Funding opportunities at the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

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Background and Introduction

- Organization of today's presentation
  - About NIFA
    - Funding authorities
  - About the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)
    - Funding priorities
    - Grant types, with emphasis on strengthening grants

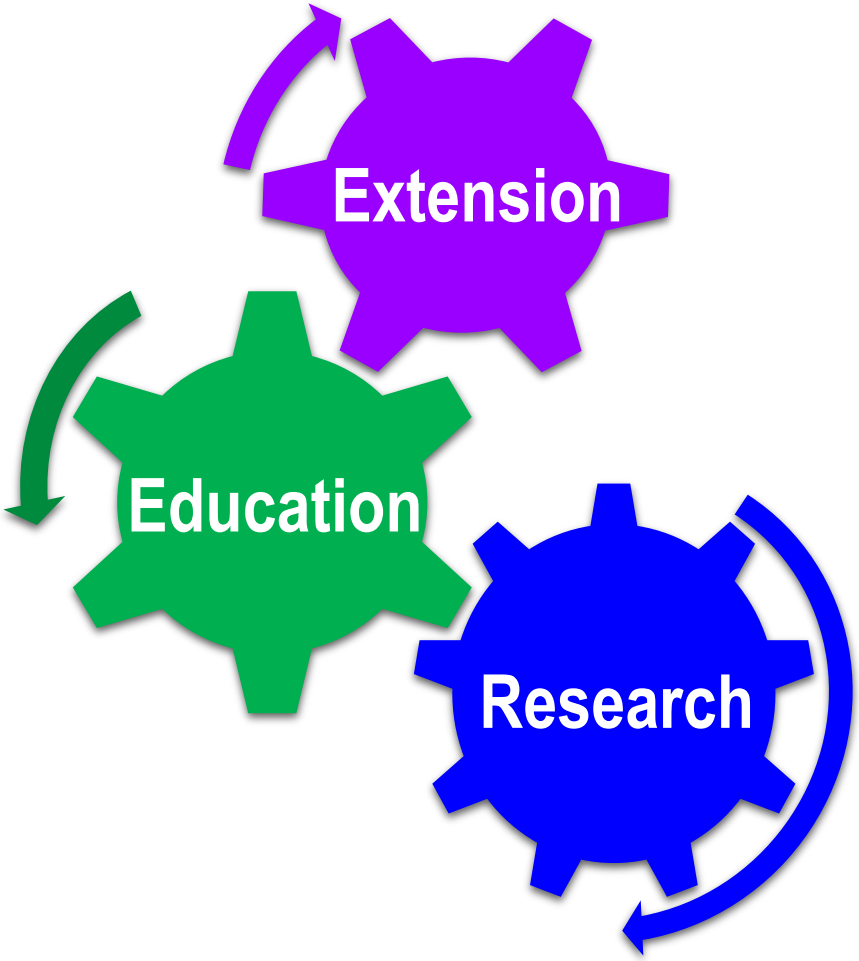
Background and Introduction

- Organization of today's presentation
  - What's new at NIFA
    - Funding initiative and opportunities
    - Administrative issues
  - When to contact NIFA
  - Tips for Success
    - things to do, issues impacting proposal quality
  - Questions and (hopefully) Answers

About NIFA

- Nation's primary agency for extramural funding in Food and Agricultural Sciences
- >30 competitive grant programs totaling >$750 million/year
  - Research, Education, or Extension
  - Integrated Research, Education, and/or Extension

NIFA Funding Support



- Research - Provide answers to the complex issues facing society
- Education - Support schools and universities in training the agricultural workforce
- Extension - Provide knowledge gained through research to agricultural workforce; theory to practice

About NIFA

- USDA's flagship competitive grant program
  - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)
  - $415 million in fiscal year 2019
  - Organized into 3 Requests for Applications (RFA) addressing 6 broad funding priorities

Funding Priorities for AFRI

- Plant health and production, plant products
- Animal health and production, animal products
- Food safety, nutrition, and health
- Bioenergy, natural resources, environment
- Agriculture systems and technology
- Agriculture economics and rural communities

Funding Success Rates

- Vary markedly by program
  - Range from <10 to >30%
  - Typical range is 15-20%
- Vary markedly by grant type
  - Coordinated Agricultural Project Grants <10%
  - Conference Grants >80%

AFRI Project Types

- Research Grants
- Education Grants
- Extension Grants
- Integrated Grants – integrate Research, Education and/or Extension Grants

AFRI Grant Types

- Standard Grants
- Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAP)
- Conference Grants
- FASE Grants
  - Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants
  - Strengthening Grants – several types
  - New Investigator Grants

FASE Grants

- Goals
  - Help institutions develop competitive projects
  - Attract new scientists and educators into careers in high-priority areas of national need in agriculture and food sciences

FASE Grants

- Types
  - Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowships
  - Strengthening
    - Strengthening Standard Grants
    - Strengthening CAP Grants
    - Strengthening Conference Grants
    - Seed, Sabbatical and Equipment Grants
  - New Investigators

FASE Grants

- Project Director (PD) Eligibility
  - – Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowships –
    - Citizens, Nationals, Permanent Residents
    - progress toward or completion of degree (see RFA)

FASE Grants

- PD Eligibility – Strengthening Grants
  - PD located at 4-yr degree granting institutions
    - in EPSCoR states
    - at small to mid-size institutions
    - at minority-serving institutions

} not among 100 most successful

FASE Grants

- Project Director (PD) Eligibility
  - New Investigators
    - First 5 years of first career-track position
    - Limited publication record
    - No previous Federal funding other than a pre- or postdoctoral fellowship or AFRI seed grant

FASE Grants

- Institutional eligibility is restricted
  - Strengthening Standard Grants
  - Strengthening CAP Grants
  - Strengthening Conference Grants
  - Seed, Sabbatical and Equipment Grants
- PD eligibility is restricted
  - New Investigator Grants
  - Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowships

What's New at NIFA

- AFRI microbiome initiative – including antimicrobial resistance
- AFRI Sustainable Agricultural Systems – funds large ($10 million/grant) integrated (research, education, and extension) projects

What's New at NIFA

- AFRI Food and Agriculture Cyberinformatics and Tools (FACT) initiative to address
  - Big data
  - Artificial intelligence
  - Precision Agriculture

What's New at NIFA

- AFRI Education and Workforce Development in Food and Agricultural Sciences
  - Junior Colleges
  - Community Colleges
  - Technical Schools
- Urban Agriculture Program

What's New at NIFA

- 2018 Farm Bill
  - Eliminated matching requirement of 2018 Farm Bill, also eliminate waivers for match
  - Caps Indirect Cost Rate at 30% of Total Federal Funds Awarded – cumulative for prime + subawardees + match

When to Contact NIFA

- Pre-submission – Program Officer (NPL)
  - Fit of prospective application to program
  - Scope of project
  - Eligibility to program or specific grant types
  - Format and requirements of application
  - Review criteria and guidelines

When to Contact NIFA

- Post-submission – Program Officer
  - Status of application
  - Time to completion of review and notification of funding decisions
- Post-review – Program Officer
  - Discussion of application review
  - Suitability for resubmission of application

When to Contact NIFA

- Post-award – Program Officer
  - Scientific aspects of project,
  - Technical reporting
  - Change of Project Director (PD) or Co-PD
  - Change of institution
  - Anything impacting completion of objectives

When to Contact NIFA

- Post-review – Administrative Officer
  - Drawdown of funds
  - Financial management
  - Financial reporting
  - Change of institutional administrative contact

Issues Impacting Proposal Quality

- Overly ambitious – especially new investigators
  - Too much work in time allotted
  - Insufficient budget to perform work proposed
  - Insufficient personnel to perform the work
  - Project team lacks relevant experience

Issues Impacting Proposal Quality

- Inadequate time in preparation of proposal
  - Lacked careful editing and proofreading
  - Didn't follow formatting guidelines and instructions
  - Omitted important information – e.g., pitfalls
  - Didn't obtain critical feedback from experienced and successful colleagues

Issues Impacting Proposal Quality

- Hypothesis or goals not stated clearly or lacking
- Objectives or specific aims
  - Don’t address the hypothesis or goals
  - Subsequent aims depend on outcome of previous aims

Things to Know

- Three **C**s of proposal preparation – proposals must be:
  - Complete
  - Compliant
  - Compelling

Things to Know

- Read the Request for Proposals, Request for Applications or Program Announcement
  - Eligibility restrictions
  - Program priorities
  - Application preparation guidelines – format, budget limits, submission deadlines
  - Review criteria

Things to Know

- Start early and develop a timeline
- Write for expert and non-expert
- Get critical feedback from experienced and successful colleagues
- Learn the review process – understand how to prepare proposal
- Develop a thick skin!

One Final Thought

A proposal is not a mystery novel !!!

Get to the point….

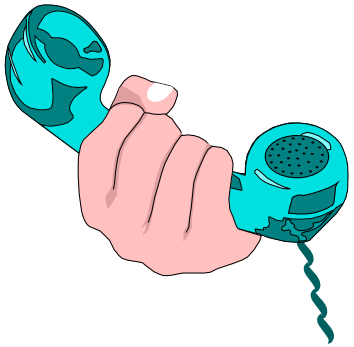
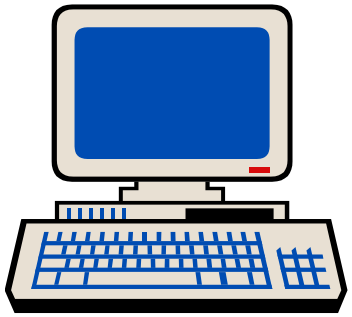
quickly, clearly, concisely, logically

One Final Thought

A proposal is not a mystery novel !!!

First sentence of the proposal should state what the problem is and why it is important

What To Do If You Have Questions?

Contact the

Program Staff!!!