

Aflatoxin Mitigation Center of Excellence Competitive Grants Program

Fiscal Year 2025 (FY2025) Request for Applications (RFA)

Application Deadline: Friday, November 29, 2024

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- I. Funding Opportunity Description
- II. Award Information
- III. Eligibility Information
- IV. Application & Submission Instructions
- V. Application Review Requirements

I. Funding Opportunity Description

The Aflatoxin Mitigation Center of Excellence (AMCOE) Competitive Grants Program was developed by a consortium of southern state corn checkoff boards to provide a unified approach to funding projects affecting growers across the region. The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) located in Chesterfield, Missouri, serves as the management structure for the AMCOE competitive grants program. This structure was developed to leverage more dollars for solving aflatoxin issues and to build strong regional teams that would be highly competitive for federal, public, and private funding.

The AMCOE Competitive Grants Program funds research addressing three **Priority Research Areas**:

- (1) **Methodologies and technologies that prevent and/or defend against the presence of aflatoxin**
 - a. Crop protection (biological control and chemistries)
 - b. Seed technologies (breeding, transgenic, gene editing)
 - c. Best management practices
- (2) **In-field mitigation measures**
 - a. Improved testing/scouting
 - b. Crop protection measures
 - c. Best management practices
- (3) **Post-harvest strategies**
 - a. Improved testing procedures
 - b. Storage and handling technologies and methodologies that mitigate aflatoxin
 - c. Amelioration technology for contaminated grain

While applications for research in all Priority Research Areas are welcome, for FY2025, AMCOE has a special interest in applications highlighting in-field sensing/testing technologies that would allow farmers to detect and manage aflatoxin prior to or at harvest.

II. Award Information

This RFA solicits applications for the FY2025 funding cycle. Awards made under this RFA may be provided by NCGA or a third-party institution of higher education utilizing United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) funding supporting the Priority Research Areas defined in Section I. Awards provided via the third-party USDA-ARS funding mechanism are conditioned on USDA-ARS approval and will include USDA-ARS's required terms and conditions. The start and end dates of awards are dependent upon funding source.

The anticipated amount available for awards to support the AMCOE program in FY2024 is \$650,000. The maximum individual award amount is \$100,000. *This RFA is being released prior to final budget availability for FY2025.*

You may submit one of two types of applications: (1) New Application; or (2) Renewal Application.

(1) **New Application**: This is a project application that has not been previously funded by AMCOE. We will review all new applications to ensure they meet administrative requirements, and all applications will be evaluated by a review panel using criteria and selection processes described in this RFA.

(2) **Renewal Application**: This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications; they also must contain a Progress Report as part of the Project Narrative. We must receive the renewal applications by the application deadline. We will evaluate renewal applications at the same time as new applications and renewal applications will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

III. Eligibility Information

The Principal Investigator (PI) on the application will serve as the primary point of contact for all communications relating to scientific, technical, and budgetary aspects if the project is awarded. PIs must be faculty or staff at an Eligible Organization.

Eligible Organizations for AMCOE competitive research funding include a) institutions of higher education; b) university research foundations; c) other non-governmental research institutions and organizations; and d) private organizations or corporations. Federal, State, or Local government agencies, foreign and international organizations are ineligible to apply for this program.

Subject to the requisite approvals, grant recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary to conduct the project. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude AMCOE from making an award.

IV. Application & Submission Instructions

Applications should include the following sections:

Project Summary/Abstract (1-page limit)
Project Narrative (8-page limit)
Bibliography & References Cited
Curriculum Vitae for PI and Co-PIs (2-page maximum per CV)
Budget
Budget Justification

NOTE: Submissions are NOT to be marked confidential or proprietary. Responses to this RFP may be subject to disclosure and will be shared with third parties for review.

The Project Narrative section must include all of the following:

- (1) Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) and supporting objectives of the proposed project. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed activities significant to the proposed project. Include preliminary data pertinent to the proposed project. This section should include in-depth information on the following:
 - (a) Relevance to stakeholders;
 - (b) Connection to ongoing research, education, and/or extension programs;
 - (c) Reasons for performing the work at the proposed institution(s).
- (2) Rationale and Significance
 - (a) Concisely present the rationale behind the proposed project;
 - (b) Describe the specific relationship of the project's objectives to one of the Priority Research Areas. Applications that do not address at least one Priority Research Area will not be reviewed; and,
 - (c) Clearly describe the potential for improvement in and sustainability of U.S. corn production systems, including discussion of technology transfer opportunities to ensure farmer access to successful research outcomes.
- (3) Approach
 - (a) Objectives: All applications must include a statement of objectives or specific aims of the proposed project in clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged terms.
 - (b) Methods: Explicitly state the procedures or methodology you will apply in the proposed project. This section should include, but not necessarily be limited to, descriptions of:
 1. Stakeholder involvement, if applicable, in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation;
 2. Proposed project activities, listed sequentially;
 3. Techniques to be employed, including their feasibility and rationale;
 4. Expected results;
 5. How data will be analyzed or interpreted;
 6. Plans to communicate results to appropriate audiences;
 7. Pitfalls that might be encountered; and
 8. Limitations to proposed procedures.

(c) Project Timetable: The proposal must outline all important phases as a function of time for the entire project, including periods beyond the FY2025 grant funding period, as applicable.

(4) Progress Report (if applicable) This requirement only applies to Renewal applications. These applications must include a progress report within the applicable page limitation of the Project Narrative. This may be a separate section or incorporated into other parts of the Project Narrative.

Budget requests **may not exceed \$100,000** per year. Multi-year projects will be considered; however, awards will only cover one year, and projects must be resubmitted for renewal funding each fiscal year. Note: End dates for awards are based on the funding entity as provided in Section II.

Budgets should include travel costs for the PI (or a designated project representative) to attend the annual AMCOE research meeting, held each winter in coordination with the Commodity Classic.

Indirect costs are not allowed on AMCOE awards.

Student tuition is not allowed on AMCOE awards, however a stipend to cover hours worked is acceptable if supported in the budget justification.

Budgets should be reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional sponsored project office prior to submission to AMCOE.

Applications should be submitted as a single PDF file via email to AMCOE@ncga.com. Applications should be prepared with 12-point font and line spacing not exceeding six lines of text per vertical inch, including all figures and tables.

Applications for the FY2025 funding cycle must be received by **Friday, November 29, 2024**. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

V. **Application Review Requirements**

We evaluate each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as outlined in this RFA. Second, a technical review panel will evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

The technical members of the review panel will include scientific experts with relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience; corn producer and checkoff board staff members will assess the relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs.

After the panel has completed its deliberations, the corn checkoff representatives will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review. NCGA reserves the right to engage with the PI and/or the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to funding any project.

Applications will be reviewed against the following criteria:

- (1) Scientific merit of the application**
 - (a) Innovation, uniqueness, and originality**
 - (b) Clarity of objectives**
 - (c) Adequacy of the description of the research program**
 - (d) Suitability and feasibility of the methodology**

- (2) Qualifications of the PI and/or interdisciplinary team**
 - (a) Qualifications of the applicant (individual or team) to conduct the proposed project**
 - (b) Demonstrated awareness of previous and alternate approaches to the identified problem**
 - (c) Potential of the PI and/or team to leverage requested AMCOE funding with additional funding sources**
 - (d) Level of collaboration from multiple cooperators and/or multiple states**
 - (e) Planning and administration of the proposed project, including time allocated for completion of objectives, planned collaborative efforts, and dissemination of project results**

- (3) Project relevance**
 - (a) Project addresses one of the three Priority Research Areas in Section II**
 - (b) Proposed work addresses stakeholder needs**
 - (c) Potential to transfer new technologies to stakeholders**

For questions related to the AMCOE Competitive Grants Program please contact:

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