

Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

FY 2015 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 22, 2015

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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

VETERINARY MEDICINE LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under No. 10.313, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP).

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on June 22, 2015**, Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (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 **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program RFA**.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)** for fiscal year (FY) 2015 to repay qualified educational loans for eligible veterinarians in exchange for veterinary services in designated shortage situations. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately **\$4.4 million**.

This notice identifies the objectives for VMLRP service agreements, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a VMLRP loan repayment award.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

In January 2003, the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA) passed into law adding section 1415A to the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1997 (NARETPA). This law established a new Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (7 U.S.C. 3151a) authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a program of entering into agreements with veterinarians under which they agree to provide veterinary services in veterinarian shortage situations.

In FY 2010, NIFA announced its first funding opportunity for the VMLRP. In the five (5) annual program cycles since, NIFA has subsequently received 858 applications from which 291 VMLRP awards totaling \$25,292,341 were issued. Funding for future years was based on annual appropriations and balances, if any, remaining from prior years.

Section 7105 of Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) amended section 1415A to revise the determination of veterinarian shortage situations to consider (1) geographical areas that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians; and (2) areas of veterinary practice that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians, such as food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety. This section also added that priority should be given to agreements with veterinarians for the practice of food animal medicine in veterinarian shortage situations.

NARETPA section 1415A requires the Secretary, when determining the amount of repayment for a year of service by a veterinarian to consider the ability of USDA to maximize the number of agreements from the amounts appropriated and to provide an incentive to serve in veterinary service shortage areas with the greatest need. This section also provides that loan repayments may consist of payments of the principal and interest on government and commercial loans received by the individual for the attendance of the individual at an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Council on Education (COE) accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) or the equivalent. This program is not authorized to provide repayments for any government or commercial loans incurred during the pursuit of another degree, such as an associate or bachelor degree. Loans eligible for repayment include educational loans made for one (1) or more of the following: loans for tuition expenses; other reasonable educational expenses, including fees, books, and laboratory expenses, incurred by the individual; and reasonable living expenses as determined by the Secretary. In addition, the Secretary is directed to make such additional payments to participants as the Secretary determines appropriate for the purpose of providing reimbursements to participants for individual tax liability resulting from participation in this program. The Secretary delegated the authority to carry out this program to NIFA.

The final rule was published in the Federal Register on April 19, 2010 [75 FR 20239-20248] and **allows eligible veterinarians to competitively apply for and receive a VMLRP award; however, only the eligible portion of the consolidation will be repaid by the VMLRP.**

Furthermore, applicants with consolidated loans will be asked to provide a complete history of their student loans from the National Student Loan Database System (NSLDS), a central database for student aid operated by the U.S. Department of Education. The NSLDS website is located at www.nsls.ed.gov. Individuals who consolidated their DVM loans with non-educational loans or loans belonging to an individual other than the applicant, such as a spouse or child, will continue to be ineligible for the VMLRP.

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program is aligned with the USDA Research, Education and Economics Action Plan http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_2014_REE_Action_Plan_08-2014_Final.pdf, and specifically addresses Goals 1B, Animal Health, and Goal 7, Rural Prosperity, by incentivizing veterinarians to serve in rural veterinary shortage situations. The VMLRP is aligned with the NIFA strategic plan <http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/NIFA%20Strategic%20Plan%20FY2014-FY2018.pdf> sub-goal 1.1, improving global food security, and sub-goal 1.7, ensuring development of human capital and communities, by placing veterinarians in remote areas where they can help assure agricultural biosecurity, animal health, food safety and public health. USDA Strategic Plan (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018.pdf>) Goal 1, assisting rural communities to create prosperity, is fostered by encouraging veterinarians to provide livestock health services necessary for animal production systems to be profitable. The VMLRP also supports USDA Strategic Plan, Goal 4 (Objective 4.4), to protect agricultural health by minimizing diseases. Veterinarians accomplish this through delivery of professional veterinary medical care aimed at prevention, early detection, control and treatment of disease in all agricultural animal species.

The Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program was re-authorized in the Agricultural Act of 2014. Pursuant to the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (H.R. 83), \$5,000,000 was appropriated for the VMLRP. Of that amount, approximately **\$4.4 million** is available for loan repayments.

B. Purpose and Priorities

A series of three (3) peer-reviewed studies published in 2007 in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA), and sponsored by the Food Supply Veterinary Medicine Coalition <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/Pages/Food-Supply-Veterinary-Medicine-studies-and-statistics.aspx> drew considerable attention to the growing and projected shortages of food supply veterinarians, the causes of shortages in this sector, and the consequences to the US food safety infrastructure and to the general public if this trend continues to worsen. Food supply veterinary medicine embraces a broad array of veterinary professional activities, specialties and responsibilities, and is defined as the full range of veterinary medical practices contributing to the production of a safe and wholesome food supply and to animal, human, and environmental health. However, the privately practicing food animal veterinary practitioner population within the US is, numerically, the largest, and arguably the most important single component of the food supply veterinary medical sector. Food animal

veterinarians, working closely with livestock producers and State and Federal officials, constitute the first line of defense against spread of endemic and zoonotic diseases, introduction of high consequence foreign animal diseases, and other threats to the health and well-being of both animals and humans that consume animal products.

One (1) of the primary findings of these Coalition-sponsored studies was confirmation that insufficient numbers of veterinary students were selecting food supply veterinary medical careers to meet future needs. This development led both to current shortages and to projections for worsening shortages through 2017. While there were many reasons students listed for opting not to choose a career in food animal practice or other food supply veterinary sectors, chief among the reasons was concern over burdensome educational debt. At the time the Act calling for establishment of VMLRP was authorized, the average educational debt of graduating veterinarians was \$75,000. According to a survey of veterinary medical graduates conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in the spring of 2013, the average educational debt for students graduating from veterinary school has risen to approximately \$162,000. Such soaring debt loads, therefore, continue to influence veterinary students and graduating veterinarians to select other veterinary career pathways, such as companion animal medicine, which tend to be more financially lucrative and thereby enable veterinarians to more quickly repay their outstanding educational loans. Furthermore, when this issue was studied in the Coalition report from the perspective of identifying solutions to this veterinary workforce imbalance, panelists were asked to rate 18 different strategies for addressing shortages. Responses from the panelists overwhelmingly showed that student debt repayment and scholarship programs were the most important strategies in addressing future shortages (JAVMA Vol. 229, No. 1, pages 57-69).

In the years since inception of the VMLRP, the findings of the 2007 series of coalition reports (<https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/Pages/about-fsvm-coalition.aspx>) have been supported empirically by the robust response each year by greater than 90% of State Animal Health Officials (SAHO) identifying priority food supply veterinary shortage situations in their respective States, and by the number of highly debt-burdened veterinarians applying to serve in officially designated shortage areas. Need for this program thus continues to be strong based on the identification by SAHOs each year of over 200 priority shortage situations across the US and Insular Areas, and on the more than 150 applications from veterinarians competing to receive one (1) of the 40 to 50 loan repayment awards that the program is able to fund each year. While a few States nominate fewer shortage designations than they are permitted, most states continue to nominate the maximum number of shortage situations their state is allowed. This indicates demand for the program remains strong throughout the country, particularly in animal agriculture-intensive states where shortages are most acute and widespread.

C. Program Area Description

This loan repayment program contains three (3) general categories of participation:

- 1. Mitigation of private practice shortage situations – emphasis on food supply veterinary medicine sector (currently implemented);*

2. *Mitigation of public veterinary practice and specialty veterinary discipline shortage situations (currently implemented); and*
3. *Service in animal health emergencies (currently not implemented, pending sufficient funding).*

The VMLRP supports NIFA's Animal Systems portfolio by facilitating professional workforce development in critical agricultural sectors related to animal health and well-being. Specifically this program incentivizes veterinarians to consider practicing, or serving in other professional capacities, in geographic or specialty veterinary discipline shortage areas that are important to the security of local, state, and federal food safety infrastructures, and more broadly to the protection of animal and public health. Congress has specified that the program shall emphasize mitigation of shortages in food animal veterinary practice, and in areas of veterinary specialization such as, but not limited to, epidemiology, food safety and public health. In this respect, the VMLRP achieves important outreach objectives of NIFA because the veterinarian is among the most highly trained and respected agricultural professionals, especially in rural areas and communities where a significant proportion of food animal production occurs. By virtue of their broad biomedical and animal science professional education, their intimate connection to the local farming communities they serve, and their skills in clinical, diagnostic, surgical, therapeutic and population medicine, veterinarians represent an essential component of NIFA's extension and outreach capacity, and of the nation's agrosecurity, food security and public health infrastructures. In an analogous fashion, veterinarians serving in specialized settings experiencing workforce shortages -- for example, as state veterinarians, epidemiologists, food safety inspectors, animal disease laboratory directors and university faculty -- provide an important communication link among state and federal government agencies, animal owners/producers, and the general public. The ultimate goal of the program is to encourage veterinarians, through competitively awarded financial incentives, to fill the most serious veterinary shortage situations in the United States. A further objective of the program is to determine the best possible match between specific shortage situations and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences of program applicants in order to enhance the chances that awardees will achieve sufficient professional success and satisfaction during their term of service.

In addition to loan repayments for the purposes described above, Congress also authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to use funds appropriated under the National Veterinary Medical Services Act to develop and implement a program that will bolster national veterinary workforce readiness and response capacity in the event of large-scale emergency situations negatively impacting US animal agriculture. However, this part of the program has not yet been implemented because the Secretary has given precedence to addressing Congressional concerns about wide-spread, day-to-day private sector food supply veterinary workforce shortages in many areas of the country. NIFA will make appropriate announcements in future RFAs should appropriations increase sufficiently to implement both the basic loan repayments award portion of the Act and to accumulate and hold the substantial pool of funds necessary to pay salaries and living expenses for awardees called into service under any future implementation of the emergency services portion of the Act.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately **\$4.4 million**. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2015, applications may be submitted to the VMLRP as one (1) of the following types of requests:

(1) New application. This is an application to provide veterinary service that has not been previously approved for funding by the VMLRP. 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 an application from a veterinarian who previously received a VMLRP award. Renewal applicants must review the application package to ensure the proper forms are submitted within the application package. Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, and will be evaluated and reviewed competitively according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications, which is described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Types of Designated Veterinary Shortages

Type I Shortage – 80 Percent or Greater Private Practice Food Supply Veterinary Medicine:

The Type I shortage situation must entail at least an 80 percent time commitment (based on a 40 hour week) to private practice food supply veterinary medicine. The shortage situation may be located anywhere (rural or non-rural) so long as the veterinary service shortages to be mitigated are consistent with the definition of “practice of food supply veterinary medicine.” The minimum 80 percent time commitment is in recognition of the fact that occasionally food animal veterinary practitioners are expected to meet the needs of other veterinary service sectors such as clientele owning companion and exotic animals. This generally corresponds to a shortage area where clients can reasonably be expected to pay for professional food supply veterinary services and where food animal populations are sufficiently dense to support a (or another) veterinarian. The personal residence of the veterinarian (VMLRP award recipient) and the address of veterinary practice employing the veterinarian are not required to be located within the geographic bounds of the designated shortage area. **However, the awardee is required to verify the specified minimum percent time commitment (80 percent, corresponding to 32 hours per week) to service within the specified geographic shortage area.**

Type II Shortage - 30 Percent or Greater Private Practice Food Supply Veterinary Medicine in a Rural Area:

The shortage situation must be in an area satisfying the definition of “rural.” The minimum 30 percent-time (30%) (12 hours per week) commitment of an award recipient to serve in a rural shortage situation is in recognition of the fact that there may be some remote or economically depressed rural areas in need of food animal veterinary services that are unable to support a practitioner predominately serving the food animal sector, yet the need for food animal veterinary services for an existing, relatively small, proportion of available food animal business is nevertheless great. Under the Type II category, the expectation is that the veterinarian may provide veterinary services to other veterinary sectors (e.g., companion animal clientele) as a means of achieving financial sustainability. The residence of the veterinarian (VMLRP awardee) and the address of veterinary practice employing the veterinarian are not required to be located within the geographic bounds of the designated shortage area. **However, the awardee is required to verify the specified minimum percent time commitment (30 percent, corresponding to 12 hours per week) to service within the specified geographic shortage area.**

Type III Shortage - Public Practice Shortage (49 percent time or greater public practice):

This is a broad category comprising many types of specialized veterinary training and employment areas relating to food supply veterinary workforce capacity and capability. These positions are typically located in city, county, State and Federal Government, and institutions of higher education. Examples of positions within the public practice sector include university faculty and staff, veterinary laboratory diagnostician, County Public Health Officer, State Veterinarian, State Public Health Veterinarian, State Epidemiologist, Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) meat inspector, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Area Veterinarian in Charge (AVIC), and Federal Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO). NIFA anticipates that loan repayments for the Public Practice sector will be limited to approximately 10 percent of total nominations and available funds. The minimum time commitment serving under a Type III shortage nomination is 49 percent, corresponding to about 20 hours per week. NIFA understands that some public practice employment opportunities that are shortage situations may be part-time positions.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP, an applicant must:

- (1) Have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA Council on Education;
- (2) Have qualifying educational loan debt;
- (3) Secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a NIFA designated veterinary shortage situation within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer; and
- (4) Provide certifications and verifications as defined in 7 CFR 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

A list of designated veterinary shortage situations will be posted on the VMLRP web site at www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map prior to or concurrent with the opening of the VMLRP application period.

Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

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. Application Package

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

The application forms must be downloaded from the VMLRP web site. Go to <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp>, click on the “Applicants” link, and then click on the “Application Forms for FY 2015” link.

If you do not have access to the web page or have trouble downloading material, you may contact the VMLRP Program Office by email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov. When emailing the VMLRP Program Office, please include your name, mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number in the body of the email. State that you want a copy of the request for applications (RFA) and the associated application forms for the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Proper preparation of applications will assist reviewers in evaluating the merits of each application in a systematic, consistent fashion. Each **new** application must contain the following elements and should be assembled in the following order:

- (NIFA-01-10) Application Information Form
- Curriculum Vitae
- Transcript
- (NIFA-02-10) Personal Statement
- (NIFA-03-10) List of Recommenders
- (NIFA-04-10) Loan Information Form
- (NIFA-06-10) Certifications for Application
- (NIFA-07-10) Intent of Employment

Except for the transcript, please type all information entered and include your full name (Last, First, Middle) on the upper right corner of all pages. **Handwritten answers in your application will not be accepted and your application will not qualify for further consideration.**

Three (3) separate recommendation forms (Form NIFA-08-10), completed by your recommenders, are also required for an application to be considered complete. These recommendation forms may be mailed with or separately from the application forms listed above. If the recommendation forms are mailed with the application forms listed above, the recommendation forms should be last in the order, after the Intent of Employment form. If a recommender chooses to submit the completed recommendation form directly to us (separate from the application forms), we will accept recommendation forms by mail, fax, or email (see item 10. of this section for more details).

The NIFA Contract (NIFA-05-10) is **not** part of the application package and will be sent to applicants when they are notified of an award. A sample of the contract is offered for review on the VMLRP website.

Each **renewal** application package must contain the same forms listed below, including three (3) recommendation forms, **except for the following forms:** Loan Information Form, and Intent of Employment

- (NIFA-01-10) Application Information Form
- Curriculum Vitae – updated
- Transcript(s) (copy acceptable unless new coursework taken since original award)
- (NIFA-02-10) Personal Statement
- (NIFA-03-10) List of Recommenders
- (NIFA-06-10) Certifications for Application

Contained within the “Applicants” section of the VMLRP web site is an Application Checklist and an Application Guide that include more detailed instructions for preparing and submitting an application to the VMLRP. General instructions of the forms that must be included in the application are provided below.

1. NIFA-01-10 Applicant Information Form

The Applicant Information Form collects relevant identifying, contact, and education information from the applicant. This form also authorizes the disclosure of information that confirms the applicant is not under a service obligation or has a Federal judgment lien against his/her property.

This form is also used to identify the application type: New or Renewal. An applicant who has never received a VMLRP award should mark New as the application type, while an applicant who has received an award and has completed or is expected to complete a prior service period should mark Renewal as the application type.

Applicants must indicate the shortage situation he/she intends to fill in the event this application results in an award by entering the five-digit Shortage Identification Code in Section 1 of this form. New applicants may only apply to fill one (1) of the designated shortage situations for 2015 which will be posted prior to when the 2015 application period opens. A renewal applicant should enter the five-digit Shortage Identification Code of the shortage situation he/she is currently serving through a VMLRP award. If a renewal applicant is uncertain as to what the five-digit Shortage Identification Code he/she is currently serving, the applicant should consult the historical shortage maps accessible under the State Animal Health Official information section of the VMLRP web site, or contact the VMLRP program office to obtain this information.

2. Curriculum Vitae (CV)

This document should describe the applicant's academic and work history. The body of the CV should be limited to two (2) pages with an optional additional page to list publications, patents, etc., if applicable. Renewal applicants must provide an updated CV to add any academic, work, and professional achievements that took place since their last VMLRP application.

3. Transcript

Official transcript(s) from the applicant's professional veterinary degree and, where applicable, graduate degree program(s) must be included in the submission of the application package. If the applicant attended more than one (1) school during his/her DVM studies, official transcripts from both schools must be provided. Renewal applicants must submit transcript(s), however copies are sufficient for any transcripts previously submitted, during the original application period.

4. NIFA-02-10 Personal Statement

For new applications, the Personal Statement includes presentation of applicant knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience relative to the specific shortage situation applied for. Note that an applicant may apply to only one (1) shortage each program year. This document must include a description of the applicant's short-term and long-term career objectives in veterinary medicine, a plan to achieve these objectives, relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and experience, and practice plans and logistics to address the specific shortage situation to which the applicant is applying.

For renewal applications, the Personal Statement provides the applicant an opportunity to present a progress report starting with the start date of the applicant's current or most recent VMLRP award. Information provided should include how the applicant has been effectively addressing the specific shortage situation in which the applicant is serving. An explanation should be included to offer justification of the applicant's ability to continue mitigation of this shortage situation.

For all applications, the Personal Statement should be prepared on only one (1) side of a standard size (8 1/2" x 11") white paper with one-inch (1") margins, typed or word processed using no type smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, Times New Roman). This document cannot exceed five (5) double-spaced, typed pages. This limit has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition.

The applicant's name and page number must be included in the header (right-justified) of each page of the document to assist NIFA program staff to ensure that applications are intact and complete upon receipt. Handwritten information in the header is acceptable, but no handwritten answers for the personal statement will be accepted. Additional pages after the first five (5) pages will not be included in the review.

5. NIFA-03-10 List of Recommenders

The List of Recommenders form identifies colleagues who will speak to the applicant's capability to fulfill program obligations. The name, email address, and phone number must be provided for the individuals who will be asked by the applicant to submit a recommendation on the applicant's behalf.

Three (3) recommendations are required for each application, new or renewal. It is the **applicant's responsibility to contact these recommenders** and confirm that the recommendation forms have been submitted by the specified deadline (see item 10 of this section).

6. NIFA-04-10 Loan Information Form

[Note: Renewal applicants should not include this form in their applications, but the VMLRP Program Office may request updated information on certain loans.]

Sections 1 through 3 must be completed by the applicant.

Sections 1 and 2 of the Loan Information Form collect relevant information relating to the outstanding educational loan debt and confirm that the loan is a bona fide legally enforceable institutional, State, or Government education loan made for the purpose of meeting the costs of attending an accredited college or university of Veterinary Medicine.

Section 3 provides authorization to lenders and their collection agents to disclose information, including the loans' repayment status to NIFA staff.

Applicants do not need to complete Section 4 prior to the application deadline. NIFA will ask a representative at the applicant's lending institution to complete this section if the applicant receives a VMLRP award. The signature confirms the validity of the information provided by the applicant in Sections 1 through 3.

7. NIFA-05-10 Contract

The VMLRP contract is a legal agreement that binds awardees and the Secretary of USDA and/or NIFA Director to the terms and conditions for participation in the VMLRP, including obligations of both parties. The contract must be signed by the applicant and the Secretary (or designee) before the agreement is effective.

Applicants will receive an official copy of the contract to sign and return when they are notified of an award. A sample contract is available on the VMLRP web site during the application cycle. There is no need to include a copy of the contract with your application.

8. NIFA-06-10 Certifications for Application

The applicant's signatures on the Certifications for Application form validate the contractual agreement, accuracy of information provided by the applicant, and request for confidential recommendations. This form is required for all applications, new and renewal.

9. NIFA-07-10 Intent of Employment

Section 1 provides information on the shortage situation the applicant intends to fill upon receipt of a VMLRP award, including the contact information for the prospective employer or hiring official. Section 2, to be signed by the prospective employer or hiring official, confirms the applicant's ability to secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a veterinary shortage situation within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer. An applicant may apply for only one (1) shortage situation for each application.

A list of designated veterinary shortage situations will be posted on the VMLRP web site at www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map prior to, or simultaneously with, the opening of the VMLRP application period.

Successful applicants will be given at least 90 days from the date the award offer is made to secure employment or establish a practice in the designated veterinary shortage situation. Failure to secure employment or establish a practice of veterinary medicine in the designated veterinary shortage situation within the given timeframe may result in the withdrawal of the award offer.

10. NIFA-08-10 Recommendation Form

The Recommendation form is to be completed and submitted by colleagues identified by the applicant on Form NIFA-03-10. The form includes ratings and short answers designed to allow reviewers to assess the applicant's capabilities to provide veterinary services in the specific shortage situation the applicant is applying for. The short answers should be prepared on only one (1) side of a standard size (8 ½" x 11") white paper with one-inch (1") margins, typed or word processed using no type smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font face (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, Times New Roman).

Recommendations for renewal applicants should speak directly to the applicant's abilities and progress exhibited while the applicant provided veterinary services within the specific shortage situation during the three-year VMLRP award (initial service agreement).

Recommenders are encouraged to review the descriptive information provided by the nominator of the shortage situation the applicant is applying to fill. Three (3) separate recommendations are required and all recommendations **must be received by NIFA no later than July 6, 2015, (14 calendar days after the application deadline of June 22, 2015.** In addition to regular or overnight mail (see mailing addresses in Section C of this Part), NIFA will accept receipt of the recommendation form by fax at (202) 720-6486 or email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov. Of the delivery methods listed above, email is the preferred method.

It is always the applicant's responsibility to contact and follow up with recommenders to ensure that all required recommendations are completed and delivered to NIFA prior to the July 6, 2015 deadline for recommendation forms.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on June 22, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

Applications must be mailed to the following address:

Regular mail:

VMLRP Applications
Division of Animal Systems (Attn: Lisa Stephens)
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240

Overnight mail:

VMLRP Applications
Division of Animal Systems (Attn: Lisa Stephens)
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 3331, Waterfront Centre
800 9th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are responsible for providing an accurate and valid e-mail address on the NIFA-01-10 form.

If the applicant has not received correspondence from NIFA regarding a submitted application within 15 days of the established deadline, the applicant is encouraged to contact the VMLRP Program Office by email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov to request confirmation of receipt of his/her complete application. **Failure to alert NIFA that confirmation of receipt has not been received could result in the application not being reviewed by the peer review panel.**

D. Funding Restrictions

NIFA has capped VMLRP loan repayment awards at \$25,000 for each year of service rendered (tax payments are additional). Loan repayments will be made directly to participants' lending institutions on behalf of participating individuals. The repayments will be applied to the principal, interest, and related expenses on government and commercial loans received by the

participating individual for attendance of the individual at an American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education (AVMA COE) accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or the equivalent.

Note that the VMLRP will only repay debt incurred at an institution that is AVMA COE accredited at the time of attendance and graduation. If an institution received full accreditation status during the participating individual's attendance at said institution, only the portion of veterinary school loans that were disbursed subsequent to the institution's date of accreditation are eligible for repayment under the VMLRP. This includes any scenario involving an individual transferring from a non-accredited institution to an accredited institution. Applicants with a degree from an institution that was not accredited at the time the degree was earned remain ineligible for award. This is regardless of the fact that they may have attended an accredited institution prior to transferring to a non-accredited institution from which they received their DVM degree (or equivalent).

NIFA will allow individuals who consolidated their veterinary school loans with other educational loans (e.g., undergraduate) to apply for the VMLRP; however, only the eligible portion of the consolidation will be repaid by the VMLRP. Furthermore, applicants with consolidated loans must provide a complete history of their student loans from the National Student Loan Database System (NSLDS), a central database for student aid operated by the U.S. Department of Education. The NSLDS website can be found at www.nsls.ed.gov. Individuals who consolidated their DVM loans with non-educational loans or loans belonging to an individual other than the applicant, such as a spouse or child, will continue to be ineligible for the VMLRP.

Tax payments equal to 39 percent (39%) of the amount of loan repayments will be credited directly to the participant's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Federal tax account simultaneously with each loan repayment. These tax payments are not tax-exempt and will be reported to the IRS along with loan payments. When loan and tax payments are made on a participant's behalf in a calendar year, a Form 1099-G (Certain Government Payments) is mailed to participants no later than January 31 of the following calendar year.

Recipients of VMLRP awards will be notified by e-mail each time a loan payment is issued directly to the lending institution and/or a tax payment is issued to the IRS on their behalf.

SPECIAL NOTE:

In accordance with 31 C.F.R., Part 208, all federal payments are required to be made through electronic funds transfers (EFTs). Each award recipient will be provided guidance regarding the appropriate form(s) which must be submitted in order to process the EFT payment(s).

E. Other Submission Requirements

Recommendation forms must be completed by colleagues identified by the applicant on Form NIFA-03-10 and **received by NIFA no later than 14 calendar days after the deadline (i.e.,**

July 6, 2015. Recommendation forms may be submitted in accordance with instructions in section B.10. of this RFA.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

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

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

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

Broadly speaking, the purpose of the VMLRP is mitigation of US infrastructure-critical veterinary service shortages in the agricultural animal health, food supply and public health veterinary service sectors, subject to the varying conditions and needs of States, Insular Areas and the Nation at-large. More specifically, veterinarian shortage situations are defined as (1) geographical areas that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians; and (2) areas of veterinary specialty practice that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians, such as food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety. However, Congress directs that priority shall be given to agreements with veterinarians for the practice of food animal medicine in veterinarian shortage situations. Reflecting this required emphasis, NIFA anticipates that approximately 90 percent of available funds will be awarded to veterinarians for the private practice of food animal medicine in geographic areas determined to have shortage(s) of veterinarians. The remaining approximately 10 percent of available funds will be awarded to veterinarians serving in public practice and specialty practices or discipline areas determined to have a shortage of veterinarians, such as, but not limited to, food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety.

In carrying out its review, the peer panel shall take into account the **quality of the match** between an applicant's professional training and experience, and the circumstances and needs of the designated shortage situation the applicant proposes to fill. In addition to the overarching priorities described above, the following evaluation criteria shall be considered by panelists in the context of the factors and circumstances necessary for:

- 1) Most effective mitigation of the specific veterinary shortage situations;
- 2) Prioritizing the relatively more severe shortages; and
- 3) Achieving the highest likelihood that awardees will realize employment satisfaction and professional success both during, and beyond, the term of the VMLRP agreement.

Additional specific criteria include:

1) Applicant knowledge, skills and abilities as evidenced by:

- (a) Formal pre-professional educational training (e.g., undergraduate or graduate degree programs and credentials);
- (b) Formal training during pursuit of the DVM (or equivalent) degree (e.g., electives, curricular emphases);
- (c) Formal post-DVM (or equivalent) training and specialization (e.g., graduate degree programs, internships, residency programs, and board certifications);
- (d) Professional employment experience in private or public veterinary practice, or other relevant work history experiences, before, during, or after earning the DVM (or equivalent) degree;
- (e) Specialty short-course certifications, accreditations or licensures (e.g., APHIS accreditation, agrosecurity training series, food animal production management courses, certified proficiency-training in foreign animal disease diagnostics);
- (f) Awards, honors or special achievements;
- (g) Recommendations; and
- (h) Content and quality of applicant's personal statement.

2) Additional criteria:

- (a) Likelihood the applicant will meet the terms and conditions of the VMLRP agreement and continue to serve in a veterinary shortage situation, or pursue a career in some other facet of food supply veterinary medicine, agricultural animal health, or public health, in private or public veterinary sectors;
- (b) Relative severity of veterinary shortage situation; and

(c) Practicality and logistical feasibility of applicant's plan to address the specific shortage(s).

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, we determine the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 555, Reston, VA, 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

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

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one-time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination prior to an award under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process.

Although an applicant may be eligible based on the provided criteria, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., license suspension of an individual). All submitted applications shall be reviewed to ensure administrative compliance and completeness prior to an evaluation by the VMLRP application review panel. A complete review of each applicant's loan documents will also take place prior to the announcement of awards.

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application; however, withdrawn applications normally will not be returned. An electronic copy of each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by VMLRP for a period of three (3) years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make contract offers to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the award shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the application is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the service agreement need not be initiated on the award effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that service agreement goals may be attained within the service period. All funds awarded by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application, the VMLRP authorizing statute at 7 U.S.C. § 3151a, the VMLRP regulations at 7 CFR part 3431, and, the terms and conditions of the award.

B. Award Notice

All VMLRP applicants will be informed by email of final funding decisions by September 30, 2015.

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

- (1) Legal name and address of applicant to whom the Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Designated veterinary shortage situation code, including the state;
- (3) Service period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the service agreement without requiring re-competition for funds;
- (4) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the service period;
- (5) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (6) Applicable award terms and conditions for the VMLRP;
- (7) 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 VMLRP applications considered for review and to project awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to the ones listed below.

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

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

2 CFR Part 415 – USDA General Program Administrative Regulations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 CFR Part 3431—Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

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

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

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

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Program Outputs:

The principal program output for FY 2015 will be verifiable mitigation of well-defined high priority veterinary shortage situations in an estimated 40 to 50 locations across the country, for a period of three (3) years.

Reporting Requirements:

1) Quarterly Report:

VMLRP recipients will be required to verify that the terms of the VMLRP contract are being met on a quarterly basis. Subsequent quarterly loan repayments will not be disbursed until this verification is provided. This report will be due fifteen business days after the end of each three (3) month interval during the VMLRP contract for the previous three (3) month period and must include the following information:

- (a) A listing of states, counties, and/or insular areas served;
- (b) A listing of veterinary services and activities provided in the shortage situation; and
- (c) Percentage time (on a 40-hour week basis) providing service to veterinary shortage situation identified in the agreement.

Program participants are responsible for notifying NIFA of any changes in the service(s) being provided in the specified shortage situation during the three (3) year period. It is strongly recommended that program participants advise NIFA of proposed changes at least two (2) months in advance to allow sufficient review and approval time. Failure to receive pre-approval for changes impacting veterinary services provided may result in the termination of the VMLRP contract and the program participant may be subject to penalties as outlined in Section C, Paragraph 3 of the contract.

2) Termination Report:

At the end of the term of the agreement, the recipient and his/her supervisor will each prepare separately and submit to NIFA a Termination Report that addresses the following, as well as any other information the participants wish to share with NIFA's VMLRP leadership:

- a. A summary of the services provided toward mitigation of the original veterinary shortage situation, as well as other veterinary services provided to the local community, institution, or other employing entity;
- b. An assessment of the current state of veterinary services in the recipient's service area and adjacent service areas, or specialty area, with emphasis on identification of ongoing shortage situations;
- c. An assessment of future veterinary service needs and trends in the recipient's service (or specialty area) and, to the extent such information may be known, adjacent service areas, with emphasis on identification of ongoing shortage situations, either geographic or disciplinary; and
- d. An appraisal of the overall effectiveness of the VMLRP in addressing the specific veterinary shortage situation served by the awardee, including the role of the mentor (where applicable).

The Termination Report must be submitted by attachment to an email sent to vmrlp@nifa.usda.gov, preferably as an MS Word or WordPerfect document. The subject line and the first line of the body of the email should include, in the following order: "Termination Report: <Last name of recipient>, <award number>, <shortage situation code>".

SPECIAL NOTE:

A Termination Report is required from all awardees and supervisors of awardees. This report is subject to review for completeness; and must be approved by the VLMRP Program office prior to disbursement of the final payment.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact Dr. Danielle Tack, VMLRP Program Manager, Program Coordinator, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20024; telephone: (202) 401- 6802; fax: (202) 720-6486; e-mail: vmllrp@nifa.usda.gov.

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 upon request 60-90 days after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility or Performance of Duties

Pursuant to the provision in 7 CFR 3431.21, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for the performance of duties in the approved service agreement.

2. Changes in Service Agreement

a. The permissible changes by the awardee in the approved service agreement shall be limited to minor changes that do not substantially impact or alter the spirit and intent of the agreement to mitigate a specific veterinary service shortage in a specific geographic and/or occupational situation. To ensure that all applications are reviewed in an equitable and consistent manner, a change in the shortage area the applicant proposes to serve will not be considered once an application has been reviewed by the peer review panel. If the awardee is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the NIFA VMLRP Program Office for a final determination.

b. Changes in Loan Repayment Schedule: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved loan repayment schedule must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the NIFA VMLRP Program Office prior to instituting such changes.

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 (3) years. 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

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. 0524-0047.

E. Definitions

Please refer to **7 CFR Part 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program**, (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=e3cd63123b08ca3a6cff8bdbc5bb2c9b&node=pt7.15.3431&rgn=div5>) for applicable definitions for this program.

F. Materials Available on the Internet

Numerous tools and reference materials are available via the VMLRP web site at www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp. The following listing represents a few selections available under the “Applicant” section at <http://nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-applicants>:

- **Detailed Instructions Before You Start Your Application**
- **Preparing and Submitting Your Application**
- **Application Guide**
- **Application Checklist**
- **Choosing Your Veterinary Shortage Situation**