

NIFA Program Specialist Webinar – April 30, 2020 at 8:00AM CT

1. Is an interested applicant with no formal agriculture training inhibited from being successful in a Program Specialist position at NIFA?

No. NIFA's Program Specialist work with small business programs, environmental programs, education programs, and more.

2. What is the career ladder of a Program Specialist?

We recruit Program Specialist positions at the GS9 and GS11 level and most have a promotion potential to a GS 12. Program Specialists have gone on to serve in many roles or units in NIFA depending on their interest and expertise. Examples include, but are not limited to, Office of the Director, Grants Management, Planning, Accountability & Reporting Staff, Policy, Communications, and National Program Leaders.

3. Is serving as a Program Specialist a prerequisite for being a National Program Leader?

No.

4. When will Program Specialist and National Program Leaders position get posted?

You can visit [USAJobs](#) to learn more about current open positions or visit the [NIFA](#) and [ERS](#) career webpages. We recommend that you set up a profile and save searches in USAJobs. You should also continue to monitor <https://workforusdakc.com> for future events and opportunities. The GS 13-15 "Social/Biological Science Specialist" positions have the working title of National Program Leader, which require a higher level of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Look for the GS 9/11 Social/Biological Science Specialist vacancies, that have the working title of "Program Specialist."

5. What do I need to emphasize to get referred for a Program Specialist position if I have a master's degree with high research emphasis?

These are administrative positions where your scientific background is used to inform your program portfolio. You should make a case of how and which of your skills are translatable to this position. The skillset of successful Program Specialists includes, but is not limited, to the following: teamwork, database management, data analysis, flexibility and adaptability, self-directed learning, project management, and leadership skills.

6. How many 'clients' do Program Specialists work with daily? What makes that relationship successful?

Program Specialists work with internal and external stakeholders on a daily basis. Attention to detail, responsiveness, and tailoring communication style are key skills needed to have a successful relationship with your stakeholders.

7. Does the Program Specialist position require travel for work?

Travel is not necessarily required for this position, but Program Specialists typically travel 2-3 times a year to promote NIFA's grant programs, observe the outcomes and

impacts of funded projects, conduct outreach, audits/site visits, attend conferences, or other professional development activities.

8. Can Program Specialists telework? If so, how many days per week?

Yes, NIFA does offer telework for eligible positions (noted on each job announcement). For those eligible, telework is currently allowed with supervisor approval for up to two days per pay period (a pay period is 2 weeks). Also, alternative work schedules are a flexibility that may help an employee be productive and enjoy work-life balance.

9. One of the current job openings is for Biological Science Specialist, and it says, "many openings". The job description includes a wide range of potential areas of expertise/focus. How does an interested applicant determine which specific jobs are available?

If an interested applicant applies for a Program Specialist position, the applicant will be considered for Program Specialist positions across all Institutes based on his/her area of expertise and Agency's needs.

10. If a person is hired for a Program Specialist position but the position is not in the desired topic area, can that individual apply for the desired position, or must they be in the position they were initially hired in for a set amount of time?

Program specialists have taken advantage of lateral moves across the agency in the past. Once onboarded, the skillset for a Program Specialist is highly transferable.

11. How far in advance of graduation should current students apply for NIFA Program Specialist positions?

NIFA encourages all interested applicants to monitor the usajobs.gov website for openings. It may be helpful to set up a 'search agent' so you can receive notifications when these positions become available. Each announcement will include timelines so that applicants can apply accordingly.

12. What does the training/on-boarding process look like for a Program Specialist?

Upon on-boarding by HR, the Program Specialist is paired up with experienced staff for on-the-job training. Formal training takes place a couple times a year based on number of new specialists hired and it is a mix of hands-on and classroom-style settings.

Don't see your question answered above from the NIFA Program Specialist Webinar? Please contact the HR Specialist listed on vacancy announcements in the USAJobs website.
