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Request for Applications for Competitive Grant Award To Establish a USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research



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Request for Applications for Competitive Grant Award To Establish a USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research

Abstract

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), in collaboration with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), invites applications for a competitively awarded grant to establish a research center to administer the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Program. The USDA Ridge Center will:

1. Provide renewed focus on economic aspects of food and nutrition assistance research;
2. Stimulate innovative research on domestic food and nutrition assistance issues by providing small grants for new analyses of the USDA major food and nutrition assistance programs, food security, and smaller, less studied programs such as the Summer Food Service Program;
3. Broaden the network of social scientists who collaborate in expanding the understanding of the economic, nutrition, and health outcomes of participation in USDA's food assistance programs, as well as of the issues surrounding program implementation and delivery, and
4. Achieve cost savings through administration of program activities at a single center.

ERS anticipates that \$600,000 will be awarded in fiscal year 2016 to support this activity with additional funding, subject to availability, for 2 more years. This publication describes the RIDGE Center responsibilities and application requirements. The deadline for submission of applications is August 1, 2016.

Keywords: Food assistance programs, nutrition, economic incentives, SNAP, child nutrition, WIC, food security, ERS, USDA

Checklist

All proposals must contain the elements described in this brochure and must be submitted through Grants.gov by August 1, 2016. The following checklist has been prepared to help ensure that the proposal is complete and in the proper order:

Application for Federal Domestic Assistance Form (SF-424)

- Is all required information accurate and complete?
- Is the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number 10.253?
- Has the authorized organizational representative signed the SF-424?
- Is the CFDA Title: “Consumer Data and Nutrition Research (CDNR)?”
- Is the Funding Opportunity Title: “Competitive Grant Award To Establish a USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research”?
- Have you included a telephone number, fax number, and 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 (Research and Related Budget)

- Are budget items complete?
- Is the budget justification included?
- Is the budget duration within the stated 3-year research cycle?

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 RIDGE 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, pertinent, and limited to 2 pages for each individual?
- Are the publication 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? (See 7 U.S.C. 3310 for limits).

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Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), in collaboration with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), invites applications from university-based institutions for a competitive grant award to establish a RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research. Started in 1998, RIDGE has been extremely effective in providing small grants for new research on major USDA programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), school meals, and smaller, less studied programs like the Summer Food Service Program. The program has resulted in nearly 300 studies by more than 200 researchers located at over 100 educational and research institutions. In addition to research grants, RIDGE has supported studies by Ph.D. candidates through its Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant Program and other activities, such as a Food Assistance Visiting Scholars Program. These activities support the RIDGE Program goals to expand the research base, reach beyond established researchers to target Ph.D. candidates and new postdoctoral scholars and encourage inclusion of food assistance issues in their studies, and introduce new investigators to the research performed at ERS and FNS.

As a major activity, the RIDGE Center will administer a program of grants to researchers at universities and other institutions and will oversee the application, peer review, sub-grant award, and quality assurance processes of the RIDGE Program. The RIDGE Center will support food and nutrition assistance research at the national level as well as for specific populations, such as immigrants, racial and ethnic subgroups, people living in rural areas, or residents in areas with limited access to healthy foods. The center will establish a system to disseminate research findings to a diverse stakeholder audience, including other researchers, policy and program officials, and to the general public.

ERS expects to fund the RIDGE Center beginning September 15, 2016. The anticipated funding will be approximately \$600,000. Subject to the availability of funds, ERS expects to provide a comparable level of funding to the RIDGE Center in FY 2017 and FY 2018. The present application should focus on the FY 2016 award.

There are no matching-fund requirements from the RIDGE Center over the term of the agreement.

Application Process Using Grants.gov

Applications to this announcement 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 grant-making agencies. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

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 to 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 is responsible for registering 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 through Grants.gov.

The posted notice through www.grants.gov is the only official program announcement. Any corrections to this announcement will be published on both the ERS website at www.ers.usda.gov and the www.grants.gov website. The applicant bears sole responsibility for 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 Alex Majchrowicz at alexm@ers.usda.gov by July 1, 2016, to inform ERS of your intent to submit an application. Include the name of your organization. Providing notice of intent to submit is not a requirement for submitting an application. However, a notice of intent to submit will help ERS in the planning for the review process.

Closing Date

The closing date for submitting applications under this announcement is midnight August 1, 2016. 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 Alex Majchrowicz, USDA, ERS, Food Economics Division.

Authority

The Authority for this program is contained in 7 U.S.C. 292, 411, 427, 1441a, 1621-1627, 1704, 1761-68, 2201, 2202, 3103, 3291, 3311, 3504; 22 U.S.C. 3101; 42 U.S.C. 1891-93; 44 U.S.C. 3501-11; 50 U.S.C. 2061 et seq., 2251 et seq.; 2 CFR Part 415; 2 CFR Part 416; 7 U.S.C. 3318; and 7 U.S.C. 3310.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for the USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research are restricted to public or private institutions of higher education.

Cost Principles and Administrative Requirements

Regulations and guidelines applicable to this announcement include (a) 2 CFR Part 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards; (b) 2 CFR Part 400 Uniform Administrative Requirements Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards; (c) 2 CFR 415 General Program Administrative Regulations; (d) 2 CFR Part 416 General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments, 2 CFR Part 417 Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension; 2 CFR Part 418 New Restrictions on Lobbying; 2 CFR Part 421 Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace; and 2 CFR Part 422 Research Institutions Conducting USDA Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number for this program is 10.253. The CFDA Title is Consumer Data and Nutrition Research.

Available Funds in FY 2016

ERS anticipates having available a total of approximately \$600,000 to fund the USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research in FY 2016. Nothing in this announcement restricts the ability of ERS to make no awards or lesser or greater awards. Awards and the distribution of awards are contingent on adequate funding, the needs of ERS, and the quality of the applications received. Subject to availability of funds, there may be additional funds in subsequent years.

Matching Requirements

None.

Program and Budget Period

ERS expects to fund the USDA RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research beginning in fiscal year (FY) 2016 and, subject to the availability of funds, to provide a comparable level of funding to the RIDGE Center in FY 2017 and FY 2018. The award pursuant to this announcement will be made on or about September 15, 2016.

Program History and Purpose

USDA, through FNS, administers 15 domestic food and nutrition assistance programs that work both individually and collectively to provide children and low-income adults with food or the means to purchase food. With a total outlay of \$104.1 billion in FY 2015, food and nutrition assistance accounted for over two-thirds of USDA's budget. Approximately 1 in 4 Americans participated in at least 1 of the 15 food and nutrition assistance programs at some point during FY 2015, making these programs fundamental to the nutritional well-being of millions of Americans. These diverse activities share the common goal of improving the nutrition, food security, and health of American consumers.

Because of the importance of the food and nutrition assistance programs to both program participants and taxpayers, sound research is needed to ensure that the programs operate effectively and efficiently. Using a strong economic framework to guide its research, ERS has become the premier source of economic research on these programs to meet the critical information needs of USDA, Congress, policy officials, program participants, the research community, and the public at large. To address the needs of this diverse group, ERS conducts a multifaceted research plan consisting of both intramural and extramural research. The intramural program, conducted by ERS research staff, takes advantage of the staff's experience and specialized knowledge. At the same time, ERS funds extramural research, often conducted jointly with ERS staff, that draws on the multidisciplinary expertise of nationally recognized social and nutrition science researchers and the resources of numerous noted institutions.

It is central to the mission of ERS to build research capacity and networks by supporting established researchers and mentoring emerging scholars whose interests focus on economic aspects of food and nutrition assistance. To stimulate new and innovative research on food assistance and nutrition issues and to broaden the participation of social science scholars in these issues, ERS, with support from FNS, sponsors the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) Program. RIDGE supports both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore economic and nutrition outcomes and health outcomes of participants in USDA's food and nutrition assistance programs, as well as issues surrounding program implementation and delivery. In recent years, the RIDGE Program has provided grants to researchers in the range of \$15,000 to \$40,000 for 1-year projects. Since its inception in 1998, RIDGE has funded more than 300 projects to 200 researchers at over 100 higher education institutions across the Nation, in keeping with the program's emphasis on making better use of State and local research expertise to understand food and nutrition assistance programs' performance and outcomes. The local focus of some RIDGE projects is particularly important because of the flexibility States have to add unique features to their assistance programs and because the needs and circumstances of local population groups vary. Thus, RIDGE provides an

opportunity to study national programs that may be operated differently across States to address local needs while focusing on the same outcome. For more information on the RIDGE Program see: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-nutrition-assistance-research/extramural-research.aspx#RIDGE>

The competitive grant award in this announcement funds the establishment of a RIDGE Center to (1) provide renewed focus on economic aspects of food and nutrition assistance research, (2) stimulate new and innovative research on food and nutrition assistance issues, (3) broaden the support of both established and emerging scholars to increase the number and diversity of researchers who collaborate in tackling the unique food and nutrition challenges that exist across communities, regions, and States, and (4) achieve cost savings through administration of program activities at a single center.

There are no projects that must be continued from the past RIDGE Centers under this award.

Applications are to include a budget estimate for a 3-year research cycle covered by the FY 2016 award. For an example of a 3-year research cycle, see section: Research and Related Budget.

Funding to support additional research cycles beginning in FY 2017 and FY 2018 is subject to future appropriations and approval of ERS. ERS expects, however, that the RIDGE Center will be supported during future fiscal years at an annual level of effort consistent with the announced level. The award pursuant to this announcement will be made on or about September 15, 2016.

Awardee Responsibilities for the RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research

The RIDGE Center will have the primary and lead responsibility to solicit, review, and select research proposals for RIDGE subawards. RIDGE subawards should reflect the diverse goals of the program, which are to promote the development of innovative ideas and approaches, encourage established researchers not involved in food and nutrition assistance research to enter the field, and nurture new talent. Consequently, RIDGE subawards may fall into categories such as research grants to (1) experienced investigators, both those involved in food and nutrition issues or other areas, (2) recent Ph.D. graduates, or (3) Ph.D. candidates who are mentored by established researchers.

The RIDGE Center is expected to perform the tasks summarized below.

Research Program

The RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research is expected to initiate and maintain a subawards program to foster new and innovative research that may include small-scale, economic, behavioral, and policy-related projects, including pilot research projects and feasibility studies; development, testing, and refinement of research techniques; secondary analysis of available data sets; or similar research projects. RIDGE subawards should include an appropriately balanced agenda of basic and applied, quantitative and qualitative, and primary and secondary analyses. Further, the RIDGE Center should provide intellectual leadership in the

national research community by establishing links with a broad range of established scholars from other institutions.

Expanding the Research Base

The RIDGE Center is expected to broaden the network of researchers who collaborate in investigating food and nutrition challenges that exist throughout the Nation by:

- Developing and expanding a diverse group of researchers who will focus their career goals on analyzing economic aspects of food and nutrition assistance issues to ensure that USDA's nutrition programs operate effectively and efficiently. The RIDGE Center will be expected to provide subawards to support established researchers, new postdoctoral scholars, and Ph.D. candidates. Centers are expected to provide direction to RIDGE awardees by encouraging them in the analysis of economic aspects of issues, in expanding research through participation in professional meetings and seminars, and in developing analyses for publication in social science journals;
- Encouraging experienced researchers in other areas to add a food and nutrition assistance perspective to their research;
- Promoting innovative research methods and new data sources to further build research capacity, and;
- Developing the capacity and expertise to examine regional and local food and nutrition assistance issues.

Dissemination of Information

Making knowledge and information available to policy officials, program participants, the research community, and the public is an important responsibility of the RIDGE Center. The center is expected to develop and maintain a system to disseminate results of RIDGE-funded studies through print or electronic methods, including, but not limited to, creative use of web-based technologies, infographics, social media, newsletters, working papers, special reports, and webinars.

The RIDGE Center leadership and subawardees are also required to participate in an annual RIDGE Conference arranged by ERS in Washington, DC, to present findings of completed projects. All costs to attend the conference shall be included in the competitive grants to the RIDGE Center and should be specified as part of the subsequent subawards granted to researchers. ERS is not responsible for conference travel arrangements and other incidental expenses for RIDGE Center staff or subawardees. Conference facilities will be provided by ERS.

The RIDGE Center will also require subawardees to prepare an Executive Summary of each funded project and furnish ERS with a publishable copy for inclusion in the electronic database of RIDGE projects (see examples at www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodNutritionAssistance/Funding/RIDGEprojects.asp).

Research Area Guidance

ERS has suggested areas of interest, summarized below, for investigation through RIDGE subawards. The RIDGE Center is expected to develop additional research topics.

I. Food Choices: Economic Determinants and Consequences

Food choices depend on food assistance and nutrition program benefits, household income, and consumer preferences, as well as prices and other market factors. ERS is interested in research on the economic determinants and consequences of food choices, including the effects of food access, time use, and the relationships among program participation, food choices, and weight status of children and low-income families.

II. Economic Incentives in Food Assistance Programs

ERS is interested in research aimed at comparing the economic costs and benefits of alternative policy choices on the behavior of food and nutrition assistance program clients and others, and in improving the use of administrative data for evaluation purposes. For example, topics may include, but are not restricted to:

Macroeconomic Factors

- What are the characteristics of the relationship between unemployment and participation in SNAP (e.g., in terms of timing and magnitude)?
- How do changes in food and nutrition assistance policies impact economic activity and household income across the U.S. economy and in various industry sectors, regions, and markets?

Behavioral Economics

- Explore the application of behavioral economics theory to food-choice behavior, including consumer behavior, behavior of retailers and other members of the food industry, to facilitate healthy and cost-effective food choices by participants in SNAP, WIC, and other food and nutrition assistance programs.

Improving Evaluation Methodology Through Existing Data

- How can administrative data, collected at the local, State, or national level, be used for evaluation research, either alone or linked to survey data? Examples of potentially useful administrative data include EBT transaction data and SNAP Quality Control data; SNAP-Ed (formerly Food Stamp Nutrition Education, or FSNE) data collected for State and national reporting; school-district data on school meal participation and food purchases; WIC State food instrument issuance or redemption data; birth certificate data containing WIC and Medicaid participation information; and store scanner data.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- What are the costs and benefits of alternative policy choices aimed at improving program access (such policy options intended to reduce client burden), program targeting (e.g., working poor), and program integrity?

- To what extent do SNAP rules on eligibility and program operations affect household decisions regarding employment, marriage, child bearing, or savings?

Child Nutrition Programs

- State and local school districts have adopted a wide range of policies intended to promote nutrition and wellness (for example, expanded nutrition education and restrictions on vending and other non-USDA foods for sale in schools). What are the costs of State and local policies intended to promote child nutrition and wellness and how do they affect program participation, children's food consumption, and/or other outcomes?

WIC

- What are the full costs to WIC State and local agencies associated with promoting breastfeeding (including the value of benefits to the breastfeeding mother-child dyad) compared with the costs of providing infant formula (including the value of benefits to the nonbreastfeeding mother-child dyad, as well as the value of infant formula rebates) under the current and the revised food packages?

III. Food Assistance as an Economic Safety Net

Food assistance programs are an economic safety net buffering the effects of low income and lack of assets and protecting target populations against income losses and unexpected expenses. Examples of research questions of interest include:

Economic Shocks

- How do economic shocks, such as unemployment, inflation, or the mortgage crisis, affect the number of eligibles and participants in the food and nutrition assistance programs, household spending choices, food choices, and diet quality? (For example, to what extent do rising food, energy, and housing costs affect food spending and food security?) Alternatively, how do nutrition assistance program policies and operational choices impact a household's ability to deal with economic disruption beyond food security and diet quality?

Multiple Program Interactions

- What share of households participate in multiple food assistance programs versus only one or none of the programs for which they are eligible, what factors influence these participation decisions, and how do the programs work individually and collectively to create a safety net?

Income Volatility

- What is the relationship between income volatility and participation in food and nutrition assistance programs?
- To what extent do food and nutrition assistance programs affect the level and stability of spending patterns of different types of households (such as elderly households, households with and without children, single-adult households, and households with earnings)?

Food Insecurity

- What are the dynamics of food insecurity among various food assistance population subgroups?
- What are the correlates and consequences of persistent food insecurity?

ERS Responsibilities

ERS will provide (1) input to reviews of research proposals submitted to the RIDGE Center, (2) statements of ERS food and nutrition assistance research priorities, (3) reviews of RIDGE Center reports to ensure that objectives and award conditions are being met, (4) coordination of activities between the RIDGE Center and ERS to ensure, for example, a diverse selection of research projects and to eliminate duplication of research efforts, and (5) ERS technical contacts for RIDGE subawardees.

Joint Responsibilities

ERS will work with the RIDGE Center in jointly establishing broad research priorities and planning strategies to accomplish the objectives of this announcement. The RIDGE Center and ERS will jointly host an annual 1-day conference in Washington, DC, for RIDGE subaward recipients and attendees to discuss results of food and nutrition assistance studies funded through the program. Conference facilities are provided by ERS at no cost to the RIDGE Center.

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.

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 Research and Related Budget 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. A checklist is provided on page ii of this document to help you provide the necessary information for completing a proposal.

Submission Requirements

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 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 often result in processing delays and may jeopardize funding opportunities.

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 RIDGE Center Director and, where applicable, the name of the submitting institution are included on the Application for Federal Domestic Assistance Form (SF-424).

Format and Content of Proposal

The proposal and all attachments must be submitted in portable document format (pdf). 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 tips that the applicant can use:

<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-tools-and-tips.html>

Research and Related Budget

A budget is required detailing requested support for the duration of the 3-year research cycle covered by the FY 2016 award. Funding levels accepted are up to \$600,000 for the RIDGE Center, inclusive of indirect costs (see 7 U.S.C. 3310 below) where applicable. For example, milestones of a 3-year research cycle may include:

- Grant awarded by ERS, September 2016
- RIDGE Center Request for Proposals for research projects released, February 2017
- Subawards for research projects announced, May 2017
- Research conducted, May 2017 to September 2018
- Research findings presented at RIDGE Conference, October 2018
- Executive summaries of research projects submitted, January 2019

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.

Budget items include:

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

Statutory Authority 7 U.S.C. 3310 limits indirect costs to not exceed 22 percent of the total Federal funds provided (or 28.2 percent of total direct costs) under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

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.

Electronic copies of the standard budget form and general instructions are available at www.grants.gov as part of the application package.

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 RIDGE 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 and 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 of Contents

A Table of Contents, 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, Review and Evaluation Process, Evaluation Criteria):

(1) Approach and Program Plan

A 3-year program plan should be included that discusses the kind of research activities needed to prepare for potential future policy debates on important food assistance and

nutrition issues and the role of the proposed RIDGE Center in carrying out those activities. The plan should demonstrate the applicant's grasp of the policy and research significance of past food assistance and nutrition analyses on which current and future studies may build to advance policy knowledge and choices related to food assistance and nutrition programs. The applicant should describe approaches and tools (e.g., electronic mailing list management systems, web postings, or other electronic methods) to solicit research proposals to build research capacity and methods, such as panels, advisory committees, or other systems, to review and select proposed studies for RIDGE subawards.

(2) Expanding the Research Base

The proposal should (1) describe methods to attract experienced researchers to food and nutrition assistance research and (2) present a training and mentoring plan for emerging scholars that describes how new researchers will benefit from participation in the RIDGE Program, particularly the benefits provided by the RIDGE Center. The discussion should include the expected number and types of emerging scholars to be supported, the level of support anticipated, and methods to ensure diversity.

(3) Dissemination of Findings

The application must also include a detailed plan that describes the methods of disseminating RIDGE-supported analyses to interested parties through use of web-based technologies such as webinars, infographics, and social media, as well as by other media, including newsletters, working papers, or special reports.

(4) Staffing and Organizational Plan

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

(5) Budget Justification

The application's budget justification must link the core management functions, research, mentoring, and dissemination program to the RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research funding level. This section should discuss how the budget for the 3-year research cycle covered by the FY 2016 grant supports proposed research, training, and dissemination activities. The discussion should include the appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to the successful completion of the research, training, and dissemination plans. In addition, the judicious use of funds is desired—that is, providing the highest level of funding for direct costs to researchers while containing indirect costs

to institutions. Applications that address indirect- cost containment will be viewed more favorably than those that do not.

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 Justification

The application's budget must be supported with a justification that links the core management functions, research, mentoring, and dissemination program to the RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance Research funding level. This section should discuss how the budget supports proposed research, training, and dissemination activities and describe how funds will be distributed across the 3-year research cycle.

Vitae and Publications List

To assist reviewers in assessing the competence and experience of the proposed program staff, the proposal must include a short curriculum vitae and publication list for the proposed RIDGE Center Director and any other individual who expects to do significant work on the program, whether or not funds are sought for his or her support. Vitae are limited to two 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 the approved negotiated indirect-cost rate agreement that provides the applicant's federally negotiated audited rate.

Current and Pending Support

The proposal must list any other current public or private research support (including in-house support) to the proposed RIDGE 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. 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 start and expiration dates, percentage of time committed, and title of project.
- All current research to which the proposed RIDGE 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.

Federal Award Administration Information

In addition to requirements listed in Cost Principles and Administrative Requirements, applicants must complete and submit Assurances - Non-Construction Programs, SF-424B, Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants, AD-3030, and any other required certification forms pertaining to listed assurances, which can be found at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/ersforms/>

In addition to the SF-424B Assurances for Non-Construction Programs, the following laws, regulations, and Federal Executive Orders, including, but not limited to the following, are applicable to the proposed award:

2 CFR Part 200 Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

2 CFR Part 400 Uniform Administrative Requirements Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards

2 CFR 415 General Program Administrative Regulations

2 CFR Part 416 General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments

2 CFR Part 417 Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension

2 CFR Part 418 New Restrictions on Lobbying

2 CFR Part 421 Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace

2 CFR Part 422 Research Institutions Conducting USDA Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct

2 CFR Part 25 - Universal Identifier and System of Award Management

2 CFR Part 170 - Reporting Subaward and Executive Compensation Information

2 CFR Part 180 - OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement)

2 CFR Part 400.2(b) - Non-Federal entities must disclose in writing any potential conflicts of interest to the USDA awarding agency or pass-through entity.

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A - USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act

7 CFR Part 1c.120 - Evaluation and disposition of applications and proposals for research to be conducted or supported by a Federal Department or Agency.

7 CFR Part 3 - Debt Management. USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A - Nondiscrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs of the Department of Agriculture-Effectuation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Non-Federal entity must post the USDA Civil Rights Poster in buildings and facilities where research is being carried out with Federal funds.

42 CFR Part 73 - Select Agents and Toxins

42 U.S.C. 6962 - Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. - Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally-assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

Federal Information System Security Management Act (FISMA), as amended by the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-283, 44 U.S.C. 3551 *et seq.*, to ensure the effectiveness of information security controls over information resources that support Federal operations and assets. Applies to a non-Federal entity if it will collect or maintain information on behalf of a Federal agency.

15 U.S.C. 205a et seq. "The Metric Conversion Act as amended by the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act."

41 U.S.C.A. § 4712, "The Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989" Prohibitions Against Using Funds Under Grants and Cooperative Agreements with Entities that Require Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements. (a) The Non-Federal Entity (NFE) may not require its employees, contractors, or subrecipients seeking to report fraud, waste, or abuse to sign or comply with internal confidentiality agreements or statements prohibiting or otherwise restricting them from lawfully reporting that waste, fraud, or abuse to a designated investigative or law enforcement representative of a Federal department or agency authorized to receive such information. (b) The NFE must notify its employees, contractors, or subrecipients that the prohibitions and restrictions of any internal confidentiality agreements inconsistent with paragraph (a) of this award provisions are no longer in effect. (c) The prohibition in paragraph (a) of this award does not contravene requirements applicable to any other form issued by a Federal department or agency governing the nondisclosure of classified information. (d) If the Government determines that the NFE is not in compliance with this award provision, it: (1) Will prohibit the NFE's use of funds under this award, in accordance with sections 743, 744 of Division E of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113) or any successor provision of law; and (2) May pursue other remedies available for the NFE's material failure to comply with award terms and conditions.

§744 and 745 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, P.L. 113-235, as amended and/or subsequently enacted for Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants

Reminder: Applications must be submitted by midnight, August 1, 2016

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 Overview, Eligible Applicants). 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 RIDGE Center for Food and Nutrition Assistance 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 a funding decision. Selection of the successful applicant will be based on the technical and financial criteria laid out in this announcement. 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) Approach and Program Plan (30 points)

The applicant demonstrates an understanding of the significant trends and past related research, especially as it relates to the priority research areas identified by ERS. The applicant's plan demonstrates a commitment to bring a broad-based, multifaceted approach to understanding food and nutrition assistance issues existing across communities, States, regions, or the Nation. The applicant indicates an ability to select projects for funding that are scientifically sound and are likely to make significant contributions to advancing policy knowledge and choices related to food and nutrition assistance programs. The applicant demonstrates the existence of, or innovative and realistic plans to establish links with, a broad range of established scholars from other institutions. The applicant specifies plans to increase the diversity of RIDGE researchers by seeking, for example, viable proposals from institutions, such as 1890 or 1994 Land-Grant Institutions. The applicant describes approaches and means used to solicit research proposals (e.g., electronic mailing list management systems and web postings) and identifies panels, advisory committees, or other systems employed to review and select proposed studies. The

applicant includes plans for program activities, with proposed time schedules, in the 3-year research cycle covered by the award.

(2) Expanding the Research Base (20 points)

The applicant proposes clear plans to develop and expand the diverse group of researchers that conduct food and nutrition assistance research by (1) encouraging experienced investigators to add a food and nutrition component to their research and (2) influencing emerging researchers to focus their career goals on food and nutrition assistance research and policy. The applicant's plan demonstrates methods to train and mentor Ph.D. candidates, postdoctoral students, and other research scholars who have received RIDGE subawards by conducting, for example, workshops with grantees to monitor progress and offer direction to facilitate the successful completion of projects. Applicants demonstrate plans to direct RIDGE awardees to expand their research by including analysis of economic aspects of relevant issues, participating in professional meetings and seminars, and developing analyses for publication in food and nutrition and social science journals. Methods to develop the capacity and expertise to examine regional and local food and nutrition assistance issues are evident in plans.

(3) Dissemination of Information (10 points)

The applicant's mechanisms for sharing and communicating results of RIDGE-supported studies with a broad audience of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners demonstrates an understanding of satisfying users' needs. Dissemination of analyses and findings of RIDGE projects to interested parties may occur through creative use of web-based technologies and various media, including newsletters, working papers, special reports, and webinars to appropriate research, policy, and program audiences.

(4) Quality of Staffing and Organizational Arrangements (25 points)

The applicant's proposed RIDGE 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 RIDGE Center. The applicant demonstrates an ability to work in collaboration with other scholars and practitioners in search of similar goals. The applicant demonstrates existing or planned relationships with researchers at other universities and institutions. The applicant demonstrates the nature and extent of the organization's support for research, mentoring scholars, and disseminating information related to the central priorities of the host institution for the RIDGE Center. The applicant demonstrates the commitment of the university (and proposed institutional unit that will contain the RIDGE Center) to support the Center's three major activities: (1) Developing scholarly, policy-relevant research; (2) Mentoring and developing emerging scholars interested in food and nutrition assistance research; and (3) Disseminating research and other information to a broad and dissimilar set of academic, research, and policy communities.

(5) Quality of Budget and Resource Allocation (15 points)

The budget will be reviewed for adequacy and overall appropriateness and for the allocation of resources across administrative, research, and other areas. That is, the applicant should provide a budget that yields an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of this announcement (i.e., granting subawards, building research capacity, mentoring, 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 RIDGE Program's goal to provide financial support for research, including, but not necessarily limited to, the level of indirect costs (1) charged by the RIDGE 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 one (1) year. The remaining copies will be destroyed.

Duration of Award

The initial period for which a grant is awarded may not exceed 5 years. Additional funding and time extensions will be based on RIDGE Center performance and availability of funds.

Notice of Award

ERS will provide the Notice of Competitive Grant Award on or about September 15, 2016. A competitive grant award package, containing the budget, terms and conditions of the award, and

other necessary information will be prepared and forwarded to the grantee 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, and other items will be governed largely by the terms and conditions of the competitive grant award agreement. These terms and conditions will include the kinds of post-award changes that may be made by the awardee and the 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

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:

Alex Majchrowicz, ERS/FED

Mailing Address:

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Economic Research Service

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