



# **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

## **American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program**

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year 2022

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 1, 2022

ANTICIPATED FUNDING: Minimum of \$25,000,000; maximum funding will depend on quality of applications received

AVERAGE AWARD RANGE: \$500,000 minimum and up to \$3,500,000 maximum for 5 years.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-OP-009004

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.234

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not Required

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture

**Assistance Listing:** The American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.234.

**Table 1:** Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
<b>Application:</b>	5:00 P.M. Eastern, <b>June 1, 2022</b> [Ref to <a href="#">Part I § C</a> of this RFA]
<b>Letter of Intent:</b>	Not Required
<b>Applicants Comments:</b>	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

**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](mailto:Policy@usda.gov) (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program RFA.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), through Section 1006 of the American Rescue Plan, is authorized to establish technical assistance and other programs to ensure improved understanding of USDA programs and services.

The goal of this program is to fund organizations, to be known as Cooperators, that will collaborate with USDA on the delivery of targeted technical assistance and related activities to achieve future outcomes of improved equitable participation of farmers, ranchers and forest land owners in USDA programs and services.

The funded Cooperators will provide ongoing coordination and substantial involvement with USDA to ensure that the plans for program development, curriculum development, deployment, and evaluation of impact are closely coordinated with USDA. Cooperators are required to coordinate with all other recipients of Section 1006 technical assistance resources in a manner as determined by USDA. Individuals and groups that are the ultimate recipients of the technical assistance must be economically distressed and/or underserved communities, including socially disadvantaged producers, farmers and ranchers with limited access to resources, veterans, and other key targeted individuals and communities.

This RFA solicits Cooperative Agreement applications. This notice identifies the objectives for the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program including program priorities, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program cooperative agreement.

**USDA anticipates provided a minimum of \$25,000,000 in funding and there is no anticipated maximum level of funding. Funding levels will depend on the quality and scope of the applications received and deemed eligible for funding.**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 4**

**TABLE OF TABLES..... 5**

**PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION ..... 6**

A. Legislative Authority ..... 6

B. Purpose and Priorities ..... 6

C. Program Area Description ..... 7

**PART II. AWARD INFORMATION ..... 11**

A. Available Funding..... 11

B. Application Restrictions..... 11

C. Project and Grant Types..... 11

**PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION..... 12**

A. Eligibility Requirements ..... 12

B. Cost Sharing or Matching ..... 12

**PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION ..... 13**

A. Method of Application..... 13

B. Content and Form of the Application ..... 13

C. Funding Restrictions ..... 19

**PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS ..... 20**

A. NIFA’s Evaluation Process..... 20

B. Evaluation Criteria ..... 20

C. Organizational Management Information..... 22

D. Application Disposition ..... 22

**PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION ..... 23**

A. General..... 23

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements..... 23

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements ..... 23

**PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION ..... 25**

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget ..... 25

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards ..... 25

C. Regulatory Information..... 25

**APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT..... 26**

**APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS..... 27**

**APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS ..... 28**

## TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines.....	2
Table 2: Program Key Information.....	7
Table 3. Steps to Obtain Application Materials.....	13
Table 4: Help and Resources .....	13
Table 5: Key Application Instructions.....	14

## **PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Legislative Authority**

Section 1006 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (hereafter referred to as the Act) ([Pub. L. 117-2](#)), as amended, authorizes the United States of Agriculture (USDA), to provide funding for Cooperators to deliver technical assistance and support for economically distressed and/or underserved communities, including socially disadvantaged producers, farmers and ranchers with limited access to resources, veterans, and other key targeted individuals and communities.

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

The primary goal of American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program is to ensure improved understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of USDA programs and services among underserved farmers, ranchers, forest land owners and operators through supporting the organizational delivery of technical assistance projects and establishment of technical assistance networks. USDA is authorized to support and facilitate the establishment of technical assistance projects toward this goal. Projects must provide a range of technical assistance services to underserved agricultural producers. The term “agricultural producer” is used to refer to agricultural farmers, ranchers, and private forest land owners and operators.

Underserved communities of agricultural producers have not received the amount of specialized technical support that would benefit the launch, growth, resilience and success of their agricultural enterprises. These audiences are more likely to operate smaller, lower-revenue farms, have weaker credit histories and may lack clear title to their agricultural land, which increases difficulty in securing loans to own or operate their businesses and to ensure the success and resiliency of their operations<sup>1</sup>. Advocacy groups have also reported these audiences have lower awareness of credit options and lending requirements, particularly for beginning farmers and recent immigrants. USDA has comparatively few programs directed at supporting specialty crop production, which is a predominant crop production choice for many of these producers and existing livestock programs may not always be designed to focus on the needs of small, diversified farms and ranches. Common barriers experienced by these underserved audiences include challenges with accessing federal agricultural programs including communication about programs, problems with the application process, lack of standardization and transparency, limited knowledge on qualification requirements for all programs, and complicated reporting requirements. Additional common barriers a robust team of cooperators can assist USDA in addressing include enhanced business and financial management training, expanded risk identification and mitigation strategies, greater use of land use tools, improved new market access identification and planning, understanding tax and legal issues facing the farm or ranch operation, as well as climate mitigation and food safety strategies uniquely focused on the needs of underserved producers.

To address these challenges, recommendations for improvement include facilitating close collaborations with community leaders and agricultural organizations, implementing grassroots strategies, developing targeted communication approaches at the local, state, and federal levels,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2019). Agricultural Lending: Information on Credit and Outreach to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Is Limited Retrieved from: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-539-highlights.pdf>

fostering transparency, greater responsiveness to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, and bolstering evaluation of outreach and technical assistance outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

In this program, USDA will fund Cooperators, who will work collaboratively with USDA and with other cooperators to deliver targeted outreach and technical assistance programs addressed to meet the needs of underserved agricultural producers through a cooperative agreement. No agreement activities will be duplicative of other activities currently undertaken by the organization (Cooperator) that are supported financially by USDA.

Applications from partnerships and collaborations that are led by nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education with specialized expertise and a proven track record in working with underserved agricultural producers and/or the specific content for technical assistance are encouraged.

The American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Plan goals:

1. Strategic Goal 1: Ensure USDA Programs Are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, With Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service;
2. Strategic Goal 3: Promote American Agricultural Products and Exports; and
3. Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development

**Table 2:** Program Key Information

Title	Description
<b>Program Code:</b>	ARP
<b>Program Code Name:</b>	ARP-Technical Assistance Investment Program
<b>Financial Assistance Listing</b>	10.234
<b>Project Type:</b>	Technical Assistance
<b>Grant Type:</b>	Cooperative Agreement
<b>Application Deadline</b>	June 1, 2022
<b>Agreement Duration:</b>	60 Months
<b>Minimum Award Amount</b>	\$500,000
<b>Maximum Award Amount:</b>	\$3,500,000

### **C. Program Area Description**

NIFA is soliciting applications under the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program.

The USDA will work cooperatively with the Cooperator as they provide enhanced outreach and technical assistance during the proposed project period of five years, and as they work towards successful completion of the purposes and activities outlined in the Statement of Work.

### **Program Requirements**

For the purposes of this program, technical assistance is defined as targeted services and support collectively designed to improve understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

USDA programs and services among underserved farmers, ranchers, forest land owners and operators through a range of activities, including but not limited to: strategies to identify unique needs and gaps in access, knowledge, and services; specialized consultation; training; coaching; capacity building; and mentoring focused on relevant topics including effectively accessing USDA programs and personnel, agricultural production, agriculture credit, rural development, financial literacy, risk management, mediation, cooperative development, land access. Such technical assistance may be delivered at the individual and organizational levels through one-on-one consultation, small group facilitation, or large group meeting via in person or by phone, email, or other online methods such as Web-conferencing.

Outreach, in contrast, helps the target audience identify the programs and services at USDA that are appropriate for their farming, ranching or forest land operations. Technical assistance, as described above, more deeply connects the programs and services to the needs of the producer and their operation and goes beyond merely identifying available services. The applicant may build in ongoing needs assessments of their target audience as an output/activity of their funded project.

To increase the likelihood of effectiveness, the development of the proposed technical assistance activities should be guided by the following set of principles:

1. **Collaborative.** Foster engagement and close collaborations with community leaders, agricultural organizations, and relevant stakeholders to develop and implement targeted activities. The applicant will determine their relevant stakeholder communities and connect community needs to targeted activities. The project will also embed collaboration with USDA in new ways to meet the needs of the targeted audience.
2. **Systematic.** Utilize a sequential, progressive approach to service delivery that addresses the needs of the target audience as identified through on-going technical support.
3. **Targeted.** Determine where technical assistance will have the greatest impact.
4. **Adaptive.** Allow for flexibility in service delivery as new needs or challenges emerge.
5. **Customized.** Respond to the unique needs of the targeted audiences and organizations.
6. **Results-driven.** Identify measures that indicate success toward goals that will lead to greater success of the target audience to be served by the activities and to greater access to USDA programs and services over time.

Underserved producers include those individuals and communities who have not received benefits and USDA program access equitably as determined by the Secretary, per the Act. Applicants are encouraged to consider and include youth-related and/or beginning farmer and rancher activities within the scope of their project, where applicable.

### **Cooperator Responsibilities**

Individuals and groups that are ultimate recipients of the technical support activities must be economically distressed/underserved farmers, ranchers or forest land owners or operators, including socially disadvantaged producers, farmers and ranchers with limited access to resources, veterans, and other key targeted communities. As part of a team of interrelated USDA cooperators, the applicant must agree to provide an array of technical assistance specialized services, appropriate for the targeted audiences. These services will include outreach, financial training, mediation access, cooperative development training and support, capacity building



training, land access technical support, technical assistance concerning agriculture production, agriculture credit, and rural development to underserved farmers, ranchers or forest land owners, as appropriate for the audiences. The activities will be, in partnership with other entities with specialized knowledge of either the communities of underserved agricultural producers and/or the specific content for technical assistance.

The Cooperator must discuss in their application for funding how they will achieve metrics for their activities. Metrics shall include, but not be limited to, identification of the agricultural producers who were reached through these efforts; the actual impact made upon those producers and land owners and their farming and ranching operations; the measurable increase in knowledge and understanding of the producers with whom they engage; the improvements to business stability, increased or improved access to markets, increased or improved access to land and other related metrics they determine are central to improving the ability of these producers to gain access to programs and services operated by USDA and improve their farming, ranching or forest land enterprises and operations. Each applicant will propose metrics within their application for funding, and, if selected for funding, will engage with USDA to finalize project and program metrics.

The Cooperator will be expected to participate in ongoing coordination with USDA. Substantial involvement from USDA will ensure that the plans for technical assistance, program development, curriculum development, deployment and evaluation of impact are closely coordinated. USDA will substantially engage with the Cooperators in planning and delivery of their activities with the targeted audience. The Cooperator must describe how they will coordinate with USDA to facilitate the use of USDA programs with economically distressed/underserved communities. The Cooperator is also required to coordinate with all other recipients of Section 1006 technical assistance resources in a manner as determined by USDA. USDA will actively engage with the Cooperators as they provide enhanced outreach and technical assistance towards completion of the purposes and activities outlined in the proposal.

In addition, Cooperators will be expected to contribute in the following ways, and the project applicant must discuss each of these expectations and identify how the expectations will be met through their program approach and design:

1. Provide specific assistance in collaboration with USDA and other cooperators that informs equitable program implementation for current producers and responds to the unique needs of farmers and ranchers.
2. Demonstrate the Cooperator's technical assistance model worked to reduce barriers that producers face in accessing desired technical federal assistance through a sound evaluation plan.
3. Assist USDA in addressing longstanding systemic discrimination and barriers to program delivery; responding to the immediate need for direct agricultural business and market planning support to individual producers impacted by the uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to debt and access to capital issues, land use and land tenure issues; and minimizing the impacts of supply chain disruptions to market access.
4. Enhance existing Cooperator technical assistance services to respond to persistent program access, financial planning, market development, and land access technical

support services issues coupled with concerns related to agriculture and food system supply chain concerns that impact underserved producers.

5. Share Cooperator expertise and experiences with other cooperators and USDA to better inform the USDA approach to outreach and technical services and engage in ongoing collaborative activities with USDA and other cooperators.

The Cooperator will incorporate promising and evidence-based practices into their technical assistance services related to financial assistance, market access and market coordination, land/water/equipment access tools and techniques, and key principles related to engagement in building critical agriculture infrastructure.

The Cooperator's workplan must include strategies for providing technical assistance, program development, curriculum development, deployment and evaluation of impact in each area of the planned activities for which the applicant is providing narrative discussion.

The Cooperator must also include an evaluation plan outlining how the outcomes of the proposed program activities will be measured through both quantitative and qualitative methods.

## PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

### A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program in FY2022 is a minimum of \$25,000,000; maximum funding will depend on the scope and quality of applications received. 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.

***New application:*** This is a technical assistance application that has not been previously submitted to NIFA. We will review all new applications to ensure they meet administrative requirements, and all applications will be competitively evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definitions).

### 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 a Technical Assistance Project.  
**Technical Assistance Projects** must propose projects that deliver existing agriculture financial training, agriculture mediation access, outreach to USDA programs and services, agriculture cooperative development training and support, capacity building training, land access technical support, targeted support related to agriculture production, and/or agriculture credit and capital access, within a comprehensive program designed to reach targeted audiences of underserved agricultural producers.
2. Grant Types. Applicants must select the **cooperative agreement** 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 minimum award is \$500,000 and the maximum award is \$3,500,000 for a five-year cooperative agreement.

## **PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligibility Requirements**

Applicants must be domestic nonprofit entities or institutions for higher education (see Definitions in Part VIII, D). A letter stating the nonprofit status should be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.).

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, with the exception of individuals and non-domestic entities. Current Cooperators under Section 1006 of the Act are not eligible to apply as a lead applicant to this funding opportunity, but may serve as cooperators, collaborators and sub-contractors to lead applicants, provided their activities are new, non-duplicative activities. Individuals, non-domestic entities and private, for profit organizations are not eligible to apply to this funding opportunity.

Applicants for the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program must meet all the requirements outlined in this RFA. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline will result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will 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. Only one submission is allowed per eligible organization. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an organization submits duplicate or multiple submissions.

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

**No Match Required** - The American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program 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](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process. The NIFA Grants Application Guide is contained in the specific funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

**Table 3.** Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
<b>Step One: Register</b>	<i>New Users</i> to <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> must register early with <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> prior to submitting an application ( <a href="#">Register Here</a> ).
<b>Step Two: Download Adobe</b>	Download and Install <a href="#">Adobe Reader</a> (see <a href="#">Adobe Software Compatibility</a> for basic system requirements).
<b>Step Three: Find Application</b>	Using this funding opportunity number <b>USDA-NIFA-OP-009004</b> , search for application here: <a href="#">Opportunity Package</a> .
<b>Step Four: Assess Readiness</b>	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
<a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov Online Support</a> Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: <a href="mailto:support@grants.gov">support@grants.gov</a> Self-service customer-based support: <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> <a href="mailto:iPortalgrantapplicationquestions@usda.gov">iPortalgrantapplicationquestions@usda.gov</a> Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except <a href="#">federal holidays</a> .	Email: <a href="mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov">grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov</a>  Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except <a href="#">federal holidays</a>

**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 Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	Part IV
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	Part IV
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part IV
Follow the submission instructions.	Part V
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	Part V
Contact the <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> 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** 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 the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program. 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). The PN must not exceed *twenty (20) 1.5 spaced* pages of written text and up to five (5) *1.5 spaced* additional pages for 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. The PN must include all the following:

- a. **Introduction and justification:** The introduction should include a clear statement of the goal(s) of the proposed project. Justify the need for the program by identifying the target audience and explaining their needs (critical barriers to knowledge of and access to federal agricultural programs), programmatic gaps in existing programs the proposed project intends to address, and any evidence that members of the target audience were or will be involved in conceptualizing the project and designing technical assistance activities. The introduction must also include a discussion of the known agriculture census data concerning the proposed project target audience within the targeted project geographic area(s) of service.

(Relevant evaluation criteria: Relevancy)

- b. **Objectives and Outcomes:** Concisely present the goals, associated objectives and expected outputs and outcomes of the project in relation to the target audience and the target audience needs as identified in the introduction and justification. Cooperators must provide a discussion of the metrics that will be gathered and reported related to their project efforts. Reporting tied to the metrics identified in the application is required on a timetable as determined by USDA.

As applicable, metrics must be provided for the following in addition to any other metrics planned for the project:

- i. Targeted audience(s);
- ii. The type of outreach and technical assistance to be conducted (in person workshops, virtual meetings, etc.);
- iii. Number of outreach and technical assistance activities and number of types of producers reached;
- iv. The preliminary and actual targeted dates of events;
- v. Targeted location for outreach or technical assistance (county, city, state);
- vi. Detailed requested amount for outreach or technical assistance activities;
- vii. General allocation of requested amount for outreach or technical assistance activities;
- viii. Numbers of underserved agricultural producers served and their general geographical location;
- ix. Number of underserved agricultural producers impacted by COVID;
- x. General demographics of those served as appropriate;
- xi. How many underserved agricultural producers have improved their businesses and financial condition;
- xii. How many have developed or improved their business plans and/or marketing plans;
- xiii. How their improvement translates into the success of their operation;
- xiv. How many underserved agricultural producers will make progress towards, securing, and/or maintaining ownership of their land or acquire new land for their farming, ranching or forest land operation;
- xv. How many individuals and families will be able to deal more effectively with heirs' property concerns and fractionated land loss concerns and plan for or

execute changes that positively impact their ability to resolve heirs' property or land fractionation;

- xvi. What new markets are opened or accessed by producers;
- xvii. How many new cooperative businesses or other agricultural-based business enterprises are created or expanded within the targeted producer groups;
- xviii. How many underserved agricultural producers have new knowledge and are applying that knowledge concerning agriculture tax issues;
- xix. How many underserved agricultural producers will be able to retain land or acquire new land;
- xx. How many underserved agricultural producers improve their knowledge of or improve access to and use of key decision support business planning tools tailored to agriculture; and
- xxi. How many underserved agricultural producers are seeking and participating in USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, Farm Service Agency farm loan programs, Rural Development loan or grant programs or any other programs and services administered by USDA.

(Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit)

- c. **Approach:** The activities proposed to achieve each objective must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied to achieve each objective must be clearly described. Specifically, this section must include:
  - i. Description of Activities and Approach: A description of the activities proposed for each objective. Discuss how and where the activities will be provided and the appropriateness of the approach for the target audience.
  - ii. A timeline of the proposed project. The timeline should include major outputs and associated outcomes for each year of the project.
  - iii. Innovation: Include any novel ideas or contributions of the proposed project to technical support providers working within the agriculture sector. Innovative activities are not required but are encouraged by potential applicants.
  - iv. Recruitment and Reach: How will members of the target audience be reached/ recruited / retained in the context of the project activities?
  - v. Sustainability: How will the project, and its partnerships and collaborations, be sustained beyond the life of the agreement (e.g., plans for organizational support or future resource development)? If there are no plans to sustain the effort, explain why not, and how the impact of the project will be lasting.
  - vi. Scalability: Discuss whether and how the approaches and efforts within this project can be adapted or scaled for use across other communities and/or agricultural systems, states, regions, or nationally.
  - vii. Potential Challenges: Describe pitfalls that may be encountered and limitations to proposed procedures, and how you will address the identified or anticipated challenges or pitfalls. Identify possible challenges to your proposed strategy for participant recruitment and how you plan to address those challenges.

(Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit; Achievability.)



- d. **Personnel and Resources:** Describe in detail the Key Personnel associated with the project and their experience and track record in serving the identified audience. In addition, discuss their ability to provide effective technical assistance, training, education, and outreach relevant to improve understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of USDA programs and services among underserved producer communities. Describe in detail the Key Personnel experience in providing financial and business planning technical services, market planning services, mediation services, cooperative development services, and the specific activities identified in the project. For any audience, but particularly for underserved farmers, ranchers and forest land owners, it is very important to have partner(s) who have knowledge and experience working with such audiences, and that such partner(s) be involved in the leadership of the project. Provide evidence of Key Personnel accomplishments and impact relevant to this project and experience with working with identified target audience in this area. Please also describe the organizational and partner resources available to improve the success of the project. Note that if Key Personnel have no or limited experience in working with underserved agricultural producers, the application will not be funded. Experience with the target audiences is required.

(Relevant evaluation criteria: Expertise and track record of the applicant; Achievability)

- e. **Outcome Evaluation Plan and Reporting:** 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 description of anticipated outcomes, their significance, and potential beneficiaries.
  - ii. A list and description of project performance measures and metrics (also referred to as indicators of success) by which your progress will be measured and success determined.
  - ii. Identify who will be responsible for overseeing and measuring performance for the project and link to the overall project plan and timeline for completion.
  - iii. Indicate the amount of funding that will be set aside for monitoring and performance measurement.
  - iv. Plans for reporting, and the communication of findings and results within the target audience and relevant stakeholders.
  - v. Plans for collaboration and commitment to engage with USDA programs and staff to meet technical assistance needs for target audience/s.

(Related evaluation criteria: Relevancy; Adequacy of plans for evaluation, data management plan, and the communication of findings and results beyond the immediate target audience.)

- f. **Management 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. Include time allocated by each partner for attainment of objectives, key roles of each partner and collaborator, and the plan for administration of the proposed project. 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.

Letters of commitment must be provided from all partners (signed by the Authorized Representative of the partnering organization) stating that the partners involved have agreed to their stated roles in the project. In addition, letters of commitment should demonstrate that the partners involved have agreed to abide by the Data Management Plan that must be provided (see “Other Attachments” below). Letters from other organizations or people whose participation is important to the success of the project, committing those collaborators to specific roles, are also encouraged. Title the attachment(s) as ‘Letter of Commitment – Organization Name’ in the document header and save file as ‘Letter of Commitment Organization Name’. The strength, specific roles, and nature of these partnerships, as described in these letters, will be carefully scrutinized by the panel with particular weight given to those that demonstrate equity and long-term sustainability of the partnerships. 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.

(Related evaluation criteria: Partnerships and collaboration; Achievability)

3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V** of the Application Guide.

**R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded).** See **Part V** 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** of the **Application Guide**).

**R&R Budget.** See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

1. Match – No match is required.

If the applicant wishes to submit an application that includes matching, they must list in their *budget justification* the matching sources, the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match, and the total pledged amount. A written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement) is not required. However, applicants are subject to the documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, as specified in [2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(the Uniform Guidance\),”](#) and [7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General](#)

[Award Administrative Provisions.](#)” No additional points or consideration will be given for those applicants offering match to support their project.

2. Indirect costs (IDC) – See [Part IV § C](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V** 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, [NIFA’s Data Management Plan](#)). If you need help in preparing a data management plan or have questions about what constitutes a data management plan for this role (including questions about data privacy, etc.), please contact the NIFA program contacts listed at the end of this RFA.

**Supplemental Information Form.** See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name (American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program and the program code **ARP**. Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part V** 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.” Corporate applicants are not eligible to apply.

### **C. Funding Restrictions**

The cooperator may use a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate if one has been established for their organization, may negotiate one, or elect to use the 10% De Minimis rate outlined in 2 CFR 200.414. If the De Minimis approach is chosen, the 10% rate must be applied consistently across all federal awards until the entity chooses to negotiate an indirect cost rate. For further information, contact Kim Lai at [Kim.Lai@usda.gov](mailto:Kim.Lai@usda.gov).

## **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 set forth in this RFA. All administrative requirements must be met in order for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (see [NIFA Peer Review Process](#)).

#### **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:

1. the level of relevant experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant activities.
2. the need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant fields.
3. 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.
4. the need to include experts from a variety of relevant organizational types and geographic locations.
5. the need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.
6. the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers.
7. the need to ensure institutional balance as part of the evaluation and awarding process.

After the peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of NIFA will recommend the 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 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:

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 to what extent the proposal includes the necessary partnerships to address barriers and improve access to federal

agricultural programs among underserved agricultural producers, delivery of technical support in the areas of financial planning, market planning, cooperative development, and related needs of the target producer communities to be served, and whether the project makes appropriate use of the expertise and other strengths of each of the partners. In addition, 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. Partners and collaborators are required to possess knowledge and considerable experience in designing and delivering technical assistance support to the target audience; failure to evidence critical knowledge of and ongoing work with the target audience may result in lower ranking of the project proposal.

2. **Relevancy** will be evaluated based on the explanation and relevant documentation that demonstrate that the project is directed toward improved understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of USDA programs and services among underserved producer communities. 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 intended audience members and stakeholders in the conceptualization and development of project activities, and the degree to which the project builds upon past or current relevant work or partnerships. Failure to discuss the relevant demographics of the target audience to be served may result in lower ranking of the project proposal.
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 acceptability and feasibility of the approach (e.g., social, economic and cultural relevance, distance-based versus face-to-face activities)
  - c. Innovation and originality of objectives and activities
  - d. Expected performance targets, outcomes and impacts as indicated in the Evaluation Plan
  - e. Scalability and/or adaptability to other locations, communities, and/or agricultural products and technologies
  - f. Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the agreement, 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, collaborative efforts, and relevant, accessible resources.

- 5. Expertise and track record of the applicants** is based on the demonstrated expertise and experience of the project team. This includes experience relevant to increasing knowledge of and facilitating access to federal agricultural programs among underserved agricultural producers through effective technical assistance which could include outreach, mentoring, and consulting activities. The successful experience can be demonstrated by the number of technical assistance activities previously carried out; number of participants in programs or initiatives, success outcomes; and 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. The applicant's team must demonstrate knowledge and experience in key areas including financial planning, market planning, cooperative development, capacity building or other key areas relevant to the target audience.
- 6. Adequacy of plans for evaluation, data management plan, and the communication of findings and results beyond the immediate target audience** is based on the soundness of the evaluation including outlining of appropriate objectives, methodology, timeline, logic model, expected products and results, metrics, measures, as well as dissemination efforts, and the data management plan and the expertise and time commitment of evaluation team members who have agreed to serve or who have been identified.

### **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 fiscally 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 enter into Cooperative Agreements with 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 awarded 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 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**

Applicants, if selected for funding, are required to provide within four weeks of signing of the cooperative agreement, specific information related to target audience, work plan/approach activities and identified metrics and measures aligning with the delivery of work plan activities; and submit quarterly reports of project activities every 90 days to the assigned National Program Leader. This program requires semi and annual reporting to NIFA's REEport System. In addition to the two reports, awardees will be required to submit to the NPL, a first and third quarter report every year for a total of four (4) reports annually. If selected for funding, applicants are also required to provide annual progress reports, and after completion of the work, submit a final report within 90 days to USDA, detailing as applicable:

1. Targeted audience(s);
2. The type of outreach and technical assistance to be conducted (in person workshops, virtual meetings, etc.);
3. Number of outreach and technical assistance activities and number of types of producers reached;
4. The preliminary and actual targeted dates of events;
5. Targeted location for outreach or technical assistance (county, city, state);
6. Detailed requested amount for outreach or technical assistance activities;
7. General allocation of requested amount for outreach or technical assistance activities;
8. Numbers of underserved agricultural producers served and their general geographical location;
9. Number of underserved agricultural producers impacted by COVID;
10. General demographics of those served as appropriate;

11. How many underserved agricultural producers have improved their businesses and financial condition;
12. How many have developed or improved their business plans and/or marketing plans;
13. How their improvement translates into the success of their operation;
14. How many underserved agricultural producers will make progress towards, securing, and/or maintaining ownership of their land or acquire new land for their farming, ranching or forest land operation;
15. How many individuals and families will be able to deal more effectively with heirs' property concerns and fractionated land loss concerns and plan for or execute changes that positively impact their ability to resolve heirs' property or land fractionation;
16. What new markets are opened or accessed by producers;
17. How many new cooperative businesses or other agricultural-based business enterprises are created or expanded within the targeted producer groups;
18. How many underserved agricultural producers have new knowledge and are applying that knowledge concerning agriculture tax issues;
19. How many underserved agricultural producers will be able to retain land or acquire new land;
20. How many underserved agricultural producers improve their knowledge of or improve access to and use of key decision support business planning tools tailored to agriculture; and
21. How many underserved agricultural producers are seeking and participating in USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service programs, Farm Service Agency farm loan programs, Rural Development loan or grant programs or any other programs and services administered by USDA.

Awardees are required to provide quarterly reports to USDA and attend ongoing collaborative meetings established and hosted by USDA to coordinate all cooperators receiving support under Section 1006 of the Act. All awardees are also required to collaborate with other agreement awardees. USDA will actively engage with the Cooperators as they provide enhanced outreach and technical assistance towards completion of the purposes and activities outlined in the proposal.



## **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. [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 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](#). This program is also not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 13175, which requires consultation with tribal officials.

## APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

### Program Contacts

Name	Email
Ahlishia Shipley	<a href="mailto:Ahlishia.Shipley@usda.gov">Ahlishia.Shipley@usda.gov</a>
Paularie N. Knox	<a href="mailto:Paularie.Knox@usda.gov">Paularie.Knox@usda.gov</a>

For administrative questions related to;

1. Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email [grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)
3. Awards under this RFA, please email [awards@usda.gov](mailto:awards@usda.gov)

### U.S. Postal 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

## APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Acronyms</b>
American Rescue Plan Act	ARPA or Act
Authorized Representative	AR
Data Management Plan	DMP
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.
Cooperative Agreement	A cooperative agreement reflects a relationship between the U.S. Government and a recipient and is used when the government's purpose is to assist the intermediary in providing goods or services to the authorized recipient. Substantial involvement is expected between the executive agency and the State, local government, or other recipient when carrying out the activity outlined in the agreement.
Institution of Higher Education, 20 U.S.C. § 1001(a)	An educational institution in any State that- For purposes of this chapter, other than subchapter IV, the term “institution of higher education” means an educational institution in any State that- (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate, or persons who meet the requirements of section 1091(d) of [title 20]; (2) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree, or awards a degree that is acceptable for admission to a graduate or professional degree program, subject to review and approval by the Secretary; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted preaccreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary for the granting of preaccreditation status, and the Secretary has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.
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.

New Application	An application not previously submitted to a program.
Non-Profit Organization	The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, 2 CFR part 200, defines the term “nonprofit organization” as follows: Nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization, <u>not including institutions of higher education</u> , that: (a) Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (b) Is not organized primarily for profit; and (c) Uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operations of the organization
Outcome	A specific, verifiable change in people’s actions or conditions. It defines how many people will change and what degree of change constitutes success.
Partnership	A relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.
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.
Technical Assistance	Targeted services and support collectively designed to improve understanding of and equitable participation in the full range of USDA programs and services among underserved farmers, ranchers, forest land owners and operators through a range of activities