United States Department of Agriculture
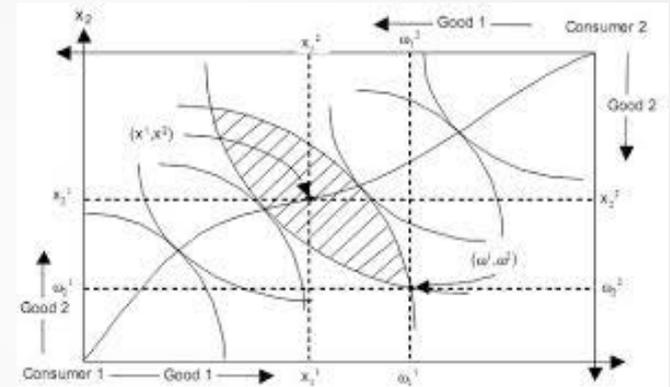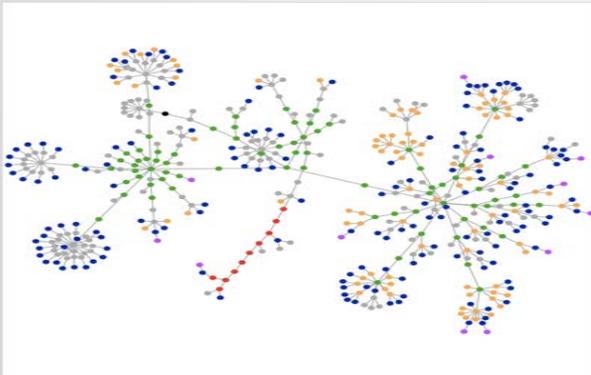
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

USDA - National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative - Competitive Grant Program

Agricultural Economics and Rural Communities Program

& Tips for Successful Grantwriting

Presented by

Robbin Shoemaker, PhD
National Program Leader for Economics

Presented to

Mississippi State University

October 31, 2017

Outline of Talk

- Overview of Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)

- Overview of Agricultural Economics and Rural Communities (AERC) programs

- Grant types and eligibility

- AFRI Proposal Evaluation Criteria

- Tips for Successful Grantwriting

- Q & A

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)

- Basic and Applied Research

- Education

- Integrated Activities (Research, Education, and/or Extension)

- Biological, Physical, and Social Sciences

- Single Discipline and Inter-disciplinary

- Single Investigator or Teams

- Broad Eligibility (but competitive)

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative

- Aligned with the 6 Farm Bill priorities:
  - Plant health and production, plant products
  - Animal health and production, animal products
  - Food safety, nutrition, and health
  - Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment
  - Agriculture systems and technology
  - Agriculture economics and rural communities

Types of AFRI Projects

- Standard (Research, Education, Extension and Integrated)
- Conference
- Coordinated Agricultural Projects
- Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) - Some Restrictions Apply
  - New Investigator
  - Post & Pre-doctoral Fellowships
  - Strengthening
  - Eligibility – EPSCoR, 1890's, MSI, and Small Institutions

Integrated Programs

Must include Research and one or two other functions:

- Research:
  - develop new knowledge

- Extension:
  - delivers science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions.
  - Eligibility: Project Director must come from public or private college or university, collaborators may be otherwise.

- Education:
  - formal classroom/laboratory instruction and practicum experience

- Interactive relations between functions is desirable for integrated projects

AFRI - Foundational Program vs Challenge Area Programs

- *Foundational Program*
  - Program areas aligned with the 6 Farm Bill priorities
  - Mostly single function research
  - Mostly fundamental research, but
  - Priority topics are indicated and change over time
  - Smaller grant size, $500,000 maximum
  - Individual investigators or small teams

AFRI - Foundational Program vs Challenge Area Programs, cont.

- *Challenge Areas*
  - Targeted programs designed to solve a societal problem
  - Mostly integrated programs
  - Research component is more applied
  - Often change markedly from year to year
  - Larger grant size, typically >$1 million
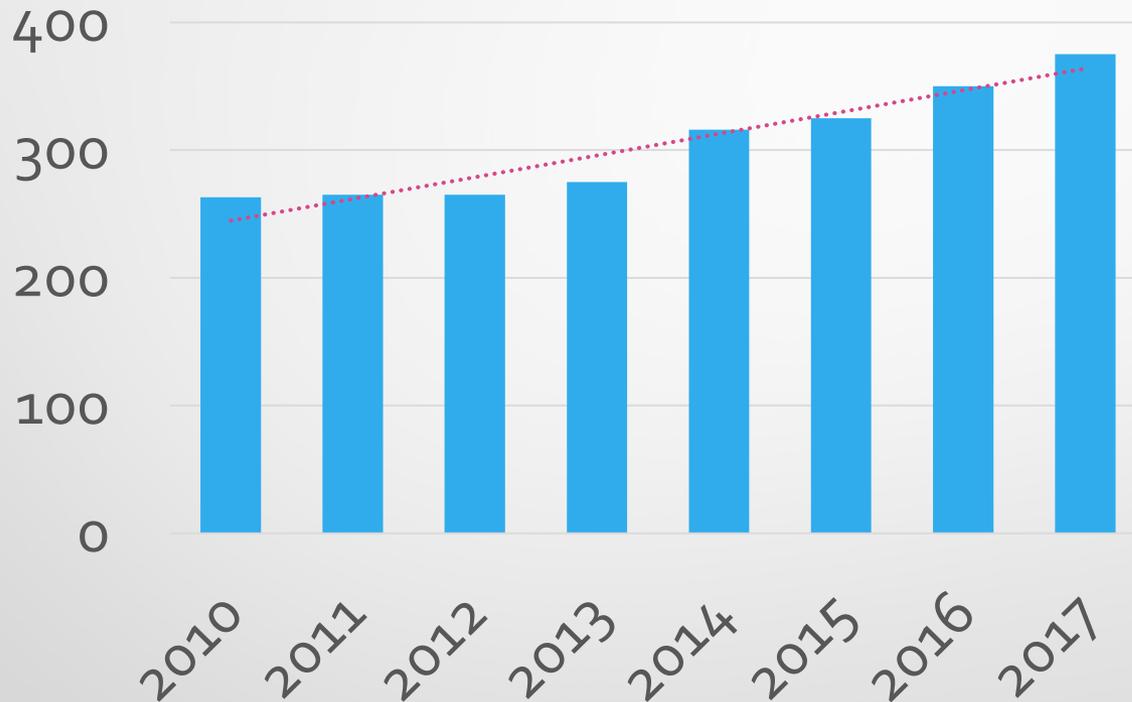 - Multiple investigators or large teams

FY 2017: AFRI Challenge Area RFAs

- Childhood Obesity Prevention

- Food Safety

- Resilient Agroecosystems in a Changing Climate

- Sustainable Bioenergy and Bioproducts

- Water for Food Production Systems

AFRI Funding History
(in millions)

Agricultural Economics & Rural Communities (AERC)

AERC Program Funds – Approximately $18 million

- Project types – (1) Research Only and (2) Integrated (multi-function)
- Five AERC Programs
  - Economics, Markets and Trade
  - Environmental and Natural Resource Economics
  - Innovation for Rural Entrepreneurs and Communities
  - Small and Medium-Sized Farms
  - Social Implications of Emerging Technologies (New for 2017)

AERC Programs and Project Types

- Economics, Markets and Trade – *Research only*
  - Applied micro - structure, function & performance of agricultural sector; producer & consumer behavior; domestic & trade policy

- Innovation for Rural Entrepreneurs and Communities – *Research or Integrated*
  - Design, analysis and implementation of strategies to enhance economic opportunities in rural areas, infrastructure and well-being of rural business, households and communities

- Small & Medium-Sized Farms – *Research or Integrated*
  - Design, analysis and implementation of strategies to enhance economic opportunities and well-being of Small & Medium-Sized farms

AERC Programs and Project Types, *cont*.

- Environmental and Natural Resources Economics *– Research only*

  - Advances economic theories/tools/analyses in ecosystem valuation, nonmarket benefit valuation; NRE/conservation policy; agro-environmental interaction

- Social Implications of Emerging Technologies *– Research only*

  - Assess the broad social, ethical, legal and other potential impacts that gene drive/genome editing technologies may pose for society, agricultural markets, consumer preferences, and other domains.

  - Involve a range of disciplines including scientists, legal scholars, bioethicists, social scientists and researchers from the humanities, etc.

AFRI Evaluation Criteria

Intellectual and Scientific Merit

- Novelty, innovation, uniqueness, and originality

- Clarity and delineation of objectives

- Adequate description of the undertaking and suitability/feasibility of methods

- Demonstrated feasibility through preliminary data

- Probability of success of the project is appropriate given the level of scientific originality, and risk-reward balance

AFRI Evaluation Criteria, cont.

Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management

- Qualifications of applicant (individual or team) to conduct the proposed project

- Demonstrated awareness of previous and alternative approaches to the problem identified

- Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, and facilities

- Adequate planning and administration of the proposed project

15

AFRI Evaluation Criteria, cont

Project Relevance and Broader Impacts

- Research is directed toward specific Program Priority Areas in the RFA

- Increases public scientific literacy and engagement

- Provision of new knowledge that can inform public policy and enhance economic well-being

- Advances science - economics and social science theory and application

- Trains new students and promotes a culture of good objective economic research

AFRI Evaluation Criteria, cont.

Conference Grant Applications

- Relevance of conference to US agriculture and food systems and appropriateness of the conference in fostering scientific exchange;

- Qualifications of the organizing committee and appropriateness of invited speakers; and

- Uniqueness, timeliness of the conference, and appropriateness of budget requests.

Sabbatical Grant and Seed Grant Applications (FASE only)

- Merit of proposed activities to enhance the capabilities and competitiveness of the applicant/institution;

- The applicant's previous experience and background and appropriateness of activities or equipment for the goals proposed.

Tips for Successful Grantwriting

- Submit ON TIME
  - How far in advance should you submit your proposal?
  a. One Week
  b. One Day
  c. One Hour
  d. One Minute
  e. One Second
- Only exceptions for lateness
  - (1) Grants.gov is down;
  - (2) natural disaster

Main Ingredients for Success

4 critical "Cs"

- Compelling

- Competent

- Criteria

- Complete

Define Goals and Objectives

- What's the point of funding this project?

    - A clear Goal Statement should define the project

        "What will be different after completing this project?"

- Supporting Objectives

    - Project functions/activities (research, education, and/or extension) should be defined through supporting objectives

Develop a Comprehensive Project Outline

- Before you start writing…

- Create an outline that reflects:

  - Goals and objectives

  - Critical project functions

  - Roles for project participants

Assemble an Effective Team

- Define roles for each team member
- Identify necessary expertise
  - How do members complement efforts
- Identify who will be responsible for project activities
- Share the responsibility of writing but edit into a single voice
- If the project involves extension activities:
  - Who are the stakeholders?
  - What roles will they play in project development and implementation?
- Who will take responsibility for project evaluation?

Develop a Timeline for Completing and Submitting the Proposal (on Time)

- When is the deadline for submission?

- How much time will your Office of Contracts and Grants need to review and submit the project?

- How much time will a colleague need for review?

★ TIP: Start early! Don't delay!!!

Proposal Summary – Make it Meaningful and Engaging

This is important!

- Proposal summary/abstract should be compelling
- Summary should include goals and objectives
- Highlight what's innovative about your project
- Describe outputs and outcomes—what do you hope to learn from effort

★TIP: Panelist have many proposals to review proposal – get them interested with your Project

N.B. – Cutting and pasting the first two paragraphs of your introduction generally is not successful.

Write the Proposal with the Reviewers in Mind

- Put yourself in the shoes of a reviewer who will read between 12 and 15 proposals.

  - Capture their attention

  - Get to the point -- Be succinct

    "What will be different as a result of your project?"

  - Describe how you will evaluate the impact or success of your project

  ⭐TIP: Include resources for evaluation

Resubmission: Respond to Reviewer Comments

- Take advantage of the extra page to address reviewer's comments

- Identify places in the proposal where reviewer comments are addressed

  - e.g., on page 9 we address…

- If you disagree with reviewers, be careful

  - ⭐TIP: It doesn't pay to refer to reviewers as idiots, intellectual lightweights, etc.

Have a Colleague Review Your Proposal

- Leave time before submitting your proposal to solicit feedback.

- Alternatively, ask successful colleagues for a copy of their funded proposal.

- Review abstracts from funded projects:

  http://tinyurl.com/AERC-Projects

Serve on a Panel

- Contact the program NPL to volunteer to serve
- Add your name to the Reviewer Database:

  Send an email to:

  newreviewer@nifa.usda.gov

  Or better yet– email me:

  rshoemaker@nifa.usda.gov

  ★ N.B. – You may not serve on a panel in the same year that you submit to the program.

READ THE RFA!!!

- The RFA is more than just the Program Description
  - Eligibility
  - Funding levels
  - DEADLINES (Letters of Intent, Full Proposals)
  - Review criteria
  - Project requirements

United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Reporting Results – What did the taxpayers get for their money?

- Report research findings and their implications in your Progress report and impacts statements.

    - Be sure to include some findings and implications for policy, markets, producers, consumers, etc.

- We want to know: What do you know now that you didn't know before?

- Please provide a brief set of bullets stating:

    - What is the research about—what's question being addressed

    - Why it's important

    - What did you find, and

    - What are the implications of those findings?

- This kind of research output is critical for NIFA to justify research investments and the continued pursuit of economic research.

Some Observations from Panelist

- Clarity of thought – clearly stated objective

- Neatness and spelling counts

- Readability—make it easy for reviewer

- Budget should be appropriate to planned activities and should be transparent

- Read and follow all the instructions

- Provide sufficiently detailed materials and methods so the reviewers can clearly understand what you are trying to do – and make it easy to read

- Try to connect emotionally with the reviewer -- early

- Preliminary data is generally a useful addition

- Don't be overly ambitious -- be realistic about what you want to accomplish.

United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food
and Agriculture

Summary

1. Read the RFA!

2. Serve on a panel

3. Write a clear/compelling goal statement

4. Write a meaningful and engaging project summary

5. Assemble an effective team and develop the proposal together

6. Define roles for each team member

7. Develop a comprehensive project outline

8. Write the proposal for the reviewers

9. Have a colleague review your proposal

10. Submit ON TIME!

Robbin Shoemaker

rshoemaker@nifa.usda.gov

202-720-5468

Links to abstracts of funded projects:

http://tinyurl.com/SMF-A1601

http://tinyurl.com/EMT-A1641

http://tinyurl.com/ENRE-A1651

http://tinyurl.com/IREC-A1661

Thanks!

Questions?