



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Program Solicitation

Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program

National Institute of
Food and Agriculture

Fiscal Year 2010

Closing Date: February 5, 2010

HEC Program:

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Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (CFDA)

10.217 Higher Education Challenge Grants

NIFA Funding Opportunity Number

USDA-NIFA-CGP-002644

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE;
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGE GRANTS PROGRAM (HEC)

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.217, Higher Education Challenge Grants.

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on February 5, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Branch; Office of Extramural Programs; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: RFP-OEP@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA announces the availability of grant funds and requests applications for the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) for fiscal year (FY) 2010 to stimulate and enable colleges and universities to provide the quality of education necessary to produce baccalaureate or higher degree level graduates capable of strengthening the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional workforce. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2010 is approximately \$5.2 million. **Note: Should additional funding become available for this HEC program to support the President's Rural Revitalization Initiative, a separate, supplemental RFA will be provided to explain that application process.**

This notice identifies the objectives for HEC projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a HEC

grant. NIFA additionally requests stakeholder input from any interested party for use in the development of the next RFA for this program.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 1405 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA), as amended, (7 U.S.C. 3121) designates the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the lead Federal agency for agriculture research, extension and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences. Authority for this program is contained in section 1417(b)(1) of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)(1)). Section 1417 of NARETPA authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, who has delegated the authority to the Director of NIFA, to make competitive grants to strengthen institutional capacities to respond to identified State, regional, national or international educational needs to formulate and administer programs to enhance college and university teaching in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, human and family and consumer sciences, disciplines closely allied to the food and agricultural system, and rural economic, community and business development.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program is to strengthen and enhance the Nation's higher education teaching and training programs in the food and agricultural sciences, and to ensure the production of sufficient numbers and quality of graduates to meet the national needs for scientific and professional expertise. The HEC grants program encourages innovative teaching enhancement projects with the potential for regional or national impact to serve as models for other institutions. While research and extension activities may be included in a funded HEC project, the primary focus must be to improve teaching within a degree-granting program. **Note: Should additional funding become available for this HEC program to support the President's Rural Revitalization Initiative, a separate, supplemental RFA will be provided to explain that application process.**

By authorizing and funding this program, Congress expects HEC projects to: (a) produce measurable outcomes aligned with HEC program goals and with USDA Strategic Objectives, (b) promote innovative, educational practices within the food and agricultural sciences that improve how students learn, and (c) include a rigorous evaluation component to assess outcomes are met. Essentially, your application must convince a peer panel of a compelling educational challenge, clearly indicate how your methodology is both unique and with merit, and offer significant promise of adoption by others.

Applications submitted to this grants program must state how the funded project will address these two HEC Program Goals:

1. To increase the number of graduates with a baccalaureate (or higher) degree in the food and agricultural sciences; and
2. To help students achieve their career goals and to help meet workplace needs by increasing the quality of postsecondary instruction within these disciplines.

Applications must address the following items within specified sections of the ‘R&R Other Project Information’ Form (Part IV, B.2.):

1. Address one of the Program Categories (Part I, C.1.); and
2. Focus upon one of the Priority Areas (Part I, C.2.); and
3. Identify and describe at least one Educational Need Area (Part I, C.3.); and
4. Within the project’s Evaluation Plan (Part I, C.4.), discuss how project activities will advance the two Program Goals (above); and
5. Document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts, etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community (Part I, C.5., Dissemination Plan).

Note: Your project’s Program Category, Priority Area, Educational Need Area and primary academic Discipline must appear on the required Project Summary/Abstract. The applicant must follow the format suggested in Part IV, B.3. Field 6, for this Project Summary/Abstract.

C. Program Area Description

1. Program Categories

Your project must support for-credit, academic coursework with a primary focus in one of the following **Program Categories**:

- (a) **Baccalaureate degree-level** teaching enhancement projects in the food and agricultural sciences;
- (b) **Masters degree-level** teaching enhancement projects only in multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary studies; or
- (c) **First professional degree-level** teaching enhancement projects in **veterinary medicine (DVM)**.

2. Priority Areas

Priority Areas are current, national issues derived from selected CSREES Strategic Goals and Objectives found in the CSREES *Strategic Plan 2007-2012* document (http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/strat_plan.html).

Your project must also ensure graduates will obtain the knowledge and skills needed to address one of the following, critical HEC Program **Priority Areas**:

- (a) Globalizing agricultural business, markets and trade, including international food security (Strategic Objective 1.2);
- (b) Developing sustainable agricultural technologies and systems promoting energy conservation and efficiency, including on-farm/ranch renewable bioenergy and wind, solar and hydro capabilities, together with related economic and social implications (e.g., marketing, distribution of products, goods and services, entrepreneurship, rural community opportunities and risks, etc.) (Strategic Objective 2.1);
- (c) Developing technologies and systems for sustainable crop and animal production (including genomics and plant breeding) to enhance the capabilities of both

- domestic and international production systems to meet the needs of producers and consumers worldwide, while enhancing environmental services, ecosystem health and animal wellbeing (Strategic Objectives 2.2 & 4.2);
- (d) Promoting human sciences that address rural youth, individual, and family well-being in a community context (Strategic Objectives 3.1 & 3.2);
 - (e) Increasing food safety and food defense; protecting the safety of America's food supply (Strategic Objective 4.1);
 - (f) Supporting healthy food choices and lifestyles, and obesity and chronic disease prevention (Strategic Objectives 5.1 & 5.2); and
 - (g) Sustaining forest, farmland, and rangeland health and protection including improved ecosystem services such as soil, air, and water quality, including agriculture and forestry's adaptive responses to address global climate change (Strategic Objectives 6.3 & 6.4).

Applicants are strongly encouraged to refer to the recommendations for change from the National Academy of Science 2009 report entitled, *Transforming Agricultural Education for a Changing World*, for supporting your application and improving your project. This report recommends that academic institutions with undergraduate programs in the food and agricultural sciences implement the following nine steps to better meet the needs of students, employers, and the broader society. These recommendations are:

- [Implement Strategic Planning](#)
- [Broaden Treatment of Agriculture in the Overall Curriculum](#)
- [Broaden the Student Experience](#)
- [Prepare Faculty to Teach Effectively](#)
- [Reward Exemplary Teaching](#)
- [Build Stronger Connections among Institutions](#)
- [Start Early—K-12 Outreach](#)
- [Build Strategic Partnerships](#)
- [Focus Reviews of Undergraduate Programs in Agriculture](#)

For information on the full report, please refer to http://dels.nas.edu/ag_education/report.shtml and click on recommendations.

You are also encouraged to refer to a 2009 whitepaper on Human Capacity Development prepared by the Academic Programs Section of the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities. Copies of the whitepaper entitled "Human Capacity Development The Road to Global Competitiveness and Leadership in Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (FANRRS)," can be found at: <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1639>.

3. Educational Need Areas

(a) Projects must focus on an Educational Need Area listed below, and applications must demonstrate how the chosen Need Area will help achieve both HEC Program Goals from Part I, B., as well as your selected Priority Area from Part I, C.2. **Note: Your application must include an Evaluation Plan (Part I, C.4.) for each Educational Need Area you**

select. It indicates how you plan to measure success in completing your objectives within your chosen Need Area. Therefore, choose only Need Areas for which you can commit to develop a rigorous Evaluation Plan.

Educational Need Areas for the HEC program are:

- (1) **Curricula Design and Materials Development.** This Need Area promotes developing new (or adapting existing) curricula and related materials to meet changes anticipated within the domestic or international food and agricultural sciences system.

Projects addressing this Need Area must be innovative and improve the quality of instruction. Projects should update disciplinary content; develop students' analytical, interpersonal, leadership, communications, problem-solving, computational, and decision-making skills and abilities; and should move away from fragmented, discipline-specific, lecture-oriented instruction and toward integrated, multidisciplinary, learner-centered instruction. Applicants are expected to demonstrate how the project will reach large audiences efficiently and effectively; provide hands-on learning experiences; extend learning beyond the classroom; reinforce recent research on how to motivate students to learn, retain, apply, and transfer knowledge, skills, and competencies; and integrate and synthesize knowledge from several disciplines.

- (2) **Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching.** This Need Area prepares academic leadership for sustainable change to address: emerging student clientele (demographic composition and learning styles), improving teaching competency (subject matter expertise and pedagogy), or developing student recruitment and advising skills to increase the number of graduates with a baccalaureate (or higher) degree in the food and agricultural sciences (e.g., increasing faculty knowledge about domestic and international career opportunities, and increasing their understanding of underrepresented populations and cultures).

Projects addressing this Need Area must enable teaching faculty to help students attain their career goals and to better address workplace needs. Activities may include helping faculty gain experience with recent developments or innovative technology relevant to their teaching responsibilities; work under the guidance and direction of experts who have substantial expertise in an area related to project goals; work with scientists or professionals in government, industry, or other colleges or universities to learn new applications in a field; expand competence with new methods of information delivery; or increase understanding of the special needs of non-traditional students or students from groups that are underrepresented in the food and agricultural sciences workforce.

- (3) **Instruction Delivery Systems.** This Need Area encourages the development and use of alternative methods of delivering instruction to help increase the number of graduates with a baccalaureate (or higher) degree in the food and agricultural sciences; and to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and cost efficiency of teaching programs. Multi-institutional, regional, national or international collaborations are encouraged.

Projects addressing this Need Area must demonstrate increases in instructional quality, reductions in duplication of educational resources, or decreases in instructional expenses. Examples may include multi-institutional or interstate approaches to curriculum development, faculty sharing, cross enrollments, joint degrees, regionalization of academic programs, regional and national workshops and symposia, and similar methodologies.

- (4) **Student Experiential Learning**. This Need Area encourages the development of new student learning opportunities to help students meet their career goals and to help address workplace needs either domestic or international. Approaches may include experiences where students are placed in team-oriented, problem-solving, decision-making situations in the context of real-world situations. Experiential learning in laboratory research or field-based internships is also encouraged, but should be within fields of science with demonstrated shortages of scientific and professional personnel.

Projects addressing this Need Area must: (1) demonstrate how the experience will help meet students' career goals or produce 'society-ready' graduates, (2) contain an evaluation process—involving both the faculty and/or employer or mentor—to assure that students meet project objectives, and (3) document that the field of science under consideration is experiencing a shortage of scientific and professional personnel, and how the project plans to address this deficiency.

Funds may be requested for materials/supplies to facilitate a student's broad exposure to research/field techniques and methodologies, reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings), and support for students (stipends) while working in domestic or international research/field settings (including paid internships and practicums) directly supporting this funded project.

Requested funds are expected to primarily support stipends for students while they are working in research/field settings. Grant funds may not be used for tuition, room and board, fees, or student financial assistance (scholarships, fellowships, etc.).

- (5) **Student Recruitment and Retention**. This Need Area seeks to increase the number of graduates with a baccalaureate (or higher) degree in the food and agricultural sciences, through the development of new and innovative counseling, marketing, career information, and other projects that: (a) increase student enrollment in disciplines with documented, critical workforce shortages; (b) target non-traditional students and students from groups that are underrepresented in the food and agricultural sciences workforce; or (c) support the development of new student retention programs focusing on the academic, social, or cultural needs of freshmen, transfer, or other at-risk students.

Projects addressing this Need Area must demonstrate how proposed activities will provide more efficient and effective strategies than existing institutional programs to increase both the quality and quantity of targeted students.

Project funds may be used to hire peer counselors or mentors assisting with these recruitment/retention activities. Project funds **may not** be used to provide entering students with scholarships, fellowships, or other forms of financial assistance.

(b) Note: NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority to address any Need Area may not be used for student tuition remission, room and board, academic fees or other financial assistance (no scholarships, fellowships, etc.). Also, funds may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities (i.e., no greenhouses, laboratories, barns, or other structures). Promotional items (e.g., T-shirts and other give-a-ways) and food functions (e.g., cookouts or other social meal gatherings) are considered ‘entertainment’ expenses, and are also **not allowed** under this grants program. Note: under Federal cost principles, restricted items (like those mentioned directly above) cannot be part of an applicant’s contribution to meeting the matching funds requirement for this grants program.

(c) Projects must be innovative and promote and strengthen academic instruction that leads to completion of a student’s formal degree. Your project should have broad-based applicability beyond a single course or an individual instructor. Projects are encouraged that include partnerships among several academic institutions to more efficiently deliver coordinated, academic instruction that reduces instructional duplication and costs. Equally valued are projects between an academic institution and employer(s) of that institution’s graduates to better prepare students to meet increasingly more scientific, technical and professional work force needs. Academic instruction that can be coordinated by articulation agreements with the applicant and either secondary, or 2- or 4-year postsecondary colleges and universities to increase academic program quality are also strongly encouraged. Successful projects should also have a positive impact on large numbers of students and on activities that achieve cost-effective economies of scale in meeting the two Program Goals.

(d) Stipends to support students’ experiential learning activities are permitted. Stipends may be requested for materials or supplies to facilitate a student’s broad exposure to research/field techniques and methodologies, as well as for reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences outside of the traditional classroom (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings) directly supporting this funded project.

(e) Note: A teacher or student recipient (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds via any Need Area above must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA. Where eligibility is claimed under 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request.

(f) Where appropriate, your project should promote partnerships among several colleges and/or universities (e.g., ‘centers of excellence’) to more efficiently deliver coordinated, academic instruction that reduces instructional duplication and costs. Such projects may include regional or interstate curriculum development, faculty sharing, cross enrollments, joint degrees (e.g., DVM/MPH), or similar, closely-related academic activities culminating in

inter-institutional, academic program delivery, and/or multi-disciplinary approach to education.

4. Evaluation Plan

In addition to measuring progress toward achieving the specific objectives of your funded project, your Evaluation Plan (see Part IV, B.3. Field 7.2.d.) must also include a strategy for assessing how your project advances the two HEC Program Goals (Part I, B.). The following, suggested evaluation strategies are derived from the Department of Education's *Report of the Academic Competitiveness Council, May 2007*, Federal STEM Education, Undergraduate National Goals and Metrics recommendations.

To demonstrate progress toward increasing the number of graduates, the following metric is suggested: first provide baseline data for the year preceding the grant award showing the number and/or percentage of students who declare and/or complete a major program of study in the food and agricultural sciences within your unit; Second, provide similar data for the final year of the grant and include an assessment of the impact of your project on changes from the baseline data.

To demonstrate progress toward increasing the quality of instruction, the following metric is suggested: first provide baseline data for the year preceding the grant award showing the current number and/or percentage of graduates who either graduate and pursue a vocation in the food and agricultural sciences, or who pursue advanced degrees within the food and agricultural sciences; Second, provide similar data for the final year of the grant and include an assessment of the impact of your project on changes from the baseline data.

For quantitative, baseline, student enrollment, degrees granted and employment data to make comparisons in meeting HEC Program Goals, applicants should reference the Food and Agricultural Education Information System (FAEIS) resource at: <http://faeis.ahnrit.vt.edu/>; the publication: *Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in the U.S. Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resources System 2005-2010* at: <http://faeis.ahnrit.vt.edu/supplydemand/2005-2010/>, or other, similar source(s).

5. Dissemination Plan

Include in the project's Dissemination Plan (see Part IV, B.3. Field 7.2.e.), a description of how the applicant plans to communicate project accomplishments (products, results and impacts, etc.) to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or national conferences and workshops, including the HEC Project Director's Conference (see Part VI, D.1.).

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

NIFA anticipates approximately \$5.2 million will be available to fund applications in FY 2010, and has no commitment to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. **Note: Should additional funding become available for this HEC program to support the President’s Rural Revitalization Initiative, a separate, supplemental RFA will be provided to explain that application process.**

B. Types of Applications

For this grant program, applications may only be submitted as one of the following types of requests:

(1) New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the HEC Program. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) Resubmitted application. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the HEC Program but not funded. Applicants must respond to the previous review panel summary (use R&R Other Project Information, Field 11 on the Form). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

C. Project Types

Applicants may submit either:

1. Regular Project Proposal (Single Institution)

Applicants may request up to \$150,000 (total, not per year) for a Regular Project Proposal. In a Regular Project Proposal, the applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners.

2. Joint Project Proposal (Applicant + Two or more Partners)

Applicants may request up to \$500,000 (total, not per year) for a Joint Project Proposal. In a Joint Project Proposal, the applicant executes the project with assistance from at least two additional partners. The additional partners must share grant funds (see explanation of required funds distribution percentage among partners in the definition of a Joint Project Proposal in Part VIII, E.).

Note: Joint Projects must include both the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget and the R&R Subaward Budget (Fed and Non-Fed) Attachment Forms. The forms should clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required

sharing percentage. All expenditures for the applicant and all partners should be further itemized in the Budget Justification. Funds **do not** have to be divided equally among project years.

All grant recipients are required to match the Federal funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources. See Part IV, B.5. R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget and Field K-Budget Justification, for details.

3. Project Duration

Project periods may range from twenty-four (24) to thirty-six (36) months. Projects should conclude no sooner than twenty-four (24) months after the award start date to allow the applicant sufficient time to evaluate the results and report the impacts. The project period **should not** exceed five (5) years.

For project budget and timeline purposes, the project start date should not occur prior to August 2010.

4. Number and Size of Grant Awards

The total number of grants awarded by this Grant Program will depend on the number and type of meritorious applications submitted in response to this notice. There is no predetermined number of awards for either Regular or Joint Project Proposals, for any one Program Category, or for any one Educational Need Area.

Based on the project scope and budget of all applications selected for awards, the actual, individual grant amounts awarded by NIFA under this Grants Program may differ from the funds requested by the applicant. In such cases, revised budgets and revised plans of work may be required by NIFA before an award is made.

5. Application Submission & Award Limitations

There is no limit on the number of applications that may be submitted by an Eligible Applicant. However, a successful applicant institution will only be awarded a maximum of three (3) grants per year under this program.

6. Funding Limitations per Institution

There are no limits on the total Grant Program funds that may be awarded to any one institution in successive years of this competition. Successful award recipients may apply for additional awards in subsequent years either as a lead applicant or as a joint partner on a project.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may be submitted by: (a) U.S. public or private nonprofit colleges and universities offering a baccalaureate or first professional degree in at least one discipline or area of the food and agricultural sciences; (b) land-grant colleges and universities, (including land grant institutions in the Insular Areas); (c) colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences; and (d) other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences. A college or university must meet the definition of an Eligible Institution as stated in this RFA (see Definitions, Part VIII, E.). An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline will result in NIFA returning the application without review.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply, provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project.

For the purposes of this program, the individual branches of a State university or other system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree-granting institutions are treated as separate institutions, and are therefore eligible for HEC Grants Program awards. Separate branches or campuses of a college or university that are not individually accredited as degree-granting institutions are not treated as separate institutions. An institution eligible to receive an award under this program includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university. Accreditation must be by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

Eligible institutions must demonstrate capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of food and agricultural sciences generally, and to the specific need and/or discipline(s) for which a grant is requested.

A teacher or student recipient (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds above must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA. (See Part VIII, Definitions.) Where eligibility is claimed under 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

A grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources. Matching funds are not required to come in any particular amount from any one source. However, all matching funds pledged in this application must be accompanied by documentation. See Part IV, B.6. R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget, Field K-Budget Justification, for additional details.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA.

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If the organization is not prepared, the AR should see http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp for steps for preparing to submit applications through Grants.gov.

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

1. In order to access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on “**Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,**” enter the funding opportunity number, **USDA-NIFA-CGP-002644**, in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This Guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If assistance is needed to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

- Grants.gov customer support
Toll Free: 1-800-518-4726
Business Hours: M-F 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time
Email: support@grants.gov

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic applications should be prepared following Part V and VI of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed in order to prepare an application in response to this RFA. If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.

Note: Some forms will contain a field with instructions to attach additional information in a separate file. All such attachments must be in PDF file format. Consult the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Part III. 3.1) for how to attach files using the proper format.

1. SF-424 (R&R) Cover Sheet

Complete all applicable fields. The following, additional information may be helpful:

Field 2. Applicant Identifier – This field is provided for the Applicant’s use if they have an internal tracking system they would like to use in tracking applications they have submitted. This field is not required.

Field 3. Date received by State and State Application Identifier – This is not applicable for HEC applications; these fields do not need to be completed.

Field 5. Applicant Information – This must be the legal name of the eligible college or university (See Part III. A, Eligible Applicant). Official correspondence will be directed to either the Project Director (Field 15) or the Authorized Representative (Field 19).

Field 8. Type of Application – Only ‘New’ or ‘Resubmitted’ applications are permitted.

Field 13. Proposed Project Start Date and End Date – A project’s duration should normally be at least 24 months (to allow time for assessment and evaluation) and no more than 36 months. **Project Start Date should not occur before August 2010.**

Field 16. Estimated Project Funding –

- a. **Total Estimated Project Funding** = Amount of Federal funds requested (See Part II. C. 1 or 2 for maximum award amounts permitted)
- b. **Total Federal & Non-Federal Funds** = Federal funds + Matching Funds (Note: The Matching Requirement for this program is 1:1 (see Part III. B.), so the amount listed in field 16. b. must be at least double the amount listed in 16. a.)

Field 20. Pre-application – Not applicable to the HEC program. No attachments needed.

2. R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information

Complete all applicable fields. Note: If a 'Yes' response is provided for Fields 1, 2, or 4.a, the applicant must provide the necessary assurances prior to an award being made.

Field 6. Project Summary/Abstract – (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)

Include the following underlined text along with your responses:

- List the Project Title;
- List the Project Director (and any) Co-Project Director(s) (include institutional affiliation for each);
- List your project's Program Category: (see Part I, C.1.);
- List your project's Priority Area: (Part I, C.2.);
- List your project's Educational Need Area: (Part I, C.3.);
- List your project's *primary* Discipline Code/Academic Discipline: (Select one from the list below);

Discipline Codes & Academic Discipline

G - General Food and Agricultural Sciences (includes multidisciplinary projects)	L - Environmental Sciences/Management
M - Agribusiness (includes Management, Marketing, and Agricultural Economics)	F - Food Science/Technology and Manufacturing
E - Agriscience (includes Agricultural/Biological Engineering)	N - Human Nutrition
S - Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Agricultural Education, Agricultural Communications, and Rural Sociology)	H - Human Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences (excludes Human Nutrition)
A - Animal Sciences	I - International Education/Research (enhancement of U.S. programs)
Q - Aquaculture	P - Plant Sciences and Horticulture
C - Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (includes Forestry)	B - Related Biological Sciences (includes General/Basic Biotechnology, Biochemistry, and Microbiology)
J - Entomology – Animal	D - Soil Sciences
T - Entomology – Plant	V - Veterinary Medicine/Science
	W - Water Science
	O - Other (Describe only if not listed above)

- Joint Project Proposal: Yes or No? (Do you plan to share Federal grant funds with other partners? See 'Definitions', Part VIII. E.);
- Partners: If Joint Project Proposal, list all partner institutions/organizations that will share grant funding (Note: Each Partner so identified needs to have their budget information submitted on a separate R&R subaward attachment). If not a Joint Project, enter: 'N.A.';
- Total Funds Requested: (List total Federal funds requested for this application. If this project is a Joint Project Proposal, also list each partner's total funds requested next to the institution's name); and
- Summary Text - Provide a very concise (approx. 250 word) summary of your project to include:
 - Purpose: What is the major problem your project will address?
 - Audience: Who are the intended beneficiaries? Who will be impacted?
 - Products: What will be produced?
 - Outcome/Impact: What is the intended result (consequence) of your project? Describe as the primary benefits to your audience. Note: outcomes/impacts should be measurable, and should be included in your project's assessment/evaluation plan to demonstrate how you will assess whether or not these benefits were achieved (See explanation of terms in Part IV, B. 2. Field 7. 2.c., below).

Field 7. Project Narrative – (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 20 pages of written text (excluding up to a maximum of 5 additional pages for supporting figures and tables). This maximum (25-page limit) ensures fair and equitable competition. Reviewers are instructed to not review material in excess of this limit.

The Project Narrative in this Field 7 attachment contains the major description of your project. It follows the HEC program’s Evaluation Criteria (Part V. B). Accordingly, please provide your responses in the following format:

(Note: To facilitate application review and evaluation, **include the following, underlined wording as headings in your attached Project Narrative**, followed by your response for each item.)

1. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem:

- a. Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact. Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem (or opportunity) to be addressed; (2) the anticipated project audience; and (3) the project’s target objectives (what change in education is proposed?) and its anticipated, overall *impact* on improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education (Note: Your *impact* should be a change you can measure at the project’s conclusion.). Clearly identify and explain how the proposed project will address your Educational Need Area described in Part I, C.3.
- b. Project Justification. Describe how and by whom the focus and scope of the project were determined. Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project’s Educational Need Area (Part I.C.3) will be of value at the State, regional, national, or international level(s), and where applicable, how it will advance improving science, technology, engineering, and mathematical (STEM) capabilities of students. Describe any ongoing or recently completed, significant activities related to the proposed project for which previous funding was received under this program.
- c. Institutional Long-range Goals. Demonstrate how the institution attributes a high priority to the project; discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the institution's long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; explain how the project will help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution's strategic plan.
- d. Innovation. Describe the proposal’s creative approach to improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education, solving an education problem, or promoting programs that advance equal opportunity for all students.
- e. Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus. Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in the food and agricultural sciences education, or with other academic curricula, and how the project will enhance students’ understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted by, or serve as a model for, other institutions.

2. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages:

- a. Plan of Operation and Methodology. Describe procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project. Describe plans for management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.
- b. Timetable. Identify all important project milestones (performance targets that indicate when project goals will be met) and dates as they relate to project start-up, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and closeout.
- c. Products, Results and Measurable Outcomes. Outline the expected products/results and their outcome (impact) on strengthening food and agricultural sciences education in the United States. (**Important Note: Make sure to differentiate among the three terms:**
 1. “Products” may be actual *items or services* acquired with funds, e.g., “...developed three, new Web-based courses”;
 2. “Results” are *accomplishments* related to the products, e.g., “...additional course materials now available online to reinforce student learning during non-classroom hours”; and
 3. “Outcomes/Impacts” are the *benefits* to your audience. Outcomes/impacts are the consequences of your project and the most critical elements in your Evaluation Plan. They are a measure of the results by comparison to what might have happened in the absence of the funded project, e.g., “...an observed, overall increase in student learning based upon 8% higher average test scores of those students who both attended class and used the supplemental, Web-based course materials”.)
- d. Evaluation Plans. State the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results and measurable outcomes from the project. Discuss the strategies and metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the two HEC Program Goals identified in Part I, B. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project will improve education. This section should clearly indicate how you plan to measure outcomes/impacts.
- e. Dissemination Plans. The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts...etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. Discuss the institution’s commitment to disseminate project results and products. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication. This section should clearly indicate how you plan to publicize your project’s outcomes/impacts.
- f. Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts. Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, joint projects with other educational institutions, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Also explain how it will stimulate academia, the States, or the private sector to join with the Federal partner in enhancing food and agricultural sciences education. Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.

3. Institution Capability and Capacity Building:

- a. Institutional Commitment and Capability. Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.
- b. Institutional Resources. Document that necessary institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how the institutional resources to be made available to the project, when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project.
- c. Academic Enhancement. Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching at the institution (including any partner institutions). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above (2.b., Timetable) will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution or the grant period.
- d. Continuation Plans. Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. For example, does the institution's long-range budget or academic plan provide for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends, are plans for eventual self-support built into the project, are plans being made to institutionalize the program if it meets with success, and are there indications of other continuing non-Federal support?

4. Key Personnel: Discuss the adequacy and specific attributes and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project. Also include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.

5. Budget and Cost-effectiveness:

- a. Budget. In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that the total budget, including funds requested from USDA and any matching support provided, are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution(s), and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project. Provide a summary of sources and amounts of all third party matching support. If the application addresses more than one Educational Need Area (see Part I, C.3.), applicants should include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area.
- b. Cost-effectiveness. Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on an Educational Need Area, or to promote coalition building that could lead to future ventures.

Field 8. Bibliography & Cited References - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)

If needed, provide a complete list of all references cited in the application. **For each reference, provide the complete name for each author, the year of the publication, full title of the article, name of the journal or book published, volume, and the page numbers.** The references should be listed in alphabetical order using the last name of the first author.

Field 9. Facilities & Other Resources - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)

If needed, describe the types, location, and availability of instrumentation and physical facilities necessary to carry out the work proposed. **If special academic, private or government laboratories or facilities are being used, include a letter in the application from the authorized representative of the facility describing the proposed arrangements and availability.** This letter should be included as a part of Other Attachments, see Field 11 below.

Field 10. Equipment Documentation - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)

Equipment purchased (defined as in excess of \$5,000 for each item) must be fully justified under this section. Note: Equipment, as previously defined, is normally not funded in a HEC grant. Other purchases (e.g., computers, laboratory materials,...etc.) are described, instead, in the Budget Justification section under the ‘Materials and Supplies’ line item.

Field 11. Other Attachments - (Must be PDF format)

- **Response to Previous Review – PDF Attachment. 1 Page Limit.** Title the attachment as ‘Response to Previous Review’ in the document header and save file as ‘Response to Previous Review’. This requirement only applies to “Resubmitted Applications” as described under Part II, B., “Types of Applications”. PDs must respond to the previous review panel summary on **no more than one page**, titled, “RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS REVIEW”. If desired, additional comments may be included in the text of the Project Narrative, subject to the page limitations of that section.
- **Appendices to Project Narrative – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as ‘Appendices’ in the document header and save file as ‘Appendices’. Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.
- **Collaborative Arrangements – PDF Attachment. No Page Limit.** Title the attachment as ‘Collaborative Arrangements’ in the document header and save file as ‘Collaborative Arrangement’. If it is necessary to enter into formal consulting or collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements should be fully explained and justified. If the consultant(s) or collaborator(s) are known at the time of the application, a vitae or resume should be provided. In addition, evidence (e.g., letter of support signed by the AR of the consultant/collaborating organization) should be provided that the collaborators involved have agreed to render these services. The applicant also will be required to provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget portion of the application.

- **Matching Funds Documentation – PDF Attachment.** This grants program requires applicants to match Federal funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources. Signed letters from each source of matching funds are required, and should be attached in this Field #11. Recommended contents of these letters is described below in item #6, R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget, Field K, Matching, under the ‘Written Verification’ section.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person (Expanded)

Complete all applicable fields. Consult the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions. Remember to attach the required Biographical Sketch for at least the Project Director, as well as any additional individual who will receive Federal support from this project.

Also, **you must attach** ‘Current and Pending Support’ information (see NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide p. 30 & 31, item 4.3, for guidelines and information format) for each senior/key person identified above. **Note: Even if no other funding is currently reported under the ‘Active’ section of this attachment, you must still list information for this grant application under the ‘Pending’ section of this attachment for each senior/key person identified above.**

5. R&R Personal Data

Submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget

This form (accompanied by the required Budget Justification attachment) contains the itemized listing and description of your project’s budget. Complete all applicable fields. Consult the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions. The following, additional information may be helpful:

Complete one R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget Form for each 12-month period, plus a cumulative budget for the entire project. If your project involves partners with whom you plan to share Federal funds (Joint Project Proposal), make sure (a) you include a budget form for the applicant institution and a R&R subaward (Fed and Non-Fed) attachment form for each project partner (subaward/consortium), for each 12-month period, and (b) your budget figures reflect the required budget sharing criteria (See ‘Definitions’, Part VIII. E, Joint Project Proposal).

During the tenure of a grant, Project Director(s) may be invited to attend at least one national Project Directors meeting, if offered, in Washington, DC, or any other announced location. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss project and grant management, opportunities for collaborative efforts, future directions for education reform, and opportunities to enhance dissemination of exemplary end products/results. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in your proposal’s travel expenses.

Field H. Indirect Costs –

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended the National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a)), limiting indirect costs to 22 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore,

when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

The maximum allowed indirect cost of 22% may be claimed under the Federal portion of the award, or the maximum allowed indirect cost of 22% may be claimed as matching contributions (if no indirect costs are requested). However, the maximum allowed indirect cost of 22% may not be claimed on both the Federal portion of the award and as matching contributions (Note: An institution may, as an example, request 10% of indirect costs on both the Federal portion of the award and as matching contributions. Or, an institution may request any other, similar percentage combination that, when combined, does not exceed the 22% maximum indirect cost allowed.) Nevertheless, the total combined percent of requested and contributed matching indirect costs cannot exceed 22%.

Field K. Budget Justification – (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)

- (a) Provide a Budget Justification that reflects each 12-month period, plus a cumulative budget for the entire project. If your project involves partners with whom you plan to share Federal funds (Joint Project Proposal), make sure the attachment reflects information (a) for the applicant institution as well as each project partner (subaward/consortium), for each 12-month period plus a cumulative column total for the entire project, and (b) your budget figures reflect the required budget sharing criteria (See 'Definitions', Part VIII. E, Joint Project Proposal). Letters of consent or collaboration or other evidence should be provided to show that collaborators have agreed to participate.

The Budget Justification should follow a standard spreadsheet format ('Budget Line Item' = row; 'Budget Year' and 'Cumulative Project' = columns) including a detailed, itemized breakdown of each of the line item categories reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form. This Budget Justification attachment provides a more detailed, itemized breakdown for each budget line item reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form (i.e., itemize your complete list of 'Materials and Supplies' showing per unit costs and number of units to be purchased, etc.). Include a description for each requested budget line item found on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form (i.e., total budget amount reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form should equal the total budget amount reported on the Budget Justification attachment).

- (b) **Matching: Note: A grant recipient is required to match the Federal funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources. The sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution should be summarized on a separate page and attached immediately following the Budget Justification. See instructions directly above, Field H, for restrictions on how to report indirect costs as matching contributions.**

Cash and non-cash contributions from the institution and any third parties should be identified.

The sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution/organization should be summarized on a separate page and attached in the R&R Other Project Information, Field 11. In addition, each source of non-Federal matching funds must be accompanied by written verification of commitment of matching support (i.e., a signed letter from the AR of the source of matching funds; including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Include each of these signed matching letters, as well, as attachments in Field #11 of the R&R Other Project Information form.

Written verification means:

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution along with an explanation of how the fair market value was determined; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

Please note, electronic signatures on matching commitment letters **are not** acceptable.

If the contribution is to be split between cash and in-kind, the exact dollar amount for each category must be clearly stated. The letter should also clearly state the budget categories that the contributed dollars should be applied to and clearly state the individual items of in-kind contributions. All pledge agreements must be placed in the application immediately following the summary of matching support. Any cost sharing commitments specified in the application will be referenced and included as a condition of an award resulting from this announcement.

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars A-87, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments, or A-21, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

Note: Funding from sources prohibited by this grants program cannot be used as an institution's matching contributions (i.e., Funding Restrictions for this grants program prohibit the use of Federal grant funds to acquire or repair a building or facility (e.g., a greenhouse). Therefore, non-Federal, matching funds that plan, acquire or construct a building or facility to support this project are not permitted as matching contributions.)

7. R&R Subaward Budget (Fed and Non-Fed) Attachment (Only required if submitting a Joint Project Proposal)

8. Supplemental Information

Complete all applicable fields. Consult the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

Field 2. Program Code -

For the 'Program Code Name' field, enter: "Higher Education Challenge Grants Program"

For the 'Program Code' field, enter: "ER"

Field 8. Conflict of Interest List - (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)

See format in NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, Section VI, 1.8, p.46, for instructions. Include this one-page attachment even if your responses to the questions are "N.A."

C. Submission Dates and Times

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on February 5, 2010 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

The receipt of all applications will be acknowledged by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received a confirmation message from NIFA within 30 days of submission of the application, please contact the Program Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended the National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a)), limits indirect costs to 22 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

Consistent with other competitive grant programs, NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority *may not* be used for student tuition remission, room and board, fees or other financial assistance (scholarships, fellowships, etc.).

Also, funds *may not* be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities (i.e., greenhouses, laboratories, or other structures). Promotional items (e.g., T-shirts and other give-a-ways) and food functions (e.g., cookouts or other social meal gatherings) are considered ‘entertainment’ expenses, and are also *not allowed* under this grants program. Federal Cost Principles governing this grant program state that items not eligible for Federal funding may also not be used as an applicant’s contribution toward meeting matching requirements.

E. Other Submission Requirements

The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.”

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria and weights below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem (30 points).

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the quality of food and agricultural sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals, identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, justification for the project, innovation, advancing educational equity, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, and potential for adoption by other institutions.

2. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages (25 points).

This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project.

3. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building (20 points).

This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its teaching or research capacity. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities,

equipment, and/or materials) available to carry out the project, potential for academic or research enhancement, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support.

4. Key Personnel (15 points).

This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications of key persons who will develop and carry out the project, and the qualifications of project personnel who will provide for the assessment of project results and impacts and the dissemination of these findings.

5. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness (10 points).

This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost effective. Elements considered include the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objectives; the appropriateness of budget allocations between the applicant and any collaborating institution(s); the adequacy of time committed to the project by key project personnel; and the degree to which the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, leverages additional funds, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority educational or research need areas.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program.

(Note: ***This management information will also be required from designated Fiscal Agents.***)

NIFA will provide copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, and the Department's assistance regulations (2 CFR 215, 2 CFR 220 and 2 CFR 230), and the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015, 3019 and 3430 of 7 CFR).

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to which the Administrator has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Administrator during the project period;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);
- (10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 215—Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-110).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A 129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3021—Governmentwide Requirements for Drug Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A 133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non profit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—CSREES procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR Part 3430—CSREES procedures to implement Competitive and Noncompetitive Nonformula Grant Programs—General Grant Administrative Provisions and Program-Specific Administrative Provisions for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in Federally assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

1. Project Directors Conference

During the tenure of a grant, Project Director(s) may be invited to attend at least one national Project Directors meeting, if offered, in Washington, D.C., or any other announced location. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss project and grant management, opportunities for collaborative efforts, future directions for education reform, and opportunities to enhance dissemination of exemplary end products/results. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in your proposal's travel expenses.

2. Annual Performance Report

An Annual Performance Report must be submitted within 90 days after the completion of the first year of the project, and annually thereafter during the life of the grant. Generally, the Annual Performance Reports should include a summary of the overall progress toward project objectives, current problems or unusual developments, the next year's activities, and any other information that is pertinent to the ongoing project or which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award. Annual Performance Reports are to be submitted through the CRIS system described in paragraph 4., below.

3. Final Performance Report

A Final Performance Report must be submitted within 90 days after the expiration date of the project. The expiration date is specified in the award documents and modifications thereto, if any. Generally, the Final Performance Report should be a summary of the completed project, including: a review of project objectives and accomplishments; a description of any products and outcomes resulting from the project; activities undertaken to disseminate products and outcomes; partnerships and collaborative ventures that resulted from the project; future initiatives that are planned as a result of the project; the impact of the project on the Project Director(s), students, the departments, the institution, and the food and agricultural sciences higher education system; and data on project personnel and beneficiaries. The report must document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts...etc.) have been published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. The Final Performance Report should be accompanied by samples or copies of any products or publications resulting from or developed by the project. The Final Performance Report also must contain any other information which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award. The Final Performance Report is to be submitted through the CRIS system described in paragraph 4., below.

4. Current Research Information System (CRIS) Reports

Grantees are required to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's Current Research Information System (CRIS). The CRIS database contains narrative project information, progress/impact statements, and final technical reports that are made available to the public. For applications recommended for funding, instructions on preparing and

submission of project documentation will be provided to the applicant by the agency contact. Documentation must be submitted to CRIS before NIFA funds will be released. Project reports will be requested by the CRIS office when required. For more information about CRIS, visit <http://cris.nifa.usda.gov>.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact Mr. P. Gregory Smith; National Education Program Leader; Higher Education Programs; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; STOP 2251; 1400 Independence Ave, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2251; Telephone: (202) 720-1973; Fax: (202) 720-2030; E-mail: HEC@nifa.usda.gov.

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access To Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO 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.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. Changes in Project Period: The project period may be extended by NIFA without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed five years. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO 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 award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of one year. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Grant Programs--General Grant Administrative Provisions, for the applicable definitions for this CSREES grant program.

Eligible institution means a land-grant college or university (including land-grant institutions in the Insular Areas), colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences, and other U.S. colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences. An eligible institution includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university.

Eligible participant means an individual who is a citizen or national of the United States as defined in this section.

Institution of higher education means an educational institution in any State that:

(1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate;

(2) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;

(3) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree;

(4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and

(5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Insular Area means the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Joint project proposal means a proposal for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution working in cooperation with **two or more** other entities not legally affiliated with the applicant institution, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, other institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution and each cooperating entity will assume a major role in the conduct of the proposed project. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, **the applicant institution submitting a joint project proposal must retain at least 30 percent but not more than 50 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds.** Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of an eligible institution as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a joint project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution.

Nonprofit, as applied to a school, agency, organization, or institution, means a school, agency, organization, or institution owned and operated by one or more nonprofit corporations or associations, no part of the net earnings of which inures, or may lawfully inure, to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

Outcomes means specific, measurable project results and benefits that, when assessed and reported, indicate the project's plan of operation has been achieved.

Plan of Operation means a detailed, step-by-step description of how the applicant intends to accomplish the project's outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include a timetable indicating how outcomes are achieved, a description of resources to be used or acquired, and the responsibilities expected of all project personnel.

Regular project proposal means a proposal for a project: (1) where the applicant institution will be the sole entity involved in the execution of the project; or (2) which will involve the applicant institution and one or more other entities, but where the involvement of the other entity(ies) does not meet the requirements for a joint project proposal as defined in this section.

Third party in-kind contributions means non-cash contributions of property or services provided by non-Federal third parties, including real property, equipment, supplies and other expendable property, directly benefiting and specifically identifiable to a funded project or program.

Application Submission Checklist

The following checklist contains suggested guidelines to verify prior to application submission:

- Have all attachments been submitted in the portable document format (PDF)?** NIFA will only accept PDF attachments. See Part III of the NIFA Application Guide.
 - Do all submitted PDF documents have one-inch margins and are typed or word processed using no type smaller than 12 point regardless of line spacing? Are all PDF documents numbered sequentially on each page of the attachment? Are all page limitations for a given attachment followed? Submitted applications that do not meet these requirements for PDF attachments will be returned without review.
- Have all required components of the SF 424 Research and Related (R&R) Application Package been completed? Did you use the “Check Package for Errors” feature of the Adobe Reader (see section 1.8 of the NIFA Application Guide)?**
 - SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet
 - R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)
 - R&R Other Project Information
 - R&R Senior/Key Person (Expanded)
 - R&R Personal Data
 - R&R Budget Fed and Non-Fed
 - R&R Subaward Budget (Fed and Non-Fed) Attachment (Only if submitting a Joint Project Proposal)
 - Supplemental Information Form
- ◆ **SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet**
 - Have all required fields been completed? Field 5 must contain the name of the eligible college or university.
- ◆ **R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)**
 - Have all required fields been completed?
- ◆ **R&R Other Project Information**
 - Have the fields describing project potential or actual environmental impact been properly completed?
 - Project Summary/Abstract**
 - Has the Project Summary PDF been attached to this form in Field 6?
 - Does this section adhere to the format?
 - Project Narrative**
 - Has the Project Narrative PDF been attached to this form in Field 7?
 - Are responses provided for all underlined text in the RFA for this section (Field 7, 1-5)?
 - Do responses clearly distinguish between project Products, Results and Outcomes/Impacts (Field 7, 2.c.)?

- Does this section adhere to the format and page limitations?
- ❑ **Bibliography & References Cited (Optional)**
 - Attach as PDF file in Field 8, but only if needed.
- ❑ **Facilities & Other Resources (Optional)**
 - Attach as PDF file in Field 9, but only if needed.
- ❑ **Equipment (Optional)**
 - Attach as PDF file in Field 10, but only if needed. Remember, 'Equipment' is defined as having a value of over \$5,000 for each item. Most equipment purchased for these projects is actually reported, instead, as 'Materials and Supplies' on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget Form.
- ❑ **Response to Previous Review (for resubmitted applications only)**
 - Only include if you are resubmitting an application that was previously not funded.
 - Include as a one-page attachment (PDF) in Field 11 and attach just before the Project Narrative.
 - Has the resubmitted application briefly addressed comments from the previous review?
- ❑ **Collaborative Arrangements**
 - Has the Collaborative Arrangements PDF been attached to this form in Field 11?
- ❑ **Appendices to Project Narrative**
 - Has the Appendices to Project Narrative PDF been attached to this form in Field 11?
- ❑ **Matching Funds Documentation**
 - Has each signed letter to verify matching support been attached to this form in Field 11?
- ◆ **R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)**
 - ❑ **Biographical Sketch**
 - Has the biographical sketch (vitae) PDF for the PD, senior associate, and other professional personnel been attached?
 - ❑ **Current and Pending Support**
 - Has the current and pending support PDF for all PD(s) been attached?
 - Have all current and pending projects been listed and summarized, including this application?
- ◆ **R&R Personal Data DO NOT PROVIDE THE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER OF THE PROJECT DIRECTOR/PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR.**
 - ❑ **Have all fields been completed?**
- ◆ **R&R Budget Fed and Non-Fed**
 - ❑ Have all fields been completed?
 - ❑ **Budget Justification**
 - Has the Budget Justification PDF been attached to this form in Field K?
 - Are budget items individually justified?
 - For multi-institutional applications, has a budget justification been included for each institution involved?
- ◆ **Supplemental Information Form**
 - ❑ Does Field 2 indicate the Program Code Name and Program Code to which you are applying?

- ❑ Have you included the required **Conflict of Interest List** (PDF) attachment? (See format in NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, Section VI, 1.8, p.46, for instructions.) Include this one-page attachment even if your responses to the questions are “N.A.”.