REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
Higher Education Challenge
Grants Program

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2024
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	March 5, 2024
ANTICIPATED FUNDING:	$5,055,342
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-CGP-010433
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.217
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required

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

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.217.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, March 5, 2024
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 (DEIA). The 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 (RFA) 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. Please use the following subject line: Response to the Higher Education Challenge Grant Program RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

This notice specifies the funding information, deadlines, application forms, and accompanying instructions for Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program projects, as well as the funding objectives and eligibility requirements for applicants and projects. NIFA is soliciting applications for the HEC Grants Program for FY 2024 to enable colleges and universities to provide the quality of education required to produce baccalaureate or higher degree-level graduates capable of bolstering the nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional workforce. The amount available for grants in FY 2024 is approximately $5,055,342.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES

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, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences. Authority for this program is contained in section 1417(b)(1) of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)(1)).

Section 1417 of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152) authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, who has delegated the authority to the Director of NIFA, to make competitive grants to land-grant colleges and universities, to colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences, and to other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences, for a period not to exceed 5 years. In response to identified State, regional, national, or international educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences, HEC programs shall promote and strengthen higher education in the food and agricultural sciences by formulating and administering programs to enhance college and university teaching programs in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, home economics, disciplines closely allied to the food and agricultural system, and rural economic, community, and business development.

B.   Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program, under assistance listing 10.217, is to strengthen institutional capacities, including curriculum, faculty, scientific instrumentation, instruction delivery systems, and student recruitment and retention, to respond to identified state, regional, national, or international educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences, or in rural economic, community, and business development.

Specifically, applications submitted to this grants program must state how the funded project will address the HEC Program Goals:

1. To strengthen institutional capacities, including curriculum, faculty, scientific instrumentation, instruction delivery systems, and student recruitment and retention, to respond to identified State, regional, national, or international educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences, or in rural economic, community, and business development;
2. To attract and support undergraduate and graduate students in order to educate the students in national need areas of the food and agricultural sciences or in rural economic, community, and business development;
3. To facilitate cooperative initiatives between two or more eligible institutions, or between eligible institutions and units of State government or organizations in the private sector, to maximize the development and use of resources such as faculty, facilities, and equipment to improve food and agricultural sciences teaching programs, or teaching programs emphasizing rural economic, community, and business development;
4. To design and implement food and agricultural sciences programs, or programs emphasizing rural, economic, community, and business development, to build teaching,

research, and extension capacity at colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments;

5. To conduct undergraduate scholarship programs to meet national and international needs for training food and agricultural sciences scientists and professionals, or professionals in rural economic, community, and business development;
6. To increase the number and diversity of students who will pursue and complete a postsecondary degree in the food and agricultural sciences;
7. To enhance the quality of instruction for baccalaureate degrees, master's degrees, and first professional degrees in veterinary sciences, to help meet current and future workforce needs in the food and agricultural sciences; and
8. To conduct graduate and postdoctoral fellowship programs to attract highly promising individuals to research or teaching careers in the food and agricultural sciences.

HEC is a NIFA-administered competitive grants program focused on improving formal, baccalaureate, or master's degree level food and agricultural sciences education, and first professional degree-level education in veterinary medicine such as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM). HEC projects provide funding to eligible applicants to help ensure a competent, qualified, and diverse workforce will exist to serve the food and agricultural sciences system. At the same time, HEC-funded projects improve the economic health and viability of communities through the development of degree programs emphasizing new and emerging employment opportunities. Finally, HEC projects address the national challenge to increase the number and diversity of students entering the food and agricultural sciences (i.e., having a food and agricultural sciences workforce representative of the nation's population).

The HEC projects are expected to: (a) produce measurable impacts aligned with HEC program goals, (b) promote innovative educational practices within the food and agricultural sciences that improve how students learn, and (c) include a rigorous evaluation component to assess that project outcomes are met. Institutions must demonstrate capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to the teaching of the food and agricultural sciences generally, and to the specific need and/or discipline(s) for which a grant is requested. Projects should encourage academic institutions, in partnership with organizations and employers, to work collectively to identify and address a state or regional challenge or opportunity facing the food and agricultural sciences education and workforce community. Additionally, projects should encourage broad participation of students traditionally underrepresented in the food and agricultural sciences. An application must convince a peer panel of a compelling educational challenge; clearly indicate how the methodology is both unique and with merit; offer significant promise of adoption by others; and include a plan for how the project impacts will be sustained once grant funds end.

The HEC program is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026 goals:
1. Strategic Goal 2: Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous
2. Strategic Goal 4: Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food
3. Strategic Goal 6: Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA

The HEC program is aligned with the following [USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026](#) priorities:

1. Priority 1: Accelerating Innovative Technologies & Practices
2. Priority 2: Driving Climate-Smart Solutions
3. Priority 3: Bolstering Nutrition Security & Health
4. Priority 4: Cultivating Resilient Ecosystems
5. Priority 5: Translating Research into Action

Traditional ecological knowledge is regarded a suitable educational program topic for a HEC program-funded project, provided it fits to the program's priorities and goals as described in this RFA.

NIFA encourages virtual education and outreach/extension techniques that broaden the reach and access to audiences in its integrated projects.

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 U.S.

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. HEC teaching 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; and
4. Organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, etc.

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.

Social and Behavioral Sciences. HEC supports social and behavioral science disciplines. Projects that integrate social and biological sciences 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 healthy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	ER
Program Code Name:	Higher Education Challenge Grants Program
ALN:	10.217
Project Type:	Education/Teaching
Grant Type:	Planning Activity; Standard Grant; Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1); Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2)
Application Deadline	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, March 5, 2024
Grant Duration:	Planning Activity – Up to 36 months; Standard – 36 to 48 months; Collaborative 1 (CG1) – 36 to 48 months; Collaborative 2 (CG2) – 36 to 48 months
Anticipated # of Awards:	18
Maximum Award Amount:	Planning Activity – Approx. $30,000; Standard – Approx. $150,000; Collaborative 1 (CG1) – Approx. $300,000; Collaborative 2 (CG2) – Approx.$750,000

Additional information:
1. The total number of grants awarded by this grant program will depend on the number and type of meritorious applications submitted in response to this notice. There is no predetermined number of proposals that may be awarded in any grant cycle.
2. Based on the project scope and budget of all applications selected for awards, the actual, individual grant amounts awarded by NIFA under this grants program may differ from the funds requested by the applicant. In such cases, revised budgets and revised plans of work may be required by NIFA before an award is made.
3. There is no limit on the number of applications that may be submitted by an applicant institution. However, each institution or group that is successful in their application will only be given two awards per year through this program. Also, each institution or organization may only receive one CG2 grant per annual HEC grant program competition. Each academic (or other) unit within the institution or organization, such as a college, school of agriculture, etc., can only have one active CG2 grant at any given time.
4. There are no limits on the total grant program funds that may be awarded to any one institution/organization in successive years of this competition. Successful award recipients may apply for additional awards in subsequent years either as a lead applicant or collaborator.

Projects must primarily focus on baccalaureate, graduate, or DVM level education. However, a project may also include an ancillary, target impact on either secondary, or two-year postsecondary students. Projects with a primary target audience of K-14 students or teachers may consider the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Grants Program offered through NIFA**.**

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A.   Available Funding

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

The amount available for Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) in FY 2024 is approximately $5,055,342. 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 for FY 2024 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 the response to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (**Field 4**)* on the application form (see Appendix III for definition).

C.   Project and Grant Types

The following describes the types of *projects* or *grants* that are eligible for funding:

1. *Project Types*. Applicants must propose Education/Teaching Projects.
   An education or teaching project must develop human capital in order to help meet current and future national food and agricultural sciences workplace needs.
   HEC projects must focus on one or more of the Need Areas listed below. Please note that at least one of these Need Areas must be indicated on the Project Summary (See Part IV, B). Need Areas for FY 2024 are defined below:

   Educational Need Areas:
   Projects must engage more than a single course or an individual instructor when addressing at least one of the three Educational Need Areas listed below. The rationale for selecting the Educational Need Area(s) 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.

   a. Curriculum Development, Instructional Delivery Systems, and Expanding Student Career Opportunities:
      Projects should promote new and improved curricula and materials to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the nation's academic programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Additionally, 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.

Examples of eligible projects in this Need Area include:
i.   Development of courses of study, degree programs, and instructional materials;
ii. Use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects;
iii. Introduction of new subjects, or new applications of knowledge, pertaining to the food and agricultural sciences;
iv. 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; or
v.   Opportunities for students to complete apprenticeships, internships, career mentoring experiences, or other participatory learning experiences.

Projects are to develop students' analytical, interpersonal, leadership, communication, problem-solving, computational, and decision-making skills and abilities. Projects that focus on integrated, multidisciplinary, learner-centered instruction should be considered. Furthermore, projects are expected to reach large audiences efficiently and effectively; reinforce recent research on how to motivate students to learn, retain, apply, and transfer knowledge, skills, and competencies; and integrate and synthesize knowledge from several disciplines.

b. Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching:
Projects should advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency, subject matter expertise, pedagogy, responsiveness to changes in student demographic composition and learning styles, and student recruitment and advising skills. Training of faculty must be relevant to the identified educational needs of students. Any individual recipient of federal funds must be an "eligible participant" as defined in the definitions section of this RFA (Appendix III).

Examples of eligible projects in this Need Area include activities that enable teaching faculty to:
i.   Develop a self-sustaining model for faculty professional development that better prepares new faculty for teaching careers, or provides retraining for experienced faculty;
ii. Gain experience with recent developments or innovative technology relevant to their teaching responsibilities;
iii. Work with scientists or professionals in government, industry, or other colleges or universities to learn new applications in a field;
iv. Expand competence with new methods of information delivery;
v.   Create assessments that document student learning outcomes or that identify conceptual areas or skills particularly challenging to students, followed by appropriate changes in instructional approaches to effectively address these issues; or

     vi. Increase utilization of teaching methods that address the special needs of non-traditional students or students from groups that are underrepresented in the food and agricultural sciences workforce.

  c. Facilitating Interaction with Other Academic Institutions. This need area promotes linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in food and agricultural sciences. Additionally, this need area supports linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, secondary, and/or 2-year postsecondary institutions to make instruction targeted at undergraduate students available to secondary students as advanced placement credit or as transfer credit from associate-degree programs into baccalaureate-level programs. Faculty research sabbaticals at other academic institutions that will enhance teaching and advising are also supported.

    Examples of eligible projects in this Need Area may include:
    i. Development and use of articulation agreements, 2+2 or 2+2+2 arrangements, advanced placement credit transfer, or the sharing of faculty and facilities; 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 4-year food and agricultural sciences degree.
    ii. A program to reduce duplication of similar educational resources across institutions and to increase instructional efficiencies. Examples may include multi-institutional or interstate approaches to curriculum development, faculty sharing, cross enrollments, joint degrees, regionalization of academic programs, regional and national workshops and symposia, and similar methodologies.

2. *Grant Types*. Applicants must select the appropriate grant type from below:
  a. Planning Activity Grant:
    Planning Activity Grants support meetings that bring together food and agricultural sciences educators to identify education/teaching needs, update information, or advance an area of education/teaching. Support for a limited number of meetings covering subject matter encompassed by this solicitation will be considered for partial or, if modest, total support. Individual planning activity grants must not exceed $30,000 for up to three years and are not renewable. Indirect costs are not permitted on Planning Activity grant awards. Planning Activity Grants may be used to facilitate strategic planning session(s) required of faculty, industry, professional association, community leaders, or other necessary participants for the specific purpose of developing a formal plan leading to a subsequent submission of a Collaborative Grant as described herein. A Planning Activity grant application may not be submitted in the same year for which a Collaborative Grant application for the same project is also submitted.

  b. Standard Grant:
    Standard Grants support targeted original education/teaching 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. Applicants may request up to $150,000 (total, not per year) for a Standard Grant application.

c. Collaborative Grants:
   Collaborative Grants support projects with at least one additional partner or a multi-partner approach to enhance education/teaching programs. Collaborative Grants should build linkages to generate a critical mass of expertise, skill, and technology to address education/teaching programs related to the food and agricultural sciences. Grants can reduce duplication of efforts and/or build capacity and should be organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management knowledge and skills to organize and carry out the initiative.
   i.   Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) (Applicant + One Partner): Applicants may request up to $300,000 (total, not per year) for a CG1 project. In this type of project, the applicant executes the project with assistance from one additional partner. The partners must share grant funds. Specifically, the applicant institution will transfer at least one-half of the awarded funds to the other institution participating in the project.
   ii. Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) (Applicant + Two or more Partners): Applicants may request up to $750,000 (total, not per year) for a CG2 project. The applicant executes the project with assistance from at least two additional partners. The additional partners must share grant funds. The applicant institution/organization submitting a CG2 proposal must retain at least 30 percent, but not more than 70 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds. A CG2 project differs from a CG1 in project scope and impact. CG2 projects must support a multi-partner approach to solving a major state or regional challenge in food and agricultural sciences education at the baccalaureate, masters or DVM level. CG2 projects are characterized by multiple partners (each providing a specific expertise) organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management knowledge and skills to organize and carry out the initiative.

   Reported impacts of CG2 projects must include (but are not limited to) the following:
   (a) Assessment of significant progress toward addressing the national challenge of increasing the number and diversity of food and agricultural sciences baccalaureate or higher degree graduates, while addressing the specific state or regional opportunity defined in the grant application;
   (b) Documented enhanced retention rates of students in food and agricultural sciences majors exposed to CG2 Project activities;
   (c) A comprehensive project evaluation, using the indicators and methods defined in this RFA, that informs the baccalaureate, masters or DVM food and agricultural sciences community and others about the effectiveness of this CG2 Project through the dissemination of results via publications, blogs, conferences/meetings, etc.

(d) A description of completed or ongoing activities supported by this CG2 Project accompanied with a description of those same activities that will be sustained once grant funds end; and

(e) A description of any related activities expected to occur as an outgrowth of this funded project.

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 Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) 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:
1. U.S. public or private nonprofit colleges and universities offering a baccalaureate or first professional degree in at least one discipline or area of the food and agricultural sciences;
2. land-grant colleges and universities, (including land-grant institutions in the Insular Areas);
3. colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences; and
4. other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences.

An applicant also must meet the definition of an Eligible Institution/Organization as stated in this RFA (see Appendix III). For the purposes of this program, the individual branches of a state university or other system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree-granting institutions are treated as separate institutions and are therefore eligible for HEC awards. Separate branches or campuses of a college or university that are not individually accredited as degree-granting institutions are not treated as separate institutions. An institution eligible to receive an award under this program includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university. Accreditation must be by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

United States citizenship is not required of faculty that wish to serve as PD, co-PD, or key personnel on a HEC grant. Any individual (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds (for developmental activities) must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA (see Appendix III). Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

The following applies to CG1 and CG2 applicants only: The applicant institution must meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in 7 CFR §3405.2(i); the other institutions participating in a CG1 and CG2 project proposals are not required to meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in 7 CFR §3405.2(i), nor required to meet the definition of "college" or "university" as specified in 7 CFR §3405.2(f).

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

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. If NIFA receives more than one proposal that is the same or very close, it will consider the most recent one. During administrative screening, any earlier entries that are found to be the same or very similar to the proposal will be declined.

**B.	Cost Sharing or Matching**

No Match Required - The Higher Education Challenge Grant Program (HEC) 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-CGP-010433,** 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 through 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. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, 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 receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within **30** days of the application deadline.	N/A

Table 6: Application Components

Application component	File Name	Designation	Page limit
Grants.gov Forms			
SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet	N/A	Required	N/A
SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s) Form	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded).	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Personal Data	N/A	Recommended	N/A
SF-424 (Budget)	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Sub-award Budget Attachment	N/A	Required (for CG1 and CG2)	N/A
Attachments			
1) Project Summary	Projectsummary.pdf	Required	250-word maximum
2) Project Narrative	Projectnarrative.pdf	Required	20-pages maximum
3) Response to Previous Review	N/A (included in Project Narrative)	Required (for resubmissions)	2-pages maximum
4) Budget Justification	Budgetjustification.pdf	Required	2-pages maximum
5) Sub-award Budget Justification	SubawardName_justification.pdf	Required (for CG1 and CG2)	2-pages maximum (per sub-awardee)
6) Mentoring Plan	MentoringPlan.pdf	Required	2-pages maximum (per tier type)
7) Data Management Plan	DMP.pdf	Required	2-pages maximum
8) Logic Model	Logic_Model.pdf	Required	1-page maximum
9) Collaborative Arrangements	Collab_Arrangements.pdf	Required	N/A
10) Expected Outcomes	Expected_Outcomes.pdf	Required	1-page maximum
11) Biographical Sketch (BS)	keypersonnel.pdf	Required	2-pages maximum (per BS)
12) Current and Pending Support for Key Personnel	PendingCurrent.pdf	Required	N/A
13) Conflict of Interest	PDLastName_COI.pdf	Required	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 Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC). The PS is limited to 250 words. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.
2. **Field 8**. **Project Narrative (PN).** The attached file, named "Projectnarrative.pdf," contains the project narrative (PN). The Project Narrative is a concise and coherent description of the project. The maximum length for the PN is 20 pages of written text, double-spaced with a font size of 12. Additionally, up to 5 double-spaced pages can be used for figures and tables. Tables and figures should have a font size of at least 11 points, Times New Roman, and written text can be single-spaced. The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if these are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN attachment must include all the following:

In new applications, the narrative cover page should come before the table of contents. In resubmitted applications, please use this order: 1) response to previous review, 2) narrative cover page, 3) table of contents. The table of contents will not count towards the page limit of the Project Narrative.

Response to Previous Review
This requirement only applies to resubmitted applications as described in [Part II, B](#). The Project Narrative attachment is to include two components: 1) a *double-spaced* two-page response to the previous review (containing the previous proposal number in the first line) titled "Response to Previous Review" as the first page of the attachment of Project Narrative, as required (see [Part IV, B](#). above).

The two-page "Response to Previous Review" does not count against the 20-page limit of the Project Narrative. In resubmitted applications, the response to previous review should come before the narrative cover page (which is discussed below).

The narrative cover page (first page of the Project Narrative for new application) must include the information below and will not count towards the page limit of the Project Narrative:
   a. Project Title.
   b. Project Director (and any) Co-Project Director(s) (include institutional affiliation for each);
   c. Educational Need Area: ([Part II, C](#)).

d. 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.).
e. Primary Academic Code and Discipline: (Select one from Table 7).
f. Grant Type: Planning Activity, Standard, CG1, or CG2. (See 'Definitions', Appendix III);
g. Total Funds Requested: (List total Federal funds requested for this application. If this project is a CG1 or CG2 Project Proposal, also list each partner's total funds requested next to the institution/organization's name); and
h. Partners: If CG1 or CG2 Project Proposal, list all partner institutions/organizations that will share grant funding.

Table 7: Academic Codes and Disciplines

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

Prepare the application using a standard size (8 1/2" x 11") page, one-inch margins, no type smaller than 12-point font, and double line spacing. Use an easily readable font face (e.g., Arial, Times New Roman). Information may not be appended to an application to circumvent page limitations prescribed for the Project Narrative.

The Project Narrative must include all the following:

a. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem
    1) *Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact*: Briefly state: (a) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (b) the anticipated project audience; and (c) 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.
    2) *Project Justification*: Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project's Educational Need Area (Part II, C.) will be of value at the state, regional, national, or international level(s). Where applicable, explain how it will improve the food and agricultural science capabilities of students. Describe any previously funded projects that are ongoing or recently completed that re related to the proposed project.
    3) *Institutional Long-range Goals*: Explain how the project will help satisfy the institution/organization's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution/organization's strategic plan.
    4) *Innovation*: Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education, solving an educational problem, or promoting programs that advance equal opportunity for all students. Support your choice, with actual experiences or literature.
    5) *Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus*: Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in food and agricultural sciences education and how the project will enhance students' understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted by or serve as a model for other institutions.

b. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages
    1) *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.
    2) *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.
    3) *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 HEC goals from Part I, B. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project will improve education. This section must clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts. This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications. The following guidance will assist you with developing your evaluation plan:
        i. The evaluation may also include assessment of other outcomes, particularly if the project aims to change organizational structures, create cost- efficiencies, or achieve other ends. Explain the data gathering procedures that will be used to monitor and assess progress toward

intended project goals. When describing the measurement instruments, you plan to use (surveys, interviews, focus groups, assessments of e-portfolios or capstone projects, measures of class performance, scores on standardized tests, cost- benefit analyses, etc.), be sure to mention why these are appropriate to gauging success.

 ii. The evaluation plan section should make a convincing case to reviewers that at the conclusion of the grant, the grantee could report the extent to which learning and engagement outcomes, professional development goals, and/or organizational outcomes have been achieved. Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the applicant thought about how to measure both successes and failures and what adjustments could be made to enhance program outcomes in the future. Collection of this evidence is critical to achieving HEC's goal of making data about educational improvements and innovation available to the education community.

 iii. The project budget should contain funding to either hire an outside project evaluator, or to present convincing evidence that an appropriate evaluator is already on staff and available to provide assistance with assessment and evaluation throughout the life of the project. As a guide, up to 10 percent of grant funds may be used to support this purpose. Be mindful if you choose this option to avoid conflicts of interest.

4) *Dissemination Plans*: The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results, and impacts, etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or national conferences and workshops, including the HEC Project Directors' Meeting. 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. This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.

5) *Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts*: Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, CG1 or CG2 projects with other educational institution/organizations, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.

6) *Potential Pitfalls, Limitations, and Alternatives (if applicable):* Identify and explain any potential challenges that might impede progress during the duration of the project. Additionally, describe any potential strategies or alternatives that might be implemented to address such challenges. This section is optional for all applications and therefore, it will not count against the applicant during the evaluation process.

c. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building**
   1) *Institutional/organizational Commitment and Capability:* Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.
   2) *Institutional/organizational Resources*: Document the necessary institutional/ organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, that will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how these resources, when combined with the support requested from USDA will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project.
   3) *Academic Enhancement*: Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching at the institution (including any partner institutions/organizations). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above (b.2, Timetable) will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution/organization or the grant period.
   4) *Continuation Plans*: Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. Describe how the institutions/organization's long-range budget or academic plan provides for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends. Explain the plans for eventual self-support built into the project, and the plans to institutionalize the program if it is successful. Describe any indications of other continuing non-federal support. Provide details of the expected outcomes, and the targeted audience that would benefit from the continuation of this project. This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.

d. **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.

e. **Budget and Cost-effectiveness**
   1) *Budget*: In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that all funds requested from USDA are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s) and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project. If the application addresses more than one Educational Need Area (see Part II, C), you must include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area.

2) *Cost-effectiveness*: Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on a need area.

    f. Logic Model: Applications must include a logic model detailing the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project, as well as potential external factors that may affect progress on the proposed project. This information should be formatted into a one-page logic model chart. The logic model planning process is a tool that should be used in developing projects before writing the proposal. More information and resources related to the NIFA logic model are provided at Logic Model Planning Process. This does not count towards the page limit for the PN.

3. **Field 12**, Add Other Attachments: See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide. *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 may not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.

Mentoring Plan – PDF Attachment: If the proposal anticipates requesting funding for student or postdoctoral support including scholarships or fellowships, it must include a maximum of a one- to two-page Mentoring Plan (MP) for all recipients. All applicants must include a Mentoring Plan attachment. In cases when a mentoring plan is not deemed suitable, it is expected that the PD will provide a written statement indicating that no student support is being sought, thereby rendering a mentoring plan unnecessary. Alternatively, the PD should provide a cogent rationale justifying the decision to not submit a mentoring plan. If various tiers of students or scholars are represented in the proposal, please provide separate mentoring plans for each educational or professional level targeted (e.g., high school students, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, etc.). Title the document header as "Mentoring Plan Undergraduate Students or Mentoring Plan Graduate Students or Mentoring Plan Postdoc" as applicable and save attachment file as "Mentoring_Plan". The Mentoring Plan should incorporate:
a. the roles and responsibilities of the Project Director and Co-Project Directors in managing the mentoring process;
b. training for and/or credentials of individuals who will serve as mentors (i.e., mentor training). Mentors may be experienced mentors from academia, industry, or government, or student peers at various levels who are expected to provide guidance, cultural support, and sense of community with the activities and facilitate the amplification of program-specific perspectives and accomplishments of the mentees;
c. a description of mentoring activities that may include, but are not limited to, peer mentoring or layered mentoring, whereby a set of mentees are progressively mentored by others at a higher level in their careers; please incorporate these activities into the overall project timeline;

d. a description of processes to ensure reasonable accommodations for program participants with disabilities or challenges with accessing program activities. Scholarship programs should include plans to accommodate scholarship recipients who find it necessary to interrupt their program of study because of health, personal, or other reasonable non-academic and non-disciplinary cause(s).

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 in Appendix I of this RFA.

Collaborative Arrangements – PDF Attachment: In the document heading, type "Collaborative Arrangements" and save the file as "Collab_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.

Expected Outcomes – PDF Attachment: Type "Expected Outcomes" in the document title and name the attached file "Expected_Outcomes." Please submit projected outcomes in a format similar to that shown in Table 8 and attach it as the final page of the application. For Planning Activity grant applications, this is optional.

Table 8: Expected Outcomes

Total expected impact during entire grant period	Expected Number	Justification for Expected Numbers
Number of products to be developed through grant funds during the grant period (i.e., curricula, academic programs, recruitment/retention programs, materials, experiential learning opportunities)	-	-
Number of faculty supported by this grant for professional development during the grant period: participation in sabbaticals, workshops, conferences, etc.	-	-
Number of students who will indirectly benefit from the products produced from the grant during the grant period (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited, or retained but not paid by the grant using scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships).	-	-

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](#).
Include the travel costs for the Project Director and any other key staff member(s) to attend at least one national Project Directors' meeting, if offered, in Washington, DC, or other announced location during the lifetime of the grant. Stipends to support students' experiential, academic learning activities outside of the traditional classroom are permitted (if such activities are clearly related to a student's degree program and are not extracurricular). Stipends may be requested for materials or supplies to facilitate a student's broad exposure to research/field techniques and methodologies, as well as for reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings) directly supporting this funded project. For students to be provided a stipend, they must be currently matriculated in the institution(s) where the projects are being implemented. Stipends may not be used for tuition or scholarships. Any application primarily focused on providing student stipends should also include a plan demonstrating how the stipends will continue once current grant funds expire. While budgets should account for this travel, virtual or hybrid meetings may be considered based on local and national pandemic conditions.

***Budget Justification* –** PDF Attachment: Consistent with the budget, the budget justification ought to be presented in the same sequence. It is essential to furnish relevant details pertaining to each component of the budget to ensure comprehensive budgetary documentation. Additionally, salaries (including the Base Annual Salary for each key personnel), equipment, travel expenses, participant/trainee assistance, and other direct cost categories must be accounted for in the budget, as applicable. In addition to incorporating any requested supplementary information for each of the designated budget categories, the budget justification should encompass any other relevant documentation that you deem essential for substantiating your budgetary appeal.

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.

R&R Sub-award Budget Attachment (Only required if submitting a CG1 or CG2 Project Proposal): Clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required sharing percentage. Further itemize all expenditures for the applicant and all partners in the Budget Justification. Funds do not have to be divided equally among project years. Remember that each sub-awardee must have a budget and cumulative for each year they participate in the grant project.

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).
1. **Field 2**. Program to which the applicant is applying. Accurate entry is critical. Enter the following:

   - **Program Name**: Higher Education Challenge Grant Program (HEC)
   - **Program Code:** ER

2. **Field 8**. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

C.   Funding Restrictions
Indirect Costs (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded (TFFA).
Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy
Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a) and (c)) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of 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 IDC rate and the IDC rate charged by sub-
   awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

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

If the result of number one above 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 number two above 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 IDC
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.

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant
may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the
application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. 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.

See NIFA Indirect Costs for information including additional resources and NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart.

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 (which are listed in priority order of importance) to evaluate this RFA:

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. The proposed project must also show its relevance to the goals of HEC. Priority will be given to
   a. applications for teaching enhancement projects that demonstrate enhanced coordination among all types of institutions eligible for funding under this section; and
   b. applications for teaching enhancement projects that focus on innovative, multidisciplinary education programs, material, and curricula.
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 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, 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. Institutional data must be included 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.
5. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness: This criterion relates to the extent to which the total 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 Federal Assistance Policy Guide applies to all NIFA awards.

C.   Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements
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 Notice.

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, 48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures;
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense (2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs);
6. 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.
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity; and
8. 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 or (443) 386-9488.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Program Contacts

Solomon Haile
National Program Leader
Solomon.Haile@usda.gov
(615) 517-4157

Cierra Campbell
Program Specialist
Cierra.Campbell@usda.gov
(786) 848-8587

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

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

Courier/Package Delivery Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. 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
Data Management Plan – DMP
Doctor of Veterinary Medicine – DVM
Higher Education Challenge Competitive Grant Program - HEC
Indirect Cost - IDC
National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 - NARETPA
National Institute of Food and Agriculture - NIFA
Project Director - PD
Project Narrative - PN
Project Summary - PS
Request for Application - RFA
Research, Education, and Economics - REE
Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12
Classroom Challenge Grant Program - SPECA
Total Federal Funds Awarded - 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.

Definitions

Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) proposal:

An application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution working in cooperation with one other entity not legally affiliated with the applicant institution, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, units of state government, private sector organizations, or a consortium of institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution and cooperating entity will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, the applicant institution/organization submitting a CG1 proposal must retain at least 30 percent, but not more than 50 percent of the awarded funds. Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a collaborative project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization.

Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) proposal:

An application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution/organization working in cooperation with two or more other entities not legally affiliated with the applicant institution, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, units of State government, private sector organizations, or a consortium of institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution and each cooperating entity will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, the applicant institution/organization submitting a CG2 proposal must retain at least 30 percent, but not more than 70 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds. Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of an eligible institution as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a collaborative project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution. CG2 proposals must support a multi-partner approach to solving a major state or regional challenge in agricultural sciences education at the postsecondary level. CG2 proposals are characterized by multiple partners (each providing a specific expertise) organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management ability to organize and carry out the initiative.

Eligible Institution:

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

Eligible Participant:

> Unless otherwise specified, only United States citizens, non-citizen nationals of the United States, and lawful permanent residents of the United States are eligible to apply for and receive NIFA awards. 7 CFR 3430.16.

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.

Planning Activity Grant Proposal:

> A proposal for a project: (1) where the applicant institution may be the sole entity involved; or (2) which will involve the applicant institution and one or more other entities, to facilitate meetings and/or strategic planning session(s) required of faculty, industry, professional association, community leaders, or other necessary participants for the specific purpose of developing a formal plan leading to a subsequent submission of a Collaborative Grant as defined in this section.

Resubmitted Application:

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

Standard Grant Proposal:

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

Teaching and Education:

> From 7 U.S.C. 3103 (20), means formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and matters relating thereto (such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies) conducted by colleges and universities offering baccalaureate or higher degrees.