

# Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program

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## 2016 Request for Applications (RFA)

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: December 16, 2015**

**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**

**Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.331**.

**DATES:** Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on December 16, 2015**. 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](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 **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program RFA**.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program** for fiscal year (FY) **2016** to support projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. Applications are requested in each of the following three categories: (1) FINI Pilot Projects (awards not to exceed a total of \$100,000 over one year); (2) Multi-year, community-based FINI Projects (awards not to exceed a total of \$500,000 over no more than four years); and (3) Multi-year, FINI Large-Scale Projects (awards of \$500,000 or more over no more than four years). Grantees will be expected to conduct a project assessment and to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluation to determine the relative effectiveness of the grant program in achieving the legislative goals of "increasing fruit and vegetable purchases" and "improving the nutrition and health status" of participating households (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, § 4405(b)(4)(A)). The appropriated amount available for NIFA to support this program in FY **2016** is approximately **\$16.8 million**. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2016. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

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

grant. A webinar reviewing these RFA proposal and match requirements will be held on **October 14th, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time for potential applicants.**

The webinar can be accessed here: <http://nifa-connect.nifa.usda.gov/finip/>

The webinar will be recorded and posted to the FINI webpage, accessible here: <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program>

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

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

The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grants Program is authorized by section 4208 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, which amends section 4405 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (“FCEA”) (7 U.S.C. 7517). The authority to administer this program was delegated to the Director of NIFA through the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE). See 79 FR 44101 (July 30, 2014), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-07-30/pdf/2014-17352.pdf>. In FY 2016, it is anticipated that up to \$16,800,000 will be available for grants under this program.

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

The FINI RFA directly aligns with Strategic Goal 4.2 of the USDA Strategic Plan, which is to Promote Healthy Diet and Physical Activity Behaviors.

The FINI RFA also aligns with the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Action Plan and specifically addresses Goal 4, Nutrition and Childhood Obesity by strengthening established strategic partnerships and strengthening implementation practices to encourage healthy eating and physical activity at the individual and community levels, focusing on high-risk groups and also advances

The FINI RFA specifically addresses NIFA’s “Strategic Goal 1 (Science), by combating childhood obesity by ensuring the availability of affordable, nutritious food and providing individuals and families science-based nutritional guidance (Subgoal 1.5).”

The primary goal of the FINI grants program is to fund and evaluate projects intended to “increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase” (FCEA, § 4405(b)(2)(A)(ii)(II)). For FINI grants, NIFA defines “fruits and vegetables” as “any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, or oils, and salt (i.e. sodium).” The program will test strategies that could contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts, and develop effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

The Act requires the Secretary to conduct an independent evaluation of funded projects, to measure the impact of projects on: “improving the nutrition and health status of participating households receiving incentives” and “increasing fruit and vegetable purchases in participating households.”

Incentivizing purchases of fruits and vegetables increases their affordability and consumption. For example, USDA recently completed an evaluation of the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP), which investigated the impact of making fruits and vegetables more affordable to SNAP participants. Under HIP, SNAP households received 30 cents deposited directly back onto their

Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to be spent on any SNAP-eligible food or beverage for every SNAP dollar they spent on targeted fruits and vegetables at participating SNAP-authorized retailers including large supermarkets, grocery stores and farmers markets. This pilot operated in Hampden County MA between November 2011 and December 2012. A rigorous evaluation showed that HIP significantly increased the consumption of targeted fruits and vegetables and this increased consumption was on the order of about one quarter of a cup per day. The final evaluation report is available online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthy-incentives-pilot-final-evaluation-report>.

Grantees that receive both FINI and SNAP-Ed funds:

- While SNAP-Ed providers are encouraged to form partnerships and collaborations in order to leverage resources, SNAP-Ed funds may not be used to provide actual cash or other financial incentives.
- SNAP-Ed funds can be used for policy, systems and environmental change interventions, such as working with retailers on fruit and vegetable product placement, and social marketing in addition to educational efforts at venues such as Farmers Markets, Senior Centers, Child Care locations etc.

All FINI projects must (1) have the support of the State agency responsible for the administration of SNAP; (2) increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (3) operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and in compliance with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (4) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation; (5) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives under the FINI grants program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 CFR. 278.2(b); and (6) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities.

The term “incentive” means any financial or non-financial inducements that would increase the purchase and consumption of eligible fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients.

- Examples of allowable financial incentives include, but are not limited to, vouchers redeemable for eligible fruits and vegetables; other SNAP-eligible items received for having purchased fruits and vegetables; and direct point-of-sale discounts on eligible fruits and vegetables.
- Examples of allowable non-financial incentives include, but are not limited to, giveaways of eligible fruits and vegetables; and nutrition education.
- Examples of unallowable incentives include, but are not limited to, giveaways of alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and lottery tickets.

Incentives that are not allowed may not be paid for with either Federal or matching funds. In addition, the cost of incentives must be allowable under the applicable cost principles in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E.

Priority will be given to grant proposals with incentives that are most likely to directly and efficiently increase the purchase and consumption of eligible fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients. Any grant proposal that includes non-financial incentives will be subject to additional scrutiny prior to approval, and would need to explain clearly how it contributes to the overall objectives of this program. In general, USDA expects non-financial incentives, if used, to be supplemental to a strong financial-based incentive.

Note: Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR 278.2(b) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grants.

In reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA, and depending on the type of FINI project (as described in further detail in Part I, C.1, C.2, and C.3), NIFA will give priority to projects that:

- Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, that would inform future efforts;
- Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document), especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience; and
- Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities (see Part VIII, E for more information).

FINI projects present the opportunity to bring together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system and to foster understanding of how they might improve the nutrition and health status of participating households receiving incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables. FINI projects are also intended to address the development of effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption that are replicable by others.

NIFA is soliciting applications for the FINI under the following areas:

## C. Program Area Description

NIFA is soliciting applications for three (3) types of grants: (1) FINI Pilot Projects (FPP); (2) FINI Projects (FP); and (3) FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP).

### 1. FINI Pilot Projects (FPP)

**Funding Level:** Awards not to exceed \$100,000.

**Period of Performance:** Project period is not to exceed one year.

**Program Code:** FPP

FINI Pilot Projects (FPP) support the development of projects with an infusion of Federal dollars to pilot innovative strategies to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. FPPs must have the support of the State SNAP agency, operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. FPPs are aimed at new entrants seeking funding for a project in the early stages of incentive program development. The project should be designed to create community-based food incentive projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that are in alignment with the FINI grants program's primary goals. Preference will be given to pilot projects that include one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience; and/or
- (iv) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities.

Examples of FPPs include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers

**Project Self-Evaluation.** All projects must involve SNAP participants. All FPPs must submit a project proposal that includes a method of evaluating the success of the program in developing a



viable project. Because FINI Pilot Projects are in the earliest stages of development and would not offer a fair test of effectiveness, they will only be required to submit limited information and data for the comprehensive program evaluation that will inform the Department of potential new strategies and promising new programs to consider in future funding cycles. FPP grantees will be required to provide their self-assessment data to the independent evaluation contractor. Project assessments must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures.

## **2. FINI Projects (FP)**

**Funding Level:** Awards not to exceed \$500,000.

**Period of Performance:** Project period is not to exceed four (4) years

**Program Code:** FIP

FINI Projects (FP) support the development and evaluation of projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. The projects will test strategies that could increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts, and develop effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

FPs should be designed to create or support local community-based food projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that are in alignment with the FINI grants program's primary goals. FPs are aimed at mid-sized groups developing incentive programs at the local or State level; organizations in this category are typically not new to implementing such programs, although projects are required to expand the breadth, scope or reach of these programs, rather than supplant current program resources. FPs are not in the pilot stages of development and should have established relationships with necessary partners and collaborators. FPs must have the support of the State SNAP agency, operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. Preference will be given to projects that include one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;

- (vi) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience; and/or
- (vii) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities.

Examples of FPs include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, CSAs, marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers.

**Project Self-Evaluation.** All FPs must involve SNAP participants and include an evaluation of whether the project met its goals and objectives. Project evaluations must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. All FPs will also be required to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluation contractor conducting the comprehensive program evaluation.

### **3. FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP)**

**Funding Level:** Awards of \$500,000 or greater

**Period of Performance:** Project period is not to exceed four (4) years

**Program Code:** FLSP

The primary purpose of the FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP) is to develop and evaluate projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase, using effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies. The projects will test strategies that could contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants to inform future efforts.

FLSP should be designed to create or support multi-county, State-wide and regional incentive programs. FLSP should be coordinated food projects with objectives, activities, and outcomes that align with the FINI grants program's primary goals. Projects must have the support of the State SNAP agency, operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements. Projects are required to expand the breadth, scope or reach of these programs, rather than supplant current program resources. Preference will be given to projects that include one or more of the following:

- (i) Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
- (ii) Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
- (iii) Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;

- (iv) Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
- (v) Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers;
- (vi) Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for the target audience; and/or
- (vii) Are located in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce communities.

FINI Large Scale Projects include, but are not limited to, innovative strategies working at point of purchase with SNAP authorized retailers, including food stores, market stands, farmers' markets, CSAs, marketing and consumer cooperatives, and other SNAP authorized retailers.

**Project Self-Evaluation.** All projects must involve SNAP participants and include an evaluation of whether the project met its goals and objectives. Project evaluations must follow USDA guidelines to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. As discussed below, a higher level of rigor will be expected for the FSLP evaluations. All FLSPs will also be required to cooperate with and contribute to an independent evaluation contractor conducting the comprehensive program evaluation.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY 2016 is approximately \$16.8 million. 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 (ASAP) system, 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>.

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

In FY 2016, you may submit applications to the FINI Program:

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

**Resubmitted application.** This is an application that had previously been submitted to the FINI Program 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.

### **C. Project Types**

Applications will be accepted for three (3) project types: (1) FINI Pilot Projects; (2) FINI Projects; and (3) FINI Large-Scale Projects. The FINI grants program will only accept one application across the three project types per project team under this RFA.

#### **1. FINI Pilot Projects (FPP)**

FPPs are aimed at new entrants seeking funding for a project in the early stages of incentive program development. Applicants should request a budget commensurate with the proposed project. No single FINI Pilot project (FPP) award shall exceed \$100,000 for the total project period. The maximum FINI Pilot Project award period is one year. Applications that exceed the budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed. All FPP awards will be made on the merit of the proposed project, with budgets considered only after the merits of the project have been determined. NIFA reserves the right to negotiate final budgets with successful applicants.

## **2. FINI Projects (FP)**

FINI Projects are aimed at mid-sized groups developing incentive programs at the local or State level. Applicants should request a budget and project period commensurate with the proposed project. FP proposals should include a budget of no more than \$500,000 for a project period not to exceed four years. Proposal budgets may be less than \$500,000 and/or a proposed project period of less than four years. Applications that exceed budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed.

All FINI awards will be made based on the merit of the proposed project with budgets considered only after the merits of the project have been determined. NIFA reserves the right to negotiate final budgets with successful applicants.

## **3. FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSP)**

FLSPs are aimed at groups developing multi-county, State, and regional incentive programs with the largest target audience of all FINI projects. Applicants should request a budget and project period commensurate with the proposed project. FLSP proposals should include a budget of \$500,000 or more for a project period not to exceed four years. Applicants may submit a proposed project period of less than four years. All FINI awards will be made based on the merit of the proposed project with budgets considered only after the merits of the project have been determined. NIFA reserves the right to negotiate final budgets with successful applicants.

## **PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligible Applicants**

Applications may only be submitted by government agencies and non-profit organizations. 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.

#### **1. FPP, FP, & FLSP Eligible Entity**

Eligibility to receive this grant is limited to government agencies and non-profit organizations (FCEA, § 4405(b)(2)(A)). Eligible government agencies and non-profit organizations may include: an emergency feeding organization; an agricultural cooperative; a producer network or association; a community health organization; a public benefit corporation; an economic development corporation; a farmers' market; a community-supported agriculture program; a buying club; a SNAP-authorized retailer; and a State, local, or tribal agency. All applicants must demonstrate in their application that they are a government agency or non-profit organization.

To be eligible to receive a FPP, FP, or FLSP grant, applicants must propose projects that: (1) have the support of the State SNAP agency; (2) would increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (3) operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and comply with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (4) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation; (5) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives under the FINI grants program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 C.F.R. 278.2(b); and (6) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities.

Note: Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR 278.2(b) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grants.

In addition, applicants must meet the following requirements to receive a FPP, FP, or FLSP grant: (1) have experience in (i) efforts to reduce food insecurity in the community, including food distribution, improving access to services, or coordinating services and programs; or (ii) experience with the SNAP program; (2) demonstrate competency to implement a project, provide fiscal accountability, collect data, and prepare reports and other necessary documentation; (3) secure the commitment of the State SNAP agency to cooperate with the project; and (4) possess a demonstrated willingness to share information with researchers, evaluators (including the independent evaluator for the program), practitioners, and other interested parties, including a plan for dissemination of results to stakeholders.

Projects are encouraged to provide employees with important job skills. Additionally, applicants are encouraged to have experience the following areas: (i) community food work, particularly concerning small and medium-sized farms, including the provision of food to people in low-income communities and the development of new markets in low-income communities for agricultural producers; and (ii) job training and business development activities for food-related activities in low-income communities.

## **2. Partners and Collaborators**

Applicants for FPP, FP, and FLSP awards are encouraged to seek and create partnerships with public or private, non-profit or for-profit entities, including links with academic institutions (including minority-serving colleges and universities) and/or other appropriate professionals; community-based organizations; local government entities; Promise Zone lead applicant/organization or implementation partners; and StrikeForce area coordinators and/or partnering entities for the purposes of providing additional resources and strengthening under-resourced communities. *Only the applicant must meet the requirements specified above for grant eligibility.* Project partners and collaborators need not meet the eligibility requirements. When planning collaborations, see Part III, B. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the successful completion of the project. See Part IV, D., Funding Restrictions.

### **Fiscal Agent:**

If an institution/organization cannot accept Federal funds directly, a letter must be included in the application stating that in the event the application results in an award, the award funds must be administered through a fiscal agent organization on their behalf. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant and the letter must be countersigned by an authorized 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. This letter is to be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.3.c.) of the application. In the event an application is recommended for funding, NIFA will request that both the applicant institution/organization and the fiscal agent organization submit complete management information (see Part V, D.). Include documents showing the organizations non-profit status here.

## **B. Cost Sharing or Matching**

FPP, FP, and FLSP applicants **MUST** provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all Federal funds awarded. Match must be documented for all project years at the time the application is submitted. FPP, FP, and FLSP grantees may meet the match requirement through cash and/or in-kind contributions, including third-party in-kind contributions fairly evaluated, including facilities, equipment, or services.

The non-Federal share of the funding may come from State government, local government, or private sources. Federal money cannot be used to match. Examples of qualifying matching contributions may include direct costs such as: rent for office space used exclusively for the

funded project; duplication or postage costs; and staff time from an entity other than the applicant for job training or nutrition education.

Note that if an applicant partners with a for-profit entity, the non-Federal share that is required to be provided by the applicant may not include the services of an employee of that for-profit entity, including salaries or expenses covered by that employer. (FCEA, § 4405(b)(1)(c)(ii)).



## **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 and Current 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/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-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/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-FINI-005395**

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](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 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](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.

**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 **FINI grants program**. 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 **10** 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 (15 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

**1. FINI Pilot Projects, FINI Projects, and FINI Large Scale Projects**

The Project Narrative for FINI Pilot Projects (FPPs), FINI Projects (FPs), and FINI Large Scale Projects (FLSPs) must include the headings below in bold followed by the response for each of the points noted below.

**(a) The Community to be Involved in the Project and the Needs to be Addressed.** Identify and succinctly describe the critical elements and needs of the local food economy or food system, including demographics, income, and geographic characteristics of the area or community to be served and how the community might benefit from an incentive project. Beyond a recitation of statistics, applications should describe local capabilities and assets, such as those identified in a community food assessment, and involvement of low-income communities in the context of project activities and operations.

Most relevant is an explanation of why the applicant and its partners selected the activities proposed in the application. Note the main targets or beneficiaries of the project and the community needs and opportunities being addressed. The needs addressed should directly relate to project goals and objectives described below. It is recommended that this section be no more than one and one-half page.

**(b) The Organizations and Communities Involved in the Project.** List the organizations and communities to be involved in carrying out the proposed project. Include a description of the relevant experience of each community group or organization, including the applicant

organization that will be involved, and any related project history. Proposals should demonstrate community linkages and coalitions as appropriate. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership should reflect the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed project activities or similar types of activities. Specify the degree to which paid and volunteer staff will be utilized. Experience in and connections with the community will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard.

To the extent practicable ensure that low-income residents are involved in planning; in particular, describe how the communities being served – particularly the targeted residents and organizations have been or will be involved in planning the project and will be engaged in its implementation and evaluation process. Please reference planning activities, assessments, meetings, or other activities that demonstrate community input into key decision-making.

Letters from the key organizations involved in the project, acknowledging their support and contributions, should be provided. A limited number of additional support letters – such as those from farmers or partner organizations, where appropriate, are encouraged to provide evidence of broad community involvement in both planning and future decision-making. All support letters should be attached in Field 12, Other Attachments (See Part IV, B. 3. c., below, Key Organization Support).

**(c) Project Goals and Intended Outcomes.** List the goals and intended outcomes of the project, and how they contribute to the primary goal of the FINI grants program. Outcomes should describe specific changes or results that will occur as a consequence of the project and that will constitute “success” for the initiative, including a general description of the range of fruits and vegetables that would be incentivized (such as, but not limited to, fresh, canned, or dried forms). Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely, describe what will be accomplished, and who and how many people, e.g., residents, participants, will benefit. It is recommended that this section be no more than two pages.

**(d) Activities to Achieve the Goals.** Discuss how the goals and intended outcomes will be achieved and include how the proposed activities comply with the rules and regulations of SNAP. Discuss how the proposed project outcomes will be realized by providing a systematic description of how the most important steps or milestones will be accomplished. Particular attention should be given to existing technical capabilities and any technical solutions that must be developed for goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved. In addition to these descriptions, it is recommended that a table of up to three pages be provided with implementation details for these activities, including: (a) specific steps and achievements in planning, implementing, and evaluating; (b) timetables for milestones, and, as relevant; (c) expected numbers of participants involved in each step of the process. Describe how the proposed project will develop effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated and scaled in other States and communities in the future.

**(e) Relationship to Program Objectives.** Discuss how the project and its proposed outcomes will address the objectives of the FINI grants program as described in Part I., B. Discuss the specific changes that will result among participants or in the communities served that address

these FINI grants program priorities. It is recommended that this section be no more than one page.

**(f) Evaluation.** Evaluation is a critical purpose of the FINI grant program. By testing and evaluating various methods and technologies to increase the fruit and vegetable purchases and improving the nutrition and health status of participating households through the FINI grant program, NIFA seeks to determine best practices, and the relative effectiveness of various incentive programs as well as benefit redemption methods. The evaluation requirements of the FINI grant program, therefore, include both process (developing and monitoring indicators of progress towards objectives) and outcomes. Recognizing that FINI projects are likely to vary substantially in scale and maturity, and that grantees are likely to vary considerably in evaluation capacity and expertise, the evaluation requirements differ for each of the three grant categories. The FINI grant program requires a project self-evaluation by each grantee and participation in the program evaluation conducted by the independent evaluator.

All FINI Pilot Projects (FPP) must include a process analysis, a self-assessment of their success in developing a viable project. FPPs will document the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations. Because these projects are in the earliest stages of development that do not offer a fair test of their potential effectiveness, limited information will be reported to the independent evaluator. FPPs must provide preliminary results of their self-assessment in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluation contractor.

All FINI Projects (FP) must include a process analysis, a self-assessment of their success in developing and operating a viable project. FPs will document the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations. The process assessment should contain enough timely information over the course of the project to improve program outcomes. FPs must provide preliminary results of their self-assessment in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluator. In addition, because of their expected scope, FPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator.

All FINI Large-Scale Projects (FLSP) must include (1) a process assessment that documents the process, challenges, and success of implementation and operations and (2) an outcome assessment that documents the project's effectiveness in increasing fruit and vegetable purchases among SNAP participants. The process assessment should contain enough timely information over the course of the project to measure program outcomes. Preliminary results shall be included in the annual report to NIFA and to the independent evaluation contractor. Outcome self-assessments must follow guidelines developed by the independent evaluation contractor in collaboration with grantees to ensure an appropriate level of comparability of methods, outcomes, and measures. In addition, because of their expected scale and maturity, FLSPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator.

<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Project Self-Evaluation</b>	<b>Comprehensive Program Evaluation (by independent evaluator)</b>
FPP	Process evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required to participate</li> <li>• Participation includes providing self-assessment information to independent evaluator.</li> </ul>
FP	Process evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required to participate</li> <li>• Contribute to minimum core data set</li> <li>• Collaborate with independent evaluator to identify comparison sites</li> </ul>
FLSP	Rigorous self-evaluation (process and outcome)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required to participate</li> <li>• Contribute to minimum core data set</li> <li>• Collaborate with independent evaluator to identify comparison sites</li> </ul>

**Comprehensive FINI Program Evaluation (by independent evaluator).** The independent evaluation is expected to be based on a cluster evaluation model that builds on the collaboration and coordination of individual project assessments and an overall program evaluation. It is expected to consist of four components: a *process analysis* to describe project implementation and support future replication of successful approaches, an *outcome analysis* to assess the effectiveness of each FP and FSLP, a *comparative analysis* to integrate results across sites and approaches, attempting to answer the question of what works best (and when or where), and *technical assistance* to support consistent implementation of evaluation protocols.

USDA has determined that a comparison group design offers the best balance between the statutory requirement to use “rigorous methodologies capable of producing scientifically valid information” while accommodating the limited administrative and evaluation capacities of potential FPs and FSLPs (FPPs have a limited role in the independent evaluation). This quasi-experimental approach uses a comparison site – such as a neighborhood across town or a group of SNAP participants who are not offered the nutrition incentive – as a baseline to assess the effect of offering an incentive. Outcomes for each group (intervention and comparison) are measured before and again sometime after the nutrition incentive is provided. The independent evaluator – working in collaboration with FPs and FSLPs – will identify groups that are as similar as possible to the intervention communities to make the comparison as fair as possible.

All FPs and FSLPs will be required to cooperate with the independent evaluator by:

- Supporting implementation of evaluation requirements (including but not limited to helping the independent evaluation contractor identify appropriate comparison sites or groups and providing the minimum core data set described below);
- Meeting periodically with staff from NIFA, FNS, the independent evaluation contractor, and other FINI grantees to review project plans, evaluation objectives and methods, data collection and reporting requirements, and analysis and reporting of results;

- Facilitating access to or providing documentation of project implementation, operations, costs, and outcomes; and
- Facilitating site visits and interviews with project staff, partners and program participants.

FPs and FLSPs will be required to periodically provide the independent evaluation contractor a minimum core data set to ensure common program tracking and enable meaningful comparisons across all projects. FPs and FLSPs may choose at their option to collect additional information beyond the minimum core data set as part of their self-assessments; the independent evaluation contractor will also collect additional data, including information on consumer knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and purchase and consumption behaviors. The minimum core data set includes the following:

#### **Site and Project Information**

- Management or organizational structure of the program
- Financial instrument used for SNAP and incentive purchases (tokens, scrip, electronic, etc.)
- Retail locations, mobile routes, or other pertinent information to understand how the project improves access to healthy food for underserved, low-income consumers
- Months of operation and operating days and hours
- Whether it is a new SNAP incentive program or the continuation, expansion, or modification of an existing program
- Whether program sites accept other nutrition assistance program benefits
- Whether program sites collaborate with nutrition education programs or offer other experiential nutrition education activities
- Expenses associated with establishment and operations of the program

#### **Incentive Program Information**

- Fruit and vegetable products eligible for incentives
- Incentive level (ratio and maximum)
- Incentive delivery mechanism
- Number of SNAP participants (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of SNAP purchases (per site/per year)
- Number of SNAP transactions (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of incentives issued (per site/per year)
- Dollar value of incentives redeemed (per site/per year)
- Average incentive value redeemed per recipient (weekly/monthly/annually)

Proposals should discuss any opportunities and challenges with the evaluation requirements and how they will be addressed. Proposals should also describe any previous process, outcome, and impact evaluation experience with SNAP participants or other related food programs. The proposal should demonstrate the capacity and willingness to comply with the evaluation requirements.

**(g) Specific Program and Incentive Information.** Additional important information that must be included in each type of proposal:

- Type of SNAP retailers involved (retail stores, farmers markets, mobile markets, CSAs, etc.)
- Number of months and days that the project, if funded, will operate (e.g. a project at a seasonal farmers market that will operate from June 15 through October 15.)
- Trigger for EARNING the incentive (purchasing fruits or vegetables, purchasing specified fruits and/or vegetables, no purchase necessary, etc.)
- Type of trigger for and the amount of the incentive at different types of retailers
- Products eligible to be PURCHASED or RECEIVED at the point of incentive redemption (all SNAP-eligible foods, all fruits and vegetables, only specified fruits and/or vegetables, etc.)
- Incentive level (percentage discount, ratio, or dollar amount and maximum)
- Financial instrument used for incentive delivery (tokens, scrip, electronic, etc.)
- Indicate if the proposal is a new SNAP incentive program or a continuation, expansion, or modification of an existing program
- Indicate if nutrition education or other interventions will be combined with the incentive
- List where the project and sub-grantee projects will operate
- Indicate if any special waivers will be requested and what the waivers will include
- Indicate if there are any identified retailer participants that still need to be authorized for SNAP, include the store/firm names and locations (or provide the page number (s) in the proposal where these are found)
- Indicate if the project anticipates new retailers that are not currently SNAP authorized, where known, include the store/firm names and locations (or provide the page number(s) in the proposal where these are found)
- Provide the approximate number of retailers, and if specific retailer names, locations, and FNS numbers are known, please provide this information
- Indicate if the project anticipates making any technical enhancements to the retailers, EBT, or other systems. Provide a high-level description of any such proposed technical enhancements and page number(s) in the proposal indicating where a detailed description of technical enhancements is found
- Implementation plan for rollout of incentives across the retailer types that includes anticipated start dates and a plan for communicating changes in implementation schedule to USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and the independent evaluation contractor

Proposals must include this detailed information in Section (g) under the heading "Specific Program and Incentive Information" so the information may be easily pulled out and used by the reviewers and the independent evaluator.

**(h) Sustainability.** Describe which aspects or components of the project will continue beyond the end of the project period. Discuss how an infusion of Federal funds will be sufficient for the proposed project to advance local capacity-building and achieve sustainability. Projects may identify actual or potential funding sources for continuation of the project. Applicants should differentiate between how the basic elements of the project will be continued versus how the low-income community will be changed and its capacity advanced.



Projects should provide evidence, e.g., a market analysis or the outline of a business plan, to demonstrate that it is likely to become successful in meeting FINI grant program goals. Business plan outlines or any other documentation of evidence for sustainability should be no more than five pages and should be included as an appendix. Such evidence should be included as an Other Attachment, Field 12 (see Part IV.B.3.c.).

**(i) Non-supplantation.** Grants shall be used to supplement, not supplant, non-Federal funds that would otherwise be available for expenditure on incentive program activities. Grant funds must be used to fund new projects, or expand or enhance existing projects. They may not be used to replace State or local funds that would, in the absence of Federal aid, be available or forthcoming for incentive programs.

**c. Field 12. Other Attachments.** All attachments must be in PDF format.

- **Key Organization Support.** Attach signed letters from the State SNAP agency and any other key organizations involved in the project acknowledging their support, contributions and commitment; title the attachment ‘Key Organization Support’. Provide evidence of broad community involvement in both planning and decision-making. This section is limited to two page letters of support for each key organization.
- **Matching Funds Documentation.** For **FPP, FP, and FLSP** applicants, this grant program requires applicants to match Federal funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources as described in Part III, B. Letters signed by the AR from each source of matching funds are required, and should be attached in Field 12; title the attachment ‘Matching Funds’. Recommended contents of the letter are described below in item 6., R&R Budget (Fed/Non-Fed).
- **Appendices to Project Narrative.** Title the attachment as ‘Appendices’ in the document header and save file as ‘Appendices’. *Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices must not exceed seven (7) pages and should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.*
- **Logic Model.** Title the attachment as ‘Logic Model’ in the document header and save file as ‘LogicModel’. In order to allow for sufficient evaluation of projects as described, it is recommended that applicants set aside between five and ten percent of the total project budget for evaluation purposes. Applicants should seek the help of academic or other experts in evaluation design and implementation, as appropriate and available. A logic model or chart may also be used. It is recommended that this section be no more than one page. [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/strat\\_plan\\_logic\\_models.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/strat_plan_logic_models.html)
- **Fiscal Agent Letter.** See Part III A. 2. If it is necessary to include a fiscal agent letter, then title the attachment as ‘Fiscal Agent’ in the document header and save file as ‘FiscalAgent’. Include documents showing the organizations non-profit status here.

#### **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.

**NOTE: For each budget prepared, a budget justification is to be attached to justify costs (both Federal and non-Federal) included in that budget.**

Matching.

i. Applicant's Contribution. As stated in Part III, B., matching funds are mandatory for FPPs, FPs, and FLSPs. The R&R Budget ("Fed/Non-Fed") form must be utilized. The applicant's matching support should be shown on the budget in the appropriate categories (salary, materials and supplies, equipment, etc.). **A budget justification (Field K. on the Form) must be included in each budget explaining all Federal and non-Federal costs included therein.**

ii. Third-party Contributions. Each third party contributor should be listed separately under Other Direct Costs (Field F. on the Form) and the amount contributed placed in the "Non-Federal (\$)" column. A detailed breakdown of third-party contributions by donor and budget category should be submitted as an attachment as part of the budget justification (Field K. on the Form). See below.

Proposals should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Letters of commitment for third party matching for the 1st, 2nd, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4th years of multi-year projects must be secured prior to the application submittal. Awards will not be issued until all matching has been verified. Written verification means:

- (a) For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the authorized representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period; and (6) whether the applicant can designate cash as the applicant deems necessary or the cash contribution has been designated to a particular budget item; and
- (b) For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement (letter of commitment) for each contribution, signed by the authorized representatives of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the

donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

**The sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant organization should be summarized on a separate page and attached in the SF 424 (R&R) Other Project Information, Field 12 (Title the attachment “Matching Support”). In addition, each source of non-Federal matching funds must be accompanied by written verification of commitment of matching support (i.e., a signed letter from the AR of the source of matching funds; including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties.** Include each of these signed matching letters, as attachments, in Field 12 of the SF 424 (R&R) Other Project Information form.

Establish the value of applicant contributions in accordance with applicable cost principles. Refer to 2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”, for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

## **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: **FINI Pilot Projects**

Enter the program code: **FPP**

Enter the program code name: **FINI Projects**

Enter the program code: **FIP**

Enter the program code name: **FINI Large Scale Projects**

Enter the program code: **FLSP**

**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.

**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 December 16, 2015**. Applications received after this deadline will 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** regarding a submitted application 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**

### **1. Indirect Costs**

*Applicants may request full indirect costs, subject to statutory limitations.*

In order to do so, the applicant must use the current negotiated indirect cost rate established by its cognizant Federal agency (the agency that provides the most funds). If awarded, the applicant will be required to produce a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement from the cognizant agency in order to recover indirect costs. If unable to obtain a negotiated rate from its cognizant agency, the applicant is not permitted indirect cost reimbursement. Rather, the applicant may only be reimbursed for allowable direct costs. Violation of cost accounting principles is not permitted when re-budgeting or charging costs to awards. Rather, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs.

If the applicant wants full indirect costs, but does not have a negotiated rate, and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant must calculate an indirect cost rate in order to request indirect costs. Several sample indirect cost rate calculations are provided on NIFA's indirect cost webpage located at: [http://nifa.usda.gov/business/indirect\\_cost\\_process.html](http://nifa.usda.gov/business/indirect_cost_process.html). During the application process, the applicant is not required to complete the entire indirect cost package identified on NIFA's website. Rather, the applicant need only calculate an indirect cost rate to serve as a basis for requesting indirect costs. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete Indirect Cost Proposal (ICP) package in order to obtain a negotiated rate as explained on NIFA's indirect cost website.

*Applicants may request a 10% de minimis indirect cost rate, subject to statutory limitations.*

Applicants who cannot obtain a negotiated rate from their cognizant agency, or who do not wish to go through the negotiation process, may request a 10% de minimis rate if eligible. Applicants who have never received a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) are eligible to request a 10% de minimis indirect cost rate.

The 10% de minimis rate should be applied to Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC). MTDC means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Violation of cost accounting principles is not permitted when charging costs to awards. Rather, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs. If the cognizant agency issues a negotiated rate subsequent to award, the negotiated rate may not be retroactively applied.

## **2. Subcontract Restriction**

The applicant is expected to perform a substantive portion of the project and no more than 50 percent of FPP, FP, and FLSP as determined by budget expenditures, may be subawarded. NIFA will allow applicants to indicate in their proposal if they intend to subcontract more than 50% of the award. This deviation will require NIFA approval. Projects may divide their budget allocations between partners as it fits their work plan. (For additional knowledge or expertise that is not available within the applicant organization, funds for expert consultation may be included in the “All Other Direct Costs” section of the proposed budget.)

## **3. Multiple Submissions**

The FINI grants program will only accept one application across the three project types per project team under this RFA.

## **4. Funding Period Limitation**

The maximum potential funding period (including any awards transferred from another institution or organization) is limited to 4 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.

## **5. Prohibiting Government-Sponsored Recruitment Activities**

Grant funds may not be used for television, radio, or billboard advertisements that are designed to promote SNAP benefits and enrollment. Grant funds may also not be used for recruitment activities that are designed to persuade an individual to apply for SNAP.

## **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 two-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., 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 the FINI grants program 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.

FINI grants program 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:

**We will use the following evaluation criteria for FPPs, FPs, and FLSPs, competing within each category/project type and not across categories, listed in descending order of importance, to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:**

1. How well the proposed project advances the primary goal of the FINI grants program which is to test and evaluate projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables (as defined in Subpart VIII (E) of this document) by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase, using effective and efficient benefit redemption technologies.

All FINI projects must (1) have the support of the State SNAP agency, responsible for the administration of SNAP; (2) aim to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase; (3) operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and in compliance with all relevant SNAP regulations and operating requirements; (4) agree to participate in the FINI comprehensive program evaluation; (5) ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits and with incentives provided under the FINI grants program as apply to purchases made by individuals who are not members of households receiving benefits as provided in 7 C.F.R. 278.2(b); and (6) include effective and efficient technologies for benefit redemption systems that may be replicated in other States and communities.

Note: Because the statutory language of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FINI grantees to provide incentives specifically to SNAP clients, the equal treatment provision of 7 CFR 278.2(b) does not apply to FINI grantees for the purpose of providing incentives under the FINI grants.

2. How well the project aligns with and advances FINI grants program priorities, which are to:
  - Maximize the share of funds used for direct incentives to participants;
  - Test innovative or promising strategies that would contribute to our understanding of how best to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants, to inform future efforts;
  - Develop innovative or improved benefit redemption systems that could be replicated or scaled;
  - Use direct-to-consumer sales marketing;
  - Demonstrate a track record of designing and implementing successful nutrition incentive programs that connect low-income consumers and agricultural producers (for FPs and FLSPs only);
  - Provide locally or regionally produced fruits and vegetables, especially those culturally appropriate for the target audience; and/or
  - Operate in underserved communities, particularly Promise Zones and StrikeForce Communities.

Identified priorities are factors that will be given additional weight in the evaluation of proposals. In instances where proposals are found to be equally meritorious with the application purpose and priorities, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the FINI grants program priorities.

3. The significance of the low-income food security issues that will be addressed by the proposed project, and an informative description of the community, its characteristics, assets, and needs;
4. The appropriateness of the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the project and how these goals will be achieved throughout the project period;



5. The relevance of the experience of the organizations that are involved in the proposed project, including the applicant entity, and the type and extent of support that other organizations will be providing, or the extent to which these organizations demonstrate the capacity to contribute to the overall grant program. The applicant organization demonstrates a history of, commitment to, and/or direct involvement in food security or nutrition incentive projects in low-income communities or in communities with low-income groups, as well as success in actively engaging low-income participants. Benefits of the program will accrue primarily to the low income population. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership reflects the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed activities or similar types of activities. Experience in and connections with the community and a demonstrated dedication to serving low income residents will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard. Professional salaries are in balance with compensation given to low-income residents for their participation in the initiative;
6. The strength of the proposed project's plans and capacity to undertake a self-assessment, collect the minimum core data set (for FPs and FLSPs only) with accuracy and validity, cooperate with and participate in an independent evaluation, share project results in an “exemplary practices” format;
7. Evidence is provided to demonstrate that the project is likely to become self-sustaining, e.g., a market analysis or the outlines of a business plan. Projects should identify actual or potential funding sources for continuation of the project after federal funding has ended; and
8. The timeline and budget for accomplishing project goals, objectives, and outcomes is realistic and achievable.

### **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 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 FINI grants program 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, 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:

- (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;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA 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 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 may 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 award 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.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

### **Programmatic Contacts –**

Dr. Jane Clary Loveless; National Program Leader, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2225 Washington, DC 20250-2225; telephone: 202-720-3891; fax: 202-720-9366; e-mail: [jclary@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:jclary@nifa.usda.gov).

Dr. Dionne Toombs; Director, Division of Nutrition, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2225 Washington DC 20250-2225; telephone: 202-401-2138; fax: 202-401-4888; email: [dtoombs@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:dtoombs@nifa.usda.gov).

### **Administrative/Business Contacts –**

Susan Bowman; Awards Management Branch Chief; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2271; Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone 202-401-4324; fax 202-401-6271; e-mail [sbowman@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:sbowman@nifa.usda.gov).

Aдриене Woodin; Awards Management Branch Chief; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 2271; Washington, DC 20250-2271; telephone 202-401-4320; fax 202-401-6271; e-mail [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 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.

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

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

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.

### **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 grant program.

For the purpose of this program, the following additional definitions are applicable:

**Community Food Assessment** is a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure.

**Emergency Feeding Organization** means a public or nonprofit organization that administers activities and projects (including the activities and projects of a charitable institution, a food bank, a food pantry, a hunger relief center, a soup kitchen, or a similar public or private nonprofit eligible recipient agency) providing nutrition assistance to relieve situations of emergency and distress through the provision of food to needy persons, including low-income and unemployed persons. (See 7 U.S.C. 7501).

**Exemplary practices** means high quality community food security work that emphasizes food security, nutritional quality, environmental stewardship, and economic and social equity.

**Expert reviewers** means individuals selected from among those recognized as uniquely qualified by training and experience in their respective fields to give expert advice on the merit of grant applications in such fields who evaluate eligible proposals submitted to this program in their respective area(s) of expertise.

**Food security** means access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times.

**Fruits and Vegetables** means for the purposes of the incentives provided under these grants (i.e. as used in Section 4208) any variety of fresh, canned, dried, or frozen whole or cut fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, or oils, and salt (i.e. sodium).

**Incentives** are defined as any financial or non-financial inducements that would increase the purchase and consumption of eligible fruits and vegetables by SNAP clients. See page 6 for details.

**Logic model** means a systematic and visual way to present and share an understanding of the relationships among resources available to operate a program, and includes: planned activities and anticipated results; and the presentation of the resources, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

**Outcomes** means the changes in the wellbeing of individuals that can be attributed to a particular project, program, or policy, or that a program hopes to achieve over time. They indicate a measurable change in participant knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. For the purposes of this document, ‘impact’ and ‘outcome’ are used interchangeably.

**Process evaluation** means examining program activities in terms of (1) the age, sex, race, occupation, or other demographic variables of the target population; (2) the program’s organization, funding, and staffing; and (3) its location and timing. Process evaluation focuses on program activities rather than outcomes.

**PromiseZone** refers to designated high-poverty communities “where the federal government will partner with and invest in communities to create jobs, leverage private investment, increase economic activity, expand educational opportunities, and improve public safety.” See <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/promise-zones/> for more information.

**Non-profit Organization** means a Nonprofit corporation is a special type of corporation that has been organized to meet specific tax-exempt purposes. To qualify for Nonprofit status, your corporation must be formed to benefit: (1) the public, (2) a specific group of individuals, or (3) the membership of the Nonprofit.



**StrikeForce** means the “USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative which works to address the unique set of challenges faced by many of America’s rural communities. Through StrikeForce, USDA is leveraging resources and collaborating with partners and stakeholders to improve economic opportunity and quality of life in these areas.” See [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE\\_FORCE](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE) for more information.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** means the supplemental nutrition assistance program established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2011 *et seq*).

**Value Chain** means adding value to a product, including production, marketing, and the provision of after-sales service and incorporating fair pricing to farms. It also involves keeping the final pricing to customers within competitive range. Value chain development, therefore, is a process of building relationships between supplier and buyer that are reciprocal and win-win; instead of always striving to buy at lowest cost.

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

FINI grants program information will be made available on the NIFA web site at <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program>

The following are among the materials available on the web page:

1. General Information
2. Resources, including webinars and FAQs
3. Program Specific Resources