merit evaluation by peer review panels comprised of scientists, educators, business representatives, and Government officials who are highly qualified to render expert advice in the areas supported. Peer review panels will be selected and structured to provide optimum expertise and objective judgment in the evaluation of proposals.

§ 3406.20 Evaluation criteria for research proposals.

The maximum score a research proposal can receive is 150 points. Unless otherwise stated in the annual solicitation published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, the peer review panel will consider the following criteria and weights to evaluate proposals submitted:

Evaluation criterion	Weight
(a) Significance of the problem:	
This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will advance or have a substantial impact upon the body of knowledge constituting the natural and social sciences undergirding the agricultural, natural resources, and food systems.	
(1) Impact—Is the problem or opportunity to be addressed by the proposed project clearly identified, outlined, and delineated? Are research questions or hypotheses precisely stated? Is the project likely to further advance food and agricultural research and knowledge? Does the project have potential for augmenting the food and agricultural scientific knowledge base? Does the project address a State, regional, national, or international problem(s)? Will the benefits to be derived from the project transcend the applicant institution or the grant period?	15 points.
(2) Continuation plans—Are there plans for continuation or expansion of the project beyond USDA support? Are there plans for continuing this line of research or research support activity with the use of institutional funds after the end of the grant? Are there indications of external, non-Federal support? Are there realistic plans for making the project self-supporting? What is the potential for royalty or patent income, technology transfer or university-business enterprises? What are the probabilities of the proposed activity or line of inquiry being pursued by researchers at other institutions?	10 points.
(3) Innovation—Are significant aspects of the project based on an innovative or a non-traditional approach? Does the project reflect creative thinking? To what degree does the venture reflect a unique approach that is new to the applicant institution or new to the entire field of study?	10 points.
(4) Products and results—Are the expected products and results of the project clearly outlined and likely to be of high quality? Will project results be of an unusual or unique nature? Will the project contribute to a better understanding of or an improvement in the quality, distribution, or effectiveness of the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional expertise base, such as increasing the participation of women and minorities?	15 points.
(b) Overall approach and cooperative linkages:	
This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach and the quality of the partnerships likely to evolve as a result of the project.	
(1) Proposed approach—Do the objectives and plan of operation appear to be sound and appropriate relative to the proposed initiative(s) and the impact anticipated? Is the proposed sequence of work appropriate? Does the proposed approach reflect sound knowledge of current theory and practice and awareness of previous or ongoing related research? If the proposed project is a continuation of a current line of study or currently funded project, does the proposal include sufficient preliminary data from the previous research or research support activity? Does the proposed project flow logically from the findings of the previous stage of study? Are the procedures scientifically and managerially sound? Are potential pitfalls and limitations clearly identified? Are contingency plans delineated? Does the timetable appear to be readily achievable?	5 points.
(2) Evaluation—Are the evaluation plans adequate and reasonable? Do they allow for continuous or frequent feedback during the life of the project? Are the individuals involved in project evaluation skilled in evaluation strategies and procedures? Can they provide an objective evaluation? Do evaluation plans facilitate the measurement of project progress and outcomes?	5 points
(3) Dissemination—Does the proposed project include clearly outlined and realistic mechanisms that will lead to widespread dissemination of project results, including national electronic communication systems, publications and presentations at professional society meetings?	5 points.
(4) Partnerships and collaborative efforts—Does the project have significant potential for advancing cooperative ventures between the applicant institution and a USDA agency? Does the project workplan include an effective role for the cooperating USDA agency(s)? Will the project encourage and facilitate better working relationships in the university science community, as well as between universities and the public or private sector? Does the project encourage appropriate multi-disciplinary collaboration? Will the project lead to long-term relationships or cooperative partnerships that are likely to enhance research quality or supplement available resources?	15 points.
(c) Institutional capacity building:	
This criterion relates to the degree to which the project will strengthen the research capacity of the applicant institution. In the case of a joint project proposal, it relates to the degree to which the project will strengthen the research capacity of the applicant institution and that of any other institution assuming a major role in the conduct of the project.	
(1) Institutional enhancement—Will the project help the institution to advance the expertise of current faculty in the natural or social sciences; provide a better research environment, state-of-the-art equipment, or supplies; enhance library collections related to the area of research; or enable the institution to provide efficacious organizational structures and reward systems to attract, hire and retain first-rate research faculty and students—particularly those from underrepresented groups?	15 points.

Evaluation criterion	Weight
(2) Institutional commitment—Is there evidence to substantiate that the institution attributes a high-priority to the project, that the project is linked to the achievement of the institution's long-term goals, that it will help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives, or that the project is supported by the institution's strategic plans? Will the project have reasonable access to needed resources such as scientific instrumentation, facilities, computer services, library and other research support resources?	15 points.
(d) Personnel Resources	10 Points
This criterion relates to the number and qualifications of the key persons who will carry out the project. Are designated project personnel qualified to carry out a successful project? Are there sufficient numbers of personnel associated with the project to achieve the stated objectives and the anticipated outcomes? Will the project help develop the expertise of young scientists at the doctoral or post-doctorate level?	
(e) Budget and cost-effectiveness:	
This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost-effective.	
(1) Budget—Is the budget request justifiable? Are costs reasonable and necessary? Will the total budget be adequate to carry out project activities? Are the source(s) and amount(s) of non-Federal matching support clearly identified and appropriately documented? For a joint project proposal, is the shared budget explained clearly and in sufficient detail?	10 points.
(2) Cost-effectiveness—Is the proposed project cost-effective? Does it demonstrate a creative use of limited resources, maximize research value per dollar of USDA support, achieve economies of scale, leverage additional funds or have the potential to do so, focus expertise and activity on a high-priority research initiative(s), or promote coalition building for current or future ventures?	5 points.
(f) Overall quality of proposal	5 points
This criterion relates to the degree to which the proposal complies with the application guidelines and is of high quality. Is the proposal enhanced by its adherence to instructions (table of contents, organization, pagination, margin and font size, the 20-page limitation, appendices, etc.); accuracy of forms; clarity of budget narrative; well prepared vitae for all key personnel associated with the project; and presentation (are ideas effectively presented, clearly articulated, thoroughly explained, etc.)?	

Subpart G—Submission of a Teaching or Research Proposal

§ 3406.21 Intent to submit a proposal.

To assist CSREES in preparing for the review of proposals, institutions planning to submit proposals may be requested to complete Form CSREES–711, ''Intent to Submit a Proposal,'' provided in the application package. CSREES will determine each year if Intent to Submit a Proposal forms will be requested and provide such information in the program announcement. If Intent to Submit a Proposal forms are required, one form should be completed and returned for each proposal an institution anticipates submitting. Submitting this form does not commit an institution to any course of action, nor does failure to send this form prohibit an institution from submitting a proposal.

§ 3406.22 When and where to submit a proposal.

The program announcement will provide the deadline date for submitting a proposal, the number of copies of each proposal that must be submitted, and the address to which proposals must be submitted.

Subpart H—Supplementary Information

§ 3406.23 Access to peer review information.

After final decisions have been announced, CSREES will, upon request, inform the principal investigator/project director of the reasons for its decision on a proposal. Verbatim copies of summary reviews, not including the identity of the peer reviewers, will be made available to the respective principal investigator/project directors upon specific request.

§ 3406.24 Grant awards.

(a) *General.* Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the authorized departmental officer shall make project grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose proposals are judged most meritorious in the announced targeted need areas under the evaluation criteria and procedures set forth in this part. The beginning of the project period shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support. All funds granted under this part shall be expended solely for the