REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

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

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	FY 2022: March 28, 2022 FY 2023: February 20, 2023
ANTICIPATED FUNDING:	FY 2022: $800,000 FY 2023: $800,000
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-RIGP-008922
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.322
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

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

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadlines
Application:	Fiscal Year 2022: March 28, 2022, (5:00 P.M. Eastern) Fiscal Year 2023: February 20, 2023, (5:00 P.M. Eastern)
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. NIFA recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when equity is grounded in the programs. 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. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and use comments to help meet the requirements of Section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) requests applications for the Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) for FY 2022 and FY 2023 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.

This request for applications (RFA) is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2022. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. The amount available for grants in FY 2022 is approximately $800,000 and FY 2023 is approximately $800,000.

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

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular areas (DEG) is administered under the provisions section 1490 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) 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 in the food and agricultural sciences.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the DEG program 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 what we know about how students learn. Many of these concepts are identified in the National Research Council's publication, "How People Learn." DEG-funded projects shall also focus on imparting both technical knowledge as well employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving. These concepts can be found in the publication: https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/agriculture-human-sciences-and-natural-resources/employability-skills-in-agriculture/index.html.

NIFA welcomes (but does not require) applicants to work with the Extension Foundation for the development and delivery of content for the public and for Extension professionals nationwide through Connect Extension, or a National Cooperative Extension Project website.

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.

The DEG program is aligned with USDA Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development; Objective 4.1: Expand rural business opportunity and rural quality of life with access to capital; improved infrastructure, broadband access and connectivity; and support for workforce availability.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	DEG
Program Code Name:	Distance Education Grants Program for Higher Education in the Insular areas
CFDA Number	10.322
Project Type:	Education/Teaching Projects
Grant Types:	Standard; Planning Activity
Application Deadlines:	FY 2022: January 21, 2022 FY 2023: January 20, 2023

Table 3: Standard Grant Key Information

Title	Description
Standard Grant Duration:	36-48 Months
Number of Applications Per Lead Institution:	3
Maximum # of Awards Per Institution:	3
Maximum Award Amount:	Up to Approx. $200,000
Total Funding Per Institution:	Approx. $450,000

Table 4: Planning Activity Key Information

Title	Description
Planning Activity Duration:	Up to 24 Months
Number of Applications Per Lead Institution:	2
Maximum # of Awards Per Institution:	1
Maximum Award Amount:	Up to Approx. $30,000
Total Funding Per Institution:	Approx. $30,000

NIFA is soliciting applications for the DEG program to strengthen the capacity of Insular Area institutions to carry out distance food, agriculture, natural resources, and human science education programs (including, but not limited to, Traditional Ecological Knowledge) using network technologies under the following characteristics and conditions:

1. Acquire the equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, digital network technology, and infrastructure necessary to teach students and teachers about technology in the classroom;
2. Develop and enhance 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 aid certification to individuals who seek to acquire or enhance technology skills in order to use technology in the classroom or instructional process;
4. Implement 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.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for the Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) in FY 2022 is approximately $800,000 and in FY 2023 is approximately $800,000. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2022. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

USDA is not committed to fund any application or to make a specific number of awards. The Automated Standard Application for Payments, operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. Funds will be awarded competitively through a peer panel review process. Institutions receiving a grant under this program are eligible to receive DEG grants in subsequent years. Receiving a grant under any other authority does not affect eligibility for this DEG grants program.

B. Types of Application

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA. Applications for FY 2022 and FY 2023 are limited to the following applications 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).
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. An education or teaching project develops human capital needed to meet current and future national food and agricultural science workplace needs.

DEG projects should 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 RFA. Please note that at least one of these Need Areas must be indicated on the Project Summary (see Part IV, B. 3). Need areas for FY 2022 and FY 2023 include the following:

1. *Curricula Design, Materials Development, and Library Resources*. To promote the development of courses of study and degree programs, new and improved curricula, and instructional materials and technology. Also, to promote the acquisition of 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 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. *Additional Information*. The use of students for only routine office, laboratory, or fieldwork is not considered education for the purposes of this program. To be considered as education related, students will need to be actively engaged in the scholarship of research activities.
    a. Expected Products and Results. The DEG program requires all project directors to provide appropriate metrics and describe the expected products and results, outcomes, and their potential impact on strengthening food, agricultural, natural resources, and human sciences education, research and extension in the United States. Metrics to assess products, outputs, and outcomes are to be clearly delineated in the proposal.
    b. Incorporation of Social Sciences and Enhancing Impacts. The DEG program supports social and behavioral science disciplines. DEG projects that integrate social and biological 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, such as increasing global demand for food production in the face of limited natural resources; improving health and reducing obesity by engaging in heathy lifestyles and consuming heathy diets; and alleviating poverty by fostering economic opportunity.

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.

    Grants 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. The project period may range from 36to 48 months.

2. *Planning Activity.* Planning Activity Grants support scientific meetings that bring together educators to identify education/teaching needs, update information, or advance an area of education/teaching. Support for a limited number of meetings covering subject matter encompassed by this solicitation will be considered for partial or, if modest, total support. Individuals planning activity grants must not exceed $30,000 for up to two years and are

not renewable. Indirect costs are not permitted on Planning Activity grant awards.

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 Distance Education Grants Program for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas (DEG) 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.

Institutions receiving a grant under this program are eligible to receive DEG grants in subsequent years. Receiving a grant under any other authority does not affect eligibility for this DEG grants program. Each faculty recipient of support for developmental activities must be an "eligible participant" please refer to: 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs-General Award Administrative Provisions, for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

Individual Institutions. For the purposes of the DEG grant 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 non-profit 2-year and 4-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; and
8. The Virgin Islands of the United States.

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 2-year or 4-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 RFA. 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; and
4. Is a public or other nonprofit institution; and 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 the 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 applicant's Project Narrative. See Part IV, B.3, Field 8.

Duplicate or Multiple Submission – Duplicate or multiple submission 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.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

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 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 5** 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 5: 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-RIGP-008922,** 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 6: 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 grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, except federal holidays

B. Content and Form of the Application

The application guide is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the application guide if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 7** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 7: 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 V
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 V5**of the **Application Guide.**

1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the DEG Program. See **Part V** of the **Application Guide** for instructions and suggested templates.
2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN). The PN must not exceed **23 double-spaced pages** including all figures and tables. The font size should be no smaller than 12 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. Applications will not be accepted for review if the project narrative is not included, exceeds 23 total double-spaced pages, or is not in **PDF format**.

The PN must include all of the following:

a. **Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem**
   i Identification of Educational Problem 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 target 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, national, or international 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 equal opportunity 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 procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project. Describe plans for management of the project 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. *This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.*

Note: 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) "i*mpacts*" 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% 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. Knowledgeable and experienced individuals should lead such efforts. As a guide, up to 10% of the grant funds may be used to support this purpose.

v Dissemination Plans. The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results, and impacts…etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or international 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. *This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications*.

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 business or industry). Provide evidence, 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 activities of the project.

iii Academic Enhancement. Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching 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 institutions/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 targeted audience that would benefit from the continuation of this project. *This is optional for Planning Activity grant applications.*

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 such budget items 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.

ii. Cost-effectiveness. Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on a need area.

3. Field 12, Add Other Attachments. See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

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. Biographical Sketch **- The following are additional instructions of information to include:**

1. Author identifier (ORCID) of the researcher if available.
2. Digital Object Identifier (DOI) of all publications where possible.

You may also include a list of data publications or published data products relevant to the proposed project, following recommended data citation format.

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

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

1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name (Distance Education Grants Program for Higher Education in the Insular areas) and the program code (DEG). Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part V** of the **Application Guide**.

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

C. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. 7 U.S.C. 3310(a) and (c) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Open Researcher and Contributor ID (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

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

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

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

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

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum indirect cost allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing. Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections 408 and 410 of 2 CFR 200.

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

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements 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 balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
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:

1. Each application will be evaluated by three peer reviewers. We will use the evaluation criteria below (which are listed in priority order of importance) to review grant applications submitted in response to this RFA: **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, justification for the project, innovation, advancing educational equity, 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 inter-collegial engagement and partnership and necessary outside collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve because of this project.
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 or research need areas.

C. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information relating to an applicant prior to an award and update the information as needed. Applicants may only have to update their information if they had previously provided the information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

D. Application Disposition

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

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

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

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Project Directors Meeting: During the tenure of a grant, Project Directors (PD) 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 results of the projects. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in the application's budget under travel expenses. While budgets should account for this travel, virtual or hybrid meetings may be considered based on local and national pandemic conditions.

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see NIFA's Terms and Conditions) for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the award.

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 and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACTS

Program Contact
Irma Lawrence
National Program Leader
Division of Community and Education
ilawrence@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

Name	Acronyms
Authorized Representative	AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998	AREERA
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance	CFDA
Data Management Plan	DMP
Distance Education Grants for Institutions of Higher Education in Insular Areas	DEG
Data Management Plan	DMP
Digital Object Identifier	DOI
Indirect Costs	IDC
National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977	NARETPA
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	NIFA
Open Researcher and Contributor ID	ORCID
Project Narrative	PN
Project Summary	PS
Request for Application	RFA
Research, Education, and Economics	REE
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.

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.

Resubmitted Application:

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