

Notice of Funding Opportunity

Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: June 15, 2026

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$1,000,000

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD RANGE: \$50,000-\$200,000

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-RIGP-011716

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.322

ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.322.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, June 15, 2026
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice <i>(NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)</i>

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:

- solving the most pressing challenges they face;
- protecting America’s food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
- supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
- expanding and developing domestic markets;
- training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
- fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to advancing these principles and encourages applicants to actively engage farmers, ranchers, and foresters when applying for funding opportunities to ensure relevancy and adherence to them. NIFA also encourages agricultural leaders to engage in the peer review panel process to ensure American producers are better served through research, education, and extension activities.

Projects submitted under this NOFO should align with [USDA Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-020](#) Directive on Departmental Research and Development Priorities:

1. Increasing Profitability of Farmers and Ranchers
2. Expanding Markets and Creating New Uses of U.S. Agricultural Products:
3. Protecting the Integrity of American Agriculture from Invasive Species
4. Promoting Soil Health to Regenerate Long-Term Productivity of Land
5. Improving Human Health through Precision Nutrition and Food Quality

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) 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 NOFOs and uses 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@usda.gov. Please use the following subject line: Response to the Distance Education Grants NOFO.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for DEG projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

NIFA requests applications for DEG for FY 2026 to strengthen the capacity of institutions of higher education in insular areas to carry out resident instruction, curriculum, and teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences through distance education technology.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The DEG program is administered under the provisions in section 1490 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 as amended and codified at [7 U.S.C. 3362](#). Funds will be awarded to individual eligible institutions of higher education in insular areas (insular area institutions) to carry out a distance education program using digital network technologies in the food and agricultural sciences.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the DEG program, under assistance listing number 10.322, is to strengthen the capacity of institutions of higher education in insular areas to carry out resident instruction, curriculum, and teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences through distance education technology. Projects funded by the DEG program support the creation, adaptation, and adoption of learning materials and teaching strategies to operationalize best practices for student learning. DEG-funded projects must also focus on imparting both technical knowledge as well as employability skills like communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

NIFA is soliciting applications for the DEG program that support:

1. Acquisition of equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, digital network technology, and infrastructure necessary to teach students and teachers about technology to support distance education
2. Development and enhancement of educational services (including faculty development) to prepare students or faculty seeking a degree or certificate that is approved by the State or a regional accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of Education
3. Provide teacher education, library and media specialist training, and preschool and teacher aide certification to individuals who seek to acquire or enhance technology skills in order to use technology in the classroom or instructional processes
4. Implementation of a joint project to provide education regarding technology in the classroom with a local educational agency, community-based organization, national nonprofit organization, or business; or provide leadership development to administrators, board members, and faculty of eligible institutions with institutional responsibility for technology education

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. DEG teaching 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.

Incorporation of Social Sciences. The DEG program supports social and behavioral science disciplines. DEG projects that integrate social and behavioral sciences to provide experiential learning opportunities for students in applied research and related community development programs are encouraged. Incorporation of social and behavioral sciences is important for addressing many of the challenges facing agriculture and rural communities.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	DEG
Program Code Name:	Distance Education Grants Program for Higher Education in the Insular Areas
ALN:	10.332
Project Type:	Education/Teaching Projects
Grant Type:	Standard Grants
Application Deadline	June 15, 2026
Grant Duration:	36-48 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	5
Minimum Award Amount:	\$50,000 for Standard Grants
Maximum Award Amount:	\$200,000 for Standard Grants

An institution can submit up to three standard grant applications as the lead institution. An institution can be awarded up to two standard grants as a lead institution.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for DEG in FY2026 is approximately \$1,000,000. 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 NOFO.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO.

Applications for FY2026 are limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include the response to the previous review panel summary and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).

C. Project and Grant Types

The following describes the types of *projects* or *grants* that are eligible for funding:

Project Types. The DEG program will only accept Education/Teaching projects. For the purposes of this NOFO, an education or teaching activity is defined as formal classroom instruction, field and laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences supporting faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies.

DEG projects must focus on one or more of the need areas listed below and fall under the characteristics and conditions referenced in Part I, B of this NOFO. Please note that at least one of these need areas must be indicated on the Project Summary (see [Part IV, B.1](#)). Need areas for FY 2026 include the following:

1. **Curricula Design, Materials Development, and Library Resources.** To promote the development of distance education courses of study and degree programs, new and improved curricula, and instructional materials and technology. Also, to promote the acquisition of digital library resources including books and journals relating to the food and agricultural sciences; and stimulate the use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects, new research on teaching and learning theory, and new applications of knowledge.
2. **Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching.** To advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency and leadership, subject matter expertise, or student recruitment and advising skills.

3. **Instruction Delivery Systems.** The purpose of this initiative is to encourage the use of alternative methods of delivering instruction to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and cost efficiency of distance education teaching programs. Focus should be on ways to maximize program quality, reduce duplication, and implementation of innovative instructional techniques, methodologies, and delivery systems in response to advances in knowledge and technology.
4. **Student Experiential Learning.** To develop scientific and professional competencies that provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations using distance education. Activities include internships, practicum experiences, and participation with faculty on applied research and related community development projects.
5. **Student Recruitment and Retention.** To strengthen student recruitment and retention programs in the food and agricultural sciences in programs utilizing distance education. Examples include: initiating new projects or supplementing current efforts to attract increased numbers of students to enroll in food and agricultural degree programs or participate in mentoring programs and other student retention initiatives; and the provision of student financial support to attend college.
6. **Additional Information.** The use of students for only routine office, laboratory, or field work is not considered education for the purposes of this program. To be considered as an education-related activity, students will need to be actively engaged in the scholarship of research activities.

Grant Types. Applicants may submit applications for one of the following grant types:

1. **Standard Grant.** This is an award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period without the announced intention of providing additional support at a future date.

An eligible institution may submit a standard project application for project activities undertaken principally on behalf of its own students or faculty, and faculty managed primarily by its own personnel. In a standard grant, the applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners.

The project period may range from 36 to 48 months.

Grant awards may differ from the amounts requested in the application and revised budgets and revised plans of work may be required by NIFA before an award is made.

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

In accordance with sections [2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422](#), institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award, that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients must, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and

documentation to support the conduct of the training. See [Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research](#) for further information.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the DEG program must meet all the requirements discussed in this NOFO. 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 [About Grants](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Eligible Institutions

For the purposes of the DEG program, an eligible institution is an institution of higher education, as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1995 ([20 U.S.C. 1001\(a\)](#)), that is located in an insular area and that has a demonstrable capacity to carry out teaching and Extension programs in the food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences. All public or nonprofit two-year and four-year accredited institutions of higher education that offer certificate/degree programs in food and agricultural sciences are eligible. Individual Land-grant Colleges and Universities, and other institutions that have secured Land-grant status through Federal legislation, and which are located in insular areas are automatically eligible for awards under the DEG grant program as direct individual applicants.

The eight insular areas are as follows:

1. American Samoa
2. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
3. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
4. The Federated States of Micronesia
5. Guam
6. The Republic of the Marshall Islands
7. The Republic of Palau
8. The United States Virgin Islands

Branch Institutions of a State System. Individual branches of a State university system or public system of higher education that are separately accredited as degree-granting institutions are treated as separate, individual institutions eligible to apply for and receive awards, provided they otherwise satisfy the definition of “eligible institution” as specified above.

Independent Branch Campuses. Independent branch campuses of individual institutions may apply for and receive grant awards under this program if they satisfy the definition of “eligible institution” as specified above. An “independent branch campus” is a unit of a two-year or four-year institution of higher education that is geographically apart from the main campus, is permanent in nature, offers courses for credit and programs leading to an associate or bachelor's degree, and is autonomous to the extent that it has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization and its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Certification of Eligibility. At the time of application, each primary applicant will be required to demonstrate or certify that it is an eligible institution as defined by this NOFO. A non-land-grant institution must submit a letter signed by the institution's Authorized Representative (AR) certifying that it meets the requirements of an “eligible institution” as defined herein. The AR

must also certify that the institution, or parent institution in the case of an independent branch campus:

1. Admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate
2. Is legally authorized by the insular area in which it is located to provide a program of education beyond secondary education
3. Provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a two-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree
4. Is a public or other nonprofit institution
5. Is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time.

All eligible institutions must demonstrate that they have a significant commitment to higher education programs in food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences and to each specific subject area for which grant funds are to be used. Eligibility documentation must be submitted as part of the application.

USDA **will not accept** competitive applications for grants and cooperative agreements submitted for due dates after June 20, 2025, and/or research and development (R&D) contract proposals submitted to solicitations issued after June 20, 2025, for dangerous gain-of-function research, as defined in [Section 8 of E.O. 14292](#)

Duplicate Submissions – NIFA will not fund efforts that duplicate or overlap substantially with efforts already funded. The submission of duplicate or substantially similar applications concurrently for review for more than one program in the same funding cycle will result in the exclusion of the redundant application from NIFA consideration. Duplicate applications are not allowed for the same program and only one application will be accepted for peer-review.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No Match Required - The DEG 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. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this NOFO electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this NOFO and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](#) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](#) registration process. [The NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is contained in the specific

funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

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).
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-RIGP-011716 , 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 Customer service business Hours 24/7, except Federal holidays .	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except Federal holidays .

B. Content and Form of the Application

The [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this NOFO. The NOFO overrides the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. 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 NOFO. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 7** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

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

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract.** The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the DEG program. The PS must not exceed 250 words. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.
2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must not exceed 15 1.5-spaced pages including all figures and tables. Font size for written text must be no smaller than 12 points, Times New Roman, with 1-inch margins. Font size for figures and tables must be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman, and can be single-spaced. The page limits outlined here ensure fair 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. Examples of allowable documents for appendices include syllabi, event/internship sample schedules, advertisements, or recruitment flyers. Applications will **not** be accepted for review if the project narrative is not included, exceeds 15 1.5-spaced pages, or is not in PDF format. The PN must include all the following:
 - a. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education
 - i. *Identification of Educational Problem(s) and Project Impact:* Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (2)

- the anticipated project audience; and (3) the project's objectives (what change in education is proposed?) and its anticipated, overall impact on improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education.
- ii. *Project Justification*: Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project's educational need area (Part II § C) will be of value at the state, regional, or national level(s), and where applicable, how it will improve the food and agricultural science capabilities of students. Describe any previously funded projects that are ongoing or recently completed that are related to the proposed project.
 - iii. *Institutional Long-range Goals*: Explain how the project will help satisfy the institution/organization's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution/organization's strategic plan.
 - iv. *Innovation*: Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education, solving an educational problem, or promoting programs that advance opportunities for all students. Using either actual experiences or literature background information, show why this approach was chosen.
 - v. *Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus*: Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in food and agricultural sciences education and how the project will enhance students' understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted by or serve as a model for other institutions.
- b. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages
- i. *Plan of Operation and Methodology*: Describe the procedures for accomplishing the project's objectives. Describe project management plans to ensure its proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.
 - ii. *Timetable*: Identify all important project milestones (performance targets that indicate when project goals will be met) and dates as they relate to project start-up, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and closeout.
 - iii. *Products, Results, and Measurable Outputs*: Outline the expected products, results, measurable outputs, and their outcome (impact) on strengthening food and agricultural sciences education. Differentiate among the three terms: (1) "*Products*" may be actual items or services acquired with funds, e.g., "...developed three, new web-based courses"; (2) "*results*" are accomplishments related to the products, e.g., "...additional course materials now available online to reinforce student learning during non-classroom hours"; and (3) "*impacts*" are the benefits to your audience. Impacts are the consequences of your project and the most critical elements in your evaluation plan. They are a measure of the results by comparison to what might have happened in the absence of the funded project, e.g., "...an observed overall increase in student learning based upon 8 percent higher average test scores of those students who both attended class and used the supplemental, web-based course materials."
 - iv. *Evaluation Plan*: All projects shall include an evaluation plan that has both a strategy for monitoring the project as it evolves as well as a strategy for

evaluating the effectiveness of the project in achieving its goals and for identifying positive and negative findings when the project is completed. Grantees are encouraged to obtain an independent evaluation to secure appropriate documentation of the project's outcomes and impacts.

- v. *Dissemination Plans*: The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results, impacts, etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at conferences and workshops, including the DEG project directors' meeting. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication.
 - vi. *Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts*: Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, or cooperative activities with industry). Evidence may be provided, via letters, from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.
- c. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building
- i. *Institutional/Organizational Commitment and Capability*: Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.
 - ii. *Institutional/Organizational Resources*: Document the necessary institutional/organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, that will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how these resources, when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the project's activities.
 - iii. *Academic Enhancement*: Document how this project will improve and strengthen distance education at the institution (including any partner institutions/organizations). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution/organization or the grant period.
 - iv. *Continuation Plans*: Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. Describe how the institution/organization's long-range budget or academic plan provides for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends. Explain the plans for eventual self-support built into the project, and the plans to institutionalize the program if it is successful. Describe any indications of other continuing non-Federal support. Provide details of the expected outcomes, and the audience that would benefit from the continuation of this project.
- d. Key Personnel
- Discuss the adequacy and specific attributes and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project and include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project

- results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.
- e. Budget and Cost-effectiveness
 - i. *Budget*: In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how budget items such as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that all funds requested from USDA are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s) and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project. If the application addresses more than one educational need area (see [Part II, C](#)), you must include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area. Quotes or estimated costs for acquiring equipment, including information technology systems, are highly recommended.
 - ii. *Cost-effectiveness*: Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds.
3. **Field 12., Add Other Attachments.** See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide. The following documents do not count against the page limit of the PN.
- a. **Data Management Plan (DMP)**: 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 NOFO, [NIFA's Data Management Plan](#) page).
 - b. **Mentoring Plan (MP)**: *Two-page limit per application.* Required for standard applications. Title the attachment as 'Mentoring Plan' and save file as 'MentoringPlan.' An MP describing peer mentoring, layered mentoring, or similar mentoring activities is required if professional development for faculty, students, or other community participants is included in grant activities. If various education levels of students or scholars are represented in the application, the MP must address how mentoring will be different and targeted to the specific education level (youth, undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, etc.), as appropriate. The MP should incorporate:
 - i. The roles and responsibilities of the project director and co-project directors in managing the mentoring process
 - ii. Training for and/or credentials of individuals who will serve as mentors (i.e. mentor training); mentors may be experienced mentors from academia, industry, or government, or student peers at various levels who are expected to provide guidance and a sense of community with the activities and facilitate the amplification of program-specific perspectives and accomplishments of the mentees
 - iii. A description of mentoring activities and how these activities are incorporated into the overall project timeline
 - iv. A description of processes to ensure reasonable accommodations for program participants who experience challenges with accessing program activities
Scholarship programs should include plans to accommodate scholarship

- recipients who find it necessary to interrupt their program of study because of health, personal, or other reasonable nonacademic and nondisciplinary cause(s)
- c. **Previous Award: *One-page Limit*.** If you are a PD or co-PD on a previous or current USDA DEG award, indicate to what extent the current application builds upon the outcomes of the prior award and the differences in the proposed approach and methodology. Explain why it is necessary to provide additional funds and how this application will complement any existing USDA DEG awards at the institution, if applicable.
 - d. **Response to Previous Review: *One-page Limit*.** This requirement only applies to “Resubmitted Applications” as described under [Part II, B of this NOFO](#), “Resubmitted application.” PDs must respond to the previous review panel summary. Title the attachment as “Response to Previous Review” in the document header and save file as “ResponsetoPreviousReview.” If desired, additional comments may be included in the text of the Project Narrative, subject to the page limitations of that section.
 - e. **Letters of Support:** If letters of support are included as part of the application, they should be attached as a single PDF file titled “Letters of Support” in the document header and save file as “LettersofSupport.” Letters of support are encouraged from partners but are not required.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants 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** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#)).

R&R Budget. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. Indirect Costs (IDC) – See [Part IV, C](#) of this NOFO for funding restrictions regarding IDC, and **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for additional information

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying.** Enter the program name “Distance Education Grants Program” and the program code “DEG”. Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

C. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) is not to exceed 30 percent of the recipient’s Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA). [7 U.S.C. 3310](#) limits the recovery of IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of the TFFA under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum allowable IDC amount recoverable under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the following and is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

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

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two amounts, 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 amount 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 amounts, then the maximum IDC 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. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections [408](#) and [410](#) of [2 CFR 200](#).

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the de minimis rate ([2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de minimis rate of 15 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in [2 CFR 200.403](#), costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

See [NIFA Indirect Costs](#) for information including [additional resources](#) and [NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart](#).

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this NOFO for the planning, acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, or repair of a building or facility.

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 set forth in this NOFO. All administrative requirements must be met in order for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met 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:

1. 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.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include other experts (e.g., agricultural producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, educators, evaluators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs.
4. 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.
5. The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to the reviewer's area of expertise, geographic area, and entity type, as appropriate.
6. 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

NIFA will use the following criteria, weighted equally, to evaluate applications to this program:

1. **Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem.** This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the project will have an impact upon and advance the quality of food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals, identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, project justification, innovation, advancement of student recruitment and retention goals, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, and potential for adoption by other institutions.
2. **Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages.** This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution through its intercollegiate engagement and partnership and necessary outside collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve because of this project. Data management plan is appropriate, clearly described, and feasible.
3. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building.** This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its teaching or research capacity. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials) available to carry out the project, potential for academic or research enhancement, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support.
4. **Key Personnel.** This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications of key persons who will develop and carry out the project, and the qualifications of project personnel who will provide for the assessment of project results and impacts of these findings.
5. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness.** This criterion relates to the extent to which the total budget adequately supports the project and is cost-effective. Elements considered include the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objectives; the appropriateness of budget allocations between the applicant and any collaborating inter-institutional sources and necessary outside collaborators; the adequacy of time committed to the project by key project personnel; and the degree to which the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, leverages additional funds, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority educational need areas.

C. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only need to provide an update if there was a change in previously provided 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 NOFO. 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 NOFO may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the program-specific laws and regulations, NIFA General Awards Administrative Provisions ([7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E](#)), USDA Regulations for Grants and Agreements ([2 CFR Chapter IV](#)), Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR part 200](#)), [NIFA-specific terms and conditions](#), [USDA General Terms and Conditions for Federal Awards](#), and approved budget and project plans.

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this NOFO (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Output and reporting requirements are included in the [award terms and conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the Award Notice.

Project Directors Meeting: During the tenure of a grant, PDs must attend at least one PD meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss project and grant management, opportunities for collaborative efforts, future directions for education reform, and opportunities to disseminate products and project results. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in the application's budget under travel expenses. While meeting locations will vary, for budgeting purposes, applicants can estimate the cost to attend a three-day meeting in Kansas City, MO. While budgets should account for this travel, virtual or hybrid meetings may be considered.

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 required);
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 [2 CFR Part 300 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, [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
6. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a Federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved Federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-Federal entity;
8. The need for additional Federal funds to complete the project;
9. Salary rates of pay exceeding an Executive Level IV salary range (see “Rates of Pay for the Executive Schedule” under the “Executive & Senior Level Employee Pay Tables” header at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) require prior NIFA approval. This rate does not include any fringe benefits, general and administrative (G&A), overhead, or other expenses. Requests for approval must include the salary rate of pay and a justification for the rate and be sent to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) to awards@usda.gov;
10. No more than 50 percent of the total dollars of this award may be subcontracted to another party(ies) without prior written approval of the ADO, except subcontracts to Federal agencies;
11. Transferring funds between the construction and non-construction work under a Federal award; and
12. A no-cost extension (meaning, an extension of time that does not require the obligation of additional Federal funds) of the period of performance, other than any one-time extension authorized by the Federal agency in accordance with paragraph 2 CFR 200.308(g)(2). All requests for no-cost extensions should be submitted at least 10 calendar days before the conclusion of the period of performance. The Federal agency may approve multiple no-cost extensions under a Federal award if not prohibited by Federal statute or regulation.

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](#).

D. Language Access Services

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#).

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

For Programmatic questions please email InsularGrants@usda.gov.

For administrative questions related to;

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this NOFO
2. Other NOFO or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this NOFO, please email awards@usda.gov

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Departmental Officer – ADO

Authorized Representative – AR

Data Management Plan – DMP

Distance Education Grants for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas – DEG

Fiscal Year – FY

Indirect Costs – IDC

Modified Total Indirect Costs – MTDC

Mentoring Plan – MP

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO

Project Director – PD

Project Narrative – PN

Project Summary – PS

Research & Related – R&R

Total Federal Funds Awarded – TFFA

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.

Definitions

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Resubmitted Application:

A project application that was previously submitted to a program but not funded.