ACSF Request for Proposals (RFP)
Academic Venture Fund
January 2014 Release

The David R. Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future (ACSF) invites proposals for its Academic Venture Fund (AVF) program. This fund has been created to stimulate new, original, cross-disciplinary research in sustainability at Cornell. The Academic Venture Fund aims to form interdisciplinary teams of Cornell scholars and connect these teams with external partners. The proposed research must show promise for securing external funding and advancing sustainability locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally. The AVF is intended to support proposals that would not be funded by traditional granting organizations because the proposed activity is interdisciplinary, still early in development, high risk, or some combination of these factors.

As you may recall from past communications, the ACSF recently developed a new strategic plan. Over the next five years, the ACSF plans to maintain the broad scope of its key programs, including the AVF, while promoting the development of external partnerships and developing its strength within six focus areas (please consult the plan for more details). As in the past, we encourage submission of AVF proposals with novel ideas that fit anywhere within or between our ‘three Es’ of sustainability: energy, environment, and economic development. We also encourage proposals that build new external relationships and/or deliberately address any of the six focus areas, as outlined in the strategic plan.

Proposed projects will be evaluated for their scholarly quality; likely contribution to understanding and solving sustainability problems; likelihood of establishing new, significant, and lasting partnerships within and outside Cornell; and durability beyond the period of ACSF seed funding. Proposals will be evaluated by ACSF’s Faculty Advisory Board, assisted by expert peer reviewers as needed.

Proposals must include two or more principal investigators from different Cornell departments and disciplines. We encourage connections between the three themes of sustainability. An AVF award is typically used to generate preliminary results needed to garner external funding; develop a common language, methodology, or theoretical framework; or establish a proof-of-concept. For examples of successful proposals, see http://www.acsf.cornell.edu/AVF/.

Most successful proposers discuss their ideas with ACSF leadership prior to submitting an AVF proposal. We can help to strengthen proposals by identifying potential partnerships and further refining the approach. Contact us at http://www.acsf.cornell.edu/people/.

Letter of Intent (due February 24, 2014)
Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a letter of intent (LOI) by Monday, February 24, 2014. The LOI should include a title, one-paragraph description of the proposed research, and contact information (names, departments, and NetIDs of the project contact and other key
participants). This information will be posted on the ACSF website in a directory accessible only to those with Cornell NetIDs. LOIs are published in this way to encourage additional partnerships. Submit a LOI at http://www.acsf.cornell.edu/AVF/.

Funding
Research grants will be made for projects of 6 to 24 month duration (past mean is 14 months). ACSF will not support projects for longer than 24 months. Recent awards have ranged from about $30,000 to $145,000 (mean is $80,000). There is no overhead charged on these grants. We expect to distribute about $700,000 in total. Past proposal success rate is approximately 30%.

Eligibility
All principal investigators must meet Cornell’s principal investigator eligibility criteria; see http://www.research.cornell.edu/VPR/Policies/PI-policy.html. Cornell tenure-track faculty, principal research scientists, and senior scientists meet these criteria. Other Cornell employees or students may participate, but may not serve as principal investigator unless the office of the Vice Provost for Research provides a waiver.

Proposals (due March 24, 2014)
Proposals will be accepted at http://www.acsf.cornell.edu/AVF/. The complete proposal will consist of a cover sheet, narrative with supporting information, and budget:

A. Fill in the cover sheet form available on the site. A project contact must be identified. The project contact provides the communication link between ACSF and the entire project team on all matters administrative and scientific. Typically, the project contact will be one of the principal investigators. Provide a 100-word abstract in non-technical language (strictly 100 words maximum) of the proposed activity. This abstract will be used in AVF announcements and publicity material.

B. The proposal narrative with supporting information must be a single pdf file, with text in 12-point font, single-spaced, with at least one-inch margins. Begin each section listed below on a new page. The narrative with supporting information must include the following sections:

1. A proposal summary that explains the motivation for and risks associated with the project, what is novel about the proposed research, what research methods will be used, and how this project will advance sustainability. This section must articulate a clear set of objectives, a compelling vision of what the project might achieve, and what differentiates it from standard disciplinary research (3 pages maximum for narrative, plus 1 page of references).

2. A plan for new internal and external partnerships that describes how new, substantive alliances will be established with external partners that can apply or otherwise further the research discoveries of the project. Identify the prospective external partners and their level of committed engagement as precisely as possible (1 page maximum, with up to 5 letters of support from external partners).
3. A follow-on funding plan that explains how the research launched by the AVF award will be continued. Include information on potential source(s) of funding and the level and timing of follow-on funding necessary to continue the research launched by the AVF grant (half page maximum).

4. Proposal milestones that include a specific timeline of well-defined activities and measurable outcomes from the project (half page maximum).

5. Metrics of success with specific, measurable indicators that are appropriate and can be used to evaluate the team’s progress in advancing sustainability locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally (half page maximum).

6. A brief curriculum vitae for the lead author and each co-PI. CVs for senior investigators are optional (strict 2-page maximum per investigator). NOTE: Excess CV pages will be dropped from the final review package; please ensure all information fits on 2 pages.

7. A budget justification that provides sufficient information for reviewers to understand the funding request. AVF funding may be used for any legitimate research expense, but will not support tenure-track faculty salaries (summer or academic year).

8. Information on related current and pending support from other sources. Only provide this information if the support is relevant to the activity proposed for AVF funding. Provide this information for the lead author and all co-PIs. Use any format that includes the following information: project/proposal title, funding source, award amount, award period, and relationship to AVF project (e.g., co-financing of materials or personnel, overlapping objectives, use of data or equipment, similar partnerships, etc.).

C. Fill in the project budget template provided. Note that AVF funds carry no indirect cost. Upload the budget to complete your proposal.

Deadline: Proposals must be received no later than Monday, March 24, 2014. Email acsf-avf@cornell.edu if you have questions.

Responsibilities:
Proposers awarded AVF funds will be requested to:

1) Meet quarterly with the appropriate ACSF faculty director or the ACSF director to discuss the progress of their efforts in research, intended application(s), desired impacts, development of Cornell and external partnerships, follow-on funding, and milestones met or missed.

2) Report progress at a semiannual AVF event, in either a poster or panel discussion session, to be coordinated by ACSF.

3) Respond to annual survey from ACSF Director about Center engagement and project details.

4) Submit a final and—in the case of projects of more than one year’s duration, also an annual—written report that describes results and progress relating toward each specific metric of success presented in the original proposal.

5) Prepare an end-of-project press release on results. ACSF staff will be available to help.
ACSF is offering **two information sessions**, including question-and-answer sections, on February 6 at 4pm and March 12 at 3:30pm in 300 Rice Hall. Please contact Paula Euvrard to register.

Thank you for your interest in the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future and its Academic Venture Fund program. Please email acsf-avf@cornell.edu for a prompt response to your questions.