

## **Critical Infrastructure Support for Colleges of Agriculture at Land-grant Universities**

### **April 2020**

This formal request elevates the national problem of critical infrastructure needs for research, Extension and teaching facilities at 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-grant and non-Land-grant schools of agriculture (herein referred to collectively as Land-grant) to a **priority for Federal resources** through funding an infrastructure grant program administered by USDA/NIFA. These Land-grant schools of agriculture have assured a plentiful, safe, affordable food supply in America for decades, which has continued through the current COVID 19 pandemic.

In February 2015, the APLU/BAA Policy Board of Directors, with Land-grant system-wide financial support, contracted with Sightlines, a nationally recognized independent consulting firm that specializes in analyzing and benchmarking all aspects of deferred maintenance, capital investment, and facilities operations at universities across the United States, to document infrastructure needs on Land-grant university campuses. The results of that comprehensive study <http://escop.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/A-National-Study-of-Capital-Infrastructure-Deferred-Maintenance-at-Sch-.pdf> were released on October 15, 2015 and documented a staggering collective total of \$8.4 billion in deferred maintenance for buildings and supporting facilities at schools of agriculture authorized to receive U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) funding. This ongoing need has resulted in higher maintenance costs, asset failure, and in some cases, health and safety implications. Addressing this situation is not simply a matter of spending the accumulated amount identified. Instead, it requires renovating and replacing under-maintained facilities and increasing maintenance expenditures going forward. The Sightlines Study assessed more than 15,000 buildings that had a combined replacement value in 2015 of \$29 billion.

Sightlines methodology included a survey of 101 colleges and universities, accompanied by a comprehensive building-by-building inventory of agriculture and agriculture-related space, and detailed reports on infrastructure needs in those buildings. The survey received a 90 percent participation rate (91 responding institutions).

Following publication of the Sightlines report on deferred maintenance at Land-grant campuses, the APLU/BAA Policy Board of Directors appointed a Task Force to review the report and recommend strategies to address these critical infrastructure issues. The committee released their report to the BAA family in November 2016. Among the many conclusions found in the report, the Task Force suggested to “Create a new and separate grants program within USDA/NIFA to assist in funding major renovations and/or new construction to replace facilities created prior to 1990. This program should be designed to make a sufficient investment to help reduce the backlog of infrastructure needs by replacement with new or renovated facilities.” The Task Force further determined from the Sightlines report that “it is estimated that some \$300 million (annually) is needed just to maintain the status quo.” Five years have passed since Sightlines conducted the study, and with no influx of new funds into infrastructure budgets,

resulting in a conservative estimate bringing the current total in deferred maintenance to over \$10 billion.

We propose that funding for an agriculture-focused infrastructure competitive grant program such as the Research Facilities Act, as authorized in Section 7503 of the 2018 Farm Bill, be included in the \_\_\_\_\_ bill. The funding should be \$8.4 billion (including 4% Federal Administration) added to the USDA/NIFA budget designated for infrastructure grants awarded over a five-year period. In addition, we would request that the Secretary have broad waiver authority to implement the Research Facilities Act. Given the uncertainty ahead, broad waiver authority will allow the Secretary to implement the program as appropriate. This request is in addition to the Facilities Improvements at 1890 Institutions program already authorized and funded. The Research Facilities Act would assure a total investment of \$12 billion (assuming a 50% non-Federal match required in Section 7503) into capital infrastructure at Land-grant/capacity institutions across the country and many other locations within each state. Short-term, this program would generate a significant impact on local economies of Land-grant/capacity institution communities and rural areas surrounding outlying research and Extension centers and contribute significantly to their post-pandemic recovery. Long-term, this influx of new funds would help assure continued significant returns on Federal investment resulting from food, agriculture, and natural resources research, Extension and teaching into the next century by addressing the current critical infrastructure crisis.