

# GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWING FY 2017 AAES AgR-SEED Funding Program Proposals

## I. General Information

**Program Information:** The full description of the AAES AgR-SEED (Agricultural ReSearch Enhancement, Exploration and Development Funding Program can be found at [aaes.auburn.edu/rfp](http://aaes.auburn.edu/rfp).

**Conflict of Interest:** You must disqualify yourself as a reviewer of an application if you have had one of the following relationships with the Leading Principal Investigator (leading PI) or co-P.I.'s listed in the application:

- (1) have ever been a thesis, dissertation or postdoctoral advisee/advisor;
- (2) have been a co-author on a publication within the past 3 years, including pending publications and submissions;
- (3) have been a collaborator on a project within the past 3 years, including current and planned collaborations;
- (4) for someone in your field, have had a consulting/financial arrangement or other conflict-of-interest in the past 3 years, including receiving compensation of any type (e.g., money, goods, or services);
- (5) are from the same department of the university unless otherwise discussed by the panel member and the AAES Assistant Director, and both feel comfortable with the level of conflict of interest; and
- (6) have a known family relationship such as a spouse, child, sibling, or parent, or other relationship, such as a close personal friendship, that you think might affect your judgment or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

If you encounter a situation about which you are uncertain, please bring it to the attention of the AAES Assistant Director for a decision.

**Confidentiality:** AAES receives research applications in confidence and is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of their submission and contents. For this reason, confidentiality must be maintained; therefore, **DO NOT copy, quote, or otherwise use material from this application**. If you believe that a colleague can make a substantial contribution to the review, consult with AAES Assistant Director before disclosing either the contents of the application or the applicant's name. When you have completed the review, please destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the application and maintain its confidentiality. **If you are unable to review, please contact AAES Assistant Director, destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the application, and maintain its confidentiality.**

Any panel member can self reveal the fact that he/she served on the panel, but CAN NOT reveal the composition of the panel or any of the discussions during the panel meeting or during the entire review processes.

**Application Page Limit:** Project Narrative section (Introduction, Rationale and Significance, and Approach) may not exceed a total of 10 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures

and tables. If the proposal is a revision, one extra page of “Response to Previous Review” is allowed. Project summary is limited to one page.

## II. Evaluation Criteria

### A. For all proposals

- (1) **Overall merit of the application**, including comments on: novelty, uniqueness, and originality, conceptual adequacy of the hypothesis, research question, or problem(s) to be addressed, clarity and delineation of objectives, adequacy of the description of the undertaking and suitability and feasibility of methodology, and probability of success of project. **(30 points)**
- (2) **Qualifications** of proposed project personnel and adequacy of facilities. Research productivity and quality: research productivity and quality as measured by peer-reviewed publications in high-quality professional journals, patents awarded, or products developed as reflected in the biosketch, experience, track record, and training, and adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation. **(20 points)**
- (3) **Relevance** of the project to Alabama and/or U.S. agriculture, and a clear justification of how the proposed project is aligned with national agricultural, environmental, natural resources, food security, bioenergy, food safety, and childhood obesity research priorities and how such alignments will lead to extramural funding to continue the research. **(20 points)**
- (4) **Leveraging** that includes efforts and success for extramural funding, and compliance with federal reporting requirements: Justification of how the project will help extramural grant applications in relation to specific funding sources and potential projects, for researchers who were previously funded through AAES funds, demonstrated efforts of extramural funding applications are required before eligible again for AAES funding (see above under “Eligibility”). Success and the level of success in extramural funding from all sources (e.g., federal, regional, state, industry, commodity groups, private, etc.) will be key factors for consideration of continued AAES funding. Timely and satisfactory reports as required by federal laws or regulations are required for continued AAES funding. **(25 points)**
- (5) **Budget** appropriateness **(5 points)**

Based on the above criteria, the reviewers will be asked to score each proposal using the following scoring sheet:

## Score sheet of Proposals Submitted to AAES AgR-SEED Funding Program

Criteria	Program Support proposals	Score for this proposal
Overall merit	30	
Qualifications	20	
Relevance	20	
Leveraging	25	
Budget	5	
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>*Overall rating: (Excellent, very good, good, fair, poor)</b>	N/A	

\* Please rate overall proposal into Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor categories. This overall rating carries more weight as to where a proposal will be ranked in the final ranking, but the score of individual line items will identify strength and weakness of the proposal.

### III. Selection of the Review Panel

The review panel members will be selected from internal and external sources to meet the needs of the types of proposals submitted based on research fields. In addition to research scientists, extension specialists will be included in the panel to specifically review the extension section of the proposals. Every effort will be made to select panel members with the following characteristics:

- a. Good reputation in his/her research field;
- b. Good publication record and/or good grantsmanship record;
- c. Good ability to provide balanced, broad, and fair reviews with constructive suggestions.

### IV. Roles of Panel Reviewers

Each reviewer will be assigned one of three roles: as **primary reviewer** -- written review required, as **secondary reviewer** -- written review required, or as **reader** -- written review not required. Proposal ratings and scores are required of all reviewers. Check the names of the submitting investigators and collaborators to determine if you have a conflict of interest (see guidelines above) with any of your assigned proposals. Notify AAES Assistant Director ([fasinoo@auburn.edu](mailto:fasinoo@auburn.edu)) immediately if you have any conflicts of interest that we have missed while making assignments.

Please note the different categories of proposals: (1) **Young Investigator Research Support Program proposals;** and (2) **SEED proposals.** Funding rate will vary among these different categories of proposals. It is anticipated that only a few projects will be funded under the SEED category while slightly higher funding rate will be given to proposals submitted under the **Young Investigator Research Support Program** category.

**Writing the review:** Two written reviews will be prepared by the reviewers: one by the primary reviewer and the other by the secondary reviewer. Readers are not required to complete a written review, but can certainly do so. The written reviews must be submitted before the panel meeting. You will have access to reviews by others only after you have submitted your written review and the scores. In your written review, please comment on the following:

- (a) What are the objectives of the project?
- (b) Is the project good science; does it have sound hypothesis, uniqueness, novelty, innovativeness, and is logical based on the current state of the science, etc.?
- (c) Are the methodologies appropriate?
- (d) Qualifications of the team.
- (e) Likelihood of successes.
- (f) Is the project highly relevant to agricultural research priorities of AAES as defined in the RFA:
- (g) Potential for leveraging extramural funding.
- (h) Is the budget appropriate?
- (i) What are the major strengths?
- (j) What are the major weaknesses?

As a general guide, if you rate a proposal as excellent, you should write a review to reflect this rating. Conversely, if you rate a proposal as poor, you must point out the major flaws to justify the poor rating.

**The primary reviewer also carries the responsibility of writing the Panel Summary.** The panel summary is not a repeat of the individual reviews. Instead, it concentrates on major strengths, major weaknesses, and constructive suggestions, based on notes taken during the panel meeting. The panel summary should be reviewed and agreed by both the secondary reviewer and the reader. Be constructive as P.I.s do not need to read negative comments in the panel summary. The individual reviews will be returned to the P.I.s.

## **V. The Panel Meeting**

It is anticipated that one and a half days should be sufficient for the panel meeting to complete the discussions and rankings of all proposals.

Day 1: Arrive, Panel meeting to begin with a working lunch. Local hotel provided.

Day 2: Panel meeting to be completed around noon, working lunch will be provided. Final rankings will follow immediately after the completion of all the discussions.

**The panel meeting will start with a brief orientation:**

1. Introduction of the panel;
2. Review of confidentiality policy;
3. Review of conflict of interest policy;
4. Brief introduction of procedures

**Proposal evaluation procedures:**

Proposals under the same category will be evaluated together before proposals in other categories are evaluated. The panel may adopt a “Triage” processes to eliminate proposals with very poor quality. In those cases, the P.I. will not receive a panel summary.

Primary reviewer will introduce the proposal by briefly stating:

- 1) what the project proposes to do?
- 2) is it good science?
- 3) are the methodologies appropriate?
- 4) Qualifications of the team
- 5) Likelihood of success
- 6) Degree to which the project is relevant to agricultural research priorities of AAES  
([aaes.auburn.edu/rfp](http://aaes.auburn.edu/rfp))
- 7) Potential for leveraging extramural funding
- 8) Is the budget appropriate?
- 9) What are the major strengths?
- 10) What are the major weaknesses?

Secondary reviewer will provide his/her evaluations of the proposal, but without repeating the comments of the primary reviewer. If you concur, just state that, or otherwise, clarify the differences.

The reader will be asked to provide an opinion, especially when the primary and secondary reviewers have different opinions.

Immediately after the discussion, the primary reviewer will be asked to preliminarily place the proposal into one of the following categories:

- a. Must fund;
- b. High Priority for funding;
- c. Medium priority for funding;
- d. Low priority for funding;
- e. Do not fund.

The secondary reviewer and the reader will also be asked to determine the relative ranking of the proposal, while the whole panel may comment on the preliminary ranking.

After all the proposals are discussed, a final ranking will be conducted in each of the two categories:

- 1) Young Investigator Research Support proposals
- 2) SEED proposals

All review materials, print out, CD, downloads, etc, are confidential materials, please destroy them after the completion of the review. The AAES Assistant Director's Office can shred materials left after the panel.

## **VI. Funding Decisions**

Funding decisions will be made according to the availability of funds based on the rankings and recommendations of the Review Panel. Budget will be adjusted based on the merit rankings such that the highest ranked proposals may receive full funding as requested while the budget of lower-ranked proposals will likely be reduced in order to fund more projects. Once a proposal is recommended for funding with significantly reduced budget, the leading P.I. will be notified; the leading P.I. has the option to accept or reject the grant. Final funding decisions will be approved by AAES Director.

### **I. Communications with Principal Investigators**

After the funding decisions are made, notifications will be made to all leading P.I. Along with the funding decision, reviewers' comments and the panel summary will also be sent to the leading P.I. Please understand that no matter how high the merits of the proposal, we have limited funds available. Due to large numbers of proposals, we expect the funding rate to be low. Therefore, the fact that a proposal is not funded does not necessarily translate into major problems in the proposal.