

Agriculture in the Classroom Excellence Grants Program 2012

Partnership between the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization
and USDA Agriculture in the Classroom

Application Due Date: March 1, 2012

Awards will be contingent upon the availability of 2012 funds from USDA

PART I – GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Background

The National Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) and USDA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA – formerly the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, CSREES) for the purpose of carrying out initiatives that promote agricultural literacy. Under the MOU, the National AITC and USDA will administer programs or activities that will ensure future generations are agriculturally literate. One of the programs to be administered is the mini-grants program, which will hereafter be referred to as the "Agriculture in the Classroom Excellence (ACE) Grants Program."

B. Purpose, Priorities, and Fund Availability

The purpose of this grant program is to strengthen state programs by funding innovative ideas and proven outreach strategies to increase agricultural literacy among K-12 teachers and their students. (Secondary Applied Technology Agriculture Education teachers may benefit from an ACE project, but are NOT the target audience for ACE project funding. Proposals that only serve this audience will be rejected.) ACE Projects should: (1) address a state, regional, or national educational need; (2) involve creative or nontraditional approaches toward addressing the need which can serve as a model to others; (3) encourage and facilitate better relationships in the education community. Approximately \$78,000 is available to fund the ACE grants in 2012. Funds will be competitively awarded. Previously funded project abstracts can be viewed at http://agclassroom.org/naitc/grant_ace.htm.

C. Eligibility

The ACE grants program is open **only** to Agriculture in the Classroom State Contacts who are members of the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization located in the 50 States and the District of Columbia. In future years, funds may be made available to AITC Programs in the following insular areas: American Samoa, Guam, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, Republic of Palau, and U.S. Virgin Islands. To be eligible to be considered for a grant, the state AITC program must pay its National AITC dues and file its State Report by published deadline.

D. Indirect Costs

Indirect costs and tuition reimbursement are not allowed under the ACE grants program.

E. Matching Requirements

Non-federal matching funds (cash or in-kind) are encouraged, but not required. **Note:** Indirect costs or tuition reimbursement may **not** be used as matching funds.

F. Funding Restrictions

Federal funds may not be used to support social functions, promotional items (T-shirts, coffee mugs, food, etc.), and other entertainment-related expenses. Federal funds must be used strictly for items of an educational nature, excluding reimbursement for tuition and academic fees.

PART II – PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A. *Project Types*

Each state may submit only one proposal. States may not submit in the Single State Project Proposal and the Joint Project Proposal. Each state needs to determine the category in which they will apply.

Project periods may range from one (1) to twelve (12) months. Grantees may request a one-time no-cost extension for up to 12 months to complete a project.

1. **Single State Project Proposal**

State Contacts may request up to \$10,000 per state proposal (total project period, not per year). The minimum award amount for a Single State Project Proposal is \$5,000.

2. **Joint Project Proposal**

In a joint project proposal, State Contacts will implement the project with collaboration from one or more additional eligible states. Contacts may request up to \$20,000 (total, not per year) for a joint project proposal. Each state can only receive one grant. **Note:** The funds requested **do not** have to be divided equally among project period years or state entities.

B. *Program Area Description*

Educational Need Areas: ACE grant applications should be innovative; strengthen state, local, or regional AITC programs; and, address one or more of the Educational Need Areas identified below:

1. **Material Development to Increase Agricultural Literacy.** Establishing or improving existing curricula by developing instructional units or classroom resources that promote agricultural literacy through integrated approaches that meet state and/or national educational content standards such as science, math, and social studies.
2. **Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching.** The purpose of this initiative is to advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency, subject-matter expertise, advising skills, or student development. Developmental activities may include both formal training and informal continuing education. Teachers are essential to education. They serve as models, motivators, and mentors – the catalysts of the learning process. Moreover, teachers are agents for developing, replicating, and exchanging effective teaching materials and methods. For these reasons, education can be strengthened only when teachers are adequately prepared, highly motivated, and appropriately recognized and rewarded.
3. **Instructional Delivery Strategies.** The purpose of this initiative is to encourage the use of alternative methods of delivering instruction to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and cost efficiency of teaching programs. Examples include, but are not limited to: 1) innovative uses of computers, teleconferencing, or networks via satellite communications; 2) regionalization of academic programs, mobile classrooms and laboratories; and 3) individualized learning centers; or symposia, forums, regional or national workshops, etc.

PART III – PREPARATION OF AN APPLICATION

A. *Program Application Materials*

The program application is available on the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization website (www.agclassroom.org/naitc). If State Contacts do not have access to the web page or have trouble downloading materials and want a hard copy, contact: **Debra Spielmaker at (435) 213-5562** or email: debra.spielmaker@usu.edu.

B. Content of Applications

General

State Contacts should prepare the application (project narrative, CSREES forms, and appendix) following the guidelines and the instructions below. An application must be submitted electronically. Applicants should send two files 1) the proposal and 2) the forms. (MS Word or PDF documents are the only acceptable formats. Do not scan entire document and send as a PDF. Save the document as a PDF from your word processor). Proper preparation of the application will assist reviewers in evaluating the merits of each application in a systematic and consistent fashion. In the event of a tie, letters of support may be used to evaluate the grants. **Proper format, readability, and legibility are factors in the proposal evaluation and selection process.** Proposals may be rejected if they do not follow the outlined format.

1. Project Narrative (submit as one file, PDF or MS Word):

Must be set up with letter-size paper, one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, and double-spaced. The narrative must not exceed 12 pages. The title of the project needs to be on the first line of the first page, centered and bold. Number each page of the project narrative sequentially. The project narrative needs to include the following items; use each bold item in this order, as a heading in your narrative:

- **Abstract:** Brief overview of the project.
- **Project Rationale:** Describe any work or research that has been done that may assist the project and how this project will meet the needs of your clientele and the mission of agricultural literacy.
- **Objectives:** List the objectives of the proposed project. Objectives should be brief and logically related to the project or opportunity identified. Each objective must be a concise phrase or sentence, composed so that progress towards the objective can be clearly recognized, monitored, or measured.
- **Methods:** Describe in detail the audience and how the program will be implemented. Experimental research and educational projects are expected to employ appropriate measurement procedures with replications and controls. The approach or methods should clearly be linked to the project objectives. This section should include the role of the project coordinator(s), major participants, cooperators, teachers, and/or organizations involved in the project.
- **Key Personnel:** The roles and responsibilities of each PD and/or collaborator should be clearly described. Note the key personnel and briefly outline their qualifications. A one-page résumé should be included in the appendix. This section should include the résumés of all key persons who are expected to work on the project, whether or not CSREES funds are sought for their support.
- **Project Schedule:** Provide a timetable for the completion of the project. Note project tasks, targeted completion dates, and person responsible for each task. Projects must be completed within 24-months. Proposal awardees will be notified no later than June 30th and funds will be distributed no later than September 30th. Organize the project schedule with this date in mind. Example:

Task	Date to Complete	Key Person Responsible	Comments

- **Impact:** List how the expected outcomes and impacts of this project will be measured and reported. How will your project make a difference?
- **Budget Narrative:** Complete the Budget Form (CSREES-2004) as instructed in the forms package. In addition to the required budget form, prepare a budget narrative to discuss how each dollar figure in the budget will be spent and supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify the project’s cost-effectiveness. Describe how the project maximizes limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, and leverages additional in-kind funds.

2. CSREES Forms (submit as one file, PDF or MS Word):

- Complete either the Word version of the application or the PDF version of the CSREES forms, both available on this page <http://aaclassroom.org/naitc/grant.htm>. (To complete the PDF version of the forms you will need to have installed Acrobat Professional; Acrobat Reader will not allow you to save your entries in the editable form.)
- Proposal Cover Page (Form CSREES-2002)
Page A and CSREES-2004 must be signed and mailed separately. Submitted proposals must contain the pen-and-ink signature(s) of the proposing Project Director(s) (PDs) and the authorized organizational representative (AOR), the individual who possesses the necessary authority to commit the organization's time and other relevant resources to the project. Any proposed PD or co-PD whose signature does not appear on Form CSREES-2002A will not be listed on any resulting grant award. Complete both signature blocks located at the bottom of the Proposal Cover Page form. Please note that CSREES-2002 is comprised of two parts – Page A, which is the Proposal Cover Page, and Page B, which is the "Personal Data on Project Director," which is an optional form.
- Abstract (Form CSREES-2003)
Complete this form as instructed. Key words will be used on search engines and if the proposal receives funding, the abstract should be brief and fit inside the box provided. This abstract will be posted online. You may copy the abstract in your project narrative.
- Budget (Form CSREES-2004)
Complete this form as instructed in the form packet. This form must be signed by the Project Director and the Authorized Organization Representative. (The form indicates signatures are required for revised budgets only, but this is a "subcontract" and **AITC must have original signatures on this form.**) Under section A, "Salaries and Wages," use the calendar year. If personnel are being paid on this project, calculate the amount of time to be spent on the project by the person on a yearly basis. For example, if the grant is for one year in duration and someone will be spending five weeks (full-time) out of 50 weeks working on the project, they are working 10% of a calendar year. If the person is really working 30% of their time for six months, but the project is one year long, average this out over the year. Also, if work is being done for no financial compensation, remember to list this time as a "contribution in-kind" in the in-kind dollars.
- Current and Pending Support (Form CSREES-2005)
On this form only list current or pending USDA grants or proposals. Do not list grants you have from other organizations. This form should be completed by the Project Director(s). State Contacts may apply for new funding each year even though a previously awarded project is being completed. If you have a current/active grant with USDA CSREES, including an ACE Grant, note the supporting agency and award number under the "Active" section. For example:

An ACE Grant that was awarded in June, 2009, 2010 or 2011, list the entry as:
Higher Education, ACE Grant
2009-38858-19738

The other columns are self-explanatory. Make sure the percent of time on this form matches the percent of time on the Budget Form (CSREES-2004). Under "Pending," list the entry as:

Higher Education, ACE Grant
2009-38858-19738

3. Appendix (Optional):

- Résumés of Key Personnel: A one-page resume is required for the Project Director(s) and any other Key Personnel as defined in the narrative. The résumés should include the name, title, address (including organizational affiliation), telephone number, email, and disciplinary training or experience. Briefly describe research or educational expertise and interests that relate to the AITC program. A list of selected publications may also be included. Provide other information that would assist reviewers in judging qualifications and experience for the proposed project (e.g., facilities, organization affiliations, agricultural background, etc.).

- Letters of support or other collaborative arrangements are encouraged but not required. However, letters of support may be used in the event that more than one application receives the same score, and a tie-breaker is needed.

C. Submission of Applications

An **application** consists of a 1) Project Narrative (one PDF or MS Word File), 2) required CSREES forms (one PDF or MS Word File) and 3) an optional Appendix (one PDF or MS Word File). Applications must be received as email attachments (Word document or PDF files are acceptable) by 11:59 PM (PST) on or before March 1, 2012. You will receive a confirmation that your application has been received. Proposals received after this deadline will not be considered for funding. The forms are editable in MS Word or in Acrobat Professional and should be completed, saved, and sent as an attachment. Email your application to debra.spielmaker@usu.edu. Forms that require a signature (CSREES-2002 Page A and CSREES-2004) should be printed out, signed, and mailed to Debra Spielmaker. The signed forms must be received no later than March 9, 2012. It is acceptable to send the unsigned forms with the CSREES Forms attachment. The signed forms will replace your unsigned forms in the attachment. Mail forms to:

Debra Spielmaker
Utah State University
1498 N. 800 E. (ASTE Building)
Logan UT 84322-2315

PART IV – REVIEW PROCESS

A. General

Grant Proposal Evaluation: All proposals received by the National AITC Organization will be evaluated by a review committee that will score the proposals based on a rubric. The review panel will be composed of National AITC members (who have not submitted a proposal), expert educators, and scientists from other sources as needed.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria and weights below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA (total of 100 points possible):

1. **Methods and Practicality:** Are the methods described appropriate to determine the results? All projects will be judged as to their agricultural literacy effectiveness and the impact they will have on their chosen audience. Does the project help to meet the goal of agricultural literacy? **(25 pts.)**
2. **Project Significance and Adaptability:** How does this project add to the state's AITC program based on the overall state program size or scope? Can the project be adapted or replicated and used by others? **(15 pts.)**
3. **Instructional Value and Team Approach:** Does this project integrate educational subjects such as math, science, literature, social studies, etc.? Preference will be given to proposals for projects that involve interdisciplinary cooperation, research and educational activities, in cooperation with formal and informal education organizations. **(15 pts.)**
4. **Evaluation:** Indicate how the findings or other outcomes will contribute towards the goals of agricultural literacy. Does the evaluation measure the project objectives? Are evaluation plans adequate and reasonable? Do they allow for continuous or frequent feedback during the life of the project? Do evaluation plans facilitate the measurement of project progress, impacts, and outcomes? **(15 pts.)**

5. **Feasibility of Objectives and Budget:** Assessment of the possibility of achieving the objectives, the efficiency of the proposed project and outreach methods proposed. Is the budget request justifiable? Are costs reasonable and necessary? Will the total budget be adequate to carry out stated objectives? Are letters of commitment attached by all partners involved in the project? **(20 pts.)**
6. **Conventions:** The proposal is in the correct format, well organized, and uses correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization. **(10 pts.)**

C. Conflicts and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. Names of submitting organizations and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to the applicants. At the end of the award process, names of reviewers may be made available in such a way that the reviewers cannot be identified with the review of any particular application.

PART V—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available, the awarding official of NIFA shall award grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in the RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA and the National AITC under this RFA must be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR).

B. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one-time basis as part of his or her responsibility to determine the applicant's eligibility for the grant identified under this RFA. If such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program, NIFA will provide copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and non-financial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

C. Award Document and Notice of Award

Awards will be issued by Utah State University Agriculture in the Classroom and presented by the National AITC Organization in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth in the original agreement entitled "Building Stronger Agriculture in the Classroom Programs Grants Program," CSREES Award Number 2002-38858-01954. The grant administrator will notify awardees upon completion of the review process.

PART VI—ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

The awardee may not, in whole or in part, delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds without prior approval from the Authorized Officer of the National AITC Organization as cited in the award letter.

2. Changes in Project Plans

- (a) The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the projects approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to by the ACE Grant Administrator for final determination.
- (b) Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ACE Grant Administrator prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.
- (c) Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ACE Grant Administrator prior to effecting such changes.
- (d) Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ACE Grant Administrator prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the award letter.
- (e) Changes in Project Period: For changes in the project period (without additional financial support), please consult with the ACE Grant Administrator.
- (f) Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ACE Grant Administrator prior to instituting such changes.

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

1. Annual Performance Report

A Progress Report must be submitted to the ACE Program Administrator by the PD every six months after the date of the award. (A one year project will have a six month and a final report.) The National AITC Organization will submit a progress report summary to the USDA-AITC program contact person 90 days thereafter. The progress report should include a summary of the overall progress toward project objectives, current problems or unusual developments, and any other information that is pertinent to the ongoing project or which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award.

2. National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference Poster Exhibit

Recipients of the ACE Grants are required to present a poster of their project at the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference that occurs after the completion of their project (travel and poster development costs may be ACE grant budget items). The posters will be part of the exhibit hall, it is recommended that the poster exhibit is staffed during exhibit hours as noted in the National Conference program for ACE projects. If recipients are unable to attend, the poster will need to be shipped for display at a minimum. You may include poster costs in your budget.

3. Final Report

A Final Report must be submitted to the ACE Program Administrator within 60 days after the expiration date of the project. The expiration date is specified in the award documents and modifications thereto, if any. Generally, the Final Report should be a summary of the completed project including: a review of project objectives and accomplishments; a description of any products and outcomes resulting from the project; activities undertaken to disseminate products and outcomes; partnerships and collaborative ventures that resulted from the project. The Final Performance Report should be accompanied by samples or copies of any products or publications resulting from or developed by the project. A final report must be submitted to the Grant Administrator within 60 days after the expiration date of the project. Products that are electronically transmittable (lesson plan files, software, multimedia resources, etc.) developed as a result of your ACE project must be made available either on a website (noted in your final report) or files must be sent to the Grant Administrator for use on the USDA-AITC National Resource Directory. A final summary report will be submitted to AITC-USDA 90 days after the submission of the all the project reports.

D. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of USDA/CSREES and the National AITC Organization transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture or the President of the National AITC Organization or their designees determine to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original application of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by USDA/CSREES and the National AITC Organization for a period of one year. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

Special Notes:

1. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means or communications of program information (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the National AITC Organization.
2. The AITC USDA program considers all funded proposals and subsequent reports and related information to be in the public domain. All reports related to funded projects will be made available to all interested parties in printed, electronic, or other means of communication, without discrimination. Names, addresses and telephone numbers of investigators (from funded projects) may be provided to interested news entities, producers, or organizations for subsequent inquiries.
3. The National AITC Organization will give considerable weight to reporting records (length of time that reports are overdue, etc.) of previous recipients of AITC contracts or grants, when evaluating projects for any future AITC funding. Previous grant recipients are encouraged to submit reports in a timely manner.
4. The following statement should be included on products that are printed/published/duplicated with these funds: This project funded in part by a grant from USDA-Agriculture in the Classroom and the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.”