come to fruition, or have actually been finalized contingent on an award under this program. A letter from a university must be signed by the dean or research director, a representative of the university's central administration, or a higher university official. A letter from a business or industry must be signed by an official who has the authority to

commit the resources of the organization. Such letters should be placed immediately following the Project Narrative in the proposal.

#### 6. Outreach and Dissemination Plan

Clearly describe how results and information will be disseminated or transferred to end users, partners, communities of interest, and stakeholders.

#### 7. Coordination and Management Plan

Describe how the project will be coordinated among the various participants and clearly describe the nature of the collaborations. Describe plans for management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration.

### Part III. Preparation of a Proposal

#### A. Program Application Materials

Program application materials will be made available to eligible entities upon request. These materials include information about the purpose of the program, how the program will be conducted, and the required contents of a proposal, as well as the forms needed to prepare and submit grant applications under the program.

To obtain application materials, please contact the 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; Telephone (202) 401-5048. When calling the Proposal Services Unit, please indicate that you are requesting forms for The Fund for Rural America—Rural Information Infrastructure Program. These materials may also be requested via Internet by sending a message with your name, mailing address (not e-mail) and phone number to [psb@reeusda.gov](mailto:psb@reeusda.gov) and state that you want a copy of the application materials for the Fiscal Year 1997 Fund for Rural America—Telecommunications Program. The materials will then be mailed to you (not e-mailed) as quickly as possible.

#### B. Content of a Proposal

A proposal should contain the following:

##### 1. Cover Page

Complete the "Application for Funding", Form CSREES-661, in its entirety.

a. Note that providing a Social Security Number is voluntary, but the number is an integral part of the

CSREES information system and will assist in the processing of the proposal.

b. One copy of the "Application for Funding" form must contain the pen-and-ink signatures of the project director(s) and authorized organizational representative for the applicant organization.

c. Note that by signing the "Application for Funding" form the applicant is providing the required certifications set forth in 7 CFR part 3017, as amended by 61 **Federal Register** 250, January 4, 1996, regarding Debarment and Suspension and Drug-Free Workplace, and 7 CFR part 3018, regarding Lobbying. The certification forms are included in the application package for informational purposes only. It is not necessary to submit the forms to USDA.

#### 2. Table of Contents

For ease in locating information, each proposal must contain a detailed Table of Contents immediately after Form CSREES-661, "Application for Funding." The Table of Contents should include page numbers for each component of the proposal. Pagination should begin immediately following the Table of Contents.

#### 3. Project Summary

The proposal must contain a project summary of 250 words or less on a separate page. This page must include the title of the project and the names of the primary project director(s) and the applicant organization, followed by the summary. The summary should be self-contained, and should describe the overall goals and relevance of the project. The summary should also contain a listing of all organizations involved in the project. The Project Summary should immediately follow the Table of Contents.

#### 4. Application Category

Each proposal must state the category under which funds are requested (1) Rural Telecommunications Technologies and Systems (2) Information Infrastructure; or (3) Building Human Capacity.

#### 5. Project Narrative

All proposals are to be submitted on standard 8.5" x 11" paper with typing on one side of the page only. In addition, margins must be at least one inch, type must be 12 characters per inch (12 pitch or 10 point) or larger, no more than 6 lines per inch, and there should be no page reductions. If applicable, proposals should include original illustrations (photographs, color prints, etc.) in all copies of the proposal

to prevent loss of meaning through poor quality reproduction. Such illustrations are not included in the page limitation for project narratives.

The narrative portion of the proposal is limited to 20 pages of text and should contain the required information described under section (c) of Part II. Program Description.

#### 6. Key Personnel

Identify the primary project director and the co-project director(s) and other key personnel required for this project. Include vitae that provide adequate information so that proposal reviewers can make an informed judgment as to their capabilities and experience.

#### 7. Conflict of Interest List

A Conflict of Interest List must be provided for individuals identified as key personnel. Each list should be on a separate page and include alphabetically the full names of the individuals in the following categories: (1) All collaborators on projects within the past five years, including current and planned collaborations; (2) all co-authors on publications within the past five years, including pending publications and submissions; (3) all persons in your field with whom you have had a consulting or financial arrangement within the past five years who would stand to gain by seeing the project funded; and (4) all thesis or postdoctoral advisees/advisors within the past five years.

#### 8. Budget

*A. Budget Form:* Prepare the budget, Form CSREES-55, in accordance with instructions provided with the form. 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. The budget form may be reproduced as needed by applicants. 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 program guidelines, and can be justified as necessary for the successful conduct of the proposed project.

The following guidelines should be used in developing your proposal budget(s):

1. *Salaries and Wages.* Salaries and wages are allowable charges and may be requested for personnel who will be working on the project in proportion to the time such personnel will devote to the project. If salary funds are requested,

the number of Senior and Other Personnel and the number of CSREES Funded Work Months must be shown in the spaces provided. Grant funds may not be used to augment the total salary or rate of salary of project personnel or to reimburse them for time in addition to a regular full-time salary covering the same general period of employment.

2. *Fringe Benefits.* Funds may be requested for fringe benefit costs if the usual accounting practices of your organization provide that organizational contributions to employee benefits (social security, retirement, etc.) be treated as direct costs. Fringe benefit costs may be included only for those personnel whose salaries are charged as a direct cost to the project.

3. *Nonexpendable Equipment.* Nonexpendable equipment means tangible nonexpendable personal property including exempt property charged directly to the award having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. As such, items of necessary instrumentation or other nonexpendable equipment should be listed individually by description and estimated cost and justified.

In addition, pursuant to Section 716(b) of Pub. L. No. 104-180 (the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997), in the case of any equipment or product that may be authorized to be purchased with funds provided under this program, entities receiving such funds are encouraged to use such funds to purchase only American-made equipment or products.

4. *Materials and Supplies.* The types of expendable materials and supplies which are required to carry out the project should be indicated in general terms with estimated costs.

5. *Travel.* The type and extent of travel and its relationship to project objectives should be described briefly and justified. If foreign travel is proposed, the country to be visited, the specific purpose of the travel, a brief itinerary, inclusive dates of travel, and estimated cost must be provided for each trip. Airfare allowances normally will not exceed round-trip jet economy air accommodations. U.S. flag carriers must be used when available. See 7 CFR part 3015.205(b)(4) for further guidance.

6. *Publication Costs/Page Charges.* Anticipated costs of preparing and publishing results of the research being proposed (including page charges, necessary illustrations, and the cost of a reasonable number of coverless reprints) may be estimated and charged against the grant.

#### 7. Computer (ADPE) Costs.

Reimbursement for the costs of using specialized facilities (such as a university- or department-controlled computer mainframe or data processing center) may be requested if such services are required for completion of the work.

8. *All Other Direct Costs.* Anticipated direct project charges not included in other budget categories must be itemized with estimated costs and justified on a separate sheet of paper attached to Form CSREES-55. This also applies to revised budgets, as the item(s) and dollar amount(s) may change. Examples may include space rental at remote locations, subcontractual costs, and charges for consulting services. You are encouraged to consult the "Instructions for Completing Form CSREES-55, Budget," of the Application Kit for detailed guidance relating to this budget category.

9. *Indirect Costs.* If requested, the current rate negotiated with the cognizant Federal negotiating agency should be used. Indirect costs may not exceed the negotiated rate. If no rate has been negotiated, a reasonable dollar amount in lieu of indirect costs may be requested, which will be subject to approval by CSREES. In the latter case, if a proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted to support the amount of indirect costs requested. CSREES will request an indirect cost rate proposal and provide instructions, as necessary.

In that grants supported by The Fund may include numerous activities other than traditional instruction or research, the institution may choose to request indirect costs rates that are lower than the institution approved negotiated research or instructional rate.

Applications from colleges and universities that are not submitted through an Office of Sponsored Programs (or equivalent thereto) must provide a statement in the budget narrative verifying that the indirect costs requested are in accordance with institutional policies.

B. *Budget Narrative:* All salaries and wages, nonexpendable equipment, foreign travel, subcontracts, and all other direct costs for which support is requested must be individually listed (with costs) and justified on a separate sheet of paper and placed immediately following the budget.

#### 9. Current and Pending Support

All proposals must contain Form CSREES-663 listing other current public or private support (including in-house support) to which key personnel

identified in the proposal have committed portions of their time, whether or not salary support for person(s) involved is included in the budget. Analogous information must be provided for any pending proposals that are being considered by, or that will be submitted in the near future to, other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs or agencies. Concurrent submission of identical or similar proposals to the possible sponsors will not prejudice proposal review or evaluation by the Administrator for this purpose. However, a proposal that duplicates or overlaps substantially with a proposal already reviewed and funded (or that will be funded) by another organization or agency will not be funded under this program. NOTE: This proposal should be identified in the pending section of Form CSREES-663.

#### 10. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

As outlined in 7 CFR part 3407 (CSREES regulations implementing NEPA), the environmental data for any proposed project is to be provided to CSREES so that CSREES may determine whether any further action is needed. In some cases, however, the preparation of environmental data may not be required. Certain categories of actions are excluded from the requirements of NEPA.

In order for CSREES to determine whether any further action is needed with respect to NEPA, pertinent information regarding the possible environmental impacts of a particular project is necessary; therefore, Form CSREES-1234, "NEPA Exclusions Form," must be included in the proposal indicating whether the applicant is of the opinion that the project falls within a categorical exclusion and the reasons therefor. If it is the applicant's opinion that the proposed project falls within the categorical exclusions, the specific exclusion must be identified. Form CSREES-1234 and supporting documentation should be included as the last page of the proposal.

Even though a project may fall within the categorical exclusions, CSREES may determine that an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement is necessary for an activity, if substantial controversy on environmental grounds exists or if other extraordinary conditions or circumstances are present which may cause such activity to have a significant environmental effect.

### Part IV. Submission of a Proposal

#### A. What to Submit

An original and 15 copies must be submitted. Each copy of each proposal must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. (DO NOT BIND.) All copies of the proposal must be submitted in one package.

#### B. Where and When to Submit

Applications must be received by September 29, 1997. Proposals sent by First Class mail must be sent to the following address: Proposal Services Unit, Grants Management Branch, Office of Extramural Programs, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, STOP 2245, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-2245, Telephone: (202) 401-5048

**Note:** Hand-delivered proposals or those delivered by overnight express service should be brought to the following address: 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. The telephone number is (202) 401-5048.

#### C. Acknowledgment of Proposals

The receipt of all proposals will be acknowledged in writing and this acknowledgment will contain an identifying proposal number. Once your proposal has been assigned an identification number, that number should be cited in future correspondence.

### Part V. Selection Process and Evaluation Criteria

#### A. Selection Process

Each proposal will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each proposal will be screened to ensure it meets the requirements as set forth in this RFP. Proposals that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated. Each proposal will be judged on its own merits.

#### B. Technical Evaluation Criteria

The review of applications submitted for funding consideration will consist of a technical evaluation conducted by CSREES using the competitive peer review process. Applications will receive a technical evaluation using the following criteria:

##### 1. Merit

Scientific, technical, or educational merit: Well defined problem; clearly defined objectives; appropriateness of approach, (including selection of proper

approach to address systems, multifaceted, or multidisciplinary problems); demonstrated integration of components (such as research, education and extension components); degree of feasibility; soundness and effectiveness of management plan.

##### 2. Quality

Creativity and innovativeness in addressing problem and issues; selection of most appropriate and qualified individuals to address problem; competence and experience of personnel; effective utilization of knowledge base in addressing problem; potential to contribute solutions to stated problem; identified potential for technology transfer and information dissemination.

##### 3. Relevance

Proposal advances purposes of The Fund for Rural America; potential to contribute solutions to priority problems in agriculture; identification and involvement of stakeholders; involvement of communities of interest and stakeholders in the identification of problems set forth in proposal; partnership with those affected by the outcome.

#### C. Programmatic Relevance Review

The National Agricultural Research, Education and Economics Advisory Board will review collective groups of recommended proposals (based on technical evaluation) to ensure the relevance of the work proposed for funding toward achieving the programmatic goals of The Fund.

### Part VI. Supplementary Information

#### A. Access to Peer Review Information

After final decisions have been announced, CSREES will, upon request, inform the project director of the reasons for its decision on a proposal. Copies of summary reviews, not including the identity of the reviewers, will be made available to respective project directors upon specific request.

#### B. Grant Awards

##### 1. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of CSREES shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose proposals are judged most meritorious in the announced program areas under the evaluation criteria and procedures set forth in this request for proposals. The date specified by the Administrator 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. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practicable so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by CSREES under this request for proposals shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, these application guidelines, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015, 3016, and 3019 of 7 CFR).

## 2. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one-time basis prior to the award of a grant identified under these application guidelines if such information has not been provided previously under this or another program for which the sponsoring agency is responsible. Copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling the requirements contained in this section will be provided by the sponsoring agency as part of the preaward process.

## 3. Grant Award Document and Notice of Grant Award

The grant award document shall include at a minimum the following:

- a. Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the Administrator has awarded a grant under the terms of this request for proposals;
- b. Title of Project;
- c. Name(s) and address(es) of project director(s) chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- d. Identifying grant number assigned by the Department;
- e. Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- f. Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Administrator during the project period;
- g. Legal authority(ies) under which the grant is awarded;
- h. Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the grant award; and
- i. Other information or provisions deemed necessary by CSREES to carry out its respective granting activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular grant.

The notice of grant award, in the form of a letter, will be prepared and will provide pertinent instructions or information to the grantee that is not included in the grant award document.

## C. Use of Funds; Changes

### 1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

The grantee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of grant funds.

### 2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the grantee, project director(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project grant shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the grantee and/or the project director(s) are 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.

b. Changes in approved goals, or objectives, shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. 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, shall be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers.

e. Changes in Project Period: The project period may be extended by CSREES without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the grantee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of a grant.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the grantee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes if the revision will:

(1) Involve transfers of amounts budgeted for indirect costs to absorb an increase in direct costs;

(2) Involve transfers of amounts budgeted for direct costs to accommodate changes in indirect cost rates negotiated during a budget period and not approved when a grant was awarded; or

(3) Involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or in the grant award.

## D. Other Federal Statutes and Regulations That Apply

Several other Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant proposals considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include but are not limited to:

7 CFR part 1.1—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR part 1c—USDA implementation of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

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 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., Circular Nos. A-21 and A-122) 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 3017, as amended by 61 FR 250, January 4, 1996—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) and Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR part 3018—USDA implementation of New 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 No. A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations.

7 CFR part 3051—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133 regarding audits of institutions of

higher education and other nonprofit institutions.

7 CFR part 3407—CSREES procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

48 CFR part 31—Contract Cost Principles and Procedures of the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

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).

*E. Confidential Aspects of Proposals and Awards*

When a proposal results in a grant, it becomes a part of the record of the Agency's transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a privileged nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as privileged should be clearly marked as such and sent in a

separate statement, two copies of which should accompany the proposal. The original copy of a proposal that does not result in a grant will be retained by the Agency for a period of one year. Other copies will be destroyed. Such a proposal will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. A proposal may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

Done at Washington, D.C., on this 25th day of July 1997.

**Colien Hefferan,**

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