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National Institute of Food and Agriculture
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NIFA

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program

MODIFICATION: This RFA is an updated version of the FY 2022 solicitation. It includes only the references to FY 2023 funding; FY 2022 references have been eliminated.

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2023
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	April 5, 2023
ANTICIPATED FUNDING:	$900,000
AVERAGE AWARD RANGE:	$50,000 - $150,000
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-SAECP-009522
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.226
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required

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

Assistance Listing: The Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program (SPECA) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.226.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	FY 2023: 5:00 P.M. Eastern, April 5, 2023
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (*NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month*)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. 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 SPECA RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program (SPECA) projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions. NIFA requests applications for the SPECA program to promote and strengthen food and agricultural science education.

NIFA requests applications for the SPECA program for FY 2023. The amount available for grants in FY 2023 is approximately $900,000.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A.   Legislative Authority

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(j) of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152(j)).

B.   Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants (SPECA) program is to award grants to:

1) Enhance curricula in agricultural education
2) Increase faculty teaching competencies
3) Interest young people in pursuing higher education in order to prepare for scientific and professional careers in the food and agricultural sciences
4) Promote the incorporation of agriscience and agribusiness subject matter into other instructional programs, particularly classes in science, business, and consumer education
5) Facilitate joint initiatives by the grant recipient with other secondary schools, Institutions of higher education that award an associate degree, and institutions of higher education that award a bachelor's degree to maximize the development and use of resources, such as faculty, facilities, and equipment, to improve agriscience and agribusiness education
6) Support other initiatives designed to meet local, State, regional, or national needs related to promoting excellence in agriscience and agribusiness education
7) Support current agriculture in the classroom programs for grades K–12

SPECA-funded projects encourage academic institutions, in partnership with organizations and employers to identify and address challenges facing the food and agricultural sciences education and workforce community. As noted in the 2016 National Academies (NAS) Press Report, Barriers and Opportunities for 2-Year and 4- Year STEM Degrees and the 2016 NAS workshop on Creating the Future Workforce in Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, the talent pipeline for the agriculture workforce begins well before college admission and a focus on secondary programs holds tremendous potential to increase not only the number, but the diversity of students entering baccalaureate programs, a requisite for the innovation needed in the food and agricultural sciences.

Accordingly, SPECA-funded project activities support the creation, adaptation, and adoption of learning materials and teaching strategies to operationalize what we know about how students learn. Many of these concepts are identified in the National Research Council's publication: *How People Learn*. SPECA-funded projects shall also focus on imparting both technical knowledge as well as professional skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving, as these are abilities expected by employers. These concepts may be found in the publication Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?

Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge is considered an acceptable topic of research, education, and extension for projects funded by this RFA, in pursuit of the aforementioned priorities, goals, and objectives.

Global Engagement. NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners may be necessary to attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promote global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and promote safe and nutritious food security in a growing world. Therefore, although application to this RFA is limited to eligible U.S. institutions, applicants may collaborate with international partners, to include subcontracts to international partners or other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the United States.

Leadership Skills Development. The development of leadership skills, knowledge, and qualities are necessary to prepare students for agricultural and related careers in the private sector, government, and academia. SPECA applications must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to equip students with technical and leadership abilities upon graduation. Specific activities may include:
1. Developing practical applications to increase understanding of leadership roles, including critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills; ethics and professionalism; and working in teams.
2. Connecting the academic classroom experience with daily leadership roles and organizational activities.
3. Providing opportunities for mentoring and shadowing.
4. Organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, etc.

Incorporation of Social Sciences and Enhancing Impacts. The SPECA program supports social and behavioral science disciplines. SPECA projects that integrate social and biological sciences to provide experiential learning opportunities for students in applied research and related community development programs are encouraged. Incorporation of social and behavioral sciences is important for addressing many of the challenges facing agriculture and rural communities, such as increasing global demand for food production in the face of limited natural resources; improving health and reducing obesity by engaging in heathy lifestyles and consuming heathy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

The SPECA is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Goals:

Strategic Goal 5: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities
Strategic Goal 6: Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	SPECA
Program Code Name:	Secondary and Two-Year Postsecondary Education Challenge
CFDA Number	10.226
Project Type:	Education/Teaching Projects
Grant Type:	Regular and Collaboration grants ONLY
Application Deadline	FY2023: April 5, 2023
Grant Duration:	24-36 months
Anticipated # of Awards:	6-8
Maximum Award Amount:	Regular Grant: $50,000 Collaborative Type 1 Grant: $150,000

Project Category. Each project must support academic instruction with a primary focus in at least one of the following three K-14 Grade Levels:

1. **K-8 grade levels:** Projects with a specific focus on any of the academic grades Kindergarten through eight.
2. **Secondary School**: Projects with a specific focus on any of the academic grades 9 through 12.
3. **Junior or Community College**: Projects with a specific focus on associate degree level (2-year postsecondary) activities.

All SPECA proposals submitted will be reviewed using the same evaluation criteria and may receive separate funding considerations based on the project categories described above.

SPECA-funded project must focus on any of the K-14 grade levels. Projects with a target audience of baccalaureate, higher-level students or professional development of teachers should, instead, refer to other education grant programs offered through NIFA that are supportive of such activities.

Educational Need Areas. When preparing a SPECA-funded project, the rationale for choosing a particular Educational Need Area below must be explained in the context of how the project can contribute to the development of a cadre of students who will either pursue higher degrees in the food and agricultural sciences or be prepared to enter the food and agricultural sciences workforce.

Educational Need Areas for the SPECA program are:

1. *Curriculum Development, Instructional Delivery Systems, and Expanding Student Career Opportunities.* To promote new and improved curricula and materials to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the Nation's K-14 academic programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Projects should stimulate the development and facilitate the use of exemplary education models and materials that incorporate the most recent advances in subject matter research, research on teaching and learning theory, and instructional technology. Projects must include strategies for the adoption and integration of curricula, materials and other products generated.

   Examples of eligible projects in this *Need Area* may include, but **are not limited to**, the following strategies:

a. The development of innovative course content, including innovative ways to integrate scientific research experiences into K-14 curricula such as STEM labs, school gardens or other activities that provide experiential learning activities to students.
b. The use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects or the introduction of new food and agricultural sciences subjects.
c. Hands-on learning experiences and methods to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations.
d. Opportunities for students to complete apprenticeships, internships, career mentoring experiences, or other participatory learning experiences. Targeted summer programs providing a bridge to 4-year food and agricultural sciences degrees for underrepresented high-school students are encouraged.
e. Creating career placement or higher education academic counseling activities to encourage graduates to pursue postsecondary food and agricultural sciences degrees.

2. *Facilitating Interaction with other Academic Institutions.* To promote K-14 focused activities that form linkages between secondary, 2-year postsecondary, and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in the food and agricultural sciences. Activities should focus on ensuring completion of secondary degrees, enrollment into postsecondary programs and/or transfer to a 4-year institution. Partnerships, collaborative arrangements, and shared resources between institutions (including course credit sharing arrangements) are encouraged. Examples of projects strategies include:
   a. Development and use of articulation agreements, 2+2 or 2+2+2 arrangements (policies and programs designed to foster credit transfer between high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions), advanced placement credit transfer, or the sharing of faculty and facilities.
   b. A project that focuses on developing and implementing comprehensive, multi-institutional practices proven to recruit and retain K-14 level students with a focus on cultivating those students to pursue a postsecondary food and agricultural sciences degree.
   c. A project that will result in establishing and implementing programs or procedures (articulation agreements, electronic exchange of coursework, etc.) to disseminate curricula, instructional methods, or training practices to faculty across the state or region.

Additional Information
1. SPECA- funded projects must engage more than a single course or an individual instructor.
2. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with an agency or research facility, including a USDA agency, to leverage grant funds and/or contribute towards overall goals and objectives. USDA agencies may be found at Agencies.
3. If organized by the program, the Project Director (PD) will be required to attend one NIFA SPECA PD meeting during the performance period of the award. Reasonable travel expenses must be included as part of the project budget. While budgets should account for this travel, NIFA may consider virtual, or hybrid meetings based on local and national pandemic conditions.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A.   Available Funding
The amount available for SPECA in FY 2023 is approximately $900,000. 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. Applications are 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 a 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:
1. Project Types. Applicants must propose one of three types of projects: Regular, or Collaborative Type 1.
   - *a. Regular Project*
     - i. Applicants may request up to $50,000 (total, not per year) for a Regular Grant.
     - ii. Applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners.
   - *b. Collaboration Project (Applicant + One or more Partners)*
     - i. Applicants may request up to $150,000 (total, not per year) for a Collaboration Project.
     - ii. Applicant executes the project with assistance from at least one additional partner. The partners must share grant funds (see explanation of required fund distribution percentage among partners in the definition of a Collaboration Project in Appendix III).

     Documented Impacts of Collaboration Projects must include, but are not limited to the following:
     1. An assessment of significant progress toward addressing the regional or national challenge of increasing the number and diversity of food and agricultural sciences graduates.
     2. Expansion of the number of students who enroll in postsecondary courses in food and agricultural sciences.
     3. Enhanced retention rates of students exposed to project activities.
     4. An informed food and agricultural sciences community and others about the effectiveness of this project through a comprehensive project

evaluation, using the indicators and methods defined in this grants program.

Collaboration projects must include both the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget and the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Subaward Budget 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.

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 SPECA must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Applications may only be submitted by: (1) public secondary schools, (2) public or private nonprofit junior and community colleges, (3) institutions of higher education, or (4) nonprofit organizations (Attach IRS 501(c)(3) status under R&R 'Other Project Information' Field 12 Other Attachments). 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.

School boards are not eligible as legal recipients of the award.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – submissions of duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications is not allowed. An eligible applicant may submit multiple applications on behalf of multiple institution's project directors as long as they are not essentially duplications of the same project or portions of the same project to multiple programs. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. For additional information or clarification please contact the NIFA POC listed in this RFA. 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

No Match Required - SPECA has *NO* matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

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. **Table 3** 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 or 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.

Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
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-SAECP-009522,** 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.

Table 4: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA 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.	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. Table **5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

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

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. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the SPECA. Application will not be accepted for review if the project summary/abstract is not included, missing information, or not in PDF format. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates

    Include the following information:
    a. Project Title
    b. Project Director (and any) Co-Project Director(s) (include institutional affiliation for each)
    c. Project Category: (see Part I)
    d. Educational Need Area: (Part I)
    e. Projected number of students or faculty to be served by the project during the project period (i.e., using a new curriculum, instructional delivery system, student career opportunity; benefitting from a partnership between institutions; etc.).
    f. Primary Discipline Code/Academic Discipline (see **Table 6** below)
    g. Grant Type: Regular or Collaborative Project
    h. Total Funds Requested: List total Federal funds requested for this application. (If this project is a collaborative project, also list each partner's total funds requested next to the institution/organization's name)

i. Partners: If a collaborative 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 subaward budget attachment)
j. Summary Text: Provide a very concise (max. 250 word) summary of your project.

Table 6: Academic Codes and Disciplines

C	Animal Sciences
B	Related Biological Sciences (includes General/Basic Biotechnology, Biochemistry and Microbiology)
C	Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (includes Forestry)
E	Agriscience (includes Agricultural/Biological Engineering)
F	Food Science/Technology and Manufacturing
G	General Food, Agriculture and Human Sciences (includes multidisciplinary problems)
H	Human Sciences/ Family and Consumer Sciences
I	International Education/Research (enhancement of US programs)
J	Entomology - Animal
L	Environmental Sciences/ Management
M	Agribusiness (includes Management, Marketing, and Agricultural Economics)
N	Human Nutrition
P	Plant Sciences and Horticulture
Q	Aquaculture
S	Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Agricultural Education, Agricultural Communications and Rural Sociology)
T	Entomology - Plant
W	Water Science
O	Other (please include the discipline supported)

Application will be excluded from review if the summary text exceeds 250 words.
Summary text should include the following:
a. Purpose: What is the major problem your project will address?
b. Audience: Who are the intended beneficiaries? Who will be impacted?
c. Products: What will be produced?
d. Outcome/Impact: What is the intended result (consequence) of your project?

2. Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed **10 single-spaced pages** (up to 46 lines of text per page) including all figures and tables. The font size should be no smaller than 12 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. Applications will not be accepted for review if the project narrative is not included, exceeds 10 single-spaced pages, or is not in PDF format. The PN must include all the following:
   a. *Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem*:
      i. Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact: Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem/challenge (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 (The impact shall 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.

ii. Project Justification: Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Describe any ongoing or recently completed, significant activities related to the proposed project for which funding was received under a previous SPECA award.

iii. Institutional Goals: Demonstrate how the institution/organization attributes a high priority to the project; discuss how the project will: (1) contribute to the achievement of the institution/organizations' long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; (2) help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives; and (3) be linked to/supported by the institution's strategic plan.

iv. 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. Using either actual experiences or literature background information, show why you selected this approach.

b. *Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages*;

i. 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.

ii. 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.

iii. Products, Results, and Measurable Outcomes: Outline the expected products/results and their outcome and impact on strengthening food and agricultural sciences education in the United States. 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".

    3) "Impacts" are the benefits to your audience. 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".

iv. Evaluation Plans: State the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results, and measurable impacts from the project. Discuss the strategies and metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the two SPECA program goals from Part I. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project will improve education. This section shall clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts.

v. 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 community. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication.

    vi. Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts: Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education. Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.

c. *Institutional Capability and Capacity Building*;

    i. Institutional/organizational Commitment and Capability: Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.

    ii. Institutional/Organizational Resources: Document that necessary institutional / organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how the institutional/organizational 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.

    iii. 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/organization'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.

    iv. 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.

d. *Budget and Cost-effectiveness*;

    i. 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. If applicable, justify that the total budget is allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution / organization(s) and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project.

    ii. 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.

3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide.](#)

*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. 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. 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.

IRS 501(c)(3) Status – PDF Attachment. Title the attachment as 'IRS 501 (c)(3) Status' in the document header and save file as 'IRS501(c)(3) Status'.

Expected Outcomes – PDF Attachment. Title the attachment "Expected Outcomes" in the document header and name the file to be saved as "Expected Outcomes". Please use a format, similar to what is provided below, to submit expected impacts and attach it as the last page of the application.

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.

Biographical Sketch - The following are additional instructions of information to include:
1. Author identifier ([ORCID](#)) of the researcher if available.
2. Digital Object Identifier (DOI) of all publications where possible.

You may also include a list of data publications or published data products relevant to the proposed project, following recommended data citation format.

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

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 Secondary and Two-Year Postsecondary Education Challenge and the program code-**SPECA.** 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) 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.
2. Or 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. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections [408](408) and [410](410) of [2 CFR 200](2 CFR 200).

If the applicant wants full IDC (Indirect Cost), but does not have a negotiated rate, and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant must calculate an IDC rate in order to request IDC. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process.

Applicants need only to calculate an IDC rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC, please see National Institute of Food and Agriculture (usda.gov) for additional resources. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the De Minimis rate (2 CFR 200.414). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in 2 CFR 200.403, costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

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, and consumers) 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
NIFA will use the following criteria, listed in order of importance, to evaluate SPECA proposals:

1. *Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem.* 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/organizations. The proposed project must also show its relevance to the goals of the SPECA Program of increasing the skills and availability of individuals entering the food and agricultural sciences workforce. Potential project impacts must be stated.

2. *Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages.* 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. The project evaluation plan must state the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results, and measurable impacts from the project. The approach must be based on sound research concepts and educational principles and may be documented through background literature or actual institutional data. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution / organization through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project. Any perceived pitfalls and alternative strategies or approaches are addressed.

3. *Institutional Capability and Capacity Building.* 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, management of generated data, 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. Include institutional data (i.e., financial, personnel and physical resources available to support the project could all be potential data provided by the applicant, depending upon the particular Need Area) to show the institution's ability to support the proposed project.

4. *Key Personnel.* This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number, qualifications and expertise 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. Specific roles for each key personnel must be defined to ensure appropriate project leadership and to avoid any duplication of effort. For a CG2 proposal, qualifications and expertise of key persons representing all contributors should be included. Such expertise should address all critical activities of the CG2 project.

5. *Budget and Cost-Effectiveness.* 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.   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).

D.   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.

C.   Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

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.
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 Contact
Carlos Ortiz, PhD
carlos.ortiz@usda.gov
(202) 445-5594

Administrative Contacts
For administrative questions related to
- Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
- Other RFA or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
- 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
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agriculture in the Classroom-AITC
Authorized Representative-AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998-AREERA
Assistance Listing Number-ALN
Digital Object Identifier-DOI
Data Management Plan-DMP
National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act-NARETPA
National Institute of Food and Agriculture-NIFA
Project Director-PD
Project Narrative-PN
Request for Application-RFA
Research, Education, and Economics -REE
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.

Collaboration Project
> An application for a project: which will involve the applicant institution and one or more other colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, or other institutions, each of which will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project, and for which the applicant institution will transfer a portion of the awarded funds to the other institutions participating in the project. Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in §3405.2(i); the other institutions participating in a Collaboration Project proposal are not required to meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in §3405.2(i), nor required to meet the definition of "college" or "university" as specified in §3405.2(f).

Eligible Institution/Organization
> A public secondary school, a public or private nonprofit junior or community college, an institution of higher education, or a nonprofit organization. School districts are not eligible applicants. (See Part III, A.)

Fiscal Agent
> A third party designated by an authorized representative of an eligible institution/organization which would receive and assume financial stewardship of federal grant funds and perform other activities as specified in the agreement between it and the eligible institution/organization.

Institution of Higher Education
> 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.

Junior or Community College
> an institution of higher education that: (1) admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance in the State in which the institution is located and who have the ability to benefit from the training offered by the institution; (2) does not provide an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree (or an equivalent degree); and (3) (i) provides an educational program of not less than 2 years in duration that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; or (ii) offers a 2-year program in engineering, mathematics, or the physical or

biological sciences, designed to prepare a student to work as a technician or at the semiprofessional level in engineering, scientific, or other technological fields requiring the understanding and application of basic engineering, scientific, or mathematical principles of knowledge (20 U.S.C. 1101a(a)(6)).

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.

Outcomes

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

Plan of Operation

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

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

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

Secondary School

A nonprofit institutional day or residential school that provides secondary education, as determined under State law, except that such term does not include any education beyond grade 12 (Section 14101(25) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8801(25))). Note that school districts are not eligible applicants.

Teaching

A formal classroom and/or laboratory instruction, or practicum experience in the food, agricultural and human sciences and matters related thereto (such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies) conducted by eligible educational institutions.