

NIFA Frequently Asked Questions - Applying for a Grant

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Eligibility

How do I know if I am eligible or my organization is eligible to apply for a NIFA grant?

Eligibility for any NIFA grant program is determined by the authorizing and annual appropriation legislation. For competitive grants, you can check the "Eligibility" section of the appropriate [Request for Applications \(RFA\)](#) (located in Part III, A). For [Capacity grants](#) and special line-item grants, NIFA notifies eligible grant recipients directly.

Does NIFA accept unsolicited grant applications?

No. NIFA must comply with the Departmental regulation 2 CFR 415.1. As a result, NIFA is to enter into grants and cooperative agreements only after competition and the competitive award process. The regulation includes an exception to this rule for awards to fund unique and innovative unsolicited applications. However, NIFA receives annual appropriations that require the agency to fund very specific areas of agricultural research, education, and extension. Therefore, NIFA does not normally accept or consider unsolicited grant applications for funding.

Request for Applications (RFAs)

What is a Request for Applications (RFA)?

A request for applications (RFAs) is a notice that provides potential applicants with detailed information about an opportunity to submit an application for Federal financial assistance. The notice generally includes the purpose, eligibility, restrictions, focus areas, evaluation criteria, and regulatory information and instructions on how to apply. NIFA's competitive RFAs are posted at <https://nifa.usda.gov/rfa-list>.

What is a funding opportunity announcement? What is a funding opportunity package?

A funding opportunity announcement is when a federal agency makes known its intentions to award discretionary grants or cooperative agreements, usually as a result of competition for funds. NIFA posts funding opportunity announcements to Grants.gov (a common website for federal agencies to post discretionary funding opportunities and for grantees to find and apply to them). An announcement includes a synopsis and a funding opportunity package. The synopsis provides basic information for the applicant to determine if they want to look at the RFA; it includes information about how to locate the RFA. The funding opportunity package includes the necessary forms to apply as well as the general instructions for completing the forms. The RFA and the funding opportunity package are used simultaneously in the preparation of an application.

How do I know when NIFA publishes a funding opportunity announcement or an RFA?

In Grants.gov, you can subscribe to receive notifications of when NIFA or other Federal agencies post a funding opportunity announcement or update thereto. You do not need to be a registered user of [Grants.gov](#) to sign-up for this service. For more information, visit [Manage Subscriptions](#).

NIFA also uses listservs and its bi-weekly publication, [NIFA Update](#), and may issue a press release to notify potential applicants that a funding opportunity announcement and a RFA is available. In rare instances (e.g., legislatively required), NIFA will publish a funding opportunity announcement or the RFA in the [Federal Register](#); in such instances it is in addition to the Grants.gov postings.

Where can I get a copy of an RFA and the application forms necessary to apply for a funding opportunity?

NIFA's competitive RFAs are posted alphabetically at <https://nifa.usda.gov/rfa-list>. Also included on the page is a link to a search page. Each RFA includes instructions about how to locate the funding opportunity announcement which contains the funding opportunity package. The funding opportunity package includes the necessary forms to apply as well as the general instructions for completing the forms.

Who should I contact if I have a question about a specific RFA?

Part VII of the RFA lists the NIFA Agency Contact(s). If you have programmatic questions, contact the Programmatic Contact. If you have an administrative question, contact the Administrative/Business contact.

Where can I send comments about a particular RFA to be considered in the development of the RFA for the next fiscal year?

At the beginning of the RFA there is a section, Stakeholder Input; Interested parties are to submit written comments in accordance with instructions of that section.

Preparing to Apply**Do I have to register with [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) before submitting an application through [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov)?**

Yes; the applicant must be registered with Grants.gov. There is a one-time registration for using [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov), regardless of the Federal agency you may be submitting an application to through Grants.gov.

Information about how to register is included on the [Grants.gov registration page](https://www.Grants.gov). If you are with an institution, we strongly recommend that you reach out to your, e.g., Grants Office, to confirm that your institution is registered with [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov).

How long does the registration process take?

The registration process must be completed prior to submission of an application. The following is guidance so you can gauge the amount of time it may take to register.

- Organization applicants with an Employer Identification Number (EIN) should allow 7 business days to complete all registration steps, but additional time may be required for AOR Authorization depending upon the responsiveness of your E-Biz POC.
 - Organization applicants applying for an EIN should plan on a minimum of 2 full weeks but additional time may be required for AOR Authorization depending upon the responsiveness of your E-Biz POC.
 - Individual applicants can register in as little as 1 business day.
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Does NIFA require any agency specific registration in addition to the required [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) registration?

No. NIFA requires no separate registration beyond the [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) registration.

What is involved in the [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) registration process?

More detailed information is included on the [Grants.gov registration page](https://www.Grants.gov) and the [Grants.gov On-line User Guide](https://www.Grants.gov). The following is a general overview.

1. Obtain a DUNS number (optional for Individual applicants).
2. Register with SAM.gov (optional for Individual applicants). Organization Applicants will not be able to move on to Step #3 until this step is completed.
3. Create a [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) username and password. You will need to create a [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) user profile by visiting the Get Registered section of the website.
4. The E-Business Point of Contact (POC) at your organization must respond to the registration email from [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) and login at [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov) to authorize you as an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR). Note there can be more than one AOR for an organization.
5. At any time, you can track your AOR status by going to the Applicant Login with your username and password.

Part of the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) process is registering in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR), which is now accomplished through System for Award Management (SAM). How does an applicant organization register?

Information for new applicants registering with the System for Award Management (SAM) is on the [Grants.gov Register With SAM](https://www.grants.gov) webpage. If assistance is needed, contact the Federal Support Desk at <https://www.fsd.gov>.

I will be the Project Director on the proposal. Do I need to register with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

No, unless you are also the person authorized to submit an application on behalf of their organization (generally this is not the case if part of an institution). For example, the Project Director for a for-profit company submitting a proposal to the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program may also be the person authorized to submit applications.

What software do I need to apply through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

[Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) recommends using Adobe Acrobat Reader for Windows or MAC OS. To determine if your Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat software is compatible with [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and therefore can be used to download, complete, and submit grant applications, see the [Grants.gov Adobe Software Tip Sheet](#).

General Submission Questions

What process does NIFA use to evaluate proposals submitted for competitive review?

Using the evaluation criteria specified in the RFA, the proposals are evaluated through a peer review process. See the [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#) page for further details.

What are indirect costs?

Indirect costs are those costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project. Examples include depreciation and use allowances for an organization's building and equipment, operation and maintenance expenses, sponsored projects administration, and departmental administration.

May I include indirect costs in my application budget?

Some competitive financial assistance programs supported by NIFA allow indirect costs. However, for some of these awards the amount is limited by legislation. The amount of allowable indirect costs will be included in the "Funding Restrictions" section (Part IV,) of the [RFA](#). To assist in the understanding of the applicable indirect cost rate under NIFA programs, an indirect cost chart is available on the NIFA web site at <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/indirect-cost-chart>. While the chart is available, NIFA applicants are to follow any indirect cost limitation identified in the applicable request for applications (RFA) and comply with any indirect cost limitation identified in an award.

How do I obtain an indirect cost rate agreement?

See [NIFA's Indirect Costs webpage](#) for information.

Electronic Submission Questions

Where can I find the information I need to complete and submit a NIFA application via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

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How do I know if my application has been received by [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)?

Within 2 days of submitting a grant application, Grants.gov will send you two email messages:

- The first email will confirm receipt of the application.
- The second email will indicate whether the application has been validated by the system OR has been rejected due to errors.
- If the application was successfully validated, Grants.gov will send you a third e-mail notifying you the application has been passed to the agency.

There are two ways to verify the status of an application submitted to Grants.gov. One way is to use the "Track My Application" tool under the Applicants section of Grants.gov. This does not require a user name or password. The second way is to "Check Application Status" under Applicant Login located under the Applicants section of Grants.gov. This tool requires a user name and password. This option gives you the opportunity to view a "manifest" of submitted forms and files within Grants.gov. This manifest will allow you to review the list of forms and file attachments that were properly uploaded and received.

OPTION 1 – Check status of application

Check Grants.gov Application Status on the Track My Application Page:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/track-my-application.html>

OPTION 2 – Check status of application and view manifest of submitted forms and files

Check Grants.gov Application Status on the Track Application Status Page:
<https://apply07.grants.gov/apply/login.faces?cleanSession=1&userType=agency&loggedout=true>

Visit the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) page, [Tracking an Applications Submission](#), for additional questions and answers.

Receipt of the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) e-mails does not indicate the application has been accepted for review. The Authorized Representative will be notified in up to two subsequent e-mails if the application has been accepted or not-accepted for program review. If accepted, the application will be assigned a NIFA application number (e.g., 2009-XXXXX). This number should be cited on all future correspondence.

If I am required to submit a Conflict of Interest List with my [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) application package what format can I use?

It's important to follow the instructions in the RFA for the correct format etc. Unless stated otherwise in the RFA, a Conflict of Interest (COI) list is required for each senior/key person included in the R&R Senior/Key Person profile. Prepare the COI list(s) following the instructions and format below. A suggested template for the COI list is located at <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/application-support-templates>. Attach a single PDF attachment containing a COI list for each senior/key person included in the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (i.e., one attachment containing all the COI lists).

INSTRUCTIONS: For each senior/key person, list alphabetically by last name (and with last name first), the full names of individuals in the following categories and mark each category which applies with an "x".

- All thesis or postdoctoral advisees/advisors
- All co-authors on publications within the past three years, including pending publications and submissions
- All collaborators on projects within the past three years, including current and planned collaborations
- All persons in your field with whom you have had a consulting/financial arrangement/other conflict-of-interest in the past three years including receiving compensation of any type (e.g., money, goods or services).
- Note: Other individuals working in the applicant's specific area are not in conflict of interest with the applicant unless those individuals fall within one of the listed categories. The program contact must be informed of any additional conflicts of interest that arise after the application is submitted.

If I am required to submit Current and Pending Support documentation with my [Grants.gov](#) application package what format can I use?

Its important to follow the instructions in the RFA for the correct format etc. Unless stated otherwise in the RFA, applicants are encouraged to use the suggested [Current and Pending Support Template](#) for each key personnel. The Current and Pending Support information is to be attached as a PDF document to the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile.

If I am required to submit a Project Summary/Abstract with my [Grants.gov](#) application package what format can I use?

Its important to follow the instructions in the RFA for the correct format etc. Unless stated otherwise in the RFA, applicants are encouraged to use the suggested [Project Summary/ Abstract Template](#). The Project Summary/Abstract is to be attached as a PDF document to the R&R Other Project Information.

How do I ensure that I am applying to the correct NIFA funding opportunity?

Field 1. of the Supplemental Information form is prepopulated with the funding opportunity name and number from the funding opportunity package. Take a look at that field to ensure it contains information for the opportunity to which you intend to apply.

There are a number of places where information is to be included in the application as an attachment. What type of attachments will NIFA accept?

NIFA requires attachments to the application to be in Portable Document Format (PDF); PDF allows applicants to preserve the formatting of their documents. If you need assistance with Adobe software, Grants.gov has PDF resources available at <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. If you need assistance converting a file to PDF, there are a number of resources available on the internet.

Will applicants have to put the attachment in PDF?

Yes. The applicant is responsible for converting an attachment file to PDF prior to attaching it to the application and submission to Grants.gov. If you need assistance converting a file to PDF, there are a number of resources available on the internet.

How does NIFA determine if an application has met the deadline?

A date and time stamp is attached to the application when you click on the Submit button to electronically send the application to Grants.gov. The date and time stamp determines whether the application was received by Grants.gov before the deadline, which is 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on the date identified in the applicable RFA. An application submitted or resubmitted after the deadline is late (an application is considered on time at 5:00.59 pm ET but it is late at 5:01 pm ET).

How do I know my application was received by the deadline date and time?

After submitting an application to [Grants.gov](#), it provides users with the electronic equivalent of a postmark stamp on a confirmation screen. It contains the date and time the application was received by [Grants.gov](#). Applicants should print out this page for their records.

When do I need to submit my application?

Refer to the Request for Applications (RFA) for the established deadline.

What if I experience a technical problem with Grants.gov on a deadline date?

You are advised to maintain documentation (e.g., case number provided by Grants.gov Customer Support) of the matter and submit the application as soon as is feasibly possible. If the application is submitted following the deadline, then contact the Agency Contact (Part VII of RFA) and inform you want a late application considered under an extenuating circumstance. See <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/late-application-consideration> for further information.

Should I look for an opportunity by entering the CFDA number on Grants.gov?

From the [Grants.gov Search Grants](#) page, you can search for funding opportunities using the CFDA number or the more effective way is using the funding opportunity number. You may also perform basic searches using the opportunity status, funding instrument type, eligibility, etc.

NIFA also has a [Search for a Funding Opportunity](#) page where searches may be performed using key word(s), funding opportunity number, CFDA number, etc.

What is the difference between the checks that Grants.gov performs on the application and those performed by NIFA?

The Grants.gov system performs a limited check of the application (e.g., completion of all required form fields); Grants.gov will notify you of the outcome of the initial review. The Grants.gov validation process also includes a check for an active CCR registration (applicants with expired CCR registrations will be rejected), to make sure no viruses are attached to the application and ensuring the DUNS number is correct. NIFA staff perform precursory review of the application. The agency validation process includes meeting eligibility requirements and following NIFA application guidelines (e.g., formatting, page limitations, budget request limits); NIFA will notify you of the outcome of this review.