

Distance Education Grants (DEG) Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas

FY 2016 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Thursday, April 7, 2016

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

DISTANCE EDUCATION GRANTS (DEG) FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INSULAR AREAS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.322.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 7, 2016**. 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 via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) RFA.

Stakeholder input/feedback are also solicited through annual Project Directors' Meetings/Conferences, webinars, electronic, formal and informal communications with clientele, federal, academic and other collaborators. Overall, NIFA gathers and reviews stakeholder feedback for incorporation into the respective RFA with assurance of meeting the requirements of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998. Through the ongoing communications including the latest Alaska Native-Serving and Native-Serving Hawaiian (ANNH) and Insular Areas PDs Meeting on June 22-24, 2015, Stakeholder Feedback has been integrated into the FY 2016 RFAs for education programs in the Insular Areas in accordance and compliance with the authorizing legislation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Distance Education Grants (DEG) Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas for fiscal year (FY) 2016 to strengthen the capacity of Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas to carry out resident instruction, curriculum, and teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences through distance education technology. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$768,000.

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

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PART I-FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Distance Education Grants for Insular Areas (DEG) program is administered under the provisions of 7 U.S.C. 3362, to strengthen the capacity of Insular Area institutions to carry out distance food and agricultural education programs using digital network technologies. Funds will be awarded to individual eligible institutions of higher education in Insular Areas (Insular Area Institutions) to carry out a distance education program in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The DEG Program directly aligns with USDA Strategic Goal 1, Strategic Goal 2, Strategic Goal 3, and Strategic Goal 4 of the USDA Strategic Plan (2014 – 2018) (<http://www.usda.gov/documents/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018.pdf>). The program also aligns with the USDA Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>), and specifically addresses Goal 6 – Education and Science Literacy, by recruiting, cultivating, and developing the next generation of scientists, leaders, and a highly-skilled workforce for food, agriculture, natural resources, forestry, environmental systems, and life sciences to ensure America’s global preeminence. The DEG program is also aligned with the NIFA Strategic Plan (2014-2018) (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>), 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).

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, “At the baccalaureate level, a comprehensive array of undergraduate programs relevant to agriculture and the food industry, as well as applied social and natural sciences, must remain strong and well-supported”. The full PCAST report is available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast_agriculture_20121207.pdf.

Accordingly, DEG-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*. DEG-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?*

Furthermore, academic institutions should broaden the undergraduate student experience by integrating opportunities to participate in research, education, and extension. At the same time, four-year colleges and universities should enhance connections with community colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions,

1890 and 1994 land-grant institutions, and non-land grant colleges and universities of agriculture.

In addition, legislatively, the purpose of this program is to strengthen the capacity of Insular Areas institutions of higher education to carry out distance food and agricultural education programs using digital network technologies.

Grants awarded under DEG shall be used to:

- (1) 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.
- (2) 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.
- (3) 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.
- (4) 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
- (5) Provide leadership development to administrators, board members, and faculty of eligible institutions with institutional responsibility for technology education.

Applicants to the DEG program are reminded of a closely related competitive grants program administered by NIFA for eligible Insular Area Institutions: The Resident Instruction Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (RIIA). As separate programs under their respective authorization, appropriation, and RFA, applicants are advised to coordinate RIIA and DEG project applications to ensure overall coordinated project objectives and to efficiently integrate proposed teaching and evaluation assessment practices for both projects.

Both programs for the Insular Areas (DEG and RIIA) promote and strengthen the ability of eligible institutions in the Insular Areas (see definition in Part VIII, E.) to carry out education within the broadly defined food and agricultural sciences and related disciplines. However, DEG funding enables the institutions in the Insular Areas to acquire the necessary equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, digital network or the needed IT infrastructure to deliver teaching and classroom learning across the ocean.

Applications recommended for funding must highlight and emphasize all of the following provisions: enhance educational equity for under-represented students; strengthen institutional

educational capacities; prepare students for careers related to the food, agricultural, and natural resource systems of the United States; and maximize the development and use of resources to improve food and agricultural science teaching programs.

Social Sciences

In addition, DEG supports social and behavioral science disciplines. Projects that integrate social and biological sciences to provide experiential learning opportunities for students in applied research, and related community development programs are encouraged. Incorporation of social and behavioral sciences is important for addressing many of the challenges facing agriculture and rural communities, such as increasing global demand for food production in the face of limited natural resources; improving health and reducing obesity by engaging in healthy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

eXtension

DEG encourages projects that develop content suitable for delivery through the Cooperative Extension System's eXtension Initiative. Funds may be used to contribute to existing Communities of Practice (COPs) or form new COPs that focus on **Stakeholder/Land Grant Institutions Partnership: Integrated Research, Extension and Education**. Projects must align with the eXtension vision, mission and values. A letter of acknowledgement from eXtension is required, and a letter of support may be required from one or more of the Communities of Practice. For detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension, go to <http://create.extension.org/node/2057>.

Leadership Skills Development

All DEG projects are required to provide leadership skills opportunities. The development of leadership skills, knowledge and qualities are necessary for preparing students for agricultural related careers in private sector, government and academia. Projects must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to ensure that students are equipped with both technical and leadership abilities.

Expected Products and Results

The DEG program requires all project directors to provide appropriate metrics and describe the expected products and results, outcomes, and their potential impact on strengthening food, agricultural, natural resources and human sciences education, research and extension in the United States. Metrics to assess products, outputs and outcomes are to be clearly delineated in the proposal.

C. Program Area Description

A proposed project may address one or more Educational Need Areas and/or be an Applied Project that addresses research, outreach and capacity building to benefit the communities they serve, especially their students.

1. Educational Need Areas

DEG projects should focus on an Educational Need Area listed below. Please note that at least

one of these Need Areas must be indicated on the Project Summary (See Part IV, B.3). Need Areas for FY 2016 are defined below:

a. Curricula Design, Materials Development, and Library Resources

The purpose of this initiative is to promote the development of courses of study and degree programs, new and improved curricula, and instructional materials and technology; to enable the acquisition of library resources including books and journals relating to food and agricultural sciences; and to stimulate the use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects, new research on teaching and learning theory, and new applications of knowledge. The overall objective is to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the academic programs of Insular Area Institutions in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

b. Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching

The purpose of this initiative is to advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency and leadership, subject matter expertise, or student recruitment and advising skills. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to: obtaining experience with recent developments and new applications in a field; expanding competence in innovative technologies and new methods to deliver instruction; developing new skills in a field of science or education including student advising skills; or pursuing graduate-level study in a field related to the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

Each faculty recipient of support for developmental activities must be an “eligible participant” as defined in Part VIII, E. Definitions.

c. Instruction Delivery Systems

The purpose of this initiative is to encourage the development and use of alternative methods of delivering instruction to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and cost efficiency of teaching programs, while simultaneously addressing the unique geographical challenges of Insular Area Institutions. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to: conducting needs assessments of institutional academic and technological capacities; developing inter-institutional and interdisciplinary partnerships and collaborations that deliver instruction in ways that maximize program quality and reduce unnecessary duplication; and consideration and implementation of innovative instructional techniques, methodologies, and delivery systems in response to advances in knowledge and technology.

d. Scientific Instrumentation for Teaching and Research

The purpose of this initiative is to provide students and faculty in science-oriented courses with suitable, up-to-date equipment in order to involve them in work central to scientific understanding and progress. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to: acquiring new, state-of-the-art instructional, laboratory, classroom, and research scientific equipment to help assure the achievement and maintenance of outstanding food and agricultural sciences education programs; and upgrading existing equipment, or replacing non-functional or obsolete equipment.

e. Student Experiential Learning

The purpose of this initiative is to further the development of student scientific and professional

competencies through experiential learning programs that provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations. The development of leadership skills, knowledge and qualities are necessary for preparing students for agricultural related careers in private sector, government and academia. Projects must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to ensure that students are equipped with both technical and leadership abilities. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to: developing 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, providing opportunities for mentoring and shadowing, organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, preparing future graduates to advance knowledge and technology that enhance quality of life, conserve resources, and address community and economic development issues. Projects should focus on advancing student problem-solving, decision-making and communication skills, and improving real-life technological expertise. Activities may include, but are not limited to: field-based internships; laboratory research; work-study practicum experiences; study abroad opportunities; and participation with faculty on applied research and related community development projects.

f. Student Recruitment, Retention, and Educational Equity (including the provision of student financial assistance)

The purpose of this initiative is to enhance educational equity for students from under-represented groups, and to strengthen student recruitment and retention programs that ensure the future strength of the Nation's scientific, professional, and technical work force in the food and agricultural sciences. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to: initiating new projects (or supplementing current efforts) in order to attract and increase the numbers of students from under-represented groups to attend college in order to prepare them for careers as food and agricultural scientists, professionals, and technicians; agricultural and science literacy programs at the high school level to attract students to college and careers in the food and agricultural sciences; mentoring programs and other initiatives for student retention; and the provision of student financial support to attend college.

Each student recipient of monetary support for education costs or developmental purposes must be enrolled at an eligible institution and meet the requirement of an “eligible participant” as defined in Part VIII, E. Definitions.

2. Applied Projects

In addition to the Educational Need Areas, applications may choose to develop studies that have relevancy and application within the communities that these institutions serve.

a. Applied Studies in the Food and Agricultural Sciences

The purpose of this initiative is to apply the body of knowledge in natural and social sciences that comprise the food and agricultural sciences to address real-world problems, including applied research activities focusing on community and economic development issues related to food, nutrition, conservation, and renewable natural resources. Illustrative examples include, but not limited to:

- (i) Conduct plant or animal breeding programs to develop better crops, forests, or livestock (e.g., improving disease resistance, improving productivity, yielding higher quality product(s));
- (ii) Conceive, design, and evaluate new bio-processing techniques for eliminating undesirable constituents from or adding desirable ones to food products;
- (iii) Propose and evaluate ways to enhance utilization of the capabilities and resources of Insular Areas institutions to promote rural development (e.g., exploitation of new technologies by small rural businesses);
- (iv) Identify control factors influencing consumer demand for agricultural products;
- (v) Analyze social, economic, and physiological aspects of nutrition, housing, and life-style choices, and of community strategies for meeting the changing needs of different populations groups; and
- (vi) Study other identified State, regional, community, national and global problems such as human nutrition and obesity prevention, sustainable agriculture, bioenergy, climate change, food safety, food security, biotechnology, agribusiness management and marketing, and aquaculture (see Part I. B on areas of priorities).

b. Applied Research Support Systems

The purpose of this initiative is to establish centralized support system to meet State, regional, or community needs, or serve clientele that cannot otherwise afford or do not have ready access to the support in question, or to provide such support more economically thereby freeing up resources for other applied research uses. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Storage, maintenance, characterization, evaluation, and enhancement of germ plasm for use by animal and plant breeders (including those using the techniques of biotechnology);
- (ii) Digital databases of important scientific information (e.g. epidemiological, demographic, nutrition, weather, economic, crop yields, animal migration patterns); and
- (iii) Expert service centers for sophisticated and highly specialized methodologies (e.g., evaluation of nutritional quality of foods, toxicology, taxonomic identifications, consumer preferences and demographics).

c. Technology-based Information Delivery Systems

The purpose of this initiative is to promote innovations and improvements in the delivery of benefits of food and agricultural sciences to producers and consumers, particularly those who are currently disproportionately low in receipt of such benefits. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Computer-based decision support systems to assist small-scale farmers, ranchers, herders, or fishermen to take advantage of relevant technologies, programs, policies, etc., and

(ii) Efficacious delivery systems for nutrition information or for resource management assistance for low-income families and individuals.

d. Other Applied Research and Community Development Applications

The purpose of this initiative is to encourage other creative projects, outside the areas previously outlined, that are designed to provide needed enhancement to the capacity of Insular Areas institutions to conduct applied research and related community development projects.

PART II-AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$768,000. The funds will be awarded competitively through a peer panel review process. 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 Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see <http://fms.treas.gov/index1.html>.

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 food, agriculture, natural resources and human 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.

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. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution through its inter-collegial engagement and partnership and necessary outside collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project.

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.

4. Key Personnel (15 points).

This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications 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.

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 inter-institutional sources and necessary outside collaborators; 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.

B. Types of Applications

Supporting the many components of agriculture under the constraints of a growing population, pressure on natural resources, and the challenges of climate variability and change, requires research, education, extension, and integrated programs that increase agricultural and natural resource sustainability. The term "sustainable agriculture" (NARETPA, 7 U.S.C. Section 3103 (19) means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will over the long-term achieve the following goals:

- (A) Satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- (B) Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends;
- (C) Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- (D) Sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
- (E) Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

In FY 2016, you may submit applications to the DEG 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 DEG program. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) Renewal application. This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications; they also must contain a Progress Report (see Project Narrative, Part IV). Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in the area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

(3) Resubmitted application. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the DEG program only but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

(4) Resubmitted renewal application. This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. In addition, this is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to the DEG Program but not funded. Therefore, PDs must provide a Progress Report as required under the Project Narrative,

Part IV. Resubmitted renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in the competition with other pending applications in the areas to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

C. Project Type

1. Regular Grant

The only grant type DEG will accept in 2016 is Regular Project. In FY 2016, each eligible Institution may submit a maximum of three DEG Standard Applications. All applicants must meet the eligibility criteria as described in Part III of the RFA.

An eligible institution may submit a standard or regular project application for project activities undertaken principally on behalf of its own students or faculty, and managed primarily by its own personnel. In a Standard Project, the applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners (See award size limit below in item E).

2. Project Duration

The project period may range from 24 to 36 months. The project start date should not occur prior to August 2016.

3. Number and Size of Grant Awards

The number of grants awarded in FY 2016 will depend on the number of applications recommended for funding in response to this notice.

This DEG RFA is announcing funding opportunities for Integrated Research, Education, and/or Extension Projects.

NIFA estimates that awards for Regular Grant applications may not be greater than \$150,000 in FY 2016. Budget forms submitted with the grant applications should reflect this estimate.

Note that actual amounts awarded by NIFA under the DEG program may differ from the amounts requested in the application submitted to the program. Awardees may be required by NIFA to submit revised budgets and plans of work before an award is made.

4. Proposal Submission Limitations

An eligible university system may receive up to three grant awards per competition. Institutions receiving a grant under this program in any one competition are eligible to receive DEG funds in subsequent years. Receiving a grant under any other authority does not affect eligibility for the DEG program.

5. Grant Limitations per Institution

For the FY 2016 program, each eligible, individual institution, independent branch campus, and branch institution of a State system may receive, or be a part to, a maximum of three Standard grant awards. USDA may fund an institution simultaneously under both applications. Institutions that received a grant under this program in a prior year are still eligible to receive a grant this year.

6. Funding Limitations per Institution

For FY 2016, there are no limits to the funds that may be awarded to any one institution. However, applicants should take note of the proposal submission limitations (see Part II, C.5) and anticipated range of awards (see Part II, C.4).

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and 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 Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See <http://nifa.usda.gov/responsible-and-ethical-conduct-research> for more information.

PART III-ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may only be submitted by an Eligible Institution. For the purposes of the DEG program, an eligible institution means an institution of higher education, as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1995 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a)), that is located in an Insular Area and that has a demonstrable capacity to carry out teaching and extension programs in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences. All public or non-profit 2yr and 4yr accredited institutions of higher education that offer certificate/degree programs in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences are eligible. Individual land-grant colleges and universities, and other institutions that have secured land-grant status through Federal legislation, and which are located in Insular Areas are automatically eligible for awards under the DEG program.

The eight insular areas are the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Virgin Islands of the United States.

The following criteria must also be met by Eligible Applicants to this grants program:

1. Branch Institutions of a State System:

For the purposes of the DEG program, the 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, individual institutions eligible to apply for and receive awards, provided they otherwise satisfy the definition of “eligible institution” as specified above.

2. Independent Branch Campuses:

Independent branch campuses of individual institutions may apply for and receive grant awards under this program, provided that they otherwise satisfy the definition of “eligible institution” as specified above. An “independent branch campus” means a unit of a 2-year or 4-year institution of higher education that is geographically apart from the main campus, is permanent in nature, offers courses for credit and programs leading to an associate or bachelor’s degree, and is autonomous to the extent that it has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization and its own budgetary and hiring authority.

3. Certification of Eligibility:

At the time of application, each primary applicant will be required to certify that it is an eligible institution as defined by this RFA. A non-Land-grant institution must submit a letter, signed by the institution’s Authorized Representative (AR) certifying that it meets the requirements of an “eligible institution” as defined in paragraphs 1, 2, or 3 above. The AR must also certify the institution, or parent institution in the case of an independent branch campus:

(a) 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;
- (b) Is legally authorized by the State in which it is located to provide a program of education beyond secondary education;
 - (c) 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; and,
 - (d) Is a public or other nonprofit institution; and 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 for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary 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.

All eligible institutions must demonstrate that they have a significant commitment to higher education programs in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences and to each specific subject area for which grant funds are to be used.

Eligibility documentation must be submitted as part of the applicant's Project Narrative. See Part IV, B.3, b.

4. Fiscal Agents:

If an institution 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. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant and the letter must be countersigned by a 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 and the applicant institution must submit complete management information (see Part V, D.). Nevertheless, the legal recipient of the award must be an eligible, individual institution, independent branch campus, or branch institution of a State system. Examples of fiscal agent arrangements include, but are not limited to, the following scenarios:

- (a) A State university system or a public system of higher education may apply on behalf of an eligible, individual institution, independent branch campus, or branch institution in its State. In such cases, the State system will act as fiscal agent for the eligible institution under a Standard Project award to advance the purposes of the DEG program.
- (b) A research foundation or other, similar foundation established and maintained by an eligible, individual institution to facilitate the application and management of externally funded grant awards may apply on behalf of its eligible, parent institution. In such cases, the foundation will act as fiscal agent for the eligible, individual institution under a Standard Project award to advance the purposes of the DEG program.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply to this DEG program provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline shall result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program, and matching resources will not be a factor in the review process as evaluation criteria.

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 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.** Item 2. below mentions the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains additional explanatory language regarding the registration process.

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 determination 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-RIGP-005698

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

Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 am - 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

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 AT RISK OF BEING 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).

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
- 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.

2. SF 424 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

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V. 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of DEG. See Part V. 4.7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 20 pages of written text regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced and up to 5 additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (25 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

- a. **Introduction:** Include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities that relate to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, this section should include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:
 - (1) Estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing state-federal food and agricultural research, education and extension programs.
 - (2) The role of stakeholders in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation as appropriate.
 - (3) Reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution.
- b. **Objectives:** All applicants must include a statement(s) of specific aims of the proposed effort in clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged terms.
- c. **Methods:** Explicitly state the procedures or methodology you will apply to the proposed effort. This section should include, but not necessarily be limited to, descriptions of:
 - (1) Stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation and evaluation;
 - (2) Proposed project activities, listed sequentially;
 - (3) Techniques to be employed in this project, including their feasibility and rationale;
 - (4) expected results;
 - (5) How extension and education activities will be evaluated;
 - (6) How data will be analyzed or interpreted;
 - (7) Plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public;
 - (8) Pitfalls that might be encountered; and,
 - (9) Limitations to proposed procedures.

- d. Project Table: The proposal should outline all important phases as a function of time, year by year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period.

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.

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.

- (a) Budgets for each project year do NOT have to be same from year to year. However, detailed budget information (budget and narrative) must be submitted for each year of the proposed project.
- (b) During the tenure of a grant, PDs must attend at least one National Project Directors' Meeting/Conference, if offered, in Washington DC, or any other announced location. 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 of the projects. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in the application's budget under travel expenses.

Supplemental Information Form

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

- a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., "Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas") and the program code (i.e., "DEG"). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.
- b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

C. Submission Date and Time

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, you should conduct an administrative review to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is include in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review. The application should be checked for the following required items that might be overlooked (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Logic Model
- Management Plan
- Current and Pending Form

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 **April 7, 2016**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

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

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 a confirmation message from NIFA 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

Section 715 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L.113-235) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided (or 42.857 percent of the total direct costs) under each award. Similar language may be included in the FY 2016 appropriation, therefore, when preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

You may not use grant funds awarded under this authority to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such a space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construction of buildings or facilities.

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.

The funding period will commence on the effective date cited in the award instrument. Any such limitation also applies to subcontracts made under awards subject to a funding period limitation.”

E. Other Submission Requirements

Applications should include elements of a logic model detailing the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project. This information may be provided as a narrative or formatted into a logic model chart. The logic model planning process is a tool that should be used in developing projects before writing the proposal. Two additional pages are allowed for this information. More information and resources related to the logic model planning process are provided at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/strat_plan_logic_models.html.

Expected Outputs’ Measures – PDF Attachment

Title the attachment “Expected Outputs’ Measures” in the document header and save file as “ExpectedOutputsMeasures”. Please use the format, similar to what is provided below, to submit expected outputs and attach it as the last page of the application.

Recommended Format for Submitting Expected Outputs' Measures

Primary Project Function: (Choose one)		
EDUCATION: <input type="checkbox"/>	EXTENSION : <input type="checkbox"/>	RESEARCH: <input type="checkbox"/>
Data for Insular Area Program		
Total expected outputs' measures during entire grant period		Expected Number and/or percentage or other descriptor
Number of collaborations with K-12 and other institutions of higher education		
Number of products developed for students through grant funds this year		
- curricula, academic programs including research		
- recruitment/retention programs		
- teaching or educational materials, distance education capability, experiential learning opportunities		
Number of collaborations to be developed between institutions		
Number of faculty attending professional development: sabbaticals, workshops, conferences, etc.		
Number of faculty members who will complete advanced or additional degree programs		
Number of individuals who indirectly will benefit from the projects (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited or retained)		
Total number of students to be directly supported by grant (i.e., scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, internships)		
Number of underrepresented students to be supported during the grant period		
Number of female students to be supported during the grant period		
Number of students who will graduate as a result of the grant during grant period		
- Four year or higher degree		
- Two year degree		
- Certificate program		
Number of students who will complete advanced or additional degree programs as a result of the grant (graduate, professional)		
Number of students who will complete internships with outside organizations or governmental agencies during the grant period		
Number of students who will complete international experiential learning (or study abroad) during the grant period and who are supported by this grant		
Number of students who will complete other experiential learning during the grant period and who are supported by this grant		

Project Directors Conference

During the tenure of a grant, Project Director must attend at least one National Project Directors' Meeting/Conference, if offered, in Washington, D.C., or any other announced location. 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 of the projects. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in your application's travel expenses.

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 review panel will technically 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 DEG 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.

DEG 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 food, agriculture, natural resources and human 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.

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. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant

institution through its inter-collegial engagement and partnership and necessary outside collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project.

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.

4. Key Personnel (15 points).

This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications 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.

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 inter-institutional sources and necessary outside collaborators; 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.

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 340, 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 pre-award 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 DEG 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 (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), 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, the following:

- (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 assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring re-competition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;
- (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 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

The output and reporting requirements are included in the awards terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

a. Evaluation Plan: All projects must have an Evaluation Plan that includes both a strategy for monitoring the project as it evolves (to provide feedback to guide these efforts), as well as a strategy for evaluating the effectiveness of the project in achieving its goals and for identifying positive and negative findings when the project is completed.

The complexity of the evaluation will depend on the scope of the project. Grantees are encouraged to obtain an independent evaluation to secure appropriate documentation of the project's outcomes and impacts. Such efforts should be led by knowledgeable and experienced individuals. As a guide, up to 10% of the grant funds maybe be used to support this purpose.

PART VII-AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Dr. Salei'a Afele-Faamuli; National Program Leader; Division of Community and Education; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; STOP 2251; 1400 Independence Ave, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2251; Telephone: (202) 720-0384; Fax: (202) 720-2030; E-mail: sfaamuli@nifa.usda.gov.

Administrative/Business Contacts –

Bruce Mertz; Team Leader, Team I, Office of Grants and Financial Management, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; STOP 2271 Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone: (202) 401-5062; fax: (202) 401-6271; email: bmertz@nifa.usda.gov.

Sondra Watkins; Team Leader, Team II, Office of Grants and Financial Management, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; STOP 2271 Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4249; fax: (202) 401-6271; email: swatkins@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.

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.

B. 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.

C. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR part 415, subpart C, 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.

D. 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.

Educational Need Area means the specific area(s) of educational focus identified in the RFA and addressed by the applicant's application. Educational Need Areas are derived from statutory language authorizing the grants program and specific Educational Need Areas may be targeted for priority funding support in the RFA.

Eligible institution means an institution of higher education, as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1995 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a)), that is located in an Insular Area as defined in this section, and that has a demonstrable capacity to carry out teaching and extension programs in the food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences. Land-grant colleges and universities in Insular Areas are automatically eligible institutions. The term eligible institution also applies to any branch of any institution of higher education that by itself satisfies the requirements contained in the definition of an Insular Area Institution, including:

- (1) The individual branches of a State university system or public system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree granting institutions, provided that they otherwise satisfy the definition of an eligible institution;
- (2) Independent branch campuses of individual institutions, provided that they otherwise satisfy the definition of an eligible institution; or

Eligible participant means an individual who is a citizen or national of the U.S. as defined in this section.

Independent branch campus means a unit of a 2-year or 4-year institution of higher education that is geographically apart from the main campus, is permanent in nature, offers courses for credit and programs leading to an associate or bachelor's degree, and is autonomous to the extent that it has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization and its own budgetary and hiring authority.

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 that provides 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.

Insular Area Institution means an institution of higher education as defined in this section that is located in an Insular Area.

Non-profit as applied to a school, college, university, agency, organization, or institution means a school, college, university, 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.