

# **Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program**

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**2013 Request for Applications**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 7, 2013**



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND BENCHMARKING (FBMB) COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.319.

**DATES:** Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on **June 7, 2013 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**STAKEHOLDER INPUT:** The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: [Policy@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:Policy@nifa.usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program RFA.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA announces the availability of grant funds and requests applications for the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB) Competitive Grants Program for fiscal year (FY) 2013 to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers; and maintain a national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management. Approximately \$1.3 million is available to fund applications in FY 2013.

This notice identifies the objectives for FBMB projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a FBMB grant. NIFA additionally requests stakeholder input from any interested party for use in the development of the next RFA for this program.

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

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

The authority for this program is under Section 7208 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L 110 – 246) amended the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990, by adding section 1672D (7 U.S.C. 5925f), which authorizes the Secretary, acting through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, to establish a competitive research and extension grants program to support improved farm management.

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

As specified in 7 U.S.C. 5925f, applications are being solicited for the purpose of (1) improving the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers; and (2) establishing and maintaining a national, publicly available farm financial management database. The assistance provided by these programs, to the extent practicable, shall be coordinated with and delivered in cooperation with similar services or assistance by other Federal Agencies or programs supporting improved farm management.

Selection Criteria – In allocating funds made available to carry out this section, the Secretary may give priority to applicants that:

- Demonstrate an ability to work directly with agricultural producers;
- Collaborate with farm management and producer associations;
- Address the farm management needs of a variety of crops and regions of the United States; and
- Use and support the national farm financial management database.

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

The Farm Business Management and Benchmarking Program outlined in this RFA seeks to expand upon work begun in FY 2010 to improve the farm management knowledge and skills of individuals directly involved in production agriculture. Specifically, FY 2013 applications are being solicited to address one or more of the following objectives:

1. Establish or expand collaborative partnerships with the national farm management benchmarking center located at <http://www.finbin.umn.edu/> to continue farm financial research and benchmarking, and to expand producer access to the database.
2. Advance data gathering and conduct research on cost of production, farm profitability factors, and farm policy.
3. Develop or expand cooperation and data sharing among existing farm management associations and farm business management education programs across the nation to convert their financial analysis activities to a uniform system.
4. Provide training, assistance, and software to states with farm management associations to facilitate uniform financial procedures and software.

5. Improve the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized farms and ranches by providing access to high quality, uniform farm business management benchmarking information.
6. Improve producers' abilities to successfully manage their agricultural operations through periods of high risk, volatility, and financial stress.

**FBMB** encourages projects that develop content and programs suitable for delivery through the Cooperative Extension System's eXtension Initiative. Funds may be used to contribute to existing Communities of Practice (CoP) or to form a new CoP focused on FBMB. Projects must align with the eXtension vision, mission, and values. A letter of acknowledgement from eXtension is required, and a letter of support may be required from one or more of the Communities of Practice. For detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension, go to <http://create.extension.org/node/2057>.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

Grants will be awarded to successful applicants. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Approximately \$1.3 million is available to fund applications in FY 2013.

On March 26, 2013, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (Public Law 113-6) was signed into law. Title I of this bill provides appropriations for the majority of NIFA's discretionary grant programs, including this one, and continues Agency operations for the remainder of FY 2013.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method\\_of\\_payment.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html).

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

In FY 2013, applications may be submitted to the FBMB Program as one of the following types of requests:

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

**(2) Renewal application.** This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications, and additionally must contain a Progress Report (see Project Narrative, Part IV). Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

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

**(4) Resubmitted renewal application.** This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. In addition, this is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to the FBMB Program but not funded. Therefore, PDs must provide a Progress Report as required under the Project Narrative,

Part IV, and must respond to the previous review panel summary as required under Response to Previous Review, Part IV. Resubmitted renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate areas to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

### **C. Project Types**

The project period shall not exceed one (1) year. Proposed project budgets may not exceed \$200,000 per objective as outlined in Part I.C. above. FBMB proposals submitted can be integrated, multistate, and/or multi-functional.

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

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, education in RCR is considered essential in the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 CFR Part 3022, institutions that conduct extramural research funded by USDA must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct and are to maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the AOR assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies and procedures as well as documentation to support the conduct of the training.

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

## **PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligible Applicants**

Applications may be submitted by numerous entities. Pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 450i(b)(7), eligible applicants means: (A) State agricultural experiment stations; (B) Colleges and universities; (C) University research foundations; (D) Other research institutions and organizations; (E) Federal agencies; (F) National laboratories; (G) Private organizations or corporations; (H) Individuals; or (I) Any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (A) through (H).

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

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

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

## **PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **A. Electronic Application Package**

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. **Applicants are advised to submit early to the Grants.gov system.**

#### **New Users of Grants.gov**

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR) (also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If the organization is not prepared (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as much as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations the AR should go to **“Get Registered” on the Grants.gov left navigation bar (or go to [http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get\\_registered.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp)) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. A quick reference guide listing the steps is available as a 4-page PDF document at the following website: <http://www.grants.gov/assets/Grants.govRegistrationBrochure.pdf>.** Item 2. below mentions the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains additional explanatory language regarding the registration process.

#### **Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials**

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

1. In order to access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see [http://www.grants.gov/help/download\\_software.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp). To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on **“Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,”** enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-FBMB-004268** in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This Guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

**If assistance is needed to access the application package** (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), **or submitting the application** then refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://www.grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

Grants.gov customer support  
1-800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035  
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [Federal Holidays](#).  
Email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov)

Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7:00 A.M. - 9:00 P.M. ET). Get help now!

Please have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov, to help expedite your inquiry:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Name of Agency You Are Applying To
- Specific Area of Concern

See [http://grants.gov/applicants/app\\_help\\_reso.jsp](http://grants.gov/applicants/app_help_reso.jsp) or <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

## **B. Content and Form of Application Submission**

Electronic applications should be prepared following Parts V and VI of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed in order to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., portable document format) in Part III section 3. of the Guide. **ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (i.e., content format, pdf file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW.** Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, subsequent submissions of an application will be accepted until close of business on the closing date in the RFA.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. Users will find a link to “Convert Documents to PDF” on [http://grants.gov/help/download\\_software.jsp#pdf\\_conversion\\_programs](http://grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp#pdf_conversion_programs).

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

- Email: [electronic@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov)
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7:00 am – 5:00 pm Eastern Time, excluding Federal holidays.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.** The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of FBMB. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

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

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 15 pages of written text regardless of whether it is single or double spaced and up to 5 additional pages for figures and tables. This maximum 20 pages has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1. A Summary Statement of the applicant's Intentions in submitting a proposal that addresses the purpose and priorities of the Farm Business Management and Benchmarking Grants Program based on one of the six objectives listed under Part I, C. of this RFA.
2. A clear Statement of Purpose, along with Goals and Objectives for the proposed Center of the farm financial management database.
3. A Discussion of the relevant Body of Knowledge sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the needs of agricultural producers for farm financial management and benchmarking capabilities. The discussion should include estimates of the relative importance of the issues to stakeholders and to ongoing State-Federal food and agricultural research, education and extension programs.
4. A Description of Planned Data Management and Coordination Efforts and Mechanisms to achieve them, sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's proficiency administering a database. This description should include discussion of any relevant past activities.

5. A Plan of Work, including Methods and Procedures for establishing the Center, and Action Steps for establishment and implementation of a farm financial management database, collaboration with farm management and producer associations, and direct work with agricultural producers. This plan of work should provide a description of the Facilities in which the Center will operate, along with Personnel Needs, Assignments, and the Division of Labor anticipated for implementation of the proposed plan. The methods and procedures section of the plan of work should include but not necessarily be limited to:
  - a. A description of the proposed project activities in the sequence in which it is planned to carry them out;
  - b. Techniques to be employed, including their feasibility and rationale for their uses in program implementation;
  - c. Kinds of results expected;
  - d. Means by which data will be collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used;
  - e. Details of plans to communicate programming and results to stakeholders and the public;
  - f. Pitfalls that might be encountered and how they might be overcome;
  - g. Limitations of the proposed project; and,
  - h. A project timetable outlining all important phases as a function of time, year by year, for the entire project, including, if appropriate, periods beyond the grant funding period.
6. A Description of Prospective Partners for collaboration and the role each will play in the Center's efforts. The description should include the role of stakeholders in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, as appropriate.
7. A Description of the Evaluation Component to assess the effectiveness of the Center's coordination efforts and database management and benchmarking outcomes.
8. Evidence and Discussion of Past Experience and Compliance with Federal Reporting Requirements.
9. Bibliography & References Cited – PDF Attachment. No Page Limit. Title the attachment as 'Bibliography & References Cited' in the document header and save file as 'Bibliography'.

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

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide includes information about the individuals for which a Senior/Key Person Profile must be completed, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support.

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

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

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

NIFA does not require matching or cost-sharing support for this program, and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

## **7. Supplemental Information Form**

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

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

## **C. Submission Dates and Times**

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on **June 7, 2013** (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

**Applicants who have problems with the submission of an application to Grants.gov are encouraged to FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.**

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent using e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

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

## **D. Funding Restrictions**

Section 718 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (Pub.L. 113-6) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award.

The applicant organization must have a Federally negotiated rate in order to claim any indirect costs. The applicant should use either their Federally negotiated indirect cost rate or the 30% of total Federal funds awarded, whichever results in the lower amount of indirect costs. If the applicant has not had a rate established they may indicate "None—will negotiate" and a

reasonable dollar amount for indirect costs may be requested based on calculations of actual costs for the entire organization from the most recently completed accounting year. This rate will be subject to approval by USDA. In cases where the applicant does not have a Federally negotiated indirect cost rate and the proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal to support the amount of indirect costs requested must be submitted and a rate negotiated prior to those funds being released. Please refer to [http://nifa.usda.gov/business/indirect\\_cost\\_process.html](http://nifa.usda.gov/business/indirect_cost_process.html) for information on requesting a negotiated indirect cost rate.

NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

Project periods cannot exceed the statutory time limit of five (5) years.

#### **E. Other Submission Requirements**

**The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, section 1.9 in the document entitled “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”**

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III., section 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

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

### **A. General**

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

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

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

*Significance of the problem and potential for enhancing farm management by any one of the six objectives listed under Part 1, C.*

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the knowledge and skills of agricultural producers and establishment or maintenance of a national publicly available farm financial management database. Elements considered include: identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed; body of knowledge, and preliminary data and other past activities used to substantiate the need for the proposed project.

*Proposed Approach, Program Design and Methodology*

This criterion is used to assess the soundness of the proposed approach. Elements considered include the adequacy of the scope of the project to produce expected outcomes/changes in knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and/or behaviors in targeted population; objectives; soundness/evidence-base of educational curricula to be used in the project; proposed activities and sequence of activities; participant recruitment; methodology and limitations of the proposed approach; project timeline; and expected new products and results (e.g., educational approaches including training curricula, workshops, meetings, conferences, exhibits, publications, electronic communication, fact sheets, newsletters, and mass media).

### *Evaluation Design and Methodologies*

This criterion is used to assess the adequacy of the evaluation design and evaluation methodology, and its capacity to measure the extent to which program objectives are met. Elements considered include: evaluation question(s), the methodological approach proposed for answering these questions, justification for the type of data to be collected, a data collection plan, data analysis plan, and strengths and limitations of the proposed evaluation approach.

Applications that provide evidence of the following criteria will be deemed the most competitive. The applicant has already: a) established and maintains collaborative partnerships with more than five (5) farm management associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States; b) maintained and continues to maintain farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including some organic commodities); c) established procedures that enable producers to i) benchmark the farms of the producers against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking database by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at the overall business and individual enterprise levels; and d) has provided and continues to provide public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.

### **C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality**

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 340, Reston, Virginia 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

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

### **D. Organizational Management Information**

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

## **PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that 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 shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), and the NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

### **B. Award Notice**

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

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

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

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

### **C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 220 – Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225 – Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Part 230 – Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

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

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

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

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

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122, now codified at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225 and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224)), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of Departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016 – USDA Implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3022 —Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

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

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

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

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

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

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions.

The funded projects will be expected to verify program accomplishments. Accomplishments can include expanded awareness of the National Farm Management Center and greater knowledge of benchmarking tools and strategies among users of the database. Evidence of actual or intended beneficial changes of producers' production practices is particularly desirable, in addition to documentation of producer involvement in program activities. The evidence is expected to include producers' assessment of the value of the database's materials and instruction, and suggestions for addition or deletion of topics and instructional materials.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Susan S. Shockey  
National Program Leader  
Division of Family and Consumer Sciences  
4425 Waterfront Centre

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)  
Phone: 202-690-2674  
Fax: 202-6902469  
Email: [sshockey@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:sshockey@nifa.usda.gov)

Regular Mail:  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-2225

Physical and Courier Address:  
800 9<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
Waterfront Centre, Room 4427  
Washington, D.C. 20024

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

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

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

### **B. Use of Funds; Changes**

#### **1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility**

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

#### **2. Changes in Project Plans**

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

b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended by NIFA without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the

ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

### **C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards**

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

### **D. Regulatory Information**

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

### **E. Definitions**

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

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

- 1) BENCHMARK, BENCHMARKING – The term “benchmark” or “benchmarking” means the process of comparing the performance of an agricultural enterprise against the performance of other similar enterprises, through the use of comparable and reliable data, to identify business management strengths, weaknesses, and steps necessary to improve management performance and business profitability.
- 2) FARM MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION – A public or nonprofit organization or educational program that a) assists farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural operators to improve financial management and business profitability by providing training on farm financial planning and analysis, record keeping, and other farm management topics; and b) is affiliated with a land-grant college or university, other institution of higher education, or nonprofit entity.

- 3) NATIONAL FARM MANAGEMENT CENTER – An entity that, as determined by the Secretary a) has collaborative partnerships with more than five (5) farm management associations that are representative of agricultural diversity in multiple regions of the United States; b) maintains farm financial analysis software applicable to the production and management of a wide range of crop and livestock agricultural commodities (including some organic commodities); c) establishes procedures that enable producers to i) benchmark the farms of the producers against peer groups; and (ii) to query the benchmarking data base by location, farm type, farm size, and commodity at the overall business and individual enterprise levels; and d) provides public online access to farm and ranch financial benchmarking databases.