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

FY 2017 Frequently Asked Questions

Please refer to the FY17 SPECA REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS for complete application instructions.

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What is the focus of the NIFA’s Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education, and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Challenge Grants Program?

- SPECA funding supports the enhancement of K-14 instruction to meet the current and future training needs in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human (FANH) sciences.
- These grants also support projects designed to increase the number and diversity of students who will pursue and complete a 2- or 4-year degree in FANH science fields.
- Funding may also support synergistic linkages among secondary, two-year postsecondary, and higher education programs in the FANH sciences in order to advance excellence in education and encourage more young Americans to pursue and complete a baccalaureate or higher degree in the FANH sciences.

Who is eligible to apply?

- Public secondary schools—applicant must be school, not district.
- Junior and community colleges
- Institutions of higher education.
- Nonprofit organizations

What is the funding rate of submitted applications?

- The funding rate for FY 2016 was 14.5%

What are the types of projects funded?

- Curriculum Development;
- Instructional Delivery Systems;
- Experiential (hands-on) Learning for Students;
- Faculty preparation and enhancement for teaching;
- Facilitating Interaction with Other Academic Institutions;
- Planning for Future Project Applications.

How much money is available and for how long?

- There are four types of projects and four funding levels. They are as follows:
  - Planning Activity Grants $25,000 total, not per year for 12 to 24 months
  - Regular Grants (single projects) $50,000 total, not per year for 24-36 months. Note: although the project director is not required to share funds in this option, projects should support more than just one class or instructor. A single project should have a broad student impact to be competitive.
  - Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) (Applicant + One or more Partners) $150,000, total, not per year for 24-36 months.
  - Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) (Applicant + Two or more Partners)
$300,000 total, not per year for 24-36 months.

CG2 applications must document how the project will address four key sets of impacts:

- Address National Challenge
- Expand recruitment into FANH science
- Improve retention of FANH science students
- Inform FANH science teaching community of best practices

**Can funds be used to support summer programs?**
  - Yes

**Can funds be used to support international projects?**
  - Yes

**Is there a limit to the number of applications an institution may submit?**
  - There is no limit to the number of applications an institution can submit,
  - A single institution can receive up to two awards per year.
  - A maximum of one CG2 award will be given to a single institution in one year.

**Do I have to be a U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents to submit an application as a project director?**
  - Yes

**Do I have to be a U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents to be a co-PD?**
  - No

**Is there a matching requirement?**
  - SPECA applicants must provide a 100% match unless they are an exempt institution or they partner with an exempt institution.
  - Matching funds can be in-kind contributions,
  - Matching funds cannot come from a federal funding source.
  - Institutions that are exempt from the match include
    - A research agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture
    - 1862 land-grant institutions
    - 1890 land-grant institutions
    - 1994 land-grant institutions
    - Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities
- Insular area schools eligible to receive funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- Recipients of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA)
- Other entities are as described in the RFA(Part III.B)

Are indirect costs allowed?
- Yes. Indirect costs are allowed up to 30%
- For more information see: http://nifa.usda.gov/indirect-costs

Are there any unallowable costs or restrictions?
- Grant funds may not be used for student tuition or scholarships.
- A Planning Activity Grant application may not be submitted in the same year for which a Collaborative Grant application for the same project is also submitted
- 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
- Construction of greenhouses or other facilities, minor alterations, renovations or repairs are, however, allowed if applicant can demonstrate teaching relevance

How do applicants begin the application process?
- STEP 1: Read the SPECA Request for Applications (RFA) on NIFA’s website. (www.nifa.usda.gov and search for SPECA) You can also access the RFA page here: http://tinyurl.com/js6n29g
- STEP 2: Ensure your school is registered with Grants.gov. All of NIFA’s competitive grants receive their proposals through Grants.gov. You will need to register for Grants.gov and SAM. Registration may take up to a month so you will need to finish this process as soon as possible. This site can guide you through the Grants.gov registration process: http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.htm
- STEP 3: Follow the RFA instructions carefully. We are not able to accept applications that do not meet the guidelines included in the RFA.
- STEP 4: Be sure to file the application in Grants.gov before the deadline of 5 p.m. EST on Friday, March 10, 2017. We do not accept late applications.

If I receive an award, what can I expect?
- A minimum of six months will be needed to process awards after the application deadline
- You will also have to provide annual reporting—both financial and project reports annually throughout the life of the grant
Are there special details to be aware of when drafting a proposal?

- Applications will not go through in Grants.gov unless all pages are in PDF format
- In 2017 applicants should use the program code **SPECA**, a change from previous years
- Page limits are strictly enforced.
  - Ten pages for regular, CG1, and CG2 applications, plus five additional pages for tables and figures
  - Seven pages for planning grants, plus three additional pages for tables and figures

How will my application be reviewed?

- An explanation of NIFA’s Peer Review Process is available online here: [https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-peer-review-process-competitive-grant-applications](https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-peer-review-process-competitive-grant-applications)

What if I still have questions?

- Contact us at K-14@nifa.usda.gov