



Sun Grant Program North Central Region

USDA-NIFA Funded
Request for Applications

2021
Competitive Grants Program

Pre-Proposals Due: 5:00 pm CST, 1 February 2021

Full Proposals Due: 5:00 pm CDT, 30 March 2021

Note: Eligible applicants are State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, Federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals within the Sun Grant Program – North Central Region. Projects must fit into the regional priority areas outlined in this RFA to be considered for funding.

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Funding Opportunity Description

About the Sun Grant Program

Authorized by Congress in 2004, the Sun Grant Program (SGP) is a national network of land-grant universities working in collaboration with national laboratories and government agencies, partnering to build a viable biobased economy. Sun Grant institutions are charged with making significant advances in biobased industries for the benefit of America's independent farmers, rural communities, and the public-at-large. The primary goal of the SGP is to *address national energy and resource needs and establish a national bioeconomy through coordinated regional research, education, and Extension activities focused on agriculture and forest-based fuels, products (e.g., chemicals and materials) and power.*

The SGP is organized as a network of five land grant universities serving as regional Sun Grant Centers: South Dakota State University (North Central), Oklahoma State University (South Central), The University of Tennessee-Knoxville (Southeastern), Pennsylvania State University (Northeastern), and Oregon State University (Western), plus a Sub-center at the University of Hawaii as part of the Western region. These centers facilitate federally funded research, Extension, and education programs in their respective regions. Each Regional Center in the SGP embraces an integrated multi-institution, multi-state, multi-disciplinary approach that is at the heart of the land-grant method of addressing needs and opportunities.

Sun Grant Program – North Central Region

The Sun Grant Program – North Central Region (SGP-NCR), located at South Dakota State University (SDSU), is the administrative unit for the region composed of the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

External Grants Program

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture – National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), the SGP-NCR will be awarding approximately **\$1.65 million** for projects in 2021.

Intent of this Solicitation

The SGP-NCR is emphasizing the importance of the need for forming multidisciplinary, multi-institutional teams for addressing critical challenges in the bioeconomy. The intent of this solicitation is to foster the formation and operation of research teams to pursue BOLD, TRANSFORMATIVE, and HIGH-IMPACT activities and outcomes that will become a road map leading to long-term success. In other words, this program is seeking to have the successful project teams use this to leverage for larger competitive opportunities, both while the project is active and after completion.

Project Funding Guidelines

Projects have a two-year (24 months) maximum duration with no more than 65% of an award amount provided in Year 1; whereas, Year 2 awards are contingent upon agency availability of funds and satisfactory project progress described in quarterly reports. The maximum funding request for this program is \$450,000. Proposals must include substantive, multi-institutional and multi-state participation with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each partner. Multi-institutional does not include branches of the same university in different locations. Roles and responsibilities of each partner must be clearly stated through a letter of commitment during the full proposal stage.

Funded grants will support:

- multi-institutional and multistate research, Extension and education programs on technology development, and
- integrated research, Extension, and education programs on technology implementation.

Projects must seek to accomplish the following and clearly articulate this in the proposal:

- a. Enhance *national security* through the development, distribution, and implementation of biobased energy and value-added product technologies;
- b. Promote *economic diversification and stability* in rural areas of the United States through biobased energy and product technologies;
- c. Promote *environmental sustainability* of agricultural production in the United States through biobased energy and product technologies;
- d. Enhance the *effectiveness and impact* of biomass, biotransformation, bioenergy and bioproducts research and development programs through effective coordination and collaboration among -
 - i. The U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - ii. Additional appropriate Federal agencies
 - iii. Land-grant and non-land grant colleges and universities
 - iv. Industry; and
- e. *Leverage the activities and outcomes* of the proposed project for future and larger funding opportunities via NIFA-funded programs, additional Federal agencies, public-private partnerships, and others.

Scope of this Solicitation

SGP-NCR invites proposals that will further its mission of developing viable alternative or emerging biobased energy sources and value-added products while enhancing economic opportunities in rural areas, all while practicing and promoting sound environmental stewardship. The following are priority areas identified by USDA-NIFA and the SGP-NCR.

Research, Education, and Extension Priority Areas

- Sustainability, including water quality and ecosystem services
- Biomass preprocessing and storage of feedstocks
- Regenerative agriculture
- Biochemical and thermochemical conversion processes for biotransformation
- Supply chain management and optimization

- Innovative outreach and delivery methods for stakeholders, including eXtension

NOTE: Proposals must address *at least one* of the Research, Education, and Extension Priority Areas, describe what feedstock(s) they will have as their focus, **AND** address how the project team will leverage the activities and outcomes of the project for future success.

Feedstocks for Consideration

This solicitation will not prioritize feedstocks, therefore, any and all feedstocks relevant to the NC region may be considered. Examples of feedstocks include (but are not limited to):

- Perennial grasses (e.g. Switchgrass, Miscanthus, Mixed Grasses, etc.)
- Annual grasses (e.g. Biomass sorghum, etc.)
- Agricultural residues
- Oilseed feedstocks
- Woody biomass (Short rotation woody crops, forest residues, etc.)
- Biobased byproducts and/or co-products found in NC-region industries

In addition, the proposal must show an estimate of displacement of foreign oil through the enhancement of the biobased economy.

Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include the following.

- state agricultural experiment stations;
- colleges and universities;
- university research foundations;
- other (non-University) research institutions and organizations;
- Federal agencies;
- national laboratories;
- private organizations or corporations; or
- individuals within the Sun Grant Program – North Central Region.

Through the application process, the principal investigator (PI) and key personnel must demonstrate competency to implement and complete a project, provide fiscal accountability, prepare project reports, and demonstrate a willingness to share and disseminate information with researchers, educators, and other interested parties.

Eligibility

The lead PI must be employed in the North Central Region (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming). Co-PIs, associate PIs, and collaborators may be from inside and outside the region.

Cost Share Requirements

Not less than 20 percent of the total project cost must be matched with funds, including in-kind contributions, from a non-Federal source.

NOTE: Matching requirements do not apply to *fundamental research*. In the context of this solicitation, fundamental research is defined as research that increases knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and has the potential for broad application; and has a positive effect on agriculture, food, nutrition, or the environment. If an applicant wishes to have their proposal be considered as fundamental research, they must provide justification for it in the proposal narrative.

In the event the project is not considered fundamental research, then cost share/matching applies. The Center requires a budget narrative that documents matching funds. The budget narrative should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Written verification means:

Cash contributions: A separate letter of commitment for each third-party cash contribution is required. This must be signed by the authorized representatives of the contributing organization and the applicant organization and must include:

1. The name, address, and telephone number of the donor,
2. The name of the applicant organization,
3. The title of the project for which the donation is made,
4. The dollar amount of the cash donation (the budget narrative must describe how the cash donation will be used on the project), and
5. A statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

In-kind contributions: A separate letter of commitment for each third-party, in-kind contribution is required. This letter must be signed by the authorized representatives of the contributing organization and the applicant organization and must include:

1. The name, address, and telephone number of the donor,
2. The name of the applicant organization,
3. The title of the project for which the donation is made,
4. A good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution and a description of how the fair market value was determined, and
5. A statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

The sources and amounts of all matching support from outside the applicant institution are to be summarized in the *Budget Narrative*. Use letters of commitment to show agreement to the matching support (to be uploaded in in the *Supporting Documents* section).

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations §200, “Uniformed Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”, for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs. All contributions, including cash and third party in-kind, must meet the

criteria included in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations §400, “Uniformed Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”.

Note: Matching Funds cannot be from federal sources. Organizations are required to provide 20% of Total Project Costs as match.

Cost Share Calculation Example

As an example, a PI is requesting **\$300,000** from the SGP-NCR to fund a project.

1. **REQUESTED FEDERAL FUNDS = \$300,000.**
2. First, determine the **FEDERAL FUNDS DENOMINATOR** by subtracting the non-federal percentage (20%) from the total available percentage (100%). $100\% - 20\% = 80\%$
3. Next, calculate the **TOTAL REQUESTED FUNDS** by dividing the REQUESTED FEDERAL FUNDS (*from Step 1*) by the FEDERAL FUNDS DENOMINATOR (*from Step 2*). $\$300,000 \div 0.80 = \$375,000$
4. Finally, determine the **COST SHARE/MATCHING FUNDS** by subtracting the TOTAL REQUESTED FUNDS (*from Step 3*) from the REQUESTED FEDERAL FUNDS (*from Step 1*). $\$375,000 - \$300,000 = \$75,000$

The total value of the project will be \$375,000 with 80% from federal funds (\$300,000) and 20% from non-federal funds (\$75,000).

Indirect Cost Limitation

Pursuant to Section 716 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Pub. L. 113-76), indirect costs are limited to the lesser of the applicant’s official negotiated indirect cost rate or 30% of Total Federal Funds provided (TFF). Thus, if the project is requesting \$300,000 TFF, the indirect request is limited to \$90,000 and direct costs would be \$210,000.

Online Submission Process

All applications (pre-proposals and full proposals) will be submitted via the InfoReady online application system. Instructions for registration and application details are at <https://sdstate.infoready4.com/>.

The InfoReady site will also be linked on the SGP-NCR website. Look for the section entitled **North Central Regional Sun Grant NIFA 2021** under the “Funding Opportunities” tab for the appropriate information.

NOTE: To complete an InfoReady submission, the PI will need to create a profile at <https://sdstate.infoready4.com>. For guidance, view the help guide available within InfoReady. Personnel who are employees of South Dakota State University will use their single sign-on (SSO) credentials to log in to the system.

Each of the five regional Sun Grant Centers has their own online submission systems. If any PI or other person associated with the proposal is registered with a different region, they must register with SDSU InfoReady system to apply to the North Central Sun Grant Center competition.

Submission Deadlines

Pre-Proposals must be submitted no later than **5:00 PM CST on 1 February 2021**. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit before the deadline, as late pre-proposals will not be accepted.

SGP-NCR will make an independent assessment of each pre-proposal based on the applicability of the pre-proposal to the priority areas listed on page 4 of this RFA. SGP-NCR will encourage a subset of applicants to submit full proposals.

- Requested funds and senior personnel identified during the pre-proposal stage may be modified during the full proposal stage.
- The pre-proposal stage does not require Letters of Commitment or Agreement.
- Pre-proposals do not need to be approved by an institutional signing official.

Full Proposals must be submitted no later than **5:00 PM CDT on 30 March 2021**. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit before the deadline, as late pre-proposals will not be accepted.

Pre-Proposal Components

1. Title Page information (entered into InfoReady)
2. PI Biosketch (pdf upload)
3. PI current and pending (pdf upload, template provided)
4. Pre-Proposal Narrative (pdf upload)

Pre-Proposal Component Description

Title page is a snapshot of the proposal. List this information within your application in InfoReady (this information is not a separate title page document to upload):

- a. PI Name, Organization, and Contact Information
- b. Project Title
- c. Proposed Project Period (up to 24 months)
- d. Senior Personnel Name, Organization, and Contact Information
- e. Collaborators and Participating Organizations
- f. Total Funds Requested of Sun Grant
- g. Total Cost Share Proposed
- h. Sources of Cost Share
- i. Priority Area(s) Identified

PI Biosketch and PI Current & Pending: The biosketch instructions follow those from the USDA NIFA application guide (*April 2018*). For current & pending, use the template provided in InfoReady; this template is also from the USDA NIFA supporting documents.

The Biographical Sketch should be limited to 2 pages in length, excluding publications listings. Recommended information includes - Education and Training, Research and Professional Experience, Collaborators and Affiliations (for conflicts of interest),

Publications and Synergistic Activities. The vitae should include a presentation of academic and research credentials, as applicable (e.g., earned degrees, teaching experience, employment history, professional activities, honors and awards, and grants received).

Include a chronological list of all publications in refereed journals during the past 4 years, including those in press. Also, list only those non-refereed technical publications that have relevance to the proposed project. List all authors in the same order as they appear on each paper cited, along with the title and complete reference as these usually appear in journals.

Pre-Proposal Narrative. Two-page limit (including references). Formatted with one-inch margins in 12-point font (Times New Roman or Arial) with single line spacing. The narrative summarizes what the PI and partners intend to accomplish.

In addition to a project description, the narrative should also indicate deliverables and potential impacts of the work by answering the following:

- a. What problem or opportunity is to be addressed? Why is this project important?
- b. How does this project fit into the mission of the Sun Grant Program?
- c. Why is this project beneficial to the North Central Sun Grant region? What are the SGP-NCR priority areas this project addresses? What specific feedstocks will be used in this project? List all.
- d. Provide a brief and general description of the research methods to be used.
- e. What are the expected deliverables? Delivery date of deliverables?
- f. Who will be affected by the findings and how will they benefit from the results?
- g. Cite any references (included in page count).

Full Proposal Guidelines

The full proposal application package must contain the following components. Submissions omitting any of these items will not be considered for funding. Components submitted in the pre-proposal stage will be carried into the full proposal application.

Full Proposal Components

- Title Page information (carried from the pre-proposal)
- PI Biosketch & Current and Pending (carried from the pre-proposal)
- Pre-Proposal Narrative (carried from the pre-proposal)
- Senior Personnel Biosketches (see format in pre-proposal for PI biosketch)
- Senior Personnel current & pending (template provided)
- Proposal Summary (pdf upload)
- Full proposal narrative with references cited (pdf upload). Citations must be complete and conform to an acceptable journal format. References do not count toward the page limit.
- Budget Documents (pdf uploads)
 - R&R federal/non-federal budget form (use provided form) showing requested award budget with cost-share.

- Budget narrative
- Subaward budget(s) with cost-share and budget narratives
- Letters of Commitment and Supporting Documents (pdf uploads)
 - Letter of Commitment signed by an authorized official from the lead institution, on organizational letterhead, verifying the submission has been reviewed and is authorized to be submitted. Include the project title, project period and award amount requested. If applicable, include the amount of cost share the institution will provide.
 - Letter(s) of commitment from collaborators and/or industry partners that acknowledge effort and commitment to the project. The letter must note any cost share (monetary or in-kind donations). Letter must be signed by the appropriate organizational authorized official and printed on organizational letterhead.
 - Other Attachments: Any other supporting documentation, such as cooperative agreements and similar.

Content and Format of Application

Title Page: This information carries from the pre-proposal and may be updated as appropriate.

PI Biosketch and PI Current & Pending: These documents carry from the pre-proposal and may be updated as appropriate.

Senior Personnel Biosketches and Current & Pending documents: Follow format for the PI biosketch, and use the current & pending template provided. Save all senior personnel biosketches as a single PDF file for upload. Do the same for the current & pending documents. The biosketch file and the current & pending file will be uploaded separately.

Pre-Proposal Narrative: The narrative submitted in the pre-proposal stage is provided in the full proposal application for reference only. The pre-proposal narrative may not be edited further after submission or during the full proposal stage.

Proposal Summary: The PI should make sure this section is accurate, complete, and sufficiently describes the proposal, as it is the first glimpse all reviewers and oversight team members have of the proposal.

Limit summary to one page (one-inch margins, single spacing, 12-point type in Times New Roman or Arial). Include the project title in the header. Note the appropriate SGP-NCR *Priority Areas and Feedstocks* addressed in the key words, rationale, or expected outcomes. **Note that projects without a complete Proposal Summary may not be considered for funding.**

The PI must provide the following sections for the proposal summary:

- Key Words
- Objectives
- Methodology
- Rationale
- Expected Outcomes

1. **Full Proposal Narrative (FPN):** Upload the proposal narrative as a PDF document.

The Full Proposal Narrative is limited to 10 pages using 12-point typeface in Times New Roman or Arial with single-line spacing. All margins must be at least 1 inch. The header must contain the Project Title and PI's first and last name. The footer must contain page numbers aligned to the bottom, right-hand corner.

All works cited should be referenced in a separately section. *Note that the page count does NOT include the references section.*

The following identifies key elements of the Full Proposal Narrative, plus suggested points to be addressed:

a. Introduction

- Provide a clear statement (paragraph) of the long-term goal(s).
- Provide a clear statement (numbered list) of the supporting objectives or research questions of the proposed project.
- Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project.
- Describe recently completed or ongoing significant activities related to the proposed project, including the work of key personnel.
- Describe preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed research, including the SGP-NCR priority areas and feedstocks associated with this project. Indicate the percentage of the project devoted to the priority area(s) identified.

b. Goals and Period Objectives:

- Expand upon the details of the long-term goals and objectives described in the Introduction.
- Present the concise rationale behind the proposed research including the specific relationship of the project's objectives to one or more of the USDA-Sun Grant's Priority Areas (see Page 4 of this RFA). Describe why the specific Research, Education, and Extension Priority Areas and Feedstocks Priority Areas this proposal addresses.
- Describe any novel ideas or contributions that the proposed project offers.

c. **Methodology:**

- State clearly any activities proposed or problems being addressed.
- Describe clearly the problem-solving approaches being applied.
- Describe the methods to be used in carrying out the proposed project.
- Identify the feasibility of the methods to be used.
- Identify any limitations to the proposed methodology.
- Describe any contingency plans for consideration.

d. **Timeline:** Identify the proposed activities, list in sequence, and estimate the time frame for completion.

e. **Projected Outcomes and Economic Justification:**

- Describe the expected outcomes and deliverables.
- Describe how results or products will be used.
- Identify any pitfalls that may be encountered and what may be done to address pitfalls.
- **Prepare a succinct economic justification and analysis. It may be written by any member of the Senior Personnel team.** The justification must describe an estimate of the proposal's displacement of foreign oil through the enhancement of a biobased economy.

f. **Outreach Activities:** At least one product of significance, i.e., Experiment Station report, Extension bulletin, eXtension submission, or white paper, is required for all funded projects. Investigators must acknowledge USDA-NIFA and SGP-NCR in all publications and presentations. In addition to outreach activities and submitted peer-reviewed articles, PIs will be invited to present research findings at regional and/or national conferences sponsored by the various regional Sun Grant Centers.

- Describe all anticipated outreach activities that disseminate information from the proposed research.
- Describe all anticipated peer-reviewed articles that would result from this research.

g. **Project Management and Evaluation Procedures:**

- Clearly describe the project team and each individual's roles and responsibilities in the project.
- Describe the facilities, equipment, and resources that are available to support the needs of the project. Equipment and facilities purchased for the project must be documented in the budget narrative.
- Discuss how the results will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted.

h. **Role of Collaborators:** If it will be necessary to enter formal collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements must be fully explained and justified. If the collaborator(s) are known at the time of application, a CV or resume should be provided in the senior personnel section.

NOTE: Evidence (*i.e. letter of commitment on university or company letterhead, signed by the senior personnel or collaborator's authorized official*) must be provided stating that the university or other collaborator involved with each PI, Co-PI and/or donor have agreed to participate and/or render these services, as well as provide any cost share or in-kind donations. Provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget narrative.

- i. **References:*** All work cited in the full proposal narrative should be referenced in this section. Citations must be complete and conform to an acceptable journal format. References do not count toward the page limit.
2. **Budget Forms:** Use the Research & Related (R&R) Budget (Total Fed + Non Fed) form. Download from the application site. Complete and upload to your application. *Note:* Do not attach the budget narrative within the budget form. Upload the narrative separately in the InfoReady application. Refer to cost share requirements when preparing the budget. For multiple years, click 'add period.' The budget form will auto calculate the cumulative budget on the final page.

The budget form includes the line items listed below:

- Sections A/B: Salaries, wages and benefits for all senior personnel, staff, and students. For salaries, list the base salary, person months (calendar, academic and/or summer months), fringe benefits amount, and the award & cost-share amount per personnel.
- Section C: Permanent Equipment over \$5,000. *Note: include an itemized list and cost in the budget narrative.*
- Section D: Travel, Specify whether domestic or international.
- Section E: Other Direct Costs (including)
 - Materials and Supplies - Expendable Supplies and Equipment (equipment under \$5,000 per unit)
 - Publication costs
 - Consultant Services
 - Subawards/Consortium/Contractual Costs
 - Tuition costs
- Facilities and Administrative costs (F&A)

Facilities and Administrative (F&A) Costs – Pursuant to Section 716 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Pub. L. 113-76), indirect costs are limited to the lesser of the applicant's official negotiated indirect cost rate or 30% of Total Federal Funds provided (TFF). Thus, if the project is requesting \$150,000 TFF, the indirect request is limited to \$45,000 and direct costs would be \$105,000.

3. **Budget Narrative:** All budget categories for which support is requested must be individually listed (with costs) in the same order as the budget. If consulting,

collaborative, or subrecipient arrangements are included in the application, the arrangements must be fully explained and justified. The rate of pay for any consultant must be included, if known at the time of application. Include a cost breakdown for the consultant. Letters of consent or collaboration or other evidence must be included in the attachments section (on university or company letterhead, signed by the authorizing individual) to show that collaborators have agreed to participate. *Since multi-organizational applications are expected, a budget and budget narrative must be included for each organization involved.* The lead organization and each participating organization must be identified.

Important: Budget narrative must include a description of the cost share funds provided, including sources. If the project is fundamental research, cost share is not required. If the project is not fundamental research, cost share is required. Cost share funds cannot come from Federal sources. Organizations are required to provide 20% of Total Project Costs as match.

4. **Subrecipient budget form(s) and subrecipient budget narrative(s)**
 - a. Use the instructions and budget form and narrative format used for the lead organization. Save all budget forms as a single PDF document. Save all narratives as a single PDF document. These will be uploaded separately in InfoReady.
5. **Letters of Commitment and Supporting Documents:** Include supporting documentation such as cooperative agreements and letters of commitment signed by an institutional authorized official. Submit all letters and documents as a single PDF.
 - Cost Share/Matching Letters of Commitment: PI, Senior Personnel and other Collaborators' Cost Share/Matching Letters of Commitment signed by the appropriate organizational authorized official and printed on organizational letterhead.
 - Collaborator Letters of Commitment: Collaborators' or Industry Partners' Letter of Commitment regarding monetary or in-kind donations signed by the appropriate organizational authorized official and printed on organizational letterhead.
 - Other Attachments: Any other supporting documentation, such as cooperative agreements and letters of commitment signed by an authorized official of the organization.

Confidentiality/Proprietary Information

Confidentiality will be maintained in the application review process. Applications will not be used for any purpose other than evaluation of merit for funding. **However, if the pre-proposal includes any proprietary, confidential information, it must be clearly marked as such.**

About Funded Projects

- Projected start date is anticipated to be **July 1, 2021**, based upon the project's acceptance date by the funding agency.
- The submission of at least one product of significance, i.e., Experiment Station report, Extension bulletin, or white paper, is required for all funded projects.
- PI must acknowledge USDA-NIFA and SGP-NCR in all publications and presentations.
- Required reports are due 10 days after the end of each quarter, with the periods beginning in January and ending in December. A quarterly report template will be provided by SGP-NCR.
- Projects will be reviewed quarterly to ensure satisfactory progress up to the maximum period allowed. All reports are subsequently submitted to USDA-NIFA for review.
- Invoices are subject to non-payment until the center receives any and all required reports or materials.
- Projects have a two-year maximum duration with no more than **65%** of award amount provided in Year 1; whereas, Year 2 awards are contingent upon agency availability of funds and project progress described in quarterly reports.
- Final technical report due one month (30 days) after the project's end date.

Review Process and Criteria

Peer and Merit Review

The guiding principle for application review and evaluation is to ensure that each proposal is treated in a consistent and fair manner.

Late proposals will not be reviewed. Upon timely receipt, all applications will be evaluated for responsiveness to the administrative requirements set forth in the RFA. Applications that do not meet these requirements may be eliminated from competition. However, the Center retains the right to conduct discussions with applicants to resolve technical and/or budget issues, as deemed necessary.

Proposal reviews are undertaken to ensure that projects supported by the Center are awarded on the basis of merit, quality, and relevance to advancing the purposes of and are consistent with the goals and requirements of the funding program. As such, applications submitted will undergo a programmatic evaluation by USDA-NIFA to determine the worthiness of Federal support.

Full Proposal

1. All proposals will undergo a rigorous review process, which will include technical peer review by experts working in the appropriate fields. Proposals will also undergo review by a Technical Review Panel and the North Central Sun Grant Center Advisory Board. Decisions will be made on the basis of the following factors:

- Scientific and Technical Merit (50%)
 - Originality and innovativeness of the concept and approach
 - Awareness of previous work or strategies
 - Clarity of objectives and presentation of information
 - Feasibility of methodology to achieve objectives
 - Likelihood of success as proposed
 - Overall technical merit
 - Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, Project Management, and Costs (25%)
 - Eligibility of investigator(s)
 - Qualifications of the investigator(s)
 - Appropriate collaborators included
 - Level to which stakeholders were involved in project planning and implementation
 - Planning and implementation strategies
 - Reasonable probability that meaningful progress can be made toward addressing the problem or opportunity within the permitted time frame
 - Reasonable budget
 - Adequacy of the facilities for carrying out the proposed research
 - Adherence to RFA guidelines
 - Completeness of application
 - Project Relevance (25%)
 - Relevance to Sun Grant's mission
 - Alignment to USDA/Sun Grant Priority Areas (see page 4 of this RFA)
 - Potential significance of the anticipated results to the region or nation
 - Degree to which end-users or potential users of the project are consulted or involved in project planning and implementation, and the potential for project implementation
 - Adequate outreach program and strategies
2. Each proposal will be peer reviewed by scientific experts who are not associated directly with the program. They will evaluate the proposals and submit their individual ranking of the proposals, as well as review comments to the Center.
 3. A panel of experts (Technical Review Panel) will be assembled to evaluate reviewer assessments. A lead panelist in each of the subfields will be identified and tasked with leading the discussion on that set of proposals. A secondary reviewer will also be identified to present additional information.
 4. The ranking of the outside reviewers, the Technical Review Panel, and the North Central Sun Grant Advisory Board will be used to construct the final rank order of the proposals.
 5. The recommendations made by the Technical Review Panel and the North Central Sun Grant Advisory Board will be reviewed by USDA-NIFA for final approval. The Center will seek to achieve a portfolio balance of projects to address the bioenergy priorities of the

region. Therefore, relevance to meeting these regional priorities may form the basis for selection among projects deemed of equivalent merit and quality.

Post-Review Process

- For those proposals selected for funding, the Center must obtain USDA-NIFA approval before awards can be made. The PI may be asked to make changes to their proposal or budget based upon USDA-NIFA recommendations. USDA-NIFA may also request additional information from the PI before final approval is received.
- After approval is received from the funding agency, the Center will provide notifications via InfoReady with award decisions and masked reviews to all who submitted Full Proposals.

Award Administration

Program Management: Administration of the program will be handled by the North Central Sun Grant Center. Reports and reviews will be collected and maintained by the North Central Sun Grant Center at South Dakota State University.

Award Notification: Notification of awards will come from the North Central Sun Grant Center.

Reporting Requirements: Quarterly progress reports must be submitted by each funded project to be considered for continuation of funding. Other reports may be required as requested by funders and stakeholders. Successful applicants will be given detailed guidelines for reporting.

It is also important to disseminate information from SGP-NCR funded projects. **At least one Experiment Station or Extension/outreach publication is required for all funded projects and at least one peer-reviewed article are expected.** Investigators must acknowledge USDA/NIFA and the NCRSGC in related publications and presentations. Funded projects are required to present project updates and results/outcomes during the annual meeting of the SGP-NCR.

Continuation of Funding: Continuation of funding beyond the first year will be determined by first year performance and continued funding from USDA NIFA.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is the indirect cost rate limited to 30% of Total Federal Funds?

A. The indirect cost rate was set by USDA NIFA.

Q. Where is the annual Sun Grant PI conference being held. We need to include travel for attendance in our budget.

A. The annual meeting locations are not yet identified but are generally within the North Central Sun Grant region.

Q. Do the other institutions involved in our project need to be within the same Sun Grant region?

A. The lead institution that submits the application must be from the North Central region. Others outside the region are welcome to participate as a Co-PI or as a collaborator on your proposal.

Q. We would like to collaborate with a Federal employee or organization on our proposal. Is this permitted?

A. Yes. Anyone can participate.

Q. May we submit our budget using an Excel sheet or word processing software document?

A. In order to streamline the review process, we are asking that all applicants use the provided budget forms for the 2021 application.

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