Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program

MODIFIED: Page 7 (04/06/2017)

FY 2017 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: May 30, 2017

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA

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

Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Challenge Grants Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.217.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on **May 30, 2017**. 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 six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider your 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 your written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and _not_ for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) for fiscal year (FY) 2017 to enable colleges and universities to provide the quality of education necessary to produce baccalaureate or higher degree level graduates capable of strengthening the Nation's food and agricultural scientific and professional workforce. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2017 is approximately $4.5 million. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2017. 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 HEC projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a HEC grant.

New in 2017: NIFA is implementing a 'Just In Time' (JIT) Pilot.
This pilot is to explore if a streamlined application submission process will reduce the administrative burden on applicants and determine what, if any, impact it has on the efficiency of the overall application and award process. Under this pilot, some information (i.e., Current and Pending support, Matching Support, Felony Tax Certification, Subcontract Statement of Work, and Subcontract Letter of Intent) is not required to be included as part of an application submitted in response to this RFA. However, if a proposed project is recommended for an award,

only then will the information be required to be submitted to NIFA. Following the pilot, NIFA will analyze information to determine whether to implement this approach more broadly.

Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 1405 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA), as amended, (7 U.S.C. 3121) designates the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the lead Federal agency for agriculture research, extension and teaching in the food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences. Authority for this program is contained in section 1417(b)(1) of NARETPA (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)(1)). Section 1417 of NARETPA authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, who has delegated the authority to the Director of NIFA, to make competitive grants to strengthen institutional capacities to respond to identified State, regional, national or international educational needs to formulate and administer programs to enhance college and university teaching in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, veterinary medicine, human and family and consumer sciences, disciplines closely allied to the food and agricultural system, and rural economic, community and business development.

B. Purpose and Priorities

HEC directly aligns with USDA Strategic Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the USDA Strategic Plan (2014 – 2018). The program aligns with the USDA Research, Education, and Economics Action Plan and specifically addresses Goal 6. HEC also is aligned with the NIFA Strategic Plan (2014-2018) specifically addressing Strategic Goal No 1.

Applications submitted to this grants program must state how the funded project will address the **HEC Program Goals**:

1. To enhance the quality of instruction for baccalaureate degrees, master's degrees, and first professional degrees in veterinary sciences, in order to help meet current and future national food, agricultural, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences workplace needs.

2. To increase the number and diversity of students who will pursue and complete a postsecondary degree in the food, agricultural, natural resources and human (FANH) sciences.

The Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC) is a NIFA-administered competitive grants program focused on improving formal, baccalaureate or master's degree level food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences (FANH) education and first professional degree-level education in veterinary medicine (DVM). HEC projects provide funding to eligible applicants to help ensure a competent, qualified and diverse workforce will exist to serve the FANH sciences system. At the same time, HEC-funded projects improve the economic health and viability of communities through the development of degree programs emphasizing new and emerging employment opportunities. Finally, HEC projects address the national challenge to increase the number and diversity of students entering the FANH sciences (i.e., having a FANH sciences workforce representative of the Nation's population).

The HEC projects are expected to: (a) produce measurable impacts aligned with HEC program goals, (b) promote innovative, educational practices within the FANH sciences that improve how students learn, and (c) include a rigorous evaluation component to assess that project outcomes

are met. Institutions must demonstrate capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of food, agricultural and human sciences generally, and to the specific need and/or discipline(s) for which a grant is requested. An application must convince a peer panel of a compelling educational challenge; clearly indicate how your methodology is both unique and with merit; offer significant promise of adoption by others; and include a plan for how the project impacts will be sustained once grant funds end.

Projects are to encourage academic institutions, in partnership with organizations and employers, to work collectively to identify and address a state or regional challenge or opportunity facing the FANH sciences education and workforce community; propose comprehensive and coordinated activities to address that challenge or opportunity; make a significant positive impact on the challenge or opportunity being addressed, with the expectation that benefits will continue to accrue after NIFA funding ends; encourage broad participation of students traditionally underrepresented in the FANH sciences; be grounded by concepts documented in relevant background literature promoting innovations in education and student learning; and show an awareness of relevant prior institutional experience and expertise.

Projects with the potential to demonstrate a state or regional impact on increasing the number, quality, diversity, and retention of baccalaureate, master's degree, and DVM students, are highly encouraged. Accordingly, projects that are submitted by (or are in partnership with) eligible, minority-serving academic institutions are encouraged.

Activities could include, but are not limited to, developing, evaluating, and disseminating:
- Exceptional educational, laboratory, or related curricular materials in areas that contribute to any of the FANH sciences disciplines;
- Instructional delivery methods to improve student retention of academic content; and/or
- Professional development approaches to improve the capacity of faculty and teaching assistants to provide effective and up-to-date instruction.

Accordingly, activities shall support the creation, adaptation, and adoption of learning materials and teaching strategies to operationalize what we know about how students learn. Many of these concepts are identified in the National Research Council's publication: *How People Learn*. Projects shall also focus on imparting both technical knowledge as well as 'soft' skills such as communication, team work, and problem solving, as these are abilities expected by employers. These concepts may be found in the publication: *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?*

Social and Behavioral Sciences

HEC supports social and behavioral science disciplines. Projects that integrate social and biological sciences are encouraged. Incorporation of social and behavioral sciences is important for addressing many of the challenges facing agriculture and rural communities, such as increasing global demand for food production in the face of limited natural resources; improving health and reducing obesity by engaging in heathy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

Leadership Development

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

- Developing practical applications to increase understanding of leadership roles, including critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, ethics and professionalism, and working in teams;
- Connecting the academic classroom experience with daily leadership roles and organizational activities;
- Providing opportunities for mentoring and shadowing; and
- Organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, etc.

Global Engagement

HEC supports advances in U.S. food, agriculture and forestry. In an increasingly interconnected world, these U.S. advances have global importance, and may require information and cooperation from beyond our borders. Therefore, you are encouraged to include international partnerships or engagement in proposals, as appropriate. When proposing international activities, applications must clearly describe and demonstrate how the international activities will add value to meeting the HEC domestic objectives and metrics for reporting beneficial outputs and outcomes. Additional guidance (Frequently Asked Questions, descriptions of existing MOUs and other resources), for enhancing the potential for global engagement is provided on the Center for International Programs (https://nifa.usda.gov/program/global-engagement-programs) webpage.

eXtension

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

C. Program Area Description

1. Program Category
Projects must support for-credit, academic instruction with a primary focus in one of the following program categories:

a) Baccalaureate degree-level projects in the food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences;
b) Master's degree-level projects in the food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences;
c) First professional degree-level projects in Veterinary Medicine (DVM).

Projects must primarily focus on Baccalaureate, Masters, or DVM level education. However, a project may also include an ancillary, target impact on either secondary, or two-year postsecondary students. Projects with a primary target audience of K-14 students or teachers should consider the Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom (SPECA) Grants Program offered through NIFA at: http://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/secondary-education-two-year-postsecondary-education-and-agriculture-k-12.

Projects shall engage more than a single course or an individual instructor.

2. Educational Need Areas

Projects must focus on at least one of the three Educational Need Areas listed below. The rationale for selecting the Educational Need Area(s) must be explained in the context of how the project can contribute to the development of a cadre of students who will either pursue higher degrees in the FANH sciences or be prepared to enter the FANH sciences workforce.

Educational Need Areas are as follows:

1. **Curriculum Development, Instructional Delivery Systems and Expanding Student Career Opportunities:** The purpose of this initiative is to promote new and improved curricula and materials to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the Nation's academic programs in the FANH sciences. The overall objective is to stimulate the development, and facilitate the use, of exemplary education models and materials that incorporate the most recent advances in subject matter research, research on teaching and learning theory, and instructional technology.

   Examples of eligible projects in this Need Area may include, but are not limited to, the following strategies:

   - Development of courses of study, degree programs, and instructional materials;
   - Use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects;
   - Introduction of new subjects, or new applications of knowledge, pertaining to the FANH sciences;
   - Hands-on learning experiences and methods to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations;
   - Opportunities for students to complete apprenticeships, internships, career mentoring experiences, or other participatory learning experiences;
   - Expanding and enriching courses which are of a practicum nature; or
   - Other approaches to achieve HEC program goals.

Projects are to develop students' analytical, interpersonal, leadership, communications, problem-solving, computational, and decision-making skills and abilities. Projects that focus on integrated, multidisciplinary, learner-centered instruction should be considered. Furthermore, projects are expected to reach large audiences efficiently and effectively; reinforce recent research on how to motivate students to learn, retain, apply, and transfer knowledge, skills, and competencies; and integrate and synthesize knowledge from several disciplines. (Applicants are encouraged to find a USDA and/or other agency, non-profit, and/or private sector organization to assist in the development of student experiential learning activities.)

2. **Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching**. The purpose of this Need Area is to advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency, subject matter expertise, pedagogy, responsiveness to changes in student demographic composition and learning styles, and student recruitment and advising skills. Training of targeted faculty recipients must be relevant to the identified educational needs of the students, who will be the beneficiaries of such faculty development. Any individual recipient of federal funds must be an "eligible participant" as defined in the definitions section of this RFA (Part VIII, E.).

   Examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to, those which enable teaching faculty to:

   - Develop a self-sustaining model for faculty professional development that better prepares new faculty for teaching careers, or provides retraining for experienced faculty;
   - Gain experience with recent developments or innovative technology relevant to their teaching responsibilities;
   - Work with scientists or professionals in government, industry, or other colleges or universities to learn new applications in a field;
   - Obtain personal experience working with new ideas and technique;
   - Expand competence with new methods of information delivery;
   - Create assessments that document student learning outcomes or that identify conceptual areas or skills particularly challenging to students, followed by appropriate changes in instructional approaches to effectively address these issues;
   - Increase utilization of teaching methods that address the special needs of non-traditional students or students from groups that are underrepresented in the FANH sciences workforce; or
   - Other approaches to achieve HEC goals.

3. **Facilitating Interaction with Other Academic Institutions**. This Need Area promotes linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in the FANH sciences. Additionally, this Need Area supports linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, secondary, and/or 2-year postsecondary institutions to make instruction targeted at undergraduate students available to secondary students as advanced placement credit or

as transfer credit from associate-degree programs into baccalaureate-level programs. Faculty research sabbaticals at other academic institutions that will enhance teaching and advising are also supported.

Examples of eligible projects in this Need Area may include, but are not limited to, the following strategies:

- Development and use of articulation agreements, 2+2 or 2+2+2 arrangements, advanced placement credit transfer, or the sharing of faculty and facilities; a project that focuses on developing and implementing comprehensive, multi-institutional practices proven to recruit and retain K-14 level students with a focus on cultivating those students to pursue a 4-year FANH sciences degree (**HEC grant funding may not be used to provide student scholarships or other tuition-remission activity**);
- A program to reduce duplication of similar educational resources across institutions and to increase instructional efficiencies. Examples may include multi-institutional or interstate approaches to curriculum development, faculty sharing, cross enrollments, joint degrees, regionalization of academic programs, regional and national workshops and symposia, and similar methodologies; or
- Other approaches to achieve HEC goals.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for HEC grants in FY 2017 is approximately $4,500,000. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2017. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. For more information see https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2017, you may submit the following types of applications to HEC:

New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the HEC. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

Resubmitted application. This is an application that was previously submitted to HEC, but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV, B.3.c., Field 12). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

C. Project Types

Applicants may only submit proposals for **Education/Teaching Projects.**

Single-function Education Projects develop human capital relevant to overall program goals for U.S. agriculture. Projects must focus on developing skills necessary for entry- and mid-level technical employment or for entering graduate programs in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

An education project or teaching project is formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and other related matters such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies.

Education/Teaching Projects may include any of the following activities:

- Institutional capacity building through faculty development and instructional delivery programs for higher education instructors. Educational activities may include curriculum and instructional materials development; externship opportunities that allow teachers to learn about industry environments and expectations for entry level workers; and opportunities to learn modern pedagogy and innovative teaching methodologies;
- Facilitating interaction with other academic institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in the FANH sciences, such as linkages between baccalaureate degree granting institutions, secondary, and/or 2-year postsecondary institutions to make instruction targeted at undergraduate students available to secondary students as advanced placement credit or as transfer credit from associate - degree programs into baccalaureate - level programs; or
- Experiential learning for students enrolled in Baccalaureate, Masters and DVM degree programs.

Educational activities must show direct alignment with one of the following:

- Increasing the number of graduates with the necessary technical skills for entry-level positions in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences;
- Improving the technical competencies needed for the workforce to ensure that U.S. agriculture remains globally competitive; or
- Enhancing the diversity of the workforce in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

Routine use of graduate and postdoctoral students as personnel on research projects is not considered education for the purposes of this program. Only students actively engaged in the scholarship of the research/extension projects are considered as education. Actively engaged students could contribute to presentations, articles, posters, and other expressions of scholarship that reflect their own work on the PD's project.

The activities for Education Projects must show direct alignment with increasing technical competency in priority area(s) to ensure that the U.S. remains globally competitive in the knowledge age.

D. Grant Types

Applicants may submit proposals for one of the following grant types:

1. **Planning Activity**
   Formerly "Conference/Planning Proposal"
   Planning Activity Grants support scientific meetings that bring together educators to identify education/teaching needs, update information, or advance an area of education/teaching. Support for a limited number of meetings covering subject matter encompassed by this solicitation will be considered for partial or, if modest, total support. Individual planning activity grants should not exceed $30,000 for up to two years and are not renewable. Indirect costs are not permitted on Planning Activity grant awards.

Applicants may request up to $30,000 (total planning activity, not per year) to facilitate strategic planning session(s) required of faculty, industry, professional association, community leaders, or other necessary participants for the specific purpose of developing a formal plan leading to a subsequent submission of a Collaborative Grant as described directly below in D.3 and D.4 of this section. **A Planning Activity grant application may not be submitted in the same year for which a Collaborative Grant application for the same project is also submitted.**

2. **Regular Grant**
   Formerly "Regular Project Proposal"
   Regular Grants support targeted original Education/Teaching projects. An eligible, individual institution, independent branch campus, or branch institution of a State system may submit a grant application for project activities to be undertaken principally on behalf of its own students or faculty, and to be managed primarily by its own personnel. The applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners. Applicants may request up to $150,000 (total, not per year) for a Regular Grant application.

3. **Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) (Applicant + One or more Partners)**
   Formerly "Joint Project"
   NIFA defines collaborative grants as follows:
   Collaborative Grants support projects with at least one additional partner or a multi-partner approach to enhance education/teaching programs. Collaborative Grants should build linkages to generate a critical mass of expertise, skill and technology to address education/teaching programs related to the food, agricultural, and natural resources, and human sciences. Grants can reduce duplication of efforts and/or build capacity and should be organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management knowledge and skills to organize and carry out the initiative.

   Applicants to HEC should consider the following in regards to CG1 applications:

   Applicants may request up to $300,000 (total, not per year) for a Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) project. **In this type of project, the applicant executes the project with assistance from at least <u>one</u> additional partner**. Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of an eligible institution as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a CG1 project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution. The partners must share grant funds. Specifically, **the applicant institution will transfer at least one-half of the awarded funds to the other institutions participating in the project**.

4. **Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) (Applicant + Two or more Partners)**
   Formerly "Large-Scale Comprehensive Initiative (LCI)" Project

   Applicants to HEC should consider the following in regards to CG2 applications:

Applicants may request up to $750,000 (total, not per year) for a Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) project. In this type of project, **the applicant executes the project with assistance from at least <u>two</u> additional partners**. The additional partners must share grant funds. Specifically, **the applicant institution/organization submitting a CG2 proposal must retain at least 30 percent but not more than 70 percent of the awarded funds and no cooperating entity may receive less than 10 percent of awarded funds.** Only the applicant institution must meet the definition of an eligible institution as specified in this RFA; other entities participating in a CG2 project proposal are not required to meet the definition of an eligible institution. **A CG2 project differs from a CG1 in project scope and impact. CG2 projects must support a multi-partner approach to solving a major state or regional challenge in FANH sciences education at the baccalaureate, masters or DVM level. CG2 projects are characterized by multiple partners (each providing a specific expertise) organized and led by a strong applicant with documented project management knowledge and skills to organize and carry out the initiative.**

Impacts of CG2 projects must include (but are not limited to) the following:
- An assessment of significant progress toward addressing the national challenge of increasing the number and diversity of FANH sciences baccalaureate or higher degree graduates, while addressing the specific state or regional opportunity defined in the grant application;
- Documented enhanced retention rates of students in FANH majors exposed to CG2 Project activities;
- A comprehensive project evaluation, using the indicators and methods defined in this grants program, that informs the baccalaureate, masters or DVM FANH sciences community and others about the effectiveness of this CG2 Project;
- A description of completed or ongoing activities supported by this CG2 Project accompanied with a description of those same activities that will be sustained once grant funds end; and
- A description of any related activities expected to occur as an outgrowth of this funded project.

E. Project Duration

Planning Activity project periods may range from 12 to 24 months.

Regular and CG1 project periods may range from 24 to 36 months, including time to evaluate the results and report the impacts.

CG2 projects are expected to use the full, 36 month period.

For project budget and timeline purposes, the project start date should not occur prior to August 2017.

F. Number and Size of Grant Awards

The total number of grants awarded by this grant program will depend on the number and type of meritorious applications submitted in response to this notice. There is no predetermined number of Planning Activity, Regular, or Collaborative Project Proposals that may be awarded in any grant cycle.

Based on the project scope and budget of all applications selected for awards, the actual, individual grant amounts awarded by NIFA under this grants program may differ from the funds requested by the applicant. In such cases, revised budgets and revised plans of work may be required by NIFA before an award is made.

G. Application Submission & Award Limitations

There is no limit on the number of applications that may be submitted by an applicant. However, a successful applicant institution/organization will only be awarded a maximum of two (2) grants per year under this program. No more than one (1) CG2 grant will be awarded to an institution/organization in any one, annual HEC grants program competition, and generally, an individual academic (or other) unit (a college, school of agriculture, etc.) within the institution/organization may only have one (1) active, CG2 grant in effect at any time.

H. Funding Limitations per Institution

There are no limits on the total grant program funds that may be awarded to any one institution/organization in successive years of this competition. Successful award recipients may apply for additional awards in subsequent years either as a lead applicant or as a partner on a project (note CG2 project focus restriction in item G, directly above).

I. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may be submitted by: (a) U.S. public or private nonprofit colleges and universities offering a baccalaureate or first professional degree in at least one discipline or area of the food and agricultural sciences; (b) land-grant colleges and universities, (including land grant institutions in the Insular Areas); (c) colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences; and (d) other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences.

An applicant also must meet the definition of an Eligible Institution/Organization as stated in this RFA (see Part VIII, E., Definitions). For the purposes of this program, the individual branches of a State university or other system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree-granting institutions are treated as separate institutions, and are therefore eligible for HEC awards. Separate branches or campuses of a college or university that are not individually accredited as degree-granting institutions are not treated as separate institutions. An institution eligible to receive an award under this program includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university. Accreditation must be by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

Any individual (eligible participant) receiving Federal funds above must be a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in this RFA (see Part VIII, Definitions). Where eligibility is claimed under 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request. 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.

The following applies to CG1 and CG2 applicants only: The applicant institution must meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in §3405.2(i); the other institutions participating in a CG1 and CG2 project proposals are not required to meet the definition of "eligible institution" as specified in §3405.2(i), nor required to meet the definition of "college" or "university" as specified in §3405.2(f).

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 application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

A grant recipient is required to match 25% of the USDA funds awarded. Matching funds must come from non-Federal sources, and are not required to come in any particular amount from any one source.

If a project is recommended for an award, matching documentation will be requested from the application. An award will not be issued unless all matching funds over the life of the grant are secured with match support documentation. There can be no contingencies on the matching amount. Refer to Section IV.B.6 for more information regarding the information and documentation that will be required.

The applicant must establish the value of matching 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.

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 information about the pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle see http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.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 two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **"Register," in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to** http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html**), for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II,1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2, below, to locate the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:
1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html and enter the funding opportunity number

    Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-CGP-006325

    From the search result, click "Select Package" to access the application package. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

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

> Grants.gov customer support
> 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
> Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on federal holidays.
> Email: support@grants.gov
>
> 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. EST). 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** you need 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. <u>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</u>. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether 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. EST, excluding federal holidays.

As part of the Just-In-Time (JIT) pilot, some information is not requested as part of the application but submission will be required if the project is recommended for award. The information includes: (1) Current and Pending Other Support; (2) Felony Tax Certification; (3) Match Support documentation; (4) specific Subcontract Information

(such as, Statement of Work, Letter of Intent); and (5) annual breakdowns of budget. Such applicants will have thirty (30) days to provide the JIT documents when notified by NIFA.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet
Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. See Part V, Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances (e.g., Prohibition Against Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements).

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)
Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form
Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. (Required Attachment – Must be PDF format). Information related to the completion of the project summary is included in Part V. 4.7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. An application that is submitted without the project summary will not be accepted for review. Applications will not be accepted for review if the project summary is not included or not in PDF format.

To ensure uniformity of all applicants, all applicants are encouraged to use the HEC project summary/abstract template that is available as a pdf fillable form at the following link: http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HEC_Project%20Summary%20Template.pdf.

Project Summary/Abstract is required in all applications and is **limited to one (1) page and 250 words**. **Project Summary that exceeds this page limit requirement will not be accepted for review.** The summary must include the relevance of the project's goals to the HEC program.

Please see the following bullet points that will assist you in completing the HEC project summary template (all underlined sections must be addressed):

- Indicate the Project Title;
- Indicate the Project Director (and any) Co-Project Director(s) (include institutional affiliation for each);
- Indicate your project's Program Category: (see Part I, C.1.);
- Indicate your project's Educational Need Area: (Part I, C.2.);
- Indicate the projected number of students or faculty to be served by the project during the project period (i.e., using a new curriculum, instructional delivery system, student career opportunity; benefitting from a partnership between institutions; etc.)
- Indicate your project's *primary* Discipline Code/Academic Discipline: (Select one from the list below);

<u>Discipline Codes & Academic Discipline</u>

G - General Food, agricultural and human sciences (includes multidisciplinary projects) M - Agribusiness (includes Management, Marketing, and Agricultural Economics) E - Agricultural/Biological Engineering S - Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Agricultural Education, Agricultural Communications, and Rural Sociology) A - Animal Sciences Q - Aquaculture C - Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (includes Forestry) J - Entomology – Animal T - Entomology – Plant	L - Environmental Sciences/Management F - Food Science/Technology and Manufacturing N - Human Nutrition H - Human Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences (excludes Human Nutrition) I - International Education/Research (enhancement of U.S. programs) P - Plant Sciences and Horticulture B - Related Biological Sciences (includes General/Basic Biotechnology, Biochemistry, and Microbiology) D - Soil Sciences V - Veterinary Medicine/Science W - Water Science O - Other (Describe only if not listed above)

- Grant Type: Planning Activity, Regular, CG1, CG2. (See 'Definitions', Part VIII. E.);
- Total Funds Requested: (List total Federal funds requested for this application. If this project is a CG2 Or CG2 Project Proposal, also list each partner's total funds requested next to the institution/organization's name); and
- Partners: If CG1 or CG2 Project Proposal, list all partner institutions/organizations that will share grant funding (Note: Each identified partner must have their budget information submitted on a separate subaward budget attachment);
- Summary Text - Provide a very concise (max. 250 word) summary of your project. **Application will not be accepted for review if the summary text exceeds 250 words.** Summary text should include:
  - o Purpose: What is the major problem your project will address?
  - o Audience: Who are the intended beneficiaries? Who will be impacted?
  - o Products: What will be produced?
  - o Outcome/Impact: What is the intended result (consequence) of your project? This should be described as the primary benefits to your audience. Note: outcomes/impacts should be measurable, and should be included in your project's assessment/evaluation plan to demonstrate how you will assess whether or not these benefits were achieved (See explanation of terms in Part IV, B. 3. Field 8. 2.c., below).

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.
NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **20** pages of written text and up to **five** (**5**) additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (**25** pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. You are encouraged to include a **table of contents** in the project narrative, which **will not count toward the narrative's page limitation.** After you convert the

narrative to PDF format you should verify it is within the required page limit. **Project narratives that exceed this page limit requirement will not be accepted for review.**

Prepare the application using a standard size (8 1/2" x 11") page, one (1)-inch margins, no type smaller than 12 point font, and 1.5 line spacing. Use an easily readable font face (e.g., Arial, Times New Roman). Information may not be appended to an application to circumvent page limitations prescribed for the Project Narrative.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem

   a. Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact. Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (2) the anticipated project audience; and (3) the project's target objectives (what change in education is proposed?) and its anticipated, overall *impact* on improving the quality of FANH sciences education (Note: Your *impact* shall be a change you can measure at the project's conclusion.). Clearly identify and explain how the proposed project will address the selected *Educational Need Area* (see Part I, C.2).
   b. Project Justification. Describe how and by whom the focus and scope of the project were determined. Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project's *Educational Need Area* (Part I, C.2) will be of value at the State, regional, national, or international level(s), and where applicable, how it will improve the FANH science capabilities of students. Describe any ongoing or recently completed, significant activities related to the proposed project for which previous funding was received under this program.
   c. Institutional Long-range Goals. Demonstrate how the institution/organization attributes a high priority to the project; discuss how the project will contribute to the achievement of the institution/organization's long-term (five- to ten-year) goals; explain how the project will help satisfy the institution/organization's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution/organization's strategic plan.
   d. Innovation. Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of FANH sciences education, solving an education problem, or promoting programs that advance equal opportunity for all students. Using either actual experiences or literature background information, show why this approach was chosen.
   e. Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus. Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in FANH sciences education, or to other academic curricula, and how the project will enhance students' understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted by, or serve as a model for, other institutions.

2. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages

   a. Plan of Operation and Methodology. Describe procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project. Describe plans for management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.

b. Timetable. Identify all important project milestones (performance targets that indicate when project goals will be met) and dates as they relate to project start-up, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and closeout.

c. Products, Results and Measurable Outputs. Outline the expected products, results, measurable outputs, and their outcome (impact) on strengthening FANH sciences education in the United States. **This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.**

   Note: Make sure to differentiate among the three terms:

   1) "Products" may be actual *items or services* acquired with funds, e.g., "…developed three, new Web-based courses";
   2) "Results" are *accomplishments* related to the products, e.g., "...additional course materials now available online to reinforce student learning during non-classroom hours"; and
   3) "Impacts" are the *benefits* to your audience. Impacts are the consequences of your project and the most critical elements in your Evaluation Plan. They are a measure of the results by comparison to what might have happened in the absence of the funded project, e.g., "…an observed, overall increase in student learning based upon 8% higher average test scores of those students who both attended class and used the supplemental, Web-based course materials".

d. Evaluation Plans. State the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of stated products, results and measurable impacts from the project. Discuss the strategies and metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the two HEC goals from Part I, A. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project will improve education. This section shall clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts. **This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.** The following guidance will assist you on developing your evaluation plan:

   1) Evaluation plan must be included in your grant application. Please refer to Part IV, B, 3, Field 12, "Expected Outputs Measures" for a suggested format for submitting expected outputs measures.
   2) The evaluation may also include assessment of other outcomes, particularly if the project aims to change organizational structures, create cost-efficiencies, or achieve other ends. Explain the data gathering procedures that will be used to monitor and assess progress toward intended project goals. When describing the measurement instruments you plan to use (surveys, interviews, focus groups, assessments of e-portfolios or capstone projects, measures of class performance, scores on standardized tests, cost-benefit analyses, etc.), be sure to mention why they are appropriate to gauging success.
   3) The evaluation plan section should make a convincing case to reviewers that at the conclusion of the grant, the grantee could report the extent to which learning and engagement outcomes, professional development goals, and/or organizational outcomes have been achieved. Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the applicant thought about how to measure what worked, what did not work as planned,

and what adjustments could be made to enhance program outcomes in the future. Collection of this evidence is critical to achieving HEC's goal of making data about educational improvements and innovation available to the education community. An evaluation plan that only indicates a desire to develop assessment measures once the project is underway, and an eventual description of resulting project activities and outcomes, would be considered a poorly prepared and inadequate evaluation plan.

4) The project budget should contain funding to either hire an outside project evaluator, or to present convincing evidence that an appropriate evaluator is already on staff and available to provide assistance with assessment and evaluation throughout the life of the project. As a guide, up to 10 percent of grant funds may be used to support this purpose. The following activities are examples of items that may be included in the Evaluation Plan: a) project objectives that lend themselves most readily to measurement and evaluation, b) baseline assessment data and a planned collection process from a possible comparison or control group, possible measurement instruments (surveys, student journals, standardized tests, interviews, focus groups, analysis of e-portfolios or capstone projects, cost-benefit analyses, etc.), a strategy for what assessment measures will be a part of the annual and final project performance reports and how this information will eventually be disseminated to interested parties and to the public.

5) Finally, the Evaluation Plan itself should contain measures of a) student learning or engagement and/or faculty professional development and b) the number of students or faculty impacted by your project as a result of the proposed activities. In addition, the PD should specify metrics summarizing who benefited the most (and the least) from your project, an explanation of what revisions, improvements, or enhancements you would make, funding permitting, to increase the value of this project in the future, and ideas about how to make projects like yours more cost-effective. These, and other funded project assessments determined by the project director and evaluation team should be reported both annually and in the final performance report.

e. Dissemination Plans. The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results and impacts…etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or national conferences and workshops, including the HEC Project Directors' Meeting. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication. **This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.**

f. Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts. Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen FANH sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, CG1 or CG2 projects with other educational institution/organizations, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Additionally, explain how it will stimulate academia, the States, or the private sector to join with the Federal partner in enhancing FANH sciences education. Provide evidence, via letters from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.

3. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building

    a. Institutional/organizational Commitment and Capability. Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.

    b. Institutional/organizational Resources. Document the necessary institutional/organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, that will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how these resources, when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the activities of the project.

    c. Academic Enhancement. Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching at the institution (including any partner institutions/organizations). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above (2.b., Timetable) will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution/organization or the grant period.

    d. Continuation Plans. Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. Describe how the institution's/organization's long-range budget or academic plan provides for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends. Explain the plans for eventual self-support built into the project, and the plans to institutionalize the program if it is successful. Describe any indications of other continuing non-Federal support. Provide details of the expected outcomes, and the targeted audience that would benefit from the continuation of this project. **This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.**

4. Key Personnel: Discuss the adequacy and specific attributes and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project. Also include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.

5. Budget and Cost-effectiveness

    a. Budget. In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that the total budget, including funds requested from USDA and any matching support provided, are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s), and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project. If the application addresses more than one Educational Need Area (see Part I, C.2.), you must include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area.

    b. Cost-effectiveness. Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on an

Educational Need Area, or to promote coalition building that could lead to future ventures.

c. Field 12. Add Other Attachments

See Part V. Section 4.12 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the form) for instructions as well as the information below.

- **Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status**. As a result of the JIT pilot, this information is **not** required as part of the application; submission will be required if the project is recommended for award.

- **Response to Previous Review – PDF Attachment. 1 Page Limit.** Title the attachment as "Response to Previous Review" in the document header and save file as "Response to Previous Review". This requirement only applies to 'Resubmitted Applications' as described under Part II, B., 'Types of Applications". PDs must respond to the previous review panel summary on **no more than one page**, titled, 'RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS REVIEW'. If desired, additional comments may be included in the text of the Project Narrative, subject to the page limitations of that section.

- **Appendices to Project Narrative – PDF Attachment.** 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 should not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.

- **Collaborative Arrangements – PDF Attachment.** Title the attachment as "Collaborative Arrangements" in the document header and save file as "Collaborative Arrangement". If it is necessary to enter into formal consulting or collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements should be fully explained and justified. If the consultant(s) or collaborator(s) are known at the time of the application, a vitae or resume should be provided. In addition, evidence (e.g., letter of support signed by the AR of the consultant/collaborating organization) should be provided that the collaborators involved have agreed to render these services. The applicant also will be required to provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget portion of the application.

- **Expected Outputs Measures – PDF Attachment**
  Title the attachment "Expected Outputs Measures" in the document header and name the file to be saved as "ExpectedOutputsMeasures". Please use a format, similar to what is provided below, to submit expected outputs and attach it as the last page of the application.

Total expected impact during entire grant period	Expected Number	Justification for Expected Numbers
Number of products to be developed through grant funds during the grant period (i.e., curricula, academic programs, recruitment/retention programs, materials, experiential learning opportunities)		
Number of faculty supported by this grant for professional development during the grant period: participation in sabbaticals, workshops, conferences, etc.		
Number of students who will indirectly benefit from the products produced from the grant during the grant period (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited or retained but not paid by the grant using scholarships, fellowships and assistantships).		

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)
Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the guide includes instructions about senior/key person profile requirements, and details about the biographical sketch.

As result of the JIT pilot, current and pending support information is not required as part of the application; submission of the information will be required if the project is recommended for award.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award. Part V.6 also notes the importance and use of the information.

6. R&R Budget Federal and Non-Federal
Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. Complete all applicable fields for the entire project as one project period (note: the single budget period).
- As a result of the JIT pilot, annual budget periods are not required as part of the application; submission of the information will be required if the project is recommended for award.

- Include the travel costs for the Project Director and any other key staff member(s) to attend at least one national Project Directors' meeting, if offered, in Washington, DC, or other announced location during the lifetime of the grant.
- **Stipends** to support students' experiential, academic learning activities outside of the traditional classroom are permitted (as long as such activities are clearly related to a student's degree program and are not extracurricular). Stipends may be requested for materials or supplies to facilitate a student's broad exposure to research/field techniques and methodologies, as well as for reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings) directly supporting this funded project. In order for the students to be provided a stipend, they must be currently matriculating in the institution(s) where the projects are being implemented. Stipends may not be used for tuition or scholarships. Any application primarily focused on providing student stipends should also include a plan demonstrating how the stipends will continue into the future once current grant funds expire.

Matching. See Part III, B of this RFA for the required match. All matching contributions must be specifically for the project objectives as proposed. As a result of the JIT pilot, supporting documentation of the match is not required as part of the application; submission will be required if the project is recommended for award. Once notified of the requirement, you will have 30 days to submit the information.

If required, the budget and matching support documentation must include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. A signed letter from the AR of the source of matching funds; including both cash and in-kind contributions, would be sufficient in providing written verification. Grant awards cannot be issued until ALL required matching has been documented and verified.

Written verification means:
For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR 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.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR 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.

If the contribution is to be split between cash and in-kind, the exact dollar amount for each category must be clearly stated. The letter shall also clearly state the budget categories that the contributed dollars shall be applied to and clearly state the individual items of in-kind contributions. Any cost sharing commitments specified in the application will be referenced and included as a condition of an award resulting from this announcement.

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.

Note: Funding from sources prohibited by this grants program cannot be used as an institution/organization's matching contributions (i.e., Funding Restrictions for this grants program prohibit the use of Federal grant funds for tuition remission or to acquire or repair a building or facility (e.g., a greenhouse)). Therefore, non-Federal, matching funds for tuition remission or that acquire or repair a building or facility to support this project is not permitted as matching contributions.

Indirect Costs. For further information and instructions regarding indirect costs, refer to Part V, section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. For indirect cost funding restrictions, refer to Part IV, D. of this RFA.

R&R Subaward Budget (Fed and Non-Fed) Attachment (Only required if submitting a CG1 or CG2 Project Proposal). The forms should clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required sharing percentage. All expenditures for the applicant and all partners should be further itemized in the Budget Justification. Funds do not have to be divided equally among project years.

7. <u>Supplemental Information Form</u>
Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part VI, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "Higher Education Challenge Grants Program") and the program code (i.e., enter "ER"). 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

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission of it via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all 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 p.m. Eastern May 30, 2017.** 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. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email 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 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, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

Section 713 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total federal funds provided (or 42.857 percent of total direct costs) under each award. Similar language may be included in the FY 2017 appropriation, therefore, when preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

Consistent with other competitive grant programs, NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority **may not** be used for student tuition remission, room and board, academic fees or other financial assistance (scholarships, fellowships, etc.).

Also, funds **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 to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities (i.e., greenhouses, laboratories, barns or other structures). Promotional items (e.g., T-shirts and other give-a-ways) and food functions (e.g., cookouts or other social meal gatherings) are considered 'entertainment' expenses, and are also **not allowed** under this grants program. Finally, grant funds may not be used for endowment investing. Federal Cost Principles governing this grant program state that items not eligible for Federal funding may also not be used as an applicant's contribution toward meeting matching requirements.

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:
- 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;
- the need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields;
- the need to include 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;
- the need to include 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;
- the need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
- the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

After each peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of HEC will recommend that your project be approved for support from currently available funds or be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

HEC 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.

We will send copies of reviews, _not_ including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Evaluation Criteria

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

1. **Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem (30 points).** This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the quality of FANH sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals,

identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, justification for the project, innovation, advancing educational equity, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, and potential for adoption by other institutions. The proposed project must also show its relevance to the goals of HEC.

2. **Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages (25 points).**
This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. The approach must be based on sound research concepts and educational principles and may be documented through background literature or actual institutional data. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution/organization through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project. Any perceived pitfalls and alternative strategies or approaches are addressed.

3. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building (20 points).**
This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its teaching or research capacity. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials) available to carry out the project, potential for academic or research enhancement, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support. Institutional data shall be included to show the institution's ability to support the proposed project.

4. **Key Personnel (15 points).**
This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number, qualifications and expertise of key persons who will develop and carry out the project, and the qualifications of project personnel who will provide for the assessment of project results and impacts and the dissemination of these findings.

5. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness (10 points).**
This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost effective. Elements considered include the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objectives; the appropriateness of budget allocations between the applicant and any collaborating institution(s); the adequacy of time committed to the project by key project personnel; and the degree to which the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, leverages additional funds, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority educational or research need areas.

C. **Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality**

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. 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 one-time, with updates on an as-needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determined prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by HEC 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, the information described in 2 CFR 200.210.

See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html to view current NIFA award terms and conditions.

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. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

E. 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 CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Antonio McLaren, Ed.D.
National Program Leader
Division of Community and Education
Location: 4435 Waterfront Centre
Full Address and Directions
Phone: (202) 720 - 0742
Fax: (202) 720 - 9366
Email: antonio.a.mclaren@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contact –

Sondra Watkins
Team Leader, Team II
Office of Grants and Financial Management
Location: 2170 Waterfront Centre
Full Address and Directions
Phone: (202) 401 - 4249
Fax: (202) 401-3237
Email: swatkins@nifa.usda.gov

Rochelle McCrea
Team Leader, Team I
Branch II
Location: 2160 Waterfront Centre
Full Address and Directions
Phone: (202) 401 - 2880
Fax: (202) 401 - 6271
Email: rmccrea@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. 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 Budget or Project Plans

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.308, awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons:
    (i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).
    (ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
    (iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.
    (iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, "Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals," or 48 CFR Part 31, "Contract Cost Principles and Procedures," as applicable.
    (v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.
    (vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
    (vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.
    (viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.

The awardee will be subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award. See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html for information about NIFA award terms.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture 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. We will retain for three years a copy of an application that does not result in an award. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR Part 415, Subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

D. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), and 7 CFR 3405, Higher Education Challenge Grants Program for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program. If a conflict exists between the two regulations, the program-specific Administrative Provision is overriding. The following are additional definitions that apply to this program.

Citizen or national of the United States means (1) a citizen or native resident of a State; or, (2) a person defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(22), who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States.

Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) Project (*formerly Joint Projects*) means an application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution and **one or more** other colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, or other institutions, each of which will assume a major role in the conduct of the proposed project.

Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2) Project (*Formerly Large-scale, Comprehensive Initiative (LCI)*) means an application for a project: (1) which will involve the applicant institution/organization working in cooperation with **two or more** other entities not legally affiliated with the applicant institution, including other schools, colleges, universities, community colleges, junior colleges, units of State government, private sector organizations, or a consortium of institutions; and (2) where the applicant institution and each cooperating entity will assume a significant role in the conduct of the proposed project.

Eligible institution means a land-grant college or university (including land-grant institutions in the Insular Areas), colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of FANH sciences, and other U.S. colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of FANH sciences. An eligible institution includes a research foundation maintained by an eligible college or university.

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

Institution of higher education means an educational institution in any State that: (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school 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 the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

Insular Area means the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Nonprofit or Nonprofit Organization, as applied to a school, agency, organization, or institution, means a school, agency, organization, or institution owned and operated by one or more nonprofit corporations or associations, no part of the net earnings of which inures, or may lawfully inure, to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

Outcomes means specific, measurable project results and benefits that, when assessed and reported, indicate the project's plan of operation has been achieved.

Plan of Operation means a detailed, step-by-step description of how the applicant intends to accomplish the project's outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include a timetable indicating how outcomes are achieved, a description of resources to be used or acquired, and the responsibilities expected of all project personnel.

Regular project proposal means a proposal for a project: (1) where the applicant institution will be the sole entity involved in the execution of the project; or (2) which will involve the applicant institution and one or more other entities, but where the involvement of the other entity(ies) does not meet the requirements for a collaborative grant type 1 or collaborative grant type 2 project proposal as defined in this section.

Teaching means formal classroom and/or laboratory instruction, or practicum experience in the FANH sciences and matters related thereto (such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies) conducted by eligible educational institute.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

HEC program information is available on the NIFA website at https://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/higher-education-challenge-hec-grants-program.

The following are among the materials available on the web page:
1. Link to Abstracts of Funded Projects
2. HEC Project Summary/Abstract Template