

# Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

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## *Request for Applications for Fiscal Years (FY) 2019 and 2020*

**APPLICATION DEADLINES:**

**FY2019 – April 12, 2019**  
**FY2020 – March 20, 2020**

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



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture

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

**VETERINARY MEDICINE LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

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

**DATES: Applications for the FY2019 RFA** must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, April 12, 2019**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). The deadline for Recommendation forms is **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, April 26, 2019**. Recommendations received after this time will not be accepted. 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.

Applications for the FY2020 RFA must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, March 20, 2020. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). The deadline for Recommendation forms (see Part IV B(9) of this RFA) is 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, April 3, 2020. Recommendations received after this time will not be accepted. 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:** We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program and, if applicable, 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 the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program RFA**.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)** for fiscal year (FY) 2019 and FY2020 to repay qualified educational loans for eligible veterinarians in exchange for veterinary services in designated shortage situations. The amount available for support of this program in FY2019 is approximately **\$7.2 million**.

NIFA requests applications for two funding cycles, fiscal years (FY) 2019 or 2020. Applicants should be sure they are submitting their application materials according to the deadlines for the year in which they are applying.

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

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

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

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

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

A final rule for the program, 7 CFR 3431, was published in the Federal Register on April 19, 2010 [75 FR 20239-20248]. This regulation establishes the process and procedures for designating veterinarian shortage situations as well as the administrative provisions for VMLRP. From FY 2010 through FY 2017, NIFA received 1349 applications from which 447 VMLRP awards were offered. Additional information is available at [NIFA VMLRP Reports and Statistics](#) website.

The VMLRP is aligned with the 2018-2022 [USDA's Strategic Plan](#): Objectives 2.1 and 2.3 by placing veterinarians in areas where they can help assure agricultural biosecurity, animal health, food safety, and public health.

*Strategic Goal 2: Maximizing the ability of American Agricultural producers to prosper by feeding and clothing the world.*

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

The goal of the program is to encourage veterinarians, through competitively awarded financial incentives, to fill the most serious veterinary shortage situations in the United States. A further objective of the program is to determine the best possible match between specific shortage situations and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences of program applicants to enhance the chances that awardees will achieve sufficient professional success and satisfaction during their term of service that they will continue in their service to the area.

Each year, State Animal Health Officials (SAHOs) identify approximately 185 priority shortage situations across the U.S. and Insular Areas and more than 150 veterinarians compete to receive one of the 40 to 50 loan repayment awards the program is able to fund annually. While a few States nominate fewer shortage designations than they are permitted, most states continue to nominate the maximum number of shortage situations their state is allowed. This indicates that

demand for the program remains strong throughout the country, particularly in animal agriculture-intensive states where shortages are most acute and widespread.

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

This loan repayment program contains three general categories of participation:

1. Mitigation of private practice shortage situations – emphasis on food supply veterinary medicine sector (currently implemented);
2. Mitigation of public veterinary practice and specialty veterinary discipline shortage situations (currently implemented); and
3. Service in animal health emergencies (currently not implemented, pending sufficient funding).

The VMLRP supports NIFA’s Animal Systems portfolio by facilitating professional workforce development in critical agricultural sectors related to animal health and well-being. Specifically, this program incentivizes veterinarians to consider practicing, or serving in other professional capacities, in geographic or specialty veterinary discipline shortage areas important to the security of local, state, and federal food safety infrastructures, and more broadly to the protection of animal and public health. The mitigation of shortages in food animal veterinary practice is emphasized in areas of veterinary specialization such as, but not limited to, epidemiology, food safety, and public health. In this respect, the VMLRP achieves important outreach objectives of NIFA because the veterinarian is among the most highly trained and respected agricultural professionals, especially in rural areas and communities where a significant proportion of food animal production occurs. By virtue of their broad education in the biomedical and animal sciences, their intimate connection to the local farming communities they serve, and their skills in clinical, diagnostic, surgical, therapeutic and population medicine, veterinarians represent an essential component of NIFA’s extension and outreach capacity, and of the nation’s agrosecurity, food security, and public health infrastructures. In an analogous fashion, veterinarians serving in specialized settings experiencing workforce shortages - for example, as state veterinarians, epidemiologists, food safety inspectors, animal disease laboratory directors and university faculty - provide an important communication link among state and federal government agencies, animal owners/producers, and the general public.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

This RFA solicits application for two funding cycles (FY 2019 or FY2020). The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY2019 and FY2020 are approximately **\$7.2 million** in each year. An appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program in FY2020. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

NIFA anticipates that approximately 90 percent of available funds will be awarded to veterinarians for the private practice of food animal medicine in geographic areas determined to have shortage(s) of veterinarians. Approximately 10 percent of the available funds will be awarded to veterinarians serving in public practice and specialty practices or discipline areas determined to have a shortage of veterinarians such as, but not limited to, food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety.

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

In FY2019 and FY2020, applications may be submitted to the VMLRP as one (1) of the following types of requests:

**(1) New application.** This is an application to provide veterinary service not previously approved for funding by the VMLRP. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V of this RFA, Application Review Requirements.

**(2) Renewal application.** Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, and will be evaluated and reviewed competitively according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications, which is described in Part V of this RFA, Application Review Requirements. Please see Part III, A.7 of this RFA for eligibility requirements.

### **C. Types of Designated Veterinary Shortages**

There are three types of veterinary shortage situations, all based on a 40-hour work week:

1. Type I – at least 80 percent time commitment in private practice food supply veterinary medicine;
2. Type II – at least 30 percent time commitment in private practice food supply veterinary medicine in a rural area;
3. Type III – at least 49 percent time commitment in public practice.

Further descriptions of each shortage situation type can be found on the [VMLRP shortage situation nomination form resource page](#) under “Type of Shortage.”

## PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

### A. Eligible Applicants

Applicants are eligible for the VMLRP program if they meet all of the following requirements:

- 1) Meet all of the requirements outlined in [7 CFR 3431.10](#);
- 2) Have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, by July 1, 2019, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Council on Education (COE);
  - a. For the FY2020 RFA, the DVM or equivalent must be received by July 1, 2020.
- 3) Have a minimum qualifying educational loan (see 7 CFR part 3431.3) debt of \$15,000 from a lender capable of accepting incoming Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments. If you are unable to verify this with your lender, please contact [vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov) (Subject: lender payment acceptance assistance) for assistance.
- 4) Secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a NIFA-designated veterinary shortage situation within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer;
- 5) Provide certifications and verifications as defined in 7 CFR part 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.
- 6) Not owe an obligation for veterinary service to the Federal government, State, or other entity under an agreement with such Federal, State, or other entity unless such obligation will be completely satisfied prior to beginning service under the VMLRP;
- 7) Not have a Federal judgement lien against their property arising from Federal debt
- 8) Renewals**
  - a. Further, to be eligible to submit a renewal application, participants must meet items (1) through (6) above and have a VMLRP contract start date of January 2016 or January 2017.
  - b. For the FY2020 RFA, renewal applicants must meet items (1)a. through (6) above and have a VMLRP contract start date of January 2017 or January 2018.

To determine the designated veterinary shortage situations which are eligible for application, go to the VMLRP web page at [www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map) and, in the middle of the page under the dropdown menu for “FY”, select the applicable FY (either 2019 or 2020) and click “Apply.” Shortages for FY2019 will be posted at, or prior to, the release of this RFA. Shortages for FY2020 are expected to be posted on or about February 2020.

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

See Part IV, D of this RFA for information about the loans eligible for payment with funds under this program.

**B. Cost Sharing or Matching**

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

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

### **A. Application Package**

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

To download the [application forms](#), go to <https://nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-applicants> , click on the “Applicants” link, and then click on the “[Application Forms for FY2019](#)” link.

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

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

Proper preparation of applications will assist reviewers in evaluating the merits of each application in a systematic, consistent fashion. Each application must be typed; *handwritten* answers in your application will not be accepted and your application will not qualify for further consideration. *Financial* documents should be unmarked in their original format, notes included in your financial documents will not be reviewed. Except for the transcript, you are to type your full name (Last, First, Middle) on the upper right corner of all pages. Identified below are the elements of a new application followed by the elements of a renewal application. Lastly, if mailing, **please do not** staple papers together - Paper Clips Only.

New applications must contain the following elements and be assembled in the following order:

- (NIFA-01-10) Application Information Form
- Curriculum Vitae
- Transcript
- (NIFA-02-10) Personal Statement
- (NIFA-03-10) List of Recommenders
- (NIFA-04-10) Loan Information Form
- (NIFA-06-10) Certifications for Application
- (NIFA-07-10) Intent of Employment
- (NIFA-08-10) Recommendation Forms (if submitted as part of application)

Renewal application packages must contain the forms listed below, including three recommendation forms:

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

- (NIFA-08-10) Recommendation Forms (if submitted as part of application)

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

### **1. Applicant Information Form (NIFA-01-10)**

Applicants must indicate the shortage situation they propose to fill by entering the five-digit Shortage Identification Code in Section 1 of this form. To determine the designated veterinary shortage situations for which are open for application and the applicable five-digit Shortage Identification Code, go to the [VMLRP](#) webpage at [www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp-map) and, in the middle of the page under the dropdown menu for “FY” select the applicable FY (either 2019 or 2020) and click “Apply”. Shortages for FY2019 will be posted at, or prior to, the release of this RFA. Shortages for FY2020 are expected to be posted on or about February 2020. .

New applicants may only apply to fill **one** of the designated shortage situations for each RFA period (one in FY2019 and one in FY2020). A renewal applicant should enter the five-digit Shortage Identification Code of the shortage situation they are currently serving through a VMLRP award. If a renewal applicant is uncertain as to the correct five-digit Shortage Identification Code, the applicant should contact the VMLRP program office to obtain this information.

### **2. Curriculum Vitae (CV)**

This document should describe the applicant’s academic and work history. The body of the CV is limited to two pages. An additional page (optional) may be included to list publications, patents, etc. Renewal applicants must provide an updated CV to add any academic degrees, work experience, professional awards and honors, or other special achievements that took place since their last VMLRP application. DO NOT include demographic information or Social Security Number.

### **3. Transcript**

Official transcript(s) from the applicant’s professional veterinary degree and, where applicable, graduate degree program(s) must be included in the application package. Transcripts will be accepted electronically or by U.S. mail directly from the school. Electronic, emailed copies are encouraged for tracking purposes. If the applicant attended more than one school during their DVM studies, official transcripts from all schools must be provided. For those graduating in the year of application, unofficial transcripts may be submitted along with a note stating when VMLRP should receive the final, official transcript with degree conferred. Renewal applicants must submit transcript(s); however, copies are sufficient for any transcripts previously submitted during the original application period.

#### **4. Personal Statement (NIFA-02-10)**

For new applications, the Personal Statement must include a description of the applicant's short-term and long-term career objectives in veterinary medicine; a plan to achieve these objectives, relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and experience; and practice plans and logistics to address the specific shortage situation to which the applicant is applying.

For renewal applications, the Personal Statement must include information about how the applicant is effectively addressing the specific shortage situation and an explanation of the applicant's ability to continue mitigating this shortage situation.

For all applications, the Personal Statement should be prepared on only one side of a standard size (8 ½" x 11") white paper with one-inch margins, typed or word processed using type no smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, or Times New Roman). This document must not exceed five double-spaced, typed pages. This limit has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition.

Additionally, for those applying to a type I or type II shortage situation, a map (limited to 1 page) must be provided to identify the location of the proposed shortage situation in relation to the location of the veterinary practice from which the applicant will be working. For mobile practices, identify beginning and end locations for a typical work day. Any spatial features added to the map (e.g., circles, arrows, or points) to highlight these areas may be handwritten.

Additional instructions can be found on the [VMLRP Personal Statement resource page](#).

#### **5. List of Recommenders (NIFA-03-10)**

The List of Recommenders form identifies three individuals who will support your capability to fulfill program obligations. You must include the name, email address, and phone number of each individual.

#### **6. Loan Information Form (NIFA-04-10) (only applicable to new applications)**

This form requests information on qualified loans you want considered for the VMLRP. Only outstanding educational loans from a legally enforceable institutional, State, or Government entity made for the purpose of meeting the costs of attending an accredited college or university of Veterinary Medicine will be considered. Applicants must complete sections one through three; applicants do not need to complete section four as part of the application. If an applicant is recommended for an award, NIFA will ask a representative at the applicable lending institution to complete section four.

For detailed instructions visit the [VMLRP Loan Information Form resource page](#).

## **7. Certifications for Application (NIFA-06-10)**

Your signature on the Certifications for Application form validates the accuracy of information you provided in the application, and request for confidential recommendations. This form is required for both new and renewal applications.

## **8. Intent of Employment (NIFA-07-10)**

This form designates where you intend to work upon receipt of a VMLRP award in order to fill the designated shortage situation. You may apply for only one shortage situation. For detailed instructions visit here: [VMLRP Intent of Employment Form resource page](#). Successful applicants will be given until January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year their contract starts secure employment or establish a practice in the designated veterinary shortage situation. Failure to secure employment or establish a practice of veterinary medicine in accordance with the award offer may result in the offer being null and void.

## **9. Recommendation Form (NIFA-08-10)**

Each individual identified on Form NIFA-03-10 must complete a Recommendation Form (NIFA-08-10). The form includes ratings and short answers designed to allow reviewers to assess your capabilities to provide veterinary services in the specific shortage situation. Recommenders are encouraged to review and consider the information describing the relevant shortage situation on the [VMLRP](#) map located on the website.

The short answers should be prepared on only one side of a standard size (8 ½” x 11”) white paper with one-inch margins, typed or word processed using type no smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font face (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, or Times New Roman). For additional instructions visit the [VMLRP Recommendation Form resource page](#).

Three separate recommendations are required. See C., 2 of this RFA for submission instructions and deadlines.

*It is always the applicant's responsibility to contact and follow up with recommenders to ensure all required recommendations are completed and submitted in accordance with the applicable instructions.*

## C. Submission Dates and Times

### 1. Applications

For the FY2019 RFA applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, April 12, 2019**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

For the FY2020 RFA, applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 20, 2020. Applications received after this deadline will not normally be considered for funding.

Applications may be emailed, faxed, or mailed to the address provided below. See below for specific instructions for each delivery method. For questions regarding the submission of applications, please email: [vmlrp.applications@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmlrp.applications@nifa.usda.gov).

- a) Email submission of application materials: Applications may be emailed, as a single PDF document, with the forms in the order listed at the beginning of section B above to: [vmlrp.applications@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmlrp.applications@nifa.usda.gov). Subject of the email should read “VMLRP Application, 5 Digit Shortage, Last Name” With the exception of the recommendations, multiple emails with separate attachments will not be considered without prior arrangements.
- b) Fax submission of application materials: Applications may be faxed, as a single document, with the forms in the order listed at the beginning of section B above) directly to: 1-833-208-8205 Attn: Lisa Stephens. With the exception of the recommendations, multiple faxes containing different parts of an application will not be considered without prior arrangements.
- c) Mail submission of application materials: Mailed applications should be sent to the addresses listed below. All materials should be included in one mailing. With the exception of the recommendations, separate mailings with different parts of the application will not be considered without prior arrangements. Mail submission is restricted to overnight mail.

Overnight mail:

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

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

If the applicant has not received correspondence from NIFA regarding a submitted application within 15 days of the established deadline, the applicant must contact the VMLRP Program Office by email at [vmrlp.applications@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmrlp.applications@nifa.usda.gov) to request confirmation of receipt of their complete application. Failure to alert NIFA that confirmation of receipt has not been received could result in the application not being reviewed by the peer review panel.

## **2. Recommendations**

For the FY2019 RFA, recommendation forms must be completed by individuals identified on Form NIFA-03-10 and received by NIFA no later than Friday, April 26, 2019 (i.e., 14 days after the application deadline).

For the FY2020 RFA, recommendations forms must be received by NIFA no later than Friday, April 3, 2020 (i.e. 14 days after the application deadline).

Recommendations may be submitted by email (preferred) at [vmrlp.applications@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmrlp.applications@nifa.usda.gov), by fax at 1-833-208-8205, or by regular or overnight mail (see mailing addresses in C.1. of this part).

## **D. Funding Restrictions**

VMLRP loan repayment awards are capped at \$25,000 for each year of service rendered (tax payments are additional). Loan repayments will be made directly to the participant's lending institution on behalf of the participating individual. Lending institutions must be capable of accepting incoming Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments. If you are unable to verify this with your lender, please contact [vmrlp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:vmrlp@nifa.usda.gov) (Subject: lender payment acceptance question) for assistance. The repayments will be applied to the principal, interest, and related expenses on government and commercial educational loans received by the participating individual for attendance at an American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education (AVMA COE)-accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or the equivalent. If an institution received full accreditation status during the participating individual's attendance, only the portion of veterinary school loans disbursed subsequent to the accreditation are eligible for repayment under the VMLRP. This includes any scenario involving an individual transferring from a non-accredited institution to an accredited institution. Applicants with a degree from an institution that was not accredited at the time the degree was earned are ineligible for award.

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

individual other than the applicant, such as a spouse or child, are ineligible for participation in the VMLRP.

Tax payments equal to 39 percent (39%) of the loan repayment amount will be paid directly to the participant. The participant is required to pay this amount to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). These tax payments are not tax-exempt and will be reported to the IRS along with loan payments. The participant will receive a Form 1099-G (Certain Government Payments) no later than January 31 of each calendar year.

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

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

### **A. General**

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, NIFA screens each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. Second, a technical, peer review panel evaluates applications that meet the administrative requirements.

NIFA selects reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant public and private veterinary practice-related fields, taking into account the following factors:

- Level of relevant training and experience in public and private veterinary practice, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant public and private veterinary practice-related activities;
- Need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant public and private veterinary practice-related fields;
- Need to include other experts (e.g., producers, grower managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and program needs;
- Need to include experts from a variety of geographic locations and organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private for-profit and non-profit organizations); and
- Need to maintain a balanced panel composition with regard to gender, age, professional seniority, and minority representation.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, VMLRP program staff will recommend approval of meritorious applications for support from available funds. Applications will be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

A reviewer's written evaluation entails two levels of assessment. First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. After the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer then evaluates the overall likelihood that the applicant will have significant outcome and impact within the designated shortage area. These written reviews are used to begin panel discussions with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. Through these discussions, peer review panelists come to consensus on the final rating and ranking of applications. A complete description of NIFA's peer review process can be found at the NIFA website: <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-peer-review-process-competitive-grant-applications>.

The major evaluation criteria for this RFA include the following:

- 1) The quality of the match between an applicant's professional training and experience, and the circumstances and needs of the designated shortage situation the applicant proposes to fill;
- 2) Most effective mitigation of the specific veterinary shortage situations;

- 3) Prioritizing the relative severity of the shortage; and
- 4) Achieving the highest likelihood that awardees will realize employment satisfaction and professional success both during, and beyond, the term of the VMLRP agreement.

Additional specific criteria include:

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

The criteria listed above will help NIFA determine the likelihood that the applicant will meet the terms and conditions of the VMLRP agreement and continue to serve in a veterinary shortage situation, or pursue a career in some other facet of food supply veterinary medicine, agricultural animal health, or public health, in private or public veterinary sectors. Additionally, the criteria will help NIFA determine the relative severity of the veterinary shortage situation; and the practicality and logistical feasibility of applicant's plan to address the specific shortage(s).

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

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

Names of submitting individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, are kept confidential except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In

addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process, to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

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

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

#### **E. Application Disposition**

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

## **PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make contract offers to eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the award shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the application is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the service agreement need not be initiated on the award effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that service agreement goals may be attained within the service period. See [VMLRP Contract](#), NIFA-05-10, for an example of the VMLRP contract. All funds awarded by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application, the VMLRP authorizing statute at 7 U.S.C. § 3151a, the VMLRP regulations at 7 CFR part 3431, and the terms and conditions of the award.

### **B. Award Notice**

All VMLRP applicants will be informed by email of final funding decisions related to the FY2019 RFA by Monday, September 30, 2019 and by Wednesday, September 30, 2020 for the FY2020 RFA.

The award document, NIFA-05-10, will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum:

1. Legal name and address of applicant to whom the NIFA Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
2. Designated veterinary shortage situation code, including the state;
3. Service period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the service agreement without requiring re-competition for funds;
4. Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the NIFA Director during the service period;
5. Legal authority, or authorities, under which the award is issued;
6. Applicable award terms and conditions for the VMLRP;
7. Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

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

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to award applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, those listed on the NIFA web page - <http://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide - a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary is available at <http://nifa.usda.gov/policy-guide>.

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

### **Program Outputs:**

The principal program output for FY2019 and FY2020 will be verifiable mitigation of well-defined, high priority veterinary shortage situations in an estimated 40 to 50 locations across the country, for a period of three years.

### **Reporting Requirements:**

#### 1) Quarterly Report:

VMLRP recipients will be required to verify that the terms of the VMLRP contract are being met on a quarterly (every three months) basis. Subsequent quarterly loan repayments will not be disbursed until this verification is provided. This Service Verification report will be due 15 business days after the end of each quarter during the VMLRP contract and must include the following information:

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

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

#### 2) Termination Report:

At the end of the term of the agreement, the recipient and their supervisor will each submit a Termination Report NIFA. The report will address the following:

- a. services provided,
- b. impact on the veterinary shortage situation,
- c. future plans,

- d. an assessment of the current state of veterinary services in the recipient's service area, adjacent service areas, or specialty area, and
- e. any other information participants wish to share.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** A Termination Report is required from all awardees. This report is subject to review for completeness and must be approved by the VMLRP Program office prior to disbursement of the final payment.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Michelle Colby, DVM, MS  
National Program Leader  
Division of Animal Systems, IFPS, NIFA, USDA  
800 9<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
Telephone: (202) 401- 4202  
E-mail: [ymlrp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:ymlrp@nifa.usda.gov)

Joseph Perez  
Program Analyst  
Policy Branch, POD, OGF, NIFA, USDA  
800 9<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
Telephone: (202) 401-3486  
Fax: 1-844-332-8008  
E-mail: [ymlrp@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:ymlrp@nifa.usda.gov)

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

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

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant upon request 60-90 days after the review process has been completed.

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

#### **1) Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility or Performance of Duties**

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

#### **2) Changes in Service Agreement**

- a. The permissible changes by the awardee in the approved service agreement shall be limited to minor changes that do not substantially impact or alter the spirit and intent of the agreement to mitigate a specific veterinary service shortage in a specific geographic and/or occupational situation. To ensure that all applications are reviewed in an equitable and consistent manner, a change in the shortage area the applicant proposes to serve will not be considered once an application has been reviewed by the peer review panel. If the awardee is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the VMLRP Program Office for a final determination.
- b. Changes in Loan Repayment Schedule: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved loan repayment schedule must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the VMLRP Program Office prior to instituting such changes.

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

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

## **D. Regulatory Information**

Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0047.

## **E. Definitions**

Please refer to [7 CFR Part 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program](#), for applicable definitions for this program.

## **F. Materials Available on the Internet**

Numerous tools and reference materials are available via the [VMLRP](#) web. The following listing represents a few selections available under the “[Applicant](#).”

- 1) Detailed Instructions Before You Start Your Application
- 2) Preparing and Submitting Your Application
- 3) Application Guide
- 4) Application Checklist
- 5) Choosing Your Veterinary Shortage Situation