

# **Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECAs) Challenge Grants Program**

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***(2015) Request for Applications (RFA)***

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 6, 2015**

**ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA**

**Award Amount: \$900,000**



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

**National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture**

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

**SECONDARY EDUCATION, TWO-YEAR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, AND AGRICULTURE IN THE K-12 CLASSROOM CHALLENGE GRANTS PROGRAM**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.226**.

**DATES:** Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 06, 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](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 Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Challenge Grants Program RFA.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Challenge Grants Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 to promote and strengthen agriscience and agribusiness education. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$900,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for SPECA projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SPECA grant.

## Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION.....	4
A. Legislative Authority and Background.....	4
B. Purpose and Priorities.....	5
C. Program Area Description.....	7
PART II—AWARD INFORMATION.....	15
A. Available Funding.....	15
B. Types of Applications.....	15
C. Grant Types.....	15
D. Project Duration.....	17
E. Number and Size of Grant Awards.....	17
F. Application Submission & Award Limitations.....	17
G. Funding Limitations per Institution.....	17
H. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research.....	18
PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION.....	19
A. Eligible Applicants.....	19
B. Cost Sharing or Matching.....	20
PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION.....	22
A. Electronic Application Package.....	22
B. Content and Form of Application Submission.....	23
C. Submission Dates and Times.....	35
D. Funding Restrictions.....	35
E. Other Submission Requirements.....	36
PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS.....	37
A. General.....	37
B. Evaluation Criteria.....	37
C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality.....	39
D. Organizational Management Information.....	39
E. Application Disposition.....	39
PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION.....	40
A. General.....	40
B. Award Notice.....	40
C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	41
D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements.....	42
PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT.....	44
PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION.....	45
A. Access to Review Information.....	45
B. Use of Funds; Changes.....	45
C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	46
D. Regulatory Information.....	46
E. Definitions.....	46

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

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

#### **Legislative Authority**

Section 1405 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA), as amended, (7 U.S.C. 3121) designates the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the lead Federal agency for agriculture research, extension and teaching in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human sciences. Authority for this program is contained in section 1417(b)(1) of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152(j)).

In accordance with statutory authority, subject to the availability of funds, the USDA Secretary, who has delegated the authority to the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education and Ag in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Challenge Grants Program will award grants to: (a) promote and strengthen secondary and 2-year postsecondary agriscience and agribusiness education in the K-12 Classroom in order to help ensure a qualified workforce to serve the U.S. food and agricultural, sciences system; and (b) promote complementary and synergistic linkages among secondary, 2-year postsecondary, and higher education programs in the food, and agricultural sciences in order to promote excellence in education and to encourage more young Americans to pursue and complete a baccalaureate or higher degree in the food and agricultural sciences.

#### **Background**

The Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education and Ag in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Challenge Grants Program is a NIFA-administered competitive grants program focused on improving formal, K-14 food, agricultural, natural resource, and human (FANH) sciences education. SPECA-funded projects ensure a competent and qualified workforce will exist to serve the FANH sciences system. At the same time, SPECA-funded projects improve the economic health and viability of communities through the development of degree programs emphasizing new and emerging employment opportunities. Finally, SPECA projects address the national challenge to increase the number and diversity of students entering the FANH sciences (i.e., having a FANH sciences workforce representative of the Nation's population).

Therefore, applications submitted to this grants program must state how the funded project will address the **SPECA Program Goals**:

1. To enhance the quality of secondary and two-year postsecondary instruction in order to help meet current and future national food, agricultural, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences workplace needs.
2. To increase the number and diversity of students who will pursue and complete a 2- or 4-year degree in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human (FANH) sciences

## B. Purpose and Priorities

The Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom Challenge Grants Program (SPECA) program directly aligns with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan (March 2014 version) ([http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA\\_REE\\_Action\\_Plan\\_03-2014.pdf](http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_REE_Action_Plan_03-2014.pdf)) and specifically addresses: Goal 6 – Education and Science Literacy. The SPECA program is also aligned with the NIFA Strategic Plan (2014-2018) ([http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat\\_plan\\_2014.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat_plan_2014.pdf)), specifically addressing Strategic Goal No 1, (Science – Catalyze exemplary and relevant research, education, and extension programs); Subgoal 1.7 – (Ensure the development of human capital, communities, and a diverse workforce through research, education, extension and engagement programs in food and agricultural sciences to support a sustainable agriculture system).

This RFA incorporates comments received in previous years, including:

1. **Focus:** All SPECA-funded projects shall focus on improving the quality of academic instruction within the K-14 FANH sciences education system in order to develop graduates who are capable of (a) entering the FANH sciences workforce with occupational competencies expected by employers, or (b) pursuing an advanced degree within the FANH sciences.
2. **Scale:** All SPECA-funded projects shall create ways to maximize available educational resources, encourage partnerships, and reduce duplication of efforts among participating academic institutions. Projects shall also demonstrate the potential for adoption by other academic institutions.
3. **Impact:** All SPECA-funded projects shall seek to create measurable impacts or outcomes. Impacts are defined as anticipated benefits to the target project audience. Measuring impacts begins with a comprehensive Project Evaluation Plan that includes developing assessment instruments. The Project Evaluation Plan explained in Part I, C.3., provides further, specific guidance on the importance of measuring impacts.

SPECA-funded projects encourage academic institutions, in partnership with organizations and employers, to work collectively to identify and address a state or regional challenge or opportunity facing the FANH sciences education and workforce community. An application submitted to the SPECA grants program shall propose comprehensive and coordinated activities to address that challenge or opportunity. SPECA-funded project activities with the potential to demonstrate a state or regional impact on increasing the number, quality, diversity, and retention of K-14 level students who pursue a higher FANH sciences degree, are highly encouraged.

SPECA-funded activities could include, but are not limited to, developing, evaluating, and disseminating:

- Exceptional educational, laboratory, or related curricular materials in areas that contribute to any of the FANH sciences disciplines;
- Instructional delivery methods to improve student retention of academic content, and/or

- Professional development approaches to improve the capacity of faculty and teaching assistants to provide effective and up-to-date instruction.

As noted in the December 2012 President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) report to the President on Agricultural Preparedness and the Agriculture Research Enterprise, the talent pipeline for the agriculture workforce begins well before college admission and a focus on secondary programs holds tremendous potential to increase not only the number, but the diversity, of students entering baccalaureate programs, a requisite for the innovation needed in the FANH sciences. The full PCAST report is available at:

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast\\_agriculture\\_20121207.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast_agriculture_20121207.pdf)

Accordingly, SPECA-funded project activities shall support the creation, adaptation, and adoption of learning materials and teaching strategies to operationalize what we know about how students learn. Many of these concepts are identified in the National Research Council's publication: *How People Learn*, available at: [http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=9853](http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9853). SPECA-funded projects shall also focus on imparting both technical knowledge as well as 'soft' skills such as communication, team work, and problem solving, as these are abilities expected by employers. These concepts may be found in the publication: *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?*, available at: <http://www.aplu.org/document.doc?id=3414>.

Projects shall also promote faculty expertise and encourage widespread implementation of educational innovation. This solicitation especially encourages projects with the potential to transform classroom practices at the institutional level, projects that improve our current understanding of how students learn most effectively, and/or projects that improve faculty adoption of effective instructional approaches.

The intent of a SPECA-funded project is to make a significant positive impact on the challenge or opportunity being addressed, with the expectation that benefits will continue to accrue after NIFA funding ends. Projects are expected to encourage broad participation of students traditionally underrepresented in the FANH science disciplines. All projects should be grounded by concepts documented in relevant background literature promoting innovations in education and student learning, and show an awareness of relevant prior institutional experience and expertise.

Educational instrumentation and equipment requests are appropriate expenses in SPECA-funded projects. However, such purchases must directly support the specific student learning outcome proposed by the grant application. Convincing documentation and justification for such expenses are required in the grant application.

By authorizing and funding this program, Congress expects SPECA projects to: (a) produce measurable impacts aligned with SPECA program goals, (b) promote innovative, educational practices within the FANH sciences that improve how students learn, and (c) include a rigorous evaluation component to assess that project outcomes are met. Essentially, your application must convince a peer panel of a compelling educational challenge; clearly indicate how your

methodology is both unique and with merit; offer significant promise of adoption by others; and include a plan for how the project impacts will be sustained once grant funds end.

**Note:** Your project's Program Category, Educational Need Area and primary academic Discipline focus must appear in the required Project Summary/Abstract. The applicant must follow the format provided in Part IV, B.3. Field 7, for this Project Summary/Abstract. Applications that do not follow this format will not be reviewed.

## C. Program Area Description

### 1. Program Category

Your project must support for-credit, academic instruction with a primary focus in at least one of the following three K-14 **Grade Levels**:

- (a) **Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom:** Projects *specifically developed by or for the state Agriculture in the Classroom program* (Note: A letter of support from the relevant state AITC organization endorsing your project, clarifying the absence of duplication with existing materials or projects, and explaining its implementation process into the academic system must accompany applications submitted in this Program Category);
- (b) **Secondary School:** Projects with a *specific focus on any of the academic grades 9 through 12*;
- (c) **Junior or Community College:** Projects with a *specific focus on associate degree-level (2-year postsecondary) activities*

**A SPECA-funded project must primarily focus on any of the K-14 grade levels. Projects with a target audience of baccalaureate or higher-level students or teachers should, instead, be referred to the *Higher Education Challenge Grants Program* offered through NIFA at: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/educationchallengehigheredhep.cfm>.**

### 2. Educational Need Areas

When preparing a SPECA-funded project, focus shall be on activities contributing to a continuous pipeline of FANH sciences students educated for the FANH sciences workforce. The rationale for choosing a particular Educational Need Area below must be explained in the context of how the project can contribute to the development of a cadre of students who will either pursue higher degrees in FANH sciences or be prepared to enter the FANH sciences workforce.

- (a) SPECA-funded projects must focus on one of the three *Educational Need Areas* listed below. **Note: Your application must include an Evaluation Plan (Part I. C. 3.) for each Educational Need Area you select. This plan indicates how you will measure success in completing your objectives within your chosen *Need Area*. Therefore, choose only those**

***Educational Need Areas for which you can develop a rigorous Evaluation Plan.  
Applications will not be accepted for review if the Evaluation Plan is not included.***

*Educational Need Areas* for the SPECA program are:

1. **Curriculum Development, Instructional Delivery Systems and Expanding Student Career Opportunities:** The purpose of this initiative is to promote new and improved curricula and materials to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the Nation's K-14 academic programs in the FANH sciences. The overall objective is to stimulate the development, and facilitate the use, of exemplary education models and materials that incorporate the most recent advances in subject matter research, research on teaching and learning theory, and instructional technology.

Examples of eligible projects in this *Need Area* may include, but are not limited to, the following strategies:

- The development of innovative course content, including innovative ways to integrate scientific research experiences- into secondary and 2-year postsecondary curricula;
  - The use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects;
  - The development of course modules to provide students with exposure to food and agricultural issues in space as a way of piquing interest in discovery science in general and furthering students interests in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences in particular;
  - Utilization of practical applications to increase understanding of leadership roles, including critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, ethics and professionalism, and working in teams;
  - Connecting the academic classroom experience with daily leadership roles and organizational activities;
  - The introduction of new subjects, or new applications of knowledge, pertaining to the FANH sciences;
  - Hands-on learning experiences and methods to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations;
  - Opportunities for students to complete apprenticeships, internships, career mentoring experiences or other participatory learning experiences;
  - Creating career placement or higher education academic counseling activities, with the expected outcome of encouraging graduates to pursue and complete postsecondary degrees; or
  - Other approaches to achieve SPECA program goals.
2. **Faculty preparation and enhancement for teaching.** The purpose of this *Need Area* is to advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency, subject matter expertise, pedagogy, responsiveness to changes in student demographic composition and learning styles, and student recruitment and advising skills. Training of targeted faculty

recipients must be relevant to the identified educational needs of the students, who will be the beneficiaries of such faculty development. Activities may include both formal training and informal continuing education. Any individual recipient of federal funds must be an "eligible participant" as defined in the definitions section of this RFA (Part VIII, E.).

NIFA encourages the submission of applications that coordinate the recruitment and development of faculty/student teams to participate in research activities at host research institutions and laboratories. In such instances, the SPECA grantee will administer the grant project in coordination with research staff at a USDA and/or other agency or research facility.

Examples of eligible projects in this *Need Area* may include, but are not limited to, the following strategies:

- Engaging graduate students enrolled in agricultural education degree program (and/or existing faculty in agricultural education) to more effectively interact with K-14 programs;
  - Developing a self-sustaining model for faculty professional development that better prepares new faculty for teaching careers, or provides retraining for experienced faculty;
  - Creating assessments that document student learning outcomes or that identify conceptual areas or skills particularly challenging to students, followed by appropriate changes in instructional approaches to effectively address these issues;
  - Establishing systems that improve student learning across a curriculum, and identifying ways to redesign curricula to meet goals for achieving improved student learning and competencies;
  - Integrating current science and pedagogy into a teacher preparation curriculum or professional development program (this may involve actual hands-on research experiences for teachers);
  - Exploring web-based approaches for faculty professional development; or
  - Other approaches to achieve SPECA program goals.
3. **Facilitating Interaction with Other Academic Institutions.** This *Need Area* promotes K-14 focused activities that promote linkages between secondary, 2-year postsecondary, and baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in the FANH sciences. Activities should focus on ensuring completion of secondary degrees, enrollment into postsecondary programs and/or transfer to a 4-year institution. Partnerships, collaborative arrangements and shared resources between institutions (including course credit sharing arrangements) are encouraged.

Examples of eligible projects in this *Need Area* may include, but are not limited to, the following strategies:

- Development and use of articulation agreements, 2+2 or 2+2+2 arrangements, advanced placement credit transfer, or the sharing of faculty and facilities;
- A project that focuses on developing and implementing comprehensive, multi-institutional practices proven to recruit and retain K-14 level students with a focus on cultivating those students to pursue a postsecondary FANH sciences degree (Note: projects that directly recruit secondary school or 2-year postsecondary graduates into baccalaureate-level programs are not supported by this grants program);
- A collaborative project between faculty from K-12, two-year postsecondary, and baccalaureate-level schools that develops a functional plan facilitating seamless transfer of course credit between institutions;
- A pilot project that explores the practical aspects of using remote laboratories or instruction among several institutions;
- A project that will result in establishing and implementing programs or procedures (faculty sharing, articulation agreements, electronic exchange of coursework, ... etc.) to disseminate curricula, instructional methods, or training practices to faculty across the state or region; or
- Other approaches to achieve SPECA program goals.

(b) **Unallowable Costs:** Promotional items (e.g., T-shirts and other give-a-ways) and food functions (e.g., cookouts or other social meal gatherings) are considered ‘entertainment’ expenses, and are also *not allowed* under this grants program. Note: Under Federal cost principles, restricted items (like those mentioned directly above) are not permitted for use as an applicant’s contribution to meeting the matching funds requirement for this grants program.

(c) SPECA- funded projects shall engage more than a single course or an individual instructor.

(d) **Stipends** to support students’ experiential, academic learning activities outside of the traditional classroom are permitted (as long as such activities are clearly related to a student’s degree program and are not extracurricular). Stipends may be requested for materials or supplies to facilitate a student’s broad exposure to research/field techniques and methodologies, as well as for reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings) directly supporting this funded project. In order for the students to be provided a stipend, they must be currently matriculating in the institution(s) where the projects are being implemented. Stipends may not be used for tuition or scholarships.

Any application primarily focused on providing student stipends should also include a plan demonstrating how such student stipends will continue into the future once current grant funds expire. SPECA does not encourage projects that cannot be sustained.

(e) Note: Any individual (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA (see Part VIII, E.). Where eligibility is claimed under 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request.

(f) Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with an agency or research facility, including a **USDA agency**, to leverage grant funds and/or contribute towards overall goals and objectives. USDA agencies are: Farm Service Agency (FSA); Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS); Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS); Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Rural Development Agency (RD); the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS); Economic Research Service (ERS); Forest Service (FS); Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA); Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS); Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); Risk Management Agency (RMA); Agricultural Research Service (ARS); and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

(g) Funded project outcomes are expected to continue after NIFA funding ends (See Dissemination and Continuation Plans section 4, below).

### 3. Project Evaluation Plan

a) Evaluation Information that must be in your grant application and suggested format for submitting expected outcomes:

<b>Total expected student impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Total number of students to be directly supported by grant (i.e., stipends)	
Number of underrepresented students to be supported during the grant period (i.e., stipends)	
Number of women students to be supported during the grant period (i.e., stipends)	
Number of students who will complete internships and other experiential learning during the grant-period	
Number of students who will complete international experiences during the grant-period	
Other relevant Impacts...	
<b>Total expected faculty impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Number of faculty attending professional development: sabbaticals, workshops, conferences, etc.	
Number of sabbaticals, workshops, conferences to be attended by faculty	
Other relevant Impacts...	
<b>Total expected overall impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Number of products to be developed through grant funds (i.e., curricula, academic programs, recruitment/retention programs, materials, experiential learning opportunities)	
Number of collaborations to be developed between institutions	
Number of individuals who indirectly will benefit from the projects (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited or retained)	
Number of collaborations to be developed between institutions	
Number of projects that will measure changes in student learning or engagement	
Other relevant Impacts...	

b) The evaluation may also include assessment of other outcomes, particularly if the project aims to change organizational structures, create cost-efficiencies, or achieve other ends. Explain the data gathering procedures that will be used to monitor and assess progress toward intended project goals. When describing the measurement instruments you plan to use (surveys, interviews, focus groups, assessments of e-portfolios or capstone projects, measures of class performance, scores on standardized tests, cost-benefit analyses, etc.), be sure to mention why they are appropriate to gauging success.

- c) The evaluation plan section should make a convincing case to reviewers that - at the conclusion of the grant - the grantee could report the extent to which learning and engagement outcomes, professional development goals, and/or organizational outcomes have been achieved. Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the applicant thought about how to measure what worked, what did not work as planned, and what adjustments could be made to enhance program outcomes in the future. Collection of this evidence is critical to achieving SPECA's goal of making data about educational improvements and innovation available to the education community. An evaluation plan that only indicates a desire to develop assessment measures once the project is underway, and an eventual description of resulting project activities and outcomes, would be considered a poorly prepared and inadequate evaluation plan.
- d) The project budget should contain funding to either hire an outside project evaluator, or to present convincing evidence that an appropriate evaluator is already on staff and available to provide assistance with assessment and evaluation throughout the life of the project. As a guide, up to 10 percent of grant funds may be used to support this purpose. The following activities are examples of items that may be included in the Evaluation Plan: project objectives that lend themselves most readily to measurement and evaluation, baseline assessment data and a planned collection process from a possible comparison or control group, possible measurement instruments (surveys, student journals, standardized tests, interviews, focus groups, analysis of e-portfolios or capstone projects, cost-benefit analyses, etc.), a strategy for what assessment measures will be a part of the annual and final Project Performance Reports (Part VI. D.) and how this information will eventually be disseminated to interested parties and to the public.
- e) Finally, the Evaluation Plan itself should contain measures of (1) **student learning or engagement** and/or faculty professional development and (2) the **number of students or faculty impacted by your project as a result of the proposed activities**. In addition, the PD should specify metrics summarizing who benefited the most (and the least) from your project, an explanation of what revisions, improvements, or enhancements you would make, funding permitting, to increase the value of this project in the future, and ideas about how to make projects like yours more cost-effective. These, and other funded project assessments determined by the project director and evaluation team should be reported both annually and in the final performance report (Part VI. D.).

The following, suggested evaluation examples are derived from the Department of Education's Report of the Academic Competitiveness Council, May 2007, Education Undergraduate National Goals and Metrics.

“To demonstrate progress toward increasing the number of graduates, the following metric is suggested: first **provide baseline data** for the year preceding the grant award showing the number and/or percentage of students who declare and/or complete a major program of study of agriscience or agribusiness within your unit; and second, provide similar data for the final year of the grant and include an assessment of the impact of your project on changes from the baseline data. List the expected number of students benefiting from this project and their level of education, a table is recommended.

To demonstrate progress toward increasing the quality of instruction, the following metric is suggested: first **provide baseline data** for the year preceding the grant award showing the current number and/or percentage of graduates who either graduate and pursue a vocation in the [FANH] sciences, or who pursue advanced degrees within the [FANH] sciences; and second, provide similar data for the final year of the grant and include an assessment of the impact of your project on changes from the baseline data”.

Suggested resources to obtain quantitative, baseline, student enrollment, degrees granted and employment data for comparison purposes; postsecondary institutions may find appropriate: information in the Food and Agricultural Education Information System (FAEIS) at: <http://faeis.ahnrit.vt.edu/>, and from the publication: *Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in Food, Renewable Energy, and the Environment United States, 2010-2015* at: <http://www.ag.purdue.edu/usda/employment/pages/default.aspx>. Other, similar sources may also be consulted.

#### **Additional Resources for Project Evaluation:**

- NSF 02-057: The 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation, a basic guide to quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods for educational projects  
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/start.htm>
- Field-Tested Learning Assessment Guide (FLAG): This website is designed for Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology Instructors who are interested in new approaches to evaluating student learning, attitudes, and performance. It has a primer on assessment and evaluation, classroom assessment techniques, discipline-specific tools, and resources - all in a searchable, downloadable data base, <http://www.flaguide.org/>
- American Evaluation Association. Online Resources: <http://www.eval.org/>

## **4. Dissemination & Continuation Plans**

### **(a) Dissemination Plan**

Include in the project’s Dissemination Plan (see Part IV, B.3. Field 8.2.e.), a description of how the applicant plans to communicate project accomplishments (products, results and impacts, etc.) to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or national conferences and workshops, including the SPECA Project Directors Conference (see Part VI, D.1.).

### **(b) Continuation Plan**

Applicants are also expected to include a statement describing how project outcomes are expected to continue after NIFA funding ends. This plan should include expected outputs and how these will become institutionalized. Also, describe any strategies for adapting or

expanding these outputs for a larger audience. Provide details of these changes, what are the expected outcomes, and the targeted audience who benefits from this project.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for support of this program in FY 2015 is approximately \$900,000. The funds will be awarded through a grant. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

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 FY2015, you may submit applications to the SPECA 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 SPECA Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) **Resubmitted application**. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the SPECA Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV B Field 12). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

### **C. Grant Types**

Applicants may submit one of the following four types of grants:

#### **1. Conference/Planning Proposal**

Applicants in this Grant Type may request up to \$25,000 (total conference, not per year) to facilitate strategic planning session(s) required of faculty, industry, professional association, community leaders, or other necessary participants for the specific purpose of developing a formal plan leading to a subsequent submission of a *Large-scale (state or region) comprehensive initiatives (LCI)*, as described directly below in C.4. **A Conference/Planning grant application may not be submitted in the same year for which a LCI application for the same project is also submitted.**

#### **2. Regular Project Proposal (Single Institution/Organization)**

Applicants may request up to \$50,000 (total, not per year) for a Regular Project Proposal. In a Regular Project Proposal, the applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners.

### **3. Joint Project Proposal (Applicant + Two or more Partners)**

Applicants may request up to \$150,000 (total, not per year) for a Joint Project Proposal. In a Joint Project Proposal, the applicant executes the project with assistance from at least two additional partners. The partners must share grant funds (see explanation of required funds distribution percentage among partners in the definition of a Joint Project Proposal in Part VIII, E.).

Note: Joint Projects must include both the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget and the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Subaward Budget Attachment Forms. The forms should clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required sharing percentage. All expenditures for the applicant and all partners should be further itemized in the Budget Justification. Funds **do not** have to be divided equally among project years.

### **4. Large-scale (state or region) comprehensive initiatives (LCI) (Applicant + Two or more Partners)**

Applicants may request up to \$300,000 (total, not per year) for a large-scale (state or region) comprehensive initiatives (LCI) Project Proposal. In a LCI Project Proposal, the applicant executes the project with assistance from at least two additional partners. The additional partners must share grant funds (see explanation of required funds distribution percentage among partners in the definition of a LCI Project Proposal in Part VIII, E.). An LCI project differs from a Joint Project Proposal in project scope and impact. LCI Project Proposals must support a multi-partner approach to solving a major state or regional challenge in FANH sciences education at K-14 grade levels. LCI Project Proposals are characterized by multiple partners (each providing a specific expertise) organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management ability to organize and carry out the initiative.

Note: LCI Projects must include both the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget and the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Subaward Budget Attachment Forms. The forms should clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required sharing percentage. All expenditures for the applicant and all partners should be further itemized in the Budget Justification. Funds **do not** have to be divided equally among project years.

Impacts for all LCI Projects: In addition to addressing the Evaluation Plan section of this program (Part I. C.3.) expected impacts from a LCI Project must include, but are not limited to:

- An assessment of significant progress toward addressing the national challenge of increasing the number and diversity of FANH sciences graduates, while addressing the specific state or regional opportunity defined in the grant application;
- Documented expansion of the number of students who enroll in postsecondary courses in FANH sciences;
- Documented enhanced retention rates of students exposed to LCI Project activities;

- A comprehensive project evaluation, using the indicators and methods defined in this grants program, that informs the FANH sciences community and others about the effectiveness of this LCI Project;
- A description of ongoing activities supported by this LCI Project, and a description of those same activities that will be sustained once grant funds end; and
- A description of any related activities expected to occur as an outgrowth of this funded project.

#### **D. Project Duration**

Project periods may range from twenty-four (24) to thirty-six (36) months. Projects should conclude no sooner than twenty-four (24) months after the award start date to allow the applicant sufficient time to evaluate the results and report the impacts. LCI projects are expected to use the full, 36-month period. Conference projects may range between twenty-four (24) and thirty-six (36) months.

No project may be active for longer than five (5) years, including no-cost extensions.

**For project budget and timeline purposes, the project start date should not occur prior to August 2015.**

#### **E. Number and Size of Grant Awards**

The total number of grants awarded by this grant program will depend on the number and type of meritorious applications submitted in response to this notice. There is no predetermined number of Conference/Planning, Regular, Joint, or LCI Project Proposals that may be awarded in any competition.

Based on the project scope and budget of all applications selected for awards, the actual, individual grant amounts awarded by NIFA under this grants program may differ from the funds requested by the applicant. In such cases, revised budgets and revised plans of work may be required by NIFA before an award is made.

#### **F. Application Submission & Award Limitations**

There is no limit on the number of applications that may be submitted by an eligible applicant. **However, a successful applicant institution/organization will only be awarded a maximum of two (2) grants per year under this program. A successful LCI grant applicant institution/organization will only be awarded a maximum of one (1) LCI grant in any one, annual SPECA grants program competition, and generally, an individual academic (or other) unit (a college, school of agriculture, etc.) within the institution/organization may only have one (1) active, LCI grant in effect at any time.**

#### **G. Funding Limitations per Institution**

There are no limits on the total grant program funds that may be awarded to any one institution/organization in successive years of this competition. Successful award recipients may apply for additional awards in subsequent years either as a lead applicant or as a joint or LCI partner on a project (note LCI project focus restriction in item F, directly above).

## **H. 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, we consider education in RCR essential to the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 3022, institutions that conduct USDA-funded 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 Authorized Organizational Representative (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, and documentation used 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 will, at a minimum, 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 (<https://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 only be submitted by: (1) public secondary schools, (2) public or private nonprofit junior and community colleges, (3) institutions of higher education, or (4) nonprofit organizations (Attach IRS 501(c)(3) status under R&R ‘Other Project Information’ Field 12 Other Attachments).

An eligible applicant must meet the definition of an Eligible Institution/Organization as stated in this RFA (see Part VIII, E., Definitions). **Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline will result in NIFA returning the application without review or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.**

Applicant institutions/organizations must demonstrate capacity for and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of agriscience or agribusiness generally, and to the specific need and/or discipline(s) for which a grant is requested.

Award recipients may subcontract portions of the project to organizations not eligible to apply, provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project.

For the purposes of this program, for secondary schools, each separate school in a school district that meets the definition of a public secondary school is eligible to apply for SPECA Grants Program awards. A school system is not eligible to apply. For community or junior colleges, and for institutions of higher education, individual branches of a State university system or public system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree granting institutions are treated as separate institutions, and are therefore eligible for SPECA Grants Program awards. Separate branches or campuses of a college not individually accredited as degree-granting institutions are not treated as separate institutions. Accreditation must be by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

Any individual (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds above must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA. (See Part VIII, Definitions.) Where eligibility is claimed under 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request.

**If an institution/organization cannot accept Federal funds directly, it must submit a letter stating that it will accept the award, but that funds must be administered through a fiscal agent organization. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant and the letter must be countersigned by an authorized representative of the fiscal agent organization. The letter should include the fiscal agent’s point of contact, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. Both the fiscal agent organization and the applicant school or institution/organization must submit complete management information (see Part V, D.). Nevertheless, the legal recipient of the award (as identified on the applicant’s SF 424 (R&R) Cover Sheet) must be an eligible public secondary school,**

**public or private nonprofit junior or community college, institution of higher education or nonprofit organization, as noted above.** (Submission of fiscal agent information (above) is not requested now, but will be required, before an award is made.)

**Please note: Fiscal agents and school boards are not eligible as legal recipients of the award.**

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

In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the SPECA program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA. The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

1. To a research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); or
2. To an entity eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program (as defined in section 251(f)(1)(C) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, 7 U.S.C. 6971(f)(1)(C)), including a partner (see Part VIII, E. Definitions for definition of partnership) of such an entity.

Entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program and exempt from the matching funds requirement include:

- a) 1862 Land-grant Institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b) 1890 Land-grant Institutions
- c) 1994 Land-grant Institutions
- d) Recipients of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)
- e) Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)
- f) Insular Area Schools Eligible to Receive Funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- g) Recipients of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h) Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) - (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA certification, see instructions for requesting certification at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>, and for attaching the certification in Part IV, C. of this RFA)
- i) Recipients of funds under a program established under section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge

Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program.

A proposal submitted in response to this RFA may indicate that the work will be completed by multiple entities as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership among multiple entities is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or third party in-kind contribution (see section 2 of 7 CFR 3430 or section 96 of 2 CFR part 200) to the total project budget costs.

If a proposal indicates that the work on the project will be completed by multiple entities as partners, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement regardless of whether all entities involved are otherwise exempt. Any partner entity can serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

After proposals have been recommended for award, NIFA will determine if the submitted proposal and proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity not otherwise exempt from the matching requirement and the proposal does not reflect substantial involvement of at least one partner that is exempt under #2 above, then the matching requirement will apply. Exemption from the matching requirement for an entity not otherwise exempt is limited to the project for which it is a partner.

Waiver of Match - NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year with respect to a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board for the year involved. To determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB, please refer to the [2014 Research, Education and Economics Action Plan](#). Instructions for requesting a waiver are included in Part IV, C. of this RFA.

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

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

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

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

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as long as 2 weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **“Register” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2. below to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide”.

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

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>. Under Step 1 click on “Download a Grant Application Package,” and enter the funding opportunity number

**Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-SAECF-004897** 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.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

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

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

Grants.gov iPortal (see <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants>):  
Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

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

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

**Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or that attachments are in PDF format; see Part III section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).**

Grants.gov provides online tools to assist if you do not own PDF-generating software. You will find PDF conversion software at <http://test.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/pdf-conversion-software.html>.

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

- Email: [electronic@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov)
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, 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. The following additional information may be helpful:

**Field 2. Date Submitted and Applicant Identifier** – This field is provided for the Applicant’s use if they have an internal tracking system they would like to use in tracking applications they have submitted. This field is not required.

**Field 3. Date received by State and State Application Identifier** – This is not applicable for SPECA applications; these fields do not need to be completed.

**Field 5. Applicant Information** – **This must be the legal name of the eligible college or university (See Part III. A, Eligible Applicant).** Official correspondence will be directed to either the Project Director (Field 14) or the Authorized Representative (Field 19).

**Field 8. Type of Application** – Only ‘New’ or ‘Resubmitted’ applications are permitted.

**Field 12. Proposed Project Start Date and End Date** – A project’s duration should normally be at least 24 months (to allow time for assessment and evaluation) and no more than 36 months. **Project Start Date should not occur before August 2015.**

**Field 15. Estimated Project Funding** –

- a. **Total Estimated Project Funding** = Amount of Federal funds requested (See Part II. C. for maximum award amounts permitted)
- b. **Total Federal & Non-Federal Funds** = Federal funds + Matching Funds (Note: The Matching Requirement for this program is 100% (see Part III. B.))

**Field 20. Pre-application** – Not applicable to the SPECA program. No attachments needed.

### **2. 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. **Complete all applicable fields.**

**Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format).** Project Summary/Abstract is required in all applications. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template. **Application will not be accepted for review if the project summary/abstract is not included or not in PDF format.**

Please use the project summary/abstract template available as a pdf fillable form available at: [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/speca\\_project\\_summary\\_template.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/speca_project_summary_template.pdf)

Include the following underlined text along with your responses:

- List the Project Title;
- List the Project Director (and any) Co-Project Director(s) (include institutional affiliation for each);
- List your project’s Program Category: (see Part I, C.1.);
- List your project’s Educational Need Area: (Part I, C.2.);
- List the projected number of students or faculty to be served by the project during the project period (i.e., using a new curriculum, instructional delivery system, student career opportunity; benefitting from a partnership between institutions; etc.)
- List your project’s *primary* Discipline Code/Academic Discipline: (Select one from the list below);

Discipline Codes & Academic Discipline

G - General Food, agricultural and human sciences (includes multidisciplinary projects)	L - Environmental Sciences/Management
M - Agribusiness (includes Management, Marketing, and Agricultural Economics)	F - Food Science/Technology and Manufacturing
E - Agriscience (includes Agricultural/Biological Engineering)	N - Human Nutrition
S - Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Agricultural Education, Agricultural Communications, and Rural Sociology)	H - Human Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences (excludes Human Nutrition)
A - Animal Sciences	I - International Education/Research (enhancement of U.S. programs)
Q - Aquaculture	P - Plant Sciences and Horticulture
C - Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (includes Forestry)	B - Related Biological Sciences (includes General/Basic Biotechnology, Biochemistry, and Microbiology)
J - Entomology – Animal	D - Soil Sciences
T - Entomology – Plant	V - Veterinary Medicine/Science
	W - Water Science
	O - Other (Describe only if not listed above)

- Grant Type: Conference/Planning, Regular, Joint, LCI. (See ‘Definitions’, Part VIII. E.);
- Total Funds Requested: (List total Federal funds requested for this application. If this project is a Joint or LCI Project Proposal, also list each partner’s total funds requested next to the institution/organization’s name); and
- Partners: If Joint or LCI Project Proposal, list all partner institutions/organizations that will share grant funding (Note: Each Partner so identified needs to have their budget information submitted on a separate subaward budget attachment);

- Summary Text - Provide a very concise (max. 250 word) summary of your project. **Application will not be accepted for review if the summary text exceeds 250 words.** Summary text should include:
  - Purpose: What is the major problem your project will address?
  - Audience: Who are the intended beneficiaries? Who will be impacted?
  - Products: What will be produced?
  - Outcome/Impact: What is the intended result (consequence) of your project? Describe as the primary benefits to your audience. Note: outcomes/impacts should be measurable, and should be included in your project’s assessment/evaluation plan to demonstrate how you will assess whether or not these benefits were achieved (See explanation of terms in Part IV, B. 3. Field 8. 2.c., below).

**Field 8. Project Narrative – (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format). Application will not be accepted for review if the project narrative is not included or not in PDF format.** Below are specifications for the Project Narrative. Note additional specifications at the end of this section for conference/planning project applications.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 15 pages of written text (excluding up to a maximum of 5 additional pages for supporting figures and tables). We have established this maximum (20-page limit) to ensure fair and equitable competition. Applicants must ensure that the page limit is not exceeded after converting to PDF format. **Applications will not be accepted for review if the project narrative is not included, exceeds 20 pages, or is not in PDF format.**

**The Project Narrative in this Field 8 attachment contains the major description of your project. It follows the SPECA program’s Evaluation Criteria (Part V. B). Accordingly, please provide your responses in the following format:**

(Note: To facilitate application review and evaluation, **include the following, underlined wording as headings in your attached Project Narrative**, followed by your response for each item.)

**The Project Narrative must include all of the following:**

1. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem:
  - a. Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact. Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (2) the anticipated project audience; and (3) the project’s target objectives (what change in education is proposed?) and its anticipated, overall *impact* on improving the quality of FANH sciences education (Note: Your *impact* shall be a change you can measure at the project’s conclusion.). Clearly identify and explain how the proposed project will address your *Educational Need Area* described in Part I, C.2.
  - b. Project Justification. Describe how and by whom the focus and scope of the project were determined. Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project’s *Educational Need Area* (Part I.C.2) will be of value at the State, regional, national, or international level(s), and where applicable, how it will

improve the FANH science capabilities of students. Describe any ongoing or recently completed, significant activities related to the proposed project for which previous funding was received under this program.

- c. Institutional Long-range Goals. Demonstrate how the institution/organization attributes a high priority to the project; discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the institution/organization's long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; explain how the project will help satisfy the institution/organization's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution/organization's strategic plan.
- d. Innovation. Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of FANH sciences education, solving an education problem, or promoting programs that advance equal opportunity for all students. Using either actual experiences or literature background information, show why this approach was chosen.
- e. Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus. Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in FANH sciences education, or to other academic curricula, and how the project will enhance students' understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted by, or serve as a model for, other institutions.

## 2. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages:

- a. Plan of Operation and Methodology. Describe procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project. Describe plans for management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.
- b. Timetable. Identify all important project milestones (performance targets that indicate when project goals will be met) and dates as they relate to project start-up, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and closeout.
- c. Products, Results and Measurable Outcomes. Outline the expected products/results and their outcome (impact) on strengthening FANH sciences education in the United States.

### **Important Note: Make sure to differentiate among the three terms:**

1. "Products" may be actual *items or services* acquired with funds, e.g., "...developed three, new Web-based courses";
  2. "Results" are *accomplishments* related to the products, e.g., "...additional course materials now available online to reinforce student learning during non-classroom hours"; and
  3. "Impacts" are the *benefits* to your audience. Impacts are the consequences of your project and the most critical elements in your Evaluation Plan. They are a measure of the results by comparison to what might have happened in the absence of the funded project, e.g., "...an observed, overall increase in student learning based upon 8% higher average test scores of those students who both attended class and used the supplemental, Web-based course materials".)
- d. Evaluation Plans. State the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results and measurable impacts from the project. Discuss the strategies and metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the two SPECA Program Goals from Part I, A. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project

will improve education. This section shall clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts. (See Part I.C.3. for additional *Evaluation Plan* information)

- e. Dissemination Plans. The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts...etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication. (See Part I.C.4. for additional *Dissemination Plan* information)
  - f. Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts. Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen FANH sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, joint or LCI projects with other educational institution/organizations, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Also explain how it will stimulate academia, the States, or the private sector to join with the Federal partner in enhancing FANH sciences education. Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.
3. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building:
- a. Institutional/organizational Commitment and Capability. Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.
  - b. Institutional/organizational Resources. Document that necessary institutional/organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how the institutional/organizational resources to be made available to the project, when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project.
  - c. Academic Enhancement. Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching at the institution (including any partner institutions/organizations). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above (2.b., Timetable) will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution/organization or the grant period.
  - d. Continuation Plans. Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. For example, does the institution's/organization's long-range budget or academic plan provide for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends, are plans for eventual self-support built into the project, are plans being made to institutionalize the program if it meets with success, and are there indications of other continuing non-Federal support.
4. Key Personnel: Discuss the adequacy and specific attributes and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project. Also include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.
5. Budget and Cost-effectiveness:

- a. Budget. In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that the total budget, including funds requested from USDA and any matching support provided, are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s), and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project. Provide a summary of sources and amounts of all third party matching support. If the application addresses more than one *Educational Need Area* (see Part I, C.2.), applicants should include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area.
- b. Cost-effectiveness. Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on an *Educational Need Area*, or to promote coalition building that could lead to future ventures.

**For Conference/Planning Grant Type (Part II.C.1.) applications, in addition to addressing the items 1-5 directly above in the Project Narrative, you must also fully describe the conference/planning event proposed, and include all of the following:**

- 1) **Justification for the meeting;**
- 2) **Recent meetings on the same subject with dates and locations;**
- 3) **Names and organizational affiliations of the chairperson and other members of the organizing committee;**
- 4) **Proposed program (or agenda for the conference), including a listing of scheduled participants and their institutional affiliations; and**
- 5) **Method of announcement or invitation to be used.**

**Field 9. Bibliography & Cited References - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)**

If needed, provide a complete list of all references cited in the application.

**Field 10. Facilities & Other Resources - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)**

Describe the types, location, and availability of instrumentation and physical facilities necessary to carry out the work proposed. **If special academic, private or government laboratories or facilities are being used, include a letter in the application from the authorized representative of the facility describing the proposed arrangements and availability.** Any such letter shall be included as a part of Other Attachments, see Field 12 below.

**Field 11. Equipment Documentation - (Optional Attachment – Must be PDF format)**

Equipment purchased (costing in excess of \$5,000 for each item) must be fully justified under this section. Other purchases (e.g., computers, laboratory materials) are described, instead, in the Budget Justification section under the 'Materials and Supplies' line item. Note: fixed equipment, as previously defined (Part I. C), is not funded in a SPECA grant.

**Field 12. Other Attachments - (Must be PDF format).**

- **Response to Previous Review – PDF Attachment. 1 Page Limit.** Title the attachment as ‘Response to Previous Review’ in the document header and save file as ‘Response to Previous Review’. This requirement only applies to “Resubmitted Applications” as described under Part II, B., “Types of Applications”. PDs must respond to the previous review panel summary on **no more than one page**, titled, “RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS REVIEW”. If desired, additional comments may be included in the text of the Project Narrative, subject to the page limitations of that section.
- **Appendices to Project Narrative – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as ‘Appendices’ in the document header and save file as ‘Appendices’. Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.
- **Collaborative Arrangements – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as ‘Collaborative Arrangements’ in the document header and save file as ‘Collaborative Arrangement’. If it is necessary to enter into formal consulting or collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements should be fully explained and justified. If the consultant(s) or collaborator(s) are known at the time of the application, a vitae or resume should be provided. In addition, evidence (e.g., letter of support signed by the AR of the consultant/collaborating organization) should be provided that the collaborators involved have agreed to render these services. The applicant also will be required to provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget portion of the application.
- **Matching Funds Documentation – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as ‘Matching Funds Documentation’ in the document header and save file as “Matching Funds Documentation”. This grants program requires applicants to provide 100% matching funds from non-Federal sources. Signed letters from each source of matching funds are required, and should be attached. Recommended contents of these letters is described below in item Field 6, R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget, Field K, (b) Matching.
- **IRS 501(c)(3) Status – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as ‘IRS 501 (c)(3) Status’ in the document header and save file as ‘IRS501(c)(3)Status’.
- **Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture (NLGCA) Certification – PDF Attachment.** Applicants claiming exemption from the new matching requirement as NLGCA, must attach the NLGCA certification letter they requested and received from NIFA. Title attachment ‘NLGCA Certification’ and save file as ‘NLGCACertification’. To request certification as an NLGCA, complete the form at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>. Note that certification can take up to 30 days from submission of request form.

- **Expected Outcomes – PDF Attachment**

Tile the attachment “Expected Outcomes” in the document header and name the file to be saved as “ExpectedOutcomes”. Please use a format, similar to what is provided below, to submit expected impacts and attach it as the last page of the application.

<b>Total expected student impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Total number of students to be directly supported by grant (i.e., stipends)	
Number of underrepresented students to be supported during the grant period (i.e., stipends)	
Number of women students to be supported during the grant period (i.e., stipends)	
Number of students who will complete internships and other experiential learning during the grant-period	
Number of students who will complete international experiences during the grant-period	
Other relevant Impacts...	
<b>Total expected faculty impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Number of faculty attending professional development: sabbaticals, workshops, conferences, etc.	
Number of sabbaticals, workshops, conferences to be attended by faculty	
Other relevant Impacts...	
<b>Total expected overall impact during entire grant period</b>	<b>Expected Number</b>
Number of products to be developed through grant funds (i.e., curricula, academic programs, recruitment/retention programs, materials, experiential learning opportunities)	
Number of collaborations to be developed between institutions	
Number of individuals who indirectly will benefit from the projects (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited or retained)	
Number of collaborations to be developed between institutions	
Number of projects that will measure changes in student learning or engagement	
Other relevant Impacts...	

#### **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. This section of the Guide includes information about the people who require a Senior/Key Person Profile, 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.

Also, **you must attach** ‘Current and Pending Support’ information (see NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide p. 33, item 5.3, for guidelines and information format) for each senior/key person identified above. **Note: Even if no other funding is currently reported under the ‘Active’ section of this attachment, you must still list information for this grant application under the ‘Pending’ section of this attachment for each senior/key person identified above.**

**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. The following, additional information may be helpful:

Complete one R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget Form for each 12-month period. If your project involves partners with whom you plan to share Federal funds (Joint or LCI Project Proposal), make sure (a) you include a subaward attachment for each project partner (subaward/consortium), for each 12-month period and (b) your budget figures reflect the required budget sharing criteria (See ‘Definitions’, Part VIII. E, Joint or LCI Project Proposal). Reasonable travel expenses to attend the Project Director’s Conference may be included in the travel expenses.

**Field H. Indirect Costs** – See Part IV, D for more information.

**Field K. Budget Justification – (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)**

**Application will not be accepted for review if this document is not included or not in PDF format (no exceptions).** Applicants must include a budget request that is appropriate for this solicitation. All USDA SPECA grants have a cap of:

- Conference/Planning Proposal: \$25,000.
- Regular Project Proposal: \$50,000
- Joint Project Proposal: \$150,000
- Large-scale comprehensive initiatives (LCI): \$300,000

**Applications with budget requests that exceed the cap will be excluded from review.**

(a) Provide a Budget Justification that reflects each 12-month period. If your project involves partners with whom you plan to share Federal funds (Joint or LCI Project Proposal), make sure the attachment reflects information (a) for the applicant institution (each project partner (subaward/consortium), for each 12-month period plus a cumulative column total for the entire project, and (b) your budget figures reflect the required budget sharing criteria (See ‘Definitions’, Part VIII, E, Joint Project Proposal). Letters of consent or collaboration or other evidence should be provided to show that collaborators have agreed to participate (such letters are to be included in Field 12).

The Budget Justification should follow a standard spreadsheet format (‘Budget Line Item’ = row; ‘Budget Year’ = columns) including a detailed, itemized breakdown of each of the line item categories reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form. This Budget Justification attachment provides a more detailed, itemized breakdown for each budget line item reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form (i.e., itemize your complete list of ‘Materials and Supplies’ showing per unit costs and number of units to be purchased, etc.). Items should be justified and include relevance to the project objectives. Include a description for each requested budget line item found on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form (i.e., total budget amount reported on the R&R Fed and Non-Fed Budget form should equal the total budget amount reported on the Budget Justification attachment).

**(b) Matching: Note: This grants program requires applicants to provide 100% matching funds from non-Federal sources. The sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution shall be summarized on a separate page immediately following the Budget Justification. See instructions directly above, Field H, for restrictions on how to report indirect costs as matching contributions.**

Cash and non-cash contributions from the institution/organization and any third parties shall be identified.

**The letters of commitment (written verification (i.e., a signed letter from the AR of the source of matching funds; including both cash and in-kind contributions)) are to be attached in the R&R Other Project Information, Field 12. For each source of non-Federal matching funds from third parties.**

Include each of these signed matching letters, as well, as attachments in Field 12 of the R&R Other Project Information form.

**Written verification means:**

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period; and (6) whether the applicant can designate cash as the applicant deems necessary or the cash contribution has been designated to a particular budget item; and

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

If the contribution is to be split between cash and in-kind, the exact dollar amount for each category must be clearly stated. The letter shall also clearly state the budget categories that the contributed dollars shall be applied to and clearly state the individual items of in-kind contributions. Any cost sharing commitments specified in the application will be referenced and included as a condition of an award resulting from this announcement.

Allowable costs will be determined in accordance with the applicable program legislation, the purpose of the grant award, the terms and conditions for the grant award, and by the following Federal cost principles that are applicable to the type of organization receiving the award,

regardless of the type of award or tier (i.e., prime awardee, subaward) as are in effect at the time of the award:

- (1) **2 CFR Part 220** (OMB Circular No. A-21), “Cost Principles for Educational Institutions.”
- (2) **2 CFR Part 225** (OMB Circular No. A-87), “Cost Principles for State and Local Government (including certain Indian tribal governments).”
- (3) **2 CFR Part 230** (OMB A-122), “Cost Principles for Nonprofit Organizations” other than institutions of higher education (nonprofit organizations excluded from coverage are listed in Attachment C of OMB Circular No. A-122).
- (4) **Federal Acquisition Regulations** (48 CFR Subpart 31.2), “Principles for determining costs with profit making firms and those nonprofits organizations that are specifically excluded from the provisions of OMB Circular No. A-122.”
- (5) **45 CFR Part 74, Appendix E**, “Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Grants and Contracts with Hospitals.”

The Code of Federal Regulations is accessible through The FDsys Federal Digital System (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>).

**Note: Funding from sources prohibited by this grants program cannot be used as an institution/organization’s matching contributions (i.e., Funding Restrictions for this grants program prohibit the use of Federal grant funds for tuition remission or to acquire or repair a building or facility (e.g., a greenhouse)). Therefore, non-Federal, matching funds for tuition remission or that acquire or repair a building or facility to support this project is not permitted as matching contributions.**

## **7. R&R Subaward Budget (Fed and Non-Fed) Attachment (Only required if submitting a LCI or Joint Project Proposal)**

### **8. Supplemental Information Form**

**Complete all applicable fields.**

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

#### **Field 2. Program Code -**

For the ‘Program Code Name’ field, enter:

“Secondary and Two-Year Postsecondary Education Challenge”.

For the ‘Program Code’ field, enter:

- "OW" only if you are submitting an application with Agriculture in the Classroom or secondary school (grades 9-12) program emphasis or,
- "UV" only if you are submitting an application with junior or community college academic program emphasis.

**Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. - (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format)** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template. Include this one-page attachment even if your responses to the questions are “N.A.”.

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

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, it is strongly recommended that an administrative review be conducted to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 6, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted for review.

**If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.**

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. 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, contact the Agency 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**

Pursuant to 716 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Pub. L. 113-76), indirect costs are limited to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution’s official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

If an institution/organization’s official negotiated indirect cost rate exceeds the maximum allowed rate then the indirect costs are limited to 30% of the total Federal funds. In this case, the maximum allowed indirect cost of 30% may be claimed under the Federal portion of the award, or the maximum allowed indirect cost of 30% may be claimed as matching contributions (if no

indirect costs are requested under the Federal portion). However, the maximum allowed indirect cost of 30% may not be claimed on both the Federal portion of the award and as matching contributions (Note: An institution/organization may, as an example, request 15% of indirect costs on both the Federal portion of the award and as matching contributions. Or, an institution/organization may request any other, similar percentage combination that, when combined, does not exceed the 30% maximum indirect cost allowed.) Nevertheless, the total combined percent of requested and contributed matching indirect costs cannot exceed 30%. This distribution of indirect costs would also apply to grantees whose official negotiated rate results in a lesser amount of indirect costs. However, the distribution would be limited to that lesser amount.

Consistent with other competitive grant programs, NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for student tuition remission, room and board, academic fees or other financial assistance (scholarships or fellowships).

Also, funds 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 to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities (i.e., greenhouses, laboratories, barns or other structures). Promotional items (e.g., T-shirts and other give-a-ways) and food functions (e.g., cookouts or other social meal gatherings) are considered ‘entertainment’ expenses, and are also not allowed under this grants program. Federal Cost Principles governing this grant program state that items not eligible for Federal funding may also not be used as an applicant’s contribution toward meeting matching requirements.

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

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

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

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

### **A. General**

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

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

When each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of SPECA will recommend that the project: (a) be approved for support from currently available funds or (b) be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

SPECA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

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

#### **1. Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem (30 points).**

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the quality of FANH sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals, identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, justification for the project, innovation, advancing educational equity, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, and potential for adoption by other institutions/organizations. The proposed project must also show its relevance to the goals of the SPECA Program of increasing the number, diversity, and quality of the FANH workforce. Potential project impacts must be stated.

**2. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages (25 points).**

This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. The project evaluation plan shall state the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results and measurable impacts from the project. The approach must be based on sound research concepts and educational principles and may be documented through background literature or actual institutional data. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution/organization through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project. Any perceived pitfalls and alternative strategies or approaches are addressed.

**3. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building (20 points).**

This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its teaching or research capacity. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials) available to carry out the project, potential for academic or research enhancement, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support. Institutional data (i.e., financial, personnel and physical resources available to support the project could all be potential data provided by the applicant, depending upon the particular Need Area) should be included to show the institution's ability to support the proposed project.

**4. Key Personnel (15 points).**

This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number, qualifications and expertise of key persons who will develop and carry out the project, and the qualifications of project personnel who will provide for the assessment of project results and impacts and the dissemination of these findings. Specific roles for each key personnel must be defined to ensure appropriate project leadership and to avoid any duplication of effort. For an LCI Grant Type, qualifications and expertise of key persons representing all multi-partner contributors (other secondary schools, institutions of higher education -associate or bachelors degree-private industry, businesses, or nonprofit organizations...etc.,) should be included. Such expertise should address all critical activities of the LCI project.

**5. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness (10 points).**

This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost effective. Elements considered include the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objectives; the appropriateness of budget allocations between the applicant and any collaborating institution(s); the adequacy of time committed to the project by key project personnel; and the degree to which the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, leverages additional funds, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority educational or research need areas.

**For Conference Applications**

In addition to the five Evaluation Criteria listed directly above, the following evaluation criteria will also be applied to applications that seek support for conferences:

1. Relevance of Proposed Conference to promote and strengthen FANH education;
2. Qualifications of Organizing Committee and Appropriateness of Invited Speakers to Topic Areas Being Covered;
3. Uniqueness and Timeliness of Conference; and
4. Appropriateness of Budget Request.

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

### **E. Application Disposition**

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

## **PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

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

### **B. Award Notice**

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

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to which 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 PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;
- (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 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 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).

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**

Grantees are to use REEport, NIFA's electronic, web-based inventory system to submit an initial project initiation which documents expected products and outcomes of the project. Additionally, annual progress report documenting realized project outcomes must be submitted to the electronic system. The web-based system facilitates an electronic workflow between grantees and NIFA for project accomplishments to be easily searchable and allows for public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements, including those specific to the annual and final technical reports, are included in the award terms and conditions.

### **1. Project Directors Meeting**

During the tenure of a grant, Project Director(s) are required to attend at least one national Project Directors meeting, if offered, in Washington, DC, or other announced location during the lifetime of the grant. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss project and grant management, opportunities for collaborative efforts, future directions for education reform, and opportunities to enhance dissemination of exemplary end products/results. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting should be included in the proposal's travel expenses. *For conference/planning grant types attendance at the project directors meeting is not mandatory.*

### **2. Annual Performance Report**

An Annual Performance Report must be submitted within 90 days after the completion of the first year of the project, and annually thereafter during the life of the grant. Generally, the Annual Performance Reports shall include a summary of the overall progress toward meeting project objectives, current problems or unusual developments, the next year's activities, progress

assessing outcomes as part of the project Evaluation Plan (Part I. C. 3.), and any other information that is pertinent to the ongoing project or which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award. Annual project reports must contain data to document the outputs and outcomes and will need to be collected by the grantee. A specific format for these reports will be provided on an annual basis by NIFA.

### **3. Final Performance Report**

A Final Performance Report must be submitted within 90 days after the expiration date of the project. The expiration date is specified in the award documents and modifications thereto, if any. Generally, the Final Performance Report shall be a summary of the completed project, to include results of the project Evaluation Plan (Part I. C. 3.), a review of project objectives and accomplishments; a description of any products and outcomes resulting from the project; activities undertaken to disseminate products and outcomes; partnerships and collaborative ventures that resulted from the project; future initiatives that are planned as a result of the project; the impact of the project on the Project Director(s), students, the departments, the institution, and FANH sciences higher education system; and data on project personnel and beneficiaries. The report must document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts, etc.) have been published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. The Final Performance Report should be accompanied by samples or copies of any products or publications resulting from or developed by the project. The Final Performance Report also must contain any other information which may be specified in the terms and conditions of the award. A specific format for the final report will be provided by NIFA.

Additionally, PDs may want to include the specific information described in the Evaluation Criteria section (Part V, B.) of the RFA:

1. The results from the measure of **student knowledge/learning or interest** in the FANH sciences resulted from the proposed project.
2. The **number and type of products created or number of students/faculty served** based on the target area(s) used in the project. Refer to the list of examples of quantifiable information in the Evaluation Criteria section (Part V, B.) of the RFA.

### **4. Federal Financial Report**

For informational purposes, the “Federal Financial Report,” Form SF-425, consolidates into a single report the former Financial Status Report (SF-269 and SF-269A) and the Federal Cash Transactions Report (SF-272 and SF-272A). The [NIFA Agency-specific Terms and Conditions](#) include the requirement that Form SF-425 is due on an **annual basis no later than 90 days following the award’s anniversary date (i.e., one year following the month and day of which the project period begins and each year thereafter up until a final report is required)**. A final “Federal Financial Report,” Form SF-425, is due 90 days after the expiration date of this award.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Victoria LeBeaux

Title: National Program Leader

Unit: Division of Community and Education

Location: 4441 Waterfront Centre

[Full Address and Directions](#)

Phone: (202) 720 - 2067

Fax: (202) 720 - 9366

Email: [victoria.s.lebeaux@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:victoria.s.lebeaux@nifa.usda.gov)

Administrative/Business Contact –

Adriene Woodin

Title: Branch Chief

Unit: Branch II

Location: 2182 Waterfront Centre

[Full Address and Directions](#)

Phone: (202) 401 - 4320

Fax: (202) 401 - 6271

Email: [awoodin@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:awoodin@nifa.usda.gov)

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

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

We will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments 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, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

#### **2. Changes in 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. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved goals or objectives prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes that are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel, prior to effecting such changes.

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all 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, prior to instituting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) 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. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

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 Federal Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for the applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program. The following are additional definitions that apply to this program.

Citizen or national of the United States means (1) a citizen or native resident of a State; or, (2) a person defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(22), who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States.

Eligible institution/organization means a public, secondary school, a junior or community college, an institution of higher education, or a nonprofit organization, (see Part III, A.).

Eligible participant means an individual who is a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this section.

Fiscal agent means a third party designated by the an authorized representative of an eligible institution/organization which would receive and assume financial stewardship of federal grant funds and perform other activities as specified in the agreement between it and the eligible institution/organization.

Institution of higher education means an educational institution in any State that:

(1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; (2) is legally authorized within such State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Joint project proposal means an application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution/organization working in cooperation with **one or more** other entities not legally affiliated with the applicant institution/organization, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, units of State government, private sector organizations, or a consortium of institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution/organization and each cooperating entity will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, **the applicant institution/organization submitting a joint project proposal must retain at least 30 percent but not more than 70 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds.** Only the applicant institution/organization must meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a joint project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization.

Junior or community college means an institution of higher education that: (1) admits as regular students persons who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance in the State in which the institution is located and who have the ability to benefit from the training offered by the institution; (2) does not provide an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree (or an equivalent degree); and (3) (i) provides an educational program of not less than 2 years in duration that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; or (ii) offers a 2-year program in engineering, mathematics, or the physical or biological sciences, designed to prepare a student to work as a technician or at the semiprofessional level in engineering, scientific, or other technological fields requiring the understanding and application of basic engineering, scientific, or mathematical principles of knowledge (20 U.S.C. 1101a(a)(6)).

Large-scale, Comprehensive Initiative (LCI) project proposal means an application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution/organization working in cooperation with **two or**

**more** other entities not legally affiliated with the applicant institution/organization, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, units of State government, private sector organizations, or a consortium of institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution/organization and each cooperating entity will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project. To demonstrate a substantial involvement with the project, **the applicant institution/organization submitting a LCI proposal must retain at least 30 percent but not more than 70 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds.** Only the applicant institution/organization must meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a joint project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution/organization. LCI Project Proposals must support a multi-partner approach to solving a major state or regional challenge in agricultural sciences education at any of the K-14 grade levels. LCI Project Proposals are characterized by multiple partners (each providing a specific expertise) organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management ability to organize and carry out the initiative.

Nonprofit, as applied to a school, junior or community college, agency, organization, or institution, means a school, junior or community college, agency, organization, or institution owned and operated by one or more nonprofit corporations or associations, no part of the net earnings of which inures, or may lawfully inure, to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

Nonprofit organization (see Nonprofit, above)

Outcomes means specific, measurable project results and benefits that, when assessed and reported, indicate the project's plan of operation has been achieved.

Plan of Operation means a detailed, step-by-step description of how the applicant intends to accomplish the project's outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include a timetable indicating how outcomes are achieved, a description of resources to be used or acquired, and the responsibilities expected of all project personnel.

Regular project proposal means an application for a project: (1) where the applicant institution/organization will be the sole entity involved in the execution of the project; or (2) which will involve the applicant institution/organization and one or more other entities, but where the involvement of the other entity(ies) does not meet the requirements for a joint or LCI proposal as defined in this section.

Secondary school means a nonprofit institutional day or residential school that provides secondary education, as determined under State law, except that such term does not include any education beyond grade 12 (Section 14101(25) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8801(25))).

Teaching means formal classroom and/or laboratory instruction, or practicum experience in the food, agricultural and human sciences and matters related thereto (such as faculty development,

student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies) conducted by eligible educational institutions.