Rural Futures Institute Competitive Grants Program
Teaching and Engagement Development Grants
Request for Proposals

All proposals must be electronically submitted, as a single PDF document, via email attachment to ruralfutures@nebraska.edu.

Proposal deadline: October 19, 2012, at 4:00 PM Central Time
Award notification: December 7, 2012
Starting date: January 7, 2013

Scope: Up to eight awards will be made, ranging from $15,000 - $25,000 per award. The project time period will not exceed 36 months. Each program/project/course must be operating for a minimum of two years.

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 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 teaching and engagement work that establishes a tradition of faculty-led community engagement and service learning programming. Community engagement and service learning pedagogies develop a structure that forms partnerships between faculty and community agencies/programs. The grant program also encourages college students involvement in providing services to help meet the community’s needs; integrates meaningful student service experiences into curriculum; and builds curriculum-based reflection activities to enhance student learning. *The RFI can assist in identifying potential community partners.*

Grant proposals must focus on involving students in one or more of the following areas:

a) **Undergraduate and Graduate Service Learning**:
Grant applicants must enhance curriculum by designing new course(s) or revising an existing course(s) with a community partner agency to include a service learning component. Service learning is a transformational pedagogy that integrates service in the community with
academic study. Faculty, in partnership with community representatives, design service learning projects based on two main objectives:

• meeting identified community needs, which helps strengthen the community;
• advancing student understanding of course content through real world experiences.

Strong reflective components should be built into the course to help students consider the relationships among their service, the course curriculum, and its impact on their personal values and professional goals.

See the following websites for information and examples of service learning:
http://tilt.colostate.edu/sl/faculty/types.cfm; http://www.servicelearning.org/

b) Undergraduate and Graduate Student Research:
Grant applicants must develop and initiate a community-based research project focused on advancing the field of engagement through service learning by addressing a community identified need/issue.

c) Community Engagement:
Implement community engagement efforts into existing or new programs to better align with the RFI core values, creating benefits to both the community and the University. For example, involving community partners in recruitment/retention programs; creating learning communities that include community engagement in the design; establishing diversity initiatives that explicitly link active and collaborative community-based teaching and learning with the academic success of underrepresented students or internship programs in rural communities.

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).
• 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.
• 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.

IV. REVIEW PROCESS
Proposals will be reviewed by a panel that will include representation from the University’s four campuses with expertise in service learning, civic engagement, and a clear understanding of the vision, mission and core values of the RFI. The panel will prioritize applications for funding based upon the selection criteria provided below. Final selections will be made by the NU Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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 for student learning, addressing community needs/issues, advancing the field of community engagement, and advancing professional development of the applicants.
4. Potential for establishing and maintaining the program/project/course(s).
5. Matching Funds are not required but may increase the likelihood of success.

VI. EXPECTATIONS

- Recipients are expected to participate in a working group composed of the RFI teaching and engagement grant recipients. It is anticipated that group will meet at least twice a semester to share ‘best practices’ around innovative and creative processes and strategies unique to engaged teaching.
- Recipients are expected to administer their program/project/course a minimum of two years over the three-year maximum project length.
- Recipients are expected to participate in two RFI-led, University of Nebraska system-wide teaching and engagement seminars to share ‘best practices’ associated with innovative and creative processes and strategies unique to the initiative.
- A final report is required and due to the RFI no later than one month following the conclusion of funding.
- Recipients are expected to demonstrate impact by sharing their research at a number of venues including conferences and in refereed publications.

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. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS AND APPLICATION FORMAT:

Applications for this award will be electronic submissions accepted 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 all 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 describe the proposed program/project/course(s) as it relates to one or more of the following three focus areas, clearly addressing the issues listed in the area below that will be the focus of the project. The plan should include a project timeline.
     - Undergraduate and Graduate Service Learning:
       - Include a course description and learning outcomes.
o Provide a clear rationale for why and how service learning should be integrated into the course(s).
  o Describe the reflection activities that clearly link the service experience with the learning objectives of the course.
  o Provide evidence for the sustainability of the course after the grant period ends.

Undergraduate and Graduate Student Research:
  o Describe the community-based project
  o Describe how the project integrates with teaching and professional service.
  o Describe student roles in the project and the reflective activities structured to link the service experience with the learning.
  o Provide evidence for project sustainability.
  o Describe how the results will be communicated.

Community Engagement:
  o Include a description of the community engagement program and expected outcomes (recruitment/retention rates, diversity focused learning objectives, etc.)
  o Provide a clear rationale for why and how the engagement activities are integrated into the program.
  o Provide evidence for the sustainability of the program after the grant period ends.

• List the projects long term and short term goals related to:
  o Student learning;
  o Furthering institutional and departmental goals toward institutionalization of community engagement and service learning;
  o Addressing community needs/issues;
  o Advancing the field of community engagement and service learning as the pedagogy of engagement; and Community partnerships including the role of community representatives, in the design and implementation of the program/project/course(s).

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.

If you have questions about the submission process, please contact Kim Wilson (kwilson4@unl.edu)