



National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FEEDING PEOPLE, FUELING PROGRESS

USDA NIFA

FY 2026 Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) Grant Writing Webinar

[NIFA.USDA.GOV](https://nifa.usda.gov)

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Introduction to NIFA Staff

- Edwin Lewis, *National Program Leader*
- Rebekah Hanson, *Program Specialist*
- Iesha McGruder, *Program Specialist*
- Steven Evans, *Grants Management Specialist*
- William Mallet, *Grants Management Specialist*



Agenda

- Introduction to USDA BFRDP
- Preparing Your BFRDP Application
 - **Before You Start**
 - **Building a Strong Application**
 - **Pre-Award Requirements from Grants Management**
 - **Understanding the Evaluation Criteria**
 - **Other Key Information**
- Reminders/Tips for Your BFRDP Application
- Application Preparation Resources



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INTRODUCTION TO THE USDA BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Edwin Lewis, BFRDP National Program Leader



USDA BFRDP Goals

The primary goals of the BFRDP, under assistance listing number 10.311, are to help beginning farmers and ranchers in the United States and its territories:

Enter and/or improve successes in farming, ranching and management of nonindustrial private forest lands.

Obtain support for projects providing training, education, outreach, and technical assistance for beginning farmers and ranchers.

Gain the knowledge, skills and tools needed to make informed decisions for their operations and enhance their sustainability.



USDA BFRDP Legislative Priorities



Basic livestock, forest management, & crop farming practices



Innovative farm, ranch, & private, nonindustrial forest land transfer and success strategies



Entrepreneurship and business training



Technical assistance to help beginning farmers or rancher acquire land from retiring farmers and ranchers



Financial & risk management training, including acquisition & management of agricultural credit



Natural resource management and planning



Diversification and marketing strategies



Curriculum development



USDA BFRDP Legislative Priorities, Continued



Mentoring,
apprenticeships, and
internships



Resources and
referral



Farm financial
benchmarking



Other similar subject
areas of use to
beginning farmers
and ranchers



Farm safety and
awareness



Food safety and
recordkeeping



Agricultural rehabilitation
& vocational training for
veteran farmers &
ranchers



USDA BFRDP Eligibility

- Applications may only be submitted by a collaborative State, Tribal, local or regionally based network or partnership of qualified public and/or private entities, including:
 - **State Cooperative Extension Services**
 - **Federal, state, municipal or tribal agencies**
 - **Community-based organizations (CBOs)**
 - **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)**
 - **Junior and four-year colleges or universities or foundations maintained by a college or university**
 - **Private for-profit organizations**



USDA BFRDP Eligibility, Exclusions

- Application submission of a project effort that is a duplicate of a current BFR project will not be accepted for review.
- Applications submitted by individuals, or by organizations that do not involve other entities in a network or partnership will not be accepted for review.
- To meet regional balance, multiple awards will not be made to the same organization, institution, or Project Director in the same calendar year.



Which Grant Type is Right for Me?

- The following **BFRDP grant types** are provided for up to 3 years at no more than \$250,000 for each year:
 - Standard
 - Education Team
 - Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse
 - Simplified Standard (less than \$50,000)



Standard Grants

- Support new and established local and regional training, education, outreach and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs).
 - 1. Identify the audience of BFRs they aim to serve, describe their characteristics and needs.**
 - 2. Demonstrate knowledge and experience in education and assistance methods that are appropriate and effective in engaging the audience and meeting their needs.**
 - 3. Propose an ambitious yet achievable plan of work to accomplish meaningful and measurable success in enhancing the number, success, and sustainability of BFRs.**



Simplified Standard Grants

- Develop plans to strengthen program ideas to develop a full proposal, curriculum development, develop apprenticeship programs and hands-on material, and/or develop an advisory committee to strengthen future program activities.
- Designed for new trainers who have never received grants, nor gained more than three years of experience in assisting with the development of BFRs.
 - 1. Sustain and enhance important collaborations and innovative activities relevant to BFR programs.**
 - 2. Initiative and develop beginning farmer and rancher project ideas to lead to future program success or success in obtaining other grants for BFR education.**



Education Team Grants

- Enhance BFR efforts based on a particular topic, region or audience and complement previously funded Education Team grants.
- Support curriculum development and conduct educational programs/workshops for BFRs across geographical areas of the United States or provide training and technical assistance for trainers and service providers that work with BFRs.
- Identify, collect, and assess existing curricula programs.
 - 1. Identify gaps & develop and deliver curricula and train-the-trainer programs to fill those gaps.**
 - 2. Collaborate with the BFRDP Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse.**



Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse Grant

- Serve as an online platform and library for educational curricula, training materials and technical assistance.
- Collaborates and facilitates coordination with BFRDP grantees and other collaborators.
- BFRDP Clearinghouse Duties:
 - **Maintain & enhance online accessible library for BFR education, training, mentoring and outreach materials.**
 - **Facilitate sharing, collaboration and use of curricula and information.**
 - **Assist in enhancing outcome-based reporting and summarize impacts.**

PREPARING YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION – BEFORE YOU START

Iesha McGruder, BFRDP Program Specialist



Before You Start Your Application

1

Review Solicitation

Read the **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)** thoroughly! It has all pertinent information, from the deadlines to evaluation criteria.

2

Determine Grant Type

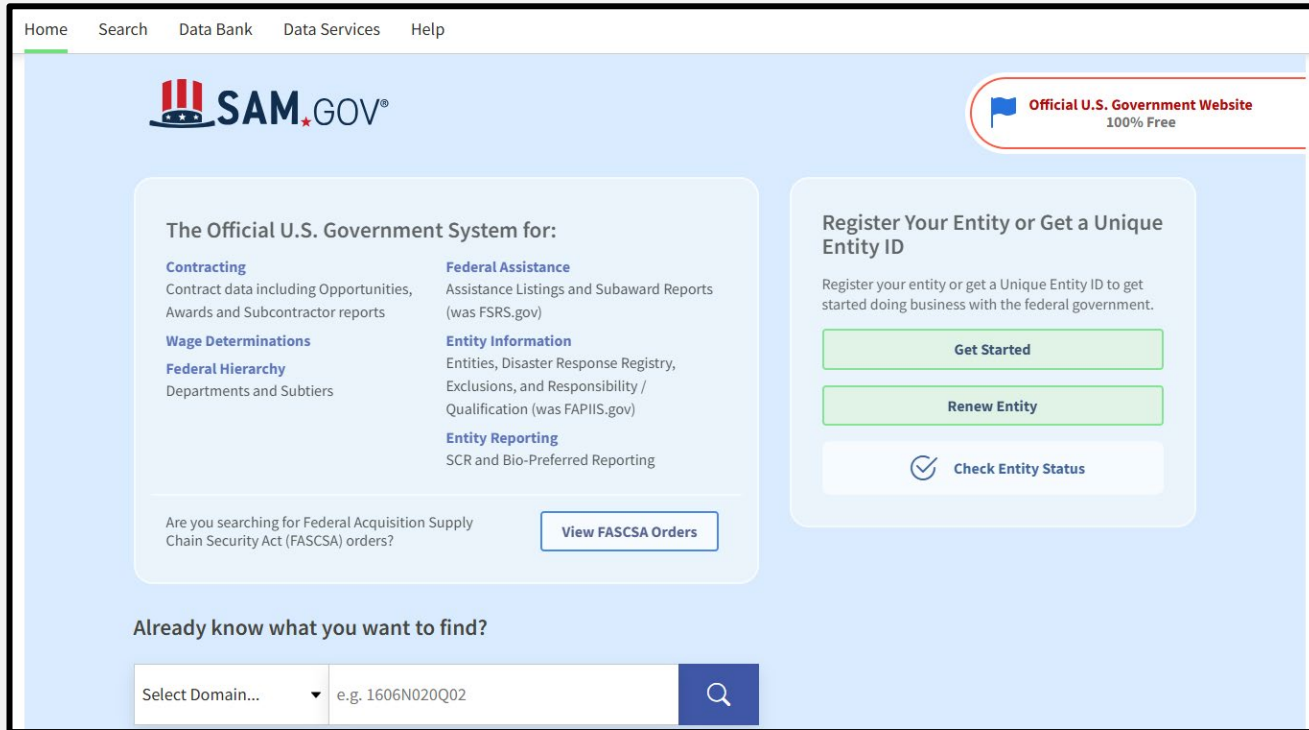
Select the grant type that aligns best with your project.

3

Registrations

Prior to submission, it is required that you register/update your organization on [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov). Do this early to prevent last minute panic!

Registration 1/2 : SAM.gov

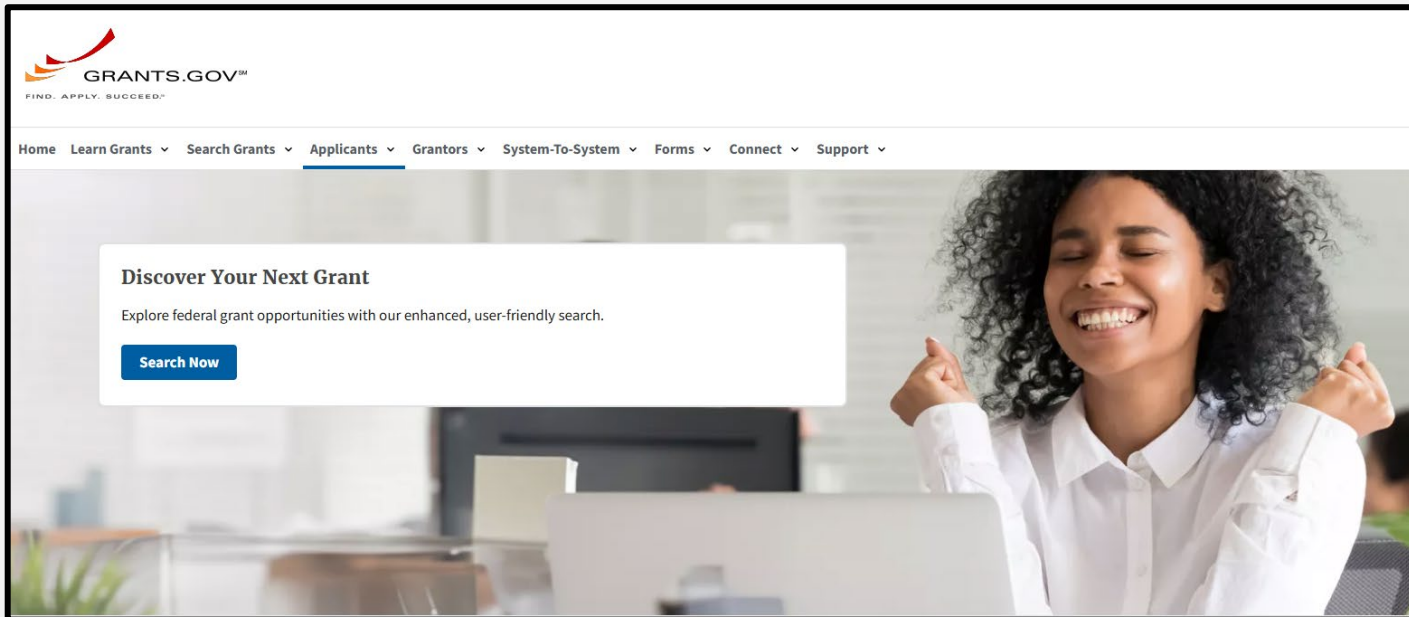


The screenshot shows the SAM.gov homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Search, Data Bank, Data Services, and Help. The main header features the SAM.gov logo and a badge indicating it is an Official U.S. Government Website, 100% Free. The page is divided into several sections: 'The Official U.S. Government System for:' which lists categories like Contracting, Federal Assistance, Wage Determinations, Federal Hierarchy, and Entity Reporting; 'Register Your Entity or Get a Unique Entity ID' with buttons for 'Get Started', 'Renew Entity', and 'Check Entity Status'; and a search section at the bottom with a dropdown menu for 'Select Domain...' and a search input field containing 'e.g. 1606N020Q02'.

- Set up SAM.gov account
- Entity registration
 - **Obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number**
 - **12-digit alphanumeric identifier required to do business with the federal government**
 - **Annual updates are needed**

<https://sam.gov/entity-registration>

Registration 2/2: Grants.gov



- Click on the Applicants tab
- Click on “Applicant Registration”
- **Detailed instructions are available on Grants.gov**
<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>



Points to Remember for Registration

- SAM.gov entity registration can take time, especially if there are issues with your registration that may affect your ability to apply before the funding opportunity close date.
- If your entity is already registered, ensure your registration has been renewed or updated per SAM.gov requirements.

PREPARING YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION – BUILDING A STRONG APPLICATION

Rebekah Hanson, BFRDP Program Specialist



Application Fundamentals

- What is BFRDP?
 - What is included in a USDA BFRDP award (funds, duration, etc.)?
 - When are applications due?
 - Who is eligible?
 - How can I prepare and submit a funding application?
 - What are the key components of an application?
 - How will the award be issued and managed?
 - Who can I talk to about this solicitation?
 - What do these words mean?
- ◇ You will find answers to all these questions within the **NOFO!**



Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

- Become a “student” of the NOFO
 - **Understand the main goals of the program.**
 - **Attend technical assistance webinars or watch the recordings.**
 - **Understand the instructions outlined in the NOFO and how to assemble the proposal.**
 - **Read the NOFO!!!**
 - **NOFO is most important; but be sure to read the NIFA Grant Application Guide, too!**



Structure of a Competitive NOFO

Eight (8) Main Parts

Executive Summary

+

Part I. Funding Opportunity Description

Part II. Award Information

Part III. Eligibility Information

Part IV. Application and Submission

Part V. Application Review Requirements

Part VI. Award Administration

Part VII. Other Information





Key Elements of BFRDP Application

Required

Summary/Abstract
Project Narrative
Budget
Budget Justification

Other Necessary Items

Key Personnel Bio Sketches
Conflict of Interest (COI)
Current & Pending Support
(C&P)
Data Management Plan
Bibliography



What to include in Project Summary

- Must be 250 words or less.
- Think about how to capture the reviewer's attention.
 - **Include description of the problem or opportunity, project objectives, and a description of the effort.**
 - **Include anticipated project outcomes.**
 - **Succinct summary of your project, with key information highlighted.**
- Do not include confidential information.
- Template available:
<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/application-support-templates>

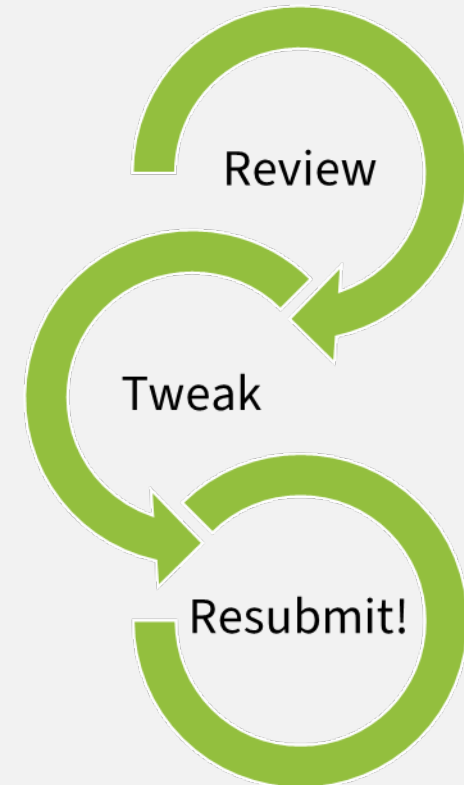


What to Include in Project Narrative

- Must keep it at 20 pages (for Standard, Education Team, and Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse), or 10 pages (for Simplified Standard).
- Key questions to answer:
 - **How does your project align with USDA BFRD program priorities?**
 - **Who is the target audience, problem/opportunity, and why is it important?**
 - **What are the goals, associated objectives and expected outputs and outcomes of the project in relation to the target audience needs?**
 - **What are the proposed activities to achieve each objective? Provide a logic model (not included in page limit).**
 - **What is the plan for outcome-based reporting, participatory evaluation, and measurable outcomes? Provide a [Data Management Plan](#) (separate attachment).**

Resubmission

- Trying to submit to BFRDP again?
 - **Resubmissions should provide response to reviewer feedback from previous application.**
 - **Take the reviewer comments and improve your application.**
 - **Do NOT exceed the ONE-page limit for your resubmission response.**
 - **This does not count towards the Project Narrative page limit.**





Tips for Project Narrative

- Provide comprehensive information.
- Write the proposal logically and clearly.
 - **Organize proposal according to the outline in the NOFO or evaluation criteria, whichever is most logical.**
 - **Following the prescribed format helps reviewers find information more easily.**
- Use tables and figures to help illustrate important points.
- Second set of eyes helps! Ask someone else to review your Project Narrative before submitting.



What to Include in Budget

- ◇ Prepare budget with a strong justification.
 - Keep in mind the budget and performance period limits.
 - **Budget: up to \$750,000 per award, depending on grant type**
 - **Period of performance: up to three years**
 - Salaries require name and title of each person and how the requested salary was determined.
 - Include fringe benefits, equipment, materials & supplies, consultants, etc.



Match Requirement

- BFRDP awardees must provide 25% match from non-Federal sources in the form of cash or in-kind contributions.
- **NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant, as determined by the Secretary (details provided in upcoming FY26 BFRDP NOFO).**



What to Include in Additional Forms

- Letter(s) of commitment and/or letters of support
- Key personnel biographical sketches
- Budget justification
- Subcontract information, if needed
- Conflict of Interest List
- Current & Pending Support

◇ **Fill out forms completely and correctly!**

PREPARING YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION – PRE-AWARD REQUIREMENTS FROM GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Steven Evans, BFRDP Grants Management Specialist
William Mallet, BFRDP Grants Management Specialist



AMD Overview

- **Pre-Award Requirements**
 - **Organizational Information**
 - **Matching**
 - **Unallowable Costs**
 - **Budget & Budget Categories**
 - **Indirect Costs**



Pre-Award Requirements

- **Ensure all forms in the NOFO are completed**
 - **SF 424 R&R Forms**
 - **R&R Other Project Information Forms**
 - **R&R Senior/Key Person Profile**
 - **R&R Personal Data**
 - **R&R Budget**

SAM.gov Representation & Certifications

- Applicant organization must be registered in SAM.gov, including the completion of Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations.
- **Select YES on the Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations.**

Question	Answer Choice	Conditional Sub Questions
Does [Legal Business Name] wish to apply for a Federal financial assistance project or program, or is [Legal Business Name] currently the recipient of funding under any Federal financial assistance project or program?	Yes/No	If yes, static Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations text is displayed.



Pre-Award Requirements, Continued

- **Current and Pending Effort and Budget Effort:**
 - **C&P has the efforts of the PD and Co-PD (your application must be included in the C&P under pending).**
 - **Budget effort is how much the PD and Co-PD get paid from federal funds.**
 - **The C&P effort must be greater than the budget effort (you cannot receive more federal funds than your effort dedicated to this award).**



Matching

- **Types of Matching**
 - **Cash Matching: The recipient's outlay of cash on-hand.**
 - **In-Kind Contributions: The value of non-cash contributions of property or services.**
 - **Third-Party Matching: Any contribution to the project by an outside organization.**



What is Allowable as Matching

- Any costs which would normally be allowable under the Cost Principles for Federal funds would be allowable as matching.
 - See Paragraphs 200.420 through 200.476 of the Uniform Guidance 2 CFR 200 for selected items of cost.
- Costs must be specifically identifiable and directly benefiting the project.



Matching Commitment Documentation

- A list documenting the donor organization's name, dollar amount and type of match (in-kind or cash).
 - **Matching commitment letters are not required to be submitted with the proposal but must be kept at the organization for auditing purposes. May be requested at the time of the award.**
- Budget and budget justification should provide details on how matching will be spent.



Unallowable Costs

◇ **If you have any question on allowability, please ask!**

- Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project.
- Planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition or construction of a building or facility.
- Hourly wages as in a job creation program for individual farmers or ranchers.
- Mini Grant or Small agricultural loans for individual farmers or ranchers; or used to incentivize individuals to attend events, workshops, or training.
- The purchase of farming supplies for individual farmers or ranchers or to enhance individual farmers' or ranchers' farms or production capabilities. Purchase of supplies for demonstration is allowable.



Unallowable Costs, Continued

- Payment of rewards to individual farmers or ranchers for outstanding effort or achievement in training.
- Scholarships for individual farmers or ranchers.
- Start-up or financing costs for businesses or for an organization's capacity building.
- Equipment purchases such as vehicles, semi-tractors or refrigeration systems.
- Meals, except in rare situations where there is a working lunch. Refreshments are allowable costs.



Preparing a Budget, Budget Categories

- **Salaries/wages for project personnel**
 - **Provide the hourly rate of pay, time commitment and the task to be completed.**
 - **Salary rates should be the normal rate of pay for that employee or job category.**
 - **Salary rates deemed excessive may need to be justified.**



Budget Categories

- **Subcontracts**
 - **Submit a letter of commitment from each subcontractor organization, signed by the organization's Authorizing Representative, statement of work, budget and budget narrative .**



Budget Categories

- **Land Rent – Rental of land for garden plots or other project activities:**
 - **Value for use of land should not exceed the fair rental value of comparable land as established by an independent appraisal of similar land in the area.**
 - **Amount is not based on the for-sale appraisal value.**
 - **Documentation on how land usage was valued is required.**



Budget Categories

- **Participant/Trainee Support Costs**
 - **Includes stipends, tuition/fees for conferences, travel, and subsistence.**
 - **Costs are to be itemized with a dollar amount provided for each item.**
 - **The number of students to be supported should be indicated for each item**
- Participant/Trainee Support Costs Vs. Incentives
 - **Incentives – influence behavior (NOT allowable)**



Budget Categories

- **Indirect Costs (IDC):**
 - **Indirect costs are those expenses not directly attributed to the project. They are expenses shared across the organization.**
 - **Examples are utilities, sanitation and janitorial services, accounting and payroll.**



Indirect Costs

- Program legislation caps indirect costs at 10% of Total Federal Funds or your organizations Federally approved negotiated rate
 - **Use the rate which results in the lowest dollar amount of IDC.**
 - **Recipient organization must have an approved negotiated rate (NICRA) to qualify for indirect costs.**
 - **No Rate? You May:**
 - **Request the 15% De Minimis Rate, or**
 - **Request a NIFA negotiated rate**
 - *NIFA must be your cognizant agency to negotiate.*



Indirect Costs, De Minimis

- De minimis Indirect Cost Rate of 15% - based on Modified Total Direct Cost
 - **May be used with NIFA approval.**
 - **Refer to Paragraph 200.414(f) of the Uniform Administrative Requirements of 2 CFR 200.**
- For information on the Indirect Cost process, refer to: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/regulations-and-guidelines/indirect-costs>



Contact Information

For questions regarding award administration only, please email questions to (please include in the Subject Line: **FY26 BFRDP Award Question**):

awards@usda.gov

PREPARING YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION – UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION CRITERIA

Edwin Lewis, BFRDP National Program Leader



BFRDP Evaluation Criteria – Standard & Education Team Grants

- 1. Partnerships and Collaboration**
- 2. Consultation of Beginning Farmers and Ranchers**
- 3. Relevancy**
- 4. Technical merit**
- 5. Achievability**
- 6. Expertise & Track Record of the Applicants**
- 7. Adequacy of Available or Obtainable Support Personnel, Facilities, and Instrumentation**
- 8. Adequacy of Plans for Participatory Evaluation Process, Outcome-Based Reporting, and the Communication of Findings and Results beyond the Immediate Target Audience**
- 9. Other priorities, as determined by the Secretary**



BFRDP Evaluation Criteria – Simplified Standard Grants

- 1. Partnerships and Collaboration**
- 2. Consultation of Beginning Farmers and Ranchers**
- 3. Relevancy**
- 4. Technical Merit**
- 5. Achievability**
- 6. Expertise & Track Record of the Applicants**
- 7. Personnel**
- 8. Project Evaluation, Results and Dissemination**
- 9. Other priorities, as determined by the Secretary**



BFRDP Evaluation Criteria – Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse Grant

- 1. Consultation with Current and Previously Funded Grantees**
- 2. Relevancy**
- 3. Technical Merit**
- 4. Achievability**
- 5. Adequacy of Available or Obtainable Support Personnel, Facilities, and Instrumentation**
- 6. Adequacy of Plans for Assisting BFRDP Grantees in the participatory evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, and communication of findings and results beyond immediate target audience**
- 7. Organizational Effectiveness in operating a digital library of BFR educating programs and materials**
- 8. Other priorities, as determined by the Secretary**

PREPARING YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION – OTHER KEY INFORMATION

Iesha McGruder, BFRDP Program Specialist

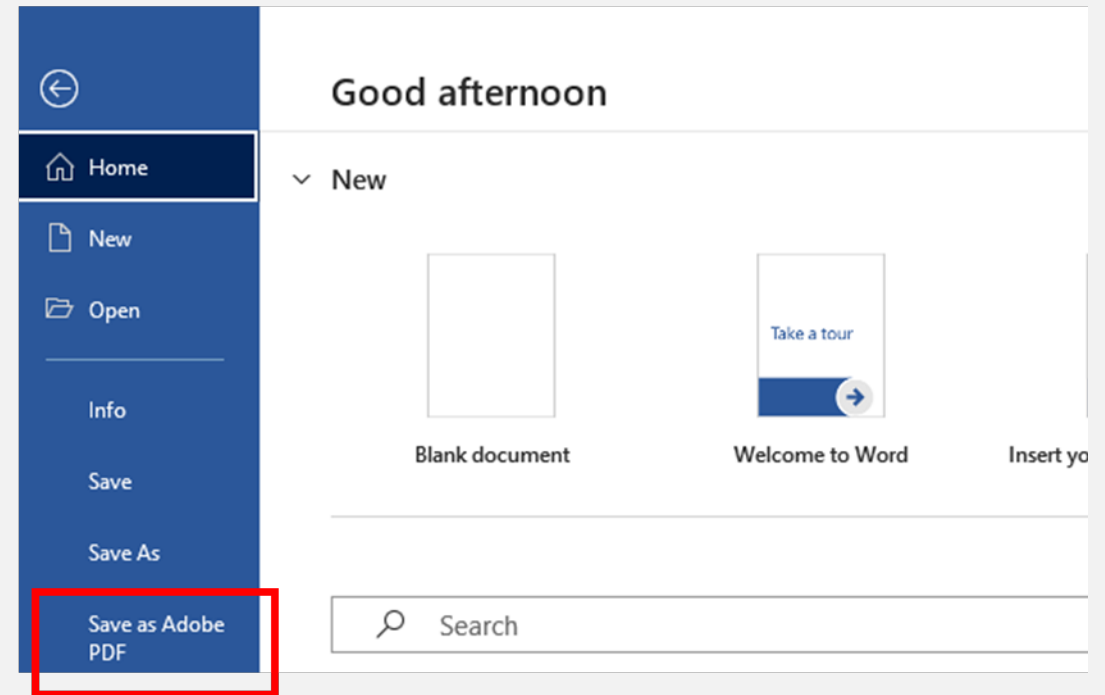
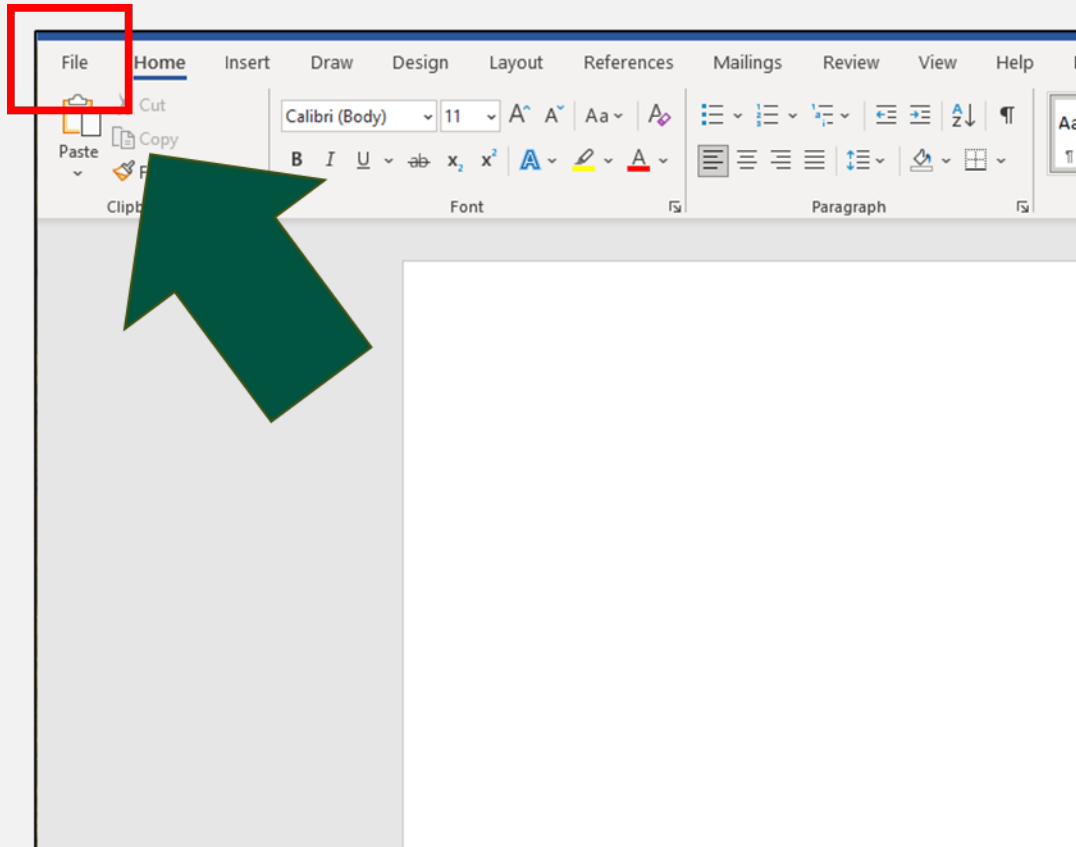


Formatting is IMPORTANT!

All forms must be in **PDF** format.

- **Margins: 1 inch**
- **Font: no less than 12 point (Times New Roman)**
 - **Table and Figure Fonts: no less than 11 point (Times New Roman)**
- **Line spacing: 1.5**
- **Format: PDF (no other file format allowed)**
- **Page limits: 20 pages for Standard, Education Team, and Curriculum and Training Clearinghouse Project Narrative; 10 pages for Simplified Standard Project Narrative**

How to Create a PDF



1. Go to “File” in the Microsoft Word top menu
2. Click on “Save as Adobe PDF”



Sample Application Prep Timeline



1 year to deadline

Start preparation and finish all registrations.

6 months to deadline

Reach out to USDA BFRDP team and talk to National Program Leader to discuss your project fit to the program.

4 months to deadline

Secure partners, contractors, and consultants. Get letters of support to include in the application.

2 months to deadline

Thoroughly review this year's NOFO and start writing your application.

1 week to deadline

Submit application to avoid any last-minute technical issues.



Application to Award Timeline

January/February



**Solicitation
Released**

Check NIFA BFRDP website for the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

March/April



**Proposal
Deadline**

Submit your application by 5 p.m. Eastern Time.

June/July



**Reviews & Award
Notification**

NIFA peer-review process.

September



Award Start Date

Begin your BFRDP-funded projects!



BFRDP Review Process



Review

Confidential peer review panel of experts including academia, CBOs, NGOs, federal agencies, and farmers.

Decision

Award decisions sent with reviewer comments.

Resubmit

Re-apply during the next application cycle. Be sure to include a 1-page response to reviewer comments.

Award

Start conducting your BFRDP work with USDA BFRDP funding!

REMINDERS/TIPS FOR YOUR BFRDP APPLICATION

Edwin Lewis, BFRDP National Program Leader



Key Reminders

- Legislative Priorities – in writing your application, discuss one or more priorities that are relevant to stakeholders.
 - **Examples of key topics in successful applications: land access, business and financial plans, farm production, and marketing.**
- Evaluation – third party evaluator is required (for Standard and Education Team grants).
- Do NOT include applications that seek to conduct research in BFRDP results (these will be declined for review).
- Recommend submitting your application via Grants.gov at least a day before the deadline.



Key Reminders, Continued

- Federal funding amount – entered in Form SF-424 must match the federal funds requested in budget form.
- Participant Support Costs vs. Salaries/Overhead
- Things to avoid:
 - **Submitting recycled applications**
 - **Using old letters of support (not specific to current application)**
 - **Using old literature citations**



Common Mistakes

- Not involving partners with the right experience.
- Not consulting with beginning farmers and ranchers in project design, implementation and decision making.
- Not addressing audience needs.
- Not addressing sustainability (how the project will be sustained beyond current grant lifecycle).
- Not addressing project pitfalls.

Common Mistakes, Continued

- Not evaluating project outcomes in measurable terms.
 - i.e., change in enhanced farm income, knowledge, and attitude
 - See [BFRDP Outcomes Based Reporting Guide](#)

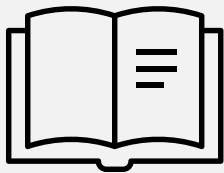


APPLICATION PREPARATION RESOURCES

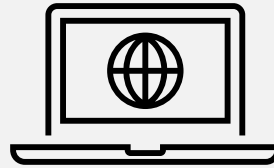
Rebekah Hanson, BFRDP Program Specialist



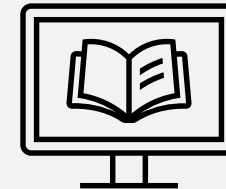
Application Preparation Resources



[NIFA Grant Application Guide](#)



[USDA BFRDP Website](#)



[BFRDP Funding Opportunity Page](#)



Check Previously Funded Projects

- NIFA BFRDP-funded projects from previous years
 - **NIFA Data Gateway:**
https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/enterprise-search/project_details/ss/1470



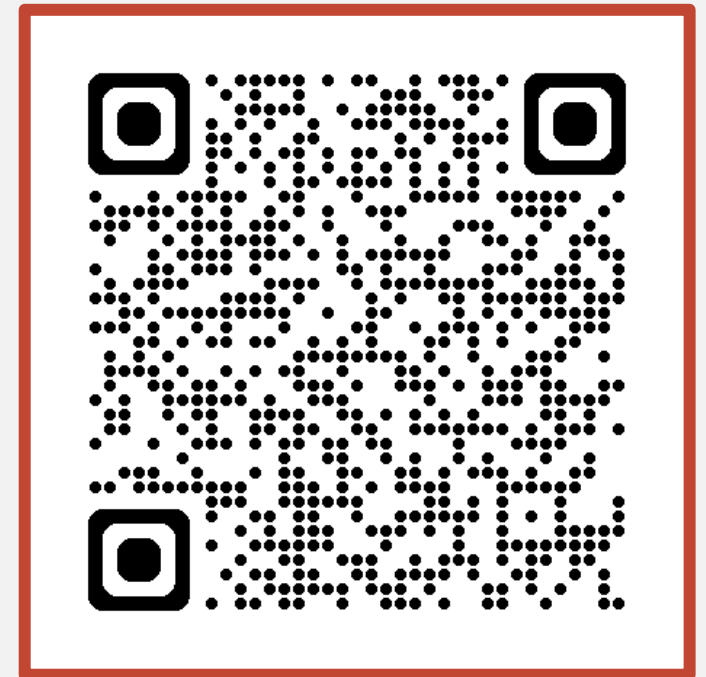
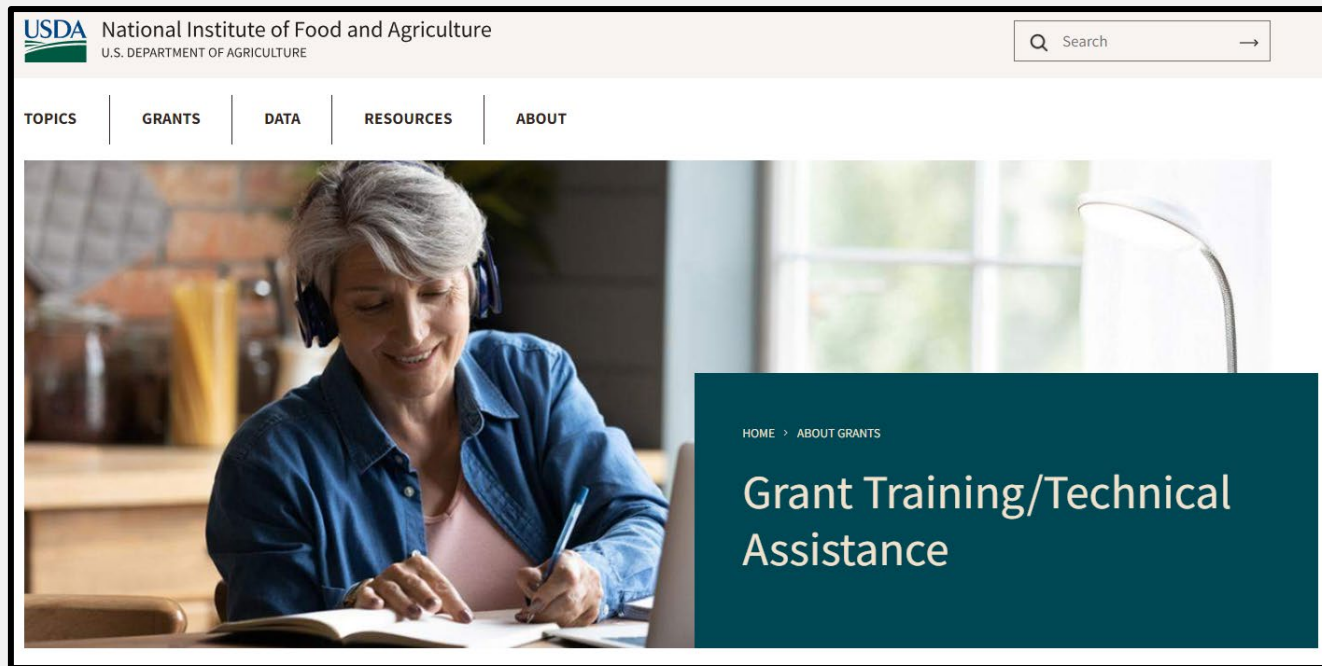
The screenshot shows the NIFA Data Gateway website. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation tabs for TOPICS, GRANTS, DATA, RESOURCES, and ABOUT. The main header features a large image of a person in a white lab coat examining a plant stem, with a dark teal overlay on the right containing the text "Data Gateway" and a breadcrumb "HOME > DATA". Below the header, there are social media share icons and a "SHARE" button. The content area is divided into two columns. The left column has two sections: "NIFA REPORTING SYSTEM" with links for NIFA Reporting System, NRS FAQ, NRS Resources, NRS Learning Community, NRS Registration Guide, and NRS User Guide; and "REEReport" with links for REEport, REEport FAQs, and REEport User Guide. The right column contains a paragraph describing the Data Gateway's purpose and a "NIFA Enterprise Search" section with a "Launch NIFA Enterprise Search" button.

Other Additional Resources

- Meet with USDA BFRDP Staff
 - **Attend information sessions**
 - **One-on-one meetings**
 - **Contact NPL for project fit**
- Local Resources
 - **BFRDP Clearinghouse, www.farmanswers.org**



NIFA Grant Training/Technical Assistance





National Institute of Food and Agriculture

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Visit nifa.usda.gov/nifa-update



SIGN UP FOR NIFA UPDATE



Contact Us!

USDA BFRDP Program Website

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/beginning-farmer-rancher-development-program-bfrdp>

Program Email

BFRDP@usda.gov

Edwin Lewis

National Program Leader

Rebekah Hanson

Primary Program Specialist

Ilesha McGruder

Program Specialist