REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children National Workforce Strategy Development

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2023
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	April 17, 2023
ANTICIPATED FUNDING:	$750,000
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-WICWD-009782
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.244
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The *National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD)* is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.244.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, **April 17, 2023** [*Ref to Part I § C of this RFA*]
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (*NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month*)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when programs are grounded in DEIA. NIFA is committed to enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and 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 (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children – National Workforce Strategy Development RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for the National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) project, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, hereafter referred to as WIC, is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and serves to safeguard the health of eligible women who are pregnant, postpartum, and/or breastfeeding, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement food purchases, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care.

This project is part of a joint agency initiative between FNS and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) that is expected to cultivate comprehensive and sustained solutions for WIC Workforce Development. The joint agency initiative aims to strengthen the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce, with the goals of increasing: 1) WIC participation through reaching those populations that are eligible, but not enrolled and 2) WIC participants' likelihood of adopting nutrition education and breastfeeding support recommendations. Strategy development related to cultural representation and culturally responsive care should, at a minimum, include cultural competency to serve historically underserved populations participating in WIC and include strategies for State/local agencies, which include Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and territories, to identify and meet targeted needs that are not captured in this list. Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of WIC Program services.

For this RFA, NIFA requests applications to develop a five-year National WIC Workforce Strategy. The amount available is approximately $750,000 for a single (1) award in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, to be administered as a Cooperative Agreement. The project is to be completed within 6 months. The Cooperative Agreement will be between NIFA and the Grantee. NIFA and FNS will provide additional context, content, and contacts, as needed, along with agency liaisons (one from each agency) to address questions and help inform the process.

Combining the experience and expertise of FNS and NIFA, including NIFA's partnerships with Land-Grant Universities and Colleges, funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, P.L. 117-2, §1106) will be used to invest in research, education, and extension to increase the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, P.L. 117-2, §1106) funding to invest in research, education, and extension to help WIC develop new workforce capacity and/or expand existing capacity. This project, the National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) Cooperative Agreement, will be supported through an Inter-Agency Agreement between Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) using ARPA funds.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) project is aligned with the USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026. Specifically, this project supports Goal 4, Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans, by contributing to a technological infrastructure that supports increased food security through assistance and access to nutritious and affordable food (Objective 4.1); and Goal 6, Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA, by contributing to a technological infrastructure that establishes a customer-centric, inclusive, high-performing WIC workforce that is representative of America and the communities we serve (Objective 6.2).

WIC and other USDA funded programs with similar public health workforce issues, specifically NIFA's Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) lack a comprehensive Federal strategy to sufficiently support a sustained infrastructure for efficient and effective program delivery to historically underserved and at-risk populations. Disconnects in educational systems, social disparities, and employment opportunities have exacerbated gaps in workforce development and, thus, programming.

The purpose of this project is to develop a five-year National WIC Workforce Strategy that will be used in subsequent components of FNS and NIFA joint agency work. The joint agency initiative aims to strengthen the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce, with the goals of increasing WIC participation through reaching those populations that are eligible, but not enrolled and increasing WIC participants' likelihood of adopting nutrition education and breastfeeding support recommendations. Strategy development related to cultural representation and culturally responsive care should include cultural competency to serve historically underserved populations participating in WIC and include strategies for State/local agencies, which include Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and territories, to identify and meet targeted needs Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of program services.

FNS works to increase food and nutrition security and reduce hunger through the administration of more than 15 Federal nutrition assistance programs including WIC. The program was established in 1974 to provide supplemental foods, nutrition education and breastfeeding support, screenings, and referrals to medical and social services to eligible low-income women who are pregnant, postpartum, and/or breastfeeding, infants, and children younger than 5 years old. Studies have found that participation in WIC could potentially contribute to lower morbidity and mortality for mothers and infants, and reduce economic, racial, and/or ethnic disparities in adverse outcomes through its services addressing nutritional status and nutrition

security as well as its referrals facilitating receipt of preventive health care and other social services.[1,2] As a Federal grant program, Congress appropriates to FNS a specific amount of funds annually for State agencies to operate WIC. Currently, the program operates through:

1. 89 WIC State agencies, which include 50 State health departments, 33 Indian Tribal Organizations, the District of Columbia, and five US territories (Northern Mariana, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands),
2. 1,900 local agencies with 10,000 clinic sites, and
3. 40,000 authorized retailers (known as "WIC authorized vendors").

State agencies administer the WIC Program in accordance with Federal regulations[3] and guide local agencies on all aspects of program operations. WIC State agencies are responsible for submitting an annual State Plan to FNS.

In FY2021, approximately 6.2 million women, infants, and children across the US received WIC benefits each month.[4] WIC benefits are well established in the scientific literature and WIC has been found to yield positive benefits for maternal and child health. Updates to the WIC food packages in 2009 that increased fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lower-fat milk, and expanded culturally appropriate food options resulted in additional positive changes to WIC participants' health and well-being. Evidence is also developing regarding the cost-effectiveness of different facets of the WIC Program. For example, WIC's work with pregnant women reduces pre-term births and improves health and development such that a $1 WIC investment is estimated to save about $2.50 in medical, educational, and worker productivity costs.[5]

In order to receive WIC benefits, applicants must meet the following eligibility requirements: (1) a categorical requirement (i.e., must be a woman who is pregnant, postpartum, and/ or breastfeeding; must be an infant; or must be a child up to age 5 years); (2) a residential requirement (i.e., must live in the jurisdiction where applying for benefits); (3) an income requirement; and (4) a nutrition risk requirement.

In the WIC clinic, competent professional authorities (CPAs) conduct nutrition risk assessments and prescribe WIC food benefits. Usually, nutritionists, registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), registered nurses, physicians, physician's assistants, and State or local medically trained health officials are trained to serve as a CPA. Professional staff also provide nutrition-focused counseling and breastfeeding promotion and support. Paraprofessional peer educators can be employed to support breastfeeding. Learning opportunities are provided in person and through remote delivery methods. Paraprofessionals' main purpose is to perform eligibility

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[1] National WIC Association. The Role of WIC in Reducing Maternal Mortality Position Paper. October 2020. Accessed at https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/fy20_nwa_factsheet_reducing-maternal-mortality-position-paper.pdf on 22 November 2021.

[2] Gamblin MD, Brooks C, Khalaf NBA. Applying Racial Equity to U.S. Federal Nutrition Assistance Program: SNAP, WIC and child nutrition. Bread for the World Institute.

[3] Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, 7 C.F.R. §246. Available at: https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-246

[4] WIC Program | Economic Research Service (ers.usda.gov).

[5] Nianogo, R. A., Wang, M. C., Basurto-Davila, R., Nobari, T. Z., Prelip, M., Arah, O. A., & Whaley, S. E. (2019). Economic evaluation of California prenatal participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to prevent preterm birth. *Preventive medicine*, *124*, 42-49.

determination, health and nutrition screening, and referral services to WIC applicants. Defining staff qualifications, along with roles and responsibilities helps ensure that participants receive quality of service, which in turn impact WIC participant recruitment and retention.

An analysis of WIC State plans found that State agencies most commonly hire RDNs and masters level nutritionists as CPAs followed by bachelor's level nutritionists, followed by registered nurses, and then physicians. Most State agencies (69% or more) prescribe local agency staffing standards that include credentials, functions of CPAs, paraprofessional requirements, staff to participant ratio standards, and staffing levels. Most State agencies (95%) also have a plan for ensuring that local agency credentials are in line with the FNS's WIC Nutrition Services Standards.[6] While most State agencies provide regular trainings to all staff on a variety of topics, only about half of State agencies reported providing training regularly or as needed for WIC professionals on cultural competencies (51%) and fewer State agencies reported providing this training to paraprofessionals.

Despite evidence that WIC contributes to healthy outcomes, only about 57 percent of WIC eligible mothers and children participated in the program in 2019.[7] And not all who participate in the program, sustain participation throughout the period they are eligible.[8] During the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC enrollment increased by only 2% between February 2020 and February 2021 even though many more people were eligible.[Error! Bookmark not defined.], [9] USDA has prioritized efforts to increase WIC participation and retention as one possible way to help lower our nation's maternal and infant mortality rates, which have been increasing significantly over the last three decades. Racial and ethnic maternal and infant mortality disparities exist. For example, black women and American Indian/Alaska Native women are 2 to 3 times more likely to die a pregnancy-related death as compared with white women. Black women also experience 2.4 times the rate of infant mortality than white women. Other communities of color face similar maternal and infant mortality disparities.[10]

For decades, WIC clinics have strived to meet the comprehensive set of needs of their service community while providing culturally responsive care. During 2021 USDA FNS convened WIC listening sessions and stakeholders conveyed that increasing diversity and cultural competency in the WIC workforce could potentially increase WIC participation and retention, particularly among historically underrepresented communities. Without question, recruiting, training, and retaining a WIC workforce that is representative of the WIC population is a key approach to maximizing WIC's full potential to support healthy development of infants and children, as well as postpartum recovery.

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[6] USDA Food and Nutrition Service WIC Nutrition Services Standards. Published August 2013.
[7] Gray K., Balch-Crystal E., Giannarelli, L., and Johnson, P. (2021). National- and State-Level Estimates of WIC Eligibility and WIC Program Reach in 2019. Prepared by Insight Policy Research, Contract No AG-3198-D-16-0095. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: COR Grant Lovellette. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-analysis.
[8] Eligible Low-Income Children Missing Out on Crucial WIC Benefits During Pandemic | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (cbpp.org).
[9] Charted: U.S. Unemployment Rates Over Time (howmuch.net) from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
[10] Petersen, E. E., Davis, N. L., Goodman, D., Cox, S., Syverson, C., Seed, K., Shapiro-Mendoza, C., Callaghan, W. M., & Barfield, W. (2019). Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths - United States, 2007-2016. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, *68*(35), 762–765. https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6835a3

ARPA provided FNS with $390 million to carry out WIC outreach, innovation, and program modernization efforts to increase participation and benefit redemption. To determine how it would invest these funds, FNS conducted more than 30 listening sessions with WIC stakeholders from around the country. FNS used this input, along with research gathered from the US Digital Service (USDS), to establish a goal-driven investment framework to increase WIC participation and retention and reduce participation and retention disparities in program delivery.

One of the pillars of the WIC modernization investment framework focuses on developing and strengthening the WIC workforce. During the listening sessions, stakeholders voiced support for workforce development initiatives such as developing educational and career pipelines for WIC staff, embedding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) principles and practices into WIC Program operations and staff training opportunities, and strategically addressing concerns around staff retention. Given the feedback received on this topic, FNS, through this initiative, is investing a portion of the ARPA funds into a collaborative effort that will support further integration of DEIA principles into the WIC workforce and evaluate the impact of investing in this pillar of the modernization framework. This will serve as a model for success which could potentially help shape the integration of DEIA principles across the broader nutrition education workforce at local, State agency, and Federal levels.

Additionally, the opportunity exists to leverage the outcomes of the initiative by utilizing the NIFA Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which uses a peer educator model to provide culturally responsive nutrition education to improve the nutritional health and well-being of families with young children and youth with limited financial resources. For more than half a century, working through the Land-Grant University (LGU) Cooperative Extension system, EFNEP has established connections and potential for building new connections in underserved communities, nationwide. EFNEP is administered through 1862 and 1890 LGUs.

Diversity in EFNEP participation is reflected in annual data. In 2021, 39% of adult participants self-identified as Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and 61% self-identified as not Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Three percent each, self-identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Multiple Races; 29% self-identified as Black or African American, and 59% reported as White.[11] Not distinguished in these percentages are the increasing number of immigrant and refugee populations that EFNEP now serves. WIC and EFNEP face similar challenges in employing and retaining staff who come from and represent the audiences they serve, which hinders program enrollment and participation.

The purpose of this project is to develop a 5-year National WIC Workforce Development Strategy that will be subsequently implemented by FNS and NIFA as a joint agency WIC Workforce Initiative. One of the key Nutrition Security pillars for USDA is "Developing, Translating, and Enacting Nutrition Science Through Partnership." USDA is working to integrate nutrition science into policy, systems, and environments to set people up for success. In doing so, we are collaborating with health professionals, the food and retail industries, and other

[11] 2021 National data reports for EFNEP. https://www.nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/EFNEP%202021%20Impact%20Report%20FINAL-508.pdf

key stakeholders to create and maximize partnerships that leverage nutrition science in increasingly culturally relevant and contextually sensitive ways.

NIFA encourages pursuing these priorities through Traditional Ecological Knowledge if consistent with the above purpose and priorities.

Program Area Description

A single award will be administered as a Cooperative Agreement between NIFA and the Grantee. Liaisons from both agencies, one from NIFA and one from FNS, will also meet regularly with the Grantee virtually to track progress, address questions and concerns, and provide additional context, content, and contacts, as needed. The Grantee will be provided with information from the WIC modernization investment framework listening sessions as a base from which to conduct additional stakeholder forums. A commitment to clear and effective communication and collaboration among all involved parties will be essential to the success of this project.

The project must address all objectives as sequentially outlined below. Specific requirements are outlined in the deliverables section.

Objective 1. Conduct an analysis of key information to better understand the current WIC workforce as it relates to the project purpose and goals.

1. Convene stakeholder forum(s) to seek broad stakeholder input, key questions, and priorities from the field to inform WIC Workforce Strategy Development.
2. Conduct a needs assessment of WIC staffing capacity, core skills for nutrition services roles in WIC to meet FNS WIC Nutrition Services Standards, including but not limited to competencies to provide culturally responsive care, and a current landscape of cultural diversity amongst the WIC workforce.
3. Identify existing workforce development programs that have potential to partner with WIC administrating agencies to recruit staff who have direct client interaction, such as administrative or clerical positions, but are not required to have specialized education and training (e.g., SNAP Employment and Training Programs, EFNEP).
4. Assess and summarize barriers to WIC workforce recruitment and retention, including but not limited to compensation, advancement opportunities, and key partnerships to provide community-level supports (e.g., childcare, transportation).

Objective 2: Assess current education and training programs that prepare prospective WIC nutrition services staff and/or provide continuing education to current WIC nutrition services staff.

1. Identify current training programs that successfully prepare culturally diverse community members and former participants to apply for nutrition services positions in WIC and could potentially serve as models.
2. Identify gaps in exposure to WIC as a career opportunity in current educational pathways and supervised practice experiences for nutrition professionals or other allied health professionals.
3. Identify gaps in continuing education to improve cultural competency for WIC nutrition services staff.
4. Recommend strategies to leverage coordination between WIC, EFNEP and other Federal nutrition programs to potentially strengthen WIC workforce recruitment and retention, including but not limited to recruiting diverse and culturally competent staff through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) employment and training programs.

Objective 3: Develop a comprehensive, National WIC Workforce Development Strategy that includes clear objectives and specific process and intervention recommendations for each of the following topics:

1. Increase diversity and cultural competency in the WIC nutrition services workforce.
2. Increase cultural diversity and competency in other WIC staff roles that involve direct client interaction (e.g., administrative or clerical positions).
3. Address barriers to recruitment and retention, including but not limited to, compensation, advancement opportunities, and known workforce development challenges (e.g., childcare, transportation).

The strategy must also:

1. Reflect assumptions and rationale for decisions made in developing recommendations.
2. Include a logic model and implementation plan that will advise how to sufficiently support a sustained infrastructure for culturally appropriate nutrition education program delivery to historically underserved and at-risk populations.
3. Put forth a model for success which could potentially help shape the integration of DEIA principles across the broader nutrition education workforce at local, State agency, and Federal levels.

For a program informational webinar please visit the NIFA calendar for dates, event registration, and link.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	NWWS
Program Code Name:	National WIC Workforce Strategy
ALN:	10.244
Project Type:	Extension, Education, or Integrated
Grant Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Application Deadline	April 17, 2023
Grant Duration:	6 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	1
Maximum Award Amount:	$750,000

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for the National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) in FY2023 is approximately $750,000 for a Cooperative Agreement. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

NIFA will assign a National Program Leader (NPL) with appropriate expertise to monitor the project, make recommendations concerning planning and procedures to be followed and ensure that objectives are fulfilled. The NPL will work closely with the Grantee to facilitate communication with FNS, and others involved in the project including, but not limited to, regular virtual meetings. The NPL will also facilitate communication between the Grantee for this project and those involved in other parts of the joint initiative to facilitate synergy in accomplishing the goals of the joint initiative. NIFA will review resources under development and provide guidance and technical assistance as needed. Additional details will be noted in the Cooperative Agreement, once finalized.

The Automated Standard Application for Payments, operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA. Application for FY2023 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see Appendix III for definition).

C. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or, preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process. [See Part III of RFA Key].

Eligibility includes:

a. State Agricultural Experiment Station;
b. colleges and universities (including junior colleges offering associate degrees or higher, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (see NIFA's Hispanic Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities page);
c. university research foundations;
d. other research institutions and organizations;
e. non-profit organizations
f. Federal agencies;
g. Governmental agencies
h. national laboratories;
i. private organizations or corporations;
j. individuals who are U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents; and
k. any group consisting of two or more entities identified in a) through j).

Eligible institutions do not include foreign or international organizations.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – duplicate or multiple submissions is not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and Grants 101. **Table 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	*New Users* to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-WICWD-009782**, 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 iPortalgrantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except Federal holidays.	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except Federal holidays

B. Content and Form of the Application

The NIFA Grants Application Guide is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA 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 RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References **(All references are to the Application Guide)**
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	Part 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 Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances.

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

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals and required deliverables of the National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD). See **Part V** of the Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates.
2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed 15 pages *1.5 spaced* including written text, figures, and tables with 1-inch margins (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit.

   The PN must include all the following:
   1. Introduction;
   2. Project goals and intended outcomes;
   3. Personnel, organizations, and resources involved;
   4. Approach, including project timeline; and

5. Cooperation and institutional/organizational involvement;

1. **Introduction.** Identify and succinctly describe the needs, relevance, significance and rational for developing a National WIC Workforce Development Strategy.

   Project goals and intended outcomes. Concisely present the goals, associated objectives and expected outputs and outcomes of the project necessary to address the needs outlined in the introduction and to achieve the deliverables outlined in the RFA. Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely, and should describe specific changes in knowledge, actions, or conditions that will occur because of the project. Strategy development related to cultural representation and culturally responsive care should include cultural competency to serve historically underserved populations and others participating in WIC. Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of program services.[12] Relevance and application will be important to ensure that projects support the systematic development of this work at the State/local agencies, which include ITOs and territories. Where possible, the Grantee should identify areas of the strategy that have transferability to other nutrition education and public health programs, including EFNEP.

2. **Personnel, organizations, and resources involved.** List the organizations and other entities and persons to be involved in carrying out the proposed project. Include a summary description of the relevant previous work and experience of each. The qualifications of persons involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership should reflect the expertise necessary to achieve the required deliverables. Including experience and connections with WIC, other Federal nutrition programs (e.g., EFNEP), Extension, historically underserved communities, and similar educational and workforce entities that serve historically underserved populations will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials.

3. **Approach.** The activities proposed to meet the project requirements and deliverables must be clearly stated. Discuss how the proposed outcomes will be realized by providing a systematic description and timeline for how the most important steps or milestones will be accomplished and the level and types of involvement of key stakeholders and partners at State/local agencies, including ITOs, and territories. Attention should be given to cultural competency to serve historically underserved populations and others participating in WIC. . Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of program services. In addition to these descriptions, it is recommended that a table be provided with implementation details for these activities, including: (a) specific steps and achievements; (b) timetables for milestones, and (c) entities involved at each step. These should align with the logic model that is also required.

4. **Cooperation and institutional/organizational involvement.** Provide a statement of commitment to communicating regularly with NIFA as per the Cooperative Agreement,

[12] Cultural Competence in Health and Human Services https://npin.cdc.gov/pages/cultural-competence

FNS, and with others who are part of the joint agency initiative where appropriate. Briefly indicate the commitment of other involved entities and organizations for the completion of this project. Letters of commitment must be included in the Appendices.

Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See Part V § 4.12 of the Application Guide for instructions for this field. All attachments must be in PDF format.

The following application content must be uploaded as separate files to Field 12.

1. Logic Model. A logic model is required and is limited to one-page. Title the attachment as 'Logic Model' in the document header and save file as 'LogicModel'. This logic model must align with what is proposed in this application.
2. Data Management Plan (DMP). Title the attachment as 'Data Management Plan' in the document header and save file as 'DataManagementPlan'. A Data Management Plan (DMP) of no more than two pages is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V § B of this RFA, Part III § 3.1 of the Application Guide and NIFA's Data Management Plan). If you need help in preparing a data management plan or have questions about what constitutes a data management plan for this role (including questions about data privacy, etc.), please contact the NIFA program contacts listed at the end of this RFA. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V § B of this RFA, NIFA's Data Management Plan).
3. Appendices to Project Narrative. Title the attachment as 'Appendices' in the document header and save file as 'Appendices'. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. Applicants may provide Specific Program Incentive Information, items 12-14 in an appendix. Appendices are limited to 7 pages.

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

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

R&R Budget. See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

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

Data Management Plan. A DMP is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project.

Supplemental Information Form. See Part V of the Application Guide.

1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD) and the program code (NWWS). Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part V** of the Application Guide.

C. Funding Restrictions

Fully negotiated rate. Applicants must use the current negotiated Indirect Cost (IDC) rate established by its cognizant Federal agency (the agency that provides the most funds). If awarded, the applicant will be required to produce a negotiated IDC rate agreement from the cognizant agency in order to recover IDC. If unable to obtain a negotiated rate from its cognizant agency, the applicant is not permitted indirect cost reimbursement. Rather, the applicant may only be reimbursed for allowable direct costs. Violation of cost accounting principles is not permitted when re-budgeting or charging costs to awards. Rather, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs.

If the applicant wants full IDC (Indirect Cost), but does not have a negotiated rate, and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant must calculate an IDC rate in order to request IDC. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process. Applicants need only to calculate an IDC rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC, please see National Institute of Food and Agriculture (usda.gov) for additional resources. 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). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect 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.

Sub-award Restriction. The applicant is expected to perform a substantive portion of the project and no more than 33 percent, as determined by budget expenditures, may be sub-awarded. NIFA will allow applicants to indicate in their proposal if they intend to sub-award more than 33% of the total award. This deviation will require NIFA pre-approval. If pre-approval is desired, contact the National Program Leader that oversees this program (see Agency Contact). Projects may divide their budget allocations between partners as it fits their work plan. (For additional knowledge or expertise that is not available within the applicant organization, funds for expert consultation may be included in the "All Other Direct Costs" section of the proposed budget.)

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

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. 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., producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, public health practitioners, educators, consumers, and commercial reviews) 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 diverse and culturally competent balanced composition of members.
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 to evaluate this RFA:

Initial Screening Criteria:

To avoid any misunderstandings, applicants should be aware that applications that do not satisfy all the screening criteria are at risk of being returned to the proposing entity without review. Returned applications may not be resubmitted (with or without revision) under this solicitation. The initial screening criteria are the following:

1. The applicant must meet the RFA eligibility requirements.
2. The application must meet the Application Content and Format requirements as described in this RFA. This includes page length requirements and all required forms and all files in PDF.
3. The proposed budget must be within the $750,000 identified in the RFA.
4. The proposed project must demonstrate capacity and willingness to communicate regularly with NIFA and meet Cooperative Agreement requirements.

Program Area Evaluation Criteria:

NIFA will use the following evaluation criteria to review National WIC Workforce Strategy Development (NWWSD).

1. Merits of the Application:
   a) Project objectives and outcomes are clearly described, adequate, appropriate and achievable;
   b) Proposed approach, procedures, or methodologies, logic model, and data management plan are appropriate, clearly described, and feasible;
   c) Expected results or outcomes are clearly stated, measurable, and achievable within the allotted time frame;
   d) The timeline and budget for accomplishing project goals, objectives, and outcomes is realistic and achievable;
   e) Proposal shows potential for achieving measurable, documented changes in learning, actions, or conditions in an identified audience or stakeholder group (historically underserved populations and others entering the WIC workforce); and
   f) Project has potential to fully develop and deliver on the required deliverables.

2, Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities and Project Management
   a) Roles of key personnel are clearly defined;
   b) Key personnel have sufficient expertise to complete the proposed project, including engaging and establishing partnerships with other types of expertise and from different disciplines to complete the project; historically underserved WIC representation is included in these partnerships; Cooperative Extension is included in these partnerships; and educational and academic institutions are also represented in the partnerships.
   c) Evidence of institutional capacity and competence in the proposed area of work is provided;
   d) Support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation are sufficient; and
   e) A clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, maintenance of partnerships with

stakeholders and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing concerning outcomes including changes in learning, actions or conditions, and reporting among members of the project team.

3. Project Relevance
   a) The project plan fully addresses the problem or issue identified;
   b) The proposed work addresses identified stakeholder needs;
   c) Stakeholder involvement in project development, implementation, and evaluation is demonstrated, where appropriate; and
   d) Communication channels established and recommendations developed will be based on a broad range of stakeholder input and expertise and will have potential for application across a broad array of situations and circumstances; May include a combination of informal, innovative, traditional, and adaptive approaches to facilitate change.

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 RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable Federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions, 7 CFR Part 3430, subparts A through E.

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

Delegation of fiscal responsibility. Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

Changes in Budget or Project Plans. In accordance with 2 CFR 200.308, awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons (the awardee is subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award):

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring).
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the Federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project.
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (Cost Principles), or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, (Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals), or 48 CFR, unless waived by the Federal awarding agency,
5. 48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures;
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense (2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs);
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a Federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see 2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards), unless described in the application and funded in the approved Federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
8. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-Federal entity; and
9. The need for additional Federal funds to complete the project.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

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

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with State agencies and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Program Contact
Pascale Jean, Ph.D., CHES, RD
National Program Leader
Pascale.Jean@usda.gov

For administrative questions related to;

1. Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this RFA, 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
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Authorized Representative – AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA
Coordinated Agricultural Project – CAP
Assistance Listing Number – ALN
Data Management Plan – DMP
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility **-** DEIA
Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program – EFNEP
Indian Tribal Organizations – ITOs
Land Grant University – LGU
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA
Request for Application – RFA
Research, Education, and Economics – REE
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children – WIC
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

Continuation Award:

An award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the Federal government and the public.

Cultural Competence:

The integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes.

Diversity:

Any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another. It means respect for and appreciation of differences. Diversity encompasses the range of similarities and differences each person brings to society, including but not limited to national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures.

Matching:

The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Renewal Application:

A project application that seeks additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award.

Resubmitted Application:

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

Resubmitted Renewal Application:

A project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. This is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to but not funded.