Pre-Proposal Receipt Deadline: Friday, October 12, 4 PM Central Time
All pre-proposals must be electronically submitted, as a single PDF document, via email attachment to ruralfutures@nebraska.edu.

Pre-proposal deadline: October 12, 2012, 4 PM Central Time
Full proposal notification: November 2, 2012
Full proposal deadline: December 7, 2012, 4 PM Central Time
Award notification: January 7, 2013
Starting date: February 4, 2013

Scope: Up to eight awards will be made, ranging from $75,000 - $150,000 each with a project time period not to exceed 24 months.

I. BACKGROUND
The University of Nebraska is committed to establishing a transformative Rural Futures Institute (RFI) http://ruralfutures.nebraska.edu/. The Rural Futures Conference that was held in May 2012 was one piece of a larger development process associated with the RFI. This process and subsequent discussions and input have generated the following vision, mission and core values. This vision, mission and core values are the fundamental underpinnings for this request for pre-proposals.

Vision
“The Rural Futures Institute (RFI) will be an internationally recognized leader for increasing community capacity as well as the confidence of rural people to address their challenges and opportunities, resulting in resilient and sustainable rural futures.”

Mission
“Building upon the strengths and assets in rural Nebraska, the Great Plains, and globally, the RFI, through a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, will mobilize the resources and talents of the University of Nebraska and its partners, including community partners, to create knowledge and action that supports rural people and places to achieve unique paths to their desired futures.”

The work commissioned and supported by the RFI must be guided by the following nine core values:

1. Inclusive: Recognizes that all voices are needed, respected and welcomed; and that the work of the RFI is largely about serving the broad public interest, including those who are vulnerable and the legitimate interests of urban stakeholders. Also, “the youth voice” is often missing despite the fact this population has the greatest stake in the future. Their voice must be heard at every juncture and in a meaningful (not token) role. “Don’t talk about us without talking with us” is an essential principle for the RFI.

2. Transdisciplinary: Utilizes a broad range of views and expertise, including community-based knowledge, to address contemporary rural issues and develop strategies for the future, including those challenges and opportunities associated with the interaction of man-made and natural environments. Some of the
most exciting and creative work of the RFI is likely to come (a) at the interstice of existing disciplines and (b) in integrating local knowledge and expertise with that found in the academe.

3. **Creative:** Creativity is the foundation for both innovation and entrepreneurship. Taken together, they are the key opportunities for transformational impact, both within communities and higher education institutions.

4. **Reflective and Collaborative:** Creates learning communities and networks of rural residents/leaders, academics and institutional partners. These networks provide new knowledge and insight from the past and continuously and critically assess, evaluate and perform mid-course adjustments to pursue positive change. Networks, rather than a hierarchy, are central to the RFI because networks tend, by their nature, to be flexible, which facilitates learning, innovation, the development of social capital and the sharing of scarce resources. All are necessary if the RFI and its partners, including community partners (both rural and urban), are to maximize opportunities.

5. **Bold:** Strategies and tactics are often too tightly tied to what has happened in the past (i.e., path dependent) and are neither very creative nor inspirational. This applies to rural communities as well as higher education and other institutions. Bold ideas often have higher risk, but should be advanced in exchange for potentially higher rewards.

6. **Opportunistic and Resilient:** Expands the capacity of academic institutions, as well as rural people and places, to respond quickly and effectively to expected and unexpected events, resulting in more strategic and resilient responses to ever-changing circumstances.

7. **Capacity Building:** Focusing on opportunities and challenges is not enough. The RFI must also focus on expanding the capacity of all stakeholders to respond quickly and effectively to future events.

8. **All Serving:** The RFI will focus its work on advancing the genuine economic interests of all, including opportunities for those who work to own the fruits of their labor through self-employment.

9. **Sustainable:** Requires that the RFI has a long-term perspective to ensure sustained effectiveness and that a community’s progress and viability are defined by the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental considerations.

**II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**
The purpose of the RFI Competitive Grants Program is to foster the development of research and engagement work that addresses critical challenges and opportunities facing rural Nebraska and the Great Plains. These grants are to function as “seed grants” that are designed to lay the foundation for larger requests to funding sources external to the University of Nebraska.

Although all of the above-noted core values underpin this Competitive Grants Program, successful proposals must explicitly address transdisciplinary and collaborative considerations both internal and external to the University. As noted above transdisciplinary work “utilizes a broad range of views and expertise, including community- based knowledge, to address contemporary rural issues…” Additionally, if the RFI is to be successful, it must create an environment in which deep and meaningful collaborative partnerships are the norm: across campuses; across departments and disciplines; and with external stakeholders such as other non-University campuses, communities, state
and local government, trade associations, civic groups and the philanthropic community. These collaborative partnerships are the essence of engaged research or “engagement”. Engaged research establishes reciprocal relationships of mutual respect and understanding. The mindset and attitude must be one of doing research “with the community”, rather than doing research “for the community” or “to the community”.

Finally, it is important to note that the issues facing rural Nebraska include economic considerations but not to the exclusion of other equally important considerations. Basic human services such as health care and education present both challenges and opportunities to rural people and places. Even broader considerations are the natural environment; and the civic, cultural, design and artistic aspect of human and community development that cannot easily be counted and measured, nor justified only in terms of economic returns. This competitive grants program encourages proposals in which “progress and viability” are defined by the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental considerations.

III. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

- For this first round of grants, only University of Nebraska faculty and staff are eligible to serve as a Principal Investigator (PI).
- An individual may serve as the PI for only one proposal but may serve as a Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) on one or more proposals.
- Co-PIs and other contributors need not be affiliated with the University of Nebraska. Indeed, such formal alliances external to the University of Nebraska are strongly encouraged.

IV. REVIEW PROCESS

Pre-proposals will be reviewed by a panel that will include both academic and non-academic representation. This panel will prioritize applications for funding based upon the selection criteria provided below. Final selections of pre-proposals will be made by the NU Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources. A similar process will be used to prioritize and make awards from the full proposals that are submitted for further consideration.

V. SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Potential to result in contributions to and measurable outcomes consistent with the RFI Vision and Mission.
2. Compatibility with the RFI Core Values, especially transdisciplinary and collaborative considerations.
3. Potential to increase competitiveness for future external funding that is consistent with the vision and mission of the RFI.
4. Matching Funds are not required but may increase the likelihood a pre-proposal will be selected for further consideration.

VI. EXPECTATIONS
Those proposals ultimately funded will have certain expectations of the PI and the key personnel including the following:

- Participation in a working group composed of RFI grant recipients. It is anticipated this group will meet at least once per academic year to share ‘best practices’ and lessons learned around
innovative and creative processes and strategies unique to the research and engagement work undertaken.

- Recipients are expected to participate in a RFI-led, University of Nebraska system-wide seminar/webinar to share ‘best practices’ associated with innovative and creative processes and strategies unique to the research and engagement work undertaken.
- In addition to the seminar/webinar noted above, recipients are expected to demonstrate sharing their insights and findings at a variety of appropriate venues including conferences and refereed publications.
- Recipients are expected to actively pursue external funding sources and submit a proposal for external funding within 24 months following the initial RFI award. Failure to do so will disqualify the applicant from future RFI funding competitions.
- A final report is required and will be due one month subsequent to the conclusion of the project.

VII. FUNDING LIMITATIONS
Funds may be used for wages and salaries of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students and other key personnel; as well as operating expenses such as databases, supplies and travel that are directly related to the project. Funds may not be used for any of the following purposes:

- To replace current funding;
- Remodeling, renovation or construction;
- Recruitment or start-up packages for new hires; and
- Items for purposes not exclusive to the project, such as desktop or laptop computers, printers, software and related accessories and general office supplies.

VIII. PRE-PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS AND APPLICATION FORMAT:
Applications for this award will be electronic submissions accepted only via email to ruralfutures@nebraska.edu in a single PDF format.

1. Title Page:
2. List of Key Personnel: Clearly identify the PI and any co-PIs and other collaborators. Provide a two-page biographical sketch/vitae for key personnel.
3. Project Description: (three-pages)
   • The project description is limited to three single-spaced pages, using Arial 11-point and one-inch borders in a PDF format.
   • The project description should include information to demonstrate its merit, potential for building new partnerships across disciplines, with private and public sector institutions and organizations, and competitiveness for future external funding.
   a. Introduction
      • Provide background/rationale for project, including (a) why the topic/scope is critical to the future of rural Nebraska and the Great Plains, (b) its linkage to the RFI’s vision and mission, and (c) its connection or relevance to the RFI core values, with a special emphasis on transdisciplinary and collaborative considerations.
   b. Proposed Plan
      • List the project’s long-term goals and shorter-term objectives.
      • Describe project methodology and include a list of project activities and timeline.
      • Delineate the linkages and partnerships that will be forged by the project.
• Describe what these funds will accomplish that cannot be achieved through other means.

c. Outcomes
• Identify potential practical applications, tools, solutions, processes and/or innovations from the project.
• Also describe how this funding will lead to future external funding support, including how the proposal aligns with stated funding priorities of the governmental agencies, foundations, or other potential funding entities that may be targeted for support.

Note: References cited in Project Description are included in the 3-page limit and should conform to an accepted journal format.

4. Project Budget: Provide a one-page budget in which personnel and operating expenditures are identified and explained.

IX. FULL PROPOSAL SUBMISSION
Pre-proposal applicants will be notified by November 2, 2012 whether they are invited to submit a full proposal. The invited applicants will be provided with an editable PDF proposal submission form. Full proposals will require a refined project description, a more detailed budget as well as various supporting information and signatures.

If you have questions about the submission process, please contact Mark Gustafson (mgustafson2@unl.edu) at the Rural Initiative (402-472-7252) or David Jackson (djackson@unl.edu) in the Agricultural Research Division (402-472-2045).