



# **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

## **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking Competitive Grants Program**

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2023

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 10, 2023

ANTICIPATED FUNDING: \$2,350,000

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-FBMB-009822

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.319

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not Required

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

**Assistance Listing:** The Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the number 10.319.

**Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines**

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	Fiscal Year 2023: April 10, 2023 5:00 P.M. Eastern
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice <i>(NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)</i>

**Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.** The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when equity is grounded in the programs. 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](mailto:Policy@usda.gov) (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program 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**

NIFA will use this solicitation to request applications for the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program for FY 2023 to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers, and maintain the national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management. At this time, NIFA requests applications for the FY 2023 funding cycle. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2023 is approximately \$2,350,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for FBMB projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

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## PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority

The authority for this program is under section [1672D of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, 7 U.S.C. 5925f](#), as amended, which authorizes the Secretary, acting through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), to make competitive research and extension grants to improve farm management.

### B. Purpose and Priorities

Consistent with [7 U.S.C. 5925f](#), NIFA is soliciting applications for the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers by maintaining and expanding a national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management. Additionally traditional ecological knowledge is an acceptable topic of research, education, and extension for projects funded by this RFA, in pursuit of the aforementioned priorities, goals, and objectives.

The FBMB program aims to strongly support intellectual talent and collaborative efforts to maintain the national, publicly available farm financial management database needed to meet the challenges facing the nation's agriculture and food systems. Meeting these challenges will require innovative approaches that foster multi-disciplinary projects. This means that farm management producers must be educated and prepared to work effectively across disciplines in order to work to solve agricultural and educational challenges. The FBMB program supports all producers to develop farm management knowledge that is consistent with the food and agricultural priorities of USDA/NIFA.

The assistance provided by these programs, to the extent practicable, shall be coordinated and delivered in cooperation with similar services or assistance by other Federal Agencies or programs supporting improved farm management. The Secretary may give priority to applicants that:

1. Demonstrate an ability to work directly with agricultural producers.
2. Collaborate with farm management, education programs and associations.
3. Address the farm management needs of a variety of crops and regions of the United States; and
4. Contribute data to support the [national farm financial management database](#).

The FBMB program supports social and behavioral science disciplines, as well as leadership skills development opportunities. Incorporation of social/behavioral sciences and leadership development is important for addressing many of the challenges facing agriculture and farm communities, such as increasing global demand for food production in the face of limited natural resources; improving health and reducing obesity by engaging in healthy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

**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.

The FBMB program leads to improved farm management knowledge and skills of individuals directly involved in the production of agriculture, and therefore is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026 found at

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-fy-2022-2026-strategic-plan.pdf>:

1. Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers to Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World/Objective 2.1: Provide an Effective Financial Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers to Sustain Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Support Rural Jobs and Economic Growth/Objective 2.2: Increase Agricultural Opportunities and Support Economic Growth by Creating New Markets and Supporting a Competitive Agricultural System.
2. Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development/Objective 4.1/Expand Rural Business Opportunity and Rural Quality of Life with Access to Capital; Improved Infrastructure, Broadband Access, and Connectivity; and Support for Workforce Availability.
3. Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research/Objective 5.1: Enhance Conservation Planning with Science-Based Tools and Information.

For a program informational webinar please visit the [NIFA calendar](#) for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

**Table 2: Program Key Information**

Title	Description
Program Code:	FBMB
Program Code Name:	Farm Business Management and Benchmarking
Assistance Listing Number (ALN):	10.319
Project Type:	Extension Projects
Grant Type:	Standard Grants
Application Deadline	FY 2023: April 10, 2023
Grant Duration:	Generally, up to 36 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	Approximately 4-6
Maximum Award Amount:	\$500,000

**C. Program Area Description**

The FBMB program outlined in this RFA seeks to expand upon work begun in FY 2010 to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of individuals directly involved in production agriculture. Specifically, applications are being solicited to address one or both of the following objectives:

1. Maintain and expand the already established national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management knowledge and skills for

producers of a variety of crops and livestock throughout multiple regions of the United States, and

2. Establish or expand collaborative farm management educational programs with farm organizations or associations that will contribute data to the existing national farm financial management and benchmarking database to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of all agricultural producers.

In addition to addressing one or both of the objectives above, the FBMB program anticipates funding projects that demonstrate one or more of the following measures:

1. Advancing data gathering and conducting research on cost of production, farm profitability factors, and farm policy.
2. Developing or expanding cooperation and data sharing among existing farm management associations and business management education programs across the nation to convert their financial analysis activities to a uniform information system.
3. Providing training, assistance, and software to states with farm management associations to facilitate uniform financial procedures and software.
4. Improving the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized farms and ranches by providing access to high quality, uniform farm business management benchmarking information; or
5. Improving producers' abilities to successfully manage their agricultural operations through periods of high risk, volatility, and financial stress.

At a minimum, applicants should provide evidence that they:

1. Will expand or establish a farm management program that works directly with agricultural producers to contribute data to the national farm management and benchmarking database.
2. Address the farm management needs of a variety of crops and regions of the United States.
3. Establish and collaborate with more than five farm management education programs or associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States.
4. Maintain farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including organic and specialty crop commodities).
5. Establish procedures that enable producers to (i) benchmark their farms against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking database by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at all overall business and individual enterprise levels.
6. Contribute data to the national farm financial management database; and
7. Provide public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.

## PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

### A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program in FY 2023 is approximately \$2,350,000. 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. Types of Applications

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Applications for FY 2022 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](#) of this RFA 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).
3. *Renewal application*. Renewal applications must contain the same information as required for new applications and must contain a *progress report*. The progress report must include the implementation of the data management plan (DMP) of the previously funded project. Renewal applications are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Applicants submitting a renewal application must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously approved 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 Extension projects. Single-function Extension Projects conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. Program delivery may range from community-based to national audiences and use communication methods from face-to-face to electronic or combinations thereof. Extension Projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, in-service training, client recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative instructional methodologies appropriate to informal educational programs.

Extension Projects address one or more of the following key strategic actions:

- a. Support informal education to increase food and agricultural literacy of youth and adults.
- b. Promote science-based agricultural literacy by increasing understanding and use of food and agricultural science data, information, and programs.

- c. Build science-based capability in people to engage audiences and enable informed decision making.
- d. Develop new applications of instructional tools and curriculum structures that increase technical competency and ensure global competitiveness.
- e. Offer non-formal learning programs that increase accessibility to new audiences at the rate at which new ideas and technologies are tested and/or developed at the community-scale; and
- f. Develop programs that increase public knowledge and citizen engagement leading to actions that protect or enhance the nations' food supply, agricultural productivity, environmental quality, community vitality, and/or public health and well-being.

These projects should lead to measurable, documented changes in learning, actions, or conditions in an identified audience or stakeholder group. These projects should synthesize and incorporate a wide range of the latest relevant research results.

2. Grant Types. Applicants must select regular grant applications. Regular grants support targeted original scientific Research, Education/Teaching, Extension, or Integrated Projects. An eligible, individual institution, independent branch campus, or branch institution of a State system may submit a grant application for project activities to be undertaken principally on behalf of its own students or faculty, and to be managed primarily by its own personnel. The applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners.

#### **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 Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) program 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 be submitted by numerous entities. Pursuant to [7 U.S.C. 3157\(b\)\(7\)](#), eligible applicant means:

1. State agricultural experiment station;
2. College and universities;
3. University research foundation;
4. Other research institutions and organizations;
5. Federal agencies;
6. National laboratories;
7. Private organizations or corporations;
8. Individuals; or
9. Any group consisting of two (2) or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (A) through (H).

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

***Duplicate or Multiple Submissions*** – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. 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*** – The FBMB program has **NO** matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

### **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 codified in ([7 U.S.C. 3157\(b\)\(7\)](#)) 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).

## 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](https://www.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](https://www.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	<i>New Users</i> to <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> must register early with <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> prior to submitting an application ( <a href="#">Register Here</a> ).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install <a href="#">Adobe Reader</a> (see <a href="#">Adobe Software Compatibility</a> for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity <b>USDA-NIFA-FBMB-009822</b> , search for application here: <a href="#">Opportunity Package</a> .
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
<a href="#">Grants.gov Online Support</a> Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035  Email support: <a href="mailto:support@grants.gov">support@grants.gov</a> Self-service customer-based support: <a href="#">Grants.gov iPortal</a>  Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except <a href="#">federal holidays</a>	Email: <a href="mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov">grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov</a>  Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except <a href="#">federal holidays</a>

### 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 <a href="#">NIFA Grants Application Guide</a> )
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 <a href="http://Grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.	N/A
Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within <b>30</b> 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. **Field 7.** Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the FBMB program. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates. Limit the abstract to 250 words.

The Abstract should include the following:

- a. Proposal Title;
- b. Names of PD, Co-PDs, and key project personnel;
- c. Names of partnering institutions (if applicable);
- d. A brief description of the proposed project that addresses the purpose and priorities of the FBMB program based on one of the two objectives and at least one of the five measures listed under [Part I, C](#) of this RFA; and
- e. Funding amount requested

2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must not exceed 18 double-spaced pages with one-inch margins of written text in 12 pt. Times New Roman font and up to 6 additional pages for figures and tables (the font size for tables 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.

Your application will be reviewed and scored according to the quality of your responses to the requirements in Sections A-G detailed below. In developing the Project Narrative section of your application, use the sections headings listed below. Indicate the Section letter and number in your response, e.g., type “A.1”, “A.2”, etc., before your response to each question. Please do not combine two or more questions or refer to another section of the Project Narrative in your response, such as indicating that the response for B.2 is in C.7.

**The PN must include all the following:**

**Response to Previous Review (if applicable)**

This requirement only applies to Resubmitted Applications or Resubmitted Renewal Applications as described in [Part II, B of this RFA](#). The two-page response to the previous review (containing the previous proposal number in the first line) titled “Response to Previous Review Proposal XXXX-XXXXX”. The response to previous review must not exceed 2 pages and does not count towards the 18-page limit for the PN.

**A. Introduction.**

1. Provide a statement of purpose of the project that addresses the purpose and priorities of the FBMB program based on one (1) of the two (2) objectives and at least one (1) of the five (5) measures listed under [Part I, C](#) of this RFA.
2. Provided goals and objectives for the proposal enhancing the already established Farm Business Management and Benchmarking National Database, hereafter referred to as “FBMB National Database”.
3. A discussion of the relevant Body of Knowledge sufficient to demonstrate the applicant’s understanding of the needs of agricultural producers for farm financial management and benchmarking capabilities. The discussion should include estimates of the relative importance of the issues to stakeholders and to ongoing State-Federal food and agricultural research, education, and extension programs.

- B. Plan of Work.** Provide methods and procedures for maintaining a FBMB National Database, and Action Steps for implementation and management of a farm financial management database, collaboration with farm management and producer associations, and direct work with agricultural producers. This plan of work should provide a description of the Facilities in which the FBMB National Database will operate, along with the Personnel Needs, Assignments, and the Division of Labor

anticipated for implementation of the proposed plan. The methods and procedures section of the plan of work should include but not necessarily be limited to:

1. A description of the proposed project activities in the sequence in which it is planned to carry them out.
2. Techniques to be employed, including their feasibility and rationale for their uses in program implementation.
3. Kinds of results expected.
4. Means by which data will be collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used.
5. Details of plans to communicate programming and results to stakeholders and the public.
6. Pitfalls that might be encountered and how they might be overcome.
7. Limitations of the proposed project; and
8. A project timetable outlining all important phases as a function of time, year by year, for the entire project, including, if appropriate, periods beyond the grant funding period.

**C. Institutional Capacity, Division of Labor and Project Management.**

It is critical to have a clearly articulated management plane which describes the roles and functions of all partners, collaborators, and organizations as it relates to the proposed project.

1. A Description of Planned Data Management and Coordination of Efforts and Mechanisms to achieve them, sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's proficiency administering a database. This description should include discussion of any relevant past activities.
2. Describe prospective collaborators and the role each will play in the FBMB National Database's efforts. The description should include the role of stakeholders in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, as appropriate.
3. Provide a description of performance measurement to assess the effectiveness of the FBMB National Database's coordination efforts and database management and benchmarking outcomes.
4. Provide evidence and discussion of past experience and compliance with Federal Reporting Requirements.

**D. Sustainability.**

1. Describe steps you will take toward project's sustainability beyond the life of the NIFA FBMB grant. For example, identify opportunities (such as resources, trainings, partnerships, collaborations, funding streams) you plan to explore/develop/enhance during the life of the proposed project to help you sustain project operations after NIFA funding has expired. If planning to sustain only certain aspects of the project beyond NIFA funding, please clearly identify them. Include your main project sustainability activities in the proposal timeline.

**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 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 should 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), COE 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) (list of certified NLGCA is available at [NLGCA list](#), and schools of veterinary medicine).

**Please indicate in this section if you are *not* pursuing status as a Center of Excellence.**

**F. Progress Report (if applicable).** This requirement only applies to the Renewal application or Resubmitted Renewal Applications (see [Part II, B of this RFA](#)). These applications must include a progress report and does not count toward the maximum page limitation for the Project Narrative stated in [Part IV, B of this RFA](#).

**G. Budget and Budget Narrative**

1. There should be a direct relationship between the items in the budget and budget narrative, as well as between budget narrative and the objectives/activities contained in the Project Narrative.
2. Every item in the budget must be justified in the proposal. The amount of detail depends on the nature of the project and the breakdown of costs.
3. Proposed budgets must not exceed \$500,000 total or request funding for more than three years.
4. Budget breakdown and budget narrative should be provided for each project year (Year 1, and Year 2 and Year 3 as applicable). For FY23 applications with a one-year period of performance, the project start date must be September 1, 2023 and the end date must be August 31, 2024. For a two-year

period of performance, the project start date must be September 1, 2023 and the end date must be August 31, 2025. For a three-year period of performance, the project start date must be September 1, 2024 and the end date must be August 31, 2026.

5. In budget narrative, costs (e.g., personnel, materials, travel, etc.) are to be broken down and itemized rather than shown as lump sums.
6. NOTE: The budget narrative does not have to count toward the maximum page count stated in [Part IV, B](#) of this RFA.

**H. Applications will not be accepted for review if they do any of the following**

1. Exceed the maximum federal budget request for the type of application proposed.
  2. Propose objectives or an approach that does not fit with the purpose and scope of the FBMB program
  3. Exceed the maximum pages allowed for Project Narrative;
  4. Failure to submit documents in portable document format (pdf); and
  5. Failure to include any of the following:
    - a. Introduction;
    - b. Plan of Work;
    - c. Institutional Capability, Division of Labor and Project Management;
    - d. Sustainability;
    - e. Center of Excellence;
    - f. Progress Report (if applicable); and
    - g. Budget and Budget Narrative
3. **Field 9.** Attach Bibliography& References Cited. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). Title the attachment as ‘Bibliography& References Cited’ in the document header and save file as ‘Bibliography’.
4. **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. 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.
2. While budgets should account for this travel, virtual or hybrid meetings may be considered based on local and national pandemic conditions.

**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](#)). 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 Farm Business Management and Benchmarking and the program code FBMB. 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, if any; or
2. Thirty 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 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.

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](http://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.

## 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 minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
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 the 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 to evaluate this RFA. The first two evaluation criterion will be given additional emphasis and the other criterion will have equal weight:

- 1. Maintain and expand the already established FBMB National Database to support improved farm management knowledge and skills for producers of a variety of crops and livestock throughout multiple regions of the United States.** This criterion is used to assess how the project will support, expand, and improve the national farm financial database and enhance its usefulness to help producers improve their farm management skills. Elements considered include expansion of the database; methodologies that will help producers better use or access the database; improvements to database technology; increasing research opportunities; increasing enterprise diversity represented in the database; or expanding the geographic range of the database.
- 2. Establish or expand collaborative farm management educational programs and association with organizations that will contribute data to the existing national farm financial management and benchmarking database to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers.** This criterion is used to assess the contributions farm management education programs or associations will make to expand the quantity and diversity of data in the national farm financial database. Elements considered include how the project will increase or initiate data contributions; increase the number or diversity of farms and ranches represented in the database, including farm types, commodities produced, or increase farm numbers from additional states or regions.
- 3. Advance data gathering and conduct research on cost of production, farm profitability factors, and farm policy.** This criterion is used to assess the contributions farm management education programs or associations will make to expand the quantity and diversity of data in the national farm financial database. Elements considered include how the project will increase or initiate data contributions; increasing the number or diversity of farms and ranches represented in the database, including farm types, commodities produced, or increasing farm numbers from additional states or regions. This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the knowledge and skills of agricultural producers and establishment or maintenance of the national publicly available farm financial management database. Elements considered include identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed; body of knowledge, and preliminary data and other past activities used to substantiate the need for the proposed project.
- 4. Develop or expand cooperation and data sharing among existing farm management associations and farm business management education programs across the nation to convert their financial analysis activities to a uniform system.** This criterion is used to assess the soundness of the proposed approach. Elements considered include the adequacy of the scope of the project to produce expected outcomes/changes in knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and/or behaviors in targeted populations; objectives; and soundness/evidence-base of educational curricula to be used in the project.

5. **Improve the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized farms and ranches by providing access to high quality, uniform farm business management benchmarking information.** This criterion is used to assess the adequacy of the performance measurements and its capacity to measure the extent to which program objectives are met. Elements considered include evaluation question(s), the methodological approach proposed for answering these questions, justification for the type of data to be collected, a data collection plan, data analysis plan, and strengths and limitations of the proposed evaluation approach.
6. **Improve producers' abilities to successfully manage their agricultural operations through periods of high risk, volatility, and financial stress.** This criterion is used to assess the adequacy of the performance measurements and its capacity to measure the extent to which program objectives are met. Elements considered include evaluation question(s), the methodological approach proposed for answering these questions, justification for the type of data to be collected, a data collection plan, data analysis plan, and strengths and limitations of the proposed evaluation approach.

### **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 relating to an applicant prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only have to update their information if they had previously provided the 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 statute 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 programs or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

At the end of the grantee's final year, the grantee must prepare a final report to USDA/NIFA that summarizes all significant activities undertaken towards achieving the outcomes of the project. The report should include basic demographics and total numbers on participants served or resources developed; tables, graphs, and other figures to facilitate comparing targeted project results with actual results, aggregated for the entire project; for projects expected to lead to measurable, documented changes in participants' learning, actions or conditions, final numbers of participants who showed/reported significant changes in learning, actions or conditions; project list of all educational materials (including web links when appropriate) produced by the project; and success stories and pictures showcasing project impacts. The NIFA program specialist on record will provide a form recommended for use in completing the final report as part of the post-award management process. Reports must be received in REEport within 120 days of the expiration date of the award.

*Reporting on Performance.* Projects are expected to develop and report on performance indicators that can demonstrate measurable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of project participants. These indicators should demonstrate the project's success at achieving the proposals objectives and overarching goal. NIFA strongly encourages involving an evaluator on the proposal project to help develop outcome-based performance measures and a plan for evaluating the project's performance.

In addition to tracking and reporting on project-specific outcomes, all grantees will report annually to NIFA on one or both of the following performance indicators:

**1. Individuals and Families**

- a. Total number of individuals and separately, families who participated in the proposed project
- b. The number of individuals and separately, families that gained an economic, environmental, or quality of life benefit from a change in resources, knowledge, attitudes, or behavior acquired by participating in the proposed projects

**2. Counties Served**

- a. Total number of counties served by the proposed projects
- b. The number of counties that gained economic, environmental, or quality of life benefit from a change in resources, knowledge or practice acquired by individuals or families participating in the proposed project

## **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](#).

**D. Limited English Proficiency**

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#) or contact Lois Tuttle, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at [Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov](mailto:Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov) or (443) 386-9488.

## APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

### Program Contacts

Keith Harris

[Keith.harris@usda.gov](mailto:Keith.harris@usda.gov)

816-589-6631

Jessica Turner

[Jessica.turner@usda.gov](mailto:Jessica.turner@usda.gov)

816-926-2500

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](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)
3. Awards under this RFA, please email [awards@usda.gov](mailto: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**

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Representative – AR

Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA

Centers of Excellence – COE

Data Management Plan – DMP

National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy of 1977 – NARETPA

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Project Director – PD

Request for Application – RFA

Research, Education, and Economics – REE

Total Federal Funds – TFFA

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.

**Benchmark, Benchmarking:** The term “benchmark” or “benchmarking” means the process of comparing the performance of an agricultural enterprise against the performance of other similar enterprises, through the use of comparable and reliable data, to identify business management strengths, weaknesses, and steps necessary to improve management performance and business profitability.

**Farm Business Management & Benchmarking National Database:** Determined by the Secretary; improves the farm management knowledge and skills of individuals directly involved in production of agriculture through 1) Participation in a farm management education and training program; and 2) Direct access to a public farm-benchmarking database. In addition to the FBMB National Database:

1. Forms collaborative partnerships with more than five (5) farm management associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States.
2. Supports farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including some organic commodities).
3. Maintains procedures that enable producers to (i) benchmark the farms of the producers against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking database by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at the overall business and individual enterprise levels; and
4. Provides public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.

**Matching:** The process through which a grant recipient matches 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.

**Partnership:** Requires that all partners have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership between multiple entities is proposed, the proposal should clearly identify the following:

1. A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project.
2. How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determine experimental design, develop the project work plan, and timetable, and submit collaborative, timely reports; and
3. A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or in-kind contribution to the total project budget costs.

**Renewal Application:** A project application that seeks additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award.

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

Resubmitted Renewal Application: A project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. This is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal but not funded.