

Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions

2016 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 15, 2016

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

INTEGRATED RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND EXTENSION COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM – ORGANIC TRANSITIONS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.303**

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 15, 2016.**

Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions RFA.

Visit the [NIFA website](#) to access a factsheet on the Center of Excellence (COE) designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities in fiscal year 2016. You can also review a recording of COE outreach webinars held in February and March of 2015 from the site. The COE webpages will be updated throughout FY 2016 with additional information, such as a summary of comments received from stakeholders

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions RFA (ORG) for fiscal year (FY) **2016** to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$3,800,000.

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

*******Please Read*******

Important Information Regarding Organic Transitions Policies and Procedures

*******Please Read*******

- Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both ORG and OREI (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative) programs.
- Use the Project Summary template provided by grants.gov. Failure to use the correct format or exceeding the word limit may result in the rejection of the proposal.
- Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.
- Proposals must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626), as reauthorized by Section 7302 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (H.R. 2642; Pub.L.113–79), authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a competitive grants program that provides funding for integrated, multifunctional agricultural research, extension, and education activities. Subject to the availability of appropriations to carry out this program, the Secretary may award grants to colleges and universities [as defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103)], as amended, on a competitive basis for projects that address priorities in United States agriculture and involve integrated research, education, and extension activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB). The RFA will be developed each fiscal year based on these established priorities and approaches to solving the critical agricultural issues. Section 7206 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended section 406(b) of AREERA to add the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions as eligible to apply for grants under this authority. Section 7129 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 406(b) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7626(b)), adding Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (HSACU) as eligible entities for competitive funds awarded under this authority (see Part III, A. for more information).

The overall goal of the ORG program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers and those who are adopting organic practices. NIFA administers the ORG program by determining priorities in U.S. agriculture through Agency stakeholder input processes in consultation with the NAREEEAB. In FY 2016, ORG will continue to prioritize environmental services provided by organic farming systems in the area of soil conservation, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including greenhouse gases (GHG), as well as the development of educational tools for Cooperative Extension personnel and other agricultural professionals who advise producers on organic practices, and development of cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from the National Organic Program’s National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. It is expected that all projects will integrate research, education and extension activities, as appropriate to project goals, although some projects may be weighted more heavily than others in one or more of these areas. However, all proposals should have activities and impact in at least two of these three areas: research, education and extension.

The ORG program directly aligns with the USDA Strategic Plan FY 2014 – 2018 (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/usda-strategic-plan-FY-2014-2018.pdf>) and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1- Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self- sustaining, re-populating, and economically thriving, Objective 1.2. -- Increase agricultural opportunities by ensuring a robust safety net, creating new markets, and supporting a competitive agricultural system.

ORG is aligned with the Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan> and specifically addresses: Goal 1. Sustainable Intensification of Agricultural Production, Subgoals 1.A., 1.B., 1.D. (which focus on Crop and Animal Production, Health, Outreach and Markets); Goal 2. Responding to Climate and Energy Needs, Subgoal 2.A. (which focuses on Climate Variability); Goal 3. Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, Subgoal 3.A. (which focuses on Water); Goal 5. Food Safety; Goal 6. Education and Science Literacy; and Goal 7. Rural Prosperity/Rural- Urban Interdependence by supporting systems-based research to enhance the sustainability of food production, including environmental, economic, and social factors. ORG is aligned with the NIFA Strategic <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>, and specifically addresses Strategic Goal 1: Science, Subgoal 1.1 by advancing our Nation's ability to achieve global food security and fight hunger.

B. Program Purpose

The goal of the ORG program is to support the development and implementation of research, extension, and higher education programs to improve the competitiveness of organic livestock and crop producers, as well as those who are adopting organic practices.

In FY 2016, ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed \$200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed \$500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of seven to eight awards.

Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and organic systems that integrate plant and animal production. Applications are expected to contain descriptions of stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Applicants are strongly encouraged to assemble project teams that include those with expertise in Research, Education, Extension, and Evaluation and to utilize a systems approach. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers, students, or their information providers, such as Extension agents/educators, agricultural consultants, or college teaching faculty.

C. Program Priorities

Organic agricultural systems and practices provide many environmental services, and environmental stewardship is a key principle in organic farming. For example, the use of cover crops, crop rotation, and erosion control; proper manure management; and livestock operation guidelines are cross-compliant with many Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards. How specific practices and combinations of practices interact in organic systems—including their contributions to conservation outcomes and climate change mitigation potential—is neither well documented nor understood, especially in the case of long-term organic soil management. The most meaningful metrics or models to quantify these services in organic systems are also not clear. A better understanding and documentation of these outcomes will allow for the adjustment of organic practices in order to optimize environmental services and to quantify and document those services in the areas of conservation practices, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This information will help farmers better assess the financial benefits and costs of their practices and improve their ability to

qualify for current and future incentives in the climate change and environmental markets. This process will also help justify consumer expectations that organically-grown and certified food is produced using the most environmentally-sound and sustainable production practices possible.

To be successful and sustainable, organic agriculture also needs essential ecosystem processes and components, such as biodiversity, to be intact. This requires better understanding and assessment of the contribution of organic agricultural systems to maintaining biodiversity.

However, for organic agriculture to provide these ecosystem benefits, producers need viable crop management tools. The National Organic Program (NOP) maintains a list of management tools, including fertilizers, cultural practices and pesticides, for certified organic growers.

Recommendation for removal of specific tools from the [NOP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop) (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop) [National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=9874504b6f1025eb0e6b67cadf9d3b40&rgn=div6&view=text&node=7:3.1.1.9.32.7&idno=7) (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=9874504b6f1025eb0e6b67cadf9d3b40&rgn=div6&view=text&node=7:3.1.1.9.32.7&idno=7>) creates the need for research-based alternatives. NOP has specifically requested research directed to finding replacements for these materials, which are critical for many segments of the industry—from producers already certified for organic production to those in transition or considering transition. The NOP National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) <http://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb> maintains a list of research priorities that is updated annually accessible using the menu on the website. The NOP Research priorities for 2014 and 2015 can be accessed using the following link: [2014 Priorities](#); [2015 priorities](#). Research findings will not have their intended impact on the organic agriculture industry unless they reach—and are adopted by—producers, requiring an aggressive Extension effort. Stakeholders have cited the need for Extension tools to help transitioning producers and their advisors, as few resources are available to guide growers during this critical period.

Priority Areas for FY 2016: Proposals that are consistent with the Legislative Authority (See Part I. A.) will be accepted for consideration by panels. In FY 2016, priority will be given to proposals addressing in the following areas (1-4 below) in accordance with evaluation criteria.

Priority 1: Documenting and understanding the effects of organic practices such as crop rotation, livestock-crop integration, organic manure, mulch and/or compost additions, cover crops, and reduced or conservation tillage on ecosystem services, greenhouse gas mitigation, and biodiversity. Project examples include:

- 1) optimizing tillage, cover crop and rotation practices to reduce erosion and increase carbon sequestration during the transition to organic agricultural systems and practices;
- 2) assessing the environmental, conservation, greenhouse gas emission reduction, and/or climate change mitigation potential of pasture-based organic dairy systems;
- 3) examining soil dynamics in fields under long-term organic soil management compared to that during the transition;
- 4) generating data sets on nitrous oxide emissions from organic systems using various sources of nitrogen, rotation practices, and tillage levels; and
- 5) evaluating the effect of transitioning to organic production on biodiversity, including pollinators.

Priority 2: Improved technologies, methods, model development, and other metrics to document, describe, and optimize the environmental services and climate change mitigation ability of organic farming systems. Project examples include:

- 1) developing tools that could be used to select an optimal suite of organic practices for a particular farming system;
- 2) developing better tools to assess the contributions of organic practices in future carbon markets; and
- 3) comparing estimates of conservation outcomes, environmental services, soil carbon sequestration potential, and/or greenhouse gas mitigation determined by current models during the transition to areas under long-term organic management.

Priority 3: Develop cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from NOP's [National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=9874504b6f1025eb0e6b67cadf9d3b40&rgn=div6&view=text&node=7:3.1.1.9.32.7&idno=7) (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&SID=9874504b6f1025eb0e6b67cadf9d3b40&rgn=div6&view=text&node=7:3.1.1.9.32.7&idno=7>). This may include effective substitutes or new technologies, cultural practices, cultivars, or breeds that render the substance in question less limiting to production under organic growing conditions. We encourage a systems approach, but will also consider proposals that are narrower in scope.

Priority 4: Barriers to organic transition: Projects under this priority should address major barriers that limit the transition to organic agriculture in a given region or specific crop or animal production systems. The constraint must be identified by growers and other stakeholders. Project examples include:

- 1) Innovative crop management strategies, including those that limit unintended contamination from genetically engineered material (GMO).
- 2) Development and validation of new tools (machine, equipment, product) or adaptation of existing technology to address unique issues in organic production.

Important Notes for All Priorities:

- 1) Fieldwork to set up treatments or collect data on organic practices must be done on certified organic land. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program (www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop) for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. Similarly, the use of conventional production technologies (including the use of GMOs) for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented.
- 2) Projects should use combinations of Research, Education, and Extension activities and describe expected outcomes and impacts. All projects must develop and implement an

evaluation plan that captures project outcomes and demonstrates the impact of the project. The evaluation section should describe how the project evaluator or evaluation team will determine whether project goals have been met and if so, their impacts. Evaluation should be based on benchmarks, indicators, or expected outcomes related to project goals and activities, such that project goals are related to activities and to outputs, outcomes, and impacts (immediate, short-term, and intermediate-term expected changes). The budget must include adequate resources for project evaluation and evaluation procedures must be adequately described in the methods section.

- 3) If appropriate, projects should include a plan to ensure continuation of the effort beyond the funding period.
- 4) Proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope cannot be submitted to both ORG and OREI (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative) programs. Additional information on the [scope of OREI and ORG](#) may be found at the following link: <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/organic-agriculture-program> under “Program Specific Resources”.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$3,800,000. The funds will be awarded through a competitive grants process described in this RFA. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see <http://fms.treas.gov/index1.html>.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2016 you may only submit a new application to the **ORG** Program as one of the following two types of requests:

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

(2) **Resubmitted application**. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the Organic Transitions 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, and according to the same evaluation criteria.

C. Project Types

ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed \$200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed \$500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of seven to eight awards.

Integrated projects aim to resolve problems through the application of science-based knowledge and address needs identified by stakeholders. Integrated projects clearly identify anticipated outcomes and have a plan for evaluating and documenting the success of the project. An Integrated Project should include at least two of the three functions of the agricultural knowledge system (Research, Extension, and Education) focused around a problem or issue; however, single-function projects with sufficient justification will be considered. The functions addressed in the project should be interwoven throughout the life of the project, should complement and reinforce each other and should be interdependent and

necessary for the success of the project. Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects must include a **data management plan** that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

PART III ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Colleges and universities as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA, 7 U.S.C. 3103) are eligible to submit applications to the ORG program. Section 1404 of NARETPA was amended by sections 7101 and 7129 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246, sections 7101, 7129 (c)(4)) to define Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) and to include research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities. (See Definitions in Part VIII, E.)

For the purposes of this program, the terms “college” and “university” mean an educational institution in any state which (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; (2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor’s degree or any other higher degree is awarded; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association. Applications also may be submitted by 1994 Land-Grant Institutions (defined in 7 CFR 3430), HSACUs, and research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities. The 2014 Farm Bill required NIFA to establish an ongoing process allowing public colleges and universities that offer 4-year or advanced degrees in the food and agricultural sciences to apply for designation as NLGCA institutions. Hispanic Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) are given the opportunity to opt out of their status to be considered for designation as a NLGCA; however, this decision will be binding on them until September 30, 2018.

Pursuant to section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626) which authorized the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grant Program, all four year Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) are eligible to apply for Integrated Projects as identified in the FY 2016 ORG RFA. Two year HSIs may be eligible to apply only if the institution has been certified as a HSACU for the fiscal year in which funding is being provided. Approximately by January 2016, a list of the institutions certified and therefore eligible to apply as HSACUs for grants under FY 2016 RFAs, including this RFA, will be made available at www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/education/in_focus/hispanic_if_hispanic_HSACU.html. Institutions appearing on this list are granted HSACU certification by the Secretary for the period starting October 1, 2015, and ending September 30, 2016. Certifications are valid for FY 2016 only. Additional questions on HSACU eligibility can be addressed to Lisa DePaolo, Policy Analyst, by email at LDePaolo@nifa.usda.gov or phone at (202) 401-5061.

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 will result in the application being excluded from

consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

When a grant provides a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, the grant recipient must match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-federal sources (see Part IV, B. 6. for details).

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if we determine that:

- (a) the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or
- (b) the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the ORG program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA unless one of the exemptions described herein is applicable. Note that NIFA included information at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/matching_require.html to further assist you in determining if you must meet the new matching requirement.

The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

1. To a research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); or
2. To an entity eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program (as defined in section 251(f)(1)(C) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, 7 U.S.C. 6971(f)(1)(C)), including a partner (see Part VIII, E. Definitions for definition of partnership) of such an entity.

Entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program and exempt from the matching funds requirement include:

- a. 1862 Land-grant Institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b. 1890 Land-grant Institutions
- c. 1994 Land-grant Institutions
- d. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)
- e. Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)
- f. Insular Area Schools Eligible to Receive Funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs

- g. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h. Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) – (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA certification, see instructions for requesting certifications at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>, and for attaching the certification in Part IV, B. of this RFA).
- i. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of funds under a program established under section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program.
- j. Individual public or private, nonprofit Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 1059d).

A proposal submitted in response to this RFA may indicate that the work will be completed by multiple entities as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership among multiple entities is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or third party in-kind contribution (see section 2 of 7 CFR 3430 or section 96 of 2 CFR part 200) to the total project budget costs.

If a proposal indicates that the work on the project will be completed by multiple entities as partners, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement regardless of whether all entities involved are otherwise exempt. Any partner entity can serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

After proposals have been recommended for award, NIFA will determine if the submitted proposal and proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity not otherwise exempt from the matching requirement and the proposal does not reflect substantial involvement of at least one partner that is exempt under #2 above, then the matching requirement will apply. Exemption from the matching requirement for an entity not otherwise exempt is limited to the project for which it is a partner.

Waiver of Match - NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year with respect to a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are

consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) for the year involved. To determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB, please refer to <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>.

Multiple Submissions

Duplicate, essentially duplicate or predominantly overlapping applications submitted to both ORG and OREI in any one fiscal year will not be reviewed. In addition, applicants may not submit to ORG an application that is considered duplicate, essentially duplicate, or predominantly overlapping with an application submitted to another NIFA program in the same fiscal year. We will review the first application we receive.

C. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will be recognizing and providing priority in the receipt of funding to applications from “centers of excellence” that have been established for purposes of carrying out research, extension, and education activities relating to the food and agricultural sciences. In July of 2014, NIFA held listening sessions and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the centers of excellence (COE) provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input gathered are available on NIFA’s website at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/legis/cntr_ex_webinar_documents.html.
<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-provision>

A center of fineness is composed of 1 or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the center of excellence. Therefore, an eligible applicant who wishes to be considered as a center of excellence must be one of the following entities that provides financial or in-kind support to the Center being proposed, as described in the grant application.

- (A) State agricultural experiment stations;
- (B) colleges and universities;
- (C) university research foundations;
- (D) other research institutions and organizations;
- (E) Federal agencies;
- (F) national laboratories;
- (G) private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
- (H) individuals; or
- (I) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

Only CAP grants and standard grant applicants may be considered for centers of excellence designation. See Part IV, C. of this RFA for additional requirements that eligible applicants must meet to be considered a center of excellence.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the 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-ICGP-005596

in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html>). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support

800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).

Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (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
- 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 **ORG**. 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 20 pages of written text, figures, and tables regardless of whether it is single- or double-spaced. We have established this maximum 20 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(a) Response to the previous panel review: An application with substantive similarities to a prior, unsuccessful project should be presented as a resubmission. Resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous panel review. The response should be as concise as possible, and limited to a maximum of three pages but there is no limit to the number of pages that may be submitted. The response to the previous review is not counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative. A NIFA-issued proposal number must be included in the response to the previous review.

(b) Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goals and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities substantiating the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed activity, including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:

- (1) Estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing state-federal food and agricultural Research, Education, and Extension programs;
- (2) Description of the role stakeholders, including end users, play in problem identification, planning, and implementation and evaluation as appropriate; and
- (3) Reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution.

(c) Objectives: Include clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statements of specific aims of the proposed effort, including the suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale. Projects must include specific objectives for Research, Education, and Extension functions (as appropriate); include evidence of necessary involvement from interdisciplinary teams; and demonstrate the extent to which partnerships with other institutions (federal, state, other) are developed.

(d) Methods: Explicitly state the procedures or methods to be applied to the proposed effort. Include, but do not necessarily limit to:

- (1) Description of how the project will solicit and use stakeholder involvement;
- (2) Description of the proposed project activities and the sequence in which they are to be carried out;
- (3) Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co-PDs vs sub-contractors.
- (4) Techniques and methodology to be employed in the project, including their feasibility and rationale;
- (5) Results expected within a reasonable time frame;
- (6) How you will monitor and evaluate (as appropriate) Research, Extension, and Education activities;
- (7) How you will analyze and interpret data;
- (8) Limitations to proposed procedures;
- (9) Pitfalls that might be encountered;
- (10) Suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale;
- (11) Details of plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public; and
- (12) Plan to sustain activities beyond this funding period

(e) Project Timetable: Outline all important phases as a function of time, year-by-year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period. Include specific, measurable goals or projected accomplishments for each year of ORG funding and expected impacts or outcomes of the work.

Center of Excellence Justification

Applicants who wish to be considered as centers of excellence must provide a brief justification statement, at the end of their Project Narratives and within the page limits provided for Project Narratives, describing how they meet the standards of a center of excellence, based on the following criteria:

(A) the ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application;

(B) in addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the Federal Government in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award;

(C) the planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and

(D) the ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) (list of certified NLGCA is available at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/nlgca_colleges.pdf), and schools of veterinary medicine)

• **Field 12. Other Attachments (Must be in PDF format).**

Data Management Plan PDF Attachment. Required for all ORG proposals. Two-Page Limit. Title the attachment as 'Data Management Plan' and save file as 'Management Plan'. Projects must budget sufficient resources to develop and implement the proposed data management plan

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 the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, Part V. 6. R&R Personal Data, 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.

Matching

If matching is required, you should use the R&R Budget (federal and non-Federal). If matching is only required where project meets certain criteria, you must use the R&R Budget with matching that is identified in the Budget Narrative of the R&R Budget. You must add to this section a statement that explains the requirement of matching funds.

Matching Funds

If you conclude that matching funds are not required as specified under Part III, B. Cost-Sharing or Matching, you must include a justification in the Budget Narrative. We will consider this justification when ascertaining final matching requirements or in determining if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements.

For grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B., the Budget Narrative should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. 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 ONLY if provided after submission of the application), must include: (1) The donor's name, address, and telephone number; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation (the budget narrative must describe how the cash donation will be used); (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.

Summarize on a separate page the sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution and place that information in the proposal as part of the Budget Narrative. You must place all pledge agreements in the proposal immediately following the summary of matching support.

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.

Additional Budget Information

ORG Project Directors must attend at least two Project Directors' Workshops during the term of their project. Sufficient funds should be budgeted in the proposal and reserved in the course of the project for the PD to attend the workshops in the Washington, DC area, each lasting 2 days. The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the Budget Narrative (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Publication costs may include the additional cost of open-source publication if that is an option for the journal. Open source availability will increase the visibility and citation rate for NIFA-funded research publications and should be chosen if it is an appropriate option.

7. Felony and Tax Certification form from your institution.

8. 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.

- **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter “**Organic Transitions**”) and the program code (i.e., enter **ORG**). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.
- **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 April 15, 2016**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

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

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** 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

Funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of Research, Education, or Extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

Section 715 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub. L. 113-235) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. When preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

E. Other Submission Requirements

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

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

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

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

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., 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 Organic Transitions will recommend that the project: (a) be approved for support from currently available funds or (b) be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

The Organic Transitions 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

Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production (including dairy), and organic systems integrating plant and animal production. Applications should describe stakeholder involvement in problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation. We will give priority to applications that describe multi-state, multi-institutional, multidisciplinary, multifunctional activities, and combinations thereof; however, a narrower focus, such as a single university that demonstrates significant collaboration with various agencies or organizations within the host state, as appropriate to project goals, may also be competitive. We strongly encourage project teams to have expertise in research, education, extension, and evaluation. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to producers and students. We also encourage description of how results at the field and farm scale can be extrapolated beyond the parameters of the proposed project.

We will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

- 1. Technical merit of all aspects of the application, including research, education, and Extension components, as appropriate (50 points).**
 - a. Degree of integration of Research, Education, and Extension (10 pts);
 - b. Extent to which proposed work addresses identified organic stakeholder needs in the priority areas described above (10 pts);
 - c. Suitability and feasibility of methodology for successfully completing work in the allotted time (10 pts);
 - d. Quality of monitoring, data management and evaluation plans (10 pts); and
 - e. Qualifications of key project personnel and institutions, including institutional experience and competence in the proposed area of work, and adequacy of available support personnel, equipment, and facilities (10 pts);

- 2. Relevance of proposed project to ORG purpose (see Part I, B.) (50 points).**
 - a. Justification for problem addressed (10 pts);
 - b. Evidence of appropriate involvement with interdisciplinary teams and institutional partners (federal, state, other) (10 pts);
 - c. Extent to which stakeholders, including end users, were and will be involved in future problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation (10 pts);
 - d. Probability that the project will be successful, have documentable impact, and produce transferable results (10 pts); and
 - e. Likelihood that the project will fill knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of organic practices and programs in the priority areas listed previously (10 pts).

Centers of Excellence Status

All eligible applicants will be competitively peer reviewed (as described in Part V, A. and B. of this RFA), and ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Those that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a center of excellence will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be centers of excellence (listed A. through D. above). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-center of excellence, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the center of excellence criteria. Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a center of excellence or who are not deemed to have met the centers of excellence standards may still receive funding.

In addition, the applicant's Notice of Award will reflect that, for the particular program, the applicant meets all of the requirements of a center of excellence. Entities recognized as centers of excellence will maintain that distinction for the specific area of science or subject matter associated with the center of excellence for the duration of their period of performance or as

identified in the terms and conditions of that award when applying for funding in covered research and extension programs.

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 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 Organic Transitions 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>.

Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

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

PDs are required to attend at least two PD workshops at a location and time to be designated at a later date. Budget amount should be sufficient to attend the 2-day workshops in the Washington, DC area. In the early years of a multiyear project, participation may be in the form of a poster presentation and submission of an abstract. In the final year of the project, an oral presentation should be made and a written report submitted.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Program Contacts:

Dr. Mathieu Ngouajio
National Program Leader, Plant Systems-Production Division Institute
of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: (202) 401-4895
Fax: (202) 401-6488
E-mail: mngouajio@nifa.usda.gov

Dr. Steve Smith
National Program Leader, Animal Systems Division Institute
of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: (202) 401-6134
Fax: (202) 401-1782
E-mail: sismith@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contacts:

Duane Alphs
Awards Management Division
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240;
Telephone: 202-401-4362
Email: dalphs@nifa.usda.gov

Rochelle McCrea
Awards Management Division
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA; STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240
Telephone: 202-401-2880
Email: rmcrea@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.

Partnership requires that all partners have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership between multiple entities is proposed, the proposal should clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and

3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or in-kind contribution to the total project budget costs.

F. Materials Available on the Internet

Information about the Organic Transitions program is available online at:
<http://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/organic-transitions-org>.