

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE****Cooperative State Research,  
Education, and Extension Service****Notice of Fiscal Year 1998 Agricultural  
Telecommunications Program;  
Solicitation of Proposals**

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

**SUMMARY:** The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service is soliciting proposals under the Agricultural Telecommunications Program. The Agricultural Telecommunications Program is authorized in Section 1673 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5926). It is anticipated that grants will be awarded competitively under the program in support of the following program areas: (1) Program Delivery and Innovative Program Development/Production, and (2) Capacity Building.

**DATE:** Applications must be received on or before August 17, 1998. Proposals received after August 17, 1998 will not be considered for funding.

**ADDRESSES:** *Proposals sent by First Class mail must be sent to the following address:* Agricultural Telecommunications Program, c/o Proposal Services Unit, 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.

*Proposals that are delivered by Express mail, courier service, or by hand must be sent to the following address:* Agricultural Telecommunications Program, c/o Proposal Services Unit, 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, D.C. 20024. Telephone: (202) 401-5048.

*For programmatic issues contact:* Cathy Bridwell; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2216; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2216; telephone (202) 720-6084; Internet: cbridwell@reeusda.gov

*For administrative issues contact:* the Grants Management Branch, Office of Extramural Programs; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; STOP 2246; 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.; Washington, D.C. 20250-2246; telephone (202) 401-5050.

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**Part I—Program Description****A. Purpose**

Proposals are requested for the purpose of awarding competitive grants for fiscal year (FY) 1998 under the Agricultural Telecommunications Program (Program). Grants will be awarded to eligible institutions to assist in the development and utilization of an agricultural communications network to facilitate and to strengthen agricultural extension, resident education and research, and domestic and international marketing of United States commodities and products through a partnership between eligible institutions and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The network will employ satellite and other telecommunications technology to disseminate and to share academic instruction, cooperative extension programming, agricultural research, and marketing information. The authority for this Program is contained in Section 1673 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5926). This Program is administered by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) of USDA.

**B. Available Funding**

For FY 1998, \$873,000 is available for the Program. Grants under this Program may provide funds for no more than 50 percent (50%) of the cost of a proposed project, unless otherwise determined by the Secretary in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 1673(g) of Pub. L. 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5926(g)). Project funds will be awarded for one fiscal

year. Applicants may re compete for additional funding, but projects will not be renewed. Funds will be awarded for no more than \$50,000 for Capacity Building projects. Funds will be awarded for no more than \$100,000 for Program Delivery and Innovative Program Development/Production projects.

**C. Matching Funds Requirement**

A grant awarded under this Program must be matched by the recipient with equal funds from a non-Federal source unless otherwise determined by the Secretary in accordance with the provisions of Sec. 1673(g) of Pub. L. 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5926(g)). The matching requirement must be satisfied through allowable costs incurred by the recipient or subrecipient and through third party in-kind contributions.

**D. Eligibility**

Proposals are invited from accredited institutions of higher education. Applicants must demonstrate that they participate in a network that distributes programs consistent with the following objectives: (1) make optimal use of available resources for agricultural extension, resident education, and research by sharing resources between participating institutions; (2) improve the competitive position of United States agriculture in international markets by disseminating information to producers, processors, and researchers; (3) train students for careers in agriculture and food industries; (4) facilitate interaction among leading agricultural scientists; (5) enhance the ability of United States agriculture to respond to environmental and food safety concerns, and; (6) identify new uses for farm commodities and to increase the demand for United States agricultural products in both domestic and foreign markets.

Pursuant to Sec. 1673(e) of Pub. L. 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5926(e)), preferential consideration will be given to applications that—(i) are submitted by institutions affiliated with an established agricultural telecommunications network that distributed programs to a wide geographical area; or (ii) demonstrate the need for such assistance, taking into consideration the relative needs of all applicants and the financial ability of the applicants to otherwise secure or create the telecommunications system.

These preferences will be factored into the evaluation of the Partnerships and Collaboration and Project Need Criteria, respectively.

### E. Definitions

For the purpose of awarding funding under this Program, the following definitions are applicable:

(1) *Accredited institutions of higher education* means a college or university which is an educational institution in any State which: (a) 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; (b) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (c) provides an educational program for which a baccalaureate degree or any other higher degree is awarded; (d) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (e) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

(2) *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.

(3) *Agricultural telecommunications* means those activities established to encourage development and utilization of an agricultural communications network employing satellite and other telecommunications technologies to disseminate and to share academic instruction, cooperative extension programming, agricultural research, and marketing information.

(4) *Authorized departmental officer* means the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or the individual acting within the scope of delegated authority, who is responsible for awarding and administering grants on behalf of the Secretary.

(5) *Authorized organizational representatives* 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.

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

(7) *Cash contributions* means the applicant's cash outlay, including the outlay of money contributed to the applicant by non-Federal third parties.

(8) *Communications network* refers to television or cable television origination or distribution equipment, signal conversion equipment (including both modulators and demodulators),

computer hardware and software, programs or terminals, or related devices, used to process and exchange data through a telecommunications system in which signals are generated, modified or prepared for transmission, or received, via telecommunications terminal equipment or via telecommunications transmission.

(9) *Delivery* means the transmission and reception of programs by facilities that transmit, receive, or carry data between telecommunications terminal equipment at each end of a telecommunications circuit or path.

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

(11) *Equipment* means tangible 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.

(12) *Facilities* includes microwave antennae, fiberoptic cables and repeaters, coaxial cables, communications satellite ground station complexes, and copper cable electronic equipment associated with telecommunications transmission and similar items subject to the approval of the authorized departmental officer.

(13) *Grant* means the award by the authorized departmental officer of funds to an accredited institution of higher education to assist in meeting the costs of conducting, for the benefit of the public, as identified project which is intended and designed to accomplish the purpose of the program as identified in these guidelines.

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

(15) *Matching* means that portion of allowable project costs not borne by the Federal Government, including the value of in-kind contributions.

(16) *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.

(17) *Prior approval* means written approval evidencing prior consent by an authorized departmental officer as defined in (4) above.

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

(19) *Project director* means the single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application and approved by the authorized departmental officer who

is responsible for the direction and management of the project.

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

(21) *Satellite ground station complex* includes transmitters, receivers, and communications antennae at the Earth station site together with the interconnecting terrestrial transmission facilities (including cables, line, or microwave facilities) and modulating and demodulating equipment necessary for processing traffic received from the terrestrial distribution system prior to transmission via satellite and the traffic received from the satellite prior to transfer to terrestrial distribution systems.

### Part II—Program Areas

#### A. Program Delivery and Innovative Program Development/Production

##### 1. Description

Applicants may submit a proposal in the Program Delivery and Innovative Program Development/Production area requesting funding to: (1) operate an agricultural communications network, employing satellite and other telecommunications technology, to deliver Cooperative Extension programming, academic instruction, agricultural research and marketing information through partnership(s) between eligible institutions and the Department; or, (2) develop distance education programming. The project goal(s) and objective(s) must be clearly stated in the proposal. Proposals in this area must clearly target a systematic approach to building an infrastructure to deliver programming at a distance or must demonstrate an innovation to developing distance education programming.

Each proposal will be evaluated based on three broad principles: (1) Is there a real need for the project; (2) will the strategy identified meet the need; and (3) is the project sustainable?

Each proposal must document the need for the project, based on literature review, case studies, audience analysis and/or needs assessment.

The project strategy should reflect an integrated approach to instructional design including subject-matter content, educational methodology and compatible production and delivery techniques. The approach described must meet the identified need.

Evidence must be given that the project will be supported by the institution or by other groups or

institutions that may wish to continue the project.

## 2. Project Narrative

The narrative portion of the proposal must describe how the project meets the three broad principles identified above. It must not exceed 20 pages in length and no additional material or appendix will be considered. The narrative should contain the following sections:

(a) **Project Need.** Describe the background and situation leading to the need for the project. The project must be based on a need articulated by an audience or on a needs assessment. Describe the targeted audience(s) for whom the project will be designed including pertinent history identified in need, demographics, and expected impact on audience. If appropriate, describe the methodology and results of the needs assessment. Demonstrate the need for assistance under this Program, including financial ability or inability to otherwise pursue the proposed program.

(b) **Strategy.** (i) *Partnerships and Collaboration.* Describe partnerships and collaborations fostered through this project including expected impact and benefit to those involved such as learner, institution, agency, state, and nation. Partners are defined as all those who will collaborate on the project. Submit evidence that partnerships are in place, and that those partners have a substantial role and interest in the project. Examples of role and interest might include joint risk-taking and shared benefits. Include information about any current affiliations with established agricultural telecommunications networks that distribute programs to a wide geographical area.

(ii) *Appropriate Distance Learning Technologies.* Describe appropriate distance learning technologies including, but not limited to, internet, multimedia, audio/visual, and other telecommunications technologies to be developed or employed in this project.

(iii) *Infrastructure.* Describe a framework representing both the technological and human infrastructure for this project including, but not limited to, technical trouble-shooting, scheduling and operation management, and learner and program support. Evidence of learner support includes, but is not limited to, facilitation of access, accommodation for diversity in special needs and learning styles, and recognition of need for alternative modes of program design and delivery.

(iv) *Innovation.* Describe the innovative application of distance education/learning delivery identified in the project. Examples of innovation

may include, but are not limited to, approaches in reaching audiences, methods of connectivity and/or interaction, use of existing resources with innovations in the teaching/learning transaction, and entrepreneurial approaches to distance education delivery.

(v) *Outreach Plan.* Describe a plan for informing others about positive and negative outcomes, results, lessons learned, innovative ideas, and research findings from the project.

(vi) *Evaluation Plan.* Describe both formative and summative design for evaluating specific aspects of the project. These designs may include methods for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the Program in terms of teaching and learning, behavior change/problem-solving, immediate application, meeting learner needs, and/or potential for replication.

(c) **Sustainability.** (i) *Project Sustainability.* Include strong evidence of the project's ability to continue and grow after receiving the funding. Examples may include replication by others; continued funding other than from this Program, or opportunities for sale of products; and/or use of ideas and results of project by others.

(ii) *Cost/Benefit.* Include a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed project, including comparison to other delivery methods, relative benefit to learner, and staffing costs versus benefits.

## B. Capacity Building

### 1. Description

Applicants submitting proposals in the Capacity Building area should target the development of capacity in the area of distance education at the university, state, regional, national or international level. Proposals must include a detailed plan for assessing capacity or a plan for targeting need based on a completed needs assessment.

Each proposal will be evaluated based on three broad principles: (1) Is there a real need for the project; (2) will the strategy identified meet the need; and (3) is the project sustainable?

Each proposal must document the need for the project, based on literature review, case studies, audience analysis and needs assessment.

The project strategy should reflect an integrated approach to instructional design including subject-matter content, educational methodology and compatible production and delivery techniques. The approach described must meet the identified need.

Evidence must be given that the project will be supported by the institution or by other groups of

institutions that may wish to continue the project.

## 2. Project Narrative

The narrative portion of the proposal must describe how the project meets the three broad principles identified above. It must not exceed 20 pages in length and no additional material or appendix will be considered. The narrative should contain the following sections:

(a) **Project Need.** Describe the background and situation leading to the need for the project. The project must be based on a need articulated by an audience or on a needs assessment. Describe the targeted audience(s) for whom the project will be designed including pertinent history identified in need, demographics, and expected impact on the targeted audience(s). If appropriate, describe the methodology and results of the needs assessment. Applicants should describe how the capacity built will improve program production or program delivery. Demonstrate the need for assistance under this Program, including financial ability or inability to otherwise pursue the proposed program.

(b) **Strategy.** (i) *Capacity Assessment.* Include a detailed assessment of capacity or a fully developed plan for assessing capacity. Areas of consideration include, but are not limited to: faculty/staff development; support resources; production/technical capability; delivery capability; building learner capacity.

(ii) *Evaluation Plan.* Describe both formative and summative design for evaluating specific aspects of the project. These designs may include methods for evaluating the overall effectiveness of program in terms of teaching and learning, behavior change/problem-solving, immediate application, meeting learner need, and/or potential for replication.

(iii) *Outreach Plan.* Describe a plan for informing others about positive and negative outcomes, results, lessons learned, innovative ideas, research findings from the project.

(c) **Sustainability.** (i) *Sustainability.* Include strong evidence of the project's ability to continue and grow after receiving the funding. Examples may include replication by others; continued funding other than from this Program, or opportunities for sale of products; and/or use of ideas and results of project by others.

(ii) *Institutional Commitment.* Discuss institutional commitment to the project. For example, substantiate that the institution(s) attributes a priority to the project; discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the

institution's(s') long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; explain how the project will help satisfy the institution's(s') high priority objectives; or show how this project is linked to and supported by the institution's(s') strategic plan.

(iii) *Partnerships and Collaboration.*

Describe partnerships and collaborations fostered through this project including expected impact and benefit to those involved such as the learner, institution, agency, state, and nation. Partners are defined as all those who will collaborate on the project. Submit evidence that partnerships are in place, and that those partners have a substantial role and interest in the project. Examples of role and interest might include joint risk taking and shared benefits. Include information about any current affiliations with established agricultural telecommunications networks that distribute programs to a wide geographical area.

### Part III—Preparation of a Proposal

#### A. Program Application Materials

Copies of this solicitation and the Application Submission Package, which contains required forms, certifications, and instructions for preparing and submitting project applications, may be obtained by contacting: Agricultural Telecommunications Program, c/o Proposal Services Unit, Office of Extramural Programs, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Stop 2245, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250-2245. Telephone: (202) 401-5048.

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

#### B. Content of a Proposal

1. Cover Page. Complete the "Project Application" form, Form CFR-2101, in its entirety. a. One copy of the "Project Application" form must contain the pen-and-ink signatures of the project director and authorized organizational representative for the applicant organization.

b. Note that by signing the "Project Application" form the applicant is providing the required certifications set forth in 7 CFR Part 3017, as amended by 61 FR 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 just after the proposal cover page. 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 200 words or less on a separate page. This page must include the title of the project and the names of the project director and the applicant organization, followed by the summary. The summary should be self-contained, and should describe the situation, targeted audience, purpose of the project, program goal, methodology, and expected outcomes of the project.

4. Program Areas. Each proposal must identify the area under which funds are requested and contain the required information for that area. Note that the project narrative should be limited to 20 pages in length.

5. Staffing Pattern and Procedure. Each proposal must describe the staff needed for project administration, instructional design/curriculum development, production, evaluation, and marketing/promotion. The narrative should demonstrate that the staffing and implementation procedure will result in an integrated approach involving content specialists, instructional designers, and quality production resources, and that the individual staff members proposed are qualified to perform these roles. The emphasis of the narrative should be placed on the relationship of the staff expertise to the proposed effort.

6. Personnel Support. To assist peer reviewers in assessing the competence and experience of the proposed project staff, key personnel who will be involved in the proposed project must be identified clearly. For each project director involved, and for all senior associates and other professional personnel who are expected to work on the project, whether or not funds are sought for their support, the following should be included:

(a) An estimate of the time commitments necessary;

(b) A curriculum vitae limited to the presentation of academic, research and extension credentials, e.g., educational, employment and professional history,

and honors and awards, with emphasis on their relationship to the effort being proposed. Unless pertinent to the project, to personal status, or the status of the organization—meetings attended, seminars given, or personal data such as birth date, marital status, or community activities should not be included. The vitae shall be no more than two pages in length, excluding the publication list(s); and

(c) Publication List(s). A chronological list of the most representative publications during the past five years as it relates to the proposed effort, including those in press, must be provided for each professional project member for whom a curriculum vitae is provided. Authors should be listed in the same order as they appear on each paper cited, along with the title and complete reference as these items usually appear in journals.

7. A. *Budget.* A detailed budget is required for each year of funding requested. In addition, a summary budget is required detailing requested 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 this solicitation, 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):

(a) *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 Professionals and Other Personnel and the number of full-time equivalents (FTE) 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. Salary funds requested must be consistent with the normal policies of the institution and with OMB Circular No. A-21, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions. Administrative and Clerical salaries are normally classified as indirect costs. However, if requested under A., **they must be fully justified.**

(b) *Fringe Benefits.* Funds may be requested for fringe benefit costs if the usual accounting practices of the

institution provide that institutional 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. See OMB Circular No. A-21, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, for further guidance in this area.

(c) *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. This applies to revised budgets, as the equipment item(s) and amount(s) may change. Each applicant also must attach to its budget an analysis of the costs and benefits of purchasing (or leasing) different types of facilities, equipment, components, hardware and software, and other items.

In addition, pursuant to Section 716(b) of Pub. L. 105-86 (the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1998), 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.

**Note:** Sec. 1673(g)(2) of Pub. L. 101-624 identifies that not more than 10% of the funds appropriated for this program may be applied to the acquisition and installation of nonexpendable equipment.

(d) *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.

(e) *Travel.* The type and extent of travel and its relationship to project objectives should be described briefly and justified.

(f) *Publication Costs/Page Charges.* Anticipated costs of preparing and publishing results of the project 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.

(g) *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.

(h) *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 the budget. This 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. Applicants are encouraged to consult the "Instructions for Completing the Agricultural Telecommunications Program Budget," for detailed guidance relating to this budget category.

(i) *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 USDA.

*B. Matching funds.* (1) Proposals must 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 organizational 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; and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the project period; and

(b) For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized organizational 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 in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

(2) 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 immediately following the budget form and any attachment thereto. All pledge agreements must be placed in the proposal immediately following the summary of matching support.

(3) Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars A-110, "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Non-Profit Organizations," and A-122, "Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations," for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

8. *Current and Pending Support.* All proposals must list any 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.

9. *Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).* As outlined in 7 CFR Part 3407 (the CSREES regulations implementing NEPA), the environmental data or documentation for any proposed project is to be provided to CSREES in order to assist CSREES in carrying out its responsibilities under NEPA. 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 (e.g., preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS)), pertinent information regarding the possible environmental impacts of a proposed project is necessary; therefore, the National Environmental Policy Act Exclusions Form (Form CSREES-1234) provided must be included in the proposal indicating whether the applicant is of the opinion that the project falls within one or more of the categorical exclusions. Form CSREES-

1234 should be included at the end of the proposal. Even though a project may fall within the categorical exclusions, CSREES may determine that an EA or an EIS 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 effects.

#### Part IV—Submission of a Proposal

##### A. What To Submit

An original and eight copies of the proposal must be submitted. Each copy of each proposal must be stapled securely in the upper left hand corner (Do Not Bind). All copies of the proposal must be submitted in one package.

##### B. Where and When To Submit

Proposals must be received on or before (60 days from date of publication).

Proposals sent by First Class mail must be sent to the following address: Agricultural Telecommunications Program, c/o Proposal Services Unit, 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.

Proposals that are delivered by Express mail, courier service, or by hand must be submitted to the following address (Note that the zip code differs from that shown above): Agricultural Telecommunications Program, c/o Proposal Services Unit, 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, D.C. 20024, Telephone: (202) 401-5048.

#### Part V—Selection Process and Evaluation Criteria

##### A. Selection Process

1. All proposals will be acknowledged.

2. 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 solicitation. Proposals that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a peer review panel using the criteria identified in the annual solicitation, as appropriate. Each proposal will be judged on its own merits.

3. Final decisions will be made by USDA based upon the individual views of the panel members and consideration of other factors, including the budget limitation.

##### B. Evaluation Criteria

The maximum score a proposal can receive is 100 points. The peer review panel will be selected and organized to provide maximum expertise and objective judgment in the evaluation of proposals. In the event the number of proposals accepted exceed dollars available, proposals will be ranked and support levels will be recommended by the panel(s) within the limitation of total funding available in FY 1998. The projects will be judged based on the following criteria.

##### 1. Program Delivery and Innovative Program Development/Production

###### (a) Project Need—40 points.

Did the proposal describe the background and situation leading to the need for the project? Is the project based on a need articulated by an audience, or on a needs assessment? Are the targeted audience(s) for whom the project will be designed described, including pertinent history identified in need, demographics, and expected impact on audience? If appropriate, are methodology and results of needs assessment described? Did the proposal demonstrate the need for assistance under this Program, including a statement of financial ability or inability to otherwise pursue the proposed program and the impact of participation in this Program on this ability?

###### (b) Strategy—40 points. (1)

*Partnerships and Collaboration.* Are partnerships and collaborations fostered through this project described, including expected impact and benefit to those involved such as learner, institution, agency, state, and nation? Is there evidence that partnerships are in place, and that those partners have a substantial role and interest in the project and are examples of role and interest given, including joint risk taking and shared benefits? Is evidence provided of any current affiliations with established agricultural telecommunications networks that distribute programs to a wide geographical area?

(ii) *Alternative Distance Learning Technologies.* Does the proposal include a plan for the development and employment of alternative distance learning technologies including, but not limited to, internet, multimedia, audio/visual, and other telecommunications technologies?

(iii) *Infrastructure.* Does the proposal include a framework representing both the technological and human infrastructure including, but not limited to, technical trouble-shooting, scheduling and operation management, and learner and program support? Is there evidence of learner support including, but not limited to, facilitation of access, accommodation for diversity in special needs and learning styles, and recognition of need for alternative modes of program design and delivery?

(iv) *Innovation.* Does the proposal describe how the application of distance education/learning delivery identified in the project is innovative? Are examples provided that may include, but are not limited to, approaches in reaching audiences; methods of connectivity and/or interaction; use of existing resources with innovations in the teaching/learning transaction; entrepreneurial approaches to distance education delivery.

(v) *Outreach Plan.* Is there an outreach plan articulating an approach for informing others about positive and negative outcomes, results, lessons learned, innovative ideas, and findings from the project?

(vi) *Evaluation Plan.* Are both formative and summative design for evaluating specific aspects of the project described? Do they include evaluating the overall effectiveness of program in terms of teaching and learning, behavior change/problem-solving, immediate application, meeting learner needs, and/or potential for replication?

(c) *Sustainability—20 points. (i) Project Sustainability.* Does the proposal present strong evidence of the project's ability to continue and grow after receiving the funding? Does this evidence include replication by others; continued funding other than from this program, or opportunities for sale of products; and/or use of ideas and results of project by others?

(ii) *Cost/Benefit.* Does the proposal include a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed project, including comparison to other delivery methods, relative benefit to learner, and staffing costs versus benefits?

##### 2. Capacity Building

(a) *Project Need—20 points.* Did the proposal describe the background and situation leading to the need for the project? Is the project based on a need articulated by an audience, or on a needs assessment? Are the targeted audience(s) for whom the project will be designed described, including pertinent history identified in terms of need, demographics, and expected impact on an audience? If appropriate, are the

methodology and results of needs assessment described? Did the applicant describe how the capacity built will improve program production or program delivery? Did the proposal demonstrate the need for assistance under this Program, including a statement of financial ability or inability to otherwise pursue the proposed program and the impact of participation in this Program on this ability?

(b) *Strategy*—30 points. (i) *Capacity Assessment*. Is a detailed assessment of capacity or a fully developed plan for assessing capacity included? Does the assessment include faculty/staff development; support resources; production/technical capability; delivery capability; building learner capacity?

(ii) *Evaluation Plan*. Are both formative and cumulative design for evaluating specific aspects of the project described? Do they include evaluating the overall effectiveness of the Program in terms of teaching and learning, behavior change/problem-solving, immediate application, meeting learner needs, and/or potential for replication?

(iii) *Outreach*. Does the outreach plan articulate an approach for informing others about positive and negative outcomes, results, lessons learned, innovative ideas, and findings from the project?

(c) *Sustainability*—50 points. (i) *Sustainability*. Does the proposal present strong evidence of the project's ability to continue and grow after receiving the funding? Does this evidence include replication by others; continued funding other than from this Program, or opportunities for sale of products; and/or use of ideas and results of project by others?

(ii) *Institutional Commitment*. Does the proposal discuss the institutional commitment to the project? Does the proposal substantiate that the institution(s) attributes a priority to the project; discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the institution's(s') long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; explain how the project will help satisfy the institution's(s') high priority objectives; or show how this project is linked to and supported by the institution's(s') strategic plan?

(iii) *Partnerships and Collaboration*. Are partnerships and collaborations fostered through this project described, including expected impact and benefit to those involved such as learner, institution, agency, state, and nation? Is there evidence that partnerships are in place, and that those partners have a substantial role and interest in the project? Are examples of role and interest given including joint risk taking

and shared benefits? Is evidence provided of any current affiliations with established agricultural telecommunications networks that distribute programs to a wide geographical area?

## Part VI—Supplementary Information

### A. Access to Peer Review Information

Information regarding the peer review process will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552), the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a), and implementing Departmental and other Federal regulations. Implementing Departmental regulations are found at 7 CFR Part 1.

### 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 area and under the procedures set forth in this solicitation. 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 solicitation shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, 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 as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this part 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

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

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization.
- (2) Title of project.
- (3) Name(s) and address(es) of Project Director(s).
- (4) Identifying grant number assigned by the Department.
- (5) Project period, which specifies how long the Department intends to support the effort.
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved during the project period.
- (7) Legal authority under which the grant is awarded.

(8) Approved budget plan for categorizing project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the grant award.

(9) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by the Department to carry out its granting activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular grant.

(b) The notice of grant award, in the form of a letter, will provide pertinent instructions and information to the grantee which are not included in the grant award document described above.

### 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. *Change 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 for such changes be approved 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.

3. *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.

4. *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 result in a need or claim for the award of additional funds or 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/or regulations apply to grant proposals considered for review and to project grants awarded under this part. These include but are not limited to:

7 *CFR Part 1*—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 *CFR Part 3*, as amended by 62 FR 40924 and 60451—USDA implementation of OMB Circular 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*, as amended by 62 FR 45947—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., Circular Nos. A-21, and A-22) and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. 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 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*, as amended by 62 FR 45934—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.

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

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

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. Other Conditions*

The Department may, with respect to any grant, impose additional conditions prior to or at the time of any award when, in the Department's judgment, such conditions are necessary to assure or protect advancement of the approved project, the interests of the public, or the conservation of grant funds.

Done at Washington, D.C., on this 11th day of June, 1998.

**Colien Hefferan,**

*Acting Administrator, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.*  
[FR Doc. 98-16155 Filed 6-17-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-22-M