

## National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Center of Excellence Information for UF Faculty

### Overview

Link to NIFA Center of Excellence Site: <https://nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence>

The Farm Bill requires that NIFA recognize centers of excellence in research, extension, and education in the food and agricultural sciences. The legislation calls for the agency to give priority in funding to applications from centers of excellence in its research and extension competitive grant programs.

To implement this provision, NIFA allows eligible applicants to request consideration for Centers of Excellence (COE) designation as part of their grant applications. Requests for applications describe the criteria applicants must meet. A factsheet on the process, including the criteria for COE designation, a list of programs offering COE opportunities in fiscal year 2017, and a description of the priority in funding provided to applications that meet the COE criteria is available at these links:

- [Centers of Excellence Provision](#)
- [Centers of Excellence Webinars](#)
- [Centers of Excellence Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Centers of Excellence Factsheet](#)

UF is eligible for Center of Excellence designation as it is Florida's agricultural experiment station. To be designated a Center of Excellence and thus benefit from this higher funding priority, there is no standalone application, but you must include a section in a proposal under another NIFA program to which you are currently applying, such as AFRI, SCRI, or another qualifying program (see below for a full list, or simply check the current solicitation for the program in question for a section on Centers of Excellence). In addition to funding the work proposed, NIFA may recognize the applicants as a Center of Excellence in that area of research.

UF PIs are eligible for this program and are encouraged to apply for Center of Excellence designation in their area of science within their NIFA proposals, if appropriate. Not every track of every NIFA program is eligible, and PIs should be certain that their proposed effort meets the requirements for the program, described below.

### Application Requirements

In fiscal year 2017, each request for application describes the type of grant application and criteria applicants must meet to be considered a center of excellence. Applications must justify the following as it relates to the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activities:

- The ability of a center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, education, and extension.
- The ability of a center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the federal government, in addition to any applicable matching requirements. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award.
- The planned scope and capability of a center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities.

- The ability or capacity of a center of excellence to increase economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues.
- Additionally, where practicable (not required), COE applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture, and schools of veterinary medicine).

### **Priority Considerations**

After all eligible applicants have been competitively peer-reviewed and ranked in accordance with the program's standard evaluation criteria, priority in funding will be provided to applications determined to have met the criteria for centers of excellence. Applications that rank as highly meritorious and request consideration as centers of excellence will be further evaluated by peer panels to determine whether they have met the support criteria.

In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with applications that are not determined to be centers of excellence, selection for funding will be based on peer review and weighed in favor of applicants meeting centers of excellence criteria. NIFA will effectively use the centers of excellence prioritization to ensure these most critical research, education, and extension initiatives are being supported.

Applicants that rank as highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a center of excellence, or who are not deemed to have met the criteria, may still receive funding.

The Applicant's Notice of Award will reflect that, for that particular grant program, the applicant meets all centers of excellence criteria. These entities will maintain that distinction for the duration of their award or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

### **UF/IFAS Resources for Centers of Excellence**

**Draft write up for the PI** (Reference: <http://research.ifas.ufl.edu/main-menu-tab/about-us/research-facilities/>)

The University Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is eligible for the NIFA Center of Excellence designation as an integrated unit with missions dedicated to teaching, research, and outreach. The research mission is pursued through the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, where faculty conduct cutting-edge research in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences to facilitate solutions in Florida, the country, and the world. UF/IFAS provides research support for faculty members assigned to 14 departments and one school on the UF main campus, plus off-campus facilities including 12 Research and Education Centers, five Research and Demonstration Sites (that include two biological stations), a research forest, and an 850-acre dairy farm.

The UF/IFAS has a very robust research program across disciplines with over 500 faculty members with research appointments. Many UF/IFAS researchers are award-winning, internationally recognized experts who publish papers in leading peer-reviewed journals and are inducted into prestigious organizations such as the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Faculty are committed to the UF/IFAS research mission while also assuming Extension and teaching responsibilities. Findings from their research are used as the basis for Extension

programs taught statewide via publications, distance education, and field day events, and are the foundation for many of the classes taught by our faculty.

UF/IFAS scientists collaborate among departments and fields, and with researchers at other UF colleges and institutions in the United States and abroad, to address key issues in agriculture and natural resources. UF/IFAS has 11 members in the American Association for the Advancement of Science and 6 members in the National Academy of Sciences. UF/IFAS researchers receive around 140 million in contracts and grants annually, and research awards for UF as a whole is over \$700 million.

The University of Florida, a land grant university and an Association of American Universities member, provides a rich environment for cross-disciplinary collaboration, both among the faculty of its 16 diverse colleges and through a network of established partnerships with other universities, government agencies, and industry partners.

### **Requirements for Centers of Excellence**

Suggested questions to consider in writing your application as it relates to the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity are given below.

**How will your work tie together people working on related topics and be cost-effective for NIFA in the long run?** *By funding one Center of Excellence in an area, NIFA can avoid funding multiple repeated grants for similar work. The proposal can highlight the ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension.*

**Who are your collaborators, and have you adequately explained their connection to the work in the proposal? How will they add value to your proposal at low or no cost to NIFA?** *This is to show the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the federal government in addition to any applicable matching requirements (if it is in the solicitation - this does not apply to all programs).*

**Is your budget for your award realistic? Do you take advantage of programs and features at UF or through partners that will save NIFA money?** *Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award. This refers to the regular award under the proposed program – there is no special funding for the Center of Excellence designation. It is simply a recognition of excellence and can be a tie-breaker between similarly-ranked proposals to NIFA.*

**How will you leverage the extension network at UF, if appropriate? How will your work impact the formal undergraduate and/or graduate curriculum, if appropriate? Why does it matter that this work is being done at a land-grant university with access to these dissemination methods, rather than at an independent research institution? Why does it matter that it is happening specifically at Florida's land-grant university – what about the audience that UF touches makes this the best place to be doing this work?** *Describe the planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities. Consider not just this project, but your broader research portfolio and how your work is disseminated directly or indirectly through these UF programs – NIFA is designating UF's work in this overall area as a Center of Excellence, not just the project at hand.*

**How does your work impact rural economies?** *This is to address the ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues. You may wish to look at the [IFAS Extension Economic Contribution Reports link](#) in the Links and Resources section below to find appropriate data to mention. Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture, and schools of veterinary medicine). Only include this if it is appropriate to the project being proposed. This brief justification statement is to be included as part of and within the page limits of their project narratives. You get no extra space to cover this topic, so be sure to highlight the most important information based on your area of research and the specific guidelines emphasized in your solicitation.*

### **Programs offering Centers of Excellence Opportunities**

The following programs will be offering Centers of Excellence opportunities in fiscal year 2017:

- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) – Foundational Program and Challenge Areas
- Aquaculture Research
- Biomass Research and Development Initiative
- Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants Program
- Children, Youth, and Families at Risk
- Crop Protection/Pest Management
- Farm Business Management and Benchmarking
- Farm Safety and Youth Farm Safety Education and Certification
- Methyl Bromide Transition
- Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative
- Organic Transition Program
- Rural Health and Safety Program
- Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)

### **Links and References**

- NIFA Centers of Excellence Information  
[nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence](http://nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence)
- NIFA Centers of Excellence Fact Sheet:  
<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-factsheet>
- NIFA Centers of Excellence FAQ  
[nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-frequently-asked-questions](http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-frequently-asked-questions)
- NIFA Centers of Excellence Outreach Webinars  
[nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-webinars](http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-webinars)
- UF/IFAS Extension Economic Contribution Reports  
<http://ifas.ufl.edu/extension-economic-contribution-reports/>
- UF Office of Research Grantsmanship Resources and Boilerplate Language page  
<http://research.ufl.edu/dsp/proposals/grantsmanship-resources.html>