# UF UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

# Finding Grant Opportunities to Support County Extension Programs[1]

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## Introduction

This EDIS publication presents information about where to look for grant opportunities, what to look for when reviewing grant opportunities, and how to determine if the opportunity fits your idea.

## Starting Your Search

There are two broad categories of grants available to county faculty: internal and external.

## Internal Grants

Internal grants are opportunities offered by the University of Florida and its subsidiaries, such as the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). Sometimes, these grant opportunities are restricted to specific program areas or geographic regions. Increasingly, grant opportunities are being written to promote submissions that focus on major issues that cross programmatic boundaries, such as water quality or climate change.

## External Grants

External grants are provided by government agencies, private companies, and nonprofit organizations. A list of grantors who recently funded proposals for Extension faculty is presented in Appendix A. Traditionally, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA, formerly CSREES), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have offered grants relevant to Extension. Grants offered at the federal level tend to be large-scale grants made primarily to fund research. The good news is that many large-scale grants now require Extension and/or outreach components in order to be funded, and that provides an excellent opportunity for county faculty to become involved. It is essential for you to know which state specialists are conducting research related to your program area so that you can communicate your interest in collaborating on grant projects.

Despite the recent trend for larger federal grants to now require an Extension component, county faculty have historically had their best success with other funding sources. Private companies and their associated foundations often support educational programs, such as those provided by Extension, as a part of their philanthropic efforts. Some private companies' initiatives, such as J.C. Penney's support of after-school programs, offer national opportunities to seek grant funding. However, your best bet may be to search the websites of companies located within your county. Banks commonly offer smaller grants to community organizations. Chain stores are another likely candidate for grant opportunities. For example, Tractor Supply is a corporate sponsor of 4-H, while the Home Depot Foundation supports the Community Impact Grants Program, and the Lowe's Charitable and Educational

Foundation supports community improvement projects and K-12 public education.

Nonprofit organizations are the third major sponsor of external grant opportunities. Although the private companies' foundations are nonprofit, the types of nonprofit organizations referred to in this publication are independent nonprofit organizations. These can be foundations privately organized by individuals or families, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, The Sunshine Lady Foundation, The Gulf Coast Community Foundation, the Everglades Foundation, and the Broad Foundations. Other nonprofit organizations are special interest groups that support grants related to their causes. For example, the National Rifle Association has been a strong supporter of the 4-H shooting sports program.

## Learning About Grant Opportunities

There are three primary ways to learn about grant opportunities:

*1. Use an Internet search engine to broadly search using key words related to the type of grant that you are seeking.* This works best when "fishing" for information about whether or not an organization may offer grants. For example, the authors learned about the Home Depot and Lowe's charitable giving by searching with the key terms "Home Depot community grants" and "Lowe's community grants."

*2. Search an organization's website directly.* Many organizations that regularly fund grant opportunities have a central location within their websites where all grant opportunities are announced. Once you find that page, you can save it as a "favorite" and make it a part of your regular routine to check for newly announced opportunities. If you are interested in pursuing federal and other large-scale grants, some helpful pages to visit include the following:

- UF Office of Research's finding funding page (http://research.ufl.edu/faculty_and_staff/program-development.html)

- NIFA's most recent active funding opportunities (http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/recentReleasedGrants.cfm)

- NSF's most recent active funding opportunities (http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_list.jsp?org=NSF&ord=rcnt)

- USDA grants and loans (http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=GRANTS_LOANS)

*3. Search an aggregate grants database or listserv.* Several aggregate grants databases store information about a large number of grant opportunities offered by a diverse array of funding organizations. Grants offered by smaller organizations and private foundations are also unlikely to show up in an aggregate grants database or to be advertised widely on a listserv. The largest of the grants databases is the Grants.gov database that centrally organizes nearly all of the federal grant opportunities, regardless of funding agency. Similarly, it is possible to subscribe to regular listserv updates that identify new grant opportunities. The advantage of using an aggregate database or a listserv is the availability of a lot of information all in one convenient location. However, it can be overwhelming to sort through so many grant opportunities and difficult to find the right search terms that lead you to the opportunities that are relevant to you and your program. One excellent resource for information related to this category is the UF Office of Research's Resources for External Funding website, which provides links to several government funding resources, searchable databases, and free grant alerts. It is available at http://www.research.ufl.edu/research-program-development/external-funding.html.

## What to Look for in a Grant Opportunity

Finding grant opportunities is the first step toward successfully obtaining funding for your program. The second step is to learn more about each opportunity. Grant opportunities are outlined in documents known as requests for applications (RFAs) or requests for proposals (RFPs). RFAs and RFPs are similar in that both describe opportunities to acquire funding. RFAs call for submissions that address a specific topic but do not typically specify methods and deliverables. RFPs are more prescriptive in that the organization describes what tasks it wants done and then seeks the most qualified individual or team to perform those tasks. Criteria that you should consider when reading an RFA/RFP include program area, geographic region, partners required, matching funds, advisory board needs, previous experiences required, time frame for proposal and project completion, and total amount of funding available. It is well worth your time to carefully compare your needs to what is being offered by the RFA/RFP so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to move forward with applying for a grant. In addition, many funders require a letter of intent prior to completing the entire application.

A letter of intent requests that you briefly describe your idea to ensure it aligns with the funder's expectations.

## Determining If Your Idea "Fits"

In the second step, you need to carefully read the RFA/RFP. The final step before committing to the grant application process is to determine if your idea "fits" the mission, vision, and values of the funding organization by checking to see if previously funded projects are similar to what you plan to propose. Nearly all organizations have overviews of previously funded projects available online. This is especially true of government-funded grants. Reviewing the previously funded projects helps you understand what types of proposals have been valued in the past. It is unlikely that an organization will deviate wildly in what it values from year to year. If your idea does not seem consistent with previously funded projects, then keep searching until you find the right opportunity. It is better not to apply at all than to apply for an ill-fitting grant. If your idea appears to "fit" – congratulations! It is time to move forward in the process.

## Appendix A – Sponsoring Agencies of Grants Funded for Extension Programs in 2011/2012

County governments (~50% of all funded Extension grants)

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Florida Department of Transportation

Florida Housing Finance Corporation

Florida Specialty Crop Foundation

National Institute of Health

Tampa Bay Wholesale

U.S. Department of Agriculture

U.S. Department of Agriculture – NIFA

U.S. Department of Energy

U.S. Department of Justice