Legislative Authority
The authority for this program is contained in section (c)(1)(A) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act, Section 2 of Pub. L. No. 89-106, as amended (7 U. S. C. 450(c)(1)(A)). This program is subject to the administrative provisions found in 7 CFR Part 3400 for the Special Research Grants Program which set forth procedures to be followed when submitting grant proposals, rules governing the evaluation of proposals, the awarding of grants, and post-award administration of such grants.

Eligibility
Principal Investigators of T-STAR Projects must be scientists at one of the five participating universities: The University of Florida, The University of Puerto Rico, and The University of the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Basin, and the University of Hawaii and the University of Guam in the Pacific Basin. Faculty members associated with the research and receiving funds from the project shall be designated “Co-Principal Investigator(s)”.

Persons cooperating in the research but not receiving funds from the project shall be designated “Cooperator(s)”. Co-Principal Investigators and Cooperators may be members of the faculties of other universities, public or private research organizations, or commercial sources of research expertise as required to perform the proposed research.

Description of Program

Title of the Program: The title of the program is one of the following:

“Tropical/Subtropical Agriculture Research - Florida”,
or
“Tropical/Subtropical Agriculture Research - Puerto Rico”,

The T-STAR program, Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture Research, is funded by Special Research Grants (under Public Law 89-106, as amended) from the Cooperative States Research and Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture. The program is designed to strengthen the research capabilities and economies of the United States tropical and subtropical areas in the Caribbean and Pacific Basins. Much of the research conducted in the temperate United States is not applicable to these areas due to large differences in climate, soils, crops, insects and diseases, as well as socio-economic constraints. Challenges include continuing plant disease pressure in the year-round growing season, control of alien pests and weeds in Caribbean and Pacific agroecosystems and adjacent natural ecosystems, and post-harvest processing to extend shelf-life and preserve quality. Opportunities include new germplasm collection, maintenance, breeding, and genetic engineering for novel products, value-added processing and marketing of tropical crops, and restoration and maintenance of healthy agroecosystems. Regional agriculture research is critical to meeting the increasing challenges and opportunities in tropical island environments.

**Strategic Plan:** The T-STAR program functions under a Strategic Plan that is available in written format or may be viewed on the T-STAR Internet homepage. The Plan presents the goals and objectives of the T-STAR research program. All persons preparing a research proposal should review these goals and objectives, and the proposal should identify those goals/objectives toward which the research is directed.

**Operational Policies:** It is recommended that all persons preparing a research proposal to be considered by the T-STAR-Caribbean Program review “Operational Policies” available on the T-STAR-Caribbean website. The information presented in “Operational Policies” advises of certain limitations in various components of a typical research proposal such as salaries, materials and supplies, equipment, travel, “excepted” research in foreign countries, and other management policies. All of these policies **may not apply** to T-STAR-Pacific projects.

**Available Funds and Award Limitations**
The current Congressional appropriation to the T-STAR Program is $2.471 million, divided equally between the Caribbean and Pacific Basins. However, future funding levels may be different based on Congressional annual appropriation decisions.
T-STAR-Caribbean research projects are funded annually. Second- and third-year awards are based on proven productivity based on annual Progress Reports. Some T-STAR-Pacific projects are funded for the full term at the beginning.

For the most part, T-STAR-Caribbean projects are limited to $30,000-$35,000 annually. However, certain research requiring obvious greater needs and higher costs may be justified. Some T-STAR-Pacific projects may be funded at a higher level, but average $45,000 annually. No funds awarded can be carried beyond three (3) years.

**Preparation of a Proposal**

**Institutional Preproposal Phase**
The three participating universities conduct a “preproposal phase” from September through mid November during which faculty members are invited to submit a five-page Preproposal briefly outlining the proposed research and estimating the proposed cost (budget). The format for the Preproposal is found at the T-STAR website. Upon receipt of these Preproposals, the Office of the Experiment Station Director appoints a committee of faculty members who review and evaluate the research ideas presented in the Preproposals. This committee then selects the ones that should be developed into a full research proposal. The appropriate faculty member is advised to proceed.

The Offices of the T-STAR-Caribbean Program Manager and the T-STAR-Pacific Coordinator provides a document designed to assist faculty members in preparing a Preproposal for the T-STAR Program. It is important that everyone preparing a Preproposal follow these guidelines, especially when developing a plan of work involving members of the faculties of other institutions. This enables all participants to be following the same guidelines. If not provided this document by the Office of the Experiment Station Director, faculty members may request one from the Program Manager or Coordinator.

**Full Proposal Phase**
All participants in the T-STAR program should follow the format prescribed for a Competitive Grant under the National Research Initiative (NRICGP) program, with certain exceptions as noted herein. All persons preparing a proposal should obtain a copy of the NRI “Application Kit” that is available in hard copy from the Experiment Station Director’s office, the appropriate office responsible for sponsored research in his/her university, or the offices of the Program Manager or Coordinator. This kit contains all required Forms.
Also, the "Application Kit" is available on the Internet at several locations as follows:

(1) http://csrees.usda.gov (then locate NRICGP)

(2) On the University of Florida web site go to the following: Office of Sponsored Programs > Agency Forms > NRICGP > NRI Instructions > Application Kit > Forms. Once at this page, the information can be downloaded to a word processing program. Then it can be printed as needed.

All proposals should be reviewed for assurance of the presence of the following items:

**Content**

Cover Page (Application for Funding; Form CSREES-661)
Table of Contents
Project Summary (Form CSREES-1232)
Project Description (Including the following)
  - Objectives
  - Justification
  - Literature Review
  - Current Work
  - Research Methods
  - Cooperation (Providing services)
  - Project Timetable
  - Key Personnel

References to Project Description
Facilities and Equipment
Collaborative arrangements (Persons actually performing parts of the research-Include letters of agreement) and Subcontracts.
Vitae and Publications list (For PI and Co-PI(s) only)
Appendices (If needed; can include one or two reprints to more fully explain Current research)
Budget (Form CSREES 55)
  - Salaries/Wages
  - Fringe Benefits
  - Non-expendable equipment (Costing over $5,000)
  - Materials/Supplies
  - Travel (Domestic and Foreign)
  - Publication Costs
  - All Other Direct Costs (Include subcontracts)

Budget Justification (Following Form 55; Defends materials/supplies as related to Research; Defends non-expendable equipment; Describes travel Relationship to research)

Other Forms
Current and Pending Support (Form CSREES 663)
Environmental Policy Act Exclusion (Form CSREES 1234)
Assurance Statement (Form CSREES 662)
   (a) Recombinant DNA or RNA Research
   (b) Animal Care
   (c) Protection of Human Subjects

Exceptions to NRICGP Instructions for T-STAR Proposals

Some requirements for NRI Grant Proposals do not apply to T-STAR Proposals. These are:

1. **Number of Copies:** T-STAR requires only the Original and seven (7) copies.

2. **Sections and Forms NOT required:**

   The following items in the Table of Contents in the NRICGP Instructions are NOT required for T-STAR Proposals:
   (a) Item D - Response to Previous Review
   (b) Item J - Conflict of Interest
   (c) Item K - Results from Prior NRICGP Support
   (d) Item P - Applicant Certification
   (e) Item R - Additions to Project Descriptions

3. **Deadline Date:**

   T-STAR Proposals do not go to USDA/CSREES by November 15.
   T-STAR Proposals are due in the Office of the T-STAR-Caribbean Program Manager or the Office of the T-STAR-Pacific Coordinator by the first week of January.
   (Mailing/Shipping addresses are shown in other parts of these Guidelines)

Clarification of Certain Requirements Specified in NRICGP Instructions

1. **Form 661:** Effective dates should be for 1 year only. The starting date should be July 1 of the year Proposal is submitted and ending June 30 of the following year. Subsequent years will be processed as a grant renewal as approved by T-STAR.
2. **Page Header:** The name of the PI’s Institution should be at the top of each page as a header.

3. **Curriculum Vitae:** Required only for the PI and Co-PI(s); **NOT** required for Cooperators. Cvs should be **limited to 2 pages**, excluding publications. **Publications** should be only those **directly related to the proposed research during the past five (5) years.**  
   **Do Include** a letter from each Cooperator that describes specifically what the Cooperator agrees to provide to the research, and the terms of participation.

4. **Non-expendable equipment:** Now defined as items costing over $5,000. Each item requires a strong justification statement that includes (a) a description of the equipment, (b) it’s cost, and (c) describe it’s relation to the proposed research. **Remember:** “Readiness for the proposed research” is a proposal evaluation factor; therefore, the need for non-expendable equipment should be very limited.

5. **Foreign Travel:** Must be “documented” in a justification statement that includes:  
   (a) Dates, (b) Places, (c) Cost, and (d) Purpose, i.e., it’s relation to the proposed research.

6. **Institutional Overhead(Indirect Costs):** On T-STAR grants, by Federal statute, institutional overhead may **not** be charged.

7. **Salaries:** T-STAR Grant funds **cannot** be used to pay salaries of the PI or a Co-PI. Grant funds **can** be used to pay Research Associates, Postdoctorals, Graduate Students and Technicians. UF applicants should contact IFAS Sponsored Programs for information regarding payments to graduate students. Other institutions should contact their appropriate fiscal offices for information.

8. **Subcontracts:** Requires four (4) items: (a) A **Statement of Work** specifically describing the work to be performed by the subcontractor, and including an explanation of the **relationship** between this work and the **Objectives** of the T-STAR project; (b) Identify the percentage of the subcontractor’s time that will be spent on the work; (c) A **separate Budget** (Form 55) for each year of the subcontract; and (d) **Narrative** and **Justification** statements attached to the Budgets. **Remember,** the parent T-STAR project Budget must **show** the **amount of the subcontract** under “All Other Direct Costs” (Line “I”, Form 55).

9. **Institution Signatures:** The “Official” should be the “highest level” official in the institution that has the authority to commit the institution to performing the proposed research. For the T-STAR institutions, the following applies:
Florida: The University Vice President for Research
Florida Only: Attach Form DSR-1. IFAS Sponsored Research will obtain the required signatures. Do not fill in “Due Date” or “Mailing Instructions”.
Puerto Rico: Dean/Director of the Experiment Station.
Virgin Islands: Director of the Experiment Station.
Hawaii: Associate Dean and Director of the Experiment Station.
Guam: Dean/Director of the Experiment Station.

10. **Budgets (Form 55):** Present a separate Budget for each year, plus an accumulative Budget for the entire tenure of the proposed grant. Funds are awarded annually. Form 55 does not require any signatures, except when revised.

11. **CRIS Forms:** CRIS forms are not required until the proposal has been approved. AFTER the PI is informed by the Experiment Station Director that his/her proposal has been approved, the PI should prepare CRIS Forms AD-416 and AD-417.

12. **Research In Foreign Countries:** If the proposed research includes research in a foreign country under T-STAR guidelines for “excepted research” (see “Operational Policies” on the T-STAR-Caribbean website), **remember- no funds can be awarded to a foreign institution.** The investigators can use grant funds to travel to/within and conduct approved research in the foreign country and can purchase materials and supplies in the foreign country to perform the approved research in accordance with the PI’s institution’s procedures.

13. **New Term Limits:** The latest Farm Bill passed by the Congress placed a term limit on “Special Grants” which includes T-STAR Grants. The term limit was reduced from five years to three years, including no-cost extensions. This means that any funding remaining after three years will be lost.

**What To Submit**
An original and seven (7) copies of the complete proposal must be submitted (this differs from the NRI Instructions). Each copy of the proposal must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. DO NOT BIND. In addition, submit 10 copies of the proposal’s “Project Summary”. All copies of the proposal and Project Summary must be submitted in one package.

**Where and When To Submit**
Proposals must be received during the **first week of January** each year. They should be mailed to the following addresses:

**Caribbean Basin:**
Dean F. Davis, Program Manager  
T-STAR-Caribbean  
PO Box 110490, University or Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611-0490
If shipped by **Fed Ex** or by **UPS**, the delivery address is:

1022 McCarty Hall  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611

**Pacific Basin:**

Dr. Lynn LeBeck, T-STAR Coordinator  
202 Gilmore Hall  
University of Hawaii  
3050 Maile Way  
Honolulu, HI 96822

**Peer Reviewers:** The letter of transmittal of the proposal should provide a list of at least five (5) persons qualified and knowledgeable in the proposed field of endeavor whom the PI believes will be willing to serve as peer reviewers for the proposal.

**Selection Process**

**Peer Review:** The T-STAR program managers submit each proposal to knowledgeable peer reviewers, using the list of suggested peer reviewers submitted by the Principal Investigators. In some cases, additional peer reviewers will be utilized. Peer reviewers are encouraged to make comments as well as use a specific evaluation form provided to them. The program managers compile all proposals along with the evaluation forms and comments by peer reviewers which are then submitted to their respective T-STAR Technical Committees.

**Caribbean Review:** The members of Caribbean Technical Committee review and evaluate each proposal along with the peer reviewer’s evaluation forms and comments. Each Committee member groups the total number of proposals into “Groups of Five”, beginning with the “best” five, the “second best” five, etc. Each “Group of Five” is assigned a value. These values are then accumulated and the consensus “Groups of Five” are established.

**Pacific Review:** The members of the Pacific Technical Committee review and evaluate each proposal along with the peer reviewer’s evaluation forms and comments. Each member ranks the proposals based on the criteria listed below, as well as reviewer input.
**Evaluation Criteria:** Criteria followed by the Technical Committees are the same as those followed by peer panels in the NRI program, together with criteria specific for the T-STAR program. These criteria are:

(1) Scientific merit
   - Conceptual adequacy of the hypothesis or approach as related to program objectives
   - Clarity and delineation of proposed project objectives as related to program issues and objectives
   - Adequacy of the description of the proposed work
   - Suitability and feasibility of the methodology for conducting the work
   - Probability of success of the project
   - Novelty, uniqueness, and originality

(2) Qualifications of the proposed project personnel, partnerships and adequacy of the facilities and equipment available
   - Training and demonstrated awareness of previous alternative approaches to relevant objective(s) listed in the Request for Proposals and/or potential for future accomplishments
   - Partnerships with other disciplines and institutions
   - Time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives
   - Institutional experience and competence in the identified area of work
   - Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities and instrumentation

(3) Adoption or transfer of technology strategies
   - Established or documented linkage with industry partner(s)
   - Clear and effective plan for educational outreach and technology transfer to end users

(4) Specific T-STAR issues
   - Relevancy to the needs of Caribbean and Pacific agriculture
   - “Balance” in problem areas in the T-STAR program
   - Current critical issues in tropical/subtropical agriculture

**Funding Awards:** As the Technical Committees go through each proposal, budget requests in the proposals are carefully reviewed and discussed. In some cases, changes are made in the budgets requested by the Principal Investigators, if amounts requested are considered unreasonable for the research involved. This process continues until all dollars allocated to the program are exhausted. Projects in the Caribbean Basin are allocated funds each year of the project’s tenure. In some cases, projects in the Pacific Basin are allocated total funds for the complete tenure of the project.
**Proposal Revision**: The Office of the Experiment Station Director advises the Principal Investigators of the fate of their proposal: “Approved” for funding, or “Not Approved” for funding. The Principal Investigators of Approved proposals are requested to make adjustments in Project budgets as advised, to consider suggestions from Peer Reviewers, and to make other changes as directed by their Station Director.

**Submittal to USDA**: After the Principal Investigators of Approved proposals make the directed changes in their proposals, the proposals are returned to their Director’s offices where they are “packaged” into one “Umbrella” proposal for the institution. The Umbrella proposal is then submitted to USDA/CSREES either directly or through the appropriate Program Manager or Coordinator.

**Processing by USDA**: The Grants Management office of USDA/CSREES processes the proposals, assigns them a number, notifies the University of receipt, gives final approval of the proposal, and finally allocates the funds to each University.

**USDA Awarding of the Grant**: Upon approval of the Umbrella grant proposals by USDA/CSREES, funds are allocated to the each university, who in turn advise the Principal Investigators that their requested funds are available.

**Project Management**
Principal Investigators of T-STAR-Caribbean research projects should review “Operational Policies” on the T-STAR-Caribbean Web site on the Internet. Many of these policies also apply to T-STAR-Pacific projects. Some items of specific interest include the following:

**Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility**: The grantee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of grant funds.

**Annual Progress Report**: Principal Investigators must submit by the first week of March each year a Progress Report to their Program Manager or Coordinator. Specific instructions for this Progress Report will be provided to Principal Investigators. Essentially, the narrative should report details of all significant activities towards achieving the goals and objectives of the project and should be succinct and be no longer than five (5) pages, using 12-point font, single-spaced type. A budget summary should be attached which will provide an overview of all monies spent during the reporting period.

**Termination Report**: Within 90 days after termination of the research project, Principal Investigators should submit a “Termination Report” covering all aspects of the research that relate to achievement of goals and objectives as planned. Principal Investigators will be provided specific instructions for this report.
As part of the Termination Report, the PI shall provide an Impact Statement. This statement should describe the impact of the results of the research in terms of scientific and economic (or potential economic) values. The statement may include one or more illustrations. The Program Manager or Coordinator may provide the PI a document entitled, “What Is Impact?” at the time the Termination Report is requested.
Changes in Project Plans:

(1) The permissible changes by the Principal Investigator, or other key project personnel in the approved project grant shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project’s approved goals. If the Principal Investigator and the Program Manager or Coordinator are uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the USDA/CSREES Program Officer.

(2) Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the Principal Investigator and approved in writing by the USDA/CSREES Program Officer prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

(3) Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement of other key project personnel shall be requested by the Principal Investigator or his/her Institution and approved in writing by the awarding official of USDA/CSREES prior to effecting such changes.

(4) Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provision of payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the Principal Investigator and approved in writing by the USDA/CSREES Program Officer prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the grant.

(5) Changes in Project Period: The project period may be extended by USDA/CSREES without additional financial support, for such additional period(s), within the statutory limitation, as the USDA/CSREES Program Officer determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project. Any extension of time shall be conditional upon prior request by the Principal Investigator or his/her Institution and approval in written by the USDA/CSREES Program Officer, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the grant.

(6) Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the Principal Investigator or his/her Institution and approved in writing by the USDA/CSREES Program Officer prior to instituting such changes if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or in the grant award.

Other Federal Statutes and Regulations That Apply
T-STAR Grants are awarded under USDA authorizations that apply to “Special Grants”. Therefore, all Federal Statutes and Regulations that apply to USDA “Special Grants” are applicable to grants under the Tropical/Subtropical Agriculture Research (T-STAR) research program. Questions regarding these statutes and regulations may be answered in appropriate information published in the Federal Register.