

**Niche Area of Excellence (NAE) Programme**

**Under the Scheme- Strengthening and Development of Higher  
Agricultural Education in India**



**Agricultural Education Division  
Indian Council of Agricultural Research  
Krishi Anusandhan Bhawan II, Pusa  
New Delhi-110 012**

## **Guidelines Governing the Niche Area of Excellence (NAE)**

### **Preamble:**

National policy on education gives emphases on equal access to requisite merit, greater institutional autonomy with accountability, research, quality and responsiveness of curricula, resource mobilization and institutional excellence.

Agricultural human resource developed has played a pivotal role in transforming agricultural situation of the country. In this endeavor, ICAR contributed significantly by providing funds for critical as well overall development and strengthening of Agricultural Universities (AUs). One of the thrust areas identified for the XI Plan in Agricultural Education is building excellence in specific strategic areas in education and research through Niche Area of Excellence. For building global competitiveness in agricultural education and research, in Vice-chancellors' Conference - 2004 held at CIFE Mumbai, it was felt that each university should have one or two Niche Areas of Excellence. Consequently, the programme was initiated during the year 2005-06 of X Plan period. This is one of the prestigious programme of the ICAR and the university concerned.

### **Objectives:**

The Niche Area of Excellence programme is aimed to achieve global competitiveness in agricultural education and research through excellence in teaching, research, consultancy & other services in specific field. Such excellence should be capable of updating itself in accordance with best of global experiences and trends and of being responsive to regional, national, social and economic needs.

The basic elements of Niche Area of Excellence are quality of human resource available; adequate infrastructure; access to latest information; attitude and commitment of faculty, staff and students; recognition & interaction with best of peer groups in India and abroad; shared vision and well developed educational technology system.

### **Scope:**

The benefit of programme shall be open to all AUs under National Agriculture Research System that includes State Agricultural Universities, Deemed Universities, Central Agricultural University, and Central Universities having agriculture faculty engaged in Agricultural Research, Education, Human Resource Development and Extension. The project proposal shall be in specific strategic areas in the field of agriculture, veterinary science & animal husbandry, fisheries, home science, dairy technology and allied sciences, capable of updating itself in accordance with best of global experiences and trends and of being responsive to regional, national, social and economic needs. For building institutional excellence in specific strategic areas in the agricultural sector, under the ongoing centrally sponsored Plan Scheme "Strengthening and Development of Higher Agricultural Education in India", financial support will be provided to AUs for sustaining the regional, national and global advantage attained by them in one or two Niche Areas of Excellence. In future, focus may be given for attaining excellence in areas of strategic advantages such as IPRs, WTO-related areas, techno-legal specialties, Agri-business etc. New centers under emerging cutting edge technologies viz., biosensors, genomics, biotechnology, alternative sources of energy, nanotechnology etc., may be proposed. As far as possible the proposal should be of multidisciplinary in nature with focus on monitorable inputs and outcomes.

### **How to apply:**

The pre-requisite for applying for funding under the programme is to have established leadership and excellence in a chosen area in terms of faculty and location specific relevance of the programme. The eligible institutions are required to submit five copies of the project proposal in the prescribed performa (Annexure I) to the Deputy Director General (Education), ICAR, Krishi

Anusandhan Bhavan II, Pusa, New Delhi-110 012. The application should be submitted through the executive authority where the Project In-charge (PI) is based, duly recommended with full justification. It is aimed that, at least in each SAU, one centre of excellence is developed to compete with the best in the world. The proposals should invariably reach in the month of April so that enough time is available to get the comments of the reviewers/ Subject Matter Divisions (SMDs) about its suitability or otherwise and if modifications/revisions are required to make it more need based, institutions get enough time to act upon.

### **Procedure for evaluation and screening:**

The proposals received in prescribed format will be referred to the concerned Subject Matter Divisions of ICAR and to two known experts in the field, for comments. In case the revision is required, it should not take more than 30 days to submit the revised proposal by the PI which will be placed along with these comments before a Screening Committee. Generally following criteria will be taken into consideration for recommending the proposal:

1. The PI of the project on Niche Area of Excellence should not be below the rank of Professor/Principal Scientist or equivalent and have minimum of 5 research papers published in refereed journals with NASS rating of 5.5 and above or its international equivalence, patents, technology generated/commercialized, and/or other recognized scientific contributions in the last five years. He/she has received a national / international level award / recognition in research/ teaching/extension in the area of proposal.
2. There should be a core faculty of at least five members whose academic and professional records must be of high standard and they should be involved as Co-PIs.
3. The project proposal is responsive to regional, national, global, social and economic needs and should not be repetition of routine research projects.

Mere submission of proposal does not guarantee for sanction/approval, unless it is examined and duly recommended by the experts and approved by competent authority.

### **Screening committee:**

The Screening Committee will comprise of the following:

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| (i) Secy. (DARE) & DG (ICAR) or his/her nominee.                   | - Chairman         |
| (ii) Dy. Director General (Agricultural Education)                 | - Member           |
| (iii) Concerned DDG or his nominee                                 | - Member           |
| (iv) Two Experts from the relevant area                            | - Member           |
| (v) Asstt. Director General/ Scientist- In-charge of the programme | -Member Secretary. |

The Screening Committee will be constituted with the approval of Secretary DARE and DG (ICAR). The ex-officio (retired) members of the committee will be paid TA/DA and honorarium for attending the meeting as per the existing Council's rules.

The functions of the Committee will be to:-

- Consider and recommend the new proposals under Niche Area of Excellence.
- Recommend the duration and budgetary support for the project.

The recommendations of the committee will be put up to the DG (ICAR) through DDG (Edn.), for approval. The DG, ICAR will be competent to perform all ancillary functions including grant of interim extension to the NAE pending the recommendation of the Screening Committee.

**Implementation and monitoring:**

The programme is to be implemented and monitored by the DDG (Education), ICAR supported by the concerned ADG/ Principal Scientist. Annual peer review of physical and financial progress (Annexure-II) by the Screening Committee and assessment of utilization of funds are an integral part of the project. The mid-term review will be done through specific committee constituted for assessment and impact of the programme. The final review will be carried out at the end of each Plan Period along with whole scheme.

**Terms and condition governing the grant:**

*General terms and conditions:*

The schedule of terms and conditions governing grant-in-aid from the Council will *mutatis mutandis* apply to the grants to Niche Area of Excellence programme.

*Specific terms and conditions:*

- i. Grant for engagement of Senior Research Fellow/Research Associates on such rates and allowances as approved by the Council from time to time shall be admissible if recommended by the screening Committee. Their engagement will be coterminous in nature and shall end up with the termination of the project.
- ii. AUs receiving grant should ensure that they have not obtained or applied for grants for the same purpose or activity from any other Ministry or Department of the GOI or State Government (GFR- 209(1)) to avoid the duplication of funds.
- iii. Concerned University / Institution shall extend the available facilities for smooth running of the project.
- iv. Annual project report and a brief six monthly report would be submitted through Dean/Head of the Institution/Director of the Institute.
- v. Duration of the projects, as recommended by the Screening Committee, shall be final and further extension, if any, could be considered under specific cases by the review committee.
- vi. The concerned university /institution shall not transfer/relocate the PI till the term of the project.

**Obligations of the Project In-charge:**

- i. Sanctioned project may normally commence within three months from the date of sanction, failing which it may be withdrawn.
- ii. PI should not be changed without the prior approval of ICAR. In case he/she accepts another position or takes up any other employment or assignment or superannuates, the successor would be of the same rank and caliber preferably from one amongst the Co-PIs who are well versed with the scope and dimensions of the project. Funds shall be withdrawn, if approval of the Council is not taken.

**Operation of the funds:**

- i. After the initial approval of the project, funds for a period of one year will be released. Subsequent releases will be made based on the receipt of UCs/AUCs and half yearly and annual reports.

- ii. Grants will be released in the name of Comptroller of AU/ Head of the Institution, who in turn will arrange to further release it on approved items to the PI. A copy of release order will also be sent to the concerned PI.
- iii. The PI should submit claim for second / subsequent installment of grant and send through the Executive Authority of the College / University/ Institute who is responsible for maintaining such accounts. The Executive Authority should certify that the expenditure claimed under different heads has actually been incurred and utilized properly during the period for which release(s) was made and further that the grant has been exclusively utilized for the purpose for which it was sanctioned. The statement of accounts should also include an adjustment account in the prescribed Performa (Annexure-III) countersigned by the appropriate authority as mentioned above.
- iv. The University/Comptroller will be responsible for timely submission of the Audited Utilization Certificate to the Council.
- v. Any unspent balance from earlier releases lying with the institution will be adjusted in the current year's budget. No diversion/re-appropriation of funds would be allowed under any circumstances.
- vi. All machinery, equipments, books etc. purchased out of the grants will have to be entered in a stock register maintained by the PI and the same should be checked by the Auditor of the host institution. Any movable properties acquired by the PI with the grant may be handed over to the host institution on completion of the project.
- vii. The expenditure on the approved items under the scheme may be restricted to the amount sanctioned under each head subject to the final settlement in due course on the basis of the audit certificate of statutory auditors furnished by the university. In no case, the expenditure is incurred on the items not approved by the ICAR. Except for the need based contractual engagement of man power, liabilities of salary etc. of the staff engaged for the work of Niche Area of Excellence will be borne by the concerned AU/State Government.
- viii. Plan and estimates of the civil works (including extension if any, to existing civil work) for which grant has ever been released/utilized shall be got approved from the ICAR. Extension to any civil works already approved of by the ICAR amounts to new civil works and specific approval thereof will be necessary before incurring any expenditure on such extension work. Expenditure estimates exceeding Rs. 10 lakh per single work needs to be vetted by the Director (Works), ICAR. Prior approval of the Council will also be necessary with reference to equipments costing over Rs. 5 lakh. No new works are to be undertaken, and emphasis should be given on strengthening of existing facilities.
- ix. In case of expenditure of the nature of capital investment, the list of work done or items purchased are to be sent to ICAR on the closure of every financial year i.e. on 31 March.
- x. The guidelines including criteria thereof may be modified, as and when required, following the formal procedure and with the approval of the Competent Authority of ICAR and shall be binding on the AUs taking grant for Niche Area of Excellence. These guidelines shall be effective from the perspective date of approval from the competent Authority.