Veterinary Medicine
Loan Repayment Program

FY 2012 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 15, 2012

U.S. Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under No. 10.313, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP).

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on **June 15, 2012 (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time)**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. 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: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used 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)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: RFP-OEP@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program** RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA announces the availability of funds and requests applications for the **Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP)** for fiscal year (FY) 2012 to repay qualified educational loans for eligible veterinarians in exchange for veterinary services in designated shortage situations. Up to $4,300,000 is available for support of this program in FY 2012.

This notice identifies the objectives for VMLRP veterinary service agreements, the eligibility criteria for applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a VMLRP loan repayment award. NIFA additionally requests stakeholder input from any interested party for use in the development of the next RFA for this program.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

In January 2003, the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA) was passed into law adding section 1415A to the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1997 (NARETPA). This law established a new Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (7 U.S.C. 3151a) authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a program of entering into agreements with veterinarians under which they agree to provide veterinary services in veterinarian shortage situations. In November 2005, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 (Pub. L. 109-97) appropriated $495,000 for the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) to implement the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program (VMLRP) and represented the first time funds had been appropriated for this program.

In February 2007, the Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007 (Pub. L. 110-5) appropriated an additional $495,000 to CSREES for support of the program, in December 2007, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008 appropriated an additional $868,875 to CSREES for support of this program, in March 2009, the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009 (Pub. L. 111-8) appropriated an additional $2,950,000 for the VMLRP, in October 2009, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-80) appropriated another $4,800,000 for the VMLRP, and in April 2011, the Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (Pub. L. 112-10), which, after the .2% rescission, appropriated an additional $4,790,400 for the VMLRP. On November 18, 2011, the President signed into law the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012 (Pub. L. 112-55), which appropriated $4,790,000 for the VMLRP.

On October 1, 2009, CSREES became the NIFA as mandated by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, section 7511(f). Accordingly, the authority to administer the VMLRP transferred from CSREES to NIFA.

In FY 2010, VMLRP announced its first funding opportunity and received 260 applications from which NIFA issued 53 VMLRP awards totaling $5,186,000. In FY 2011, VMLRP announced its second funding opportunity and received 159 applications from which NIFA issued 78 VMLRP awards totaling $7,506,000. Consequently, there will be a cumulative total of **up to $4,300,000** available for awards in FY 2012. Funding for future years will be based on annual appropriations and balances, if any, remaining from prior years.

Section 7105 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110-246, (FCEA) amended section 1415A to revise the determination of veterinarian shortage situations to consider (1) geographical areas that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians; and (2) areas of veterinary practice that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians, such as food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety. This section also added that priority should be given to agreements with veterinarians for the practice of food animal medicine in veterinarian shortage situations.

NARETPA section 1415A requires the Secretary, when determining the amount of repayment for a year of service by a veterinarian to consider the ability of USDA to maximize the number of agreements from the amounts appropriated and to provide an incentive to serve in veterinary service shortage areas with the greatest need. This section also provides that loan repayments may consist of payments of the principal and interest on government and commercial loans received by the individual for the attendance of the individual at an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Council on Education (COE) accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) or the equivalent. This program is not authorized to provide repayments for any government or commercial loans incurred during the pursuit of another degree, such as an associate or bachelor degree. Loans eligible for repayment include educational loans made for one or more of the following: loans for tuition expenses; other reasonable educational expenses, including fees, books, and laboratory expenses, incurred by the individual; and reasonable living expenses as determined by the Secretary. In addition, the Secretary is directed to make such additional payments to participants as the Secretary determines appropriate for the purpose of providing reimbursements to participants for individual tax liability resulting from participation in this program. The Secretary delegated the authority to carry out this program to NIFA.

The interim rule for VMLRP was published in the Federal Register on July 9, 2009 [74 FR 32788-32798] for public comment. As a result of comments received, NIFA reconsidered the policy regarding individuals who consolidated their veterinary school loans with other educational loans (e.g., undergraduate) and their eligibility to apply for the VMLRP. The final rule was published in the Federal Register on April 19, 2010 [75 FR 20239-20248] and **allows these individuals to apply for and receive a VMLRP award; however, only the eligible portion of the consolidation will be repaid by the VMLRP.** Furthermore, applicants with consolidated loans will be asked to provide a complete history of their student loans from the National Student Loan Database System (NSLDS), a central database for student aid operated by the U.S. Department of Education. The NSLDS website is located at www.nslds.ed.gov. Individuals who consolidated their DVM loans with non-educational loans or loans belonging to an individual other than the applicant, such as a spouse or child, will continue to be ineligible for the VMLRP.

B. Purpose and Priorities

A landmark series of three peer-reviewed studies published in 2007 in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA), and sponsored by the Food Supply Veterinary Medicine Coalition (http://www.avma.org/fsvm/recognition.asp), gave considerable attention to the growing shortage of food supply veterinarians, the causes of shortages in this sector, and the consequences to the US food safety infrastructure and to the general public if this trend continues to worsen. Food supply veterinary medicine embraces a broad array of veterinary professional activities, specialties and responsibilities, and is defined as the full range of veterinary medical practices contributing to the production of a safe and wholesome food supply and to animal, human, and environmental health. However, the privately practicing food animal veterinary practitioner population within the US is, numerically, the largest, and arguably the most important single component of the food supply veterinary medical sector. Food animal veterinarians, working closely with livestock producers and State and Federal officials,

constitute the first line of defense against spread of endemic and zoonotic diseases, introduction of high consequence foreign animal diseases, and other threats to the health and wellbeing of both animals and humans that consume animal products.

Among the most alarming findings of the Coalition-sponsored studies was objective confirmation that insufficient numbers of veterinary students are selecting food supply veterinary medical careers. This development has led both to current shortages and to projections for worsening shortages over the next 10 years. While there were many reasons students listed for opting not to choose a career in food animal practice or other food supply veterinary sectors, chief among the reasons was concern over burdensome educational debt. According to a survey of veterinary medical graduates conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in the spring of 2009, the average educational debt for students graduating from veterinary school is approximately $130,000. Such debt loads incentivize students to select other veterinary careers, such as companion animal medicine, which tend to be more financially lucrative and, therefore, enable students to more quickly repay their outstanding educational loans. Furthermore, when this issue was studied in the Coalition report from the perspective of identifying solutions to this workforce imbalance, panelists were asked to rate 18 different strategies for addressing shortages. Responses from the panelists overwhelmingly showed that student debt repayment and scholarship programs were the most important strategies in addressing future shortages (JAVMA Vol. 229, No. 1, pages 57-69).

C. Program Area Description

This loan repayment program contains three general categories of participation:

1. Mitigation of private practice shortage situations – emphasis on food supply veterinary medicine sector.
2. Mitigation of public veterinary practice and specialty veterinary discipline shortage situations.
3. Service in animal health emergencies (not implemented in FY 2012).

The VMLRP supports NIFA's Animal Systems portfolio by facilitating professional workforce development in critical agricultural sectors related to animal health and well-being. Specifically this program incentivizes veterinarians to consider practicing, or serving in other professional capacities, in geographic or specialty veterinary discipline shortage areas that are important to the security of local, state, and federal food safety infrastructures, and more broadly to the protection of animal and public health. Congress has specified that the program shall emphasize mitigation of shortages in food animal veterinary practice, and in areas of veterinary specialization such as, but not limited to, epidemiology, food safety and public health. In this respect, the VMLRP achieves important outreach objectives of NIFA because the veterinarian is among the most highly trained and respected agricultural professionals, especially in rural areas and communities where a significant proportion of food animal production occurs. By virtue of their broad biomedical and animal science professional education, their intimate connection to the local farming communities they serve, and their skills in clinical, diagnostic, surgical, therapeutic and population medicine, veterinarians represent an essential component of NIFAs extension and outreach capacity, and of the nation's agrosecurity, food security and public health infrastructures. In an analogous fashion, veterinarians serving in specialized settings

experiencing workforce shortages -- for example, as state veterinarians, epidemiologists, food safety inspectors, animal disease laboratory directors and university faculty -- provide an important communication link among state and federal government agencies, animal owners/producers, and the general public. The ultimate goal of the program is to encourage veterinarians, through competitively awarded financial incentives, to fill the most serious veterinary shortage situations in the United States. A further objective of the program is to determine the best possible match between specific shortage situations and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences of program applicants in order to enhance the chances that awardees will achieve sufficient professional success and satisfaction during their term of service.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Up to $4,300,000 is available to fund VMLRP awards in FY 2012.

B. Types of Applications

All applications may only be submitted as a **new** application in FY 2012. Individuals who submitted an application in response to previous RFAs and did not receive an award must submit a new application in FY 2012 to be considered.

New application. This is an application to provide veterinary service that has not been previously submitted and approved for funding by the VMLRP. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Types of Designated Veterinary Shortages

Type I Shortage – 80 Percent or Greater Private Practice Food Supply Veterinary Medicine
The Type I shortage situation must entail at least an 80 percent time commitment to private practice food supply veterinary medicine. The shortage situation may be located anywhere (rural or non-rural) so long as the veterinary service shortages to be mitigated are consistent with the definition of "practice of food supply veterinary medicine." The minimum 80 percent time commitment is, in part, recognition of the fact that occasionally food animal veterinary practitioners are expected to meet the needs of other veterinary service sectors such as clientele owning companion and exotic animals. This generally corresponds to a shortage area where clients can reasonably be expected to pay for professional food supply veterinary services and where food animal populations are sufficiently dense to support a (or another) veterinarian. The personal residence of the veterinarian (VMLRP award recipient) and the address of veterinary practice employing the veterinarian are not required to be located within the geographic bounds of the designated shortage area. **However, the awardee is required to verify the specified minimum percent time commitment (80 percent, corresponding to 32 hrs per week) to service within the specified geographic shortage area**.

Type II Shortage - 30 Percent or Greater Private Practice Food Supply Veterinary Medicine in a Rural Area
The shortage situation must be in an area satisfying the definition of "rural." The minimum 30 percent-time (12 hr/wk) commitment of an award recipient to serve in a rural shortage situation is in recognition of the fact that there may be some remote or economically depressed rural areas in need of food animal veterinary services that are unable to support a practitioner predominately serving the food animal sector, yet the need for food animal veterinary services for an existing, relatively small, proportion of available food animal business is nevertheless great. Under the Type II category, the expectation is that the veterinarian may provide veterinary services to other veterinary sectors (e.g., companion animal clientele) as a means of achieving financial

sustainability. The residence of the veterinarian (VMLRP awardee) and the address of veterinary practice employing the veterinarian are not required to be located within the geographic bounds of the designated shortage area. **However, the awardee is required to verify the specified minimum percent time commitment (30 percent, corresponding to 12 hours per week) to service within the specified geographic shortage area**.

Type III Shortage - Public Practice Shortage (49%-time or greater public practice)
This is a broad category comprising many types of specialized veterinary training and employment areas relating to food supply veterinary workforce capacity and capability. These positions are typically located in city, county, State and Federal Government, and institutions of higher education. Examples of positions within the public practice sector include university faculty and staff, veterinary laboratory diagnostician, County Public Health Officer, State Veterinarian, State Public Health Veterinarian, State Epidemiologist, Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) meat inspector, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Area Veterinarian in Charge (AVIC), and Federal Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO). NIFA anticipates that loan repayments for the Public Practice sector will be limited to approximately 10 percent of total nominations and available funds. The minimum time commitment serving under a Type III shortage nomination is 49 percent, corresponding to about 20 hours per week. NIFA understands that some public practice employment opportunities that are shortage situations may be part-time positions.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an 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.

To be eligible to apply to the VMLRP, an applicant must (1) have a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), or the equivalent, from a college of veterinary medicine accredited by the AVMA Council on Education; (2) have qualifying educational loan debt; (3) secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a NIFA designated veterinary shortage situation within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer; and (4) provide certifications and verifications as defined in 7 CFR 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

A list of designated veterinary shortage situations will be posted on the VMLRP web site at www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp prior to or concurrent with the opening of the VMLRP application period.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Application Package

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

The application forms must be downloaded from the VMLRP web site. Go to http://www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp, click on the "Applicants" link, and then click on the "Application Forms for FY 2012" link.

If you do not have access to the web page or have trouble downloading material, you may contact the VMLRP Program Office by email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov. When emailing the VMLRP Program Office, please include your name, mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number in the body of the email. State that you want a copy of the request for applications (RFA) and the associated application forms for the Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Proper preparation of applications will assist reviewers in evaluating the merits of each application in a systematic, consistent fashion. Each application must contain the following elements and should be assembled in the following order:

(NIFA-01-10) Application Information Form
Curriculum Vitae
Transcript
(NIFA-02-10) Personal Statement
(NIFA-03-10) List of Recommenders
(NIFA-04-10) Loan Information Form
(NIFA-06-10) Certifications for Application
(NIFA-07-10) Intent of Employment

Except for the transcript, please type all information entered and include your full name (Last, First, Middle) on the upper right corner of all pages. **Handwritten answers in your application will not be accepted and your application will not qualify for further consideration.**

Three separate recommendation forms (Form NIFA-08-10), completed by your recommenders, are also required for an application to be considered complete. These recommendation forms may be mailed with or separately from the application forms listed above. If the recommendation forms are mailed with the application forms listed above, the recommendation forms should be last in the order, after the Intent of Employment form. If a recommender chooses to submit the completed recommendation form directly to us (separately from the application forms), we will accept recommendation forms by mail, fax, or email (see item 8. of this section).

The NIFA Contract (NIFA-05-10) is **not** part of the application package and will be sent to applicants when they are notified of an award. A sample of the contract is offered for review on the VMLRP website.

Contained within the "Applicants" section of the VMLRP web site is an Application Checklist and an Application Guide that include more detailed instructions for preparing and submitting an application to the VMLRP. General instructions of the forms that must be included in the application are provided below.

1. NIFA-01-10 Applicant Information Form

The Applicant Information Form collects relevant identifying, contact, and education information from the applicant. This form also authorizes the disclosure of information that confirms the applicant is not under a service obligation or has a Federal judgment lien against his/her property.

2. Curriculum Vitae (CV)

This document should describe the applicant's academic and work history. The body of the CV should be limited to two pages with an optional page to list publications, patents, etc., if applicable.

3. Transcript

An official transcript from the applicant's professional veterinary degree program must be included in the submission of the application package. If the applicant attended more than one school during his/her DVM studies, official transcripts from both schools must be provided.

4. NIFA-02-10 Personal Statement

The Personal Statement includes presentation of applicant knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience relative to the specific shortage situation applied for. Note that an applicant may apply to only one shortage each program year. This document must include a description of the applicant's short-term and long-term career objectives in veterinary medicine, a plan to achieve these objectives, relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and experience, and practice plans and logistics to address the specific shortage situation to which the applicant is applying. This information should be prepared on only one side of a standard size (8 ½" x 11") white paper with one-inch margins, typed or word processed using no type smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, Times New Roman).

The Personal Statement must not exceed five double-spaced, typed pages. This limit has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The applicant's name and page number must be included in the header (right-justified) of each page of the document to assist NIFA program staff to ensure that applications are intact and complete upon receipt. Additional pages after the first five pages will not be included in the review.

5. NIFA-03-10 List of Recommenders

The List of Recommenders form identifies colleagues who will speak to the applicant's capability to fulfill program obligations. The name, email address, and phone number must be provided for the individuals who will be asked by the applicant to submit a recommendation on the applicant's behalf.

Three recommendations are required for each application. It is the **applicant's responsibility to contact these recommenders** and confirm that the recommendation forms have been submitted by the specified deadline (see item 10 of this section).

6. NIFA-04-10 Loan Information Form

Sections 1 through 3 must be completed by the applicant.

Sections 1 and 2 of the Loan Information Form collect relevant information relating to the outstanding educational loan debt and confirm that the loan is a bona fide legally enforceable institutional, State, or Government education loan made for the purpose of meeting the costs of attending an accredited college or university of Veterinary Medicine.

Section 3 provides authorization to lenders and their collection agents to disclose information, including the loans' repayment status to NIFA staff.

Applicants do not need to complete Section 4 prior to the application deadline. NIFA will ask a representative at the applicant's lending institution to complete this section if the applicant receives a VMLRP award. The signature confirms the validity of the information provided by the applicant in Sections 1 through 3.

7. NIFA-05-10 Contract

The VMLRP contract is a legal agreement that binds awardees and the Secretary of USDA and/or NIFA Director to the terms and conditions for participation in the VMLRP, including obligations of both parties. The contract must be signed by the applicant and the Secretary (or designee) before the agreement is effective.

Applicants will receive an official copy of the contract to sign and return when they are notified of an award. A sample contract is available on the VMLRP web site during the application cycle. There is no need to include a copy of the contract with your application.

8. NIFA-06-10 Certifications for Application

The applicant's signatures on the Certifications for Application form validate the contractual agreement, accuracy of information provided by the applicant, and request for confidential recommendations.

9. NIFA-07-10 Intent of Employment

Section 1 provides information on the shortage situation the applicant intends to fill upon receipt of a VMLRP award, including the contact information for the prospective employer or hiring official. Section 2, to be signed by the prospective employer or hiring official, confirms the applicant's ability to secure an offer of employment or establish and/or maintain a practice in a veterinary shortage situation within the time period specified in the VMLRP service agreement offer. An applicant may apply for only one shortage situation for each application.

A list of designated veterinary shortage situations will be posted on the VMLRP web site at www.nifa.usda.gov/vmlrp prior to, or simultaneously with, the opening of the VMLRP application period.

Successful applicants will be given at least 90 days from the date the award offer is made to secure employment or establish a practice in the designated veterinary shortage situation. Failure to secure employment or establish a practice of veterinary medicine in the designated veterinary shortage situation within the given timeframe may result in the withdrawal of the award offer.

10. NIFA-08-10 Recommendation Form

The Recommendation form is to be completed and submitted by colleagues identified by the applicant on Form NIFA-03-10. The form includes ratings and short answers designed to allow reviewers to assess the applicant's capabilities to provide veterinary services in the specific shortage situation the applicant is applying for. The short answers should be prepared on only one side of a standard size (8 ½" x 11") white paper with one-inch margins, typed or word processed using no type smaller than 12 point font, and double spaced. Use an easily readable font face (e.g., Geneva, Helvetica, Times New Roman).

Recommenders are encouraged to review the descriptive information provided by the nominator of the shortage situation the applicant is applying to fill. Three separate recommendations are required and all recommendations **must be received by NIFA no later than June 29, 2012 (14 calendar days after the application deadline of June 15, 2012)**. In addition to regular or overnight mail (see mailing addresses in Section C of this Part), NIFA will accept receipt of the recommendation form by fax at (202) 720-6486 or email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov. Of the delivery methods listed above, email is the preferred method.

It is **always the applicant's responsibility to contact and follow up with recommenders to ensure that all required recommendations are completed and delivered** prior to the June 29, 2012 deadline for recommendation forms.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by COB on **June 15, 2012** (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

Applications must be mailed to the following address:

Regular Mail:
VMLRP Applications
Division of Animal Systems (Attn: Lisa Stephens)
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
STOP 2240
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-2240

Overnight Mail:
VMLRP Applications
Division of Animal Systems (Attn: Lisa Stephens)

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 3331, Waterfront Centre
800 9th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are responsible for providing an accurate and valid e-mail address on the NIFA-01-10 form.

If the applicant has not received correspondence from NIFA regarding a submitted application within 15 days of the established deadline, the applicant is encouraged to contact the VMLRP Program Office by email at vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov to request confirmation of receipt of his/her complete application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel.**

D. Funding Restrictions

NIFA has capped VMLRP loan repayment awards at $25,000 for each year of service rendered (not counting tax payments). Loan repayments will be made directly to participants' lending institutions on behalf of participating individuals. The repayments will be applied to the principal, interest, and related expenses on government and commercial loans received by the participating individual for attendance of the individual at an AVMA COE accredited college of veterinary medicine resulting in a degree of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or the equivalent.

Note that the VMLRP will only repay debt incurred at an institution that is AVMA COE accredited at the time of attendance and graduation. If an institution received full accreditation status during the participating individual's attendance at said institution, only the portion of veterinary school loans that were disbursed subsequent to the institution's date of accreditation are eligible for repayment under the VMLRP. This includes any scenario involving an individual transferring from a non-accredited institution to an accredited institution. Applicants with a degree from an institution that was not accredited at the time the degree was earned remain ineligible for award. This is regardless of the fact that they may have attended an accredited institution prior to transferring to a non-accredited institution from which they received their DVM degree (or equivalent).

NIFA will allow individuals who consolidated their veterinary school loans with other educational loans (e.g., undergraduate) to apply for the VMLRP; however, only the eligible portion of the consolidation will be repaid by the VMLRP. Furthermore, applicants with consolidated loans must provide a complete history of their student loans from the National Student Loan Database System (NSLDS), a central database for student aid operated by the U.S. Department of Education. The NSLDS website can be found at www.nslds.ed.gov. Individuals who consolidated their DVM loans with non-educational loans or loans belonging to an individual other than the applicant, such as a spouse or child, will continue to be ineligible for the VMLRP.

Tax payments equal to 39 percent of the amount of loan repayments will be credited directly to the participant's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Federal tax account simultaneously with each loan repayment. These tax payments are not tax-exempt and will be reported to the IRS along with loan payments. When loan and tax payments are made on a participant's behalf in a calendar year, a Form 1099-G (Certain Government Payments) is mailed to participants no later than January 31 of the following calendar year.

Recipients of VMLRP awards will be notified by e-mail each time a loan payment is issued directly to the lending institution and/or a tax payment is issued to the IRS on their behalf.

E. Other Submission Requirements

Recommendation forms must be completed by colleagues identified by the applicant on Form NIFA-03-10 and **received by NIFA no later than 14 calendar days after the deadline (i.e., June 29, 2012)**. Recommendation forms may be submitted in accordance with instructions in section B.10. of this RFA.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by an external peer review panel.

Panelists will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant veterinary clinical medicine, veterinary science, or veterinary specialty area fields, public or private, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal clinical, scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is currently engaged in veterinary private practice, veterinary public practice (local, State and Federal), or aspects of veterinary science and medicine including relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of veterinary specialization; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and gender representation and equitable age and geographic distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effectiveness and relevance to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA:

Broadly speaking, the purpose of the VMLRP is mitigation of US infrastructure-critical veterinary service shortages in the agricultural animal health, food supply and public health veterinary service sectors, subject to the varying conditions and needs of States, Insular Areas and the Nation at-large. More specifically, veterinarian shortage situations are defined as (1) geographical areas that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians; and (2) areas of veterinary specialty practice that the Secretary determines have a shortage of veterinarians, such as food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety. However, Congress directs that priority shall be given to agreements with veterinarians for the practice of food animal medicine in veterinarian shortage situations. Reflecting this required emphasis, NIFA anticipates that approximately 90 percent of available funds will be awarded to veterinarians for the practice of food animal medicine in geographic areas determined to have shortage of veterinarians. The remaining approximately 10 percent of available funds will be awarded to veterinarians serving in public practice and specialty practices or discipline areas determined to have a shortage of veterinarians, such as, but not limited to, food animal medicine, public health, epidemiology, and food safety.

In carrying out its review, the peer panel shall take into account the **quality of the match** between an applicant's professional training and experience, and the circumstances and needs of the designated shortage situation the applicant proposes to fill. In addition to the overarching priorities described above, the following evaluation criteria shall be considered by panelists in the context of the factors and circumstances necessary for 1) most effective mitigation of the specific veterinary shortage situations, 2) prioritizing the relatively more severe shortages and, 3) achieving the highest likelihood that awardees will realize employment satisfaction and professional success both during, and beyond, the term of the VMLRP agreement.

Additional specific criteria include:

1) Applicant knowledge, skills and abilities as evidenced by:

(a) Formal pre-professional educational training (e.g., undergraduate or graduate degree programs and credentials);

(b) Formal training during pursuit of the DVM (or equivalent) degree (e.g., electives, curricular emphases);

(c) Formal post-DVM (or equivalent) training and specialization (e.g., graduate degree programs, internships, residency programs, and board certifications);

(d) Professional employment experience in private or public veterinary practice, or other relevant work history experiences, before, during, or after earning the DVM (or equivalent) degree;

(e) Specialty short-course certifications, accreditations or licensures (e.g., APHIS accreditation, agrosecurity training series, food animal production management courses, certified proficiency-training in foreign animal disease diagnostics);

(f) Awards, honors or special achievements;

(g) Recommendations; and

(h) Content and quality of applicant's personal statement.

2) Additional criteria

(a) Likelihood the applicant will meet the terms and conditions of the VMLRP agreement and continue to serve in a veterinary shortage situation, or pursue a career in some other facet of food supply veterinary medicine, agricultural animal health, or public health, in private or public veterinary sectors;

(b) Relative severity of veterinary shortage situation; and

(c) Practicality and logistical feasibility of applicant's plan to address the specific shortage(s).

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 6400 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 648, Falls Church, Virginia 22042. Phone: (703) 532-2300. Web site: http://www.hepinc.com.

Names of individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Administrative Requirements Verification

Although an applicant may meet the eligibility criteria, there may be factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., license suspension of an individual). All submitted applications shall be reviewed to ensure administrative compliance and completeness prior to an evaluation by the VMLRP application review panel. A complete review of each applicant's loan documents will also take place prior to the announcement of awards.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make contract offers to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious by peer review panels, under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the award shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the application is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the service agreement need not be initiated on the award effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that service agreement goals may be attained within the service period. All funds awarded by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application, the VMLRP authorizing statute at 7 U.S.C. § 3151a, the VMLRP regulations at 7 CFR part 3431, and, the terms and conditions of the award.

B. Award Notice

All VMLRP applicants will be informed of final funding decisions by September 30, 2012.

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

(1) Legal name and address of applicant to whom the Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;

(2) Designated veterinary shortage situation code, including the state;

(3) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;

(4) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the service agreement without requiring re-competition for funds;

(5) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;

(6) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;

(7) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;

(8) Applicable award terms and conditions (see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/animals/pdfs/nifa_vmlrp_contract.pdf to view VMLRP award terms and conditions);

(9) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to VMLRP applications considered for review and to service agreements awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

2 CFR Part 417—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

2 CFR Part 421—Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance).

7 CFR Part 3407—NIFA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR Part 3431—Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in Federally assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Program Outputs:

The principal program output for FY 2012 will be verifiable mitigation of well-defined high priority veterinary shortage situations in 40 to 50 locations across the country, for a period of three years.

Reporting Requirements:

1) Quarterly Report: VMLRP recipients will be required to verify that the terms of the VMLRP contract are being met on a quarterly basis. Subsequent quarterly loan repayments will not be disbursed until this verification is provided. This report will be due fifteen business days after the end of each three month interval during the VMLRP contract for the previous three month period and must include the following information:

   (a) A listing of states, counties, and/or insular areas served;
   (b) A listing of veterinary services and activities provided in the shortage situation; and
   (c) Percentage time (on a 40-hour week basis) providing service to veterinary shortage situation identified in the agreement.

   Program participants are responsible for notifying NIFA of any changes in the service being provided in the specified shortage situation during the three-year period. It is strongly recommended that program participants advise NIFA of these changes at least two months in advance to allow sufficient processing time. Failure to provide the updated information may result in the termination of the VMLRP contract and the program participant may be subject to penalties as outlined in Section C, Paragraph 3 of the contract.

2) Termination Report: At the end of the term of the agreement, the recipient and his/her supervisor will each prepare and submit to NIFA a Termination Report that addresses the following, as well as any other information the participants wish to share with NIFA's VMLRP leadership:

   a. A summary of the services provided toward mitigation of the original veterinary shortage situation, as well as other veterinary services provided to the local community, institution, or other employing entity;
   b. An assessment of the current state of veterinary services in the recipient's service area and adjacent service areas, or specialty area, with emphasis on identification of ongoing shortage situations;
   c. An assessment of future veterinary service needs and trends in the recipient's service (or specialty area) and, to the extent such information may be known, adjacent service areas, with emphasis on identification of ongoing shortage situations, either geographic or disciplinary; and
   d. An appraisal of the overall effectiveness of the VMLRP in addressing the specific veterinary shortage situation served by the awardee, including the role of the mentor (where applicable).

The Termination Report must be submitted by attachment to an email sent to vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov, preferably as an MS Word or WordPerfect document. The subject line and the first line of the body of the email should include, in the following order: “Termination Report: <Last name of recipient>, <award number>, <shortage situation code>”.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact Dr. Gary Sherman, VMLRP Program Manager, National Program Leader, Veterinary Science, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20024; telephone: (202) 401-4952; fax: (202) 720-6486; e-mail: vmlrp@nifa.usda.gov.

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant upon request 90-120 days after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Responsibility for Performance of Duties

Pursuant to the provision in 7 CFR 3431.21, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for the performance of duties in the approved service agreement.

2. Changes in Service Agreement

a. The permissible changes by the awardee in the approved service agreement shall be limited to minor changes that do not substantially impact or alter the spirit and intent of the agreement to mitigate a specific veterinary service shortage in a specific geographic and/or occupational situation. To ensure that all applications are reviewed in an equitable and consistent manner, a change in the shortage area the applicant proposes to serve will not be considered once an application has been reviewed by the peer review panel. If the awardee is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the NIFA VMLRP Program Office for a final determination.

b. Changes in Loan Repayment Schedule: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved loan repayment schedule must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the NIFA VMLRP Program Office prior to instituting such changes.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

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. 0524-0047.

E. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR Part 3431, Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program, for the applicable definitions for the VMLRP.