



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food
and Agriculture

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The logo for the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), featuring the letters 'NIFA' in a white serif font against a dark background with a stylized sunburst.

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Centers of Excellence at 1890 Institutions

(1890 COEs)

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year 2020
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	January 31, 2020
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	December 6, 2019
AWARD AMOUNT:	\$4.8 million
CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE NUMBER:	10.523

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States (U.S.) Department of Agriculture
(USDA)

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. The Centers of Excellence at 1890 Institutions (1890 COEs) is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number 10.523.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, January 31, 2020
Letter of Intent:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, December 6, 2019
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

Stakeholder Input. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and use comments to help meet the requirements of [Section 103\(c\)\(2\) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 \(7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)\)](#). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@nifa.usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Centers of Excellence at 1890 Institutions RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for 1890 COEs projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions. NIFA requests Letters of Intent (LOIs) and applications for the Centers of Excellence at 1890 Institutions (1890 COEs) program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 to host one of the three existing Centers of Excellence established on the 125th Anniversary of the Second Morrill Act of 1890.

The intent of the 1890 COEs is to increase profitability and rural prosperity in underserved farming communities; address critical needs for enhanced international training and development; and increase diversity in the science, technology, engineering, agriculture and mathematics (STEAM) pipeline. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2020 is approximately \$4.8 million.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Pursuant to the authority contained in Section 774 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-6), grants will be awarded to the 1890 Land-grant Institutions (those receiving funds under the Second Morrill Act; 7 U.S.C. 3221 et seq.), including Tuskegee University to support the three (3) existing 125th Anniversary Centers of Excellence.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The 1890 COEs program directly aligns with the [2018-2022 USDA Strategic Plan](#), *Strategic Goal #4*:

Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development; Objective 4.1: Expand rural business opportunity and rural quality of life with access to capital; improved infrastructure, broadband access and connectivity; and support for workforce availability.

The purpose of the 1890 COEs program is to provide support for three existing Centers established in 2015 in conjunction with the 125th Anniversary of the Second Morrill Act of 1890. Funding will be awarded to build capacity of the following 125th Anniversary Centers of Excellence:

1. The Center for Innovation and Sustainable Small Farms, Ranches, and Forestlands (CISFRF);
2. The Center of Excellence for International Engagement and Development (CEIED); and
3. The Virtual Center to Motivate and Educate for Achievement (MEA).

CISFRF

The CISFRF will fund research, extension, and integrated projects designed to increase profitability, natural resource conservation and market demand for small farmers, including socially disadvantaged/underserved farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. Projects may also address challenges related to healthier families and enhanced quality of life in rural communities.

CEIED

The CEIED will fund teaching, research, extension, and integrated projects designed to supply the country with a globally educated workforce and support critical global development needs. Projects may include, but are not limited to, experiential learning opportunities for students; collaborative research to address trans-boundary challenges; and extension projects that have mutual benefits domestically and abroad.

MEA

The MEA will fund teaching, research and extension projects to enhance academic achievement in food, agricultural, natural resources, and human (FANH) sciences. Projects may include development of STEAM academies, support for graduate degree program, 4-H STEAM program, and support for research related STEAM education (e.g., barriers to broadening participation and success of minorities in STEAM fields).

1890 COE

As used here, an “1890 COE” refers to an administrative unit, not a brick and mortar facility. The 1890 COEs facilitate administration, coordination, and management of multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research, teaching, extension and integrated projects. The 1890 COEs serve as focal points to assess regional and national needs and establish priorities for cooperatively funded projects.

The 1890 COEs provide leadership and administrative support for planning, development, implementation, and performance tracking of the research, teaching and extension projects targeted at the critical needs addressed by the respective Centers. The 1890 COEs also ensure the relevancy, quality, and performance of funded projects. Each 1890 COE can sub-contract with a non-1890 university or a non-governmental organization to support the administrative and coordination responsibilities of the Centers.

Each 1890 COE will consist of a host 1890 institution that will maintain fiduciary responsibility for the awarded funds. NIFA encourages a consortium of 1890 institutions to provide programmatic and administrative direction for each of the 1890 COEs. The Centers must also have developed a process for soliciting input and partnerships from relevant entities (i.e., industry, government, community-based organizations, etc.).

The host institution(s) for each 1890 COE must have: 1) demonstrated commitment and competencies related to the mission of the respective Center; 2) ability to provide broad programmatic leadership for research, teaching, and extension activities administered by the Center; 3) demonstrated competency in grant and subcontract management; and 4) ability and willingness to provide administrative support for the Center.

The 1890 COEs will solicit proposals from the 1890 institutions through a fair and transparent competitive process. All projects funded by the Centers must address the identified objectives and priorities. The solicitation will encourage multidisciplinary and multi-institutional projects.

Each 1890 COE must submit an annual accomplishment report and a final termination report into the NIFA REEport system within 90 days from the end reporting period as per the Terms and Conditions. Annual and Termination reports must include: 1) an outline of project information including specific projects and project objectives and goals for awards funded by the Centers; and 2) a concise description of individual project progress; and 3) how the work aligns with the 1890 COE goals, and USDA and NIFA strategic goals.

eXtension. The 1890 COEs program encourages (but does not require) projects that develop content suitable for delivery through [eXtension](#).

Global Engagement. NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners may be necessary to attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promote global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and promote safe and nutritious food security in a growing world. Therefore, although application to this RFA is limited to eligible U.S. institutions, applicants may collaborate with international partners, to include subcontracts to international partners or

other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the U.S. (The following AFRI program guidance is also relevant for the 1890 COEs program - see [International Partnerships](#)).

Leadership Skills Development. The development of leadership skills, knowledge, and qualities are necessary to prepare students for agricultural and related careers in the private sector, government, and academia. The 1890 COEs teaching/education applications must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to equip students with technical and leadership abilities upon graduation. Specific activities may include:

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

The 1890 COEs program is aligned with the following [USDA Strategic Goals](#):

1. Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers To Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World;
2. Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development;
3. Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research;
4. Strategic Goal 7: Provide all Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	COE
Program Code Name:	1890COE
CFDA Number	10.523
Project Type:	Integrated
Grant Type:	Standard
Application Deadline:	January 31, 2020
Letter of Intent Deadline:	December 6, 2019
Grant Duration:	24-36 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	3
Maximum Award Amount:	\$1,600,000

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for the 1890 COEs program in FY 2020 is approximately \$4.8 million for grants. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

In FY 2020, applicants will compete to host one of the three 1890 COEs in two stages. Applicants will be required to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) (see [Part IV., A., Letter of Intent \(LOI\) Instructions](#)). The LOIs will be evaluated by program staff for suitability to the program and in regard to program priorities, needs, and scope. Invitations to submit a full application will be issued by the program staff to *only one* 1890 Institution or consortium for each of the three Centers. Applications submitted without prior approval of the LOI will be returned without review.

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Application for FY 2020 is limited to the following applications type:

1. *New application*: **Only new applications** will be accepted and evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein.

C. 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. Eligibility Requirements

Letters of Intent (LOI) (see [Part IV., A., Letter of Intent \(LOI\) Instructions](#)) may only be submitted by an individual or consortium of the nineteen 1890 land-grant institutions, including Tuskegee University (as identified in the Second Morrill Act; 7 U.S.C. 322 et seq.). Full applications will be requested from individual or consortium of the 1890 land-grant institutions selected by NIFA. Grant recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply for the purpose of supporting the overall coordination and administration of the 1890 COEs. 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.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. 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.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No Match Required - The 1890 COEs program has *NO* matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Letter of Intent (LOI) Instructions

A Letter of Intent is required for the 1890 COEs program. Applicants must submit an LOI by the due date specified in the RFA. The LOI is a prerequisite for the submission of an application for the 1890 COEs program. Although an LOI does not enter into the review of a subsequent application, the information that it contains allows program staff to develop invitations for full proposals, estimate the potential review workload, and plan the review process.

Please use the following guidelines for LOI submission:

1. The LOI must adhere to the following formatting guidelines:
 - a. Font size: 12 point
 - b. Margins: One inch in all directions
 - c. Line spacing: Must not exceed six lines of text per vertical inch
 - d. Page size: 8.5 inches × 11 inches
2. The LOI is limited to three pages.
 - a. On Page 1, provide only the following information:
 - i. the name, professional title, department, institution, and e-mail address of the host institution's project director (PD) and name, professional title, department, and institution of all collaborating investigators; and
 - ii. the name of the Center of Excellence (only one of the three) to be addressed in the application.
 - b. On Pages 2-3, include:
 - i. a descriptive title
 - ii. rationale
 - iii. overall goal
 - iv. specific objectives
 - v. approach
 - vi. potential impact and expected outcomes
- To further clarify LOI instructions for the FY 2020 1890 COEs, LOIs should also include:
 1. description of the goal(s) addressed by the Center of Excellence and approach to ensure support for multi-disciplinary and integrated projects (i.e., research, teaching and/or extension);
 2. description of the approach used to ensure fair and inclusive participation of all best qualified 1890 institutions;
 3. clear description of the approach to providing administrative oversight for the Center of Excellence; and
 4. description of the benefits to the FANH sciences within the “potential impact and expected outcomes” section of the LOI.
3. All LOIs must be in a portable document format (PDF). Applicants must submit the LOI as an attachment and send via email to the programmatic contact identified in this RFA

(see [Appendix 1: Agency Contacts, Programmatic Contact](#)). The subject of the email must be formatted as: Letter of Intent [Program Code] _ [PD’s Last Name].

4. A LOI is required for all three (3) 1890 Centers of Excellence. Additionally, if there is more than one LOI for a Center, NIFA will select the LOI that demonstrates more alignment with one of the three existing 125th Anniversary Centers of Excellence.
5. NIFA will give priority to 1890 Institutions or consortia that previously hosted one of the 125th Anniversary Centers of Excellence.
6. Applicants must notify the appropriate program contact of any changes to key project personnel, title, or objectives between the submission of the LOI and the full application.

B. 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 3** 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 3. Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	<i>New Users</i> 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-1890COE-006990 , 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 4: 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	Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov Phone: 202-401-5048 <i>Key Information:</i> Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
<i>Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays.</i>	

C. 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 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: 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 and
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.	
Contact NIFA if applicant does not received correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 30 days of the application deadline.	

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 the 1890 COEs program. See **Part V § 4.7** of the [Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.
2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed **20 1.5 spaced** pages of written text and up to **5 1.5 spaced** additional pages for figures and tables (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all of the following:

a. Rationale and significance

- i. *Problem and Opportunity* - Clearly state the research, teaching, or extension problem or opportunity to be addressed by the 1890 COE.
- ii. *Justification* - Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed 1890 COE. Discuss the target audiences that the Center will engage, and the potential beneficiaries. Discuss how the projects funded through the Center will be of value at the regional, national, or international level(s).
- iii. *Products and Results* - Explain, including metrics, the expected products, and results, outputs, and their potential impact on strengthening food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences education, research and extension in the United States.

b. Management Plan

Describe the management plan that will be implemented to ensure that effective and efficient operation of the 1890 COE. This section must address the following:

- i. The institutional support and capabilities of the host 1890 institution;
- ii. The role of member institutions in the consortium (if applicable);
- iii. Plan for soliciting stakeholder (i.e., industry, government, community-based organizations, etc.) input regarding funding priorities; and
- iv. The role of any known non-1890 subcontractor(s) that will support the overall administration and coordination of the 1890 COE.

c. Sub-award Program and the 1890 COE Competitive Process

Provide a description of the sub-award program and the competitive process that will ensure effective management of federal resources. Include the following:

- i. A description of the sub-award program that will be used to solicit and select applicants for each funding opportunity to ensure a fair and open decision-making process;
- ii. Details on the proposal review process, the process for selecting panelists, and the criteria that will be used to rank the applications during the selection process; and
- iii. Rationale (if applicable) regarding the applicant's intent on requesting applications for sub-awards that deviate from the primary criteria for projects funded through this 1890 COE.

A streamlining agreement may be requested for competitively selected sub-award projects.

To alleviate the administrative burden and expedite the awards process, NIFA may agree to modify the requirements for the administration of the 1890 COE awards. When the sub-award process has been approved by NIFA (streamlining agreement), the grantee will still be required to submit proposals and budgets for sub-awards to NIFA for programmatic approval by the NIFA 1890 COEs program staff.

Under the terms of the streamlining agreement, previously released funds may not be spent on sub-awards until a specific request is made, on official letterhead of the host institution, and signed by the AR. The specific request for the proposed projects shall be submitted to the NIFA 1890 COEs program staff for programmatic approval as per the streamlining agreement between NIFA and the host institution of the 1890 COE.

d. Reporting and Evaluation Plan

- i. Describe the capacity and plan of the host institution and the 1890 COE leadership for collecting and reporting data as required by NIFA;
- ii. Describe the evaluation plan that will be used to measure the collective impact of the 1890 COE; and
- iii. Strategies for incorporating feedback into the program to improve effectiveness.

3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V § 4.12** of the [Application Guide](#).

- **Collaborative Arrangements** – PDF Attachment. Title the attachment as “Collaborative Arrangements” in the document header and save file as “Collaborative Arrangement”. If it is necessary to enter into formal consulting or collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements should be fully explained and justified. If the consultant(s) or collaborator(s) are known at the time of the application, a vitae or resume should be provided. In addition, evidence (e.g., letter of support signed by the AR of the consultant/collaborating organization) should be provided that the collaborators involved have agreed to render these services. The applicant also will be required to provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget portion of the application.
- **Letters of Commitment** should be included for all individuals, 1890 consortia members, and other organizations included in the proposal.

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. Match – Not Required
2. 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.

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. Enter the program name (**1890 COE**) and the program code (**COE**). 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."

D. Funding Restrictions

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible under the program provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project.

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. 7 U.S.C. 3310 (a) and (c) Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

1. the sum of an institution's negotiated indirect cost rate and the indirect cost rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2. 30 percent of TFFA.

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates.

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee's negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of number two is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum indirect cost allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing (see 7 CFR 3430.52(b)). Amounts

exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections 408 and 410 of 2 CFR 200.

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this RFA to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

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 regarding 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 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.

Conflicts of interest. NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

B. Evaluation Criteria

Each application will be evaluated by three peer reviewers. We will use the evaluation criteria below (which are listed in priority order of importance) to review grant applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Rationale and significance

- a. Clear justification for the 1890 COE that demonstrates a national or regional need that can be addressed through effective and collaborative research, teaching, and/or extension programs; and
- b. Description of the anticipated outcomes, outputs and impact on strengthening food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences via education, research and extension.

2. Management Plan

- a. Demonstration of the capacity of the host 1890 institution to administer Federally funded programs including the necessary internal financial and administrative control systems;
- b. Clear description of the role and qualifications of members of the 1890 COE host consortium and other collaborators;
- c. Effective plan for identifying and engaging with appropriate stakeholders to guide the priorities and support the initiatives of the 1890 COE.

3. Sub-award program and the Center's competitive process

- a. Clear description of the sub-award and competitive process that ensures fairness and transparency; and
- b. Effective communication and coordination plan to ensure that all 1890 institutions are treated fairly.

4. Reporting Capacity and Evaluation.

- a. Demonstration of current capacity to collect and report data for multiple projects;
- b. Effective and realistic plan for evaluating the success and impact of the 1890 COE; and
- c. Plan for incorporating feedback into the program to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the 1890 COE.

C. 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).

D. Application Disposition

Applicants may withdraw at any time before NIFA makes a final funding decision. NIFA will retain all applications, including withdrawn applications and unfunded applications.

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](#).

Release of Funds for 1890 COEs

The initial award will obligate the entire amount available for funding in the fiscal year, and approve those costs related to and allowed for the administration of the 1890 COEs and in compliance with approved streamlining agreements. The 1890 COEs will withhold funds for recommended projects/sub-awards pending submission of a NIFA-approved Request for Release of Funds, submitted on institutional letterhead, and signed by the AR of the host institution along with the Plan of Work for which the funds have been requested.

Plan of Work: A Plan of Work outlining information relative to individual projects must be submitted to the NIFA 1890 COE Program staff for approval after the administrative Center has completed their respective competitions and have selected the projects that will be awarded. The Plan of Work must include:

- Project Title;
- Project Duration;
- Funding Requested by Subcontracting Institution;
- Executive Summary;
- Project Work Group;
- Background and Project Justification;
- Related Current and Previous Work; Project Goals and Specific Objectives;
- Alignment with USDA and NIFA strategic goals;
- Work Statement and Procedures;
- Timetable;
- Define research, teaching, and/or extension components, as relevant;
- Budget Pages by Institution and year;
- Budget Narrative by Institution;
- One-page Vitas of Participating Collaborators; and
- Role of Participating Collaborators.

Award Notice. The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information as described in [2 CFR 200.210](#) (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 statute 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 (see [NIFA's Terms and Conditions](#) for information about NIFA award terms). Program specific reporting guidelines will be included in the Award Terms and Conditions. If there are any award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

Due to the nature and administrative differences relative to the 1890 COEs Program, in addition to the reporting requirements listed in the Terms and Conditions of the initial administrative award, the following information must be submitted into REEport annually for each sub-award funded by the administrative Center:

1. NIFA Proposal Number;
2. NIFA Award Number;
3. Project Title;
4. Institutions involved;
 - a. PD and co-PD names, title, and institution;
 - b. All other participants involved in the project, funded or unfunded;
5. Purpose and Goals of the Project;
6. Specific Objectives of the Project;
 - a. Update progress and results of each specific objective;
 - b. Rationale for lack of progress on specific objectives;
 - c. Actions to be taken to accomplish specific objectives;
7. Final Sub-award Project Report;
 - a. Outcomes for each Objective

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. [Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([§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 [§200.332, 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 CONTACTS

Programmatic Contact

Name	Email	Telephone	Fax
Antonio McLaren	antonio.a.mclaren@usda.gov	202-480-3494	

Administrative Contacts

Name	Email	Telephone	Fax
Awards Management Division (AMD)	SM.AMDAdministrative Contacts-NIFA		

NIFA's Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
 6501 Beacon Drive
 Kansas City, MO 64133

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Name	Acronyms
Agriculture and Food Research Initiative	AFRI
Authorized Representative	AR
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance	CFDA
1890 Centers of Excellence	1890 COEs
Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture and Mathematics	STEAM
Data Management Plan	DMP
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	NIFA
Request for Application	RFA
Letter of Intent	LOI
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.