



REQUEST FOR APPLICATION

Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans

Competitive Grants Program

MODIFICATION:

This RFA is an updated version of the FY 2020-FY 2021 solicitation. It includes only the references to FY 2021 funding; FY 2020 references have been eliminated.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| FUNDING YEAR: | Fiscal Year 2021 |
| APPLICATION DEADLINE: | March 23, 2021 |
| LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: | Not Required |
| AVAILABLE FUNDING: | Approximately \$4,850,000 |
| ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: | 10.334 |

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), United States (U.S.) Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA). The Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program (AgVets) is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number 10.334.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

| Task Description | Deadline |
|----------------------|--|
| Application: | Fiscal Year 2021: March 23 , 2021 5:00 P.M. Eastern |
| Letter of Intent: | Not Required |
| Applicants Comments: | Within six months from the issuance of this notice (<i>NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month</i>) |

Stakeholder Input. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and use comments to help meet the requirements of [Section 103\(c\)\(2\) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 \(7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)\)](#). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for AgVets projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

NIFA will use this solicitation to request applications for the AgVets program for Fiscal Year **2021** to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans. **At this time, NIFA requests applications for the FY 2021 funding cycle.** The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2021 is approximately \$4,850,000.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Section 742 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260) provides funds to NIFA for a pilot program to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The USDA and NIFA continue to take a leadership role in assisting veterans who are interested in pursuing careers in agriculture, while also supporting military families in rural America. As military members from diverse backgrounds complete their tours of duty or transition to Veteran status, many return to rural America ready to farm, ranch, and start new businesses. Job and career opportunities can be difficult to locate. Connecting interested military veterans with meaningful employment is key.

The need for workforce development opportunities for Veterans in rural areas corresponds to the need to train a new generation of farmers and ranchers in areas dominated by an aging farm population. Along with higher percentages of rural youth enlisting in the Army when compared to those from more urban areas, America is experiencing demographic changes such as increased numbers of women and minorities serving, and a greater reliance on the National Guard and Reserve in overseas deployments.

The Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) program, Assistance Listing 10.334, specifically targets military veterans interested in pursuing careers across the food and agricultural sector. Equipping veterans with the necessary skills, training, and experience that lead to meaningful employment opportunities in turn strengthens personal finances and rural economies. During FYs 2018-2020, NIFA has funded 29 AGVETS projects. Information about the funded projects is available at [AgVets](#).

Other NIFA programs that include military veterans among various population groups served include [AgrAbility](#) and the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program](#). In addition, military veterans and their families are eligible for most [USDA programs](#).

Handling of baseline data and data collection will be addressed per approved project evaluation or performance measures/outcomes.

Program Purpose: The overarching goal of AgVets is to increase the number of military veterans pursuing knowledge and skills development through comprehensive, hands-on and immersive model farm/ranch programs offered locally or regionally that lead to successful careers in the food and agricultural sector ([see Definitions in Part VIII, D](#)).

eXtension. AgVets encourages (but does not require) projects that develop content suitable for delivery through [eXtension](#).

AgVets is aligned with the [USDA Strategic Goals](#). Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development. Additionally, AgVets contributes to advancing USDA's Veterans in Agriculture task force goals:

1. Transitioning service members and Veterans are aware of opportunities available to them in employment, education, and entrepreneurship (3Es).
2. Transitioning service members and Veterans understand how they can contribute and benefit from the food and agricultural sectors, and to communities in rural America.
3. Veterans know about, and use, programs and incentives offered by USDA.

Additional requirements on expected performance goals, indicators and targets may be required as a condition of award.

Table 2: Program Key Information

| Title | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| Program Code: | AGVETS |
| Program Code Name: | Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans |
| CFDA Number | 10.344 |
| Project Type: | Extension Projects only |
| Grant Type: | Standard Grants only |
| Application Deadline | Fiscal Year 2021: March 23, 2021 |
| Grant Duration: | 36 Months |
| Maximum Award Amount: | Approximately \$250,000 per year for up to 3 years for large standard grants; Approximately \$100,000 per year for up to 3 years for small standard grants |

C. Program Area Description

To help achieve the AgVets Program goal, both small and large standard AgVets grants support new and established local and regional projects that will develop model training programs specifically designed for hands-on farming/ranching/entrepreneurial training for military veterans. These model training programs must:

1. Offer farm, ranch, and agricultural entrepreneurial hands-on training and classroom education through an immersive onsite, **virtual, and/or hybrid** learning experience leading to a comprehensive understanding of successful farm/ranch/business operation/management practices aligned to the veteran cohort’s interests
2. Develop or identify curriculum used, including **new** technologies and innovations that producers can adopt to help manage their operations
3. **Describe the kinds** of education, workshops, tours and instructor-supervised field experiences **offered**
4. Be led and managed by a project team that has experience in one or more areas that include:
 1. Veteran engagement in agricultural **management and leadership**, particularly concerning small and medium-size farms and agribusiness, such as the provision of education and training to veterans and the development of skills leading to job placement and career opportunities in farming and ranching, including access to land, equipment, and capital

2. On-the-job training and education, apprenticeship, and business development activities for veterans pursuing vocational and entrepreneurial interests that support and grow the food supply chain; and/or
3. Efforts to enhance and increase workforce readiness and employment prospects for service-disabled veterans through volunteer engagement and leadership development efforts that promote nature-based reintegration, civic ecology, and earning farm and off-farm income
5. Be led and managed by a project team that has demonstrated competency to implement a project of comparable size and complexity, provide fiscal accountability, collect data, and prepare reports and other necessary documentation
6. Provide support for veteran participation with a special focus on diverse and underrepresented groups. Successful applications will include a sound approach to outreach, selection, and retention of participants
7. Include outreach to veterans who may have previously participated in projects funded by the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program \(BFRDP\)](#) and/or the Outreach and Assistance for [Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Grant Program](#)
8. Connect, as appropriate, with [AgrAbility](#), in the service area identified.
9. Create partnerships and collaborations with academic institutions (including minority-serving and tribal colleges and universities), [Extension Risk Management Education Centers \(ERMES\)](#), [the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network](#), [Regional Rural Development Centers \(RRDCs\)](#), or other regional entities to meet requirements for program and project evaluation and dissemination of findings, recommendations and impacts, including scalability
10. Evaluate the training model and participate in cross-program evaluation to assess the collective impact toward shared performance measures and outcome goals through activities that include Project Team meetings, conference calls, and engagement with federal agency partners as appropriate
11. Ensure results are disseminated through an effective communication plan
12. Align education and training goals with USDA programs and resources to increase awareness and engagement with state and local offices of [the Cooperative Extension Service](#), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD), including potential job and career opportunities within the Department
13. Collaborate with the Department of Veteran Affairs at the regional, state or local level to promote referrals, access to healthcare and other benefits to improve the Veteran experience and quality of service to Veterans
14. Engage with the Small Business Administration and their resourced partners at the regional and local level such as [Veterans Business Outreach Center \(VBOC\) program](#); [Small Business Development Centers \(SBDCs\)](#), [Women's Business Center \(WBCs\)](#), and the Service-Disabled Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program
15. Engage with the [Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service](#)
16. Contribute program information and resources to [Farm Answers](#); and
17. Generate recommendations at the state and/or federal level that strengthen collaboration on transitioning Service members' education, training, and apprenticeship programs,

including use of GI Bill benefits, to promote the food and agricultural sector as a viable career option.

Small and large standard grants will be reviewed by the same panel, and funding can be requested for a three-year project duration. Both small and large standard grant proposals will be evaluated using the same evaluation criteria (see [Part V](#)). The expectations for smaller projects, however, will be commensurate with their size (e.g., smaller audiences, more limited geographic reach, less complex collaborative arrangements) and provide an opportunity for smaller or less experienced organizations to propose projects that have smaller budgets and less complex administration.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for AgVets in FY 2021 is approximately \$4,850,000. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. All applications for FY 2021 should request September 1 project starting dates on all applications. Applications for FY 2021 are limited to the following applications types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definition). Entities with current, active AgVets awards are ineligible to apply.
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include the responses to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).

C. Project and Grant Types

The following describes the types of *projects* or *grants* that are eligible for funding:

1. Project Types. Applicants must propose an extension project.
Extension Projects must conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. Program delivery may range from community-based to national audiences and use communication methods from face-to-face to electronic or combinations thereof. Extension projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, instructional materials and innovative instructional methods appropriate to informal educational programs.

Extension Projects address one or more of the following key strategic actions:

- a. Support non-formal education to increase food and agricultural literacy in adults
- b. Promote science-based agricultural literacy by increasing understanding and use of food and agricultural science data, information, and programs
- c. Build science-based capability in people to engage audiences and enable informed decision making
- d. Develop new applications of instructional tools and curriculum structures that increase technical competency and ensure global competitiveness
- e. Offer non-formal learning programs that increase accessibility to new audiences at the rate at which new ideas and technologies are tested and/or developed at the community-scale; and
- f. Develop programs that increase public knowledge and citizen engagement leading to actions that protect or enhance the nation's food supply, agricultural productivity, environmental quality, community vitality, and/or public health and well-being

2. Grant Types. Applicants must select **the standard grant type**. This is an award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period without the announced intention of providing additional support at a future date. The maximum award for a standard grant is **approximately** \$250,000 per year for three (3) years. The program will also accept applications for smaller grants of no more than \$100,000 per year for three (3) years of project duration.

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

In accordance with sections [2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422](#), institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

AgVets applicants must be nonprofit entities (see Definitions in Part VIII, D). A letter stating the non-profit status should be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.). Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the 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.

Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirement. Project partners and collaborators need not meet the eligibility requirement. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the successful completion of the project. Applications submitted by individuals are not eligible for consideration under any category applicable to AgVets.

Fiscal Agent:

If an applicant 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.). In the event an application is recommended for funding, NIFA will request that both the applicant or institution/organization and the fiscal agent organization submit complete management information (see Part V, D.).

Applicants for AgVets must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or, preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's [Grants Overview](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – Duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's [Grants Overview](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No Match Required - AgVets has ***NO*** matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part II § 1** of the [NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide](#) (Application Guide) contains detailed information regarding the Grants.gov registration process.

Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

| Steps | Action |
|------------------------------|--|
| Step One: Register | <i>New Users</i> to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here). |
| Step Two: Download Adobe | Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements) |
| Step Three: Find Application | Using this funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-OP-008118 search for application here: Opportunity Package . |
| Step Four: Assess Readiness | Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization’s readiness to submit an electronic application. |

Table 4: Help and Resources

| Grants.gov Support | NIFA Support |
|--|---|
| Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer based support: Grants.gov iPortal <i>Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays.</i> | Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays Email: policy@usda.gov |

B. Content and Form of the Application

The [Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the [Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA’s review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that

meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

| Instruction | References (All references are to the <u>Application Guide</u>) |
|---|--|
| Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format. | Part III § 3 |
| Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format. | Part III § 6.1 |
| Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission. | Part VII and |
| Follow the submission instructions. | Part IV § 1.5 |
| Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R. | Part IV § 1.5 |
| Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support, and keep a record of the correspondence. | N/A |
| Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 30 days of the application deadline. | N/A |

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V § 2** and **Part V § 2.17** of the [Application Guide](#) for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V § 3** of the [Application Guide](#).

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V § 4** of the [Application Guide](#).

1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of AgVets. See **Part V § 4.7** of the [Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.

The Summary/Abstract is limited to 250 words and must be single-spaced.

2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN – PDF Format is Required). For Small and Large Standard Grants, the PN must not exceed 16 *1.5 spaced* pages of written text, including figures and tables (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit.

Your application will be reviewed and scored according to the quality of your responses to the requirements in Sections A-F detailed below. In developing the Project Narrative

section of your application, use the sections headings listed below. Indicate the Section letter and number in your response, e.g., type “A.1”, “A.2”, etc., before your response to each question. Please do not combine two or more questions or refer to another section of the Project Narrative in your response, such as indicating that the response for B.2 is in C.7.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

a. Introduction:

The introduction should include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) of the proposed project. Justify the need for the program by identifying the target audience and explaining their needs (military and veteran population, service disability, region, workforce opportunity: as defined by the Economic Research Service as being farm dependent, primarily based on industry wage and employment, or have employment in agriculture or other natural resource-based industries that is above the national average, structure of the particular industry being targeted and associated job skills/training needed, critical barriers such as access to land, equipment, and capital, etc.); and by briefly summarizing, as appropriate to the respective scope of work proposed, how the program has and will offer a comprehensive, immersive learning experience that becomes a model for veterans pursuing opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness, and facilitates connections to USDA field offices, including Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Rural Development, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration and/or other federal entities at the regional, state or local level. If necessary, provide a map or schematic of the model farm/ranch or business training facility, including its geographic reach (See Part VIII.D. Definitions). Show evidence that the project has a clear plan to recruit and seek qualified referrals to the project to meet the projected number of veterans served. As a pilot, discuss how the project builds upon or relates to other models or systems that support Service Members transitioning to veteran status. **Describe how the program will benefit rural communities and economies.** All works cited should be referenced. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria (see Part V.B): Relevancy.)

b. Objectives and Outcomes:

Concisely present the goals, associated objectives and expected outputs and outcomes of the project in relation to the audience and needs identified in the introduction. Provide the number of veterans that will be served. Estimate how many of them will attain specific, anticipated knowledge gains or actions (e.g., job placement and career advancement in farming and ranching, vocational and entrepreneurial achievements across the food supply chain; or volunteer and workforce readiness opportunities for service-disabled veterans) and demonstrate how program participants have been informed about and connected with resources that can assist their chosen endeavors. Discuss whether and how this program can be adapted to other regions, communities and/or agricultural systems. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit.)

c. Approach:

The activities proposed to achieve each objective must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the 16 pages for this section. Specifically, this section must include the following:

- i. Description of the activities proposed for each objective
- ii. Timeline of the proposed project, including activities and major outputs and associated outcomes for each year of the project
- iii. How and where the activities will be provided and the appropriateness of the approach for the veteran audience served
- iv. The referral and recruitment process for the veteran audience, including past and prospective focus on disabled, diverse, and underrepresented groups as well as how you will identify possible challenges to your proposed strategy and your plan to address those challenges
- v. Description of the pilot farm/ranch/agribusiness, including acreage, facilities and equipment, spectrum of agricultural activities offered; e.g., row crops, livestock, orchards, gardens, apiaries, commercial kitchens, ag engineering
- vi. Description of any non-formal curriculum, programs, resources and other materials developed/used
- vii. Description of the outreach and selection process for students who will be provided support to participate in training
- viii. Demonstration of engagement with federal agency partners at the regional, state, and/or local level
- ix. How will the project, and its partnerships and collaborations be sustained beyond the life of the grant (e.g., plans for eventual self-support or institutionalization or other sources of support)? If there are no plans to sustain the effort, explain why not, and how the impact of the project will be lasting
- x. What makes this pilot unique or different from existing similar efforts, if any
- xi. Barriers that may be encountered and limitations to proposed procedures, and how you will address them. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit: Achievability)

d. Personnel and Resources:

Describe in detail the Key Personnel's experience working with military veterans and the ability to provide effective education, training, outreach, and mentoring programs through a comprehensive, immersive farm/ranch field experience. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project, and how they promoted workforce development in the agricultural sector. This information may include: the years and locations of prior activities; number of training assistance or education activities previously carried out; number of participants and graduates from the program, including special populations; success rate in completing the program; percentage of graduates who are still engaged in agricultural production and related fields; and/or percentages of those who improved their operations. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages (of the Project Narrative) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Expertise and track record; Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel.)

e. Plan for Outcome Based Reporting:

Third-party evaluators are required. Be sure the budget reflects work to be completed by professional evaluators. Participatory evaluation, and formative as well as summative evaluation, are encouraged. All projects must describe methods and resources for documenting and evaluating their outcomes and impacts. Clearly identify a minimum of two expected outcomes within the life of the project and explain the plan to document and evaluate these outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include:

- i. A completed logic model or alternative schematic that illustrates the causal linkages between planned activities and desired outcomes. A logic model template and explanation of its components can be located at [Integrated Programs' Logic Model Planning Process](#).
In addition, see [CYFAR](#) for a program example
- ii. A description of anticipated outcomes, their significance, and potential beneficiaries
- iii. A list and description of project performance measures (also referred to as indicators of success) by which your progress will be measured and success determined. Applicants for Standard grants that include instruction in farm financial management are also strongly encouraged to employ the applicable evaluation instruments available in the Farm & Ranch Business Health Assessment as individuals enter and exit the respective pilot programs (see [Other Resources](#)).
- iv. Identify who will be responsible for overseeing and measuring performance for the project and link to the overall project plan and timeline for completion
- v. Indicate the amount of funding that will be set aside for monitoring and performance measurement

Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the 16 pages (of the Project Narrative) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process.)

f. Management, Collaboration and Partnership Plan:

A clear management plan **must be provided** that describes the roles and functions of all partnerships, collaborators and organizations, **involved in** the proposed project. Strong partnerships among complementary organizations with shared leadership are essential to successful and sustainable projects, see “Definitions” (Part VIII.D) for definitions of Partnership and Collaborator. Include time allocated by each partner for attainment of objectives; key roles of each partner and collaborator; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance and partnerships. Describe the plans for coordination, communication, data-sharing and reporting among members of the project team and stakeholder groups. Describe the commitment of the project team to this project; and how the partnership and its impact will be sustained beyond the period of the award. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. In addition, letters of commitment signed by the AR of the partnering organization demonstrating that the partners involved have agreed to

abide by the Management Plan must be provided (see “Other Attachments” below).
(Related evaluation criteria: Partnerships and collaboration; Achievability.

The following summarizes the sections of the Project Narrative for AgVets applications, suggests an approximate number of pages to allocate to each section, and shows the evaluation criteria most relevant to each section:

Table 6: AgVets Project Narrative Summary

| Narrative Section | Suggested Number of Pages | Related Evaluation Criteria (see Part V, B. of this RFA) |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Introduction | 2 | Relevancy |
| Objectives and Outcomes | 2 | Technical merit |
| Approach | 4 | Technical merit; Achievability |
| Personnel and Resources | 2 | Expertise and track record of the applicants; Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities and instrumentation |
| Plan for Outcome Based Reporting | 4 | Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, and the communication of findings, logic model and results beyond the immediate target audience |
| Management and Collaboration Plan | 2 | Partnerships and collaboration; Achievability |
| Total Narrative | 16 total pages | N/A |
| Response to Previous Review (if resubmission) | 1 additional | Responsiveness to previous comments and recommendations by reviewers |

- g.** Response to previous review: The response to previous review must not exceed *1 single-spaced* page. This does not count towards the 16-page limit for the PN. Applicants should provide a clear statement acknowledging comments from the previous review, indicating revisions, rebuttals, etc. This response is a critical part of the screening criteria. Furthermore, the revised application should clearly indicate the changes that have been made in the project. If more than one page is required, additional responses/pages are counted as part of the 16-page limit of the Project Narrative.

Applications will not be accepted for review if they do any of the following:

- i. Exceed the maximum federal budget request for the type of application proposed (\$250,000 per year for three (3) years for large standard grants; \$100,000 per year for three (3) years for small standard grants);
- ii. Propose objectives or approach that does not fit the purpose and scope of the AGVETS Program;
- iii. Exceed the maximum pages allowed for **the** Project Narrative;
- iv. Failure to submit documents in portable document format (pdf); and

- v. Failure to include any of the following items:
 - a. Introduction;
 - b. Objectives and Outcomes;
 - c. Approach;
 - d. Personnel and Resources;
 - e. Plan for Outcome Based Reporting; and
 - f. Management, Collaboration, and Partnership Plan
3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V § 4.12** of the [Application Guide](#).
- a. Commitment Letters. PDF attachment(s). No page limits. Letters of commitment from all partners (signed by the AR of the partnering organization) stating that the partners involved have agreed to their stated roles in the project and have agreed to abide by the Management Plan. Letters from other organizations or people whose participation is important to the success of the project, committing those collaborators and partners to specific roles, are also encouraged. Title the attachment(s) as ‘Letter of Commitment – Organization Name’ in the document header and save file as ‘LetterofCommitment_OrganizationName’. Other more general letters of support (i.e., from those who are not committing to a specific role in the project) are not needed and should not be included. See [AgVets Sample Letter](#) for an example of a commitment letter.
 - b. Fiscal Agent Letter. See Part III.A. 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’.
 - c. Non-profit Status Letter. See Part III.A.

Do not add any other attachments not specifically requested in this RFA. Specifically, do not attach examples of curricula or other appendices. Attaching additional narrative or figures or tables other than those specifically requested in this RFA will result in disqualification from review.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (*Expanded*). See **Part V § 5** of the [Application Guide](#) for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see **Part V § 6** of the [Application Guide](#)).

R&R Budget. See **Part V § 7** of the [Application Guide](#).

- 1. Indirect costs (IDC) – See [Part IV § C](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V 7.9** of the [Application Guide](#) for additional information.

Data Management Plan. A DMP is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see [Part V § B](#) of this RFA, [Part III § 3.1 of the Application Guide](#) and [NIFA’s Data Management Plan](#)).

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part VI § 1** of the [Application Guide](#).

1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name “Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) Competitive Grants Program” and the program code “AGVET”. Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part VI § 1.8** of the [Application Guide](#).

Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. This is required for corporate applicants. See **Part VI § 2** of the [Application Guide](#) for a description of the term, “corporation.”

C. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

1. the sum of an institution’s negotiated indirect cost rate and the indirect cost rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates.

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee’s negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of number two is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum indirect cost allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing (see 7 CFR 3430.52(b)). Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections 408 and 410 of 2 CFR 200.

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this RFA to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates 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 scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements using a review panel (see [NIFA Peer Review Process](#)).

Scientific Peer Review Process:

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel 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 NIFA will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or 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.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

Conflicts of interest. NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

B. Evaluation Criteria

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA. Each evaluation criteria are listed below and in priority order of importance:

1. **Partnerships and Collaborations will be reviewed to determine** to what extent the application represents a substantial and effective collaborative network or partnership of public and/or private entities. Reviewers will evaluate whether or not the proposal includes the necessary partnerships to meet the training and workforce development needs of veterans, and whether the project makes appropriate use of the expertise and other strengths of each of the partners. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners.
2. **Relevancy will be evaluated based on the** explanation and relevant documentation that demonstrate that the project is directed toward increasing the numbers of veterans seeking and securing educational, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the food and agriculture sector. In addition, the relevancy will be evaluated by the description of the necessity of the project based on the needs identified for the target audience, the inclusion of veterans in the conceptualization and development of project activities, and the degree to which the project builds upon past or current work or partnerships examining veteran workforce needs.
3. **Technical merit** will be evaluated on the basis of:
 - a. Clarity and delineation of objectives, activities and outcomes
 - b. Conceptual adequacy of the proposed activities to meet the needs of the targeted audience including suitability and feasibility of the approach (e.g., social, economic and cultural relevance, distance based versus face-to-face)
 - c. Innovation and originality of objectives and activities
 - d. Expected performance targets, outcomes and impacts as indicated in the Plan for Outcome Based Reporting
 - e. Adaptability to other locations, communities, and/or agricultural products and technologies
 - f. Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the grant, or a compelling explanation of how the project impact will be lasting if the collaboration itself is not sustained; and
 - g. Reasonableness of the budget for planned activities (i.e., whether the budget matches logically with the program described in the narrative)
4. **Achievability is based on the review of the** probability of success of the project. The probability of success includes the appropriate level of originality, target audience and budget for each activity. The extent to which the applicant identifies potential pitfalls and how they will be addressed is also included. There should be sufficient time commitment of all project directors and co-directors for the stated project activities, including project management. The plans for management and collaborative arrangements of the proposed project should be adequate, e.g., sufficient time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key participants and collaborators; plan for decision-making; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, and collaborative efforts.

5. **Expertise and track record of the applicants is based on** the demonstrated expertise of the project team. This includes successful multi-year experience in education, outreach, mentoring and/or technical assistance addressing Veteran workforce concerns, especially related to food and agriculture. The successful multi-year experience can be demonstrated by the number of training, assistance, or education activities previously carried out; number of participants or graduates of the program, success rate and their current occupation; the number of years a program or activity has been offered. The adequacy of the qualifications of the project director and team to conduct the proposed project activities and to evaluate project outcomes must be demonstrated. The applicant's demonstration of experience and competence in serving the needs of the identified target audience are also evaluated under this criterion.
6. **Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, data management plan, and the communication of findings and results beyond the immediate target audience is based on** the expertise and time commitment of evaluation team members who have agreed to serve or who have been identified.
7. **Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation is based on the** expertise of consultants and collaborators, sufficiency of the educational facilities and equipment for the proposed on-site and distance education and outreach methods.

C. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information relating to an applicant prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only have to update their information if they had previously provided the information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, 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, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

D. Application Disposition

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and 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 must 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, 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E](#).

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in [2 CFR 200.211](#) (see [NIFA's Terms and Conditions](#)).

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the [award terms and conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

Grantees will be expected to provide the following information in REEport, NIFA's reporting system:

1. A brief statement of the issue or problem that the project addresses and why the issue is significant; (**non-technical summary**)
2. A description of the activity or activities being taken to address the issues, including the number of anticipated and actual beneficiaries (where applicable)
3. A description of the changes in knowledge, behavior, or condition that occurred, supported by quantitative and qualitative data

Additionally, grantees will be required to submit regular progress reports and a final technical report to NIFA. The agency depends on the information provided in these reports to assess progress toward NIFA's strategic and programmatic goals; develop and justify budget requests; and, communicate the value of the work of NIFA's partners to the U.S. Congress and the American people. As shrinking budgets result in more competition for Federal and State funds, it is imperative that NIFA has rigorous data to demonstrate the relevance of its programs and the effectiveness of our partners who implement NIFA-funded programs.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

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.

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 (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring);
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award;
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project;
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), 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, unless waived by the federal awarding agency,
5. [Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([§200.75 Participant support costs](#));
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [§200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
8. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity; and
9. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of [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](#).

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Programmatic Contacts

| Name | Email | Telephone |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| Brent Elrod | richard.elrod@usda.gov | 202-445-5456 |
| Crystal Kyle | crystal.kyle@usda.gov | 816-908-3177 |

Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

For administrative questions related to

- Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
- Other RFA or application questions, please email policy@usda.gov
- Awards under this RFA, please email awards@usda.gov

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| Name | Acronyms |
|--|-----------------|
| Authorized Representative | AR |
| Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998 | AREERA |
| Coordinated Agricultural Project | CAP |
| Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance | CFDA |
| Center of Excellence | COE |
| Data Management Plan | DMP |
| Indirect Costs | IDC |
| National Institute of Food and Agriculture | NIFA |
| Request for Application | RFA |
| Research, Education, and Economics | REE |
| United States Department of Agriculture | USDA |

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to 7 CFR 3430 [Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

| Terms | Definitions |
|-------------------------|--|
| Collaborator | A person or an organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project but is not immediately connected to the management of the project. |
| Food and Agriculture | The term food and agriculture refers to extension project types in food and fiber, agricultural, renewable natural resources, forestry, and physical and social sciences. |
| Matching | The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources. |
| Military Veteran | A person who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and/or who was discharged or released from the service under conditions other than dishonorable. |
| Model Farms or Ranches | Sites that enroll veterans in comprehensive, immersive training programs that offer a blend of formal education and instructor-supervised field experience leading to practical knowledge gain and experience in production agriculture and/or business and entrepreneurial skills necessary to obtain employment or start/manage a business in the agricultural sector. Such farms or ranches may offer a full- or part-time residency component. |
| New Application | An application not previously submitted to a program. |
| Non-Profit Organization | <p>The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, 2 CFR part 200, defines the term “nonprofit organization” as follows:</p> <p>Nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization, <u>not including IHEs</u>, that:</p> <p>(a) Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest;</p> <p>(b) Is not organized primarily for profit; and</p> <p>(c) Uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operations of the organization</p> |
| Partnership | A relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project. |

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Performance Target | A specific, verifiable change in people’s actions or conditions. It defines how many people will change and what degree of change constitutes success. |
| Producer | An individual, family, or other entity in the U.S. engaged in the business of agriculture, crop, livestock, forestry, and range production, management and marketing. |
| Regions | <p>(1) The Northeast region consists of the 12 Northeast States and the District of Columbia (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia);</p> <p>(2) The Southern Region consists of 13 States plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma);</p> <p>(3) The North Central Region consists of 12 States (Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota); and</p> <p>(4) The Western Region consists of 12 States and the American Territories in the Pacific (Hawaii, Alaska, Washington State, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Micronesia)</p> |
| Resubmitted Application | A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded. |
| Veteran Farmer or Rancher | A farmer or rancher who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and/or who was discharged or released from the service under conditions other than dishonorable. |