



United States Department of Agriculture

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Service

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Number 064

May 2014

Competitive Grant To Establish a USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research

Request for Applications



United States Department of Agriculture

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Competitive Grant To Establish a USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research

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Abstract

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) invites proposals for a competitive grant to establish and fund a USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research. The USDA Center will facilitate new and innovative research on the application of behavioral and experimental economics theory and practice to the provision of ecosystem services from the Nation's agricultural lands. The USDA center will be expected to (1) establish an innovative behavioral and experimental economics research program related to the design and implementation of policies and programs that provide ecosystem services; (2) broaden the network of social scientists participating in policy-relevant behavioral and experimental economics research on agricultural ecosystem services, policies, and programs; and (3) disseminate information obtained via its research program to USDA and other Federal program agencies, along with other researchers and the general public. We anticipate that up to \$750,000 will be available in fiscal year 2014 (ending September 30) to support this activity over the next 3 years. Additional funds may be awarded in subsequent years, subject to availability of funds and the performance of the USDA Center. This publication describes the USDA Center responsibilities and application requirements. **The deadline for submission of applications is 11:59 p.m., July 7, 2014.**

Keywords: Agri-environmental programs, ecosystem services, experimental economics, behavioral economics, economic incentives, conservation, working lands, water quality, soil erosion

Checklist

All proposals submitted must contain the applicable elements described in this brochure and must be submitted through Grants.gov by **11:59 p.m., July 7, 2014**. The following checklist has been prepared to assist in ensuring that the proposal is complete and in the proper order prior to submission:

Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational Form (SF-424)

- Is all required information accurate and complete?
- Is the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number 10.250?
- Has the authorized organizational representative signed the SF-424?
- Is the CFDA Title: “Agricultural and Rural Economic Research Program”?
- Is the Funding Opportunity Title: “Competitive Grant To Establish a Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research ”?
- Have you included a telephone number, fax number, and/or e-mail address where a message may be left for you?
- Have you included the requested total funding amount from the budget form?

Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)

- Are budget items complete?
- Is the summary budget included?
- Is the budget duration within the stated 3 years?

Proposal and All Attachments in PDF

- Does the proposal conform to all format and page limitations and deadline requirements?

Program Summary Page

- Is the program title listed at the top?
- Has the Program Summary been included?
- Does the summary include program objectives?
- Is the summary no more than 250 words?
- Do the name and institution of the proposed Center Director appear on the page or on the following page?
- Does the page include the total amount requested?
- Does the page include the start and end date?

Table of Contents

- Are page numbers included for each item?

Program Description

- Is the program fully described?
- Does this section adhere to the format and page limitations, as specified?
- Does this section begin as page 1, as specified?
- Does the program description contain a tentative schedule or work plan of major steps of study?

Vitae and Publications List(s)

- Are vitae included for the proposed Center Director and key program personnel?
- Are the vitae current and pertinent?
- Are the publications lists complete and limited to the last 5 years?

Indirect Cost Rate Schedule

- For reimbursement of indirect costs, is a copy included of the applicant’s indirect cost rate schedule that reports the applicant’s federally negotiated audited rate?

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Errata

On June 6, 2014, Table 1, “Specific Instructions for Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424),” Item 6b-c was changed from “leave blank” to “enter the requested information.”

Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) invites proposals for a competitive grant award to establish a new USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research. ERS has a longstanding research program on agri-environmental topics, focusing on how USDA policies, ranging from conservation policies to crop insurance and farm support programs, affect the provision of ecosystem services from agricultural land.

The Center will specialize in applying behavioral and experimental economics techniques to issues that influence the effective design and implementation of policies that have an agri-environmental impact, including but not limited to, agricultural conservation policies and farm support programs. The USDA Center is expected to facilitate new and innovative research using behavioral and experimental economics techniques to provide insights on the design of policies and programs potentially affecting the provision of ecosystem services from the Nation's agricultural lands.

Specifically, the USDA center will be expected to (1) establish an innovative behavioral and experimental economics research program related to the design and implementation of policies and programs that provide agricultural ecosystem services; (2) broaden the network of social scientists participating in policy-relevant research applying behavioral and experimental economics theory to the provision of agricultural ecosystem services, policies, and programs; and (3) disseminate information obtained via its research program to USDA and other Federal program agencies, along with other researchers and the general public.

It is expected that ERS and Center researchers will be in regular communication. Some of the Center's projects may entail active collaboration between the Center and ERS researchers. These projects may be subject to approval requirements, such as those dictated by Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB). For projects that do not directly involve ERS researchers, ERS approval is not required, but regular communication with ERS is strongly encouraged to leverage ERS capabilities and understanding.

The USDA Center is expected to make use of varied dissemination mechanisms suitable to key target audiences. Examples include, but are not limited to, research summaries published on the USDA Center website; electronic newsletters sent to USDA researchers and administrators as well as other interested parties; and webinars for USDA program staff that present research findings and implications for program operations. ERS expects to make one award in fiscal year FY 2014 of up to \$750,000 to fund the USDA Center, with activities supported by that funding to take place over a 3-year period. There are no matching requirements from the USDA Center over the term of the agreement.

Application Process Using Grants.gov

Applications for this program must be submitted electronically through the Grants.gov website at www.grants.gov. The Grants.gov website is the single access point to electronically find and apply for competitive Federal funding opportunities and manage grants from all Federal grantmaking agencies.

First-time users of Grants.gov should go to the “Apply for Grants” tab on the Grants.gov website and carefully read and follow the steps listed to apply. Your organization will need to have a Dun and Bradstreet Universal Data Numbering System (DUNS) number, be registered with the Federal System for Award Management (SAM), and have established an Authorized Organizational Representative to apply for funding.

Important Information for Faculty and Staff of Educational Institutions

To submit your application via Grants.gov, you should first check with your Office of Sponsored Programs to verify that your organization is registered with Grants.gov. The Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) of your organization must register the educational institution or applicant organization. Most applications by faculty, staff, or other principal investigators are actually submitted on behalf of the institution at which they are employed; awards are made to the institution. All registration steps for the institution are completed by the AOR; likewise, the AOR is the person who must actually submit the application to Grants.gov. Questions about Grants.gov should be directed first to your Office of Sponsored Programs, which will assist you in preparing your application for submission. **Please provide that office with sufficient notice of your intent to apply using Grants.gov.**

The posted notice through www.grants.gov is the only official program announcement. Any corrections to this announcement will be published on the ERS website at www.ers.usda.gov and the www.grants.gov website. The applicant bears sole responsibility in ensuring that the copy downloaded and/or printed from any other source is up to date, accurate, and complete.

Deadlines

Notice of Intent

Please email Daniel Hellerstein at danielh@ers.usda.gov by June 6, 2014, to inform ERS of your intent to submit an application and include the name of your organization. Providing notice of intent to submit is not a requirement for submitting an application but it will help ERS in the planning for the review process.

Closing Date

The closing date for submitting applications under this announcement is **11:59 p.m., July 7, 2014**. Applications that are not received by the time stated are considered late applications. ERS will notify each late applicant that its application will not be considered in the current competition.

Extension of Deadlines

ERS may extend an application deadline when circumstances warrant (such as widespread disruptions of Internet service). Determinations to extend or waive deadline requirements rest with Daniel Hellerstein, USDA, ERS, Resource and Rural Economics Division.

Authority

The authority for this program is contained in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014, P.L. 113-46.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research are restricted to public or private U.S. institutions of higher education. Proposals submitted by non-United States institutions will not be considered.

Applicable Federal Statutes, Regulations, and Guidelines

Applicable Federal statutes, regulations, and guidelines include the following: (a) guidelines to be followed when submitting grant proposals and cooperative agreements and rules governing the evaluation of proposals; (b) the USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations, 7 CFR Part 3019; (c) the USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, 7 CFR Part 3015; and (d) the USDA Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments, and 7 CFR Part 3016.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for this program is 10.250. The CFDA Title is Agricultural and Rural Economic Research Program.

Available Funds in FY 2014

ERS anticipates having available a total of approximately \$750,000 to fund the USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research. Nothing in this announcement restricts the ability of ERS to make no award or a lesser or greater award. Awards and the distribution of awards are contingent on adequate funding, the needs of ERS, and the quality of the applications that are received. And, subject to availability of funds and the performance of the USDA Center, additional funds may be awarded in subsequent years.

Matching Requirements

The competitive grant award to establish and operate the USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research requires no matching funds.

Program and Budget Period

ERS expects to fund the USDA Center as a one-time award to conduct a 3-year program. Subject to the availability of future funds, ERS may choose to provide additional funding in future years. The award pursuant to this announcement will be made by **September 30, 2014**.

Background and Purpose

USDA administers a number of programs designed to enhance the provision of ecosystem services from the Nation's agricultural lands. These include programs that convert cropland into other land uses, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Of growing importance are working lands programs that encourage adoption of more environmentally benign agricultural practices, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). As of 2013, these programs receive approximately \$6.2 billion per year. These programs all depend on voluntary participation by rural landowners. Each of these programs has its own methods for determining eligibility, recruiting participants, offering compensation, specifying acceptable actions, and determining who shall be accepted into a program when funding is insufficient to accept all interested parties. For further information on the USDA's conservation programs see www.ers.usda.gov/topics/natural-resources-environment/conservation-programs.aspx

USDA program administrators face the challenge of developing program options to influence participation choices and improve program effectiveness in the face of declining agency budgets. They also face incomplete information on the behavioral responses to program features which then may impact performance measures.

USDA provides incentives for farmers to adopt conservation practices, yet many farmers do not participate. Behavioral and experimental economics can provide valuable insights into factors influencing individual choices, including perceived risk, the description of options (referred to as framing), the decision or choice environment, and the propensity of people (including farmers) to discount the future consequences of current decisions such as the choice of payment schedules.

For example, the CRP uses a reverse auction with bid caps to limit payments, and a multi-dimensional score to rank offers. While limiting profits to any single landowner, this mechanism may dissuade offers from environmentally valuable lands that have high relative agricultural value. It also may fail to motivate owners of highly erodible and low productivity lands to install highly beneficial conservation practices. Development of alternative enrollment mechanisms, such as auction mechanisms that creatively use information (such as local land rents), could encourage bidding closer to reservation prices and greater adoption of more beneficial (though more costly) conservation practices.

Behavioral and experimental methods can provide greater insight into conservation practice adoption decisions, leading to better use of limited resources for conservation incentives. Bringing together information on field-specific conservation needs, conservation program incentives, and the characteristics of farms and farmers will help researchers develop a clearer picture of the forces driving conservation practice adoption. This information will feed directly into USDA efforts to document and enhance conservation program benefits.

For example, adoption of improved manure management and other mitigation strategies is low among small- and medium-sized animal operations. Low adoption rates threaten the ability of many jurisdictions to meet Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) guidelines under the Clean Water Act. Behavioral and experimental approaches could shed light on more efficient strategies for promoting improved manure management on confined animal operations (such as nutrient management plan adoption, establishing riparian buffers, and use of cover crops).

Another example concerns Technical Service Providers (TSPs)—private entities that serve farmers in need of conservation planning and other technical services traditionally offered by NRCS. Fewer farmers have used these services than expected. Experimental approaches could test if, and how, targeted delivery of information to farmers could impact farmers employing TSPs and the filing of conservation plans.

Since the 2008 Farm Act, USDA has facilitated the development of environmental markets that elicit the participation of America’s farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners in addressing conservation and pollution reduction goals. Improved understanding of the influence of behavioral responses can provide guidance on more effective design of conservation programs and environmental markets, and can identify low cost mechanisms to encourage (“nudge”) farmers to select higher benefit and more cost-effective options.

For example, the FSA periodically conducts “general signup” enrollments into the CRP. Given commodity prices, USDA is concerned that many current, and potential, CRP participants will not participate in future, general signups, thereby reducing the pool of available offers. Early work on the use of behavioral nudges suggests that expanded, yet inexpensive, outreach efforts can encourage participation in the program.

USDA and other Federal and State programs that do not focus specifically on agri-environmental issues can also have significant impacts on the provision of agricultural ecosystem services, such as by leading to production of crops on environmentally sensitive lands.

For example, USDA crop insurance programs might reduce the risk of farming marginal land that may also be environmentally sensitive. Behavioral and experimental techniques can help determine contract structures that reward land stewardship and offset these indirect impacts.

USDA Center Awardee Responsibilities

Conduct Innovative Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research

The USDA Center will specialize in the application of behavioral and experimental economics techniques to issues that influence the effective design and implementation of policies that affect the provision of ecosystem services from the Nation's agricultural lands. The Center will hire administrative and support staff, fund senior researchers (i.e.; partial funding of university-affiliated researchers), acquire equipment (such as computer lab equipment), fund active researchers (such as Ph.D. candidates), provide subawards to researchers outside the institution when appropriate, and cover ongoing expenses (such as fees to experiment participants).

It is anticipated that the Center will conduct both laboratory and field experiments. Creative experimental design—such as randomized field testing in small-scale pilots in collaboration with program administrators—would be an ideal project for the Center.

Some examples of potential study topics include:

- What types of information affect participation in USDA agri-environmental programs
- Cost-effectiveness of different environmental market mechanisms
- The role of the distribution and timing of payments for ecosystem services
- The determinants of contract compliance and strategies to improve compliance/measurement/reporting of environmental services provided

The Center may engage in research using a variety of behavioral and experimental methods. Some examples include:

- Lab experiments using students
- Lab experiments using potential program participants such as agricultural landowners (artefactual field experiments)
- Lab experiments using potential program participants with enriched economic context (framed field experiments)
- Field experiments using potential program participants that preserve the natural environment in which subjects interact (natural field experiments). These can include
 - “Nudge” experiments using low-cost treatments on a large sample
 - Studies that vary financial benefits to a randomized sample
 - Pilot studies that introduce several variants of a program in distinct geographic regions

Ideally, research projects would be the result of ongoing communication between Center staff, USDA researchers and staff, and other stakeholder groups. Such communication could entail the Center proposing projects that are likely to be of interest to an agency. For example, the Center could collaborate with a USDA agency (such as the Farm Service Agency) to conduct a field experiment within the context of an existing program (such as the CRP).

Broaden the Research Base

The Center will broaden the network of researchers who apply behavioral and experimental economics concepts and techniques to issues affecting the provision of ecosystem services from the Nation's agricultural lands. The Center will encourage experienced researchers to expand their research interests to address this area. The Center will also support emerging researchers in developing their research abilities. The Center may conduct workshops, conferences, and other activities that will expand researcher knowledge of behavioral and experimental economics concepts and theories and their potential application to USDA programs that affect the provision of ecosystem services from agricultural lands.

A possible strategy for broadening the research base can be administration of a program of research subawards (small grants). The USDA Center will have the lead responsibility in soliciting, reviewing, and selecting research proposals for subawards. Subawards may support small-scale, economic, behavioral, and policy-related projects, including pilot research projects and experimental studies.

Disseminate Information

Communicating research findings and their implications for USDA programs—including conservation programs and farm support programs—will be an important responsibility of the Center. Information should be communicated in a manner that is readily available and understandable to a diverse group of stakeholders, including agency policymakers, administrators and researchers, as well as the research community and the general public. The Center will be expected to develop and maintain a system to disseminate results of funded studies through print or electronic methods. Creative use of a website and web-based technologies, newsletters, working papers, special reports, and briefings are a few examples.

Comply with Human Subjects Regulations

All research activities involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate committee(s) at the institution where the research will be conducted.

ERS Responsibilities

ERS will provide:

- (1) reviews of USDA Center reports to ensure that objectives and award conditions are being met;
- (2) statements of USDA's behavioral and experimental economics and agri-environmental research priorities;
- (3) coordination of activities between ERS and the USDA Center to ensure, for example, a diverse selection of research projects and to eliminate duplication of research efforts; and
- (4) facilitation of communication between the USDA Center and USDA program agencies such as the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Joint Responsibilities

ERS will work with the USDA Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research in jointly establishing broad research priorities and planning strategies to accomplish the objectives of this announcement.

Application Process

General Information

The guidelines below are provided to assist you in preparing a proposal. Please read these guidelines carefully before preparing your submission.

Submission Requirements

A checklist is provided at the beginning of this document to help you provide the necessary information for completing a proposal. An Application for Federal Domestic Assistance Form (SF-424) and a budget form (SF-424A) are required for the proposal. These forms (from the Short Organizational family of forms) are included in the application package, downloadable from www.grants.gov.

The submission through Grants.gov must contain an Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424), including authorized electronic signatures from your organization. In preparing the proposal, applicants are urged to ensure that the name of the proposed USDA Center Director and, where applicable, the name of the submitting institution are included on the SF-424.

The purpose of a grant proposal is to persuade ERS and members of the review panel that the proposal is worthy of support under the evaluation criteria listed below. The application should be self-contained, clearly present the merits of the proposed program, and be written with care and thoroughness. It is important that all the essential information for a comprehensive review be included. Omissions may result in processing delays and jeopardize funding opportunities.

Format and Content of Proposal

The proposal and all attachments must be submitted in Adobe PDF format. Using PDF allows applicants to preserve the formatting of their documents. To save a document as a PDF, the applicant will need to use PDF generator software. Grants.gov has published the following web page on tools and software that the applicant can use: www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support.html.

Budget Information for Non-Construction Program (SF-424A)

A summary budget is required detailing requested support for the duration of the program, which is not to exceed 3 years. Funding requests should not exceed \$750,000 inclusive of indirect costs where applicable.

Funds may be requested under any of the budget categories listed, provided that the item or service requested is identified as necessary for successful conduct of the proposed program, allowable under applicable Federal cost principles, and not prohibited under any applicable Federal statute or regulation.

Table 1 Specific Instructions for Application for Federal Domestic Assistance-Short Organizational (SF-424)	
Item	Specific Instruction
1. Name of Federal Agency	Enter "Economic Research Service, USDA"
2. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number CDFA Title	Enter "10.250" Enter "Agricultural and Rural Economic Research Program"
3. Date Received	Leave blank
4. Funding Opportunity Number Funding Opportunity Title	Enter "CBEAR-2014" Enter "Competitive Grant To Establish a Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research"
5a-g. Applicant Information	Enter requested information
6a. Project Title	Enter title of project proposal
6b-c.	Enter requested information
7. Do not include Social Security Number	Enter other USDA Center director information
8-9.	Enter requested information

Budget items include:

- Personnel
- Fringe benefits
- Travel
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual items
- Other direct costs
- Indirect charges

Salaries of faculty members and other personnel who will be working on the program may be requested in proportion to the effort they will devote to the program.

Indirect costs are limited by Federal statute to the federally recognized audited rate for the institution.

Electronic copies of the standard budget form and general instructions are available at www.grants.gov as part of the application package. Specific instructions for completing the proposal budget form are found below.

Program Summary Page

The proposal must contain a Program Summary Page, which must follow immediately after the budget form, and should not be numbered. The name and institution of the proposed USDA Center Director should be listed on the summary page. The program summary is limited to 250 words. The program summary should be a self-contained, specific description of the activities to be undertaken. The summary should focus on the overall program goals and supporting objectives and plans to accomplish the goals. The importance of a concise, informative program summary cannot be overemphasized.

Table 2 Specific instructions for Budget Information for Non-Construction Program (SF-424A)	
Item	Specific Instruction
1(a). Grant Program Function or Activity	Enter ““Agricultural and Rural Economic Research Program”
1(b). Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	Enter “10.250”
1(c), (d), (f).	Leave blank
1(e), (g).	Enter amount of Federal funds requested
2-4.	Leave blank
5(b),(c),(d),(f).	Leave blank
5(e),(g).	Enter amount of Federal funds requested (same as item 1)
6(a-k) (columns 1 and 5).	Allocate Federal funds to appropriate budget categories
6(a-k) (columns 2-4).	Leave blank
7-20.	Leave blank
21-23.	Optional

Table of Contents

A Table of Contents, itself unpaginated, should be placed immediately after the Program Summary Page. This table should direct the reader to the pages for all sections of the proposal, beginning with the Program Description.

Program Description

The Program Description may not exceed 15 pages (single-spaced) of written text, and the overall application may not exceed 45 pages, including attachments. The proposal should be assembled so that the Program Description immediately follows the Program Summary. To clarify page-limitation requirements, page numbering for the Program Description should start with 1 and should be placed on the bottom of the page. All proposals are to be formatted for standard 8½” x 11” paper. In addition, margins must be at least 1 inch, type size must be 12 point (equivalent to this size for some printers is 10 pitch or 10 characters per inch, which is also acceptable), line count should be no more than 6 lines per inch, and pages should not be reduced.

The program description must address the following components (see also, Evaluation Criteria, page 17):

(1) Active Research

A 3-year program plan discussing the kind of behavioral and experimental economics research activities needed to inform important issues in the provision of ecosystem services from agricultural lands, and the role of the proposed Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research in carrying out those activities. The plan should demonstrate the applicant’s deep knowledge of policy issues, past research projects and their impacts, and how current and future studies can further the knowledge base. The plan should also discuss how USDA may develop and implement new strategies and mechanisms to improve program

effectiveness. The plan should describe how the Center will implement and develop capacity to conduct experiments on issues relevant to agri-environmental policy. In addition, the plan should outline a strategy for collaborating with ERS and USDA program agencies in identifying topics of especial and timely interest.

(2) Expanding the Research Base

The proposal should (1) describe methods to attract experienced and emerging researchers to apply behavioral and experimental economics techniques to issues of the provision of ecosystem services from agricultural land; (2) present a training and mentoring plan for emerging scholars that describes how new researchers will benefit from participation in the activities sponsored by the Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research. The discussion should describe intended activities, such as workshops, conferences and other activities that will expand researcher knowledge of the application of behavioral and experimental economics techniques to USDA's agri-environmental policies; (3) outline the subaward program if one is planned. This should include the proportion of USDA Center funds and implementation strategy. In addition, the discussion should include the expected number and types of emerging scholars to be supported, any special mentoring activities intended to support their professional development, the level of support anticipated, and methods to ensure diversity.

(3) Dissemination of Findings

The application must also include a detailed dissemination plan that describes the planned methods of disseminating Center-supported analyses to interested parties through use of web-based technologies and various media, including newsletters, working papers, special reports, briefings, and presentations to key stakeholder groups.

(4) Staffing and Organizational Plan

The application must include a staffing and organizational proposal for the Center, including an analysis of the types of background needed among staff members. The application shall identify the proposed Center Director and key staff. The application should discuss the Center's capacity to collaborate and issue subawards to researchers outside of the Center. Full resumes (two-page maximum) of proposed staff members shall be included as a separate appendix to the application. The time commitment to the Center and other existing commitments for the Director and each proposed staff member should be clearly indicated in chart form.

Citations to Program Description

All references cited should be complete, including titles and all co-authors, and should conform to an accepted journal format.

Budget Narrative

The application's budget summary narrative must link the core management functions, research, mentoring, and dissemination program to Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research funding level. This section should discuss how the budget supports proposed research, training, and dissemination activities and should link the first-year funding to a 3-year plan.

Vitae and Publications List

To assist reviewers in assessing the competence and experience of the proposed program staff, the proposal must also include a short curriculum vitae and publication list of the Center Director and any other individual who expects to work on the program in a significant fashion, whether or not funds are sought for their support. Vitae are limited to 2 pages for each individual and the publications list should focus on the past 5 years.

Indirect Cost Rate Schedule

For reimbursement of indirect costs, the applicant must include with the application a copy of its indirect cost rate schedule that reports the applicant's federally negotiated audited rate.

Current and Pending Support

The proposal must list any other current public or private research support (including inhouse support) to the proposed USDA Center Director and key staff, whether or not salary support for the person(s) involved is included in the budget.

Analogous information must be provided for any pending proposals, including this proposal, that are now being considered by, or that will be submitted in the near future to, other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs or agencies. Note that this proposal must be listed as Pending.

Applicants should include a brief statement of research objectives or project summaries for all projects listed in Current and Pending Support. Concurrent submission of identical or similar proposals to other possible sponsors will not prejudice proposal review or evaluation. However, a proposal that duplicates or overlaps substantially with a proposal already reviewed and funded (or that will be funded) by ERS will not be funded under this program.

Please include the following information under the heading "Current and Pending Support":

- Record information for active and pending projects in separate sections by name, supporting agency, total funding amount, effective and expiration dates, percentage of time committed, and title of project.
- All current research to which the proposed USDA Center Director and key staff have committed a portion of their time must be listed, whether or not salaries for the persons involved are included in the budgets of the various projects.

What/When/Where To Submit

All applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. Applicants may submit paper-copy applications under extenuating circumstances, such as outages of the Grants.gov website that can be substantiated by a valid case number with the Grants.gov support center.

Every effort should be made to ensure that the proposal contains all pertinent information when originally submitted. Prior to submitting, the applicant is urged to compare the application with the checklist on page ii of this announcement.

Late proposals will not be considered unless extenuating circumstances are documented with Grants.gov.

Reminder: Applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m., July 7, 2014

Review and Evaluation Process

Intergovernmental Review

USDA has determined that this program is not subject to Executive Order No. 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, because it is a program that is national in scope and the only impact on State and local governments would be through subgrants. Applicants are not required to seek intergovernmental review of their applications within the constraints of Executive Order 12372.

Initial Screening

Each application submitted under this announcement will undergo a pre-review to determine that (1) the application was received by the closing date and submitted in accordance with the instructions in this announcement, and (2) the applicant is eligible for funding (see Eligible Applicants, page 3 of this document). Applications that do not meet these pre-review requirements will not be reviewed further and will be ineligible for funding.

Competitive Review and Evaluation Criteria

Applications for the Center for Behavioral and Experimental Agri-Environmental Policy Research that meet the initial screening requirements will be evaluated and rated by a technical review panel. The panel will use the evaluation criteria listed below to score each application. The evaluation criteria are designed to assess the quality of the proposed program and to determine the probability of its success. The evaluation criteria are closely related and are considered as a whole in judging the overall quality of an application. Points are awarded only to applications that are responsive to the evaluation criteria within the context of this program announcement. These review results will be the primary element used by ERS in making funding decisions. Reviewers will determine the strengths and weaknesses of each application in terms of the evaluation criteria listed below, provide comments, and assign numerical scores out of a possible 100 points. A summary of all applicant scores and strengths/weaknesses and recommendations will be prepared and submitted to ERS for decisions. The point value following each criterion heading indicates the maximum numerical relative weight that each section will be given in the review process. An unacceptable rating on any individual criterion may render the entire application unacceptable. Consequently, applicants should take care to ensure that all criteria are fully addressed in the applications.

Evaluation Criteria

(1) Active Research (40 points)

The applicant demonstrates an understanding of significant behavioral and experimental economics research, especially as it applies to the design and implementation of agri-environmental programs and policies. The applicant indicates an ability to conceive and conduct experiments that are scientifically sound and are likely to result in improved provision of ecosystem services from USDA's agri-environmental programs. The applicant demonstrates the existence of, or innovative and realistic plans to establish, links with a broad range of researchers and administrators in ERS and USDA program agencies. The applicant includes plans for program activities, with proposed time schedules, in the first year as well as a 3-year agenda.

(2) Expansion of the Research Base (10 points)

The applicant proposes clear plans to develop and expand the diverse group of researchers that conducts behavioral and experimental economics research applied to USDA's agri-environmental programs and policies by (1) encouraging experienced investigators to focus on the application of behavioral and experimental economics to agri-environmental programs and policies, and (2) influencing emerging researchers to focus on the application of behavioral and experimental economics to agri-environmental programs and policies. The applicant's plan demonstrates methods to train and mentor Ph.D. candidates, postdoctoral students, and other research scholars. These methods may include workshops with subaward recipients to facilitate the successful completion of projects and dissemination of findings via presentations at professional meetings and publications in peer-reviewed journals.

(3) Dissemination of Information (10 points)

The applicant proposes mechanisms for sharing and communicating results of Center-supported studies with a broad audience of researchers, policymakers, program officials and the general public demonstrates an understanding of users' needs and effective strategies for meeting them. Dissemination of analyses and findings from Center projects may occur through creative use of websites and web-based technologies and various media, including newsletters, working papers, special reports, and presentations to appropriate professional audiences (such as the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, and the Soil and Water Conservation Society) and stakeholder groups.

(4) Staffing and Organizational Arrangements (25 points)

The applicant's proposed Center Director and staff demonstrate appropriate levels of research experience, demonstrated research skills, administrative skills, public administration experience, and relevant technical expertise. The applicant demonstrates an adequate level of director and staff time commitments to the Center. The applicant demonstrates an ability to work in collaboration with other scholars and practitioners as well as existing or planned relationships with researchers at other universities and institutions. This also includes a capacity to issue subawards to researchers in other institutions when such collaboration would further the research program. The applicant demonstrates the nature and extent of the organization's support for research, mentoring of scholars, and disseminating information related to the central priorities of the host university for the Center. The applicant demonstrates the commitment of the university (and proposed institutional unit that will contain the Center) to support the Center's three major activities: (1) applying behavioral and experimental economics techniques to issues in the design and implementation of agri-environmental programs and policies; (2) broadening the involvement of researchers in policy-relevant behavioral and experimental economics research on agricultural ecosystem services, by both encouraging established researchers and by supporting and mentoring emerging scholars; and (3) disseminating research and other information to government researchers, program agency staff, and administrators, as well as to research, policy, and citizen groups.

(5) Budget and Resource Allocation (15 points)

The applicant provides a budget that yields an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of this announcement (i.e., funding experiments, granting subawards, building research capacity, and disseminating information, as well as core administrative functions necessary to carry out the Center's mission). The application includes a narrative description and justification for proposed budget line items and demonstrates that the project's costs are adequate, reasonable, and necessary for the activities or personnel to be supported. The budget and narrative demonstrate a clear relationship to the approach. The applicant demonstrates the manner in which funds will be allocated to best serve the Center's goal to conduct economics research, including, but not necessarily limited to, the level of indirect costs (1) charged by the Center and (2) allowed to the institutions of researchers receiving subawards.

Proposal Disposition and Award Administration

Notifications

Approval, Disapproval, or Deferral. On the basis of the review of the application, ERS will either (a) approve the application as a whole or in part; (b) disapprove the application; or (c) defer action on the application for such reasons as lack of funds or a need for further review.

Notification of Disposition. ERS will notify the applicants of the disposition of their applications. If approved, a signed notification of the award will be sent to the business office named in the application.

ERS reserves the right to negotiate with the proposed Center Director and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding program revisions or funding level prior to recommending any program for funding.

A proposal may be withdrawn by the proposed Center Director at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the proposal; however, withdrawn proposals normally will not be returned. One copy of each proposal that is not selected for funding (including those that are withdrawn) will be retained by ERS for a period of 1 year. The remaining copies will be destroyed.

Duration of Award

The initial period for which a grant is awarded may not exceed 3 years. Additional funding and time extensions will be based on USDA Center performance and availability of funds.

Notice of Award

A competitive grant award document, containing the budget, terms and conditions of the award, and other necessary information, will be prepared and forwarded to each grantee, along with a Notice of Competitive Grant Award, by the Administrative and Financial Management, Agricultural Research Service, USDA.

Management Information

Once a grant has been reviewed and recommended for funding, specific management and organizational information relating to the applicant shall be requested on a one-time basis prior to the award. Copies of forms needed in fulfilling the requirements will be provided by the Administrative and Financial Management, Agricultural Research Service, USDA—our servicing agency.

Authorization to make changes in approved program plans, budget, period of support, etc., will be governed largely by the terms and conditions of the competitive grant award agreement. Among other things, these terms and conditions will set forth the kinds of post-award changes that may be made by the awardee and the kinds of changes that are reserved to ERS. It is urged that all key program personnel and authorized organizational representatives read them carefully.

Financial Obligations

For any competitive grant awarded, the maximum financial obligation of ERS shall be the amount of funds authorized for the award. This amount will be stated on the award instrument and on the approved budget. However, in the event an erroneous amount is stated on the grant award instrument, the approved budget, or any supporting document, ERS reserves the unilateral right to make the correction and to make an appropriate adjustment in the amount of the award to align with the authorized amount.

Nothing in these guidelines or any program announcement shall obligate ERS, USDA, or the Federal Government to take favorable action on any application received in response to any announcement, or to support any program at a particular level. Further, neither the approval of any application nor the award of any program grant shall commit or obligate the United States in any way to make any renewal, supplemental, continuation, or other award with respect to any approved application or portion of an approved application.

Awardees will be required to ensure that all funds are expended in accordance with the terms and conditions of grant award, USDA regulations, and the applicable Federal cost principles in effect on the date of the award. Responsibility for the use and expenditure of grant funds may not be transferred or delegated in whole or in part to another party (even if a grantee enters into a contractual relationship with that party), unless the grant agreement itself is transferred in whole or in part to another party by ERS.

Release of Information

ERS receives grant agreement proposals in confidence and will protect the confidentiality of their contents to the extent permitted by law. When a proposal results in a grant agreement, however, it becomes part of the public record and is available to the public upon written request. Copies of proposals (including excerpts from proposals) that are not funded will not be released. Information regarding funded programs will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, and implementing USDA regulations.

Requests to obtain authorized information (and fee schedule relating to the handling of this information) or to obtain information regarding procedures related to release of grantor cooperative agreement information should be directed to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Coordinator, ARS Information Staff, 5601 Sunnyside Ave., Bldg. 1, Rm. 2248, Mail Stop 5128, Beltsville, MD 20705-5128; telephone (301) 504-1640.

How to Obtain Application Materials and Support

ERS is using the Internet for primary distribution of information and application materials for these planning grants. All applications must be submitted electronically through www.grants.gov. Applicants may submit paper-copy applications under extenuating circumstances, such as outages of the Grants.gov website that can be substantiated by a valid case number with the Grants.gov support center. If you have questions, contact:

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