

# Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)

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## 2015 Request for Applications

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 30, 2015**

**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**

**ORGANIC AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION INITIATIVE**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.307**, Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative.

**DATES:** Notification of Intent to Submit (NOI) emails are due by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 1, 2015**. Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 30, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**STAKEHOLDER INPUT:** The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the 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 written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice to: [Policy@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:Policy@nifa.usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension RFA.

As part of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) strategy to successfully implement the 2014 Farm Bill, NIFA is soliciting stakeholder input on NIFA's centers of excellence strategy. Between January and March 2015 NIFA will hold webinars to collect stakeholder input about the centers of excellence strategy in fiscal year (FY) 2015. Dates for the informational outreach webinars are February 26, 2015 and March 5, 2015, they will also be announced on the [NIFA website](#). The full transcript of the webinars will also be available on the [NIFA website](#). NIFA will also request to receive input through an advertised call-in number, fax and email. All comments and suggestions for the FY 2015 centers of excellence should be received by March 30, 2015.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) for fiscal year (FY) 2015 to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research, education, and extension activities. OREI funds research, education, and extension programs that enhance the ability of producers and processors who have already adopted organic standards to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$17.5 million.

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

**\*\*\*\*\*Please Read\*\*\*\*\***

**Important Information Regarding Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative Policies and Procedures**

**\*\*\*\*\*Please Read\*\*\*\*\***

- Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both OREI and ORG (Organic Transitions) programs.
- This year OREI offers a new priority on new curriculum development for organic agriculture with \$250,000 total maximum budget for up to 2 years.
- Use the Project Summary template provided by grants.gov. Failure to use the correct format or exceeding the word limit may result in the rejection of the proposal.
- Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs. sub-contractors.
- Multi-Regional, Regional, and Targeted proposals must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public

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## **PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Legislative Authority and Background**

Section 7211 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 amended section 1672B of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade (FACT) Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 5925b). The FACT Act, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB), to make competitive grants to support research, education, and extension activities regarding organically grown and processed agricultural commodities for eight legislatively-defined goals (see Part I, B. of this RFA).

The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) directly aligns with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan ([http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA\\_REE\\_Action\\_Plan\\_03-2014.pdf](http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_REE_Action_Plan_03-2014.pdf)) and specifically addresses: Goal 1 – Sustainable Intensification of Agricultural Production, Subgoals 1A, 1B, 1D (which focus on Crop and Animal Production, Health, Outreach and Markets); Goal 2 - Responding to Climate and Energy Needs, Subgoal 2A (which focuses on Climate Variability); Goal 3 – Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, Subgoal 3A (which focuses on Water); Goal 5 – Food Safety; Goal 6 – Education and Science Literacy; and Goal 7 – Rural Prosperity/Rural-Urban Interdependence by supporting systems-based research to enhance the sustainability of food production, including environmental, economic, and social factors. OREI is aligned with the NIFA Strategic plan ([http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat\\_plan\\_2014.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat_plan_2014.pdf)), and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1 (Science - Catalyze exemplary and relevant research, education and extension programs), by advancing our Nation’s ability to achieve global food security and fight hunger (Subgoal 1.1).

### **B. Purpose and Priorities**

The OREI seeks to solve critical organic agricultural issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research, education and extension activities. The purpose of this program is to fund high priority research, education and extension projects that will enhance the ability of producers and processors who have already adopted organic standards to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products. Priority concerns include biological, physical, and social sciences, including economics.

The OREI has eight goals that were legislatively-defined by the Farm Bill:

1. Facilitating the development and improvement of organic agriculture production, breeding, and processing methods.
2. Evaluating the potential economic benefits of organic agricultural production and methods to producers, processors and rural communities.
3. Exploring international trade opportunities for organically grown and processed agricultural commodities.
4. Determining desirable traits for organic commodities.
5. Identifying marketing and policy constraints on the expansion of organic agriculture.

6. Conducting advanced on-farm research and development that emphasizes observation of, experimentation with, and innovation for working organic farms, including research relating to production, marketing, food safety, socioeconomic conditions, and farm business management.
7. Examining optimal conservation and environmental outcomes relating to organically produced agricultural products.
8. Developing new and improved seed varieties that are particularly suited for organic agriculture.

**Priorities for FY 2015: Proposals addressing any of the legislatively defined goals listed above will be accepted for consideration by panels. In FY 2015, proposals are encouraged in the following areas as defined in the legislation:**

1. Conduct advanced on-farm crop, livestock, or integrated livestock-crop research and development that emphasize observation of, experimentation with, and innovation for organic farms, including production, marketing and socioeconomic issues. These issues could include both identification of factors reducing yields, efficiency, productivity, and economic returns on organic farms and the economic and socioeconomic contributions of organic farming to producers, processors and local communities.
2. Develop and demonstrate educational tools for Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices. Applications bringing end-users together with OREI-funded research, education, and extension teams are encouraged. Coordination of the development of online content with eXtension and the eOrganic Community of Practice is encouraged but is not a requirement for a successful application.
3. For both plant and animal-based organic products: evaluate, develop and improve allowable post-harvest handling, processing and food safety practices to reduce toxins and microbial contamination, while increasing shelf-life, quality and other economically important characteristics.
4. Strengthen organic crop seed systems, including seed and transplant production and protection, and plant breeding for organic production, with an emphasis on publically available releases. Breeding and selection characteristics for organic systems may be different from those in conventional systems. Goals of organic seed systems proposals can include, but are not limited to: disease and pest resistance, stress tolerance, quality and yield improvement, and genetic mechanisms to prevent inadvertent introduction of GMO traits through cross-pollination. Projects dealing solely with cultivar evaluation do not fit under this priority.
5. Explore technology that meets the requirements of the National Organic Program and that can control weeds, diseases, and pests while maintaining healthy water resources. Specifically, develop, improve and evaluate systems-based integrated pest management programs to address pest and pest-related problems for organically grown crops. Systems-based evaluations can include the safety and efficacy of allowable pest management

materials and practices. Proposals addressing management of diseases, nematodes, weeds, and insect pests in the Southern Region are especially encouraged.

6. Develop or improve systems-based animal production, animal health and pest management practices, especially in the areas of nutrition, grazing, and pasture and confinement requirements to improve animal productivity, health and welfare while retaining or enhancing economic viability.
7. Catalog, characterize and/or select animal genotypes and breeds adapted to organic systems. This would include, but is not restricted to: identification of and selection for pest and disease resistance; health and performance under organic pasture and feed regimens; and performance in small, mixed or innovative farming operations.
8. Develop new undergraduate and/or graduate curriculum in organic agriculture. Education activities under this priority may include instructional delivery programs and experiential learning for students enrolled in associate, baccalaureate, masters, and Ph.D. degree programs.

The OREI is particularly interested in research, education, and outreach projects that will assist farmers and ranchers with whole farm planning by delivering practical research-based information. Applicants should describe how the results of their research, education, and extension programs will improve the ability of growers to develop the Organic System Plan required for certification. Organic systems fieldwork must be done on certified organic land or on land in transition to organic certification, as appropriate to project goals and objectives. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program ([www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)) for organic production standards. For FY 2015, we encourage research, education and extension relating to management of diseases, insect pests and weeds in specific regions, such as the southern region, where organic acreage is demonstrably increasing and yet the region remains deficient in terms of numbers of certified and exempt organic farms, compared to nationwide averages. This priority applies to all project types described in Part II, C. of this RFA.

**Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both OREI and ORG (Organic Transitions) programs. Additional information on the scope of OREI and ORG may be found at the following link:**

**[http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/plants/pdfs/orei\\_org\\_synop\\_9\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/plants/pdfs/orei_org_synop_9_2014.pdf)**

Clinical trials investigating animal health issues need not be conducted in a certified organic setting unless animal management could play a pivotal role in the response of the animal to the proposed intervention. For example, animals that have been raised under organic standards should be used to compare pasture-raised animals to those from a confined animal feeding operation.

OREI strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with: small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities; 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in organic agriculture research, education, and outreach. International partnerships,

linkages, and exchanges that contribute to solving or solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems in the United States are also encouraged.

NIFA **strongly encourages** applicants to consult with organic producers and/or processors before developing project applications. Producers and/or processors should play an important role in developing project goals and objectives; in implementing the plan; and in evaluating and disseminating project results and outcomes. Projects must involve work that is viewed by stakeholders as both necessary and important. There is an expectation that a local and/or regional advisory panel will inform the program throughout its life, including ongoing identification and prioritization of research, education and extension objectives. An outcome-oriented plan for disseminating information derived from project work must be an integral part of the project. This information delivery plan should consider a number of delivery systems and methods. The metrics for evaluating research, education and extension outcomes should be clearly described and appropriate to project goals.

The following websites may be useful in developing OREI applications:

- National Organic Program ([www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)) and National Organic Standards Board research priorities (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5108951>);
- NIFA Organic Agriculture ([www.nifa.usda.gov/organicagriculture.cfm](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/organicagriculture.cfm))
- Synopsis of OREI and ORG ([http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/plants/pdfs/orei\\_org\\_synop\\_9\\_2014.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/plants/pdfs/orei_org_synop_9_2014.pdf))
- eOrganic Section of eXtension: [www.extension.org/organic\\_production](http://www.extension.org/organic_production)
- 2009, 2010 and 2011 OREI, Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) Grantsmanship Workshops and NIFA Grantsmanship Workshops: [www.nifa.usda.gov/business/training/cpworkshops\\_past.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/training/cpworkshops_past.html)
- 2007 census of Agriculture, 2008 Organic Production Survey factsheet: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/Practices/organics.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Practices/organics.pdf)

The OREI encourages use of multiple extension delivery methods, including face-to-face meetings and tours, farmer-to-farmer mentoring, print publications and social media, as appropriate to project goals. In creating web-based electronic content, project directors (PDs) are encouraged, but not required, to coordinate their efforts with eXtension, the national land grant university and extension web initiative, or the eOrganic Community of Practice (CoP). Extensive opportunities for collaboration, networking, integration of research, education and extension, and stakeholder engagement are offered within eXtension and the eOrganic CoP.

**Please see the following links for more information:**

**eXtension Home Page:** <http://about.extension.org/>

**eXtension Background:** [www.extension.org/main/about](http://www.extension.org/main/about)

**eOrganic Home Page:** [eOrganic.info/](http://eOrganic.info/) and [www.extension.org/organic\\_production](http://www.extension.org/organic_production).



## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$17.5 million. The funds will be awarded through a grant. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see

[http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method\\_of\\_payment.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html).

### **B. Types of Applications**

In FY 2015, you may submit applications to the OREI Program as one of the following two types of requests:

(1) **New application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the OREI Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) **Resubmitted application**. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the OREI Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

### **C. Project Types**

The following four types of projects are being requested for the OREI in FY 2015. See the table at the end of this section for project periods, anticipated grant types, and suggested maximum funding requests.

(1) **Integrated Project Proposals**: Integrated project applications must include at least two of the three functions of the agricultural knowledge system (Research, Education, and Extension). Awards will be made as standard grants or under certain circumstances, NIFA may determine that it will support continuation grants. See footnotes at the end of this section for definitions. Every OREI proposal must have clear and documented integration of at least two functions (Research, Education and/or Extension) as part of the project. That integration needs to be evident and explicit. To accommodate projects differing in scope, three types of integrated project proposals are offered. However, projects with similar content and same investigators may not be submitted to more than one category.

a. **Multi-Regional**. Proposals addressing program priorities with Suggested Maximum Funding Requests of \$2,000,000. These are large coordinated projects addressing

critical issues that cut across multiple regions. A regional advisory panel is required for multi-regional proposals.

- b. **Regional.** Proposals addressing program priorities with Suggested Maximum Funding Requests of \$1,000,000. These are multidisciplinary projects addressing issues that may be limited to a single region.
- c. **Targeted.** Proposals addressing specific critical constraints with Suggested Maximum Funding Requests of \$500,000, reflecting the possibly narrower scope of these projects. All eligible applicants may submit Targeted proposals, but proposals originating from or including small, mid-sized and minority-serving institutions are particularly encouraged.

Multi-Regional, Regional, and Targeted proposals will (1) be reviewed together with no set aside amount for any of the proposal types and (2) **must** include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public.

- (2) **Conference Proposals:** Conference proposals support workshops or symposia bringing together scientists and others, including end-users, to identify research, education or extension needs, update information, or advance understanding of organic issues and problems using a systems-based approach. They should occur within 12 months of the award start date. Conferences providing current information to farmers and ranchers should be held in conjunction with meetings regularly attended by organic producers and processors to the extent possible. Conference awards cannot exceed \$50,000
- (3) **Research, Education and Extension Planning Proposals:** Planning proposals provide assistance in the development of future OREI proposals requiring multi-regional coordination. Proposals are encouraged from applicants who: (1) demonstrate limited resources for submitting large grant applications, (2) articulate anticipated benefits from the proposed planning activities, and (3) present evidence that the resulting OREI application will have a high probability of success. Applicants are encouraged to budget for planning meetings that bring together scientists, end-users and technology providers. Applicants should detail the types of participants who will be invited in order to document that planning meeting participants represent a broad range of expertise. Research, Education and Extension Planning Proposal awards cannot exceed \$50,000 and are not renewable. Funding of a planning proposal is not a guarantee that the resulting application will be funded by NIFA. All proposals resulting from Planning Grants will be reviewed by the panel using the same standards as all other proposals. It is expected that planning activities supported by this program will occur within 12 months of award start date. Planning grants, from or including small, mid-sized and minority-serving institutions are particularly encouraged.
- (4) **Curriculum Development Proposals (New in FY 2015):** Curriculum development proposals provide assistance in the development of NEW undergraduate and/or graduate curriculum in organic agriculture. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized OREI to support Education activities. Education activities under this priority may include instructional delivery programs and experiential learning for students enrolled in associate, baccalaureate, masters, and Ph.D. degree programs. Routine use of students as personnel on

research projects is not considered Education for the purposes of this priority and students should be actively engaged in the scholarship of the research/extension projects. Programs designed to educate growers are considered extension rather than educational activities for the purpose of this RFA. Projects must be innovative and promote and strengthen academic instruction or activities that lead to completion of a student’s formal degree. Projects should have broad-based applicability beyond a single course or an individual instructor. Projects are encouraged to include partnerships among several academic units or institutions to more efficiently deliver coordinated, academic instruction that reduces instructional duplication and costs. Curriculum development projects cannot exceed \$250,000 total budget per award for a period of up to two years.

Applicants should decide the project type best suited to the objectives of their proposed project and develop a budget that fits the objectives. The suggested maximum funding requests are intended only as a guide and some degree of deviation will not result in a failure to review the proposal.

Project Types		Project Periods	Anticipated Grant Types	Suggested Maximum Funding Requests
Integrated Project Proposal	Multi-Regional	2 to 4 years	Standard* or continuation**	\$2,000,000
	Regional	2 to 4 years	Standard or continuation	\$1,000,000
	Targeted	2 to 3 years	Standard or continuation	\$500,000
Curriculum Development Proposal		1 to 2 years	Standard or continuation	\$250,000
Conference Proposal		1 year	Standard	\$50,000
Planning Proposal		1 year	Standard	\$50,000

**\*A standard grant is an instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period without any statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date.**

**\*\*A continuation grant is an instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, funds are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the Federal government and the public. NIFA is under no obligation to award a continuation grant. In no case, however, can the total funding period exceed 5 years.**

#### **D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research**

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, we consider education in RCR essential to the

preparation of future scientists. 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. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

Note that the training referred to herein shall be either on-campus or off-campus training. The general content of the ethics training will, at a minimum, emphasize three key areas of research ethics: authorship and plagiarism, data and research integration, and reporting misconduct. Each institution will be responsible for developing its own training system, as schools will need flexibility to develop training tailored to their specific student needs. Grantees should consider the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program for RCR (<https://www.citiprogram.org/rcrpage.asp>). Typically this RCR education addresses the topics of: Data Acquisition and Management - collection, accuracy, security, access; Authorship and Publication; Peer Review; Mentor/Trainee Responsibilities; Collaboration; Conflict of Interest; Research Misconduct; Human Subject Research; and Use of Animals in Research.

## **PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligible Applicants**

The following entities are eligible to apply for and receive a grant under this program.

1. State agricultural experiment stations;
2. Colleges and universities;
3. University research foundations;
4. Other research institutions and organizations;
5. Federal agencies;
6. National laboratories;
7. Private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
8. Individuals who are United States citizens or nationals; or
9. A group consisting of two or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (1) through (8).

Award 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 time of 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.

### **B. Cost Sharing or Matching**

In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the OREI program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA. The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

1. To a research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); or
2. To an entity eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program (as defined in section 251(f)(1)(C) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, 7 U.S.C. 6971(f)(1)(C)), including a partner (see Part VIII, E. Definitions for definition of partnership) of such an entity.

Entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program and exempt from the matching funds requirement include:

- a) 1862 Land-grant Institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b) 1890 Land-grant Institutions
- c) 1994 Land-grant Institutions
- d) Recipients of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)

- e) Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)
- f) Insular Area Schools Eligible to Receive Funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- g) Recipients of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h) Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) - (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA certification, see instructions for requesting certification at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>, and for attaching the certification in Part IV, C. of this RFA)
- i) Recipients of funds under a program established under section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program
- j) Individual public or private, nonprofit Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 1059d).

A proposal submitted in response to this RFA may indicate that the work will be completed by multiple entities as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership among multiple entities is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or third party in-kind contribution (see section 2 of 7 CFR 3430 or section 96 of 2 CFR part 200) to the total project budget costs.

If a proposal indicates that the work on the project will be completed by multiple entities as partners, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement regardless of whether all entities involved are otherwise exempt. Any partner entity can serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

After proposals have been recommended for award, NIFA will determine if the submitted proposal and proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity not otherwise exempt from the matching requirement and the proposal does not reflect substantial involvement of at least one partner that is exempt under #2 above, then the matching requirement will apply. Exemption from the matching requirement for an entity not otherwise exempt is limited to the project for which it is a partner.

Waiver of Match - NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year with respect to a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board for the year involved. To determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB, please refer to the [2014 Research, Education and Economics Action Plan](#). Instructions for requesting a waiver are included in Part IV, C. of this RFA.

### **C. Multiple Submissions**

Duplicate, essentially **duplicate** or predominantly overlapping applications submitted to **both OREI and ORG** in any one fiscal year will not be reviewed. In addition, applicants may not submit to OREI an application that is considered duplicate, essentially duplicate, or predominantly overlapping with an application submitted to another NIFA program in the same fiscal year.

### **D. Centers 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 be recognizing and providing priority in the receipt of funding to applications from “centers of excellence” that have been established for purposes of carrying out research, extension, and education activities relating to the food and agricultural sciences. In July of 2014, NIFA held listening sessions and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the centers of excellence provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input gathered are available on NIFA’s website at [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/legis/cntr\\_ex\\_webinar\\_documents.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/legis/cntr_ex_webinar_documents.html).

A center of excellence is composed of 1 or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the center of excellence. Therefore, an eligible applicant who wishes to be considered as a center of excellence must be one of the following entities that provides financial or in-kind support to the Center being proposed, as described in the grant application.

- (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 2 or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

Only Integrated Project Proposals applicants may be considered for COE designation. See Part IV, C. of this RFA for additional requirements that eligible applicants must meet to be considered a center of excellence.

## PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

### A. Notice of Intent to Submit an Application Instructions

Prospective applicants are asked to email a notice of Intent to Submit an application by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 1, 2015**. This notification is not required and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application. The information it contains will be used by program staff to plan the review process. It will not be used for screening for project appropriateness or applicant eligibility, nor will feedback be offered.

This email should include the following information **IN THE BODY OF THE EMAIL**:

1. Descriptive tentative title of proposed research
2. Name of the Project Director and Institution
3. Names of other potential co-Project Directors and their affiliations, if applicable
4. Priority area(s) addressed (see second half of Part I (B) for specific details). This is referring to the 2015 Program Priorities, NOT the legislatively defined goals. Please list the number for each of the priorities addressed. **You do not need to list the legislated goals addressed.**
5. Likely type of application and project (defined in Part II, Section C)

**Please follow this format and do not include additional narrative or documents or attach a document to the email.** Provide the information, as listed above, in the body of the email.

Subject line of email should read: OREI – Intent to Submit

E-mail should be sent to [organicprograms@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:organicprograms@nifa.usda.gov)

### 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 an overview of the Grants.gov application process see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

#### New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) 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 2 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 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/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-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/apply-for-grants.html>. Under Step 1 click on “Download a Grant Application Package,” and enter the funding opportunity number

### **Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-ICGP-004960**

in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

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-resources.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](mailto: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 a.m. - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

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** needed to prepare 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 (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. 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. 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).**

Grants.gov provides online tools to assist if you do not own PDF-generating software. You will find PDF conversion software at <http://test.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/pdf-conversion-software.html>.

**For any questions related to the preparation of an application,** review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: [electronic@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov)
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

### **1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

### **2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

### **3. R&R Other Project Information Form**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

**a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.** The Abstract is limited to **250 words**. The abstract should be concise and informative and include the relevance of the project to the goals of the OREI. Conference and Planning proposals should state the objectives of the conference, symposium, workshop, or planning activity as well as the proposed location and probable date(s). Use the Project Summary template provided by grants.gov. Failure to use the correct format or exceeding the word count may result in the rejection of the proposal.

See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to the required template.

**b. Field 8. Project Narrative.**

**For all three types of Integrated Project Proposals and Curriculum Proposals:** The Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 21 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables. The Introduction may not exceed 6 pages, and the rest of the Project Narrative may not exceed 15 pages.

**For Conference and Planning Proposals:** The Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 7 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables.

All pages, including those with figures and tables, should be numbered sequentially. To ensure fair and equitable reviews, applications exceeding the page limit **may not be reviewed**.

The project narrative should start with the response to the previous panel review, if applicable, followed by the executive summary and table of contents.

**The Project Narrative must include all of the following:**

- (i) **Response to the previous panel review:** An application with substantive similarities to a prior, unsuccessful project should be presented as a resubmission. Resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous panel review. The response should be as concise as possible, but there is no limit to the number of pages that may be submitted. The response to the previous review **is not** counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative. A NIFA-issued proposal number *must* be included in the response to the previous review (also see instructions in section 2.8 of Part V of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide).
- (ii) **Executive summary and table of contents:** The executive summary and table of contents does not count toward the narrative's page limitation, but must include the following information in a combined executive summary and table of contents. Applications without an executive summary containing the following parts will **NOT** be considered for funding. Note that this section is in addition to and different from the Project Summary page.
  1. Project title.
  2. Project type (see Part II C. of this RFA).
  3. List the legislatively-defined goals being addressed (see Part I B. of this RFA), and provide an estimate of the percentage of effort/funds dedicated to each (sum of percentages should equal 100 percent). Note that the legislatively-defined goals are not the same as the FY 2015 program priorities.
  4. Indicate the approximate distribution of percentage of effort between research, education and extension.
  5. Program Staff and their role – include name, title, affiliation, address, and e-mail for PD(s), Co-PD(s) and Key Personnel. Please note all people listed as co-PD or co-PI should be eligible and able to fulfill the role of PD/PI for the project if the need arises.

Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.

6. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing the critical stakeholder needs addressed by the project and the project's long-term goals (provide cross-references to full descriptions in the narrative).
7. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) of the outreach plan proposed by the project (provide a cross-reference to the full description in the narrative).
8. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing potential economic, social, and other benefits (Who benefits and how will it be measured?).
9. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing stakeholder engagement throughout the project (provide a cross-reference to the full description in the narrative).

**(iii) Outcome from previous awards:**

If you have previously received funding from OREI or ORG, provide the following:

1. Award number(s)
2. Significant outcome from each award (200-300 words per award)

**(iv) Introduction:**

1. Provide a clear statement of the long-term goal(s), the critical need(s) of organic agriculture being addressed, and supporting outreach objectives.
2. Describe how stakeholders were engaged to identify project goals and objectives, and as appropriate, how stakeholder involvement will continue.
3. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project and provide relevant citations.
4. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Documentation of prior research, education and extension activities in organic agriculture are particularly important. Applications should also demonstrate how duplication of effort with similar activities by others will be avoided.
5. Preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed work should be included in this section. All works cited should be referenced and attached at Field 9 on the Form, Bibliography & References Cited. Refer to Part V, 4.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. The Bibliography & References Cited is also a required section.

**(v) Rationale and Significance:** Concisely present the rationale behind the proposed project. The specific relationship of the project's objectives to one or more of the FY 2015 OREI priorities should be clear. These purposes and priority areas are described under Part I. B. Purpose and Priorities. Discuss novel or innovative aspects of the proposed project.

**(vi) Approach:** Clearly state the activities proposed or problems being addressed. Describe the approaches to be used. Specifically, this section must include:

1. A description of the activities proposed, key personnel and institutional roles in those activities, and the timeline;
2. Methods to be used in carrying out the proposed project, including the feasibility of the methods and why they were selected;

3. Expected results and outcomes, including how the project will contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of organic agriculture;
4. Means by which these results and outcomes will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted;
5. How results or products will be used;
6. Outreach plan (if appropriate): including science-based tools disseminated, participants involved in delivery, and how impacts will be measured, including the learning outcomes;
7. Pitfalls that may be encountered;
8. Limitations to proposed procedures; and
9. A full explanation of any materials, procedures, situations, or activities related to the project that may be hazardous to personnel, along with an outline or precautions to be exercised to avoid or mitigate the effects of such hazards. For work with organisms that might be perceived as potentially invasive species, indicate precautions to prevent spread or specific information on the context in which they are being used.

### **Centers of Excellence Justification**

Only Integrated Project Proposals applicants may be considered for COE designation.

In addition to meeting the other requirements detailed in Part IV, C., of this Request for Application (RFA), eligible applicants who wish to be considered as centers of excellence must provide a brief justification statement, as part of their Project Narratives and within the page limits provided, describing how they meet the standards of a center of excellence, based on the following criteria:

- (A) the ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application;
- (B) in addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the Federal Government in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award;
- (C) the planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and
- (D) the ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) (list of certified NLGCA is available at [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/nlgca\\_colleges.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/nlgca_colleges.pdf)), and schools of veterinary medicine).

c) Field 12. **Other Attachments.** Any matching pledge agreements must be included as PDF attachments in this field.

- **Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture (NLGCA) Certification – PDF Attachment.** Applicants claiming exemption from the new matching requirement as NLGCA, must attach the NLGCA certification letter they requested and received from NIFA. Title attachment ‘NLGCA Certification’ and save file as ‘NLGCACertification’. To request certification as an NLGCA, complete the form at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>. Note that certification can take up to 30 days from submission of request form.
- **Data Management Plan - PDF Attachment.** Required for Multi-Regional, Regional, and Targeted proposals only. Allowable for Research Projects. Two-Page Limit. Title the attachment as ‘DataManagement Plan’ and save file as ‘ManagementPlan’. Projects must budget sufficient resources to develop and implement the proposed data management plan

#### **4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the Guide includes information about the people who require a Senior/Key Person Profile, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support, including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support. Please respect the page limit for the Biographical Sketch. Current and Pending forms **MUST INCLUDE THE CURRENT PROPOSAL WITH A PERCENTAGE OF TIME** committed, even if there will be no financial compensation.

**5. R&R Personal Data** – As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

#### **6. R&R Budget**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Please be as specific as possible in the budget narrative and include actual amount, not percentages. It is also strongly encouraged to provide a breakdown of budget by PD and CO-PD.

**Matching.** If you conclude that the project meets the criteria for a waiver and wish to seek approval for a waiver (as specified under Part III, B.), **a justification should be included in the Budget Narrative.** NIFA will consider this justification when ascertaining final matching

requirements. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements.

For those projects where a waiver is not sought, applications shall include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and fair market value of in-kind contributions) from third parties (non-federal sources) in an amount at least equal to the amount awarded by the Federal government. Written verification means:

(a) For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the authorized representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period.

(b) For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution including a basis for the estimate; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

Summarize on a separate page the sources and the amount of all matching support from outside the applicant organization and place that information in the proposal as part of the Budget Justification attachment (see Field K on the Form R&R Budget).

### **Additional Budget Information**

For Conference Proposals: These budgets may include appropriate amounts for transportation and subsistence costs for participants and for other allowable costs. Include an itemized breakdown of all support requested in the Budget Justification (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

For Integrated Project Proposals: Applicants for Integrated Project Proposal and Curriculum Proposal may request funds to attend at least two Project Director's workshops during the term of their project. Sufficient funds should be requested and reserved during the course of the project for the PD to attend the workshops in the metropolitan Washington, DC area. In the early years of a multiyear project, participation could be in the form of a poster presentation and submission of an abstract. In the final year of the project, an oral presentation should be made, along with the submission of a written report. **The request for these travel funds should be clearly indicated in the Budget Justification** (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Applicants for Conference and Planning Proposals are not required to attend the Project Director's Workshop and do not need to include these funds in their budgets.

## **7. Supplemental Information Form**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

- a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter “OREI”) and the program code (i.e., enter “113.A”).
- b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

### **D. Submission Dates and Times**

Notification of Intent emails are due by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 1, 2015.**

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, it is strongly recommended that an administrative review be conducted to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 30, 2015.** Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

**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.**

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail 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 applicable 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, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

### **E. Funding Restrictions**

NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or



installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 1462 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310), limiting indirect costs to 22 percent of total Federal funds provided under the award. Therefore, the recovery of indirect costs on awards made by NIFA under this program area may not exceed the lesser of the institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

#### **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.

## **PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

### **A. General**

We evaluate each application in a 2-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a review panel will technically evaluate applications that meet these requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) 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; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers 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; (d) the need to include as reviewers 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; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

When each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of OREI will recommend that the project: (a) be approved for support from currently available funds or (b) be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

OREI 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 project for funding.

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

We will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

#### **1. Proposal Relevance (50 points):**

##### **For Integrated Proposals:**

- (a) Documented need. Application includes documentation that the project is directed to current and likely future problems/challenges in organic agriculture. Application adequately addresses at least one of the FY 2015 OREI priorities referenced in Part I.B. (15 points);
- (b) Stakeholder involvement. Application includes information on how stakeholders were selected and how their input was solicited and incorporated. There is an expectation that a local and/or regional advisory panel will inform the program throughout its life (10 points);

- (c) Outreach plan. Application includes a detailed outreach plan that includes deliverables and a description of how impacts will be measured. A description of the learning outcome metrics for training and educational activities should be included (10 points);
- (d) Potential for project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of organic production or marketing systems (10 points); and
- (e) Importance of the commodity or production system or importance of constraints (marketing/yield/pest/other) and resulting impacts on the production system. Potential for project to make a difference (5 points).

**Center of Excellence Status**

All eligible applicants will be competitively peer reviewed (as described in Part V, A. and B. of this RFA), and ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Those that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a center of excellence will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be centers of excellence (Part III D. and Part IV C.). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-center of excellence, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the center of excellence criteria. NIFA will effectively use the center of excellence prioritization as a “tie breaker”. Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a center of excellence or who are not deemed to have met the centers of excellence standards may still receive funding.

In addition, the applicant’s Notice of Award will reflect that, for the particular grant program, the applicant meets all of the requirements of a center of excellence. Entities recognized as centers of excellence will maintain that distinction for the duration of their period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

**For Conference, Curriculum Development and Planning Proposals:**

- (a) Demonstrated need. Justification of conference, curriculum proposed, or planned activities. Application adequately addresses at least one of the FY 2015 OREI priorities referenced in Part I.B. (15 points);
- (b) Adequacy of background research. Listing of recent meetings, outreach activities or other activities on the same subject (10 points);
- (c) Stakeholder involvement. Application includes names and organizational affiliations of the chair and other members of the organizing committee or planning team members, including information on how stakeholders were selected, how their input was solicited and incorporated, and a description of their future involvement in the project (10 points);
- (d) Quality of proposed program (or agenda) for the conference activity and planning proposals, including a listing of scheduled participants, their institutional affiliations, and a description

of their expertise. For curriculum products, a description of the program including the target audience, expected number of participants, a detailed syllabus, experiential training activities, how the program fits within ongoing activities. For all proposal types, describe how the impact of the programs being proposed will be assessed. (10 points); and

(e) Potential for the project to make a difference (5 points).

## **2. Proposal Quality (50 points): (All Project Types)**

(a) Conceptual adequacy. Application clearly states objectives and how they will be achieved within the timeframe, scope and budget of the proposed project (10 points);

(b) Approach. The proposed method and approach are appropriate to project objectives (15 points);

(c) Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise (5 points);

(d) Experience of key project personnel (5 points);

(e) Appropriateness of budget (5 points);

(f) Feasibility, probability of success (5 points); and

(g) Adherence to guidelines: For proposals involving eXtension and eOrganic, or other extension outlets this includes adherence to the guidelines on incorporating these into proposals, such as inclusion of supporting letters and budgets (5 points).

## **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. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, we determine the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 555, Reston, VA, 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, are kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process, to the extent permitted by law; therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

## **D. Organizational Management Information**

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination

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 preaward 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; however, withdrawn applications normally will not be returned. One copy of each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by OREI 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:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);
- (10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

### **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 include, but are not limited to the ones listed below.

2 CFR Part 200 – Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

2 CFR Part 400 —USDA implementation of 2 CFR Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.

2 CFR Part 415 – USDA General Program Administrative Regulations.

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

2 CFR Part 180 and Part 417--OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-Wide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) and USDA Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

2 CFR Part 416—USDA General Program Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

2 CFR Part 418—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

2 CFR Part 421—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

2 CFR Part 422—Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

7 CFR Part 3407—USDA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--  
General Award Administrative Provisions.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA  
implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap  
in federally-assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by  
employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities,  
in federally-assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

44 U.S.C. 3541 et seq. (Pub. L. 107-347) - Federal Information System Security Management  
Act of 2002 (FISMA), to improve computer and network security within the Federal  
Government. Applies to awardees if it will collect, store, process, transmit, or use information  
on behalf of NIFA.

#### **D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements**

Grantees are to use REEport, NIFA's electronic, web-based inventory system to submit an initial  
project initiation which documents expected products and outcomes of the project. Additionally,  
annual progress report documenting realized project outcomes must be submitted to the  
electronic system. The web-based system facilitates an electronic workflow between grantees  
and NIFA for project accomplishments to be easily searchable and allows for public access to  
information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements, including  
those specific to the annual and final technical reports, are included in the award terms and  
conditions.

PDs are required to attend at least two PD workshops at a location and time to be designated at a  
later date. Budget amount should be sufficient to attend the 2-day workshops in the Washington,  
DC area. In the early years of a multiyear project, participation may be in the form of a poster  
presentation and submission of an abstract. In the final year of the project, an oral presentation  
should be made and a written report submitted.



## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

### **Programmatic Contacts:**

Dr. Mathieu Ngouajio  
National Program Leader  
Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, Plant Systems - Production  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA  
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Dr. Steve Smith  
National Program Leader  
Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, Animal Systems  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA  
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### **Administrative/Business Contacts:**

Duane Alphs  
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Rochelle McCrea  
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## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

### **A. Access to Review Information**

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

### **B. 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 Project Plans**

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved goals or objectives prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes that are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel, prior to effecting such changes.

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not federal funds are involved, prior to instituting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of

amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

### **C. 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 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. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. 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.

### **D. 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.

### **E. Definitions**

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

Organic System Plan means a plan of management of an organic production or handling operation that has been agreed to by the producer or handler and the certifying agent and that includes written plans concerning all aspects of agricultural production or handling described by the National Organic Program.