

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

FY 2018 Request for Pre-Applications (RFPA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: December 8, 2017

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFPA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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

SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH INITIATIVE

PRE-APPLICATION

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.309**.

DATES: Pre-Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time** on December 8, 2017. Pre-Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered (see Part IV, C. of this RFPA). Comments regarding this request for pre-applications (RFPA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

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

Visit the [NIFA website](#) to access a factsheet on the Center of Excellence (COE) designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs that offered COE opportunities in FY 2018. You may also review a recording of COE outreach webinars held in February and March of 2015 from the site. We will update COE webpages as appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests pre-applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2018 to solve critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities that use systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. The intent of the SCRI program is to address the needs of the various specialty crop industries through the promotion of collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology. The SCRI program will give priority to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary (see Definitions, Part VIII (E)), and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public. The anticipated amount available for support of this program in FY 2018 is approximately \$48.1 million.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the pre-application forms and associated instructions needed to submit a pre-application for SCRI.

Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION.....	4
A. Legislative Authority and Background.....	4
B. Purpose and Priorities	4
PART II – AWARD INFORMATION.....	8
A. Available Funding.....	8
B. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research	10
PART III — ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION.....	11
A. Eligible Applicants	11
B. Cost Sharing or Matching	11
C. Centers of Excellence	13
PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION.....	14
A. Electronic Application Package.....	14
B. Submission of Stakeholder Relevance Statements	15
C. Submission Dates and Times.....	17
PART V—PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS	18
A. General.....	18
B. Evaluation Criteria	18
C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality.....	19
PART VI—AGENCY CONTACT.....	20
PART VII—OTHER INFORMATION.....	21
A. Use of Funds; Changes – Not Applicable.....	21
B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	21
C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	21
D. Regulatory Information.....	21
E. Definitions.....	21

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is reauthorized by Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 which amends Section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7632). Section 412 of the AREERA of 1998 established a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions. Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 added a requirement that, in addition to the scientific peer review NIFA regularly conducts, a panel of specialty crop industry representatives review and rank SCRI applications for merit, relevance, and impact. In addition, Section 7306 requires increased consultation between NIFA and the Specialty Crops Committee of the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board. The consultation after the FY 2016 competition occurred on August 29 and 30, 2017 and comments provided by the Committee were considered prior to finalizing this RFPA.

B. Purpose and Priorities

In FY 2018, the SCRI program will be competed in two stages. Applicants will be required to submit a pre-application containing a Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS). The content required in an SRS is described in Section IV, B. of this RFPA. Panels of industry representatives from various specialty crop sectors will review and rank the pre-applications for merit, relevance and impact. The industry representatives for each specialty crop sector will decide which pre-applications should be invited to submit full applications. Details of the full-application process will be provided to invitees in a separate Request for Applications (RFA). Review criteria for the SRS can be found in Section V, A. of this RFPA.

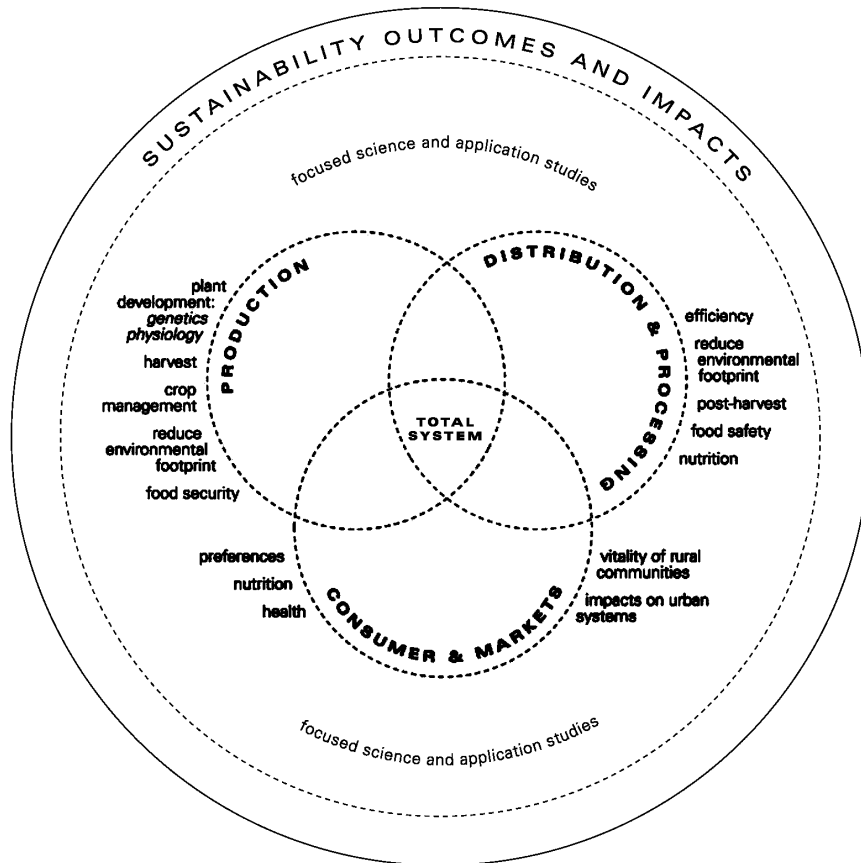
The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in Part VIII, E) by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems. **Except for Research and Extension Planning Projects, the SCRI program only considers projects that integrate research *and* extension activities.**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a systems approach:

A systems approach is any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation. The only way to fully understand why a problem or element occurs and persists is to understand the part in relation to the whole.

The philosophy of the SCRI program is that truly effective, long-term solutions to specialty crop industry challenges can best be achieved by understanding and treating those problems as complex systems of many interacting components. This perspective requires projects that are larger in scope and complexity, and that demand more resources than have traditionally been allocated to individual research and extension projects.

In doing so, projects should focus on entire primary systems, or on areas where two or more primary systems overlap. For the purpose of this announcement, a primary system is one of the three main sectors of the specialty crop industry depicted in the graphic below: the production system; the processing and distribution system; and the consumer and marketing system. Meeting the challenges faced by these industries can best be handled by considering the full breadth of system components (see example components listed for each primary system), rather than treating each component in isolation and ignoring important interactions and conflicts among components that may reduce the viability of component-specific solutions in the long term.



Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. USDA has developed a more detailed description of specialty crops that is now in use by all USDA agencies. Please see more information about this document at <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/specialty-crop-research-initiative>. Collectively, these

crops face many challenges. The SCRI program seeks to address these challenges by funding systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. **PLEASE NOTE: For purposes of the SCRI program, the term trans-disciplinary is defined as a multi-disciplinary approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner.** It is anticipated that successful applications will:

1. Engage stakeholders in collaborative ways to identify those priorities of greatest need;
2. Bring together multi-state, multi-institutional teams of biological, physical, and social scientists to develop strategies and actions emphasizing **systems-based, trans-disciplinary** approaches for meeting the identified priorities;
3. Address priorities through research and extension;
4. Present plans for documenting the impacts of funded applications that include stakeholder involvement; and
5. Include explicit mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public.

The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas, which are:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:
 - a. product, taste, quality, and appearance;
 - b. environmental responses and tolerances;
 - c. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency;
 - d. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
 - e. enhanced phytonutrient content.
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators;
3. Efforts to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing);
4. New innovations and technology, including improved mechanization and technologies that delay or inhibit ripening; and
5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.

NIFA will address all focus areas by funding projects that emphasize **systems-based, trans-disciplinary** approaches. In addition, for the purposes of this program, NIFA interprets new innovations and technology to include, among other things, automation, robotics, sensor technology, and precision agriculture for specialty crops. NIFA also recognizes the importance of specialty crops in enhancing human nutrition and health.

In an increasingly interconnected world, scientific advances have global importance, and may require information and cooperation from beyond our borders. To address critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities, applicants are encouraged to include international partnerships or engagement in proposals, as appropriate. Any proposed activity (e.g., partnerships, exchanges, training, and/or

travel), must support the domestic objectives of SCRI. Applicants must clearly describe and demonstrate how international activities proposed in applications submitted to SCRI will contribute to advances in U.S. specialty crop industries. When proposing international activities, applicants must describe the metrics that will be used for reporting beneficial outputs and outcomes. These metrics should reflect how the proposed international collaboration adds value to achieving the SCRI program's objectives by introducing innovative technologies/approaches, promoting synergistic science, addressing issues of mutual concern, or other means. Additional guidance on including international activities in SCRI applications is provided on the [Center for International Programs](#) webpage that includes Frequently Asked Questions, descriptions of existing MOUs and other resources to assist applicants interested in enhancing the potential for global engagement.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with: (1) small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities, and/or (2) 1890 land-grant institutions, 1994 land-grant institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences.

Please note: The intent of this program is not to fund start-up businesses, however a small business can apply. Projects must address only scientific research and extension activities. A small business must not propose technical assistance, demonstration projects, classified research, or financial assistance to start, create, or expand a company or submit patent applications.

SCRI supports NIFA Strategic Plan (<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>) sub-goals 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7. Further, SCRI supports REE Action Plan (<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>) sub-goals 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 3A, 3B and Goals 4, 5 and 7.

PART II – AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for support of this program in FY 2018 is approximately \$48.1 million.

Please note: The SCRI Pre-Application process does not result in award recommendations. However, an estimate of project costs is required. The following information should be used to develop the estimate.

The SCRI program offers the following three project types in FY 2018. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a preliminary budget that fits the objectives. Applicants are discouraged from developing a project (and selecting a project type) based on a budget request target.

It is anticipated that most funded SREPs/CAPS for FY 2018 will be close to the historical median over the project period.

1. Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)

- a. Project Period – Up to four years.
- b. Budget – Normally, Federal funds will not exceed \$1,000,000 per year. Requests less than \$250,000 per project are discouraged.
- c. Purpose – To support targeted problem-solving efforts that would not qualify in scope for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP).
- d. Statistical Analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2014). It is anticipated that most funded SREPs for FY2018 will be close to the historical median:
 - i. Mean award: \$1,980,070
 - ii. Median award: \$1,846,428
 - iii. Minimum award: \$226,905
 - iv. Maximum award: \$6,010,232.

SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components (see Sustainability Outcomes and Impacts diagram in Part I,B), and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a CAP. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. For each SREP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will be formed to inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and extension objectives. SREPs represent the “focused science and application studies” portion of the systems diagram under Part I, B.

2. Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)

- a. Project Period – Up to four years.
- b. Budget – Normally, Federal funds will not exceed \$2,000,000 per year.

- c. Purpose – To address specific multiple components of a primary system or multiple components of areas where primary systems overlap (see diagram in Part I, B).
- d. Statistical analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2014). It is anticipated that most funded CAPs for FY 2018 will be close to the historical median.
 - v. Mean award: \$5,008,679
 - vi. Median award: \$4,438,003
 - vii. Minimum award: \$1,912,178
 - viii. Maximum award: \$10,898,772

CAPs will be awarded to consortia or groups of qualified applicants to address multiple components of a primary system, an entire primary system or problems that cut across primary systems, with the expectation that the project will make significant contributions to the sustainability of the system or system component (see Sustainability Outcomes and Impacts diagram in Part IB). CAP applications are expected to demonstrate coherent and complementary integrated activities with the ultimate goal of developing a strategy or solution that could be implemented for specialty crops. Applications are expected to take advantage of recent advances in biological, physical, and social and economic sciences and to translate basic discoveries and knowledge to practical applications. Applications are expected to demonstrate the potential to develop a national strategy or solution as an ultimate goal. This would include the intent to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information and development of resources that accelerate the application of scientific discovery and technology to address the needs of various specialty crop industries. Such a national CAP should aim to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions.

3. Research and Extension Planning Projects

- a. Project period – One year.
- b. Budget – Federal funds up to \$50,000 per project.
- c. Purpose – To provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning). Funds may also be requested to provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed plans could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications.

Research and Extension Planning Projects are intended to support two types of activities, either to: (1) provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning) or (2) provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed “plans” could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications. Priority will be given to applicants who can: (1) demonstrate limited resources for either submitting large grant applications or for supporting strategic planning activities on their own, (2) articulate benefits to be accrued from formal planning activities, and (3) provide evidence of a high likelihood that quality future applications would be submitted for SCRI projects (desired for grant planning) or would result in a publicly available strategic plan, which could be used to support a variety of industry-relevant research and

extension activities, including development of one or more future SCRI grant applications (desired for strategic planning). Research and Extension Planning Project grants do not support preliminary research. However, support for stakeholder survey activities may be requested, where appropriate and necessary.

B. 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.

For information about the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research, see <http://nifa.usda.gov/responsible-and-ethical-conduct-research>.

PART III — ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Pre-Applications may only be submitted by Federal agencies, national laboratories, colleges and universities, research institutions and organizations, private organizations or corporations, State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension Services, individuals, or groups consisting of two or more of these entities.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

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

The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

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

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

- a. 1862 land-grant institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b. 1890 land-grant institutions
- c. 1994 land-grant institutions
- d. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)
- e. Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)
- f. Insular area schools eligible to receive funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- g. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h. Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) – (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA

certification, see instructions for requesting certifications at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html> and for attaching the certification, in Part IV, B of this RFA)

- i. Entities eligible to receive funds under a program established under Section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program
- j. Individual public or private, nonprofit Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 1059d).

Proposal submissions to this RFA may indicate that multiple entities will complete work as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. Proposals for partnerships among multiple entities must clearly identify the following:

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

If a proposal indicates that multiple entities, as partners, complete work on the project, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement. Any partner entity may serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

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

Waiver of Match: NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year for a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) for the year involved. Refer to the [2014 Research, Education and Economics Action Plan](#) to determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB. See R&R Budget under Part IV, B, of this RFA.

C. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will recognize and provide priority in the receipt of funding to applications from “centers of excellence” that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. NIFA held listening sessions in July 2014 and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the COE provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input are available on NIFA’s website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence>.

A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE.

- (A) State agricultural experiment stations;
- (B) Colleges and universities;
- (C) University research foundations;
- (D) Other research institutions and organizations;
- (E) Federal agencies;
- (F) National laboratories;
- (G) Private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
- (H) Individuals; or
- (I) any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

COE designation is available only to CAP and SREP applicants.

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 RFPA. 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 2 weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **“Register” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2. below to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide”.

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of [Adobe Reader](#) compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html> and enter the funding opportunity number

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-SCRI-006394

Click “Search.” On the displayed page, click the corresponding link to continue. 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 pre-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. Submission of Stakeholder Relevance Statements

Stakeholder Relevance Statements (SRSs) are required for all SCRI project types. SRSs must be submitted as an attachment to a pre-application in the portable document format (PDF). SRSs not submitted in PDF format will not be transmitted from Grants.gov to NIFA and pre-applications not containing an SRS will be rejected.

Content of Stakeholder Relevance Statement for Research and Extension Planning Projects

- a) Title of Project;
- b) Type of planning activity to be undertaken (i.e. grant planning or strategic planning);
- c) Estimated amount of funding to be requested;
- d) Name, professional title, affiliation and email address of the project director;
- e) Name, professional title and affiliation of all known collaborators, including industry stakeholders;
- f) Brief description of the stakeholder problem being addressed;
- g) Brief description of relevant expertise represented by project team;
- h) Description of the planning activities to be undertaken and the expected outcomes of the planning process;
- i) Brief description of the benefits to growers/processors/consumers and how that benefit will be documented and evaluated; and
- j) Letters of collaboration from all known industry stakeholders.

PLEASE NOTE: SRSs for Planning Projects cannot exceed 4 pages in length, exclusive of the letters of collaboration. Pages must be formatted with margins of at least 1 inch on all sides. Text must be 12 point or larger and must be left justified. Detailed budgets and budget narratives **ARE NOT** required in the SRS. **The SRS must be submitted in the portable document format (PDF).**

Content of the Stakeholder Relevance Statement for SREP and CAP Projects

- a) Title of the project;
- b) Type of project to be submitted (i.e. SREP, CAP);
- c) Estimated amount of funding to be requested;
- d) Economic/environmental/social significance of the problem being addressed;
- e) Potential economic/environmental/social benefit to solving the problem being addressed;
- f) How stakeholders were engaged in defining the problem being addressed and determining project objectives;
- g) How stakeholders will continue to be engaged in project development and evaluation;
- h) How information developed during project will be translated into actionable recommendations or products and delivered to end-users;
- i) Experience of PD and key co-investigators (6 max) in working with the specific stakeholder community and in dealing with the problem identified (a bio of up to 200 words can be included for each);
- j) List of project objectives with corresponding hypotheses to be tested. [Please note: Because the scientific merit review panel that examines subsequent full applications will help verify that the pre-application and full-application projects are essentially identical, the list of project objectives identified here must carry forward to a full application and the estimated budget in “c” above should be commensurate with those objectives.];
- k) Outline of methodology to be used to achieve project objectives (NB: the list of objectives and the methodology outline, combined, should consume no more than one page);
- l) Logic model chart; and
- m) Letters of support and collaboration from industry stakeholders.

PLEASE NOTE: The SRS cannot exceed 7 pages in length, exclusive of industry letters of collaboration and support. The SRS must be formatted with margins no less than 1 inch on all sides. Text must be 12 point or larger and must be left justified. Detailed budgets and budget narratives **ARE NOT** required in the SRS. **The SRS must be submitted in the portable document format (PDF).**

The SRS should be prepared following Parts IV and V of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following **additional information** is needed in order to prepare an application in response to this RFPA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFPA is overriding.**

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. The following are additional instructions:

- a. **Field 1. Type of Submission.** Click the “Pre-application” box.
- b. **Field 15. Enter Estimated Project Funding.** Enter the estimated amount of funding to be requested.
- c. **Field 20. Pre-application.** Click on “Add Attachment” to attach the Stakeholder Relevance Statement.

2. Supplemental Information Form

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 “Specialty Crop Research Initiative”) and the program code (i.e., enter “SCR1”). 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

Pre-Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on December 8, 2017**. Pre-Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting a pre-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 Pre-applications. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted pre-application within **10 days** of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFPA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the pre-application not being considered by the industry relevance review panel. Once the pre-application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

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

PART V—PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

SCRI has instituted a two-phase review process. The first phase of the review process is the Industry Relevance Review. Each Pre-Application containing a Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS) will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each SRS will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFP. Administrative requirements include: meeting the application deadline; meeting eligibility requirements; satisfying program intent; inclusion of all required sections of the SRS package; and adherence to guidelines. Based on the crop proposed, an SRS that meets these requirements will be evaluated for relevance by a panel of industry reviewers representing closely allied crops. The panel will decide which applications to invite for submission of a full application. Invited applicants will be sent instructions on how to access the full Request for Applications via email once the relevance review is completed.

Industry reviewers will be selected from: (a) persons directly involved in the growing, handling and processing of specialty crops; or (b) persons representing those defined in (a) above through trade organizations or other professional associations.

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

The evaluation criteria listed below, with relative weights in parentheses, will be used to review pre-applications submitted in response to this RFP:

Criteria for Industry Relevance Review for Planning Projects

1. The problem being addressed is significant at a national or regional level. (20 points)
2. Addressing the problem will result in benefits to growers/processors/consumers. (25 points)
3. The project will result in a partnership between a specialty crop sector and a scientific community. (20 points)
4. The project fully integrates research and extension. (15 points)
5. The project will result in a systems approach to insuring the sustainability of the targeted specialty crop sector. (10 points)
6. The project team represents a trans-disciplinary approach to problem solving. (10 points)

Criteria for Industry Relevance Review for SREP and CAP Projects

1. The issues/challenges addressed are relevant on a state, regional or national scale. (20 points)
2. The described research and extension approach will result in impacts/outcomes that are important to the target stakeholders. (25 points)

3. Stakeholders involved in identifying and developing project goals and objectives. (15 points)
4. Information developed by the project team will be delivered to stakeholders in ways that allow them to implement new and/or improved practices. (20 points)
5. Plans are in place for stakeholders to remain actively engaged in project activities. (10 points)
6. Stakeholders will be involved in program evaluation. (5 points)
7. Project team has at least some members who have worked with the target stakeholders in the past and have experience with the described research and extension approach. (5 points)

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.

PART VI—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Tom Bewick; National Program Leader; Division of Plant Systems Production; Institute of Food Production and Sustainability; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-2240; telephone: (202) 401-3356; fax: (202) 401-4888; e-mail: tbewick@nifa.usda.gov.

Administrative/Business Contact –

Susan Bowman, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4324; e-mail: sbowman@nifa.usda.gov.

OR

Adriene Woodin, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4320; e-mail: awoodin@nifa.usda.gov.

PART VII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds; Changes – Not Applicable

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

Because pre-applications do not result in awards, all information conveyed in a pre-application will be considered confidential. A copy of the pre-application will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years.

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 - <https://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

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

Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

Refer to Part II, B for more information.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 C.F.R. part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), and [7 CFR 3430.200, Subpart F – Specialty Crop Research Initiative](#) for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

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

Director means the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and any other officer or employee of NIFA to whom the authority involved is delegated.

Multifunctional research and extension activities are those in which research results are communicated via extension activities to stakeholders and the public in a coordinated manner during the life of a single project.

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

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

Project Director or PD means the single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application, who is responsible for the direction and management of the project and who is approved by the Authorized Departmental Officer. By extension of this definition, then, all project personnel listed as Co-PDs on an application are assumed to be approved by the grantee institution as ready and able to fulfill the role of PD in the event that the PD can no longer serve in that capacity. All other project personnel should be identified as co-principal investigators or key personnel.

Specialty crop means fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).

Trans-disciplinary means a multi-discipline approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner.