

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program

Modifications made on pages 10, 12 and 14 (4/25/2017)

Modifications made on pages 10 and 12 (6/1/2017)

Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Education and Literacy Initiative

Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Request for Applications (RFA)

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not Applicable

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Varies by Program Area

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD RESEARCH INITIATIVE COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM

FOOD, AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES AND HUMAN SCIENCES EDUCATION AND LITERACY INITIATIVE

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.310.

DATES: If applicable, a Letter of Intent (LOI) must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on the deadline date indicated in the Program Area Descriptions section beginning in Part I, C. (see Part IV, A. for LOI instructions). Please note that a LOI is not required for conference grants. Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on the deadline date indicated in the Program Area Descriptions section beginning in Part I, C. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C.). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this request for applications (RFA). We will consider your comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to 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)). Submit your written comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and *not* for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to this RFA.

Visit the [NIFA website](#) to access a factsheet on the Center of Excellence (COE) designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities in fiscal year (FY) 2017. You may also review a recording of COE outreach webinars held in February and March of 2015. We will update COE webpages as appropriate.

NIFA solicits proposed topics for [Agriculture and Food Research Initiative](#) (AFRI) RFAs from eligible state and national commodity boards on an ongoing basis, pursuant to Section 7404 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79). Topics must relate to the established AFRI priority areas, which are plant health and production and plant products; animal health and production and animal products; food safety, nutrition, and health; bioenergy, natural resources, and environment; agriculture systems and technology; and agriculture economics and rural communities (as stated in the 2014 Farm Bill).

NIFA received topics from eligible commodity boards until July 18, 2016, for incorporation into FY 2017 RFAs. Topics submitted by the commodity boards that aligned with NIFA priorities were chosen for inclusion in selected Programs of relevant AFRI RFAs. None of the topics submitted by commodity boards were included in this RFA because the topics did not fit the subject matter of this RFA. The NIFA Fact Sheet on implementation of the commodity boards provision of the 2014 Farm Bill can be found at:

<https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Commodity%20Board%20Fact%20Sheet%20P6.pdf>. Additional information on eligibility and how to submit topics for inclusion in future AFRI Requests for Applications can be found at: <http://nifa.usda.gov/commodity-boards>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is America's flagship competitive grants program that provides funding for fundamental and applied research, education, and extension projects in the food and agricultural sciences. In FY 2017, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) requests applications for the AFRI's Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Education and Literacy Initiative (ELI) to support:

- professional development opportunities for K-14 teachers and education professionals;
- training of undergraduate students in research and extension; and
- fellowships for predoctoral and postdoctoral candidates.

The anticipated amount available for new grants in this FY 2017 ELI RFA is approximately \$18 million.

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of budget appropriations for FY 2017. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or appropriations may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

This notice identifies the objectives for AFRI ELI projects, eligibility criteria, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an AFRI ELI grant.

Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION	4
A. Legislative Authority and Background.....	4
B. Purpose and Priorities.....	4
C. Program Area Description.....	6
PART II—AWARD INFORMATION	16
A. Available Funding.....	16
B. Types of Applications.....	16
C. Project Types.....	17
D. Grant Types.....	17
E. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research.....	17
PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION	18
A. Eligible Applicants.....	18
B. Request for Determination of Status.....	19
C. Cost Sharing or Matching.....	19
D. Center of Excellence.....	20
PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION	22
A. Letter of Intent.....	22
B. Electronic Application Package.....	22
C. Content and Form of Application Submission.....	23
D. Submission Dates and Times.....	40
E. Funding Restrictions.....	41
F. Other Submission Requirements.....	41
PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS	42
A. General.....	42
B. Evaluation Criteria.....	42
C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality.....	43
D. Organizational Management Information.....	43
E. Application Disposition.....	43
PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION	44
A. General.....	44
B. Award Notice.....	44
C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	44
D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research.....	44
E. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements.....	44
PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS	46
PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION	48
A. Use of Funds; Changes.....	48
B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	49
C. Regulatory Information.....	49
D. Definitions.....	49
E. Materials Available on the Internet.....	51
TABLE 1. Most Successful Universities and Colleges	52
TABLE 2. Lowest One Third of Universities and Colleges Receiving Federal Funds	52
FIGURE 1. Flow Chart for Strengthening Grant Eligibility	53

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 7406 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 2(b) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act (7 U.S.C. 450i(b)) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to establish the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), a competitive grant program that will provide funding for fundamental and applied research, education, and extension to address food and agricultural sciences, as amended by the 2014 Farm Bill under section 7401. The legislation directed the Secretary to award grants to address priorities in U.S. agriculture in the following six Farm Bill priority areas:

1. Plant health and production and plant products;
2. Animal health and production and animal products;
3. Food safety, nutrition, and health;
4. Bioenergy, natural resources, and environment;
5. Agriculture systems and technology; and
6. Agriculture economics and rural communities.

To the maximum extent practicable, NIFA, in coordination with the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE), will make grants for high priority research, education, and extension, taking into consideration, when available, the determinations made by the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) pursuant to section 2(b)(10) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act (7 U.S.C. 450i(b)(10)), as amended. The authority to carry out this program has been delegated to NIFA through the Under Secretary for REE.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is to support research, education, and extension work by awarding grants to solve key problems of local, regional, national, and global importance in sustaining conventional, organic, and urban agricultural systems. These include farm efficiency, profitability and sustainability, ranching, bioenergy, forestry, aquaculture, rural communities and entrepreneurship, human nutrition, mitigating impacts of biotic and abiotic constraints on food production, food safety, mitigating food waste and food loss, physical and social sciences, home economics and rural human ecology, biotechnology, and classical breeding. Through this support, AFRI advances knowledge in both fundamental and applied sciences important to agriculture. It also allows AFRI to support education and extension activities that deliver science-based knowledge to end users, allowing them to make informed, practical decisions. This AFRI RFA is announcing funding opportunities for research, education, extension, or integrated research, education, and/or extension projects.

Food and agricultural systems are under the constraints of a growing population, pressure on natural resources, challenges of climate variability, and complex demands of ensuring nutritional security and food safety in a global economy. Addressing these challenges require

This AFRI RFA aligns with the [USDA Research, Education, and Economics \(REE\) Action Plan](#), and specifically addresses Goal 6.

The AFRI ELI Program is aligned with the [NIFA Strategic plan](#), and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1: Science (Subgoals 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7).

C. Program Area Description

The AFRI Food, Agriculture, Natural Resource, and Human Sciences Education and Literacy Initiative addresses projected shortfalls of qualified graduates in the agricultural, food, and renewable natural resources sectors of the U.S. economy ([Employment Opportunities for College Graduates](#)). Thus, the AFRI ELI has three overarching goals:

- Develop pathways to identify and replicate best practices to engage youth in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields within the food, agriculture, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences through “Professional Development for Secondary School Teachers and Educational Professionals” (Program Code A7501), described under the Program Area Description in Part 1, C, 1.
- Enhance capacity of institutions to produce graduates with skills needed to address challenges of the 21st Century in FANH sciences through “Research and Extension Experiences for Undergraduates (REEU)” (Program Code A7401), described under the Program Area Description in Part 1, C, 2.
- Advance science by recruiting and retaining the best graduate and post-graduate candidates in the FANH sciences through “Predoctoral Fellowships” (Program Code A7101) and “Postdoctoral Fellowships” (Program Code A7201), described under the Program Area Description in Part 1, C, 3 and Part 1, C, 4, respectively.

The Professional Development for Secondary School Teachers and Education Professional (PD-STEP) program area seeks to increase the number of K-14 teachers and educational professionals trained in FANH sciences. Participating teachers are expected to build their skills necessary for integrating FANH concepts in their classes; explore the opportunities available in the FANH career paths; and forge mentorships with professional and business leaders, and faculty.

The REEU program area promotes research and extension learning experiences for undergraduates such that upon graduation they may enter the agricultural workforce with exceptional skills. This initiative will allow colleges and universities to provide fellowship opportunities for undergraduate students, including those from underrepresented and economically-disadvantaged groups, minority-serving institutions, community colleges, and other universities. Projects may provide students opportunities to: 1) Obtain hands-on experiences; 2) Acquire research and extension skills necessary to join the agricultural workforce or pursue graduate studies in the FANH sciences; 3) Obtain a strong mentoring experience required for success in the FANH sciences; and 4) Gain experience by participating in research and extension projects or programs that deliver science-based knowledge to people, thus, enabling them to make practical decisions. Program delivery may include audiences from community-based to national, and may use communication methods from face-to-face to electronic or combinations thereof. Extension Projects may also include related matters such as

[Postdoc-Additional-Instructions-1.pdf](#). Proposals that are not in compliance with these instructions can be excluded from review.

- The postdoctoral scholar must be the sole PD listed on the Key Personnel form of the application. The mentor should not be listed as a Co-PD. Select “Post Doctoral” for the Postdoctoral Fellowship applicant. Select “Other (Specify)” for the corresponding scientific mentor(s). Enter “Mentor” for corresponding scientific mentor(s) in the *Other Project Role Category Field*.
- Mentor Letter and the Reference Letters must be included in the Documentation of Collaboration. See the details for submission of Mentor Letter and Reference Letters on the NIFA website at <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Pre-and-Postdoc-Additional-Instructions-2.pdf>.
- At the time of the award and release of funds from NIFA to sponsoring institution, Fellows are required to carry out their projects on a full-time basis (i.e. 100% effort), as specified by the sponsoring institution in accordance with its own policies.
- In addition to the information on Attach Biographical Sketch Field (see Part IV, C, 4 c), applicants must include the date of completion of their terminal degree. The Biographical sketch of the Primary mentor (more than one Primary Mentor if integrated project only) should include the number of mentees mentored at least for the last 5 years.
- Note that the Program Area Additional Information identified for Predoctoral Fellowships also applies to AFRI Postdoctoral Fellowships.
- Although a proposed project may fit in the context of the mentor's existing scientific area, the Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant should initiate an independent scientific program, rather than serve as an extension of ongoing projects in the mentor's laboratory.
- The PD will be required to attend one NIFA AFRI ELI PD meeting in Washington, DC during the performance period of the award. The PD is also required to attend a PD meeting of the Foundational Program Area or a Challenge Area with which the project is most closely aligned during the performance period of the award. Reasonable travel expenses should be included as part of the project budget.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

Of the amount available to make awards, no less than 30 percent will be made available to fund integrated research, education, and extension projects. Of the AFRI funds allocated to research activities, section 7406 of the FCEA directs 60 percent toward grants for fundamental (or basic) research and 40 percent toward grants for applied research. Of the AFRI funds allocated to fundamental research, not less than 30 percent will be directed toward research by multidisciplinary teams. It is expected that no less than 15 percent of the FY 2017 funds will be made available for Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants, and no more than two percent of the funds available for fundamental research will be made available for Equipment Grants.

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

NIFA anticipates \$18 million will be available to support Program Areas in this AFRI RFA that are designed to help solve critical problems across the United States for project durations of up to 2, 3 or 4 years (FY 2017 – FY 2020).

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2017. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

Funding of projects beyond FY 2017 is contingent upon the availability of funds, and the best interests of the US government. Funding in FY 2017 does not obligate NIFA to any future-year commitments.

The funds will be awarded through a grant. There is no commitment by NIFA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. For more information see https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2017, you may submit applications to one of the Program Areas in this RFA as one of the three types of requests: (1) New Application; (2) Renewal Application; and (3) Resubmitted Application.

- (1) **New application.** This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to NIFA. We will review all new applications to ensure they meet administrative requirements and all applications will be competitively evaluated by a review panel using criteria and selection processes described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

- (2) **Renewal application.** This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications; they also must contain a Progress Report (see Project Narrative, Part IV). We must receive the renewal applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate renewal applications in competition with other pending applications in the program area priority to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B.) as new applications.
- (3) **Resubmitted application.** This is an application that was submitted previously to NIFA but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV, C.). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate resubmitted applications in competition with other pending applications in the program priority area to which they are assigned, and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B.) as new applications. A renewal application that was submitted previously but not funded and is being resubmitted is also considered as Resubmitted application; however, PDs must include a Progress Report (see 2 above) and a Response to Previous Review.

C. Project Types

Applicants must propose one of the AFRI project types specified within the relevant program area description beginning in Part I, C. of this RFA. Only project types specifically solicited under each Program Area or Program Area Priority described in Part I, C. of this RFA will be considered for review. A detailed description of the project types available across AFRI is located at <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/AFRI-Project-Types.pdf>.

D. Grant Types

Applicants must select the appropriate AFRI grant type specified within the relevant program area description beginning in Part I, C. of this RFA. Only grant types specifically solicited under each program area or program area priority described in Part I, C. of this RFA will be considered for review. A detailed description of the grant types available across AFRI is located at <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/AFRI-Grant-Types.pdf>.

E. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See <http://nifa.usda.gov/responsible-and-ethical-conduct-research> for more information.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may only be submitted by eligible entities. Eligibility is linked to the project type. All project types are described beginning in Part II, C.

Applicants must respond to the Program Area priorities and deadlines found in this RFA. Grant recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award (see Part III B).

1) Research, Education or Extension Projects

Eligible applicants for single-function Research, Education or Extension Projects include: 1) State Agricultural Experiment Station; 2) colleges and universities (including junior colleges offering associate degrees or higher); 3) university research foundations; 4) other research institutions and organizations; 5) Federal agencies, 6) national laboratories; 7) private organizations or corporations; 8) individuals who are U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents; and 9) any group consisting of 2 or more entities identified in 1) through 8). Eligible institutions do not include foreign and international organizations.

2) Integrated Projects

Eligible applicants for Integrated Projects include: 1) colleges and universities; 2) 1994 Land-Grant Institutions; and (3) Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (<https://nifa.usda.gov/hispanic-serving-agricultural-colleges-and-universities-hsacu>).

For Integrated Projects, the terms "college" and "university" mean an educational institution in any state which 1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; 2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; 3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded; 4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and 5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association. A research foundation maintained by a college or university is eligible to receive an award under this program.

3) Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement Grants

The Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants have additional eligibility requirements. See Part II, D., for details.

B. Request for Determination of Status

1. Minority–Serving Institution

If an applicant's institution can be considered a minority-serving institution and wishes to be considered for a Strengthening Grant (as described in Part II, D.), but does not serve one or more of the minority groups specified in the Definitions section of this RFA (see Part VIII, D.), the applicant must submit to NIFA, documentation supporting the request. This documentation (see below) must be submitted as part of the requestor's Letter of Intent (if required) and the full application package (Part IV, B.) and we must receive it by the applicable program area or program area priority deadline. The Secretary of Agriculture or designated individual will determine whether the group or groups identified by the institution are eligible as a minority group for the purpose of receiving a Strengthening Grant under this program.

The following information must be provided within the application in the order specified below:

1. A description of each minority group that is being submitted for determination;
2. Data or studies supporting this group's designation as a minority group; and
3. Data indicating that enrollment of the minority group(s) exceeds 50 percent of the total enrollment at the academic institution, including graduate and undergraduate and full-and part-time students.

2. Multi-Campus Institution

All institutions grouped under one main campus as listed in Table 1, unless located in an Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) State (see Part II, D.) are excluded from eligibility for all strengthening funds. However, if any campus within a multi-campus listing can provide information demonstrating that it is administratively independent or has an independent accreditation, then the institution may petition for an exemption to this rule and request eligibility for strengthening funds. The Letter of Intent (if required) and the application must include a letter indicating how the institution is independent of the main campus, either through accreditation or administration. In addition, the letter should stipulate that the institution is eligible as a small and mid-sized or minority-serving institution due to enrollment and total federal funds received for science and engineering research and development. The letter must be signed by the Authorized Representative (AR) and included with the Letter of Intent (if requested) and the completed application (see Part IV, B.).

C. Cost Sharing or Matching

If an applied **Research or Integrated Project** with an applied research component, is commodity-specific and not of national scope, the grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions (see Part IV, C., 6). See Part VIII, D. for the definition of applied research. NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if we determine that:

- (a) The results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or

(b) The project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

For Equipment Grants: The amount of Federal funds provided may not exceed 50 percent of the cost of the equipment acquired using funds from the grant, or \$50,000, whichever is less. Grantees are required to match 100 percent of Federal funds awarded from non-Federal sources. The Secretary may waive all or part of the matching requirement if all three of the following criteria are met: 1) applicants must be a college, university, or research foundation maintained by a college or university that ranks in the lowest one third of such colleges, universities, and research foundations on the basis of Federal research funds received (see Table 2, following Part VIII, for eligibility); 2) if the equipment to be acquired using funds from the grant costs not more than \$25,000; and 3) has multiple uses within a single research project or is usable in more than one research project. If the institution believes it is eligible for the waiver for matching funds, the budget justification must include a letter signed by the institution's AR stating this information.

D. Center of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will recognize and provide priority in the receipt of funding to applications from "centers of excellence" that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. NIFA held listening sessions in July 2014 and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA's implementation of the COE provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input are available on NIFA's website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence>.

A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE.

- (A) State agricultural experiment stations;
- (B) Colleges and universities;
- (C) University research foundations;
- (D) Other research institutions and organizations;
- (E) Federal agencies;
- (F) National laboratories;
- (G) Private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
- (H) Individuals; or
- (I) any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Letter of Intent

If a Program Area or Program Area Priority within this RFA requires a Letter of Intent (LOI), then a LOI is a prerequisite for submission of an application. Refer to the Program Area Descriptions beginning in Part I, C for LOI deadlines for a specific Program Area or Program Area Priorities. For detailed guidance on LOI submission, see [AFRI Letter of Intent Instructions.pdf](#).

B. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For information about the pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.html>.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an AR to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as long as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to “**Register,**” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>), for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. Part II,1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2, below, to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of [Adobe Reader](#) compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html> and enter the funding opportunity number

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-AFRI-006354

From the search result, click “Select Package” to access the application package. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit

an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-tools-and-tips.html>). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support

800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).

Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (see <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants>):

Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time).

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Name of agency you are applying to
- Specific area of concern

C. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A of this part). The following is **additional information** you need to prepare for an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements in Part III, Section 3 of the guide (e.g., PDF). ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether attachments are in PDF format; see Part III, Section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

The required form for the Conflict of Interest List can be found at:
www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/templates/conflict_of_interest.doc.

D. Submission Dates and Times

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission of it via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

You should check the application for completeness. The application should be checked for the following required items, which may include:

- Project Summary/Abstract
- Project Narrative
- Bibliography & References Cited
- Logic Model for Integrated Program
- Management Plan for Integrated Program
- Data Management Plan
- Facilities & Other Resources
- Curriculum Vitae
- Conflict of Interest Lists
- Current and pending support
- Budget
- Budget Justification

This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight items that may be overlooked. Failure to include any of the three critical required documents of Project Summary/Abstract, Project Narrative, or Bibliography & References Cited sections as PDF attachment will result in the application not being reviewed or considered for funding by NIFA.

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV, A for Grants.gov contact information.

1. Letter of Intent

The Letter of intent if applicable, must be received at NIFA by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on the dates indicated in the Program Area Descriptions beginning in Part I, C and in the format specified in Part IV, A.

2. Full Application

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on the dates indicated in the Program Area Descriptions beginning in Part I, C**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.**

E. Funding Restrictions

Section 713 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total federal funds provided under each award. Similar language may be included in the FY 2017 appropriation, therefore, when preparing budgets, you should limit your request of the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

You may not use grant funds awarded under this authority to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such place; or the plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construction of buildings or facilities.

F. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, Section 1.9 in the document entitled "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III, Section 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Multiple submissions

In accordance with Part III, Section 5 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, duplicate, essentially duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications submitted to one or more program areas within the AFRI (including FASE Grants) in any one fiscal year will not be reviewed. In addition, applicants may not submit to AFRI an application that is considered duplicate, essentially duplicate, or predominantly overlapping with an application submitted to another NIFA program in the same fiscal year.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

We evaluate each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

- 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;
- the need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields;
- the need to include other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- 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;
- the need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
- 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 will recommend that your project be approved for support from currently available funds or be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with 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 AFRI project for funding.

We will send copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the review panel comments to the PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Evaluation Criteria

Detailed evaluation criteria for each project types, grant types, exploratory projects and center of excellence are outlined at <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/AFRI-Review-Criteria.pdf>. We will use the appropriate evaluation criteria to review applications submitted in response to this RFA.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted one-time, with updates on an as-needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determined prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, 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 involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by the agency for a period of three years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make grants to those responsible, 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 shall 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 at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR 200.210](#).

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view current NIFA award terms and conditions.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, the ones listed on the NIFA web page – <http://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide—a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary—is available at <http://nifa.usda.gov/policy-guide>.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

Refer to Part II, E for more information.

E. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS

For general questions related to the AFRI Programs, applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

AFRI Program Office:

Dr. Parag Chitnis, Deputy Director, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability

Dr. Denise Eblen, Deputy Director, Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition

Dr. Muquarrab Qureshi, Deputy Director, Institute of Youth, Family, and Community

Dr. Louis Tupas, Deputy Director, Institute of Bioenergy, Climate, and Environment

Telephone: (202) 401-5022

Fax: (202) 401-6488

E-mail: AFRI@nifa.usda.gov

Specific questions pertaining to technical matters may be directed to the appropriate Program Area Priority Contacts:

Program Area	Program Area Contact
Professional Development for Secondary School Teachers and Educational Professionals (PD-STEP)	Victoria LeBeaux (202) 720-2067; victoria.s.lebeaux@nifa.usda.gov
Research and Extension Experiences for Undergraduates (REEU)	Victoria LeBeaux (202) 720-2067; victoria.s.lebeaux@nifa.usda.gov
Predoctoral Fellowships	Ray Ali (202)720-2727; rali@nifa.usda.gov
Postdoctoral Fellowships	Ray Ali (202)720-2727; rali@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contacts:

Rochelle McCrea

Title: Team Leader

Unit: Office of Grants and Financial Management, Awards Management Division

Location: 2160 Waterfront Centre

[Full Address and Directions](#)

Phone: (202) 401-2880

Fax: (202) 401- 6271

Email: rmccrea@nifa.usda.gov

Sondra Watkins

Title: Team Leader

Unit: Office of Grants and Financial Management, Awards Management Division

Location: 2170 Waterfront Centre

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds; Changes

1. 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.

2. 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:

- (i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).
- (ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
- (iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.
- (iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part 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 Part 31, “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures,” as applicable.
- (v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.
- (vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
- (vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.
- (viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.
- (ix) NIFA Predoctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships can be converted to Standard Grants under certain circumstances (e.g., if the Fellow obtains a faculty position). One condition is that the Fellow has completed at least one year in the fellowship. The conversion process commences with a formal request by e-mail from the Project Director indicating objectives completed, funds remaining, timeline involved, etc. If initially agreed upon by the National Program Leader,

additional administrative processes take place (e.g., submission of an application, revised budget, etc.). NIFA reserves the right to approve or deny the conversion request.

The awardee will be subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award. See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. We will retain for three years a copy of an application that does not result in an award. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR Part 415, Subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the 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. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

For the purpose of this program, the following additional definitions are applicable:

Applied Research means research that includes expansion of the findings of fundamental research to uncover practical ways in which new knowledge can be advanced to benefit individuals and society.

Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants mean funding awarded to eligible applicants to strengthen science capabilities of Project Directors, to help institutions develop competitive scientific programs, and to attract new scientists into careers in high-priority areas of National need in agriculture, food, and environmental sciences. FASE awards may apply to any of the three agricultural knowledge components (i.e., research, education, and extension). FASE awards include Pre- and Postdoctoral Fellowships, New Investigator grants, and Strengthening grants.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

AFRI program information will be made available on the NIFA website at www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/afri/afri.html. The following are among the materials available on the NIFA website:

1. Stakeholder Input
2. Requests for Applications
3. AFRI Abstracts of Funded Projects
4. AFRI Annual Synopsis
5. Frequently Asked Questions
6. Interagency Programs

TABLE 1. Most Successful Universities and Colleges

Any institution listed in [Table 1](#) is not eligible for Strengthening Grants from the FASE program unless they are located in an EPSCoR state.

TABLE 2. Lowest One Third of Universities and Colleges Receiving Federal Funds

The lowest one third of universities and colleges receiving Federal funds listed in [Table 2](#) are used to determine eligibility for possible waiver of matching funds requirement for Equipment Grants.

FIGURE 1. Flow Chart for Strengthening Grant Eligibility

Do you have an appointment at a State Agricultural Experiment Station or a degree granting institution?

