



United States
Department
of Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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Distance Education Grants for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) FY 2019 Frequently Asked Questions

Please refer to the [FY19 DEG REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS](#) for complete application instructions.

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Purpose of the DEG Grant Program

- **What is NIFA and what is its mission?**
 - Established in 2009, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture is a federal science agency within the [United States Department of Agriculture](#). Congress created [NIFA](#) through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. NIFA provides leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculturally-related sciences. The agency seeks to invest in and support initiatives that ensure the long-term viability of agriculture.
- **What is the purpose of the DEG Program?**
 - The purpose of this program is to strengthen the capacity of Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas to carry out resident instruction, curriculum, and teaching programs in the food, agriculture, natural resource and human (FANH) sciences through distance education technology.
- **What are the expectations for funded DEG projects for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019?**
 - Any funded DEG project is to strengthen the capacity of insular area institutions to carry out distance food, agriculture, natural resource and human science education programs using network technologies under the following characteristics and conditions:
 - Acquire the equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, digital network technology, and infrastructure necessary to teach students and teachers about technology in the classroom;
 - Develop and enhance educational services (including faculty development) to prepare students or faculty seeking a degree or certificate that is approved by the State or a regional accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of Education;
 - Provide teacher education, library and media specialist training, and preschool and teacher aid certification to individuals who seek to acquire or enhance technology skills in order to use technology in the classroom or instructional process;
 - Implement a joint project to provide education regarding technology in the classroom with a local educational agency, community-based organization, national nonprofit organization, or business; OR
 - Provide leadership development to administrators, board members, and faculty of eligible institutions with institutional responsibility for technology education.
 - See RFA for more information.

DEG Support

- **What types of applications are expected for the DEG Program?**
 - In FY 2019, you may submit applications to the DEG Program as one of the following types of requests:

- **New application.** This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the DEG Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.
 - **Resubmitted application.** This is an application that had previously been submitted to the DEG Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate resubmitted applications in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B) as new applications.
- **Is there a cost sharing or matching requirement for DEG projects?**
 - NIFA does not require matching support for this program, and matching resources will not be a factor in the review process as evaluation criteria.
 - **What are DEG funding restrictions?**
 - Section 713 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided (or 42.857 percent of total direct costs) under each award. If the institution does not have, or cannot obtain, a negotiated rate, it must calculate an indirect cost rate in order to request indirect costs.
 - The use of grant funds to plan, acquire, or construct a building or facility is not allowed under this program. With prior approval, and in accordance with the cost principles set forth in 2 CFR part 220 (Circular No. A- 21), some grant funds may be used for minor alterations, renovations or repairs deemed necessary to retrofit existing teaching or research spaces in order to carry out a funded project. However, requests to use grant funds for such purposes must demonstrate that the work is essential to achieving the major purpose of the project. Grant funds may not be used for endowment funding.
 - Statutory language or agency policy limits the maximum potential funding period (including any awards transferred from another institution or organization) to five years in duration. The funding period will commence on the effective date cited in the award notification. Any such limitation also applies to subcontracts made under awards subject to a funding period limitation.
 - See RFA for a complete description of funding restrictions.
 - **What is the duration of the DEG award?**
 - The project period may range from 24 to 36 months (two to three years).

Eligibility Requirements

- **Who is eligible to apply for the DEG program?**
 - Applications may only be submitted by eligible institutions as described in the RFA (Part III, A). Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration.
 - See RFA for a complete description of eligibility.
- **Will I be eligible to apply for a DEG if I have an active award with NIFA through another program?**
 - Institutions receiving a grant under this program are eligible to receive DEG in subsequent years. Receiving a grant under any other authority does not affect eligibility for this DEG program.

Application Process

- **How do I apply for a DEG?**
 - Applicants submit their DEG application through the [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) portal. Applicants are advised to prepare their material early and pass the complete package through their institution's Grants Office for submission by 5:00 pm (EASTERN) on the due date. Further information is included in the RFA.
- **What must I submit to apply?**
 - Application package as identified in the published Request for Applications (RFA).
- **Is there a limit to the number of applications an institution can submit to the FY 2019 DEG program?**
 - Up to three per institution as lead.
- **When are the DEG applications due to NIFA?**
 - Applications must be received by Grants.gov by the date referenced on the RFA. Please see the RFA for detailed information.
- **What if I miss the deadline?**
 - You may apply when the DEG program publishes another call for applications. The DEG application submission deadline is adhered to rigorously.

Evaluation Process

- **What is the administrative review?**
 - The DEG Program team screens each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Only complete applications that meet all eligibility requirements, project requirements, and supporting documents described in the RFA will be considered for a merit review. Applications identified as incomplete or that do not meet the eligibility or complete application package requirements will be deemed ineligible.

- **What is the technical review?**
 - All complete DEG applications from eligible institutions undergo a peer review by a panel of experts in the areas of study related to the DEG Program. DEG proposal will be evaluated using a peer review process to find win-win matches between the proposed work, capabilities of applicant organization(s), and the DEG Program purpose, priorities and goals. Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, and managers/operators in STEM fields) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application. Panel members rate applications based on the evaluation criteria described below.
- **How will my application be evaluated?**
 - Applications are evaluated by a review panel on the following criteria:
 - Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem
 - Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages
 - Institutional Capability and Capacity Building
 - Key Personnel
 - Budget and Cost-Effectiveness
 - Following the completion of a peer review process for DEG proposals, the program staff will recommend that your proposal be approved for support from currently available funds or be declined to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.
 - See RFA for details.

Selection Process

- **When will I be notified with a decision?**
 - Applicants will generally be notified of their award status within six months of submitting an application.
- **Can I receive my scores and the review panel's comments?**
 - Yes. Panel review comments are sent to each applicant after awards have been made.

DEG Program Grantees

- **What happens once I am selected as a potential DEG award recipient?**
 - DEG Program staff submits an offer of funding letter and requests responses to clarifying questions raised in the peer panel meeting. Applicants must respond to all issues and queries.
- **How can I be a peer reviewer for the DEG program?**
 - If you are not submitting an application, you may express your interest in serving as a reviewer and submit your curriculum vita via joyce.parker@nifa.usda.gov. The selection of reviewers will be confirmed after the deadline for submission of applications.
- **Are there restrictions or conflicts that apply to serving as a reviewer?**
 - Yes. If any of the following apply as a relationship with any of the key personnel on a proposal, you are ineligible to serve as a peer reviewer for the proposal:
 - Co-author on any publication (print or digital), within the past three (3) years;
 - Collaborator on teaching, research and/or extension projects, within the past three (3) years, or pending/planned future collaborations;
 - Consulting arrangement, financial arrangement or any other conflict of interest, within the past three (3) years;
 - Advisee/advisor on thesis, or dissertation, or postdoctoral training. There is a lifetime conflict for a major professor-advisee relationship. There is a three-year conflict for service on graduate committees, or as academic or professional mentor, including postdoctoral mentor;
 - Belonging to same institution. If you have moved from an institution, there is a one-year institutional conflict.
- **If I am an applicant, can I serve as a reviewer for FY 2019 DEG applications?**
 - No, as this is a potential conflict of interest.
- **How can I get answers about my DEG application?**
 - The Request for Applications on NIFA's website has contact information for program questions. Look on NIFA's website for the RFA which has the contact number for the national program leader for DEG.
 - (Electronic Application Process Issues) questions: call 202- 401- 5048 OR electronic@nifa.usda.gov.
 - For Submission Issues in www.grants.gov seek assistance by e-mail: support@grants.gov or phone: 1-800-518-4726. Hours of Operation: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Disclaimer

This FAQ document is not a substitute for reading the published Request for Applications and providing the information requested for a complete DEG Program application package.