Smith-Lever Special Needs Competitive Grants Program

Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 25th, 2021

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA

ANTICIPATED AWARD AMOUNT: Approximately $462,000

USDA United States Department of Agriculture — National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

SMITH-LEVER SPECIAL NEEDS COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number **10.511.**

DATES: Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on **February 25th, 2021.** 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@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 Smith-Lever Special Needs Competitive Grants Program RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Smith-Lever Special Needs Competitive Grants Program (SLSN) RFA for fiscal year (FY) 2021 to implement applied programs that serve public needs in preparation for, during, and after a disaster or disaster threat. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2021 SLSN is approximately $462,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for SLSN projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SLSN grant.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

[Section 3(b)(1) of the Smith-Lever Act, Pub. L. No. 63-95](#) [(7 U.S.C. 343)](#) allows the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), to conduct competitive grant programs for State Extension Services at 1862 Land-Grant Institutions to support innovative, education-based approaches to provide cooperative agricultural extension work.

B. Purpose and Priorities

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), there were 14 billion-dollar weather disasters in 2018 (approximately $91 billion) and another 14 disasters in 2019 (approximately $45 billion) – for a combined total of approximately $136 billion in losses (https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/weather-disasters.html). Among those events were historic flooding in the Midwest that negatively impacted crop and livestock production and Western wildfires that altered farm and ranch operations. 2020 has seen another outbreak of destructive wildfires in the west concurrent with Hurricane Laura making landfall as a Category 4 storm along the Louisiana Gulf coast. The 2020 calendar year has also been distinguished by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, as well as an increase in social protests. These ongoing events have raised public safety concerns for individuals, families and communities. Whether natural or human-made, a disaster or threat of disaster exacts mental and physical health tolls, in addition to the more easily quantified financial costs. Further, the associated challenges may disproportionally affect people of color and those economically vulnerable. For agricultural producers, such disasters or threats may lead to disruptions in plant and animal production, the supply chain, infrastructure, and the environment.

The purpose of the Smith-Lever Special Needs Competitive Grants Program (SLSN), Assistance Listing 10.511, is to support innovative, education-based approaches to addressing disaster preparedness and specific responses related to natural and human-made disasters or disaster threats. The goals and objectives of SLSN include supporting quality of life in communities across the United States by addressing disaster preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery in the context of food and agricultural sciences. The SLSN also seeks to continue to provide information and tools to USDA, stakeholders, and collaborators to improve decision-making in handling disasters.

Funds will support innovative extension education initiatives that address risks, hazards, and disaster and disaster threats. The SLSN enables the Cooperative Extension System (CES) to assist in preparing for, providing an educational response to, and recovering from disasters and disaster threats. Some types of hazards and disaster-related programming funded in previous years include uncertainties caused by losses of economic infrastructure, severe weather or other natural disasters, security breaches, human disease, or high consequence animal diseases and plant pests. The SLSN promotes awareness and capacity building of urban/rural communities' response to disasters by strengthening individuals, families, farms and small businesses disaster preparedness through education and collaborations with other agencies/volunteer organizations.

The SLSN aligns with the following:

USDA Strategic Goals for 2018-2022:
- Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agriculture Producers to Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World, and
- Goal 4: Facilitate rural prosperity and economic development.

USDA Science Blueprint:
- Strengthen food, agricultural, and forest production, processing, manufacturing, utilization, and marketing through new technologies, innovation, and data analysis to create jobs and economic opportunities in rural areas.

USDA Agriculture Innovation Agenda:
- Work with existing regional outreach networks and other partnerships to identify innovation opportunities in order to rapidly integrate the latest technologies into our programs and understand how those technologies can best serve our customers.

NIFA intends to fund SLSN projects to implement applied programs that serve public needs in preparation for, during, and after disaster or disaster threats. National, regional, and/or multi-state efforts are prioritized. Highly replicable single-state projects may be considered if they have a strong plan for transferring successful methods to other states. The SLSN will also fund the development of educational programs and demonstration activities focusing on disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. The most competitive proposals will provide educational and communication leadership across an optimized mix of these and other resources.

NIFA welcomes proposals that add new or build upon existing web-based educational materials on the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) website. In such instances, applicants may contact the EDEN executive committee via the EDEN website during proposal formulation to solicit guidance on how best to interface with EDEN on the SLSN and to secure a letter of support as appropriate.

Handling of baseline data and data collection will be addressed in the Data Management Plan (DMP) in accordance with the Part IV(B) of this RFA.

eXtension
NIFA encourages (but does not require) projects that develop content suitable for delivery through eXtension (https://extension.org/) and the Regional Rural Development Centers.

Behavioral and Social Sciences

Behavioral education and promotion of disaster preparedness is important in planning for individual and community resiliency. Incorporation of social and behavioral sciences is key for addressing many of the challenges facing communities, such as helping people plan for and mitigate disasters/threats. Effective education programs and services in social and behavioral sciences can promote and enhance disaster preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery and in the long run increase community resiliency. Such initiatives can provide timely and adequate

information to communities that lead to behavior change. Extension outreach disaster education projects should include programs and activities that use community leadership to address resiliency. Projects should promote increases in Extension professionals' capacity to engage in disaster/threat education in communities, which includes gaining the knowledge and skills to collaborate, connect, communicate, and build community capacity in the context of disaster education. The proposed Extension outreach program should include activities that integrate social and behavioral sciences in the program design and implementation. Extension educators and other relevant partners, supported by innovative communication platforms, can employ these programs and services to sustain disaster/threat education activities that successfully protect and enhance vitality and resiliency of communities. SLSN provides funding for such initiatives and may include strategies that help promote dialogue to address complex issues, community engagement, and cultural understanding.

Global Engagement

NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. To attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promotion of global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and safe and nutritious food security in a growing world, NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners can contribute to these advances. Thus, applications in response to this program's RFA may include collaborations with international partners. Only eligible U.S. institutions may apply; such applications may include subcontracts to international partners or other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the U.S. Additional guidance on including international activities is provided on the International Partnerships website.

NIFA is soliciting applications for SLSN national, regional, multi-state, or state projects under the following areas:

- Education and technical assistance through inter-disciplinary disaster/threat training programs and demonstration projects for problem solving, especially those which build upon already existing strengths, that contribute to or expand the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and/or eXtension educational materials related to disaster preparation, mitigation, response and recovery;

- Inter-disciplinary education, training and technical assistance programs and demonstration projects that promote dialogue as a way to address complex issues and cultural understanding;

- Long-range family, farm, and community planning projects that enhance implementation of programs that serve public needs in preparation for, during, and after disasters within impacted states and across impacted regions; and

- Communication delivery of key information that meets end-users' needs in a timely fashion with consideration of potentially limited communication channels due to disaster/threat situations.

Additional requirements on expected performance goals, indicators and targets may be required as a condition of award.

C. Program Area Description

Program Area Code: MB (program code name is ESNP Special Needs)
Application Deadline: February 25, 2021 (5:00 p.m. ET)
Grant Types: Standard, Planning, and Conference or Training Workshop
Project Types: Extension Standard, Extension Planning, and Extension Conference or Training Workshop Grants
Program Area Contact: R. Brent Elrod; 202.445.5456; richard.elrod@usda.gov

To be considered for funding, projects must support extension activities through at least one of the following strategies:

1. Enhance national, regional, multi-state or state networks that support official information by ensuring the content is:
   - In a format appropriate to the situation and intended audience;
   - Delivered in a timely fashion; and
   - Science-based.

2. Provide national, regional, multi-state, or state education and communications leadership to develop or add value to current educational materials regarding disaster/threat issues, utilizing a distribution mix of the EDEN website, eXtension, Regional Rural Development Centers, related social media, and/or other outlets. This strategy could include materials targeted to underserved audiences (such as people who speak English as a second language, individuals with low literacy, and older adults who lack technology access or literacy).

3. Improve national, regional, multi-state, or state stakeholder partnerships (which might include the public, governments at all levels, non-profit and/or volunteer organizations, academia, and/or industry) to prepare for and respond to disasters/threats through extension education.

4. Deliver extension education to affected citizens and communities, in one or more states, to address effects of a major declared disaster or social unrest that occurred no more than 12 months prior to the application due date of this RFA.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for SLSN grant in FY 2021 is approximately $462,000. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any 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 ASAP.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2021, eligible entities may submit applications to the SLSN as one of the following types of requests:

New application. New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see Appendix III for definition).This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the SLSN.

Resubmitted application. Resubmitted applications must include the response to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see Appendix III for definition). This is an application that has previously been submitted to the NIFA but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV).

C. Project and Grant Types

The following describes the types of projects that are eligible for funding. NIFA does not plan to award a specific number of awards under each project type and all proposals will be reviewed together.

1. **Standard Grant**

   Standard awards of federal funds for this grant generally range from $50,000 to $150,000. The amount requested will vary depending on the geographic scope of the project (national, regional, multi-state, or state) and the urgency of the need(s) being addressed. Typical project periods range from one to three years. Only applications that address one or more of the following five key target areas will be considered for funding:

   - Education and technical assistance;
   - Collaboration;
   - Long range family, farm, community and planning projects;
   - Communication delivery; and/or
   - Dissemination of credible, science-based information.

2. Planning Grant

The budget for the planning grant, which has a maximum of one-year duration, may include an appropriate amount for transportation and subsistence costs for participants and for other related costs. Planning awards of federal funds for this grant will generally not exceed $15,000 and are not renewable. Include an itemized breakdown of all support requested in the Budget Justification (Field K. of the R&R Budget Fed/NonFed).

3. Conference or Training Workshop Grant

The Conference Grant may support a meeting that brings together scientists, educators, and community stakeholders to address a critical issue(s) and update information to advance disaster/threat preparedness, mitigation, response, and/or recovery. This support should be for a new initiative that addresses a critical or emerging issue, i.e. promoting cultural understanding. These activities should be recognized as integral parts of scientific efforts. The Conference Grant should result in a final report with recommendations for next steps. In addition, the Conference Grant may be used for training to scale up an already successful effort. The project must have demonstrated impact at the local, state, or regional level and be viable for a national scale up to expand the program. Individual Conference Grants may be awarded up to $50,000 for one year and are not renewable. The effort must be evaluated to report outcomes. Include an itemized breakdown of all support requested in the Budget Justification (Field K. of the R&R Budget Fed/NonFed).

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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 must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training. See Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research for further information.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A.   A. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the SLSN Grant must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or, preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Applications may only be submitted by 1862 Land-grant Institutions in the 50 states and the U.S. territories, American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply, provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. The 1862 land-grant institutions may partner with each other as well as with other land-grant institutions (e.g., 1890s and 1994s), non-land-grant institutions, and non-governmental organizations within their state or their region on joint proposals.

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.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. Duplicate submission refers to an institution submitting the same application more than once in the cycle (we accept for review the proposal with the latest submitted time stamp before the deadline and reject any earlier submissions).

Multiple submission refers to a project director from an institution submitting more than one proposal with different scopes in the same cycle. In such rare instances, all proposals from this PD would be declined review. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

For those new to Federal financial assistance, a Grants Overview Page is available on the NIFA website. This page includes information about free Grants 101 Training and other resources that are highly recommended for those seeking to increase understanding of Federal awards.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

Match Required – Applicants **MUST** provide matching contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis for all Federal funds awarded under the SLSN. Pursuant to rules and policies governing Section 3(b) & (c) of the Smith–Lever Act as amended, "no allotment shall be made to a State under subsection (b) or (c), and no payments from the allotment shall be made to a State, in excess of

the amount that the State makes available out of non-federal funds for cooperative extension work."

To comply with the matching requirements of the SLSN, applicants are required to provide 100% matching funds from non-federal sources for all proposed federal funds sought in the application. In-kind and third-party contributions are not allowed for this program; thus, all matching funds must come from the applicant institution (sub-awards/partner match would be considered third party).

No match is required for 1994 institutions and Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Only 50% matching funds are required for Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands; NIFA may consider waiver of match for these territories. Additionally, consistent with 48 U.S.C. 1469a(d) and 1469a note, notwithstanding any other provision of law, in the case of American Samoa, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands, NIFA will waive any requirement for local matching funds under $200,000 (including in-kind contributions).

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A.   Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and Grants 101. **Table 1** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part II § 1** of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Application Guide) contains detailed information regarding the Grants.gov registration process.

Table 1. Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	*New Users* to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements)
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-SLBCD-008098, search for application here: Opportunity Package.
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 2: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer based support: Grants.gov iPortal *Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays.*	Email: policy@usda.gov *Key Information*: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

B. Content and Form of the Application

The Application Guide is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the Application Guide if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that

meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 3** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 3: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References (All references are to the Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	**Part III § 3**
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	**Part III § 6.1**
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	**Part VII**
Follow the submission instructions.	**Part IV § 1.5**
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	**Part IV § 1.5**
Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support, and keep a record of the correspondence.	**N/A**
Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within *30* days of the application deadline.	**N/A**

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V § 2** and **Part V § 2.17** of the Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V § 3** of the Application Guide.

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V § 4** of the Application Guide.
1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of See **Part V § 4.7** of the Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates.

   The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of SLSN. Project Summary should provide the following information, in the order listed below:

   - Project title;
   - List of Project Directors (PDs) and Co-PDs and their institutions/organizations;
   - Concise (250 words or less) description of the project;
   - Funding amount requested, *per year* and *in total*;
   - Proposal type: New Submission or Resubmission;
   - Project type: Standard, Planning, or Conference Grant.

   2. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 10 pages of written text and up to 5 additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (15 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all the following:

- 1-inch margins;
- Times New Roman 12-point font; and
- Single- or double-spaced text.

Please include a one-page Table of Contents in the project narrative, which will not count towards the Project Narrative's 15-page limitation.

Response to Previous Review (if applicable)
This requirement only applies to Resubmitted Applications or Resubmitted Renewal Applications as described in Part II, B. The Project Narrative attachment is to include two components: 1) a one-page response to the previous review (containing the previous proposal number in the first line) titled "Response to Previous Review" as the first page of the attachment and 2) the 15 page Project Narrative, as required (see Part IV, C. 3. b., above). The one-page "Response to Previous Review" does not count against the 15-page limit of the Project Narrative.

In developing the Project Narrative section of your application, use the sections headings listed below. Indicate the Section letter and number in your response, e.g., type "A.1", "A.2", etc., before your response to each question. Please do not combine two or more questions or refer to another section of the Project Narrative in your response, such as indicating that the response for B.2 is in C.7.

Section A. Introduction:

1. Provide background information on and describe the disaster education problem that the project proposes to address. Provide references for data. Explain and substantiate any assumptions made.
   • Describe the targeted issue to be addressed and why it is important.
   • What is the current problem or situation?
   • Who is affected by the problem and the approximate size of the population affected?
   • How long has the problem existed?
   • What will happen if the problem is not addressed?
   • Describe the potential benefit to the population group or community served.
   • If the project will support the Extension Disaster Education Network, briefly describe how.
   • If the project seeks to contribute to eXtension and/or the Regional Rural Development Centers, briefly describe how it will complement or enhance resources currently available to Extension professionals and/or the public.
   • If proposing a planning project, briefly lay out the project steps beyond the planning period and indicate how the SLSN will enable the project to become competitive for future funding.
2. Concisely state which of the five program areas the project will address (*Enhance national, regional, multi-state, or state networks; Provide national, regional, multi-state, and/or state education and communications leadership;, Improve national, regional, multi-state, or state stakeholder partnerships; and/or Provide national, regional, multi-state, or state educational*

leadership as a result of a declared disaster). What geographic area(s) is/are served? Provide relevant national, regional, multi-state, or state statistics and other data to document the need for this issue to be addressed in the target community. Identify what has already been done and where gaps remain.
3. Concisely state the overall goal(s) of the proposed project; and
4. Describe how this project will build upon or expand related work or programs.

Section B: Objectives

Objectives must be realistic and answer the questions of "Whom," "What," and "To What Extent." Each objective needs a specific action plan describing a reasonable scope of activities that can be accomplished within the resource and time constraints of the grant. Be sure to:
1. Define the target audience and/or end users of project deliverables. Support for identifying these specific groups must be clearly reflected in the data provided for the state(s) in which the proposed project will operate; and
2. Present a clear, concise set of project objectives.

Section C: Methods

Describe the procedures for the proposed effort, including:
1. Techniques and methods, including their feasibility and rationale for their use in this project, and how they accomplish stated objectives;
2. A description of the proposed project activities related to the objectives provided and in the sequence in which it is planned. A project timeline should include education/extension/planning activities with milestones, partners'/collaborators' roles (if appropriate) and verifiable indicators, which demonstrate progress;
3. A brief description of participant recruitment strategy(ies) to be used;
4. Project development and implementation challenges that may be encountered and how you plan to address those challenges; and
5. Limitations to proposed procedures and how you plan to address the limitations.

Section D: Project Performance Assessment

Project performance assessment plans allow projects to review outcomes achieved and to use results to inform, refine and adjust future project plans as needed. Applicants to SLSN need to submit a plan for monitoring and measuring performance of their projects. The plan must include the following elements:
1. A logic model or alternative schematic such as theory of change that illustrates the causal linkages between planned activities and desired outcomes. A logic model template and explanation of its components can be located at: Integrated Programs' Logic Model Planning Process. The logic model is required for Extension Standard Grant only.
2. A Timeline to demonstrate the duration and the sequence of project activities, as well as division of labor. The Timeline should depict project quarters by project years.
3. Indicate the amount of funding that will be set aside for monitoring performance of your project.
4. Indicate who on the team will provide the project performance assessment oversight. NIFA strongly encourages, but does not require, applicants to include on their teams colleagues

skilled in project performance measurement or evaluation who can help develop the monitoring plan and, if feasible, participate in carrying out the plan.

Section E: Project Management Plan

1. If the proposed SLSN project represents collaboration between two or more land-grant institutions or other organization, provide an explanation of how the relationship and communication will be managed.
2. Describe how the relationship and communication between the State Cooperative Extension System and the non-land-grant partners will be managed, if applicable.
3. Describe the fiscal and administrative oversight for the project.

Section F: Partner Roles

1. State Cooperative Extension System and non-Land Grant partners may jointly or individually provide leadership for different objectives/activities. Briefly describe roles of key staff on the proposed SLSN project and percent of time each will be dedicating to the project.
2. Land Grant Institutions submitting joint applications must demonstrate that the institutions' roles and responsibilities align with the main aspects of project development and implementation. Describe institutions' relevant work that demonstrate its ability to successfully execute the proposed project.

   Please be as specific as possible in describing the linkages among activities, outputs, and different types of outcomes (e.g., changes in participant knowledge, awareness, competency, behavior, or changes in condition). Also, indicate who on the team will provide the lead and oversight for design and conduct of project outcomes evaluation. We highly recommend involving on your proposed project a faculty/professional with expertise/strong experience in developing and implementing program evaluations to lead the design and conduct of your SLSN project's outcome evaluation.

3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V § 4.12** of the [Application Guide](#).
   a. **Commitment Letters**. No page limit. Letters of commitment from all partners (signed by the AR of the partnering organization) stating that the partners involved have agreed to their stated roles in the project and have agreed to abide by the Management Plan. Letters from other organizations or people whose participation is important to the success of the project, committing those collaborators and partners to specific roles, are also encouraged. Title the attachment(s) as 'Letter of Commitment – Organization Name' in the document header and save file as 'LetterofCommitment_OrganizationName'. Other more general letters of support (i.e., from those who are not committing to a specific role in the project) are not needed and should not be included. See Part VIII, E for an example of a commitment letter.

   b. **Bibliography.** No page limit. Title the attachment as "BibliographyReferencesCited." All work cited in the proposal should be referenced in this section of the application. All references must be complete, include titles and all co-authors, conform to an

acceptable journal format, and be listed in alphabetical order using the last name of the first author or listed by number in the order of citation.

Do not add any other attachments not specifically requested in this RFA. Specifically, do not attach examples of curricula or other appendices. Attaching additional narrative or figures or tables other than those specifically requested in this RFA will result in disqualification from review.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). See **Part V § 5** of the Application Guide for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see **Part V § 6** of the Application Guide).

R&R Budget. See **Part V § 7** of the Application Guide.
1. Indirect costs (IDC) – See Part IV § C of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V 7.9** of the Application Guide for additional information.

Matching is required for this program, so the R&R Budget (Federal and Non-Federal) form is mandatory. Grant awards cannot be issued until all required matching has been documented and verified. To comply with the matching requirements, the applicant institution is required to provide 100% matching funds from non-federal sources for all proposed federal funds sought in the application. Third party in-kind contributions are not allowed for this program.

All matching must be summarized on a separate page and placed in the proposal as part of the Budget Narrative. Applicants may 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.

NIFA no longer requires written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement). However, applicants are still subject to documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, etc. as specified in 2 CFR Part 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (the Uniform Guidance)," 7 CFR 3430, "Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions," and program-specific regulations, as applicable. In instances where match is required, any resulting award will require the signature of an Authorized Representative. Only when NIFA receives the award signed by the AR will award funds be released and available for drawdown.

Data Management Plan. A DMP is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V § B of this RFA, **Part III § 3.1 of the Application Guide** and NIFA's Data Management Plan).

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part VI § 1** of the Application Guide.
1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. (i.e., enter "ESNP Special Needs") and the program code (i.e., enter "MB"). Accurate entry is critical.

2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part VI § 1.8** of the [Application Guide].

Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. This is required for corporate applicants. See **Part VI § 2** of the [Application Guide] for a description of the term, "corporation."

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. While the checklist referenced above should be used to determine the application for completeness, the application should be checked additionally for the following required item(s). This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight required items that are commonly overlooked by applicants**:**
- Project Summary/Abstract
- Project Narrative with all required sections
- Bibliography
- Budget Justification
- Logic Model and Timeline
- Data Management Plan
- Current and Pending Support forms
- Conflict of Interest forms
- Match Letter signed by Authorized Representative
- Response to Previous Review (if applicable);
- Letters of Commitment
- Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 25, 2021.** 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 15 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

Pursuant to Section 1473 of the National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, as amended, 7 USC 3319, indirect costs and tuition remission are not allowable costs under section 2(c)(1)(B), Section 3(d) of Smith-Lever) projects, and no funds will be approved for this purpose. Further, costs that are a part of an institution's indirect cost pool (e.g., administrative or clerical salaries) may not be reclassified as direct costs for the purpose of making them allowable.

You may not use grant funds awarded under this authority to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space. You may not purchase or install fixed equipment in such space or plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, Section 1.5 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.   NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates 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 scientific peer- review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements using a review panel **(see NIFA Peer Review Process)**.

Scientific Peer Review Process:
NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel 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 NIFA will recommend that your project is either approved for support from currently available funds or declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or 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 AFRI project for funding.

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, _not_ including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

B. Evaluation Criteria

A reviewer's written evaluation entails two levels of assessment. First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. After the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer then evaluates the overall likelihood that the project will have significant outcome and impact. These written reviews are used to begin panel discussions with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. Through

these discussions, peer review panelists come to a consensus on the final rating and ranking of proposals. A complete description of NIFA's peer review process can be found at the NIFA website:

[NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA:

1. **Potential for Advancing Education about Disaster/Threat Preparedness and Response; Significance of the Problem**

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will increase knowledge and skills of disaster preparedness and response. Elements considered include institutional goals, USDA's Goals, identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, body of knowledge and data, justification for the project, innovation, advancing educational equity, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, potential for enhancing extension's reach of providing innovative, education-based approaches to addressing disaster preparedness and specific responses related to natural and man-made disasters, and potential for adoption by others.

2. **Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages**

This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, logic model, scope of the project to produce expected outcomes/changes in knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and/or behaviors in targeted population, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. Emphasis is placed on the educational support provided to the applicant institution through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project. Proposed approach should be one that can be implemented at regional or national level and utilized via existing electronic distribution media such as the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), eXtension, and/or the Regional Rural Development Centers.

3. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building**

This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its extension 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 and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support.

4. **Key Personnel**

This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications 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 dissemination of these findings.

5. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness**

This criterion relates to how well the total budget 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; matching funding, 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, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority educational 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 [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#) for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D.   Centers of Excellence

In addition to evaluating applicants using the criterion listed in Part V § B of this RFA, NIFA will use the COE standards described in this RFA to evaluate applicants that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a COE. In instances where applicants are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-COE applicant, NIFA will prioritize the COE applicant meeting the COE criteria. NIFA will effectively use the COE prioritization as a "tie breaker." Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a COE or who are not deemed to have met the COE standards may still receive funding.

Applicants that meet the COE requirements will have the COE designation in their notice of award. Entities recognized as COE will maintain that distinction for the duration of their period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

E. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information relating to an applicant prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only have to update their information if they had previously provided the information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, 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, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

F. 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 NIFA for a period of three years.

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A.   General

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and 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 must 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,7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in 2 CFR 200.211 (see NIFA's Terms and Conditions).

B.   Administrative and National Policy Requirements
Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: Federal Regulations). Unless specifically noted by statue or award-specific requirements, NIFA Policy Guide applies to all NIFA awards.

C.   Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements
The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

Grantees will be expected to provide the following information in REEport, NIFA's reporting system:

1. A brief statement of the issue or problem that the project addresses and why the issue is significant; (**non-technical summary)**

2. A description of the activity or activities being taken to address the issues, including the number of anticipated and actual beneficiaries (where applicable)

3. A description of the changes in knowledge, behavior, or condition that occurred, supported by quantitative and qualitative data

Additionally, grantees will be required to submit regular progress reports and a final technical report to NIFA. The agency depends on the information provided in these reports to assess progress toward NIFA's strategic and programmatic goals; develop and justify budget requests; and, communicate the value of the work of NIFA's partners to the U.S. Congress and the American people. As shrinking budgets result in more competition for Federal and State funds, it is imperative that NIFA has rigorous data to demonstrate the relevance of its programs and the effectiveness of our partners who implement NIFA-funded programs.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A.   Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

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.

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 (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):
1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring);
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award;
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project;
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (Cost Principles), 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, unless waived by the federal awarding agency,
5. 48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures;
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense (2 CFR §200.75 Participant support costs);
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see 2 CFR §200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards), unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
8. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity; and
9. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B.   Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards
When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of NIFA transaction records, which are available to the public. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, applicants should clearly mark any information within the application they wish to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary. NIFA will retain a copy of an application that does not result in an award for three years. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An applicant may withdraw at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C.   Regulatory Information
This program is not subject to the provisions of 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.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Programmatic Contacts

Name	Email	Telephone
R. Brent Elrod	richard.elrod@usda.gov	816-926-2535
Deborah Reyome	deborah.reyome@usda.gov	816-642-1203

For administrative questions related to
- Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
- Other RFA or application questions, please email policy@usda.gov
- Awards under this RFA, please email awards@usda.gov

NIFA's Mailing Address:
U.S. Postal Mailing Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Name	Acronyms
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998	AREERA
Agriculture and Food Research Initiative	AFRI
Authorized Representative	AR
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance	CFDA
Center of Excellence	COE
Coordinated Agricultural Project	CAP
Data Management Plan	DMP
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	NIFA
Request for Application	RFA
Research, Education, and Economics	REE
United States Department of Agriculture	USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

Terms	Definitions
Continuation Award	An award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the federal government and the public.
Matching	The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.
New Application	An application not previously submitted to a program.
Renewal Application	A project application that seeks additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award.
Resubmitted Application	A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.
Resubmitted Renewal Application	A project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. This is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to but not funded.