REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2023
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	April 27, 2023
ANTICIPATED FUNDING:	$7,500,000
AVERAGE AWARD RANGE:	$1,000,000
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-ICGP-009747
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.303
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions (ORG) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.303.

1. Key Dates and Deadlines
- Application Deadline: **5:00 P.M. Eastern, April 27, 2023**
- Letter of Intent: Not Required
- Applicants Comments Deadline: Within six months from the issuance of this notice (*NIFA may not consider c*omments received after the sixth month)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when programs are grounded in DEIA. NIFA is committed to enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and uses comments to help 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))](#). Applicants may submit written comments to [Policy@usda.gov](#) (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the ORG RFA.

Centers of Excellence. Applicants are encouraged to visit the NIFA's [Centers of Excellence (COE)](#) for information on COE designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities. A recording of COE outreach and COE implementation webinars are also available.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for ORG projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an ORG grant.

NIFA requests applications for the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – ORG for the fiscal year (FY) 2023 funding cycle, to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems. Applicants considering applying should check the [Organic Transitions (ORG) Web Page](#) to access the RFA and check for updates. The amount available for grants in FY 2023 is approximately $7,500,000.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY INFORMATION

PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A.   Legislative Authority

The Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions (ORG) authorized under 7 U.S.C. 7626 enables the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a competitive grants program that provides funding for integrated, multifunctional agricultural research, extension, and education activities.

The RFA will be developed every two fiscal years based on these established priorities and approaches to solving critical agricultural issues.

B.   Purpose and Priorities

The *ORG* under assistance listing 10.303 is aligned with the following:

1. Subject to the availability of appropriations to carry out this program, the Secretary may award grants to colleges and universities [as defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103)], as amended, on a competitive basis for projects that address priorities in United States agriculture and involve integrated research, education, and extension activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB).
2. One of the primary goals and objectives of the ORG program is to address practices and systems particularly associated with organic crops, organic animal production, and organic systems that integrate crop and animal production.
3. ORG strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities; 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in organic agriculture research, education, and outreach.
4. International partnerships, linkages, and exchanges that contribute to solving or solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems in the United States are also welcome.
5. Applications are expected to contain descriptions of stakeholder involvement in the research process from problem identification, planning, implementation, transfer of knowledge and technology, and evaluation. Applicants are strongly encouraged to assemble project teams that include those with expertise in research, education, extension, and evaluation, and to utilize a systems approach. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers, students, or their information providers, such as extension agents/educators, agricultural consultants and other service providers, or college teaching faculty.
6. Organic agricultural systems and practices provide many ecosystem services, and natural resources stewardship is a key principle in organic farming. For example, the use of cover crops, crop rotations, and erosion control measures; proper manure management practices; and humane livestock operation guidelines are cross-compliant with many Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards. How specific practices and combinations of practices interact in organic systems—including

their contributions to conservation outcomes and climate change mitigation and adaptation potential—is neither well documented nor understood, especially in the case of long-term soil management under organic production conditions.

7. The most meaningful metrics or models to quantify these services in organic systems are also not clear. A better understanding is needed, and documentation of these outcomes will allow for the adjustment of organic practices to optimize ecosystem services and to quantify and document those services in the areas of conservation practices, pollinator health, and climate adaptation, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This information will help farmers better assess the financial benefits and costs of their practices and improve their ability to qualify effects for current and possible future incentives in conservation program payments and climate change markets, and sustainability labeling premiums. This process will also help justify consumer expectations that organically grown and certified food, feed, fiber, or other value-added organic products are produced using the most environmentally sound and sustainable production practices possible.

8. To be successful, organic agriculture also needs to contribute toward essential ecosystem processes and components, such as biodiversity. This requires better understanding and assessment of the contribution of organic agricultural systems to maintain biodiversity. However, for organic agriculture to provide these ecosystem benefits, producers need economically viable crop and livestock management tools. The National Organic Program (NOP) maintains a list of management tools for certified organic producers. Recommendation for removal of certain tools from the NOP also creates the need for research-based alternatives.

9. The NOP has specifically requested research directed to finding replacements for listed prohibited substances that are critical for many segments of the industry - for producers already certified for organic production to those in transition or considering transition. 7 CFR Part 205 defines the National Organic Program and lists the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (see National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances).

10. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) maintains a list of research priorities that is updated annually. The NOSB Research priorities can be accessed here: https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/MSResearchPrioritiesProp.pdf

11. Research findings will not have their intended impact on the organic agriculture industry unless they reach and are adopted by producers. Effective extension or other outreach efforts are required. Because few extension tools and other information resources are available to organic farmers and ranchers, producers and their advisors have cited the need for these to help guide transitioning during this critical period.

12. Projects that use indigenous traditional ecological knowledge are appropriate for this program.

C.   Priority Areas for FY 2023:

Proposals consistent with the Legislative Authority (see Part A of this RFA) will be accepted for the competitive peer review process involving an external panel of experts. NIFA is soliciting applications for ORG in the following areas (not listed in order of importance):

Priority 1: Document and understand the effects of organic practices on soil health and fertility; greenhouse gas mitigation; enhanced biodiversity; and understanding of weeds, pests and diseases dynamics for better management to help systems adapt to climate change, build resilience of the organic farming system, protect water and other resources, and provide other ecosystem services. These practices include but are not limited to crop rotation; livestock feeding and management; livestock-crop system integration; organic manure, mulch, and/or compost additions; cover crops; and reduced or conservation tillage.

Priority 2: Develop improved technologies, methods, models, and metrics to document, describe, and optimize the ecosystem services and the climate change adaptation and mitigation ability of organic crop, livestock, and integrated crop-livestock production systems.

Priority 3: Develop cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from NOP's [National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances](#). This may include effective substitutes or new technologies, cultural practices, cultivars, or breeds that render the NOP-cited substance in question less limiting to production under organic standards. Studies of alternatives should include evaluation of efficacy based on resulting productivity, profitability, climate change adaptation, and natural resources stewardship effects. We encourage a sustainable whole-systems approach but will also consider proposals that are narrower in scope.

Priority 4: Overcome barriers to organic transition. Projects under this priority should address major barriers that limit the transition to organic agriculture in a specific region, crop, or animal production system and develop practical information and tools for producer use. These can include, but are not limited to, production challenges during the transition period, local and regional infrastructure constraints, marketplace challenges, disruptive conditions like the COVID-19 pandemic, and administrative or policy barriers. Any constraint must be acknowledged by growers and other stakeholders. Proposals to improve organic animal or crop production management strategies and production systems should be submitted to the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI). Lobbying and advocacy activities are not allowed.

Important Notes for All Priorities:

1. All fieldwork on organic practices must be done on certified organic land and/or certified facilities. Refer to the USDA [National Organic Program](#) for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land and facilities in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. If land or facilities in transition are to be used, documentation should be provided from the certifying agent confirming a transition plan has been developed and is in progress. In addition, the use of conventional production technologies (including the use of Genetically Modified Organisms or GMOs) for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible, if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented.

2. Projects must use combinations of research plus education and/or extension activities and describe expected outcomes and impacts. A hybrid of hands on and virtual Cooperative Extension techniques that increase the impact, reach and diversity of integrated projects are encouraged.

3. Topics that are relevant to small or minority farmers (e.g., scale neutral and affordable technologies, crops, and farm animals most used by ethnic minorities, culturally compatible food systems, etc.) are encouraged.

4. All projects must develop and implement an evaluation plan that captures project outcomes and demonstrates the impact of the project. The evaluation section must describe how the project evaluator or evaluation team will determine whether project goals have been met and their impacts. Evaluation must be based on benchmarks, indicators, or expected outcomes related to project goals and activities.

5. Project goals are expected to be related to immediate, short-term, and intermediate term expected changes that result from the project activities and measured outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The budget must include adequate resources for project evaluation, and evaluation procedures must be adequately described in the methods section.

Applicants must not submit proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope to both ORG and OREI programs. If proposals with significant overlap are submitted to both ORG and OREI, both proposals will be rejected. Additional information on the scope of OREI and ORG is available at NIFA Organic Agriculture under: "Program Specific Resources."

The ORG program is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2022-2026 and specifically addresses the following Strategic Goals:

Goal 1-Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities - Objective 1.1: Use Climate-Smart Management and Sound Science to Enhance the Health and Productivity of Agricultural Lands; Objective 1.4: Increase Carbon Sequestration, Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Ce Economic Opportunities (and Develop Low-Carbon Energy Solutions);

Goal 2-Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous - Objective 2.1: Protect Plant and Animal Health by Minimizing Major Diseases, Pests, and Wildlife Conflicts; Objective 2.3: Foster Agricultural Innovation;

Goal 3-Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers - Objective 3.2: Expand Markets for Emerging Technologies; and Sustainable Products, and Novel Products

Goal 5-Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities – Objective 5.3: Increase Capacity, Sustainability, and Economic Vitality in Rural and Tribal Communities

2. **Program Key Information**

Program Code: 112.E
Program Code Name: Organic Transitions
ALN: 10.303
Project Type: Integrated
Grant Type: Standard
Application Deadline: **5:00 P.M. Eastern, April 27, 2023**
Grant Duration: Up to 4 years
Anticipated # of Awards: 8
Maximum Award Amount: $1,000,000

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding
The amount available for ORG in FY 2023 is approximately $7,500,000. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Application for Payments, operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions
NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA. Application for FY 2023 is limited to the following application types:
1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see Appendix III for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include the response to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see Appendix III for definition).

C. Project and Grant Types
The following describes the types of projects or grants that are eligible for funding:

ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 2 to 4 years. The budgets that applicants provide may not exceed $400,000 per year with the total amount budgeted per award not to exceed $1,000,000. NIFA expects to make a total of eleven awards in FY 2023.

Integrated projects aim to resolve problems through the application of science-based knowledge and address needs identified by stakeholders. Integrated projects clearly identify anticipated outcomes and have a plan for evaluating and documenting the success of the project. ORG projects should include research and at least one of the other two functions of the agricultural knowledge system (Extension, and Education) focused on a problem or issue. However, single-function projects with sufficient justification will be considered. The functions addressed in the project should be interwoven throughout the life of the project; complement and reinforce each other; and be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project. Integrated projects must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public.

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects
In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and

documentation to support the conduct of the training. See [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A.   Eligibility Requirements
Applicants for the ORG must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or, preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Applications may only be submitted by colleges and universities, as defined in 7 U.S.C. 3103, 1994 Institutions, and Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – Duplicate, essentially duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications submitted simultaneously to both ORG and another NIFA program, such as OREI, in the same fiscal year is not allowed and will not be reviewed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

B.   Cost Sharing or Matching
Match Required – Applicants **MUST** provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all Federal funds awarded under the ORG. Non-Federal matching funds described in paragraph may include in-kind support.

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if one of the following applies:
  1. The results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or
  2. The project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

C.   Centers of Excellence
Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), NIFA will recognize and prioritize COE applicants that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE:
  1. State agricultural experiment stations.
  2. Colleges and universities.
  3. University research foundations.
  4. Other research institutions and organizations.
  5. Federal agencies.
  6. National laboratories.

7. Private organizations, foundations, or corporations.
8. Individuals; or
9. Any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (1) through (8).

A full explanation, including the process for requesting Center of Excellence designation can be found here: [Centers of Excellence (COE)](#)

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A.   Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and Grants 101. **Steps to Obtain Application Materials** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the Grants.gov registration process. The NIFA Grants Application Guide is contained in the specific funding opportunity package; a sample of the guide can be found here. When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

3. Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Step One: Register
New Users to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).

Step Two: Download Adobe
Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements)

Step Three: Find Application
Using this **Funding Opportunity Number, USDA-NIFA-ICGP-009747**, search for application here: Opportunity Package.

Step Four: Assess Readiness
Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

4. Help and Resources

a) **Grants.gov Support**
Grants.gov Online Support
Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
Email support: support@grants.gov

Self-service customer-based support: Grants.gov iPortal
Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays.

b) **NIFA Support**
Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

B.   Content and Form of the Application

The NIFA Grants Application Guide is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the NIFA Grants Application Guide if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. Applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial

applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Key Application Instructions** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

5. Key Application Instructions

All references are to the Application Guide
   a) Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format. **(Part IV)**
   b) Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format. **(Part IV)**
   c) Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission. **(Part IV)**
   d) Follow the submission instructions. **(Part IV)**
   e) Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R. **(Part V)**
   f) Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.
   g) Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within *30* days of the application deadline.

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.
   1. **Field 7.** Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the ORG. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates.
   2. **Field 8.** Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed 21 pages of written text including figures and tables. Applications exceeding these page limits will not be accepted for review. Use font no smaller than 12-point, regardless of line spacing for written text (the font size for tables and figures should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all the following:
      a. Introduction: include a clear statement of the long-term goals and supporting objectives of the proposed activities: describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed activity, including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, include in-depth information on the following, when applicable: estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing state-federal food and agricultural Research, Education, and Extension programs; description of the role stakeholders, including end users, have in problem identification, planning, and implementation and evaluation as appropriate; and reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution.

b. Objectives: include clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statements of specific aims of the proposed effort, including the suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale. Projects must include specific objectives for Research, Education, and Extension functions (as appropriate); include evidence of necessary involvement from interdisciplinary teams; and demonstrate the extent to which partnerships with other institutions (federal, state, other) are developed.

c. Approach: explicitly state the procedures or methods to be applied to the proposed effort. Include, but do not necessarily limit to:
    i. Description of how the project will solicit and use stakeholder involvement;
    ii. Description of the proposed project activities and the sequence in which they are to be carried out;
    iii. Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.
    iv. Techniques and methodology to be employed in the project, including their feasibility and rationale;
    v. Results expected within a reasonable time frame;
    vi. How you will monitor and evaluate (as appropriate) Research, Extension, and Education activities;
    vii. How you will analyze and interpret data;
   viii. Limitations to proposed procedures;
    ix. Pitfalls that might be encountered;
    x. Suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale;
    xi. Details of plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public; and
    xii. Plan to sustain activities beyond this funding period

d. Project timeline: outline all important phases as a function of time, year-by-year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period. Include specific, measurable goals or projected accomplishments for each year of ORG funding and expected impacts or outcomes of the work.

e. Centers of Excellence Justification; For consideration as a COE, you must provide a brief justification statement, as part of your Project Narrative and within the page limits provided, which describes how you meet the standards of a COE, based on the following criteria:

    1. The ability of the COE to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts in the research, teaching, and extension activities outlined in this application;
    2. In addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the COE to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the federal government in the proposed research and/or extension activities outlined in this application. Resources leveraged be commensurate with the size of the award;
    3. The planned scope and capability of the COE to implement teaching initiatives that increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences

through extension activities of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and

4. The ability or capacity of the COE to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA). A full explanation, including the process for requesting Center of Excellence designation can be found here: Centers of Excellence (COE); and

f. Response to previous review: The response to previous review must not exceed three pages. This does not count towards the page limit for the PN.

3. **Field 12**. Add Other Attachments. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide).

R&R Budget. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

1. Match – If an applicant concludes that the matching requirements described under Part III, B of this RFA is not applicable to them; the applicant must include an explanation of their conclusion in the *budget justification*. NIFA will consider this justification when determining final matching requirements or if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements. Grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B of this RFA must list in their *budget justification* the matching sources, the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match, and the total pledged amount. A written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement) is not required. However, applicants are subject to the documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, as specified in 2 CFR Part 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (the Uniform Guidance)," and 7 CFR 3430, "Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions."

2. Indirect costs (IDC) – See Part IV, C of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for additional information.

Data Management Plan. A DMP is required for this program and will not count against the [21]-page limit of the PN. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and Co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V, B of this RFA, NIFA's Data

[Management Plan](#)). If you need help in preparing a data management plan or have questions about what constitutes a data management plan for this role (including questions about data privacy, etc.), please contact the NIFA program contacts listed at the end of this RFA.

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).
1. **Field 2.** Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name (*ORG*) and the program code (*112.E*). Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8**. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

C.   Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. Section 1462(a) and (c) of the [National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA),](#) [7 U.S.C. § 3310](#) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:
1. the sum of an institution's negotiated indirect cost rate and the indirect cost rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates.

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee's negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of number two is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum indirect cost allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing (see [7 CFR 3430.52(b)](#)). Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections [408](#) and [410](#) of [2 CFR 200.](#)

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this RFA to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A.   NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. All administrative requirements must be met in order for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (see NIFA Peer Review Process).

Scientific Peer Review Process:

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

1. 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.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, public health practitioners, educators, consumers, and commercial reviews) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs.
4. The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations.
5. The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to race, ethnicity, gender representation, and an equitable age distribution.
6. The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of NIFA will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, _not_ including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

Conflicts of interest. NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications).

B.   **Evaluation Criteria**

A reviewer's written evaluation entails two levels of assessment. First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. After the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer then evaluates the overall likelihood that the project will have significant outcome and impact. These written reviews are used to begin panel discussions with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. Through these discussions, peer review panelists come to consensus on the final rating and ranking of proposals. A complete description of NIFA's peer review process can be found at NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications.

NIFA will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Technical merit of all aspects of the application, including research, education, and extension components, as appropriate.
   a) Degree of integration of research, education, and extension;
   b) Extent to which proposed work addresses identified organic stakeholder needs in the priority areas described above;
   c) Suitability and feasibility of methodology for successfully completing work in the allotted time;
   d) Quality of monitoring, data management and evaluation plans; and
   e) Qualifications of key project personnel and institutions, including institutional experience and competence in the proposed area of work, and adequacy of available support personnel, equipment, and facilities;

2. Relevance of proposed project to ORG purpose (see Part I, B.).
   a) Justification for problem addressed;
   b) Evidence of appropriate involvement with interdisciplinary teams and institutional partners (federal, state, other);
   c) Extent to which stakeholders, including end users, were and will be involved in future problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation;
   d) Probability that the project will be successful, have documentable impact, and produce transferable results; and
   e) Likelihood that the project will fill knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of organic practices and programs in the priority areas listed previously.

C.   **Centers of Excellence**

In addition to evaluating applicants using the criterion listed in Part V, B of this RFA, NIFA will use the COE standards described in this RFA to evaluate applicants that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a COE. In instances where applicants are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-COE applicant, NIFA will prioritize the COE applicant meeting the COE criteria. NIFA will effectively use the COE prioritization as a "tie breaker." Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a COE or who are not deemed to have met the COE standards may still receive funding.

Applicants that meet the COE requirements will have the COE designation in their notice of award. Entities recognized as COE will maintain that distinction for the duration of their period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

D.   Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only need to provide an update if there was a change in previously provided information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

E.   Application Disposition

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A.   General
Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must 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. 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 may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E.

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in 2 CFR 200.211 (see NIFA's Terms and Conditions).

B.   Administrative and National Policy Requirements
Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: Federal Regulations). Unless specifically noted by statue or award-specific requirements, NIFA Policy Guide applies to all NIFA awards.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A.   Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

Delegation of fiscal responsibility. Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees 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.

Changes in Budget or Project Plans. In accordance with 2 CFR 200.308, awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring).
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project.
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (Cost Principles), or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, (Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals), or 48 CFR, unless waived by the federal awarding agency,
5. 48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures;
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense (2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs);
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see 2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards), unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
8. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity; and
9. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B.   Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C.   Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of 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.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Program Contacts
Dr. Mathieu Ngouajio
Mathieu.Ngouajio@usda.gov
202-570-1915

Dr. Steve Smith
Steven.I.Smith@usda.gov
202-445-5480

Catherine Bohnert
Catherine.Bohnert@usda.gov
816-398-3349

For administrative questions related to
1. Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this RFA, please email awards@usda.gov

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Authorized Representative – AR
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance – CFDA
Centers of Excellence – COE
Data Management Plan – DMP
Fiscal Year – FY
Genetically Modified Organism – GMO
Indirect Cost – IDC
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board – NAREEEAB
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA
National Organic Program – NOP
National Organic Standards Board – NOSB
Non-Governmental Organization – NGO
Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture – NLGCA
Office of Management and Budget – OMB
Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative – OREI
Organic Transitions – ORG
Portable Document Format – PDF
Principal Investigator – PI
Project Director – PD
Project Narrative – PN
Project Summary   – PS
Request for Applications –   RFA
United States Department of Agriculture –USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

Definitions

Continuation Award:

> An award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the federal government and the public.

Matching:

> The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.

New Application:

> An application not previously submitted to a program.

Resubmitted Application:

> A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.