

Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program

2018 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: December 13, 2017

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

Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.331.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on December 13, 2017**, 5 p.m. EST. 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 six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider your comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit your written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and *not* for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program RFA**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program** for fiscal year (FY) **2018** to support projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. The anticipated amount available for NIFA to support this program in FY **2018** is approximately **\$21 million**. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2018. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

This notice identifies the objectives for **FINI** projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a **FINI** grant.

A webinar reviewing this proposal and match requirements will be held on **October 19, 2017 at 2:00pm Eastern Time** for potential applicants. The webinar will be recorded and posted to the FINI webpage accessible here: <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program>. The webinar can be accessed at <https://nifa-connect.nifa.usda.gov/finip/>.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program is authorized by section 4208 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, which amends section 4405 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (“FCEA”) (7 U.S.C. 7517). The authority to administer this program was delegated to the Director of NIFA through the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE). See 79 FR 44101 (July 30, 2014), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-07-30/pdf/2014-17352.pdf>. In FY 2018, it is anticipated that up to \$21,000,000 will be available for grants under this program.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The FINI RFA directly aligns with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan (<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>) and specifically addresses Goal 4 by strengthening established strategic partnerships and strengthening implementation practices to encourage healthy eating and physical activity at the individual and community levels, focusing on high-risk groups and also advancing Strategic Goal 4.2 of the USDA Strategic Plan (<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018>).

FINI specifically addresses NIFA’s Strategic Goal 1 (Subgoal 1.1) <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>.

The primary goal of the FINI grant program is to fund and evaluate projects intended to “increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in [SNAP] by providing incentives at the point of purchase” (FCEA, § 4405(b)(2)(A)(ii)(II)). For FINI grant, NIFA defines “fruits and vegetables” as “any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, or oils, and salt (i.e. sodium).” The program will test strategies that could contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to inform future efforts, and develop effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

The Act requires the Secretary to conduct an independent evaluation of funded projects, to measure the impact of projects on: “improving the nutrition and health status of participating households receiving incentives” and “increasing fruit and vegetable purchases in participating households.”

Incentivizing purchases of fruits and vegetables increases their affordability and consumption. For example, USDA recently completed an evaluation of the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP), which investigated the impact of making fruits and vegetables more affordable to SNAP participants. Under HIP, SNAP households received 30 cents on every SNAP dollar they spent on targeted fruits and vegetables at participating SNAP-authorized retailers including large supermarkets, grocery stores and farmers markets. This pilot operated in Hampden County, MA between November 2011 and December 2012. A rigorous evaluation showed that HIP significantly increased the consumption of targeted fruits and vegetables and this increased consumption was on the order of about one quarter of a cup per day. The final evaluation report

is available online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthy-incentives-pilot-final-evaluation-report>.

Grantees that receive both FINI and SNAP-Ed funds must keep in mind the following guidelines:

[SNAP-Ed](#) is an evidence-based program that helps people lead healthier lives. SNAP-Ed teaches people using or eligible for SNAP about good nutrition and how to make their food dollars stretch further. SNAP-Ed participants also learn to be physically active.

- While SNAP-Ed providers are encouraged to form partnerships and collaborations in order to leverage resources, SNAP-Ed funds may not be used to provide actual cash or other financial incentives.
- SNAP-Ed funds can be used for policy, systems and environmental change interventions, such as working with retailers on fruit and vegetable product placement, and social marketing in addition to educational efforts at venues such as Farmers Markets, Senior Centers, Child Care locations, etc.

All FINI projects must (1) aim to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (2) operate through authorized and reported SNAP retailers per Part I Section D of this RFA titled “Program Policy”, and in compliance with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (3) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation and facilitate participation through data collection and the use of Data Use Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding as outlined in Part IV Section B titled “Content and Form of Application Submission” and Part I Section D of this RFA titled “Program Policy”; (4) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives provided under the FINI grant program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 C.F.R. 278.2(b); (5) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities; and (6) applicants proposing projects that require interaction with or modification of EBT systems must submit a letter of support from applicable SNAP State Agencies as part of their grant application. All other applicants are encouraged, but are not required, to submit letters of support from applicable SNAP State Agencies as part of their grant application.

In reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA, and depending on the type of FINI project (as described in further detail in Part I, C.1, C.2, and C.3), NIFA will give priority to projects that:

- Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, that would inform future efforts;
- Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;

- Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document), especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience;
- Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities (see Part VIII, E for more information);
- Focus on incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients; and
- Require that SNAP recipients utilize their EBT cards to make qualifying food purchases in order to earn FINI incentives.

FINI projects present the opportunity to bring together stakeholders from distinct parts of the food system and to foster understanding of how they might improve the nutrition and health status of participating households receiving incentives through the purchase of fruits and vegetables. FINI projects are also intended to address the development of effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption that are replicable by others.

C. Program Area Description

NIFA is soliciting applications for three (3) types of grants: (1) FINI Pilot Projects (FPP); (2) FINI Projects (FP); and (3) FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP).

1. FINI Pilot Projects (FPP)

Funding Level: Awards not to exceed \$100,000.

Period of Performance: Project period is up to one year.

Program Code: FPP

FINI Pilot Projects (FPP) support the development of projects with an infusion of federal dollars to pilot innovative strategies to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. FPPs must operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. FPPs are aimed at new entrants seeking funding for a project in the early stages of incentive program development. The project should be designed to create community-based food incentive projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that are in alignment with the FINI grant program's primary goals. Preference will be given to pilot projects that do one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;

- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience;
- (vi) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities;
- (vii) Focus on incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients; and/or
- (viii) Require that SNAP recipients utilize their EBT cards to make qualifying food purchases in order to earn FINI incentives.

Examples of FPPs include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers.

Project Self-Evaluation. All projects must involve SNAP participants. All FPPs must submit a project proposal that includes a method of evaluating the success of the program in developing a viable project. Because FINI Pilot Projects are in the earliest stages of development and would not offer a fair test of effectiveness, they will only be required to submit limited information and data for the comprehensive program evaluation that will inform the Department of potential new strategies and promising new programs to consider in future funding cycles. FPP grantees will be required to provide their self-assessment data to the independent evaluator. Project assessments must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures.

2. FINI Projects (FP)

Funding Level: Awards not to exceed \$500,000.

Period of Performance: Project period is not to exceed four (4) years

Program Code: FIP

FINI Projects (FP) support the development and evaluation of projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. The projects will test strategies that could increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts, and develop effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

FPs should be designed to create or support local community-based food projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that are in alignment with the FINI grant program's primary goals. FP(s) are aimed at mid-sized groups developing incentive programs at the local or state level; organizations in this category are typically not new to implementing such programs, although projects are required to expand the breadth, scope or reach of these programs, rather than supplant current program resources. FPs are not in the pilot stages of development and

should have established relationships with necessary partners and collaborators. FPs must operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. Preference will be given to projects that do one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- (vi) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience;
- (vii) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities;
- (viii) Focus on incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients; and/or
- (viii) Require that SNAP recipients utilize their EBT cards to make qualifying food purchases in order to earn FINI incentives.

Examples of FPs include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, CSAs, marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers.

Project Self-Evaluation. All FPs must involve SNAP participants and include an evaluation of whether the project met its goals and objectives. Project evaluations must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. All FPs will also be required to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluator conducting the comprehensive program evaluation.

3. FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP)

Funding Level: Awards of \$500,000 or greater

Period of Performance: Project period is not to exceed four (4) years

Program Code: FLSP

The primary purpose of the FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP) is to develop and evaluate projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase, using effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies. The projects will test strategies that could contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts.

FLSP should be designed to create or support multi-county, State-wide and regional incentive programs. FLSP should be coordinated food projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that align with the FINI grant program's primary goals. Projects must operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. Projects are required to expand the breadth, scope or reach of these programs, rather than supplant current program resources. Preference will be given to projects that do one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- (vi) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience;
- (vii) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities;
- (viii) Focus on incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients; and/or
- (ix) Require that SNAP recipients utilize their EBT cards to make qualifying food purchases in order to earn FINI incentives.

FINI Large Scale Projects include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, CSAs, marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers.

Project Self-Evaluation. All projects must involve SNAP participants and include an evaluation of whether the project met its goals and objectives. Project evaluations must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. As discussed below, a higher level of rigor will be expected for the FLSP evaluations. All FLSPs will also be required to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluator conducting the comprehensive program evaluation.

D. Program Policy

This section deals with certain aspects of FINI policy and SNAP policy as it pertains to the FINI grant program. Questions regarding the policies discussed below may be directed to FINI@fns.usda.gov.

General questions about SNAP and EBT should be directed to USDA FNS's Ask the Expert system at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ask-the-expert> (→ "Nutrition" → "Supplemental Nutrition Asst Prgm"). This system can provide prompt answers for general SNAP inquiries. Inquiries regarding the evaluation of the FINI grant program should be directed to Westat, the independent evaluator. Other FINI-related inquiries should be directed to NIFA. Contact information is located in Part VII.

Definition of Incentive

The term "incentive" means any financial or non-financial inducements that would increase the purchase and consumption of **FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables** by SNAP clients.

1. Examples of allowable financial incentives include, but are not limited to, vouchers redeemable for FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables; other SNAP-eligible items received for having purchased FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables; and direct point-of-sale discounts on FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables.
2. Examples of allowable non-financial incentives include, but are not limited to, giveaways of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables; and nutrition education.
3. Examples of unallowable incentives include, but are not limited to, giveaways of alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and lottery tickets.

Incentives that are not allowed may not be paid for with either Federal or matching funds. In addition, the cost of incentives must be allowable under the applicable cost principles in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E.

SNAP Eligible Food

Financial incentives disbursed through a FINI grant project may only be redeemable for SNAP eligible food as defined by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (the Act) and SNAP regulations at 7 CFR §271.2.

SNAP eligible food is any food or food products (including seeds and plants that produce eligible food) intended for home preparation and human consumption. The following types of products are ineligible for purchase using SNAP benefits: alcohol, tobacco, hot food, food sold for on-

premises consumption, and nonfood items (such as soap, paper, medicine, etc.). Products that carry a “Supplement Facts” label are classified by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as supplements and are, therefore, not considered SNAP eligible food.

Seeds and plants are eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits only when the product of their cultivation is intended for consumption by the purchasing SNAP household. Seeds and plants may not be purchased with SNAP benefits if they are intended for cultivation for ornamental purposes. In addition, the seeds and plants of toxic or inedible flora, such as azaleas or hydrangeas, are not considered eligible for purchase with SNAP benefits as the products of their cultivation are not fit for human consumption. Finally, cut floral bouquets, ornamental gourds, or other plant products sold for decorative purposes are not SNAP eligible, as these products are not sold for human consumption.

FINI Qualifying Fruits and Vegetables

A FINI grant project furthermore must incentivize the purchase of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables. Such FINI qualifying fruits or vegetables would be considered SNAP staple foods in the fruit or vegetable staple food category. FINI grantees may choose to only incentivize a narrower subset of the FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable category (e.g., incentivize only fresh, local fruit). For example, some grantees have chosen to incentivize the fruits and vegetables that appear on their States’ Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Approved Products List (APL). This is an acceptable subset of fruits and vegetables to incentivize under FINI. It should be noted, however, that some States’ WIC APLs may exclude products that would otherwise be considered FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables (e.g., white potatoes). Some FINI grantees have, nevertheless, opted to incentivize only fruits and vegetables that appear on their States’ WIC APLs as this simplifies implementation with their retailer partner outlets. FINI grantees that seek to incentivize only a narrower subset of the FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable category must justify this in their proposal. FINI grantees may not incentivize only specific brand names or product lines of qualifying fruits or vegetables, nor may FINI grantees incentivize only a specific subset of FINI qualifying fruits or vegetables that are not considered by FNS and NIFA to advance the spirit or purpose of the FINI grant program.

The definition of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables includes any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, or oils, and salt (i.e. sodium). Examples of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables include, but are not limited to, the following: frozen spinach, fresh apples, sundried tomatoes, 100% orange juice, and canned artichoke hearts (so long as these products contain no added sugars, fats, oils, or salts). In response to feedback received from FINI grantees, SNAP eligible seeds and plants intended for cultivation and consumption (e.g., tomato seeds or tomato plants) and fresh herbs (e.g., fresh basil, thyme, or mint) are also now considered FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables.

Examples of fruit-based and vegetable-based products that do not qualify for the purposes of FINI include accessory food items such as powdered, dried, or extracted herbs and spices, fruit punch (less than 100% fruit juice), honey, ketchup and other condiments, as well as multiple ingredient food items that are not primarily composed of qualifying fruits and vegetables (such as pastries containing fruit, frozen pizza pies, or burritos). If you are uncertain as to whether or not a fruit or vegetable product qualifies for the purposes of FINI, please check the ingredients panel

for the presence of the four aforementioned additives. If sugars, fats, oils, or salts are present as a listed ingredient on the product's nutrition label, then that product is generally not considered a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable.

An allowable FINI grant project must have a trigger and incentive. This means that all approved grant projects must require eligible participants to perform an action and then provide those participants with an incentive. Usually the trigger event is the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable, but there are four allowable models as follows:

1. Participating SNAP households receive incentives ONLY through the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable and incentives are redeemable for the purchase of any SNAP eligible food product;
2. Participating SNAP households receive incentives through the purchase of any SNAP eligible food product and incentives are redeemable ONLY for the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable;
3. Participating SNAP households receive incentives ONLY through the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable and incentives are redeemable ONLY for the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable; and
4. No purchase is required for participating SNAP households to receive incentives and incentives are redeemable ONLY for the purchase of a FINI qualifying fruit or vegetable.

If no purchase is required to receive a FINI benefit or if the required purchase is paid for with a non-SNAP form of tender (e.g., cash), then an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card balance check operation must be performed to verify the participant's status as a SNAP household. Additionally, if no purchase is required then a separate trigger must be required before participants receive incentives. Usually no purchase required projects use attendance of nutrition or cooking education classes as the trigger. Additionally, "no purchase required" incentive triggers will be subject to providing additional justification prior to approval, and would need to explain clearly how it intends to ensure that only eligible SNAP households will be able to receive incentives.

Grant Selection Priority

Priority will be given to grant proposals with incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients. Any grant proposal that includes non-financial incentives will be subject to providing additional justification prior to approval, and would need to explain clearly how it contributes to the overall objectives of this program. In general, USDA expects non-financial incentives, if used, to be supplemental to a strong financial-based incentive. Additionally, USDA encourages FINI grantees to structure their grant projects so that project participants are required to utilize their EBT cards to spend SNAP benefits and make qualifying purchases in order to become eligible to receive the incentives offered. Such a project model improves the precision of USDA efforts to evaluate the success of FINI grant projects and has the added benefit of verifying the SNAP household status of participants as well. While "no purchase required" FINI grant project models are allowable, it is incumbent upon FINI grantees and their retailer partner outlets to verify that all FINI grant project participants are eligible SNAP households. Any grant

proposal that includes “no purchase required” incentive triggers will be subject to providing additional justification prior to approval, and would need to explain clearly how it intends to ensure that only eligible SNAP households will be able to receive incentives.

Sales Tax

Per Section 4405(a)(3) of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill), as amended by Section 4208 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill), no State or local sales tax shall be collected on any purchase of food made using FINI grant project incentives.

Geographic location and ownership of SNAP authorized firms

Long-standing Agency policy requires a SNAP authorization (and the unique seven digit FNS number that serves as a retail food store’s numerical identifier) to be restricted to a single geographical location (i.e., that of the retail food store). This means that it is not allowable for a grocery store, for example, to use its SNAP authorization to accept and redeem SNAP benefits at any location other than its listed address as reported to FNS (e.g., supermarket chains are required to have individual SNAP authorization for each store location). Likewise, a farmers market (FM) may not use its SNAP authorization (and FNS number) at more than one geographic location (e.g., doing business at one location on Mondays and at a second location on Thursdays requires two licenses). If an FM seeks to operate at more than one location continuously, then a firm must be authorized at each of those locations.

Furthermore, whenever a SNAP authorized firm relocates to a new physical address it must notify FNS of the new address immediately. Likewise, if an FM relocates (e.g., from its winter market location to its summer market location), then it must notify FNS of the new address immediately.

Finally, whenever a SNAP authorized firm changes its ownership structure (e.g., the firm is sold) it must apply for a new SNAP authorization and FNS number.

FNS understands that retailer information (ownership status and geographical location) for FMs changes more frequently than for typical SNAP authorized retailers (i.e., brick-and-mortar retailer food stores). As with any retail food store, FNS requires an FM to apply for a new SNAP authorization and FNS number whenever that FM’s ownership structure changes.

Equal Treatment

Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR §278.2(b) and 7 CFR §274.7(f) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grant.

Refunds

FMs with one central EBT point-of-sale (POS) terminal often utilize scrip or tokens for the redemption of SNAP benefits. Under such a system SNAP households swipe their EBT cards at

the FM's central EBT POS terminal for a declared amount and receive specially marked tokens which can only be spent on eligible food at the FM's stalls and booths. If, after shopping, SNAP households still possess an excess of these tokens they may return to the FM's central EBT POS terminal for a refund on such tokens.

Refunds, both for such tokens and for any product purchased with SNAP benefits, can never be made in cash. Providing cash refunds for SNAP scrip or items purchased with SNAP benefits is considered trafficking SNAP benefits. This is a serious violation of SNAP rules and can have lasting legal ramifications for any retailer engaging in such practices. Refunds of SNAP scrip and purchases made with SNAP benefits must be returned to the SNAP household's EBT card through a refund transaction on an EBT POS device.

Incentives received through a FINI grant project are intended to increase the consumption of qualifying fruits and vegetables and must be spent accordingly. The returning or refunding of FINI benefits is not consistent with the intention of the FINI grant program. While spoiled or undesired food products purchased with FINI benefits may be exchanged for equivalent food products at the retailer's discretion, FINI benefits may neither be refunded with cash, nor refunded onto a SNAP household's EBT card through a refund transaction on an EBT POS device. Therefore, if an FM using a scrip system utilizes a distinct FINI benefit token (i.e., valid only for FINI qualifying fruits and vegetables), such tokens may only be redeemed as intended at the FM; they may not be refunded or exchanged.

SNAP Household Data Confidentiality

Personally Identifying Information (PII) of SNAP households is protected under Section 11(e)(8)(A)(i) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (the Act) and SNAP regulations at 7 CFR §272.1(c)(1). Local and State SNAP Agencies may not disclose SNAP household data to FINI grantees. If FINI grantees gather SNAP household data from grant project participants as a part of their grant project, then that grantee is responsible for using that data appropriately and safeguarding it from disclosure. It is prohibited to maintain a database of SNAP household data for any purpose other than to meet the necessary requirements of conducting your FINI grant project. Information regarding SNAP participants may never be sold or in any way used for marketing or commercial purposes. Any SNAP household data collected as a function of your FINI grant project must be safeguarded against disclosure for the duration of the project and must be destroyed at the conclusion of the project. Under no circumstances should the following types of information be gathered or retained for this purpose: full EBT card numbers, images (photographed, photocopied, scanned, etc.) of EBT cards, EBT PINs, and Social Security Numbers (SSNs).

SNAP Retailer Data Confidentiality

Under 7 CFR §278.1(q) certain forms of SNAP retailer information are prohibited from disclosure. Local and State SNAP Agencies may not disclose such retailer data to FINI grantees. The names and addresses of SNAP authorized retailers are available to the public and can be obtained via the SNAP retailer locator tool: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailerlocator>. However, the FNS number for individual firms is not public information and is subject to restrictions in SNAP regulations at 7 CFR §278.1(q); therefore, it must be obtained directly from

the retailer. Likewise, SNAP redemption or transaction data at the individual store level is considered protected data and must be obtained directly from the retailer. FINI grantees should work in close concert with their retailer partner outlets in order to obtain any such required information. Both the FNS number and individual retailer transaction/redemption data, while necessary for data collection and evaluation purposes, are protected and shall not be published in a public report. SNAP retailer transactions/redemptions should only be reported in aggregate.

Changes in FINI Grantee Primary Point of Contact

Per Part VIII Section 2 titled “Changes in Budget or Project Plans”, FINI grantees are required to inform the USDA regarding any changes in their FINI grant project’s primary point(s) of contact. At the very least this means that FINI grantees must inform FNS and NIFA points of contact of any change to their Project Directors (PDs) no more than 10 calendar days after the change occurs. FINI grantees are also strongly encouraged to inform NIFA and FNS points of contact of changes to other primary grantee points of contact in a timely fashion.

Current NIFA and FNS points of contact are [Daniel Cline](#), [Eric Williams](#), and [Jane Clary](#); updates to these USDA points of contact will be provided to all grantees in a timely fashion as necessary.

Allowable Participation of Retailer Partner Outlets in your FINI Grant Project

In order to conduct a FINI grant project it is necessary to partner with retail food stores. Entities that respond to this RFA document are required to submit a list of retailer partner outlets that are expected or planned to participate in their FINI grant project, if awarded, per Part IV Section B titled “Content and Form of Application Submission” Subsection (g) titled “Specific Program and Incentive Information” of this RFA document. The terms “store” and “firm” are used interchangeably to refer to FINI retailer partner outlets and this can include a broad range of retail food purveyors from traditional brick-and-mortar grocery stores to farmers’ markets.

No store may disburse (e.g., print, distribute, make available, or otherwise give) or redeem (e.g., accept, honor, or otherwise receive) FINI incentives, regardless of the format of those incentives (e.g., tokens, scrip, gift cards), unless the store is SNAP authorized by FNS. FINI grantees and applicants may provide NIFA and FNS with a list of future participant stores before such stores have completed the SNAP authorization process, but unauthorized stores may not materially participate in FINI grant projects until and unless they are SNAP authorized.

You can read more about the SNAP authorization process and apply for authorization online here <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer-apply>. SNAP regulations allow 45 days from receipt of a completed application for a decision to be made. FNS makes every effort to expedite authorization decisions and on average these decisions are made in fewer than 20 days. If a store has questions they can be directed to the SNAP Retailer Service Center (RSC) at 1-877-823-4269. Before any new store is added to a FINI grant project in an active status, the FINI grantee must take the following necessary steps to report that store’s participation:

1. Contact primary NIFA and FNS points of contact providing the store name, store address (including street, city, State, and 9-digit ZIP code), and FNS number (a 7-digit unique numerical identifier assigned to a store that applies for SNAP authorization) of the stores that the grantee would like to add to their grant project (current NIFA and FINI points of contact are Daniel Cline (daniel.cline@fns.usda.gov), Eric Williams

- (eric.williams@fns.usda.gov), and Jane Clary (jclary@nifa.usda.gov); updates to these points of contact will be provided to all grantees in a timely fashion as necessary).
2. Ensure that the store applies for and receives SNAP authorization. FINI grantees may require that a new store provides the grantee with a scanned version of the store's FNS-issued SNAP authorization permit document in order to verify the store's status.
 3. Ensure that the store has signed and authorized a Data Use Agreement (DUA) or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that guarantees that the store will share necessary evaluation-related data with the grantee and FNS. FNS may require the submission of applicable DUAs or MOUs. This requirement is further detailed in Part IV Section B titled "Content and Form of Application Submission" Subsection (f) titled "Evaluation" of this RFA document.
 4. Obtain NIFA and FNS approval.

No retailer partner outlet may benefit in any way from a FINI grant unless all of these conditions have been met in advance.

Once a FINI grantee has taken all of these steps and once NIFA and FINI points of contact have approved the addition of new stores, then the new store may be added to a FINI grant project and may begin disbursing and redeeming incentives.

Grantee Noncompliance with Program Policy

Grantees are expected to comply with all of the policies and requirements laid out in this RFA document as well as any policies or requirements further clarified in Q&As, memoranda, or other relevant USDA documents. If any grantee fails to comply with FINI policies or requirements, then the USDA will notify that grantee of the issue and establish a timeline for corrective action. If the grantee fails to take required corrective action within the established timeline, then the USDA will immediately suspend that grantee's access to grant funds. The general timeline for such corrective action is 30 calendar days, although the timeline may be extended or shortened depending on the nature and extent of the issue at hand at the discretion of the USDA.

In cases in which grant funds, have been spent on unallowable expenses or otherwise misallocated, the USDA will require that the grantee repay the full amount of grant funds that have been misallocated.

If a grantee engages in a pattern of noncompliant actions, then USDA will consider rescission of the FINI grant award in its entirety. Additionally, a history of noncompliance with FINI or any other USDA grant policies and requirements will be considered during the grant application evaluation process as detailed in Section B. Evaluation.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY 2018 is approximately \$21 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. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2018. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment (ASAP) system, operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2018, you may submit applications to the FINI Program:

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

Resubmitted application: This is an application that had previously been submitted to the FINI 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

Applications will be accepted for three (3) project types: (1) FINI Pilot Projects; (2) FINI Projects; and (3) FINI Large-Scale Projects. The FINI grant program will only accept one application across the three project types per project team under this RFA.

All FPP awards will be made on the merit of the proposed project, with budgets considered only after the merits of the project have been determined. NIFA reserves the right to negotiate final budgets with successful applicants.

1. FINI Pilot Projects (FPP)

FPPs are aimed at new entrants seeking funding for a project in the early stages of incentive program development. Applicants should request a budget commensurate with the proposed project. No single FINI Pilot project (FPP) award shall exceed \$100,000 for the total project period. The maximum FINI Pilot Project award period is one year. Applications that exceed the budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed.

2. FINI Projects (FP)

FINI Projects are aimed at mid-sized groups developing incentive programs at the local or State level. Applicants should request a budget and project period commensurate with the proposed project. FP proposals should include a budget of no more than \$500,000 for a project period not to exceed four years. Proposal budgets may be less than \$500,000 and/or a proposed project period of less than four years. Applications that exceed budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed.

3. FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP)

FLSPs are aimed at groups developing multi-county, state-wide, and regional incentive programs with the largest target audience of all FINI projects. Applicants should request a budget and project period commensurate with the proposed project. FLSP proposals should include a budget of \$500,000 or more for a project period not to exceed four years. Applicants may submit a proposed project period not to exceed four years.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may only be submitted by government agencies and non-profit organizations. 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.

1. FPP, FP, & FLSP Eligible Entity

Eligibility to receive this grant is limited to government agencies and non-profit organizations (FCEA, § 4405(b)(2)(A)). Eligible government agencies and non-profit organizations may include: an emergency feeding organization; an agricultural cooperative; a producer network or association; a community health organization; a public benefit corporation; an economic development corporation; a farmers' market; a community-supported agriculture program; a buying club; a SNAP-authorized retailer; and a State, local, or tribal agency. All applicants must demonstrate in their application that they are a government agency or non-profit organization.

To be eligible to receive a FPP, FP, or FLSP grant, applicants must propose projects that: (1) would increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (2) operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (3) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation; (4) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives under the FINI grant program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 C.F.R. 278.2(b); and (5) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities.

Note: Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR 278.2(b) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grant.

In addition, applicants must meet the following requirements to receive a FPP, FP, or FLSP grant: (1) have experience in: (i) efforts to reduce food insecurity in the community, including food distribution, improving access to services, or coordinating services and programs; or (ii) experience with the SNAP program; (2) demonstrate competency to implement a project, provide fiscal accountability, collect data, and prepare reports and other necessary documentation; and (3) possess a demonstrated willingness to share information with researchers, evaluators (including the independent evaluator for the program), practitioners, and other interested parties, including a plan for dissemination of results to stakeholders.

Projects are encouraged to provide employees with important job skills. Additionally, applicants are encouraged to have experience in the following areas: (i) community food work, particularly concerning small and medium-sized farms, including the provision of food to people in low-income communities and the development of new markets in low-income communities for agricultural producers; and (ii) job training and business development activities for food-related activities in low-income communities.

2. Partners and Collaborators

Applicants for FPP, FP, and FLSP awards are encouraged to seek and create partnerships with public or private, non-profit or for-profit entities, including links with academic institutions (including minority-serving colleges and universities) and/or other appropriate professionals; community-based organizations; local government entities; Promise Zone lead applicant/organization or implementation partners; and StrikeForce area coordinators and/or partnering entities for the purposes of providing additional resources and strengthening under-resourced communities. *Only the applicant must meet the requirements specified above for grant eligibility.* Project partners and collaborators need not meet the eligibility requirements. When planning collaborations, see Part III, B. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the successful completion of the project. See Part IV, D., Funding Restrictions.

Fiscal Agent:

If an institution/organization cannot accept Federal funds directly, a letter must be included in the application stating that in the event the application results in an award, the award funds must be administered through a fiscal agent organization on their behalf. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant and the letter must be countersigned by an authorized representative of the fiscal agent organization. The letter should include the fiscal agent's point of contact, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. This letter is to be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.3.c.) of the application. In the event an application is recommended for funding, NIFA will request that both the applicant institution/organization and the fiscal agent organization submit complete management information (see Part V, D.). Include documents showing the organization's non-profit status when responding to this request.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

FPP, FP, and FLSP applicants **MUST** provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all Federal funds awarded. Match must be documented for all project years at the time the application is submitted. FPP, FP, and FLSP grantees may meet the match requirement through cash and/or in-kind contributions, including third-party in-kind contributions fairly evaluated, including facilities, equipment, or services.

The non-Federal share of the funding may come from State government, local government, or private sources. Federal money cannot be used to match. Examples of qualifying matching contributions may include direct costs such as: rent for office space used exclusively for the

funded project; duplication or postage costs; and staff time from an entity other than the applicant for job training or nutrition education.

Note that if an applicant partners with a for-profit entity, the non-Federal share that is required to be provided by the applicant may not include the services of an employee of that for-profit entity, including salaries or expenses covered by that employer. (FCEA, § 4405(b)(1)(c)(ii)).

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

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

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an 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 two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to “**Register,**” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>), for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. Part II, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2, below, to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

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

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-FINI-006393

Click “Search.” On the displayed page, click the corresponding link to continue. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

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

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

Grants.gov customer support

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

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

Email: support@grants.gov

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

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

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A of this part). The following is **additional information** you need to prepare 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. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether attachments are in PDF format; see Part III, Section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. **Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).**

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
- Phone: 202-401-5048

- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST, 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. See Part V, Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances (e.g., Prohibition Against Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements).

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

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

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

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.

The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of **FINI grant program**. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **10** pages of written text, regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced, and up to **5** additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (**15** pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1. FINI Pilot Projects, FINI Projects, and FINI Large Scale Projects

The Project Narrative for FINI Pilot Projects (FPPs), FINI Projects (FPs), and FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSPs) must include the headings below in bold followed by the response for each of the points noted below.

(a) The Community to be Involved in the Project and the Needs to be Addressed. Identify and succinctly describe the critical elements and needs of the local food economy or food system, including demographics, income, and geographic characteristics of the area or community to be served and how the community might benefit from an incentive project. Beyond a recitation of statistics, applications should describe local capabilities and assets, such as those identified in a community food assessment, and involvement of low-income communities in the context of project activities and operations.

Most relevant is an explanation of why the applicant and its partners selected the activities proposed in the application. Note the main targets or beneficiaries of the project and the community needs and opportunities being addressed. The needs addressed should directly relate to project goals and objectives described below. It is recommended that this section be no more than one and one-half page.

(b) The Organizations and Communities Involved in the Project. List the organizations and communities to be involved in carrying out the proposed project. Include a description of the relevant experience of each community group or organization, including the applicant organization that will be involved, and any related project history in a management plan. Proposals should demonstrate community linkages and coalitions as appropriate. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership should reflect the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed project activities or similar types of activities. Specify the degree to which paid and volunteer staff will be utilized. Experience in and connections with the community will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard.

To the extent practicable, ensure that low-income residents are involved in planning; in particular, describe how the communities being served (particularly the targeted residents and organizations) have been or will be involved in planning the project and will be engaged in its implementation and evaluation process. Please reference planning activities, assessments, meetings, or other activities that demonstrate community input into key decision-making.

Letters from the key organizations involved in the project, acknowledging their support and contributions, must be provided. A limited number of additional support letters – such as those from farmers or partner organizations, where appropriate, are encouraged to provide evidence of broad community involvement in both planning and future decision-making. All support letters should be attached in Field 12, Other Attachments (See Part IV, B.3.c., below, Key Organization Support).

(c) Project Goals and Intended Outcomes. List the goals and intended outcomes of the project, and how they contribute to the primary goal of the FINI grant program. Outcomes should describe specific changes or results that will occur as a consequence of the project and that will constitute “success” for the initiative, including a general description of the range of fruits and vegetables that would be incentivized (such as, but not limited to, fresh, canned, or dried forms). Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely, describe what will be accomplished, and who and how many people, e.g., residents, participants, will benefit. It is recommended that this section be no more than two pages.

(d) Activities to Achieve the Goals. Discuss how the goals and intended outcomes will be achieved and include how the proposed activities comply with the rules and regulations of SNAP. Discuss how the proposed project outcomes will be realized by providing a systematic description of how the most important steps or milestones will be accomplished. Particular attention should be given to existing technical capabilities and any technical solutions that must be developed for goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved. In addition to these descriptions, it is recommended that a table of up to three pages be provided with implementation details for these activities, including: (a) specific steps and achievements in planning, implementing, and evaluating; (b) timetables for milestones, and, as relevant; (c) expected numbers of participants involved in each step of the process. Describe how the proposed project will develop effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated and scaled in other States and communities in the future.

(e) Relationship to Program Objectives. Discuss how the project and its proposed outcomes will address the objectives of the FINI grant program as described in Part I, B. Discuss the specific changes that will result among participants or in the communities served that address these FINI grant program priorities. It is recommended that this section be no more than one page.

(f) Evaluation. Evaluation is a critical purpose of the FINI grant program. By testing and evaluating various methods and technologies to increase the fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating households through the FINI grant program, NIFA seeks to determine best practices, and the relative effectiveness of various incentive programs as well as benefit redemption methods. The evaluation requirements of the FINI grant program, therefore, include both process (developing and monitoring indicators of progress towards objectives) and outcomes. Recognizing that FINI projects are likely to vary substantially in scale and maturity, and that grantees are likely to vary considerably in evaluation capacity and expertise, the evaluation requirements differ for each of the three grant categories. The FINI grant program requires a project self-evaluation by each grantee and participation in the program evaluation conducted by the independent evaluator.

All FINI Pilot Projects (FPP) must include a process analysis, a self-assessment of their success in developing a viable project. FPPs will document the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations. Because these projects are in the earliest stages of development that do not offer a fair test of their potential effectiveness, limited information will be reported to the independent evaluator. FPPs must provide preliminary results of their self-assessment in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluation contractor.

All FINI Projects (FP) must include a process analysis, a self-assessment of their success in developing and operating a viable project. FPs will document the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations. The process assessment should contain enough timely information over the course of the project to improve program outcomes. FPs must provide preliminary results of their self-assessment in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluator. In addition, because of their expected scope, FPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator.

All FINI Large-Scale Projects (FLSP) must include (1) a process assessment that documents the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations and (2) an outcome assessment that documents the project's effectiveness in increasing fruit and vegetable purchases among SNAP participants. The process assessment should contain enough timely information over the course of the project to measure program outcomes. Preliminary results shall be included in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluator. Outcome self-assessments must follow guidelines developed by the independent evaluator collaboration with grantees to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. In addition, because of their expected scale and maturity, FLSPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator.

Project Type	Project Self-Evaluation	Comprehensive Program Evaluation (by independent evaluator)
FPP	Process evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required to participate • Participation includes providing self-assessment information to independent evaluator.
FP	Process evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required to participate • Contribute to minimum core data set • Collaborate with independent evaluator to identify comparison sites
FLSP	Rigorous self-evaluation (process and outcome)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required to participate • Contribute to minimum core data set • Collaborate with independent evaluator to identify comparison sites

Comprehensive FINI Program Evaluation (by independent evaluator). The independent evaluation is expected to be based on a cluster evaluation model that builds on the collaboration and coordination of individual project assessments and an overall program evaluation. It is expected to consist of four components: a *process analysis* to describe project implementation and support future replication of successful approaches, an *outcome analysis* to assess the effectiveness of each FP and FLSP, a *comparative analysis* to integrate results across sites and approaches, attempting to answer the question of what works best (and when or where), and *technical assistance* to support consistent implementation of evaluation protocols.

USDA has determined that a comparison group design offers the best balance between the statutory requirement to use “rigorous methodologies capable of producing scientifically valid information” while accommodating the limited administrative and evaluation capacities of potential FPs and FLSPs (FPPs have a limited role in the independent evaluation). This quasi-experimental approach uses a comparison site – such as a neighborhood across town or a group of SNAP participants who are not offered the nutrition incentive – as a baseline to assess the effect of offering an incentive. Outcomes for each group (intervention and comparison) are measured before and again sometime after the nutrition incentive is provided. The independent evaluator – working in collaboration with FPs and FLSPs – will identify groups that are as similar as possible to the intervention communities to make the comparison as fair as possible.

All FPs and FLSPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator by:

- Supporting implementation of evaluation requirements (including but not limited to helping the independent evaluation contractor identify appropriate comparison sites or groups and providing the minimum core data set described below);
- Meeting periodically with staff from NIFA, FNS, the independent evaluator, and other FINI grantees to review project plans, evaluation objectives and methods, data collection and reporting requirements, and analysis and reporting of results;

- Facilitating access to or providing documentation of project implementation, operations, costs, and outcomes; and
- Facilitating site visits and interviews with project staff, partners and program participants.

FPS and FLSPs will be required to periodically provide the independent evaluator a core program data set to ensure common program tracking and enable meaningful comparisons across all projects. FPS and FLSPs may choose at their option to collect additional information beyond the core program data set as part of their self-assessments; the independent evaluation contractor will also collect additional data, including information on consumer knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and purchase and consumption behaviors. The core program data set includes the following:

Site and Project Information

- Management or organizational structure of the program
- Financial instrument used for SNAP and incentive purchases (tokens, scrip, electronic, etc.)
- Retail locations, mobile routes, or other pertinent information to understand how the project improves access to healthy food for underserved, low-income consumers
- Months of operation and operating days and hours
- Whether it is a new SNAP incentive program or the continuation, expansion, or modification of an existing program
- Whether program sites accept other nutrition assistance program benefits
- Whether program sites collaborate with nutrition education programs or offer other experiential nutrition education activities
- Expenses associated with establishment and operations of the program

Incentive Program Information

- Fruit and vegetable products eligible for incentives
- Incentive level (ratio and maximum)
- Incentive delivery mechanism
- Number of SNAP participants (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of SNAP purchases (per site/per year)
- Number of SNAP transactions (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of incentives issued (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of incentives redeemed (per site/per year)
- Average incentive value redeemed per recipient (weekly/monthly/annually)

Grantees are required to have a Data Use Agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding with each retailer or subgrantee that guarantees each retailer will provide information required for the core program data set and to complete an outlet survey of retailers to be conducted by the independent evaluator.

Proposals should discuss any opportunities and challenges with the evaluation requirements and how they will be addressed. Proposals should also describe any previous process, outcome, and impact evaluation experience with SNAP participants or other related food programs. The proposal should demonstrate the capacity and willingness to comply with the evaluation requirements.

(g) Specific Program and Incentive Information. Provide a detailed description of the way incentives will be handled in your grant project and the stores that will participate in your grant project. Please be sure to include information responsive to this section as a clear and discrete section of your proposal (do not reference other sections or charts located elsewhere in your proposal). Please include the following information in this section:

- The type and number of SNAP retailer partner outlets that will be involved in your grant project (e.g., small brick and mortar stores, farmers' markets, etc.) – additional information regarding SNAP store types is available in the 2016 Q&As <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/FAQs%20FY%202016%20RFA.pdf>.
- The number of months and days that the project, if funded, will operate (e.g., a project at a seasonal farmers' market that will operate from June 15 through October 15)
- The trigger for earning or receiving the incentive (e.g., purchasing fruits or vegetables, purchasing specified fruits and/or vegetables, no purchase necessary, etc.)
- The type of trigger for and the amount of the incentive at different types of retailers
- The relationship of the trigger to the incentive received (e.g., every customer receives a \$5 voucher, customers receive \$1 for every \$1 spent, etc.)
- The products eligible to be purchased or received at the point of incentive redemption (e.g., all SNAP-eligible foods, all fruits and vegetables, only FINI qualifying fruits and/or vegetables, only fresh and local FINI qualifying fruits and/or vegetables, etc.)
- The incentive levels offered (e.g., percentage discount, ratio, dollar amount and maximum, etc.)
- The financial instrument used for incentive delivery (e.g., tokens, scrip, gift card, electronic, etc.)
- The methods that will be used to track SNAP households' grant project participation (e.g., a store loyalty card issued to each participant, etc.)
- If no purchase is required for receipt of incentives as a part of your FINI grant project please specify how you will verify the SNAP household status of participants
- Indicate if the proposal is a new SNAP incentive program or a continuation, expansion, or modification of an existing program
- Indicate if nutrition education or other interventions will be combined with the incentive
- List where the project and sub-grantee projects will operate
- Indicate if any special waivers will be requested or required and what the waivers will include
- Provide the store/firm names, street addresses, and FNS numbers for all of the identified SNAP authorized retailer partner outlets that will participate in your grant project
- Indicate if there are any identified retailer partner outlets that are not yet SNAP authorized, include the store/firm names and street addresses; if any of these firms are currently undergoing the SNAP authorization process please also include those firms' FNS numbers
- Indicate if the project anticipates new retailers that are not currently SNAP authorized, include the store/firm names and street addresses
- Retailer partner outlet information (including store/firm name, street address, and FNS number) must be reported to USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) on a quarterly basis after a grant award has been made. If you are unable to provide all of the required retailer partner outlet information required above, you may do so in your quarterly

reports. Quarterly reports are due to FNS 30 days after the end of each quarter. A quarterly report including the store/firm name, street address, and FNS number for all active retailer partner outlets participating in your grant project is required every quarter for the duration of your grant project even if no changes have been made since your last quarterly report. If you are unable to provide any of the information required in your quarterly reports, please indicate why. Quarterly reports may be sent to FINI@fns.usda.gov.

- Indicate if the project anticipates making any technical enhancements to the retailers, EBT, or other systems. Provide a high-level description of any such proposed technical enhancements and page number(s) in the proposal indicating where a detailed description of technical enhancements is found.
- Implementation plan for rollout of incentives across the retailer types that includes anticipated start dates and a plan for communicating changes in implementation schedule to FNS and the independent evaluator Westat.

SEE the link to the FAQs regarding FINI: <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program>.

Proposals must include this detailed information in Section (g) under the heading “Specific Program and Incentive Information” so the information may be easily pulled out and used by the reviewers and the independent evaluator.

(h) Sustainability. Describe which aspects or components of the project will continue beyond the end of the project period, discuss how an infusion of Federal funds will be sufficient for the proposed project to advance local capacity-building and achieve sustainability. Projects may identify actual or potential funding sources for continuation of the project. Applicants should differentiate between how the basic elements of the project will be continued versus how the low-income community will be changed and its capacity advanced.

Projects should provide evidence, e.g., a market analysis or the outline of a management business plan, to demonstrate that it is likely to become successful in meeting FINI grant program goals. Business plan outlines or any other documentation of evidence for sustainability should be no more than five pages and should be included as an appendix. Such evidence should be included as an Other Attachment, Field 12 (see Part IV.B.3.c.).

(i) Non-supplantation. Grants shall be used to supplement, not supplant, non-Federal funds that would otherwise be available for expenditure on incentive program activities. Grant funds must be used to fund new projects, or expand or enhance existing projects. They may not be used to replace State or local funds that would, in the absence of Federal aid, be available or forthcoming for incentive programs.

c. Field 12. Add Other Attachments. All attachments must be in PDF format.

See Part V. Section 4.12 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the form) for instructions regarding mandatory Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status.

- **Key Organization Support.** Attach signed letters of support from the State SNAP agency if there is an interaction with or modifications of EBT systems and any other key organizations involved in the project acknowledging their support, contributions and commitment; title the attachment ‘Key Organization Support’. Provide evidence of broad community involvement in both planning and decision-making. This section is limited to two page letters of support for each key organization.
- **Matching Funds Documentation.** For **FPP, FP, and FLSP** applicants, this grant program requires applicants to match Federal funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources as described in Part III, B.

For grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B, the Budget Justification must list matching sources, identify the entity(ies) providing the match, and include the total dollar amount being pledged. NIFA is no longer requiring written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement). However, you are still subject to documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, etc., as specified in 2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (the Uniform Guidance),” 7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions,” and program-specific regulations, as applicable. In instances where match is required, any resulting award will require the signature of an Authorized Representative. Only when NIFA receives the award signed by the AR will award funds be released and available for drawdown.

- **Appendices to Project Narrative.** Title the attachment as ‘Appendices’ in the document header and save file as ‘Appendices’. ***Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices must not exceed seven (7) pages and should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.***
- **Logic Model.** Title the attachment as ‘Logic Model’ in the document header and save file as ‘LogicModel’. In order to allow for sufficient evaluation of projects as described, it is recommended that applicants set aside between five and ten percent of the total project budget for evaluation purposes. Applicants should seek the help of academic or other experts in evaluation design and implementation, as appropriate and available. A logic model or chart may also be used. It is recommended that this section be no more than one page. <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/logic-model-planning-process>
- **Fiscal Agent Letter.** See Part III A. 2. If it is necessary to include a fiscal agent letter, then title the attachment as ‘Fiscal Agent’ in the document header and save file as ‘FiscalAgent’. Include documents showing the applicant’s non-profit status here.

- **Promise Zone or Strikeforce Letter.** If you are a Promise Zone, please submit a completed certified HUD Form 50153. (Or add, just like the CFP: If you are a Promise Zone or Strikeforce area, please submit a letter indicating your status as such.)

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

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the guide includes instructions about senior/key person profile requirements, 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.

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. Part V.6 also notes the importance and use of the information.

6. **R&R Budget**

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Cost sharing or Matching.

As stated in Part III, B., matching funds are mandatory for FFP, FP, and FLSP. The R&R Budget (“Fed/Non-Fed”) form must be utilized.

For grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B, the Budget Justification must list matching sources along with the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match as well as the total dollar amount being pledged. NIFA is no longer requiring written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement). However, you are still subject to documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, etc. as specified in 2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (the Uniform Guidance),” 7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions,” and program-specific regulations, as applicable. In instances where match is required, any resulting award will require the signature of an Authorized Representative. Only when NIFA receives the award signed by the AR will award funds be released and available for drawdown.

Indirect Costs.

For further information and instructions regarding indirect costs, refer to Part V, section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. For indirect cost funding restrictions, refer to part IV, D. of this RFA.

7. **Supplemental Information Form**

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available 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: **FINI Pilot Projects**

Enter the program code: **FPP**

Enter the program code name: **FINI Projects**

Enter the program code: **FIP**

Enter the program code name: **FINI Large Scale Projects**

Enter the program code: **FLSP**

Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.

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.

C. Submission Dates and Times

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

While you should use the checklist to check the application for completeness, the application should be checked for the following required item(s). The list includes:

- Logic Model
- Data Sharing Agreement
- Current and Pending Support

This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight items that may be overlooked.

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 p.m. Eastern Time on December 13, 2017**. 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. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

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

D. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Costs

Applicants may request full indirect costs, subject to statutory limitations.

In order to do so, the applicant must use the current negotiated indirect cost rate established by its cognizant Federal agency (the agency that provides the most funds). If awarded, the applicant will be required to produce a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement from the cognizant agency in order to recover indirect costs. If unable to obtain a negotiated rate from its cognizant agency, the applicant is not permitted indirect cost reimbursement. Rather, the applicant may only be reimbursed for allowable direct costs. Violation of cost accounting principles is not permitted when re-budgeting or charging costs to awards. Rather, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs.

If the applicant wants full indirect costs, but does not have a negotiated rate, and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant must calculate an indirect cost rate in order to request indirect costs. Several sample indirect cost rate calculations are provided on NIFA's indirect cost webpage located at: http://nifa.usda.gov/business/indirect_cost_process.html. During the application process, the applicant is not required to complete the entire indirect cost package identified on NIFA's website. Rather, the applicant need only calculate an indirect cost rate to serve as a basis for requesting indirect costs. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete Indirect Cost Proposal (ICP) package in order to obtain a negotiated rate as explained on NIFA's indirect cost website.

2. Subcontract Restriction

The applicant is expected to perform a substantive portion of the project and no more than 50 percent of FPP, FP, and FLSP, as determined by budget expenditures, may be subawarded. NIFA will allow applicants to indicate in their proposal if they intend to subcontract more than 50% of the award. This deviation will require NIFA approval. Projects may divide their budget allocations between partners as it fits their work plan. (For additional knowledge or expertise that is not available within the applicant organization, funds for expert consultation may be included in the "All Other Direct Costs" section of the proposed budget.)

3. Multiple Submissions

The FINI grant program will only accept one application across the three project types per project team under this RFA.

4. Funding Period Limitation

The maximum potential funding period (including any awards transferred from another institution or organization) is limited to 4 years in duration. The funding period will commence on the effective date cited in the award instrument. Any such limitation also applies to subcontracts made under awards subject to a funding period limitation.

5. Change to Policy Regarding Prohibiting Government-Sponsored Recruitment Activities

As of November 1, 2016, all FINI grantees may promote or advertise their FINI grant projects using Federal and/or match funds using any media, including television, radio, and billboards. Regardless of format, however, promotional activities funded with Federal and/or match funds:

- must present factual statements intended to inform, not to persuade,
- may include locational information about retailer partner outlets (i.e., the address of retail food stores participating in the grantee's project),
- may also specify that retailer partner outlets accept SNAP and EBT (this includes appropriate logo use as outlined at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/SNAP-Logo-Guidance.pdf>, and
- may include information describing the mechanics of the grantee's project (e.g., spend \$1 on fruits or vegetables and earn \$1 to spend on more fruits or vegetables).

Under no circumstances should FINI grantees engage in any activities intended to persuade or recruit individuals to apply for SNAP benefits. The use of Federal and/or match funds to employ personnel tasked with enrolling individuals in SNAP is strictly prohibited. Allowable promotional activities must be limited to factual statements and FINI grantees should generally avoid emotional appeals in their promotional activities.

Pursuant to this change to FINI policy, a television, radio, or billboard advertisement that stated the following would be an allowable expense:

- "Fresh fruits and vegetables are 50% off when you shop with your EBT card at the Main Street Farmers Market. The market is open all day every Wednesday and Friday on the corner of Maple and Elm Streets."

The following example, however, would still be an unallowable expense regardless of format:

- "Sign up to receive SNAP benefits and then you can also get 50% off fresh fruits and vegetables at the Main Street Farmers Market! Eating fruits and vegetables will keep you and your family healthy and happy, so come on down to the market every Wednesday and Friday on the corner of Maple and Elm Streets!"

Any promotional activity that is not considered allowable may be paid for only with a third stream of funds (i.e., neither Federal, nor match funds). If you are unclear as to whether a specific promotional material is acceptable it can be submitted to FINI@fus.usda.gov for review by FNS.

This change pertains only to FINI grant project promotion activities as discussed above. Grant funds, including Federal and match funds, still may not be utilized for actual recruitment activities that directly encourage or assist individuals in applying for or obtaining benefits. Costs associated with actual recruitment activities remain unallowable.

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

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

- the level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities;
- the need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields;
- the need to include other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- the need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations;
- the need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
- the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of FINI grant program will recommend that your project be approved for support from currently available funds or be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

FINI grant program 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.

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

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

We will use the following evaluation criteria for FPPs, FPs, and FLSPs, competing within each category/project type and not across categories, listed in descending order of importance, to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. How well the proposed project advances the primary goal of the FINI grant program which is to test and evaluate projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as

defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase, using effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

All FINI projects must (1) aim to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (2) operate through authorized and reported SNAP retailers per Part I Section D titled “Program Policy”, and in compliance with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (3) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation and facilitate participation through data collection and the use of Data Use Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding as outlined in Part IV Section B titled “Content and Form of Application Submission” and Part I Section D titled “Program Policy”; (4) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives provided under the FINI grant program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 C.F.R. 278.2(b); (5) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities; and (6) applicants proposing projects that require interaction with or modification of EBT systems must submit a letter of support from applicable SNAP State Agencies as part of their grant application. All other applicants are encouraged to, but are not required to, submit letters of support from applicable SNAP State Agencies as part of their grant application.

Note: Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR 278.2(b) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grant.

2. How well the project aligns with and advances FINI grant program priorities, which are to:

- Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants; any grant proposal that includes non-financial incentives (e.g. giveaways of kitchen utensils or cookware) will be subject to providing additional justification prior to approval and would need to explain clearly how it contributes to the overall objectives of the FINI grant program;
- Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- Involves a diversity of types of food stores (e.g., convenience stores, supermarkets, farmers’ markets, etc.)
- Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers (for FPs and FLSPs only);
- Provide locally or regionally produced and fresh fruits and vegetables, especially those culturally appropriate for the target audience; and/or

- Operate in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce Communities.

Identified priorities are factors that will be given additional weight in the evaluation of proposals. In instances where proposals are found to be equally meritorious with the application purpose and priorities, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the FINI grant program priorities.

3. If the grant requesting entity has received USDA grant awards in the past, then demonstrating a history of compliance with grant requirements will be considered when making grant award determinations.
4. The significance of the low-income food security issues that will be addressed by the proposed project, and an informative description of the community, its characteristics, assets, and needs;
5. The appropriateness of the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the project and how these goals will be achieved throughout the project period;
6. The relevance of the experience of the organizations that are involved in the proposed project, including the applicant entity, and the type and extent of support that other organizations will be providing, or the extent to which these organizations demonstrate the capacity to contribute to the overall grant program. The applicant organization demonstrates a history of, commitment to, and/or direct involvement in food security or nutrition incentive projects in low-income communities or in communities with low-income groups, as well as success in actively engaging low-income participants. Benefits of the program will accrue primarily to the low income population. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership reflects the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed activities or similar types of activities. Experience in and connections with the community and a demonstrated dedication to serving low income residents will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard. Professional salaries are in balance with compensation given to low-income residents for their participation in the initiative;
7. The strength of the proposed project's plans and capacity to undertake a self-assessment, collect the minimum core data set (for FPs and FLSPs only) with accuracy and validity, cooperate with and participate in an independent evaluation, share project results in an “exemplary practices” format (see Definition of ‘exemplary practices, page 49.);
8. Evidence is provided to demonstrate that the project is likely to become self-sustaining, e.g., a market analysis or the outlines of a business plan. Projects should identify actual or potential funding sources for continuation of the project after federal funding has ended; and

9. The timeline and budget for accomplishing project goals, objectives, and outcomes is realistic and achievable.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

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

D. Organizational Management Information

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

E. Application Disposition

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

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

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

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

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

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

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

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

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

NIFA Programmatic Contact –

Dr. Jane Clary Loveless; National Program Leader, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2225 Washington, DC 20250-2225; telephone: 202-720-3891; fax: 202-720-9366; e-mail: jclary@nifa.usda.gov.

Dr. Pascale Jean; Director, Division of Nutrition, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2225 Washington DC 20250-2225; telephone: 202-401-2138; fax: 202-401-4888; email: Pascale.Jean@nifa.usda.gov

NIFA Administrative/Business Contact –

Susan Bowman; Awards Management Branch Chief; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2271; Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone 202-401-4324; fax 202-401-6271; e-mail sbowman@nifa.usda.gov.

Adriene Woodin; Awards Management Branch Chief; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2271; Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone 202-401-4320; fax 202-401-6271; e-mail awoodin@nifa.usda.gov.

FNS Evaluation Contact –

Eric Williams; Office of Policy Support; Food and Nutrition Service, USDA; 3101 Park Centre Dr., Alexandria, VA 22302; telephone 703-305-2640; e-mail Eric.Williams@fns.usda.gov.

FNS Policy Contact –

Daniel Cline; Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program; Food and Nutrition Service, USDA; 3101 Park Centre Dr., Alexandria, VA 22302; telephone 703-605-4388; e-mail Daniel.Cline@fns.usda.gov.

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Budget or Project Plans

In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons:

- (i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).
- (ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
- (iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.
- (iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, “Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals,” or 48 CFR Part 31, “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures,” as applicable.
- (v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.
- (vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
- (vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.
- (viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.

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

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

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

C. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR Part 415, Subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

D. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), and 7 CFR 3430 Subpart P Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grant Program for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program. If a conflict exists between the two regulations, the program-specific Administrative Provision is overriding.

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

Community Food Assessment is a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) ventures require participants to pay an annual or seasonal subscription fee, in advance, for a set amount of food (share) that the business expects to produce that year/season; CSA shares are typically made available or delivered during regular intervals (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) during the active (harvest) season; CSAs primarily sell local produce (at minimum the majority, more than 50%, of their sales come from local produce) where local produce is defined as agricultural products, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as meat, fish, dairy, and/or grains grown, gathered, or hunted either within the State where the CSA is headquartered or within 100 miles of the CSA's headquarters (so long as the point of origin is still within the States or territories of the United States of America); a CSA is **NOT** considered a store type but simply a way of doing business; CSAs can be conducted by SNAP-authorized agricultural producers or co-ops.

Emergency Feeding Organization means a public or nonprofit organization that administers activities and projects (including the activities and projects of a charitable institution, a food bank, a food pantry, a hunger relief center, a soup kitchen, or a similar public or private nonprofit eligible recipient agency) providing nutrition assistance to relieve situations of emergency and distress through the provision of food to needy persons, including low-income and unemployed persons. (See 7 U.S.C. 7501).

Exemplary practices means high quality community food security work that emphasizes food security, nutritional quality, environmental stewardship, and economic and social equity.

Expert reviewers means individuals selected from among those recognized as uniquely qualified by training and experience in their respective fields to give expert advice on the merit of grant applications in such fields who evaluate eligible proposals submitted to this program in their respective area(s) of expertise.

Food security means access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times.

Fruits and Vegetables means for the purposes of the incentives provided under these grants (i.e. as used in Section 4208) any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, or oils, and salt (i.e. sodium). See page 11 for details.

Incentives are defined as any financial or non-financial inducements that would increase the purchase and consumption of eligible fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients. See page 11 for details.

Logic model means a systematic and visual way to present and share an understanding of the relationships among resources available to operate a program, and includes: planned activities and anticipated results; and the presentation of the resources, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Outcomes means the changes in the wellbeing of individuals that can be attributed to a particular project, program, or policy, or that a program hopes to achieve over time. They indicate a measurable change in participant knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. For the purposes of this document, ‘impact’ and ‘outcome’ are used interchangeably.

Process evaluation means examining program activities in terms of (1) the age, sex, race, occupation, or other demographic variables of the target population; (2) the program’s organization, funding, and staffing; and (3) its location and timing. Process evaluation focuses on program activities rather than outcomes.

PromiseZone refers to designated high-poverty communities “where the federal government will partner with and invest in communities to create jobs, leverage private investment, increase economic activity, expand educational opportunities, and improve public safety.” See http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/CEDP_PZ.html for more information.

Non-profit Organization means a Nonprofit corporation is a special type of corporation that has been organized to meet specific tax-exempt purposes. To qualify for Nonprofit status, your corporation must be formed to benefit: (1) the public, (2) a specific group of individuals, or (3) the membership of the Nonprofit.

StrikeForce means the “USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative which works to address the unique set of challenges faced by many of America’s rural communities. Through StrikeForce, USDA is leveraging resources and collaborating with partners and stakeholders to improve economic opportunity and quality of life in these areas.” See http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE for more information.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) means the supplemental nutrition assistance program established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 *et seq*).

Value Chain means adding value to a product, including production, marketing, and the provision of after-sales service and incorporating fair pricing to farms. It also involves keeping the final pricing to customers within competitive range. Value chain development, therefore, is a process of building relationships between supplier and buyer that are reciprocal and win-win; instead of always striving to buy at lowest cost.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

FINI grant program information will be made available on the NIFA web site at <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program>.

The following are among the materials available on the web page:

1. General Information
2. Resources, including webinars and FAQs
3. Program Specific Resources