

# Department of Defense Virtual Lab School (VLS)

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## *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Request for Applications (RFA)*

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:** September 6, 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**

**Virtual Lab School (VLS)**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.500**.

**DATES:** Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 6, 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/USDA) 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](mailto:Policy@nifa.usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Virtual Lab School RFA.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA/USDA requests applications for the Virtual Lab School (aka Virtual Laboratory School) (VLS) program for fiscal year (FY) 2016 to provide all maintenance and support necessary to maintain the Virtual Lab School, a virtual learning platform which houses all statutorily mandated training for Department of Defense (DoD) child development program staff. The amount available to support this program in FY 2016 is \$454,546.

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

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

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

In accordance with the Economy Act of 1932, as amended, (31 U.S.C. 1535), the Department of Defense (DoD) will utilize the unique resources of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). DoD has provided NIFA/USDA with funds to support the Virtual Lab School Competitive Program.

Pursuant to 7 U.S.C. Section 3318(c), the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Director of the NIFA/USDA, may enter into contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements, for periods not to exceed five (5) years with State agricultural experiment stations, State cooperative extension services, all colleges and universities, other research or educational institutions or organizations, Federal and private agencies and organizations, individuals, and any other contractor or recipient, either foreign or domestic, to further research, extension, or teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences of the Department of Agriculture.

Within the Department of Defense, Economy Act transactions are governed by Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation, Volume 11A, Chapter 3, Economy Act Orders.

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

NIFA is soliciting applications for the VLS which is aligned with the USDA Strategic Plan found at (<http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/usdasp.htm>)

Strategic Goal 1: Assist Rural Communities to Create Prosperity so They Are Self-Sustaining, Repopulating, and Economically Thriving through addressing human and social capital.

VLS is aligned with the USDA Research, Economics, and Education Action Plan found at ([http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA\\_REE\\_Action\\_Plan\\_03-2014.pdf](http://www.ree.usda.gov/ree/news/USDA_REE_Action_Plan_03-2014.pdf)) Goal 7: Rural-Urban Interdependence and Prosperity through “supporting information and technology transfer and translational research, ‘transformational extension,’ to inform citizens and enable and support vibrant and resilient communities.”

VLS is aligned with the NIFA’s Strategic Plan found at ([http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat\\_plan\\_2014.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/about/pdfs/strat_plan_2014.pdf)), Goal 1: Science through “catalyzing exemplary and relevant research, education and extension programs.”

This work also supports the mission of the DoD-USDA Partnership for Military Families Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2010 by USDA-NIFA and DoD senior leadership. The goal of the MOU is “...to enhance federal interagency coordination and build capacity for partnerships and collaboration among the agencies and across public and private sectors to sustain programs and services for military Service members and their families.”

NIFA/USDA encourages, but does not require, projects that develop content suitable for delivery through eXtension (<https://extension.org/>).

## **Background and Context**

The military child care system experiences the similar personnel challenges that are experienced throughout the child care profession, including challenges of significant turnover, expectations for highly qualified and well-trained staff that are often a mismatch for the salaries earned by providers, and consistent high-quality instruction in all classrooms. The significant turnover in personnel in virtually all child care settings and the increasing importance of high quality care means that child care systems regularly seek educational and professional development opportunities for a continuous pipeline of new staff.

The military child care system is also prone to unique personnel challenges as military Child Development Centers (CDCs) that often employ spouses, family members, and other military community members as child care providers, many of whom are hired without a child development background. Given the frequent transfers of military personnel, CDCs, particularly those on installations in foreign countries, can experience very high rates of provider staff turnover that increases the need for efficient and responsive training. When these challenges are not met consistently and effectively, program quality is diminished and this impacts military dependent children and their families.

To address these needs, the Child Development Virtual Laboratory School (aka Virtual Lab School) was created in 2009 to provide innovative and cost effective professional development for military helping professionals working in child and youth development systems within the military services and to provide those materials for public use as well. The Virtual Lab School has become the focal point of the DoD's Child Care Training System and houses all statutorily mandated training for child development program staff. VLS is an online professional development system for personnel working in the U.S. military's child care and education system. VLS content is anchored around the 13 core Child Development Associate (CDA) competencies. The 13 CDA competencies have been translated into a series of "Courses" and "Lessons" which are designed to convey useful information about a particular topic. Additional content and training are an integral aspect of ensuring that the information contained within the Virtual Lab School is relevant and up to date.

The overall objective of this project is:

- to continue the work of the Virtual Lab School in providing innovative and cost effective, virtual professional development for child development program staff.

This objective should be accomplished through the following activities and product development:

- maintenance and support necessary to maintain the Virtual Lab School web presence;
- further development of competencies for providers, trainers, and managers within the child, youth and family care environments;
- further piloting of competencies on military installations as they are developed;
- training opportunities to installation level personnel; and
- collection of ongoing feedback from users to enhance content and incorporate system improvements.

The awardee should have a proven ability to work with the DoD's child development system, as well as demonstrated expertise in the development of comprehensive child care training content as prescribed by the Military Child Care Act of 1989. In addition, the recipient must demonstrate their ability to provide technical assistance and training to military, helping professionals through both virtual and face to face methodologies.

The awardee will also be expected to provide regular updates to the VLS team at NIFA/USDA and the designated DoD leadership. These discussions and updates regarding progress will be a part of the Award Terms and Conditions.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available to support one (1) grant in FY **2016** is **\$454,546**. The funds will be awarded through a **grant**. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see <https://www.fms.treas.gov/aboutfms/index.html>.

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

In FY **2016**, you may only submit a new application to the **VLS Competitive Program**:

**New application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the **VLS** Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

### **C. Project Types**

For FY 2016, **\$454,546** will be available to fund one (1) proposal for one (1) year. (See Part I, A. Legislative Authority and Background.)

### **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/USDA 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/USDA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

See <http://nifa.usda.gov/responsible-and-ethical-conduct-research> for further information.

## **PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligible Applicants**

Applications may be submitted by State agricultural experiment stations, State cooperative extension services, all colleges and universities, other research or educational institution or organizations, Federal and private agencies and organizations, individuals and any other recipient, either foreign or domestic, to further research, extension, or teaching programs in the food and agriculture sciences of the Department of Agriculture.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may 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/USDA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

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

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

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA/USDA 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/apply-for-grants.html>.

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

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

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

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html> and enter the **Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-EXCA-006005** in the appropriate box and click “Search.” From the search result, click “Select Package” to access the application package. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

**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-tools-and-tips.html>. Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

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

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

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

## **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 (2) 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/USDA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA/USDA 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/USDA 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](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov)
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

### **1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. See Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide which provides that the applicant's electronic signature on the SF-424 affirms its agreement with Federal representations and assurances (e.g., Prohibition against FY 16 Appropriations Act

Funding under Grants and Cooperative Agreements With Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements)

**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 Form**

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

**a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.** The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of VLS. See Part V. 4.7 of 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 six (6) pages of written text regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced and up to four (4) additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum of ten (10) pages to ensure fair and equitable competition.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following sections:

**Section 1: Statement of Need & Background**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the issue this project is seeking to address.
- Describe how the overall project will effectively address the audience(s) to be served.
- Detail the characteristics of the institution(s) that make it particularly qualified to conduct the proposed work; describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project, particularly expert knowledge and experience in providing professional development for child and youth development system professionals; virtual learning platform development and maintenance; curriculum development; program evaluation, providing technical assistance, working with military family helping professionals, and project management.

**Section 2: Objectives**

- List clear, concise, and logically arranged project goals and objectives. Goals must address the statement of need identified in the first section of your proposal; and Objectives must link to goals and address program priorities listed in Part 1, Section B.

**Section 3: Approach and Design**

Project Action Plan: Based on the objectives, a project plan will be drafted. The DoD project manager will provide feedback and any guidance needed on the project plan once the grantee is selected. The plan should contain the following:

- a preliminary project design to show the relationships between objectives, project activities, products, and anticipated impacts of:
  - (1) maintenance and support necessary to maintain the Virtual Lab School web presence;
  - (2) further development of competencies for providers, trainers, and managers within the child, youth and family care environments;
  - (3) further piloting of competencies on military installations as they are developed;
  - (4) training opportunities to installation level personnel; and
  - (5) collection of ongoing feedback from users to enhance content and incorporate system improvements;
- the evaluation approach to include internal, process and outcome evaluations and quality assurance controls for each of the project components as applicable;
- development challenges that may be encountered; and
- a description of how stakeholder feedback and involvement will be a part of the project.

Priority is placed on continuing with the main activities of the current Virtual Lab School project within the DoD-USDA Partnership for Military Families.

#### **Section 4: Project Communication Plan**

- Briefly describe how pertinent information, progress and results from this project will be communicated to the project team, as well as relevant stakeholders in the context of project objectives.

#### **Section 5: Project Management**

- Provide a brief summary of key personnel, their project functions, qualifications and expertise along with timelines, reporting, and collaborative efforts.

#### **c. Field 12. Add Other Attachments**

See Part V., Section 4.12. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the Form) for instructions regarding **mandatory** Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status”.

#### **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. Part V.6. also notes the importance and use of the information.

However, NIFA/USDA strongly encourages applicants to provide the requested information to help NIFA/USDA identify and address any inequities based on gender, race, ethnicity, or disability of its proposed PDs/PIs and co-PDs/PIs. Information not submitted will seriously undermine the statistical validity, and therefore the usefulness, of information received from others. The information you submit will be kept confidential and will be used only for tracking and statistical purposes necessary to meet the demands of the agency and will not be part of the review process.

#### **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.

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

#### **7. 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., enter **Virtual Lab School**) and the program code (i.e., enter “**VLS**”). 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 List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

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

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

While the checklist should be used to check the application for completeness, the application should be checked additionally for the following required item(s). This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight required items that are sometimes overlooked by applicants:

- Project Summary
- Project Action Plan
- Bibliography

- Current and Pending Support forms
- Conflict of Interest forms

**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 September 6, 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.**

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA/USDA** regarding a submitted application within 14 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**

**Indirect Cost:** Fully negotiated rate. The applicant should use the current negotiated indirect cost rate established (i.e., approved) by its cognizant Federal agency. If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate, the applicant should request a rate from the Federal agency from which the applicant receives the most funding. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

**Statutory language or agency policy limits the maximum potential funding period (including any awards transferred from another institution or organization) to 5 years in duration. 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.**

The PD may incur pre-award costs within the 90-day period immediately preceding the effective date of the award providing: the approval of pre-award spending is made and documented in accordance with the awardee's normal procedures prior to the incurrence of the cost(s); the advanced funding is necessary for the effective and economical conduct of the project; and the costs are otherwise allowable. Pre-award expenditures are made at the awardee's risk. AR authority to approve pre-award costs does not impose an obligation on NIFA/USDA:  
(1) in the absence of appropriations;

- (2) if an award is subsequently not made; or
- (3) if an award is made for a lesser amount than the awardee expected.

Pre-award costs incurred outside the 90-day period immediately preceding the effective date of the award must receive written approval from the Authorized Departmental Official (ADO). Please verify with the Administrative/Business Contact listed in this RFA before any pre-award expenditures. Any expenditures made before such verification are made at your own risk.

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

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

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

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

### **A. General**

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

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., educators, administrators) 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 the VLS team 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.

The VLS team 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 Developing and Maintaining a High-Quality, Dynamic Virtual Professional Development Platform for the DoD Child and Youth Development System Workforce (35 percent)**

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will succeed in:

- (1) securing the expertise and personnel necessary to effectively complete objectives outlined in Part 1, Section B;
- (2) providing the overall management of this project including any partnerships and management of project staff;
- (3) meeting established project objectives and timelines; and

(4) demonstrating successful past experience with related projects or initiatives, particularly those involving providing professional development for child and youth development system professionals; virtual learning platform development and maintenance; curriculum development; program evaluation; providing technical assistance; working with military family helping professionals; and project management.

## **2. Proposed Approach and Program Coordination (35 percent)**

This criterion is used to assess the soundness of the proposed approach including statement of need, scope of the project, objectives, methods, key personnel, timeline, partnerships, product design, and communication plan and its capacity to meet the project objectives. Experience working with the DoD or the Services will be considered.

## **3. Evaluation (20 percent)**

This criterion is used to assess the adequacy of the strategies that will be used to for internal, process and outcome evaluations as well as quality assurance controls.

## **4. Budget and Budget Narrative (10 percent)**

This criterion is used to assess the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost effective based on budget outline provided. Elements considered include: the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objective and the adequacy of time committed relative to the project by key project personnel.

## **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. See [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive\\_peer\\_review.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html) for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

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

## **E. Application Disposition**

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by **VLS** for a period of three (3) years.

## **PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. General**

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA/USDA awarding official shall make a grant to the responsible, eligible applicant whose application is judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA/USDA 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/USDA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA/USDA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

### **B. Award Notice**

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

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to which the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA/USDA;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA/USDA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA/USDA 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/USDA 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 projects awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, the ones listed on the NIFA/USDA web page - <http://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

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

### **Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research**

Please refer to Part II, D. for more information.

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

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

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

The awardee will also be asked to provide regular updates to the VLS team and the designated DoD leadership. These discussions and meetings regarding progress will be a part of the Award Terms and Conditions.

**Data Use:** Use of data provided to NIFA/USDA awardees pursuant to this grant shall comply with the provisions of this paragraph. NIFA/USDA awardees shall be free to publish in professional, refereed journals information or data developed or collected (except confidential data or information including PHI or PII) resulting from the activities under this grant. Awardees will be required to submit a copy of any such publication to USDA NIFA sixty (60) days prior to publication for review and approval by NIFA and DoD to ensure that any confidentiality

necessary related to the grant is maintained and that NIFA/USDA and the DoD have been accurately represented. All educational and technical assistance materials developed by the awardee under an agreement with NIFA/USDA shall be owned by the awardee. NIFA/USDA and the DoD will have a non-exclusive, royalty-free, non-transferable, irrevocable license to reproduce, prepare derivative work and distribute copies of the products so long as such products are used for non-commercial educational or government purposes.

Any work produced under a NIFA/USDA award is subject to 2 C.F.R. Part 200.315 related to intangible property.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

### **Programmatic Contacts:**

Ahlishia Shipley, Ph.D.  
National Program Leader  
Division of Family & Consumer Sciences  
USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)  
Telephone: (202) 401-6854  
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Sylvia Montgomery  
Program Specialist  
Division of Family & Consumer Sciences  
USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)  
Telephone: (202) 720-8855  
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### **Administrative/Business Contact:**

Adriene Woodin  
Branch Chief  
Awards Management Division  
Office of Grants and Financial Management  
USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)  
Telephone: (202) 401-4320  
Email: [awoodin@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:awoodin@nifa.usda.gov)

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

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

We will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

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

#### **1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility**

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

#### **2. Changes in Project Plans**

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the ADO for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

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

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

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not federal funds are involved, prior to instituting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the

ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

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

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA/USDA 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 (3) years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

### **D. Regulatory Information**

This program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372. See, e.g., CFDA 2015 print catalog at Appendix I, page AA-1 (Dec. 2015). Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

### **E. Definitions**

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA/USDA program.

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

Virtual Lab School: <http://vls.ehe.osu.edu/>