

USDA-NIFA FUNDED REQUEST for APPLICATIONS



Competitive Grants Program FY2026

Application Deadline|12/15/2025
Anticipated Funding| \$84,000-\$100,000

Note: Eligible applicants are state agricultural experiment stations; colleges and universities; university research foundations; other research institutions and organizations; Federal agencies; national laboratories; private organizations or corporations; or individuals within the Sun Grant Program – South Central Region. Projects must fit into the regional priority areas and feedstocks categories outlined in this RFA to be considered for funding.

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE SUN GRANT PROGRAM

Authorized by Congress in 2004, the Sun Grant Program (SGP) is a national network of land-grant universities working in collaboration with national laboratories and government agencies, partnering to build a biobased economy. Sun Grant institutions are charged with making significant advances in biobased industries for the benefit of America's independent farmers, rural communities, and the public-at-large. The primary goal of the SGP is to address national energy and resource needs and establish a national bioeconomy through coordinated regional research, education, and Extension activities focused on agriculture and forest-based fuels, products (e.g., chemicals and materials) and power.

The mission of the Sun Grant Program is to (1) enhance national energy security through development, distribution and implementation of biobased energy technologies; (2) promote diversification and environmental sustainability of agricultural production in the United States through biobased energy and products technologies; (3) promote economic diversification in rural areas of the United States through biobased energy and product technologies; and (4) enhance the efficiency of bioenergy and biomass research and development programs through improved coordination and collaboration between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, Department of Transportation, and the land-grant colleges and universities.

The Sun Grant Program is organized as a network of five land grant universities serving as regional Sun Grant Centers: South Dakota State University (North Central), Oregon State University (Western), Oklahoma State University (South Central), The University of Tennessee-Knoxville (Southeastern), and Pennsylvania State University (Northeastern).

These centers facilitate federally funded research, extension, and education programs in their respective regions. Each program embraces the multi-institution, multi-state, multi-disciplinary integrated approach that is at the heart of the land-grant method of addressing needs and opportunities.

SUN GRANT PROGRAM – SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

The Sun Grant Program – South Central Region (SGP-SCR), located at Oklahoma State University (OSU), is the administrative unit for the region composed of the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. *In this Request for Applications (RFA), the terms Sun Grant Program – South Central Region, SGP-SCR, and the Center will be used interchangeably.*

2026 EXTERNAL GRANTS PROGRAM

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture–National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), the SGP-SCR will award approximately **\$420,000** for projects in 2026. Funds are contingent upon agency’s availability of appropriated funds. **Please note that the timing of award notices and agreements will be impacted by the government shutdown outcomes.**

Project Funding Guidelines

The SGP-SCR requests proposals that will provide education, training, and research support to undergraduate and graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers attending a college or university within the SGP-SCR who are conducting biofuel, bioenergy, and biobased product related research benefiting the region or university under the guidance of a faculty mentor(s).

Proposals may be submitted by a faculty mentor or PI(s) through one of the following types of project applications (*see application guidelines for each option on page 4-7 for details*):

1. **Graduate Research Support** (max. per proposal: \$84,034)
2. **Postdoctoral Research Support** (max. per proposal: \$84,034)
3. **Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Site** (max. per proposal: \$100,000)

Scope of Solicitation and Program Areas

The SGP-SCR invites proposals that will further its mission of developing viable alternative biobased energy sources and products while enhancing economic opportunities in rural areas.

Funded grants will support fundamental or applied research, education, and Extension programs on technology/process development, and integrated research, Extension, and education programs on implementation.

Funding is available to support biofuel, bioenergy, and biobased product related projects. Applications must focus on efforts to support efficient, economically viable, and sustainable supply chains for development of bioenergy and biobased products. Research proposals in areas of feedstock development, processing operations and methods, conversion, and separation technologies for the advancement of biobased industries and markets may be submitted. Projects encompassing agronomy, engineering, chemistry, microbiology, policy, and/or economic evaluation are welcomed.

II. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

Who Can Apply

Applications must be submitted by a university/college faculty mentor(s) supporting an eligible graduate student with a research assistantship, postdoctoral researcher, or undergraduate researchers. The lead PI must be employed within the South-Central Region. Co-PIs and collaborators may be from inside and outside the region. Eligible graduate students are those enrolled in higher education institutions from the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas; and conducting research in one of the areas mentioned under scope of solicitation and program areas.

Cost Sharing/Matching Requirements

Not less than 20 percent of the total project costs or 25 percent of the Total Federal Funds requested must be matched with non-federal funds. **Note: Matching requirements do not apply to fundamental research.** *Fundamental research is defined as research that increases knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and has the potential for broad application; and has a positive effect on agriculture, food, nutrition, or the environment.*

In the event the project is not considered fundamental research, then cost share/matching is applicable. The Center requires a budget narrative that documents matching funds. The budget narrative should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions). Matching Funds cannot come from Federal sources. Any F&A waived on the Federal funds **cannot** be used as part of the required match. However, organizational waived F&A on the matching direct costs can be used.

Facilities and Administrative Costs (F&A)

Pursuant to Section 716 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Pub. L. 113-76), indirect costs are limited to the lesser of the applicant's official negotiated indirect cost rate or 30% of Total Federal Funds (TFF) provided (30% TFF = 42.857% TDC) for budget items where IDC is allowable.

III. Application Guidelines

1. GRADUATE RESEARCH SUPPORT GRANTS

The SC Sun Grant Program requests proposals that focus on providing education and training to graduate students from a college or university within the SGP-SCR who are conducting research benefiting the region or university under the guidance of a faculty mentor(s). Funding will be awarded for a graduate student assistantship up to 8 months duration with a stated minimum stipend allocation. Tuition or tuition remission is allowable, according to the recipient university's policy, and funds can be designated for other direct costs within the maximum award amount.

Funding Information

Projects have a maximum duration of 8 months and are contingent upon agency availability of funds. The maximum award amount per proposal is **\$84,034 with indirect costs. At least \$20,000 of the budget must be used for the graduate student stipend** and the remaining funds can be allocated for tuition, fringe benefits, travel, materials and supplies, or other related direct costs.

Award Duration

Grants will be supported for up to 8 months **starting January 1, 2026 with an end date of August 30, 2026.**

Content and Format of Application

Applications must consist of:

- Proposals, which are limited to a maximum of **four** single-spaced pages with 1" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. The page count includes graphics and tables but excludes references.
- Proposals must include the following:
 - a. Project title
 - b. Faculty Mentor/PI Contact Information
 - c. Type of project: Applied or Fundamental (if fundamental, provide justification statement)
 - d. Graduate Student Information (Name, Graduate Degree Program, email)
 - e. Project Narrative (Background, Objectives, Methods, Timeline, and Plans for student professional development) *Note: For existing research, please provide progress to date.*
 - f. Expected Project Outcomes and Deliverables
 - g. Budget and Budget Justification (not included in the page count). Budget must be allocated to benefit the graduate student and the research being worked on with the faculty mentor. At least \$20,000 of the budget must be allocated for the graduate student assistantship while the rest of the budget can be used for research support (e.g., tuition, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, etc.). Faculty salary is not allowed. Indirect costs (F&A) are allowed.
 - h. References Cited (*not included in the page count*)
 - i. 2-page Biographical Sketches for the faculty mentor/PI(s) and graduate student, including GPA (*not included in the page count*)
 - j. Faculty mentor and Co-PIs' conflict of interest (COI) (*not included in the page count*)

2. POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH SUPPORT GRANTS

The SC Sun Grant Program requests proposals that focus on providing education and training to postdoctoral researchers from a college or university within the SGP-SCR who are conducting research in biofuel, bioenergy, or biobased product priority areas and benefiting the region or university under the guidance of a faculty mentor(s). Funding will be awarded for postdoc support up to 8 months duration with a stated minimum salary allocation and other funds designated as direct costs within the maximum award amount.

Funding Information

Projects have a maximum duration of 8 months and are contingent upon agency availability of funds. The maximum award amount per proposal is **\$84,034 with indirect costs. At least \$31,000 of the budget must be used for the postdoc salary** and the remaining funds can be allocated for fringe benefits, travel, materials and supplies, or other related direct costs.

Award Duration

Grants will be supported for up to 8 months **starting January 1, 2026 with an end date of August 30, 2026.**

Content and Format of Application

Applications must consist of:

- Proposals, which are limited to a maximum of **four** single-spaced pages with 1" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. The page count includes graphics and tables but excludes references.
- Proposals must include the following:
 - a. Project title
 - b. Faculty Mentor/PI Contact Information
 - c. Type of project: Applied or Fundamental (if fundamental, provide justification statement)
 - d. Postdoc Researcher Information (Name, Department, email)
 - e. Project Narrative (Background, Objectives, Methods, Timeline, and Plans for scholar professional development) *Note: For existing research, please provide progress to date.*
 - f. Expected Project Outcomes and Deliverables
 - g. Budget and Budget Justification (not included in the page count). Budget must be allocated to benefit the postdoc, and the research being worked on with the faculty mentor(s). At least \$31,000 of the budget must be allocated for the postdoc salary while the rest of the budget can be used for research support (e.g., fringe benefits, travel, supplies, etc.). Faculty salary is not allowed. Indirect costs (F&A) are allowed.
 - h. References Cited (*not included in the page count*)
 - i. 2-page Biographical Sketches for the faculty mentor/PI(s) and postdoctoral researcher (*not included in the page count*)
 - j. Faculty mentor and Co-PIs' conflict of interest (COI) (*not included in the page count*)

3. RESEARCH EXPERIENCES FOR UNDERGRADUATES (REU) SITE GRANTS

The SC Sun Grant Program requests proposals that focus on providing research experiences for undergraduate students in research priority areas funded by SGP-SCR. The REU Site(s) must be supervised by a faculty mentor(s) from a college or university within the SGP-SCR. Funding will be awarded to support undergraduate participant costs and stipends, materials, supplies, travel, support personnel, and other related costs within the maximum award amount. The faculty mentor(s) must offer projects related to biofuel, bioenergy, or biobased product research and technology development. REU research projects must be conducted during the summer months of May to August 2026.

Funding Information

Funding for REU sites has a maximum duration of 7.5 months and is contingent upon agency availability of funds. The maximum award amount per proposal is **\$100,000 with indirect costs**. The funds can be allocated for participant costs (e.g., student stipends, room and board), travel, materials and supplies, salaries and fringe benefits for program support personnel (e.g., graduate students, post-docs), summer salary and fringe benefits for faculty mentor(s) as appropriate, and other related direct costs.

Award Duration

Grants will be supported for up to 7.5 months **starting January 1, 2026 with an end date of August 15, 2026.**

Content and Format of Application

Applications must consist of:

- Proposals, which are limited to a maximum of **eight** single-spaced pages with 1" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. The page count includes graphics and tables but excludes references.
- Proposals must include the following:
 - a. Project title
 - b. Faculty Mentors/PI/Co-PIs Contact Information
 - c. Summer REU Site(s)
 - d. Duration of the REU program
 - e. Number of planned undergraduate participants
 - f. Project Description (Background and Motivation, Goals and Objectives, Research Environment and Site Qualifications, Nature of Student Research Activities—ongoing activities, proposed research projects and significance, Site Programming and Student Experience, Program Management and Mentoring Plan, Timeline and Milestones
 - g. Undergraduate Student Recruitment and Selection Plan—selection process, timeline, and criteria for recruitment
 - h. Evaluation of REU program (Description of a cumulative evaluation to assess the extent to which the REU program goals and objectives are met)
 - i. Budget and Budget Justification (*not included in the page count*). Budget must be allocated for reasonable participant costs (i.e., stipend, housing, meals), travel, laboratory use fees, materials, and supplies. Graduate student and/or post-doc support personnel salary and fringe benefits, and faculty mentor(s) summer salary and fringe benefits as appropriate (no more than one-month for a given faculty PI) are allowed. Indirect costs (F&A) are allowed.
 - j. References Cited (*not included in the page count*)
 - k. 2-page Biographical Sketches for the PI, co-PIs, and key personnel (*not included in the page count*)
 - l. PI, co-PI, and key personnel conflict of interest (COI) (*not included in the page count*)

IV. SUBMISSION PROCESS

Deadline and Online Submission

Applications should be submitted as a single PDF (filename: "Last name_SCSGPReg2026) via email to Pamela Abit at (pamela.abit@okstate.edu) by **December 15, 2025 at 5:00 PM CST**, using subject line: "**SC Sun GrantReg2026_Last name_Type of Application**".

Confidentiality/Proprietary Information

Confidentiality will be maintained in the application review process. Applications will not be used for any purpose other than evaluation of merit for funding. **However, if the proposal includes any proprietary, confidential information, it must be clearly marked as such.**

Contact Information

For questions and more information on proposal development and submission, please contact:

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V. PROPOSAL REVIEW INFORMATION

Peer and Merit Review

The guiding principle for application review and evaluation is to ensure that each proposal is treated in a consistent and fair manner.

Late proposals will not be reviewed. Upon timely receipt, all applications will be evaluated for responsiveness to the administrative requirements set forth in the RFA. Applications that do not meet these requirements may be eliminated from competition. However, the Center retains the right to conduct discussions with applicants to resolve technical and/or budget issues, as deemed necessary.

Proposal reviews are undertaken to ensure that projects supported by the Center are awarded on the basis of merit, quality, and relevance to advancing the purposes of and are consistent with the goals and requirements of the funding program. As such, applications submitted will undergo a programmatic evaluation by USDA-NIFA to determine the worthiness of Federal support.

Evaluation Criteria

All proposals for Graduate Research Support and Postdoc Research support will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Relevance and scientific merit (innovative, and/or significantly contributes to the knowledge in field, scientifically sound and appropriate methods used to meet goals and objectives).
2. Graduate student or postdoc qualifications to conduct research successfully and be active in the scientific community.
3. Potential outcomes and accomplishments
4. Budget and budget justification

REU Site proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Intellectual merit (quality of proposed research and training activities that are appropriate for undergraduate students)
2. Undergraduate research environment (research lab facilities and faculty mentors' experience with undergraduate research)
3. Recruitment and selection plan and mentoring plan
4. Summer program offered, management and mentoring plan
5. Program evaluation
6. Budget and budget justification

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

Administrative Program Management

The South-Central Sun Grant Center will manage the administrative program management. Contracts and payments for the award will be written and distributed from Oklahoma State University. Reports and Reviews will be collected and maintained by Oklahoma State University.

Award Notice

Notification of award will come from the South-Central Sun Grant Center at Oklahoma State University.

Faculty Mentor/Investigator Reporting Requirements

For Graduate Research/Postdoctoral Research Support Awards

- Recipients will be required to submit quarterly progress report, which are due 10 days after the end of each quarter, with periods beginning in January and ending in September. A quarterly report template shall be provided. Projects will be reviewed quarterly to ensure satisfactory progress up to the maximum period allowed.
- A final technical report (3-5 pages) on project results and impacts is due within one month after the award end date.
- Invoices are subject to non-payment until the Center receives any and all required reports.

For REU Site Awards

- Recipients will be required to submit a final technical report (up to 5 pages) on REU participants' accomplishments, and other specific products and impacts of the REU project and is due within one month after the award end date.
- Invoices are subject to non-payment until the Center receives the required report.