

Good afternoon everyone my name is Gary Sherman and I will be your host for today's webinar addressing the veterinary services program implementation. I serve as the USDA's NIFA's national program leader for veterinary science and agro-security and previously led veterinary medicine loan repayment program now led by Dr. Danielle Tack. While I am program lead for the Veterinary Services Grant Program, I'm just one of a large team of dedicated NIFA professionals bringing the subject matter, policy and administrative expertise to the table as we work to stand up this new program aimed at enhancing food supply veterinary coverage in veterinary service shortage areas within the United States.

The purpose of today's and next week's stakeholder listening session is to give all interested parties an opportunity to provide comments and suggestions to NIFA in advance of development of the first request of applications under this new program. That RFA is tentatively targeted for release in late April. We are on a tight timeline. I'll first give up brief presentation of the summary of program based on authorizing language. During the summary I will highlight some key specific questions we seek key stakeholder advice about. The discussion does not need to be limited to those questions only. Please hold comments and questions till the end of the presentation. There are two ways for you to enter a question into the "que". The first is according to the instructions that the teleconference operator will give you in a moment and the second is by posting a question in the webinar chat box. When asking a question by phone, please first give your name and state your affiliation clearly, when called upon by the moderator to speak. Questions submitted by the chat box should also include your name and affiliation. If we don't have time to get to your questions or comment, they are being recorded and our NIFA team is taking them in to account as the first RFA and federal rules are drafted. Please be concise and limit your comment and questions to a minimum of two minutes. More lengthy input may be submitted in writing to the vet services program mailbox; [vsgp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vsgp@nifa.usda.gov) through 5pm eastern time February 29, 2016.

The Veterinary Services Grant Program legislative background is as follows. This program was authorized in 2014 Farm bill and funding was first appropriated in FY 2016 of this year and \$2.5 million was appropriated. Indirect cost are limited to 30% of total federal funds provided. Key to this program is the overall goal, the overall goal is to help mitigate food supply and public health veterinary shortage situations in the US.

Our tentative timeline, which is quite expedited for this program, is that by late April we hope to have released the RFA. By mid-June we are anticipating applications will be due and in late August peer-reviewed panels will meet. As of September 30<sup>th</sup>, we anticipate that award funds will be obligated.

Is important to note that unlike the veterinary medicine loan repayment program, this is a grant program that will follow our typical competitive grant review process. This will be a competitive peer reviewed process. It will be with merit review of applications by external experts who will be brought in to review and help us rank applications. The ranking

criteria and these are general because we have not developed the program fully yet but these apply to most of our programs here at NIFA. Raking criteria will include tactical and strategic merit, applicant capabilities including knowledge, skills and abilities and experiences of individuals and/or teams that apply and potential to enhance veterinary services in high priority shortage situations.

Again, the purpose of the veterinary service grant program is generally to develop, implement and sustain veterinary services and relieve veterinarian shortage situations. To competitively awarded program areas are authorized under this authority. One of them we are just calling education grants and the other are equipment grants. The specific objective of education grants is to substantially relieve veterinarian shortage situations through education, extension and training programs. The specific objective of the equipment grants is to establish or expand veterinary clinical practices and shortage situations designated by the veterinary medicine loan repayment program in rural areas. It's important to note the "and" It means for eligibility includes having been identified under the medicine loan program and meet the definition of rural area that is defined in the footnote.

Here is our first key question that I said we would highlighting throughout the talk and that we would like our stakeholders to give advice on. Of the 2.5 million and that we would like our stakeholders to give advice on. Of the \$2.5 million available this year for VSGP, how much should be devoted to the education component of this program versus the equipment grants program? The list of qualified applicants is unusually long so it is important that we consider all of the various stakeholders who may have an interest in this program. There are seven broad categories and within those subsections. The first is US-based entities including for-profit and not profit individuals operating a veterinary clinic that provides veterinary service in a VMLRP designated shortage situation and in a rural area as defined. Number two, state, national, allied or regional veterinary organizations or specialty boards recognized by the AVMA. Continuing the list of qualified applicants, number three; colleges or schools of veterinary medicines accredited by the AVMA. Number four, university research of veterinary medical foundations. Number five, departments of veterinary science or comparative medicine accredited by the Department of Education. Number six, state agricultural experiment stations and number seven, state, local or tribal agencies.

An important caveat under this authorization is that preference will be given to qualified applicants who provide documentation of coordination with other qualified applicants. This could be consortium of any size. It could be between larger entities and smaller entities but this will be an important caveat for evaluating applications.

Eligibility requirements there are two major eligibility requirements that are relevant for this first year of implementation. Qualified applicants may receive grants to carry out programs or activities that will substantially relieve veterinarian shortage situations or support or facilitate private veterinary practices engaged in public health activities.

A couple of additional key questions that we would like you to consider: How should veterinary public health activities be defined? And what proportion of the practice needs to be engaged in public health activities?

We will move on to the education grants. Again there are five multiple broad areas to help relieve veterinarian shortage situations. These include first recruitment, placement and retention of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, students of veterinary medicine or veterinary technology and students in secondary education which is typically defined as grades six through 12. Number two, expenses for food safety or food animal medicine training programs. Veterinary students, interns, externs, fellows, residents and veterinary technical students. The third, establish or expand accredited veterinary education, residency, fellowship, intern and externship programs and this includes faculty recruitment and retention. Provide continuing education and extension including veterinary telemedicine and other distance-based education and provide technical assistance for developing shortage area nominations. That is a process that our State Animal Health Officials (SAHO) in the VMLRP go through every year determining these nominations.

Two more key questions in relation to what we just discussed. Given the expedited timeline and limited funding, how should NIFA prioritize education projects? Should the focus be on recruitment, continuing education, technical assistance etc.? Or strengthening the academic pipeline or emphasize projects for current practitioners or is there some other focus that this education component of this grant program should focus on.

Getting back to equipment grants. For-profit or nonprofit entities or individuals operating veterinary clinics may only use funds for certain purposes. This is to expand veterinary practices by equipping veterinary offices, sharing in the reasonable overhead costs of such veterinary practices or establishing mobile veterinary facilities in which a portion of the facility will address education or extension needs.

There is a special requirement connected with equipment grants that is not connected with the education grant and that includes something that is the case in the VSGP. The awardees under these program will be subject to an agreement that includes a required term of service for the awardee.

Three more additional key questions that we would like for you to consider. What types of equipment should be eligible? Should any be excluded? What are reasonable overhead costs? And what portion of the equipment grants awarded should address education or extension needs?

Continuing the key questions, how long should a term of service be? What should the minimum award amount be? And should there be a minimum term of service regardless of the award amount?

That concludes our summary of the program as we understand it and we now seek your input. We will get to as many as we can. Questions and comments and feedback can also be submitted to our email [VSGP@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:VSGP@nifa.usda.gov). For those comments to be considered prior to the drafting of the first RFA and rule writing we would need to receive those before 5 PM on February

29, 2016. We also want you to know the transcript and additional information will be available at [www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP](http://www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP). Those transcripts will be of this webinar as well as the one next week. Our next listening session is Thursday, February 25 from 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM Eastern time.

**Question 1#** (from the chat box): The question is will these be renewable grants?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** We are talking about these as standard grants right now. There are two separate types that we are discussing as part of the program. One of these is the education grant and we certainly see the possibility of those being renewable. I think that's a good area to submit comments on if you have concerns or thoughts how we can best do that. Something like equipment grant through NIFA is not usually renewable. Those are normally a year in length. If you could see a need for something longer than that that would be outside our model and we could certainly appreciate any comments that you have on that as well.

**Question 2#** (from the phone): Will be education grants be available for private practitioners that wish to attend an education session to offset the cost? Or more academic institutions who wish to provide an educational opportunity?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** The way the legislation is written it looks like the grants that would be available directly to private clinicians or individuals would be on the side of the program where you would be purchasing equipment and things like that rather than on the educational side however, because the eligibility is so broad certainly these applications could come in including not just an institution as a primary grantee but there's a lot of different designs for these applications that could include allowing for the payment of that sort of thing. It wouldn't be directly as a grant to an individual clinician under this program. Does that answer your question?

We have a couple more posted on the chat.

**Question 3#** (from the chat box): Will the listening session on February 25 be the same as today's information?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Yes, it will be the same information that was presented today. It's just a second opportunity for people to provide additional feedback of questions especially if anyone attending today opts to think about and wants to join back on for additional comments.

**Question 4#** (from the chat box): How will NIFA limit the grants awarded by type?

**Answered by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** It may help to have some clarification about by type. If we mean by type of grant that is standard versus conference or do we mean type education versus equipment? One of the questions that we did ask with respect to type is how much

funding should go to each and within those what would be the size limits on this grants and depending on the meaning of what type is.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:**

We want to flip back to the slide that had these questions on it, to refresh people's memory. I think this is where we are open to folk's suggestions. This authorization allows us to do a lot of different things however two and a half-million is not enough to accomplish all of that. We are trying to be responsive and open to our stakeholders about how to prioritize the work that we are doing and we don't have direction from Congress from the legislation as far as how much of the program should focus on the educational component versus the equipment so if that's the question I think, I'm not trying to dodge it but a putting out there we appreciate your feedback where we should focus first because again two and a half-million the folks that joined us today can appreciate and this is not a lot to accomplish with the small amount of money as compared to some other education programs in particular.

**Additional input by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Related to that we address it in the as a key question for equipment but it would also apply to education along the lines of minimum awards so between some feedback on how much should go towards education versus equipment and within those what should be the minimum awards even maximum so we can kind of limit as well as provide the largest opportunity available with the limited funds.

**Question 5a#** (from the phone): Good afternoon this is Dave Schmidt from Iowa. Is the 2.5 million is a one time or it's an annual allocation?

**Answered by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Good question. This is the first time funding. When there is a new authority that is appropriated that is the question that is on everyone's minds, will it be funded again the next year. That is entirely up to Congress. We cannot give you any solid answer on that. Sometimes programs are funded once and not again and other times, like the VMLRP, it was funded once and it grew. It may have to do with issues that are well beyond the control of those who are advocating for it but it also has to do with how much interest there is in Congress to fund it again. This program was supported by Congress and was put into the budget by Congress.

**Question 5b#** (from the phone): One more question. There is a lot of questions and a lot of information that is listed in your presentation will that be posted on the NIFA website? And would it be possible to get that link or get a copy of the PowerPoint presentation for reviewing again and looking at those questions that you are asking?

**Answered by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Absolutely. This PowerPoint presentation is already posted to our website for the veterinary services program. You can find the presentation at [www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP](http://www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP)

**Comment 1#** (from the phone): This is Lincoln Montgomery Rodgers from Virginia. In my opinion, I think the funds limited as they are, should be directed by primary towards organizations or practitioners that are

actively relieving shortage situation versus the vague pipeline building or student outreach. Shortage tends to exist in areas that are not economically desirable to set up a veterinary business, that's why it's a shortage. Creating more veterinary students or telling more veterinary students to consider food animal medicine doesn't really fix the problem.

**Response by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Thank you for that comment. It's very relevant. In some measures it is captured in the authority by virtue of the overarching language that says there must be - - for any of these applications to be funded, they must significantly address and mitigate the shortages that exists. A strong case-justification will have to be made and while there are some who believe that the pipeline of folks that are coming into the field is important and it could be that a very strong case could be made for instance for secondary education and so forth that will be that the peer review panel will look at but they will look into account the likelihood of impact and largest impact. Largest bang for the buck so I understand your comment and we appreciate it.

**Question 6#** (from the chat box): Could the educational grant funding be used to help fund a regional veterinary core which would help the State Animal Health officer in emergency management disease reporting and potentially epidemiologic investigation?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Could the funds be used to help fund a regional veterinary core? It depends how that vet core is defined because the state government can apply as well as an association or a foundation. If that veterinary core falls into one of those entities it definitely can apply. As far as where the focus is on emergency management disease reporting and potentially epidemiologic investigation, we would like input as we put into the education grants where those focuses could be. We heard from our previous caller, his opinion was there should be some focus on providing that education and outreach for people that are already serving shortages. This would be something we would appreciate further comment and elaboration on, addressing how the emergency management disease reporting and epidemiologic investigation in the context of the shortage areas could be addressed. I will look to others in the room if there are any additional comments or answers to this question.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** This authority defers in terms of what is a shortage in a couple of places back to the Veterinary Services Grant Program. The language used there is that shortages defined by the secretary which is a little bit nebulous but we partner with the state animal health officials to identify those across the country from a practice area standpoint and from the disciplinary standpoint. There is also the definition was extended in the Veterinary Services Grant Program under shortage to not just geographic areas but to disciplines. Originally the list was epidemiology, food safety and public health etc. epidemiology, food safety and public health etc. One could imagine and certainly we would like your input as to whether it would be deemed important to consider a shortage disciplinary area as emergency veterinary service and that would be something that the

USDA could take under consideration as potential disciplinary shortage area like those other three and so we would like your input on that.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** There's nothing that you are suggesting that we wouldn't be able to find. If you think it's a priority you may want to weigh in on some of the particular questions that were raising today such as the size of a grant and would it accomplish some of the things you are talking about? I would also say that the preference in this program being for qualified entities working together. What you are suggesting may be something you want to talk to us about. How we use that preference or you may want to think about as an applicant how you would go about taking advantage of that preference.

**Question 7#** (from the chat box: With an eye towards maximizing the funding to the most pressing identify needs, how will NIFA encourage applicants to collaborate with each other?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** I believe this is one of the things that we would encourage feedback from the stakeholders. Though not overtly expressed, how could this be outlined in the evaluation process through the review panel? Those with collaborations would essentially receive higher consideration or for lack of a better word, bonus points in order to help award those situations where there is collaboration taking place.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** The specific encouragement for collaboration in this authority would suggest that that will be a part of the RFA and I can't imagine anything would cause it not to be there. That language in the RFA would be the specific encouragement but NIFA would in no other ways be in a position to mediate among different stakeholders. It could be discussed whether conference grant may ultimately be considered under this authority but absent that it's typically a self-organizing activity that applicants engage in when they put together a consortium or a team of folks who are going to apply and collaborate in the way this authority describes would be considered beneficial.

**Additional Comment to question 6#** (from the chat box): **Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** More explanation on that regional veterinary core question. Described as a joint effort between the SAHO and the State Health Dept. that would include zoonotic disease reporting and epidemiology. I echoed what Aaron said, one you have the collaboration component which would be falling under the legislation again both are state entities which are eligible under the legislation. The part where we would enjoy feedback on would be again it's on the education. Who is the education to? Is this more of an extension type education or education to veterinarians currently doing shortage situations or extensions in areas that have shortages? Again, the focus is on helping relieve shortage situations. How that can come into context with the shortage situation would be where that would need possibly further development. We would enjoy any additional comments to that as far as education.

**Question 7#** (from the chat box): Will there be consideration for giving priority for equipment purchase portion of these grants to current VMLRP recipients to strengthen their commitment to stay in the area they are in? One of the other commenters concurs with this question.

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** There's definitely a possibility as we build this program and we encourage additional feedback so we can weigh how many people or how many stakeholders believe we should consider doing that as one of our priorities while doing these awards.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** A little bit about the history of the authorization, one of the goals was (we find it in several places in authorization) was to try to tie these funds to the vet medicine funds and let those programs complement each other. The agency has flexibility there. We are looking to accomplish that goal. It seems it was behind a good portion of what was in final legislation. In several places in legislation it talks about the priority being relieving these shortages. There are references to the shortage situation on folks that we have already incentivized to work in those areas. The long and short of it is "yes", I don't think that would be off based at all and certainly we encourage comments on how best to do that and again several of these questions are very poignant and have to do with asking how much money would it take to accomplish certain goals? I know you have not had as much time as we in the agency have to digest some of this and we encourage you to take these questions it back to and discuss with other folks. If this was your problem to resolve and this is the amount of funding you have and these are the goals you are trying to accomplish -- would look at things like how much funding is available vet medicine and how can that money be used to keep people in areas where we need them and what additional funding on the equipment side really tip the balance and make both programs more effective and if so how much would it take? Again I want to point back to that service piece as well which we haven't had a chance to hear comment on yet. I think it's an interesting component of the legislation and I think we are grappling as an agency if we tie this to something like vet medicine we need to get our heads around how much additional service would be appropriate if we work to grant funds for a piece of equipment. Again I thank you for your comments and I hope we will continue to hear from stakeholders on those particular questions.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Regarding that last question which was about the preference to those who are serving in an area -- in a way out right preference is not something we typically get under circumstances. Where that comes in to play possibly in a big way is that those applicants who are committed and serving in a shortage situation will be writing applications that will be competitively evaluated and in the end it comes down to the competitiveness of that application and one can imagine that someone who is serving in that situation and can make a compelling argument that with a piece of equipment or mobile vet clinic or something how much more they could reach and how much greater impact they could have. That will be reflected in the application and convince the panel but they do have that advantage theoretically and hopefully they can capitalize on it

well and make an argument that is convincing and so from that standpoint those folks may have a little bit of a boost and that's consistent with the intent of the program. In the end, the competition is real and there won't be any -- I can't imagine scenario -- where extra points from the beginning would be given but those applications could be more competitive.

**Question 7a#** (from the phone): This Bill Hillhouse from Oklahoma. When we define shortage areas--Is that just the shortage areas that were submitted for that year or will previous shortage areas that are not re-submitted be considered as a shortage area?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** For the most part the goal would be those that are submitted for the year of the grant funding award similar to what VMLRP the shortage that are available for loan repayment are posted for the year. However we are still working on the details for this I do envision that those shortages are currently being served by the VMLRP recipients just as they can apply for renewal awards and would also be shortages considered under this. Again this is not something we necessarily have had the chance to discuss here at USDA but I do not see -- what I do know is we would not necessarily open up something that was nominated in 2013 but never necessarily awarded.

**Question 7b#** (from the phone): So my question is - if it was award in 2013, would they be eligible for this grant?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** That something we still need to discuss but my guess would be similar to renewal awards where they are eligible and that they would be eligible through this grant program. In an area that is currently awarded--"yes".

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Someone who is currently filling a shortage area will be exactly the person that can make the argument, be competitive and further mitigate the shortage in their area.

**Question 7c#** (from the phone): But it would not necessary be an area that was nominated again in 2016--- correct?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Correct, if it's currently awarded. I believe you may be familiar with our renewal process with VMLRP which those who are currently serving in an area can submit during the current application year for the location that they are currently serving but no one else can submit for that particular location when it's a renewal. This should be a certain situation, with this grant program where those shortages for the current fiscal year would be open to anyone applying to these grants that those currently being served would be restricted to those that are currently serving in those awarded areas.

**Question 7d#** (from the phone): So would the VMLRP recipient be the only one that could apply for this grant through that shortage situation?

**Answered by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** One of the things that we have to be careful about and it sounds like a person has no

competition but just like with renewals it's full open competition nationally for the available funds and so the application while there is no one else can apply for the very same position there are many applications on the table in front of the peer panel and they will rank them and only if the application would fall in the outstanding to very high priority which is usually where our fundable area falls -- could it be funded. It's not a guarantee of funding because it is carrying on mitigation of a shortage in a previously awarded area.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** We would not try to limit it to folks who were already receiving from the VMLRP in that area. It would be helpful to us if you feel we need to open beyond the current fiscal year for instance to two or three years' worth of nominations any specific feedback you can give us on that and what the advantages would be for the program by broadening the list of areas, that would be helpful for us to have as we developed the RFA language.

**Question 8#** (from the chat box): Could the educational grant funding be used to fund veterinary student externship opportunities in clinics located in shortage situations? That is could the funding be used for traveling, living expenses during the externship period?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** The first part being what you described as an externship opportunity is something that would be open. That is one of the educational ones that is in there. We can't necessarily fit all five or seven broad areas in this education component so we are asking for feedback from everyone on where we should possibly focus the limited funds on these education areas as we develop the RFA. As far as the funding, if it could be used for traveling and living expenses, I will defer that to Aaron as far as what the legislation may say.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** I may have to get back to you on this. I think we can look up specific things that are referenced in the authorization but definitely the externship is a "yes". There are expenses of that externship that would be allowable but beyond that we would have to get you details on what would fall inside and outside. It's certainly one of the goals is -- it's explicitly mentioned in the authorization to allow veterinary students, interns, externs, fellow, residents, ect... to cover expenses to attend training programs in food safety or food animal medicine and I think what you are describing would fall clearly underneath that.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Just reminding it will be the creativity of the applicant who makes the case about the impact so if one were to propose something like what you are describing one can imagine that it's a real force multiplier in terms of mitigation because of something unique about the way maybe an externship program is put together and there's evidence of potential for impact that ramifies beyond the exact number of students getting certain training and serving in a certain area for a limited amount of time. What we are looking for is innovation in these applications and ways that whatever is done synergizes with other activities or other possibilities and provides

for longer-term solutions to these issues. I think it sounds like what was asked would be supported but again it will have to be put together in a way that makes the argument that this will be an award that will have significant impact for the longest duration possible.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** These grants would fall under our normal duration which is not to exceed more than 4 years on the education side. On the equipment side, it would not exceed more than one year of work but we could vary from that model. We have to have stakeholder feedback that suggested why it would be important for us to exceed the 1 year because on equipment grant it is typically one year of work. I think we do take feedback. We cannot exceed five years under this authorization but we can take feedback on this. The reason we normally limit them to four years is so we can allow a no-cost extension to grantees that have not completed the work at the end of the four years so the funds don't end up going back to the Department of Treasury.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** For an education program to go to fruition and see the impact of it, can oftentimes be more than one year and so we will have to see how long they go for but it's not unreasonable to think an education program like an extension, externship sort of training program may be something where a few cohorts of students going through assessments of what these students learn and what these folks learn and then go on to be able to accomplish.

**Additional input by D. Tack, program coordinator:** I would like to expand a little bit. Equipment grants are one year. The only thing different with this program compared to other programs is a requirement of a service agreement that is tied to that grant. That's where we would really like feedback. Things along the lines of minimum amount and type of service so although it's a one-year grant expires when you get the money to purchase the equipment the service that is required when you receive that equipment may be longer depending on feedback from you all. The best example is that for the veterinary medical loan repayment program for the initial contracts no matter the amount of award amount, which is up to \$75,000, they do have to do three years of service. Where looking for feedback for these equipment grants. I do know that someone made a comment online along the lines saying they encourage a three-year usage commitment in parallel to the timeline of the VMLRP award. We are looking for those types of feedback.

**Question 9#** (from the chat box): Is there a similar program in the human medical field as far as the type of grant?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Looking at the room I'm probably the only one that has some public health background. I don't believe any of us are aware of this type of grant especially type of service. I'm only aware of loan repayment program not necessarily equipment and as far on the educational side for helping getting shortage situations they are all related to loans and actually paying tuition not necessarily for actual education program.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** If you are familiar with something that we should be looking at, that other agency are doing we are always grateful in the early stages of development to be aware of similar things in the field that are being done that we may be able to learn from.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Regarding on the human side. The national health core is a much larger program. It actually has many components not just loan repayment but also scholarships and I believe there are other support mechanisms. I don't recall anything about equipment but there may be something along these lines and we would certainly investigate with our sister agencies regarding how they may handle something like this if they do at all. Also in rural development that agency within the USDA there may be a program where equipment is part of what they support and we can look into how they handle that sort of thing.

**Comment 2#** (from the chat box): The best source of veterinary public health is to support of local food animal practitioners perform routine veterinary services that allow for the detection of diseases and forming the veterinary/client relationship that promote public health.

**Response by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** We appreciate those comments and will take those type of things into account as we define public health and we are looking for other stakeholder feedback to help us with that definition.

**Comment 3#** (from the chat box): Time of service to the equipment itself not necessarily to the individual using it.

**Response by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** We thank you for that comment and we will take into account when looking to tie the service agreement as we develop these.

**Comment 4#** (from the chat box): It is difficult for private practitioner to compete with an academic institution when they have entire foundations devoted to grant writing.

**Response by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** We agree and this is why we need input because there is two different components to this grant. The education which is focused more on foundations, University and governments and larger entities and the equipment which is more focused on the private practitioner. There may be situations where there may be abilities to cross over with the individual although I don't necessarily think that with equipment. We'll continue to encourage people to give us input on how we should divide those funds between these two components of the grant.

**Question 10#** (from the chat box): Are both the educational and equipment grants limited to the shortage area or are just equipment grants limited to the shortage areas?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** I believe both are tied to the shortage -- for relieving shortage situation but we will double check on that legislation.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** So the eligibility is that it's not explicitly limited to the seven groups. A strong applicant will have work to relieve shortage situation on both sides of this program and I think what you will see in the evaluation criteria once it has been developed and that will be important component of the program. There's nothing in the legislation that would limit someone from sending an application and trying to make a case that they have worked in an area. It will be weighed against other factors. I'll also say the legislation is tricky when it comes to these private practices versus the educational institutions. There are requirements on the equipment side of the for-profit and nonprofit clinics that are not present for the state institutions for example. What we ended up with was some legislation that came from several different groups who had several different goals. They accomplished the goal by way of having a program that is funded what we are struggling with now is the limitation on the private side for the funds include service to rural shortage situations. On the educational institution side [while that would make a strong application, that is not a base requirement in order for eligibility]. If you feel that that important component anything that you can suggest that would help us prioritize those applications and like I said I think it's something to do but not a base requirement on the education side.

**Comment 5#** (from the chat box): Recommendation for us to open the current grant program to more than just the current fiscal year VMLRP shortages.

**Comment 6#** (from the chat box): In agreement with previous comment and stating that it should be opened to recipients that are still serving under the VMLRP contracts.

**Response by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Thank you for those comments. Again as you go home and contemplate and think about this please feel free to submit your feedback, answer to key questions, thoughts, comments and questions to the VSGP mailbox at [VSGP@NIFA.USDA.gov](mailto:VSGP@NIFA.USDA.gov)

The legislation is also posted at [www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP](http://www.USDA.NIFA.gov/VSGP) if anyone wants to read in-depth about some of these items that have been discussed today. Please feel free to comment or submit questions by either route.

**Comment 7#** (from the chat box): Suggestion or recommendation to devote of the 2.5 million, devoted 2 million for equipment and 500,000 for education.

**Question 11#** (from the chat box): Will the Veterinary Services Grant Program award money for individuals for equipment be subject to taxes?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** When applications come in under other programs for equipment we do not pay for taxes beyond the cost of the equipment. I guess that's where we would fall on that piece. I'm glad someone brought this up because it's an important piece to understand about the legislation especially considering how small the funding is

compared to some other programs. The way NIFA's grants work, on the competitive research education extension side many of our applicants or grantees are land grant institutions and they have a negotiated rate of doing business. NIFA pays either that rate on the federal funds that we provide them or 30% whichever is less. This grant program has a similar cap. I'm trying to describe a situation where if you ask for certain amount of funds in your application you will be allowed to request as much as 30% of that total figure in addition to what you are getting in order to cover your overhead costs. So if we make a pact on equipment grant that will include indirect cost of up to 30%. This is going to be somewhat complicated for us because clinician are not going to have a negotiated rate the way the institutions do. At this point, we have talked to our lawyers and based on the authorization they think we will be making the full 30% available but will have to start negotiating rates with some of these folks. In lieu of indirect cost, folks that do not have rates can request some of those costs on the direct cost side and one get too technical with this conversation. Except to say with institutions there's oftentimes a struggle between grant offices and folks in the field about the cost of doing business and we recognized as a federal research agency there is a cost of overseeing the grant. We know on the education side there are institutions that are used to doing business with us and will be familiar with these rates in the amount of funds they need to request. We're going to have to provide much more specific guidance on the private clinician side as to how to request those funds and how to justify in a budget which pieces of their overhead would be available at a federal cost. Again one other piece that is important and we are looking for feedback on if we could go back to the questions that will related to the reasonable cost of overhead. That is an interesting thing for us to see in legislation. Again, we talked about two components to the program. These questions focus on the equipment side. In addition to being able to request or apply for equipment there is another piece in the legislation that allows for reasonable overhead costs for private clinicians and again their nonprofit or for profit, these are individuals. How would someone substantiate a reasonable cost of overhead and again the overall purpose of this program is to relieve veterinary shortage situations. How would one do that in such a way that it would be persuasive that by relieving their reasonable overhead cost that we are in fact accomplishing with that grant is to relieve a veterinary shortage situation? We can appreciate the cost of setting up practice in some of these shortage areas is high. We are going to have to figure out as an agency how much guidance to provide applicants and also how can they best influence in providing justification that reasonable overhead costs are going to compete against a piece of equipment for merit in terms of most meritorious awards, the agency could make the best use of those funds so we will be grappling on how to provide guidance on applicants to that. Certainly any input that you all have on indirect cost and any input on overhead costs associated with the private practices that are running in shortage areas is something it would be helpful for us to have. If there are studies of this in particular that we may not have in our possession, please point us in the direction of data that would be helpful for us to consider as we put together the solicitation for this program.

**Comment 8#** (from the chat box): Priority be given to proposals that tie education and equipment together helping veterinarians develop a new service that would enhance their business and better serve their client.

**Response by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Thank you for those comments and we will make sure that we take that into account as we work on developing the RFA.

**Question 12#** (from the chat box): Will there be an administrative costs from NIFA from the 2.5 million allocated?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** Yes, NIFA takes 4% off the top of our competitive appropriation funds. That serves as an operating cost as an agency, which is fairly low as compared to other agencies. The 2.5 million figure that is used in the slide is prior to NIFA taking 4% percent. Again we are factoring into the impact side, project award side and things like the indirect costs that will be assessed on the funds on the applicant side.

**Question 13a#** (from the phone):

Just some points of clarification. If a private practitioner applies for equipment grants will the indirect cost be essentially some amount in excess of the amount funds requested or will there be a portion taken from the amount of funds requested?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** The way we would write this solicitation it would be in addition to the cost of equipment. We would tell you can request up to a certain amount and then your indirect cost would be an addition to that. The solicitation will give you various explicit instructions on maximum cost of the equipment grants and the maximum allowable indirect cost. On other programs we allow a maximum 10% for equipment grants. We talk to lawyers and it looks like this may be something we want to accomplish long term and we certainly want folks feedback but the indirect cost associate with buying a piece of equipment is not the same as the indirect cost for an institution to grow an education program long-term. So if folks have feedback on that and again we are trying to be good stewards of these funds and try to get the most impact from the amount of funds that have been given---it's a challenge.

**Question 13b#** (from the phone):

As far as overhead what is the federal government definition of overhead? Is that in terms of rent, electricity and light or does that include salaries and other variable costs that go into operating a practice?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** What we can do is share -- first of all, NIFA doesn't use over -- overhead cost as a term. They're throwing us into a loop of this terminology. We don't talk about overhead cost we talk about indirect cost. Indirect cost does includes some of things you're describing whether it be rent or portions of salary but there are specific federal guidance on indirect cost so what we can do for now is share with you how we would normally define indirect cost. I think as an agency, we are probably leaning in that direction of defining overhead the same way. In order for these grants to be consistent with the other federal assistance that we put in the field.

**Question 13c#** (from the phone): You are inclined to use your present definition of indirect cost to also apply overhead cost that is specified in the legislation.

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** Yes, my policy mind is leaning in that direction. Certainly if folks have other ideas as to what they think what may need to be covered here we would be open to considering that. From a policy perspective I would like to see this defined as closely as indirect cost as possible.

**Question 13d#** (from the phone): As a private practitioner in the field, the only thing I could say for indirect cost/overhead is, lay staff people. If you're one business as one doctor in a shortage lay staff people allow you to do more veterinary things and less washing of tools and answering phones. I don't know how that falls into that definition but that is how they let me provide more services to shortage areas.

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** That is great feedback. I do think overhead is not defined in the legislation. We will have a certain degree of flexibility but will have to draw lines around what we think is appropriate. To hear that would be important to effectiveness using these funds that is important feedback.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** Just a point of clarification when we refer to states here at USDA would include insular areas and insular areas means territories. So places like Puerto Rico, Guam, US Virgin Islands and so forth are included.

**D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** I'm going to go ahead and move the slides to get to those key questions that we are strongly encouraging stakeholders for feedback as we try and work through this process.

First key question is of the 2.5 million, less administrative cost, how much should be devoted to education versus equipment grants? Using a percentage or dollar amounts is what we are looking for.

The second key question related to is on the eligibility component. Where it says to support or facilitate private veterinary practices engaged in public health activities. How should we define veterinary public health activities? Again we ask for this because depending on the veterinarian or the field of practice someone may be in this could be defined differently. We are looking for input on that we've already received some comments.

The third key question is what proportion of the practice needs to be engaged in these public health activities as it relates to the definition we were seeking feedback on.

Next question is focusing on the education grants. We have these five broad areas ranging from recruitment, placement and retention for food safety and food animal medicine training programs, establishing or expanding vet student training programs, internship, externship, and residencies, continuing education and extension and technical experience for shortage areas. Keeping these five in the broad categories and again this is to relieve help shortage situations with all of these. Where should we prioritize the education projects? Should there be one or two

of those five that we should focus in on and develop well versus having five very broad areas that are a little less defined. Again focus recruitment, continuing education, technical assistance or more on strengthening the academic pipeline or emphasizing projects for current practitioners or other when we look at these. Finally the final set of key questions that we are interested in focus on those equipment grants. What type of equipment should be eligible? Should anything be excluded? What are reasonable overhead costs? What portion of equipment grants awarded should address education or extension needs? As we get to the terms of service portion just with the money for this particular equipment grants it doesn't stop with getting the piece of equipment you have to provide a level of service to that shortage situation with that piece of equipment. How long should the term of service be for a piece of equipment? Which are the minimum award amount be when it comes to the shortage? Again I gave the example from the vet med loan repayment program, we have a minimum term of service for three years no matter the amount of the award. They have loan repayments at 15,000 or at 75,000 they have a minimum term of service. However for the equipment grants should we be doing something similar or should we be looking for every 25, 30 or 10,000 amount of equipment there is so many years of service that must correlate with that?

**Question 14#** (from the chat box): Dose the equipment include adding large animal facility such as pens, stocks and bars to an existing practice that currently only has the ability to serve food animal clients via house calls?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** There's a prohibition in the legislative language and this is what the funds may not be used for. Constructing new buildings or facilities, acquiring expanding, remodeling or altering existing buildings or facilities. That includes spending funds on site grading, site improvement and architect fees. In other words you cannot build anything brand-new that is will be a free standing building. You also cannot do the types of major renovations that would be on a non-movable piece of equipment. Hopefully that clears things up. That's one of things case-by-case you can talk all day long. Those are the blanket prohibitions in the legislation.

**Comment 9#** (from the chat box): The next part is a comment and a suggestion that the education area should focus on continuing education for current practicing veterinarians.

**Additional input by G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** To add clarification because we haven't had much in terms of the prioritization for instance all of the education different activities that could be conducted. We've had a few comments on it. Not enough to count as consensus. Just to give you a sense of how this works at NIFA we oftentimes don't have enough funding in many of our programs supporting research to cover for instance every species or every disease within a species if we are talking about animal health. What we do here at NIFA when we develop our RFA's, given the limited funds we have to limit in that what may be eligible in a given year. We tried to do that based on prioritization and input from our stakeholders so it makes sense but sometimes we have to rotate from year-to-year. We may focus more on plant

health and animal health another year or something like that. It's not like anyone is less important but because of limited funds we may have to say which two of our six priorities we want to have this year and that we take that into consideration in subsequent years when we write our RFA's. What has been funded and what needs to be funded. That is revisited every year. If we can get guidance from our stakeholders we would appreciate help with that. It's a very difficult decision. That is what to prioritize with such limited funding amongst all those different kinds of activities that can be undertaken under this program and also the big question which is how much to the equipment side of the program versus to the education part of the program.

**Comment 10#** (from the Phone): I concur with the online comments. I agree that the education should be focused or prioritized for continuing education for current veterinarians that are actively relieving a shortage situation or potential applicants that are going into shortage situations and I would give that the top priority. I struggle with the question how to define public health services as a practicing veterinarian because many of the things I do routinely contribute to public health but I never send a bill to the state and I don't put my public health hat on when I go TB test something. I'm not sure how to define or define my contribution to the greater public health. It's part of the job when you do when you are a food animal veterinarian. It's difficult to quantify that.

**D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Thank you. Those are the type of comments we're looking at. It may be that some of these might be a broad definition as we move forward so again we appreciate these types of comments especially from those in the field. As we sit here and get technical but also recognize you could define a lot of things that a veterinarian does on a day-to-day basis that would fall under public health more so than the food animal field.

**E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** We showed our slide with the timeline. Understand there are several things that we have been doing and several things that we will be doing before the solicitation hits the street. Fiscal year 2016 is the first that we have funding and certainly there have been ongoing conversations in the agency and across the department and with our legal team as well about how much flexibility you have with the program and what kinds of things we have most impact in the field. You will note that we are closing the doors to commenters at a certain point and at February 29 at 5 PM is the deadline we set for ourselves to go through this open listening mode to the actual RFA writing mode. The way our agency works is when we sit down and write a solicitation that's when the information that is in there that comes confidential until it is released. We are grateful for so much participation and we are running hard to getting broad representation and many of the good ideas that we can get from the field between now and the end of February will be spending the month of March drafting the first request for applications for the program and also starting to move forward with regulations. Those regulations will include the things about the program that will remain the same from year-to-year. To make it consistent for our applicants and the community. By the end of April that RFA should be reaching the street. Again we are trying to give you all in the field some time to

react to that. So we have middle of June as our estimated time of applications coming in. I think Dr. Sherman talked about the peer review process at NIFA. If you're not familiar the way we work the competition and the external experts that we will be bringing in to evaluate those applications -- that will take a little bit of time and certainly that is a compressed timeline for competitive grant program so August what where setting for ourselves, it's the latest that we can evaluate these applications and the way Congress appropriated the funds for the program this year they are only available to NIFA until the end of September. One of the comments that I got from folks outside of this webinar is that 2.5 million is not enough that you just hold onto it and add next year's money to it. No even if there is money next year and certainly hope that there will be these funds will expire on September 30 so we need to get the awards out the door and doing the most good that we can by the end of September. I wanted to review the timeline so you are aware what needs to happen between now and the end of the fiscal year.

**Question 15#** (from the chat box): Are applications available at this time? And if so where and if not when will they be available?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** At this time applications are not available. This is going to be a grant program so they will become available when the RFA's are released and that will be through grants.gov. For those individuals that have applied to the veterinary loan repayment program this is different because this is a grant program everything is submitted through the online system grants.gov. If you want to go to Grants.gov now and take a look and make yourself an account and become familiar with it by all means -- do that. Applications for this program will not be available until April 2016. We will put all this information on the website as things become available.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** I will also add that because of the ties between this program and the vet med loan repayment program, prior to this RFA being released, the FY 2016 Shortage situations will be available on the website NIFA website.

**Additional input by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** We will be posting that information at the beginning of April. Those have all been nominated and are going through the review process now.

**Question 16#** (from the chat box): A mobile veterinary service unit; would funding be available for something like this?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** If you are referring to something like a veterinary truck that is not something that is written as expressly prohibited and probably falls along the lines as equipment item.

**Additional input by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** The specific language in the authority about mobile veterinary facility says-- you can use the funds to establish mobile veterinary facilities in which a portion of the facility will address education or extension needs.

**G. Sherman, NIFA national program leader:** I want to ask the help of the people online, our timeframe for announcing this was quite brief. We are asking your help in spreading the word to your colleagues and networks about next week's listening session which will essentially be a repeat of this so we would appreciate getting the word out about that. One of our request is that we will be needing to call on experts to create our peer panels. It turns out there will be considerable overlap between the veterinary loan program and this panel. It has been a challenge to find panelist each year that are sufficiently diverse in various ways to meet the vet medicine loan repayment program and now will have in the same month the requirement for many of the same people. There will be a slightly different population due to the education component but we need practitioners and the veterinary community at large to consider volunteering to be on our peer panels and we will have a connection for those who wish to volunteer their services to serve on our peer panels available on our website so please consider volunteering for that and also spreading that word among your colleagues.

**Question 17#** (from the Phone): Last time I tried to fill out a competitive grant application for the USDA on grants.gov the application was 114 pages long. That was not NIFA. Can we keep it to less than 20 pages it would allow those of us who are not professional grant writers to maybe get to the end of it?

**Answered by E. Daly, NIFA policy office:** I think we like that idea as well. For every page you are writing we have panelist who will have to review them. We hear you. NIFA is doing a better job. I have been here 15 years. We are doing a better job at recognizing that less is more on some of these grant applications. I imagine will be setting a maximum length.

**Question 18#** (from the chat box): Will equal opportunity be given for profit and nonprofit organization?

**Answered by D. Tack, NIFA program coordinator:** Yes, all the entities will be given equal consideration at this time.

With that we're two or three minutes over. There will be other opportunities next Thursday one to 2:30 Eastern Time. Our mailbox for input is open [vsgp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vsgp@nifa.usda.gov) and we will continue to receive input. If you want your input to be considered before the time that we have to go into drafting mode for the RFA it must be in by February 29, 2016. After that we continue to take stakeholder input but it won't necessarily be taking into consideration. With that, we thank you all for your participation. It's invaluable the vice that you are giving us. Please think on this and give us more advice. We will now close the session. Thank you all.

Thank you to our speakers.

[Event Concluded]