



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food  
and Agriculture

[www.nifa.usda.gov](http://www.nifa.usda.gov)  
@USDA\_NIFA

The logo for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), featuring the letters "NIFA" in a large, white, serif font. The letters are set against a background of a stylized, golden-brown landscape with rolling hills and a sun or moon in the sky.

# **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

## **Specialty Crop Research Initiative**

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2024

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 12, 2024

ANTICIPATED FUNDING: \$70,259,450

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-SCRI-010534

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.309

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not Required

PROGRAM CODE: SCRI

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

**Assistance Listing Number (ALN):** The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is listed in the Assistance Listings under the number 10.309.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
<b>Application:</b>	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, April 12, 2024
<b>Letter of Intent:</b>	Not Required
<b>Applicants Comments:</b>	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 (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](mailto:Policy@usda.gov). Please use the following subject line: Response to the SCRI RFA.

**Centers of Excellence.** Applicants are encouraged to visit the NIFA’s [Centers of Excellence \(COE\)](#) page 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. A COE designation applies to the PROJECT, including all contributors, for the term of the project. *All SCRI applicants are eligible for COE status, except for planning projects.*

## 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. NIFA requests invited applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2024. The amount available for grants in FY 2024 is approximately \$70,259,450.

Based on recommendations from scientific merit reviewers and panel managers, SCRI program staff have updated the formatting requirements for full applications. It is imperative that the formatting requirements are followed, or applications may be returned without review. The formatting requirements can be found in [Part IV, B](#) of this RFA. SCRI program staff will present a webinar shortly after delivery of invitations for full applications. Details of date, time, and connection information will be sent to Project Directors and Authorized Representatives. Project teams may invite others.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SCRI grants.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TABLE OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Legislative Authority .....	6
B. Purpose and Priorities .....	6
<b>PART II. AWARD INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
A. Available Funding .....	10
B. Application Restrictions .....	10
C. Project Types .....	10
D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects .....	12
<b>PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
A. Eligibility Requirements .....	13
B. Cost Sharing or Matching .....	13
C. Centers of Excellence .....	14
<b>PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION .....</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Method of Application.....	15
B. Content and Form of the Application .....	15
C. Funding Restrictions.....	22
<b>PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS .....</b>	<b>24</b>
A. NIFA’s Evaluation Process.....	24
B. Evaluation Criteria.....	25
C. Center of Excellence.....	26
D. Organizational Management Information.....	26
E. Application Disposition .....	27
<b>PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION .....</b>	<b>28</b>
A. General .....	28
B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	28
C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements .....	28
<b>PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>29</b>
A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget.....	29
B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	29
C. Regulatory Information .....	29
D. Limited English Proficiency .....	30
<b>APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>33</b>

**TABLE OF TABLES**

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines.....2  
Table 2: Program Key Information.....9  
Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials.....15  
Table 4: Help and Resources .....15  
Table 5: Key Application Instructions.....16  
Table 6: Legislatively-Mandated Focus Areas .....18  
Table 7: List of Program Staff .....18

## PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is reauthorized by Section 7305 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 which amends Section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) of 1998 ([7 U.S.C. 7632](#)). Section 412 of the AREERA of 1998 established a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions. [Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014](#) added a requirement that, in addition to the scientific peer review NIFA regularly conducts, a panel of specialty crop industry representatives will review and rank SCRI applications for merit, relevance, and impact.

The regulations for SCRI may be found in Subpart F of [7 CFR 3430](#).

### B. Purpose and Priorities

In FY 2024, applicants are competing for the SCRI program in two stages. Applicants were required to submit a pre-application containing a Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS). Panels of industry representatives from various specialty crop sectors reviewed and rated the pre-applications for merit, relevance, and impact. The industry representatives for each specialty crop sector decided which pre-applicants are being invited to submit full applications. NIFA is providing details of the full-application process to invitees in this separate RFA.

The purpose of the SCRI program, Assistance Listing 10.309, is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in [Appendix III](#) of this RFA) by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems. **Except for Research and Extension Planning projects, the SCRI program only considers projects that integrate research and extension activities.**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a transdisciplinary, systems-based approach.

**Transdisciplinary approaches** intentionally integrate knowledge from different disciplines with relevant stakeholders and community members to address societal challenges. The development of transdisciplinary approaches engages these diverse teams from the onset of project conceptualization.

More information about transdisciplinary approaches can be found at:  
<https://www.nal.usda.gov/about-us/events/transdisciplinary-approaches>

A **systems-based approach** is any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation. The only way to fully understand why a problem or element occurs and persists is to understand the part in relation to the whole.

A thorough discussion of using systems science in agriculture can be found at:  
<https://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Systems-Research-for-Agriculture>

The philosophy of the SCRI program is that truly effective, long-term solutions to specialty crop industry challenges can best be achieved by understanding and treating those problems as complex systems of many interacting components. This perspective requires projects that are larger in scope and complexity.

Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. USDA has developed a more detailed description of specialty crops that is now in use by all USDA agencies. Please see more information about this document at  
[https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/definition\\_of\\_specialty\\_crops.pdf](https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/definition_of_specialty_crops.pdf).

Collectively, these crops face many challenges. The SCRI program seeks to address these challenges by funding transdisciplinary, systems-based approaches.

**It is anticipated that successful applications will:**

1. Engage stakeholders in collaborative ways to identify those priorities of greatest need;
2. Bring together multi-state, multi-institutional teams of biological, physical, and social scientists to develop strategies and actions emphasizing **systems-based, transdisciplinary** approaches for meeting the identified priorities;
3. Address priorities through research and extension;
4. Present plans for documenting the impacts of funded applications that include stakeholder involvement; and
5. Include explicit mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public.

**The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas:**

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:
  - a. product, taste, quality, and appearance;
  - b. size-controlling rootstocks for perennial crops;
  - c. climate adaptation, environmental responses, and tolerances;
  - d. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency;
  - e. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
  - f. enhanced phytonutrient content.
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including:
  - a. threats to specialty crop pollinators;
  - b. emerging and invasive species; and
  - c. a more effective understanding and utilization of existing natural enemy complexes.
3. Efforts:
  - a. to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing); and
  - b. to achieve a better understanding of:
    - i. the soil rhizosphere microbiome;

- ii. pesticide application systems and certified drift-reduction technologies; and
  - iii. systems to improve and extend the storage life of specialty crops.
- 4. New innovations and technology, including:
  - a. Mechanization and automation of labor-intensive tasks in production and processing;
  - b. Technologies that delay or inhibit ripening;
  - c. Decision support systems driven by phenology and environmental factors;
  - d. Improved monitoring systems for agricultural pests; and
  - e. Effective systems for pre-harvest and post-harvest management of quarantine pests.
- 5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.

NIFA will address all focus areas by funding projects that emphasize transdisciplinary, systems-based approaches in either organic or conventional production systems. NIFA also recognizes the importance of specialty crops in enhancing human nutrition and health. Scientific advancement in pursuit of the above focus areas by deploying or preserving traditional ecological knowledge is an acceptable technique to be funded by this program.

USDA recognizes that the development of the next generation of thought leaders and innovators in agricultural science is essential to societal sustainability. Applicants to SCRI are encouraged to include undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral scholars, as appropriate, in their budget request. These scholars should be engaged in project activities in meaningful ways that allow for personal and professional growth. Applicants are encouraged to develop mentoring plans appropriate to the requirements of their institution(s) that are measurable and emphasize accountability.

***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.

***Climate Change.*** Rapidly changing climate is one of the most pressing issues facing farmers, ranchers, landowners, households, and communities. Decreased rainfall, increased carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), and increased temperatures reduce the productivity of farms, ranches, and forests, which affect food supply and raise prices. NIFA encourages proposals for projects that help the nation mitigate climate change and adapt to conditions such as drought, flood, and extreme temperatures.

The SCRI is aligned with the following:

[USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026](#) goals:

1. **Strategic Goal 1:** Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities;



2. **Strategic Goal 2:** Ensure America’s Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous;
3. **Strategic Goal 3:** Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers;
4. **Strategic Goal 4:** Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food;
5. **Strategic Goal 5:** Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities.

[USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026](#) priorities:

6. **Priority 1:** Accelerating Innovative Technologies & Practices
7. **Priority 2:** Driving Climate-Smart Solutions
8. **Priority 3:** Bolstering Nutrition Security & Health
9. **Priority 4:** Cultivating Resilient Ecosystems
10. **Priority 5:** Translating Research Into Action

SCRI fulfills 5(a) of the United State Trade Representative’s joint plan with the U.S. Department of Commerce and USDA entitled *Plan to Support American Producers of Seasonal and Perishable Fruits and Vegetables*, as published in the September 2020 [Report on Seasonal and Perishable Products in U.S. Commerce](#), as SCRI expands research opportunities for seasonal and perishable products, as well as supports projects intended to increase the competitiveness of seasonal produce through new innovations and technology.

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
<b>Program Code:</b>		SCRI
<b>Program Code Name:</b>		Specialty Crop Research Initiative
<b>ALN:</b>		10.309
<b>Application Deadline</b>		April 12, 2024
<b>Grant Duration:</b>		12-60 Months
<b>Anticipated # of Awards:</b>		25

## 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 SCRI in FY2024 is approximately \$70,259,450. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

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

### B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Application for FY2024 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) of this RFA for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted full applications from previous years must include a response to the previous review panel summary and reviewer comments from past full applications; subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted full 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](#) of this RFA for definition).

Applications for renewal of existing projects are not eligible under this RFA. An application for renewal means an application submitted to continue an existing award agreement. Program is expecting no renewal applications this year. If you hope to continue work funded previously by SCRI, you must compete as a new application with different objectives from those previously funded.

### C. Project Types

The SCRI program offers the following three project types in FY 2024. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a budget that fits the objectives. Applicants are discouraged from developing a project (and selecting a project type) based on a budget request target.

#### 1. Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)

- a. Project Period – Up to five years.
- b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed approximately \$1,000,000 per year. Requests less than \$250,000 per project are discouraged.
- c. Purpose – To support targeted problem-solving efforts that would not qualify in scope for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP).
- d. Statistical Analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2022). It is anticipated that most funded SREPs for FY 2024 will be close to the historical median:
  - i. Mean award: \$2,461,152
  - ii. Median award: \$2,032,727

- iii. Minimum award: \$226,905
- iv. Maximum award: \$6,242,957

SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components (see Sustainability Outcomes and Impacts diagram (Figure 1) in the [Pre-Application RFA](#)), and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a CAP. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. For each SREP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will be formed to inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and extension objectives.

## **2. Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)**

- a. Project Period – Up to five years.
- b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed \$2,000,000 per year.
- c. Purpose – To address specific multiple components of a primary system or multiple components of areas where primary systems overlap (see Figure 1 in the [Pre-Application RFA](#)).
- d. Statistical analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2022). It is anticipated that most funded CAPs for FY 2024 will be close to the historical median.
  - i. Mean award: \$5,815,695
  - ii. Median award: \$5,778,830
  - iii. Minimum award: \$1,912,178
  - iv. Maximum award: \$10,898,772

CAPs will be awarded to consortia or groups of qualified applicants to address multiple components of a primary system, an entire primary system or problems that cut across primary systems, with the expectation that the project will make significant contributions to the sustainability of the system or system component. CAP applications are expected to demonstrate coherent and complementary integrated activities with the ultimate goal of developing a strategy or solution that could be implemented for specialty crops. Applications are expected to take advantage of recent advances in biological, physical, and social and economic sciences and to translate basic discoveries and knowledge to practical applications. Applications are expected to demonstrate the potential to develop a national strategy or solution as an ultimate goal. This would include the intent to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information and development of resources that accelerate the application of scientific discovery and technology to address the needs of various specialty crop industries. Such a national CAP should aim to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions.

## **3. Research and Extension Planning Projects**

- a. Project period – One year
- b. Budget – Federal funds up to \$50,000 per project
- c. Purpose – To provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning). Funds may also be requested to provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning).

The expectation is that developed plans could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications.

Research and Extension Planning Projects are intended to support two types of activities, either to: (1) provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning) or (2) provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed “plans” could provide the relevance basis for future SCRI grant applications. Priority will be given to applicants who can: (1) demonstrate limited resources for either submitting large grant applications or for supporting strategic planning activities on their own, (2) articulate benefits to be accrued from formal planning activities, and (3) provide evidence of a high likelihood that quality future applications would be submitted for SCRI projects (desired for grant planning) or would result in a publicly available strategic plan, which could be used to support a variety of industry-relevant research and extension activities, including development of one or more future SCRI grant applications (desired for strategic planning). Research and Extension Planning Project grants do not support preliminary research. However, support for stakeholder survey activities may be requested, where appropriate and necessary.

#### **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 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**

Invited applications may only be submitted by Federal agencies, national laboratories, colleges and universities, research institutions and organizations, private organizations or corporations, State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension Services, individuals, or groups consisting of two or more of these entities. Applicants for the SCRI 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.

#### ***Duplicate or Multiple Submissions***

Applicants may submit applications more than once in Grants.gov (prior to the deadline) if there are problems with the initial submission. When there is more than one submission for a project, the most recent submission will be accepted.

NIFA will not fund any specific project objective activities more than once. In cases where all or part of a project proposal is submitted to more than one program in NIFA, and one of the proposals is recommended for funding, all other applications must be withdrawn in order to proceed with making that award. Applicants may submit more than one proposal to a program in the same year if the projects have no overlap in goals for objectives. There is no limit to the number of project teams on which an individual can serve, as long as they are within 100% time commitment.

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**

In accordance with [Section 1491 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 \(7 U.S.C. 3371\)](#), as amended by [Section 7614 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018](#), for grants awarded after December 22, 2018, the recipient of an award from the SCRI program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA.

The matching requirement for SCRI awards has been waived for FY 2024 using authority granted by The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) General Provisions, Section 744), which states: "The Secretary of Agriculture may waive the matching funds requirement under Section 412(g) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 ([7 U.S.C. 7632\(g\)](#)).” This means that no matching funds will be required of FY 2024 applicants or awardees, and applicants will not need to submit a waiver request with their application.

Changes to match requirements or match waivers may apply at time of award, when required or allowed by law, such as in the annual appropriations act that provides funding for the program.

**C. Centers of Excellence**

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 ([7 U.S.C. 5926](#)), 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 designation applies to the PROJECT, including all contributors, for the term of the project. All SCRI applicants are eligible for COE status, *except* for planning projects.

## 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
<b>Step One: Register</b>	<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> ).
<b>Step Two: Download Adobe</b>	Download and Install <a href="#">Adobe Reader</a> (see <a href="#">Adobe Software Compatibility</a> for basic system requirements).
<b>Step Three: Find Application</b>	Using this funding opportunity number <b>USDA-NIFA-SCRI-010534</b> , search for application here: <a href="#">Opportunity Package</a> .
<b>Step Four: Assess Readiness</b>	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="#">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 10 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.

**R&R Other Project Information Form.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

Application materials must be submitted according to the following format, in the designated order and labeled as indicated. All appendices must be submitted as separate PDF attachments in Field 12 (Other Attachments). Combined appendix pdfs will not be accepted.

1. Field 7. Project Summary ([using template from NIFA website](#))
2. Field 8. Project Narrative: Table of Contents, Executive Summary, Response to Previous Scientific Merit Review, Project Description
3. Field 12. Appendix A Data Management Plan
4. Field 12. Appendix B Project Timeline and Team Roles and Responsibilities
5. Field 12. Appendix C Project Management Plan
6. Field 12. Appendix D Letters of Support
7. Field 12. Appendix E Response to this year's Industry Relevance Review
8. Field 12. Appendix F Center of Excellence Justification



See specific instructions and parameters for each of these sections below.

**1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract.**

Name this PDF “Project\_Summary”. The PS must show how the project goals align with the legislative priorities of the SCRI. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and required templates.

The template found at <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/application-support-templates> **must** be used. **This is not optional.** Project Director and full Co-PDs should be listed on this form. Other team members will be listed in Executive Summary and in Key Personnel pages.

**2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).**

Name this PDF “Project Narrative”. The PN contains the sections: Table of Contents, Executive Summary (provided [template](#) must be used), Response to Previous Scientific Merit Review and the Project Description. Each section of the PN has a maximum number of pages allowed. Details regarding page limits are provided in the subsequent descriptions. The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Include page breaks between each four required sections to make it clear how many pages are being used for each component. For all project types, font size must be 12 point Times New Roman for body text with 1 inch margins on all sides (11 points Times New Roman for tables). Appendices beyond those indicated are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all of the following, in this order. Sections below this list provide formatting instructions for these four elements. More detail on each section is offered below.

a. Project Table of Contents

Your table of contents should list the categories and page numbers for all sections in the PN and Appendices.

b. Executive Summary, including Logic Model

All applications must include the following information in an executive summary. The executive summary **should not be more than four pages, including the logic model.** Logic models are required for SREPs and CAPs, but NOT for Planning Projects. Applications without an executive summary will **NOT** be considered for funding. The following format **MUST** be used for the Executive Summary. List project staff information in a table as shown below. A link to this template can be found at the bottom of the SCRI home page, located at: <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/specialty-crop-research-initiative-scri>.

NIFA page with resources related to logic models:

<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/integrated-programs-logic-model-planning-process>.

- i. **Project Title**
- ii. **Project Type** (Planning, SREP, or CAP) (Note that NIFA expects project type to remain the same from pre-application to full application.)
- iii. **Requesting consideration for Center of Excellence?** (Yes or No)
- iv. **Legislatively-Mandated Focus Areas** (percentage total should equal 100%)

**Table 6:** Legislatively-Mandated Focus Areas

<u>Focus area</u>	<u>Percentage addressed in this proposal</u>
Plant Breeding and Genetics	
Pest Management	
Plant Production and Production Efficiency	
Technology	
Food Safety	

- v. **Program Staff** (expand table as necessary to list additional staffs)

**Table 7:** List of Program Staff

Role	Name	Title	Institution	City, State	Email
Project Director (PD)					
Co-Project Director (Co-PD)					
Co- Investigator (Co-I)					
Collaborator					

- vi. **Relevancy Review Rating**  
vii. **Outreach plan summary**  
viii. **Transdisciplinary Approach:** Describe how the project fulfills the requirements for a transdisciplinary approach to systems science.  
ix. **Logic Model**

**PLEASE NOTE:** As stated in the definitions in [Appendix III](#) of this RFA, the PD is that person who is legally responsible for ensuring that project funds are used to accomplish the project objectives. A Co-Project Director (Co-PD) is someone who could assume those responsibilities in the event that the PD has to step out of that role prior to completion of the term of the project. Listing more than 3 Co-PDs is not necessary. Scientists who will have the main responsibility for achieving specific objectives and/or those who will be part of an objective team should be listed as co- Investigators (co-I) The label “Co-Principal Investigators” (Co-PI) should not be listed. (Grants.gov does not differentiate between Co-PD and Co-PI.)

You are asked to list up to six scientists on your Stakeholder Relevance Statement. **There is no limit on the number to list in your full application.** Please note that an important use of this information, in addition to allowing reviewers to quickly see who is on the project team, is to check for conflicts of interest as part of the peer review panel planning process. It is important to list the **full name** of all essential personnel and the person’s **institution**, along with the **city and state**. **Be sure that this information is clearly stated.** The Executive Summary is NOT the place to include paragraphs of information about what each team member will bring to the project. That information goes in the document with project timeline and team roles and responsibilities.

- c. Response to Previous Full Application Review

Resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous scientific merit review of a preceding full application, even if time has passed. The response should be as concise as possible. Please include the Grants.gov number or NIFA proposal number of

the previous submission. Limit of 5 pages, single spaced in 12 point font with 1-inch margins.

d. Project Description

The Project Description for Planning Projects must not exceed 12 single-spaced pages of written text. The Project Description for Standard Research and Extension Projects and for Coordinated Agricultural Projects must not exceed 22 single-spaced pages including figures and tables. The Project Description should include the following components:

**Introduction** (maximum 5 pages)

- i. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that demonstrate the probable success of the proposed project.
- ii. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Applications should also demonstrate how duplication of effort with similar activities by others will be avoided.
- iii. Preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed work should be included in this section. All works cited should be referenced and attached at Field 9 on the Form, Bibliography & References Cited. Refer to **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

**Approach – For CAPs and SREPs:** The activities proposed, or problems being addressed must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Specifically, this section must include:

- i. Description of activities proposed and methods to be used in carrying out the proposed project, including the feasibility of the methods. Clearly describe the systems thinking used in the project methodology and the contribution of transdisciplinary approaches;
- ii. Expected outcomes, including how the project contributes to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crops;
- iii. Means by which results will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted;
- iv. How results or products will be used;
- v. Outreach plan: including, how science-based tools will be disseminated, participants involved in delivery, and how impacts will be measured;
- vi. Pitfalls that may be encountered;
- vii. Limitations to proposed procedures; and
- viii. A full explanation of any materials, procedures, situations, or activities related to the project that may be hazardous to personnel, along with an outline or precautions to be exercised to avoid or mitigate the effects of such hazards.

**Approach – For Research and Extension Planning Projects:**

- i. A justification for the meeting (see [Part II, C](#));
- ii. Recent meetings on the same subject with dates and locations;
- iii. Names and organizational affiliations of the chair and other members of the organizing committee;
- iv. A proposed program (or agenda) for the activity, including a listing of scheduled participants and their institutional affiliations (see [Part II, C](#));

- v. Expected outcomes, including how the planning project expects to contribute to the development of a successful application for a SCRI CAP or SREP; and
- vi. The method of announcement or invitation that will be used.

- 3. Field 12: Appendix A: Data Management Plan.** Name this PDF “AppA\_DMP”. A Data Management Plan (DMP) is required and is to clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. DMP must be no more than 2 pages, single spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 point font. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see [Part V, B, NIFA’s Data Management Plan](#)). See **Part III** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for NIFA attachment specifications.

The requirements for preparation and inclusion of a DMP in your application is included on the following web page, <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/data-management-plan-nifa-funded-research-projects>. Also included on the web page are FAQs and information about accessing examples of DMPs.

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.

- 4. Field 12: Appendix B: Project Timeline.** Name this PDF “AppB\_Project\_Timeline”. A project timeline may be presented using a Gant chart or other format not to exceed 5 pages, single spaced, 12 pt font (or 11 pt font on figure labels) and 1 inch margins. This timeline should clearly identify which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project. Also identify short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects. This section may include expanded information about team members.
- 5. Field 12: Appendix C: Project Management Plan.** Name this PDF “AppC\_Project\_Mgmt\_Plan”. SREP and CAP project applications must include a description of how the project will be coordinated and managed. The description should be single-spaced, 12 point font with 1 inch margins on all sides, and not exceed 2 pages. Inclusion of Project Manager on the team is strongly encouraged. This should include plans for staying on track with project milestones listed in project timeline. This plan should include an organizational chart, a description of how the project will be governed, and intellectual property management. The management plan must include a strategy to become self-supporting by the end of the project period. For all project types except Planning Projects, include a plan and timeline for the recruitment and functioning of an advisory group of principal stakeholders and scientists, as appropriate, relevant to the proposed research and extension projects to assess and evaluate the quality, potential outcomes and impacts, and how they could function effectively to support the goals and objectives of the project. For meetings related to project management, virtual or hybrid meetings may be considered based on local and national pandemic conditions.

6. **Field 12: Appendix D: Letters of Support.** Name this PDF “AppD\_Support\_Letters”. A single pdf with all letters of support, even those submitted with the pre-application, should be attached. This will allow reviewers to find all letters in one place. It is helpful to reviewers if this appendix contains a list of those organizations that have provided letters of support at the beginning of the appendix.
7. **Field 12: Appendix E: Response to Industry Relevance Review.** Name this PDF “AppE\_Relevance\_Response”. A response to comments from the current year industry relevance review must be included. This appendix should be no more than 2 pages, single space, 12 pt font, 1 in margins. Note that the full SRS and reviews from the Relevance Review will be appended to the application.
8. **Field 12: Appendix F: Center of Excellence Justification.** Name the PDF “AppF\_COE\_Justification”. If you are requesting designation as a Center of Excellence, you must provide a brief justification statement, no longer than 1 page, which describes how you meet the standards of a COE, based on the following criteria. Please prepare this with a parallel format, using A, B, C, D with information addressing each criterion.
  - A. The ability of the COE to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts in the research, teaching, and extension activities outlined in this application;
  - B. 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;
  - C. 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
  - D. 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.

***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](#). Please complete the key personnel forms fully. For ARS personnel, **please list the ARS region with which the individual is associated**. For example, the institution would be listed as “USDA ARS NE Region”. This will be very helpful in identifying COIs during the review process. Inclusion of COI forms, biosketches, and Current and Pending forms is required.

***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](#). Variation from the budget amount estimated in the pre-application over 25% should be cleared with the Program Director and justified in the Budget Narrative.

1. **Match – Not Required**
2. **Indirect costs (IDC)** – See [Part IV, C](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding IDC, and **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for additional information.
3. If the program organizes an annual investigator meeting, the Project Director or a representative of the project should plan to attend at least once during the term of the project. These meetings are optional for Planning Grant recipients. Reasonable travel expenses should be included as part of the project budget. If a program does not have an in-person annual investigator meeting, Project Directors will be allowed to use the allocated budget for other allowable expenses with program’s approval.

**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 “Specialty Crop Research Initiative” and the program code “SCRI”. Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#). Please ensure COI lists are current and included for all Co-PDs through Co-PIs.

### **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](#).

In accordance with [7 U.S.C. 7632\(i\)](#): Funds made available under this section shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees).

## PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

### A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

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

#### Scientific Peer Review Process:

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

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

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

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

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

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



## **B. Evaluation Criteria**

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA:

### **Criteria for Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)**

1. Conceptual adequacy (20%). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope, and budget.
2. Design (30%). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, and effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates understanding of a whole system(s) approach and discusses how the project will contribute to an integrated systems solution to the identified problem. Even if a single component is the focus of the project, the proposal must provide a thorough analysis of the broader systems context, why that component is critical, and why the solution offered will lead to an improved system in economic, ecological, and social terms. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems. The Data Management Plan is clearly described.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of transdisciplinary approach (20%). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science and engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as appropriate, as well as expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop.
4. Outreach plan (15%). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured, including the likelihood that the project will provide solutions that lead to measurable benefits to producers and consumers.
5. Feasibility, probability of success, including the likelihood that the project will contribute to the overall sustainability of a component or primary system (10%).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5%).

### **Criteria for Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)**

1. Conceptual adequacy (20%). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope, and budget.
2. Design (30%). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, a continuity plan addresses future long-term plans for the proposed activities, and the project effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates an understanding of a whole system(s) approach and applies that approach to overcoming the identified problem. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems. The Data Management Plan is clearly described.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of transdisciplinary approach (20%). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science, engineering disciplines, and socio-economic sciences. The application should include appropriate extension activity, and program evaluation and the application documents should include expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.

4. Outreach plan (15%). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured.
5. Feasibility, probability of success (10%).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5%).

### **Criteria for Research and Extension Planning Projects**

1. Documented need (15%). Application includes documentation substantiating that project is directed to current or likely future problems/challenges in specialty crop agriculture. Demonstrates specific need for planning activity, e.g., limited resources for submitting large grant applications (or for developing a strategic plan) and potential benefits accrued from formal planning activities.
2. Stakeholder involvement (30%). Application includes information on how stakeholders will participate in the activity, including a listing of key participants who will be invited and their affiliations.
3. Conceptual adequacy and design (25%). Application clearly states objectives and includes a preliminary agenda that addresses those objectives. Application demonstrates an understanding of and proposes to develop the application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems.
4. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise in planning activity committees, speakers, and attendees (15%). Application documents that the project brings together biological, physical, and social scientists as appropriate to project goals to address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
5. Appropriateness of budget (5%).
6. Feasibility (10%). Likelihood that the effort will result in a future grant application to the SCRI and/or address the strategic plan goals.

### **C. Center 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 a COE will maintain that distinction for the duration of their period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

### **D. Organizational Management Information**

Applicants must submit specific management information prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only need to provide an update if there was a change in previously provided information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the

requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

**E. Application Disposition**

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

## **PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must be no later than September 30 of the federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and [NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E](#).

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

### **B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute 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](mailto:Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov) or (443) 386-9488.

## APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

### Program Contacts

Tom Bewick

[TBewick@usda.gov](mailto:TBewick@usda.gov)

(email to schedule call)

Jessica Shade

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

831-278-2073

Megan O'Reilly

[Megan.OREilly2@usda.gov](mailto:Megan.OREilly2@usda.gov)

202-445-5410

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**

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative – AFRI

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Representative – AR

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

Coordinated Agricultural Project – CAP

Centers of Excellence – COE

Data Management Plan – DMP

Indirect Cost – IDC

Modified Total Indirect Cost - MTDC

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Request for Application – RFA

Research, Education, and Economics – REE

Specialty Crop Research Initiative – SCRI

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**

#### **Matching:**

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

#### **New Application:**

An application not previously submitted to a program.

#### **Resubmitted Application:**

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

#### **Project Director or PD:**

The single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application, who is responsible for the direction and management of the project and who is approved by the Authorized Departmental Officer.

#### **Co-Project Director or Co-PD:**

Project participants who have been approved by the grantee institution as ready and able to fulfill the role of PD in the event the PD can no longer serve in that capacity.

#### **Specialty Crop:**

Fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). [More information about the definition of a specialty crop can be viewed here.](#)

#### **Transdisciplinary:**

Transdisciplinary approaches intentionally integrate knowledge from different disciplines with relevant stakeholders and community members to address societal challenges. The development of transdisciplinary approaches engages these diverse teams from the onset of project conceptualization. More information about transdisciplinary approaches can be found at: <https://www.nal.usda.gov/about-us/events/transdisciplinary-approaches>