



Association of
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Centers

STEM PUBLIC PROGRAMS: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers

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*In an effort to make ASTC members more aware of some of the lesser-known programmatic and funding opportunities offered by a variety of sources – and available to science centers and museums – ASTC recently launched **STEM Public Programs: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers**, a new series of electronic briefs where we'll share details from meetings and conversations with key representatives from U.S. federal agencies and elsewhere. In today's edition (which marks our return after a brief mid-August break), we'll highlight the Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Program offered by the United States Department of Agriculture...*

In 2009, after passage of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 by the U.S. Congress, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) was created as a federal science agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), replacing the former Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, which had been in existence since 1994. NIFA's mission is "to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities by supporting research, education, and extension programs in the Land-Grant University System and other partner organizations." Although the agency itself doesn't undertake these activities, it does provide resources at the state and local level, while also providing program leadership and oversight.

As part of this mission, NIFA offers the Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Program (WAMS), which is designed to support activities that will help increase the number of women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas who will pursue and complete a postsecondary degree in the science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) fields. The USDA angle here is a unique one: NIFA awards WAMS grants to support research and extension projects that provide STEM knowledge, skills, and competencies to women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas so that they can become members of the STEM workforce, or innovators and entrepreneurs who add value to the STEM fields in five specific Challenge Areas: (1) Global Food Security and Hunger; (2) Climate Change; (3) Sustainable Energy; (4) Childhood Obesity; and (5) Food Safety. WAMS proposals must also focus on one of three Program Areas as well; they include: (1) Recruitment/Retention Strategies; (2) Research and Extension Strategies; and (3) Career Guidance Programs or Motivational Strategies.

Grant applications may be submitted by eligible applicants and may be a collaborative state, tribal, local, or regionally-based network or partnership of public or private entities. Eligible applicants include nonprofits with or without 501(c)(3) Internal Revenue Service status; colleges and universities; university research foundations; other research institutions and organizations; federal agencies; national laboratories; private organizations or corporations; individuals; or any group consisting of two or more of these entities. It should be noted that informal education institutions including science museums, zoos, and botanical gardens were mentioned by name as "eligible domains" for Joint Applicant Projects in FY 2010. In fact, Twin Cities Public Television (an informal education institution) received a grant for its "SciGirls STEM Network" that same year.

For FY 2012, \$350,000 in total funding was estimated to be available for WAMS grants. Awards may range from \$75,000 to \$300,000, and there is a dollar-for-dollar cost sharing requirement. This year, the

Request for Application was released on March 12, and the application deadline was one month later, on April 12.

A National Program Leader at NIFA suggested that it would be great for potential applicants to consider partnering with an eligible institution of higher education on grant proposals. In addition, she offered a reminder that, in general, WAMS is about supporting the women and under-represented minorities in rural areas to complete their post-secondary education-to-STEM workforce programs/careers.

For more information about the Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Program, including the Request for Application, application tips, frequently asked questions, abstracts of previously funded projects, and program officer contact information, please visit: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/womenandminoritiesinsciencetechnologyengineeringandmathematics.cfm>.

Previous issues of “STEM Public Programs: Updates and Opportunities for Science Centers” have focused on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the Science Education Drug Abuse Partnership Awards program, the Museums Connect program, and the Environmental Education Grants program. Please visit: <http://www.astc.org/about/government/STEMprog.htm> to view these archived bulletins.