Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program

MODIFICATIONS on Pages: cover page, 2, 4 & 19

FY19 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 11, 2019

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



United States Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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

Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number **10.334.**

DATES: Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on **February 11, 2019.** Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider your comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit your written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and *not* for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program (AgVets) RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the AgVets for fiscal year 2019 (FY19) to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY19 is approximately $4,797,500.

This notice identifies the objectives for AgVets projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an AgVets grant.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 777 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 provides funds to NIFA for a pilot program to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans.

The USDA and NIFA continue to take a leadership role in assisting returning veterans who are interested in pursuing careers in agriculture, while also supporting military families in rural America. While military veterans are eligible for most USDA programs, a hands-on immersive training experience has been identified as a critical strategy for helping them enter into and sustain successful careers in farming and ranching. With targeted outreach and key strategic partnerships, existing and pilot programs can assist veterans in securing meaningful employment opportunities that strengthen rural economies across America. In turn, these veterans bring the training and leadership skills they have developed to local communities, contributing to rural prosperity and an enhanced quality of life.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The need for jobs training for Veterans in rural areas corresponds to the need to train a new generation of farmers and ranchers in areas dominated by an aging farm population. Along with higher percentages of rural youth enlisting in the Army when compared to those from cities, the nation is experiencing demographic changes such as increased numbers of women and minorities serving, and a greater reliance on the National Guard and Reserve in overseas deployments.

As these military members from diverse backgrounds complete their tours of duty or transition to Veteran status, many return to rural America, ready to farm, ranch, and lead. Some have cited finding a new mission here at home: ensuring the future of American agriculture by farming and ranching and through the myriad jobs associated with producing food, fuel, and fiber.

In FY18, NIFA funded six AGVETS pilot projects. Information about the funded projects is available at https://nifa.usda.gov/program/enhancing-agricultural-opportunities-military-veterans-agvets.

Program Purpose: The overarching goal of AgVets is to increase the number of military veterans pursuing knowledge and skills development through comprehensive, hands-on and immersive model farm/ranch programs offered regionally that lead to successful careers in the food and agricultural sector (see Definitions in Part VIII, D.).

Program Priority Information:

Application Deadline – February 11, 2019 (5:00 p.m., Eastern Time)
Proposed Budget Requests –

- Applications must not exceed $1,000,000 total (including indirect costs) for project periods of 3 years.
- Applications with budget requests exceeding the budgetary guidelines will not be

reviewed.

Requested Project Type –Extension Projects only
Requested Grant Type – Standard Grants only
Program Code – AGVETS
Program Code Name – Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans
CFDA – 10.334
Program Area Contact – Mr. Brent Elrod (belrod@nifa.usda.gov)

To help achieve the AgVets Program goal, this program is seeking projects that will develop a model training program specifically designed for hands-on farming and ranching training for military veterans. These model training programs must:

- Offer farm and ranch hands-on training and classroom education through an immersive onsite learning experience leading to a comprehensive understanding of successful farm/ranch operation/management practices aligned to the veteran cohort's interests;
- Develop or identify curriculum used, including cutting edge technologies and innovations that producers can adopt to help manage their operations;
- Include the appropriate mix of education, workshops, tours and instructor-supervised field experiences;
- Be led and managed by a project team that has experience in one or more areas that include
    - veteran engagement in agricultural pursuits, particularly concerning small and medium-size farms and agribusiness, such as the provision of education and training to veterans and the development of skills leading to job placement and career opportunities in farming and ranching, including access to land, equipment, and capital;
    - on-the-job training and education, apprenticeship, and business development activities for veterans pursuing vocational and entrepreneurial interests that support and grow the food supply chain; and/or
    - efforts to enhance and increase workforce readiness and employment prospects for service-disabled veterans through volunteer engagement and leadership development efforts that promote nature-based reintegration, civic ecology, and earning farm and off-farm income;
- Be led and managed by a project team that has demonstrated competency to implement a project of comparable size and complexity, provide fiscal accountability, collect data, and prepare reports and other necessary documentation;
- Provide support for veteran participation with a special focus on diverse and underrepresented groups. Successful applications will include a sound approach to outreach and selection of participants.
- Include outreach to veterans who may have previously participated in projects funded by the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) https://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/beginning-farmer-and-rancher-development-program-bfrdp and/or the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Grant Program https://www.outreach.usda.gov/grants/;
- Connect, as appropriate, with Arability https://nifa.usda.gov/program/agrability;

- Create partnerships and collaborations with academic institutions (including minority-serving and tribal colleges and universities), Extension Risk Management Education Centers (ERMEs) https://extensionrme.org/About.aspx, Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) https://rrdc.info/, or other regional entities to meet requirements for program and project evaluation and dissemination of findings, recommendations and impacts, including scalability;
- Evaluate the training model and participate in cross-program evaluation to assess the collective impact toward shared performance measures and outcome goals through activities that include Project Team meetings, conference calls, and engagement with federal agency partners as appropriate;
- Ensure results are disseminated through an effective communication plan;
- Align education and training goals with USDA programs and resources to increase awareness and engagement with state and local offices of Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD), including potential job and career opportunities within the Department;
- Collaborate with the Department of Veteran Affairs at the regional, state or local level to promote referrals, access to healthcare and other benefits to improve the Veteran experience and quality of service to Veterans;
- Engage with the Small Business Administration and their resourced partners at the regional and local level such as Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) program https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/vboc; Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/sbdc, Women's Business Center (WBCs) https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/wbc, and the Service-Disabled Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program;
- Engage with the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service https://www.dol.gov/vets/veterans/index.htm;
- Contribute program information and resources to Farm Answers https://farmanswers.org/Programs?au=Veterans; and
- Generate recommendations at the state and/or federal level that strengthen collaboration on transitioning Service members' education, training, and apprenticeship programs, including use of GI Bill benefits, to promote the food and agricultural sector as a viable career option.

Other Key Program Information:

- AgVets encourages (but does not require) projects that develop content suitable for delivery through eXtension (https://extension.org/).

The AgVets program directly aligns with:

- USDA's Strategic Plan for FY2018-2022
  https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-strategic-plan-2018-2022.pdf

  In addition, AgVets contributes to advancing USDA's Veterans in Agriculture task force goals:

1. Transitioning service members and Veterans are aware of opportunities available to them in employment, education, and entrepreneurship (3Es).
2. Transitioning service members and Veterans understand how they can contribute and benefit from the food and agricultural sectors, and to communities in rural America.
3. Veterans know about, and use, programs and incentives offered by USDA.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for AgVets grants in FY19 is approximately $4,797,500.

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. For more information see https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm.

B. Types of Applications

In FY19, you may submit applications to the AgVets Program as one of the following types of requests:

1. **New application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the AgVets Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements. **Projects that were funded in FY18 are ineligible to apply for FY19 funding.**

2. **Resubmitted application.** This is an application that had previously been submitted to NIFA but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. A resubmitted application must address concerns of the previous review panel. USDA reserves the right not to submit for review any application found not to be responsive to the previous reviews. We will evaluate resubmitted applications in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B) as new applications. If you are submitting a resubmission application, enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously-submitted application in the Federal field (Field 4 on the form).

C. Project Types and Grant Types

1. Project Types - The AgVets program will accept extension project types.

Extension Projects must conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. Program delivery may range from community-based to national audiences and use communication methods from face-to-face to electronic or combinations thereof. Extension

projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, instructional materials and innovative instructional methods appropriate to informal educational programs.

Extension Projects address one or more of the following key strategic actions:

1) Support non-formal education to increase food and agricultural literacy in adults;
2) Promote science-based agricultural literacy by increasing understanding and use of food and agricultural science data, information, and programs;
3) Build science-based capability in people to engage audiences and enable informed decision making;
4) Develop new applications of instructional tools and curriculum structures that increase technical competency and ensure global competitiveness;
5) Offer non-formal learning programs that increase accessibility to new audiences at the rate at which new ideas and technologies are tested and/or developed at the community-scale; and
6) Develop programs that increase public knowledge and citizen engagement leading to actions that protect or enhance the nation's food supply, agricultural productivity, environmental quality, community vitality, and/or public health and well-being.

2. Grant Types - The following is the available grant type under this RFA.

Standard. 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.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

AgVets applicants must be nonprofit entities (see Definitions in Part VIII, D). A letter stating the non-profit status should be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.). Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirement. Project partners and collaborators need not meet the eligibility requirement. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the successful completion of the project. Applications submitted by individuals are not eligible for consideration under any category applicable to AgVets.

Fiscal Agent:
If an applicant cannot accept Federal funds directly, a letter must be included in the application stating that in the event the application results in an award, the award funds must be administered through a fiscal agent organization on their behalf. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant and the letter must be countersigned by an authorized representative of the fiscal agent organization. The letter should include the fiscal agent's point of contact, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. This letter is to be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments (Part IV.B.). In the event an application is recommended for funding, NIFA will request that both the applicant or institution/organization and the fiscal agent organization submit complete management information (see Part V, D.).

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

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

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package and Content and Form of Application Submission

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For information about the pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle see https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.html.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative, or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed **PRIOR** to submitting an application. It can take as long as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **"Register," in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to** https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html**), for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2, below, to locate the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html and enter the funding opportunity number

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-OP-006669

Click "Search." On the displayed page, click the corresponding link to continue. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may move forms amongst different Grant Application Packages but you may ONLY submit an application to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

Contained within the application package is the "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide." This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information

about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application,** refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support.html). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support
800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on federal holidays.
Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (see https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants):
Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. E
Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Name of agency you are applying to
- Specific area of concern

Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A of this part). The following is **additional information** you need to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III, Section 3 of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether attachments are in PDF format; see Part III, Section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. See Part V, Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances (e.g., Prohibition Against Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements).

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract – (PDF Format is Required)

The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of AgVets. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for:

- instructions including a
- link to a suggested template.

The Summary/Abstract is limited to 250 words and must be single-spaced.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative – (PDF Format is Required)

16 PAGES is the Page Limit for the Project Narrative (including any figures and tables). We have established this maximum (16 pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. **Applications that exceed required page limits or that do not meet the required PDF format will be excluded from review.**

Response to Previous Review – For applicants who are submitting an application in which the project described was previously submitted to the AgVets program, but not funded, a one page response to the previous review is allowed and does not count against the 16 page limit. Applicants should provide a clear statement acknowledging comments from the previous review, indicating revisions, rebuttals, etc. This response is a critical part of the screening criteria. Furthermore, the revised application should clearly indicate the changes that have been made in the project. If more than one page is required, additional responses/pages are counted as part of the 16 page limit of the Project Narrative.

The Project Narrative for AgVets **must** include the information noted below (any additional information, e.g., cover sheets, table of contents, will be subject to the page limit and therefore are discourage from inclusion). The Project Narrative must include the heading followed by the response for each of the points noted below.

1) Introduction. The introduction should include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) of the proposed project. Justify the need for the program by identifying the target audience and explaining their needs (military and veteran population, service disability, region, workforce opportunity: as defined by the Economic Research Service as being

farm dependent, primarily based on industry wage and employment, or have employment in agriculture or other natural resource-based industries that is above the national average, structure of the particular industry being targeted and associated job skills/training needed, critical barriers such as access to land, equipment, and capital, etc.); and by briefly summarizing, as appropriate to the respective scope of work proposed, how the program has and will offer a comprehensive, immersive learning experience that becomes a model for veterans pursuing opportunities in agriculture, and facilitates connections to USDA field offices, including Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Rural Development, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration and/or other federal entities at the regional, state or local level. If necessary, provide a map or schematic of the model farm/ranch, including its geographic reach (See Part VIII.D. Definitions). Show evidence that the project has a clear plan to recruit and seek qualified referrals to the project to meet the projected number of veterans served. As a pilot, discuss how the project builds upon or relates to other models or systems that support Service Members transitioning to veteran status. All works cited should be referenced. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria (see Part V.B): Relevancy.)

2) Objectives and Outcomes. Concisely present the goals, associated objectives and expected outputs and outcomes of the project in relation to the audience and needs identified in the introduction. Provide the number of veterans that will be served. Estimate how many of them will attain specific, anticipated knowledge gains or actions (e.g., job placement and career advancement in farming and ranching, vocational and entrepreneurial achievements across the food supply chain; or volunteer and workforce readiness opportunities for service-disabled veterans) and demonstrate how program participants have been informed about and connected with resources that can assist their chosen endeavors. Discuss whether and how this program can be adapted to other regions, communities and/or agricultural systems. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit.)

3) Approach. The activities proposed to achieve each objective must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the 16 pages for this section. Specifically, this section must include the following:

    a. Description of the activities proposed for each objective;
    b. Timeline of the proposed project, including activities and major outputs and associated outcomes for each year of the project;
    c. How and where the activities will be provided and the appropriateness of the approach for the veteran audience served;
    d. The referral and recruitment process for the veteran audience, including past and prospective focus on disabled, diverse, and underrepresented groups as well as how you will identify possible challenges to your proposed strategy and your plan to address those challenges;

e. Description of the pilot farm/ranch, including acreage, facilities and equipment, spectrum of agricultural activities offered; e.g., row crops, livestock, orchards, gardens, apiaries, commercial kitchens;
f. Description of any non-formal curriculum, programs, resources and other materials developed/used;
g. Description of the outreach and selection process for students who will be provided support to participate in training;
h. Demonstration of engagement with federal agency partners at the regional, state, and/or local level;
i. How will the project, and its partnerships and collaborations be sustained beyond the life of the grant (e.g., plans for eventual self-support or institutionalization or other sources of support)? If there are no plans to sustain the effort, explain why not, and how the impact of the project will be lasting.
j. What makes this pilot unique or different from existing similar efforts, if any?
k. Barriers that may be encountered and limitations to proposed procedures, and how you will address them. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit: Achievability.)

4) Personnel and Resources. Describe in detail the Key Personnel's experience working with military veterans and the ability to provide effective education, training, outreach, and mentoring programs through a comprehensive, immersive farm/ranch field experience. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project, and how they promoted workforce development in the agricultural sector. This information may include: the years and locations of prior activities; number of training assistance or education activities previously carried out; number of participants and graduates from the program, including special populations; success rate in completing the program; percentage of graduates who are still engaged in agricultural production and related fields; and/or percentages of those who improved their operations. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages (of the Project Narrative) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Expertise and track record; Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel.)

5) Plan for Outcome Based Reporting. Third-party evaluators are required. Be sure the budget reflects work to be completed by professional evaluators. Participatory evaluation, and formative as well as summative evaluation, are encouraged. All projects must describe methods and resources for documenting and evaluating their outcomes and impacts. Clearly identify a minimum of two expected outcomes within the life of the project, and explain the plan to document and evaluate these outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include:

a. A completed logic model or alternative schematic that illustrates the causal linkages between planned activities and desired outcomes. A logic model template and explanation of its components can be located at https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/integrated-programs-logic-model-planning-process. In addition, see www.cyfar.org for a program example.
b. A description of anticipated outcomes, their significance, and potential beneficiaries.

c. A list and description of project performance measures (also referred to as indicators of success) by which your progress will be measured and success determined. To provide a useful, portable tool for veterans to benchmark their farm and ranch business acumen, NIFA is recommending consideration of use of the Farm & Ranch Business Health Assessment as individuals enter and exit the respective pilot programs (see Part VIII.E. Other Information: Materials Available on the Internet). NIFA anticipates sharing additional information on how data will be stored and used as part of the program webinar.
d. Identify who will be responsible for overseeing and measuring performance for the project and link to the overall project plan and timeline for completion.
e. Indicate the amount of funding that will be set aside for monitoring and performance measurement.

Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the 16 pages (of the Project Narrative) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process.)

6) Management, Collaboration and Partnership Plan. It is critical to have a clearly articulated management plan that describes the roles and functions of all partnerships, collaborators and organizations, as related to the proposed project. Strong partnerships among complementary organizations with shared leadership are essential to successful and sustainable projects, see "Definitions" (Part VIII.D) for definitions of Partnership and Collaborator. Include time allocated by each partner for attainment of objectives; key roles of each partner and collaborator; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance and partnerships. Describe the plans for coordination, communication, data-sharing and reporting among members of the project team and stakeholder groups. Describe the commitment of the project team to this project; and how the partnership and its impact will be sustained beyond the period of the award. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the 16 pages for this section. In addition, letters of commitment signed by the AR of the partnering organization demonstrating that the partners involved have agreed to abide by the Management Plan must be provided (see "Other Attachments" below). (Related evaluation criteria: Partnerships and collaboration; Achievability.)

The following table summarizes the sections of the Project Narrative for AgVets applications, suggests an approximate number of pages to allocate to each section, and shows the evaluation criteria most relevant to each section:

Narrative Section	Suggested Number of Pages	Related Evaluation Criteria (see Part V, B. of this RFA)
Introduction	2	Relevancy
Objectives and Outcomes	2	Technical merit
Approach	4	Technical merit; Achievability

Personnel and Resources	2	Expertise and track record of the applicants; Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities and instrumentation
Plan for Outcome Based Reporting	4	Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, and the communication of findings, logic model and results beyond the immediate target audience
Management and Collaboration Plan	2	Partnerships and collaboration; Achievability
	16 total	
Resubmissions only	1 additional page	

B. Field 12. Add Other Attachments

See Part V. Section 4.12 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the form) for instructions for this field. Included below are additional attachments that are to be included, as appropriate.

1. Commitment Letters. PDF attachment(s). No page limit. Letters of commitment from all partners (signed by the AR of the partnering organization) stating that the partners involved have agreed to their stated roles in the project and have agreed to abide by the Management Plan. Letters from other organizations or people whose participation is important to the success of the project, committing those collaborators and partners to specific roles, are also encouraged. Title the attachment(s) as 'Letter of Commitment – Organization Name' in the document header and save file as 'LetterofCommitment_OrganizationName'. Other more general letters of support (i.e., from those who are not committing to a specific role in the project) are not needed and should not be included. See Part VIII, E for an example of a commitment letter.

2. **Fiscal Agent Letter.** See Part III.A. If it is necessary to include a fiscal agent letter then title the attachment as 'Fiscal Agent' in the document header and save file as 'FiscalAgent'.

Do not add any other attachments not specifically requested in this RFA. Specifically, do not attach examples of curricula or other appendices. Attaching additional narrative or figures or tables other than those specifically requested in this RFA will result in disqualification from review.

3. Data Management Plan. A Data Management Plan (DMP) is required and is to 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.). **See Part III Section 3.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for NIFA attachment specifications.**

The requirements for preparation and inclusion of a DMP in your application is included on the following web page, https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/data-management-plan-nifa-funded-research-projects. Also included on the web page are FAQs and information about accessing examples of DMPs.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the guide includes instructions about senior/key person profile requirements, and details about the biographical sketch and the current and pending support, including a link to a suggested template for the current and pending support.

5. R&R Personal Data

As noted in Part V, 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award. Part V.6 also notes the importance and use of the information.

6. R&R Budget

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. Include the travel costs for the Project Director, Evaluator, and any other key staff member(s) to attend the annual Project Director and Evaluator meeting beginning in the first year of funding and during each year of the project.

For further information and instructions regarding indirect costs, refer to Part V, section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. For indirect cost funding restrictions, refer to Part IV, D. of this RFA.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part VI, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) Competitive Grants Program") and the program code (i.e., enter "AGVET"). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.

b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List**. See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

8. Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants

This is a required form for corporate applicants. See Part VI, 2 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for a description of the term, "corporation," and detailed information related to the questions on this form.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Full applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on February 11, 2019**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission of it via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

While the checklist should be used to check the application for completeness, the application should be checked for the following required item(s). This is not an exhaustive list of required items; it only serves to highlight items that are critical to Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans review. Applications that fail to include these items will not be accepted for review. The list includes:

- Summary/Abstract
- Narrative with all required sections: Introduction; Objectives and Outcomes; Approach; Personnel and Resources; Plan for Outcome Based Reporting; and Management and Collaboration Plan;
- Budget for the entire duration of the project (3 years);
- Budget Narrative

In addition, applications will not be accepted for review if they:

- Exceed the maximum pages allowed for the Project Narrative.
- Attach any extra narrative or graphic materials or other attachments not specifically requested in the RFA.
- Exceed the maximum federal budget request.
- Include objectives or an approach that does not fit the purpose and scope of the AgVets program.
- Fail to include a completed logic model or alternative schematic that illustrates the causal linkages between planned activities and desired outcomes.

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

Grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for:

- Section 713 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Pub. L. 115-141) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total federal funds provided (or 42.857 percent of total direct costs) under each award. When preparing budgets, you should limit your request for the recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of your institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded. See Part V section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further indirect cost information.

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, Section 1.9 in the document entitled "NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide."

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III, Section 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

We evaluate each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a technical review panel will evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

- the level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities;
- the need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields;
- the need to include other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- the need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations;
- the need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
- the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to veterans, producers, agribusiness, and the general public.

All AgVets awards will be made based on the merit of the proposed project with budgets considered only after the merits of the project have been determined. USDA reserves the right to negotiate final budgets with successful applicants.

After the peer review panel has completed its deliberations, the responsible program staff of AgVets will recommend that your project be approved for support from currently available funds or be declined due to insufficient funds or unfavorable review.

AgVets reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization 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.

We will send copies of reviews, ***not*** including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The AgVets proposal review process includes an assessment of each of the program's evaluation criteria by an external panel of experts. Program reviewers consider the overall strengths and weaknesses of each criterion and evaluate the overall likelihood that the project will have a

significant outcome and impact in consideration of the AgVets program's goals. An application does not need to be equally meritorious in all criteria to be judged likely to have high impact on meeting the AgVets program goals. The AgVets program evaluation criteria are listed below and in priority order of importance:

1. **Partnerships and Collaborations will be reviewed to determine** to what extent the application represents a substantial and effective collaborative network or partnership of public and/or private entities. Reviewers will evaluate whether or not the proposal includes the necessary partnerships to meet the training and workforce development needs of veterans, and whether the project makes appropriate use of the expertise and other strengths of each of the partners. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners.

2. **Relevancy will be evaluated based on the** explanation and relevant documentation that demonstrate that the project is directed toward increasing the numbers of veterans seeking and securing educational, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the food and agriculture sector. In addition, the relevancy will be evaluated by the description of the necessity of the project based on the needs identified for the target audience, the inclusion of veterans in the conceptualization and development of project activities, and the degree to which the project builds upon past or current work or partnerships examining veteran workforce needs.

3. **Technical merit** will be evaluated on the basis of:
   a) Clarity and delineation of objectives, activities and outcomes;
   b) Conceptual adequacy of the proposed activities to meet the needs of the targeted audience including suitability and feasibility of the approach (e.g., social, economic and cultural relevance, distance based versus face-to-face);
   c) Innovation and originality of objectives and activities;
   d) Expected performance targets, outcomes and impacts as indicated in the Plan for Outcome Based Reporting;
   e) Adaptability to other locations, communities, and/or agricultural products and technologies;
   f) Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the grant, or a compelling explanation of how the project impact will be lasting if the collaboration itself is not sustained; and
   g) Reasonableness of the budget for planned activities (i.e., whether the budget matches logically with the program described in the narrative).

4. **Achievability is based on the review of the** probability of success of the project. The probability of success includes the appropriate level of originality, target audience and budget for each activity. The extent to which the applicant identifies potential pitfalls and how they will be addressed is also included. There should be sufficient time commitment of all project directors and co-directors for the stated project activities, including project management. The plans for management and collaborative arrangements of the proposed

project should be adequate, e.g., sufficient time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key participants and collaborators; plan for decision-making; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, and collaborative efforts.

5. **Expertise and track record of the applicants is based on** the demonstrated expertise of the project team. This includes successful multi-year experience in education, outreach, mentoring and/or technical assistance addressing Veteran workforce concerns, especially related to food and agriculture. The successful multi-year experience can be demonstrated by the number of training, assistance, or education activities previously carried out; number of participants or graduates of the program, success rate and their current occupation; the number of years a program or activity has been offered. The adequacy of the qualifications of the project director and team to conduct the proposed project activities and to evaluate project outcomes must be demonstrated. The applicant's demonstration of experience and competence in serving the needs of the identified target audience are also evaluated under this criteria.

6. **Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, data management plan, and the communication of findings and results beyond the immediate target audience is based on** the expertise and time commitment of evaluation team members who have agreed to serve or who have been identified**.**

7. **Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation is based on the** expertise of consultants and collaborators, sufficiency of the educational facilities and equipment for the proposed on-site and distance education and outreach methods.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. See https://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted one-time, with updates on an as-needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determined prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, 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 involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by AgVets for a period of three years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make grants to those responsible, 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 shall 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 at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in 2 CFR 200.210.

See https://nifa.usda.gov/terms-and-conditions to view current NIFA award terms and conditions.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, the ones listed on the NIFA web page – https://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide—a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary—is available at https://nifa.usda.gov/policy-guide.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see https://nifa.usda.gov/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.

Grantees will be expected to provide the following information in REEport, NIFA's reporting system:

1. A brief statement of the issue or problem that the project addresses and why the issue is significant; (**non-technical summary)**

2. A description of the activity or activities being taken to address the issues, including the number of anticipated and actual beneficiaries (where applicable);

3. A description of the changes in knowledge, behavior, or condition that occurred, supported by quantitative and qualitative data.

Additionally, grantees will be required to submit regular progress reports and a final technical report to NIFA. The agency depends on the information provided in these reports to assess progress toward NIFA's strategic and programmatic goals; develop and justify budget requests; and, communicate the value of the work of NIFA's partners to the U.S. Congress and the American people. As shrinking budgets result in more competition for Federal and State funds, it is imperative that NIFA has rigorous data to demonstrate the relevance of its programs and the effectiveness of our partners who implement NIFA-funded programs.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact:
Brent Elrod
National Program Leader
Division of Family and Consumer Sciences
Institute of Youth, Family and Community
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
800 9th St., SW, Room 4434
Washington, DC 20250-2250
Phone: 202-690-3468
Fax: 202-690-2469
Email: belrod@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contacts:
Susan Bowman
Awards Management Branch Chief
Office of Grants and Financial Management
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
800 9th St., SW, Mail Stop 2240
Washington, DC 20250-2271
Phone: 202-401-4324
Fax: 202-401-6271
Email: sbowman@nifa.usda.gov

Adriene Woodin
Awards Management Branch Chief
Office of Grants and Financial Management
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
800 9th St., SW, Mail Stop 2182
Washington, DC 20250-2271
Phone: 202-401-4320
Fax: 202-401-6271
Email: awoodin@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds; Changes

1. 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.

2. 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:

(i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).

(ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.

(iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.

(iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part 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 Part 31, "Contract Cost Principles and Procedures," as applicable.

(v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.

(vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.

(vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.

(viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.

The awardee will be subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award. See https://nifa.usda.gov/terms-and-conditions for information about NIFA award terms.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. We will retain for three years a copy of an application that does not result in an

award. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

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

D. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions, for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

In addition, the following definitions apply:

Collaborator: a person or an organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project but is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Food and Agriculture: The term food and agriculture refers to extension project types in food and fiber, agricultural, renewable natural resources, forestry, and physical and social sciences.

Military Veteran: a person who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and/or who was discharged or released from the service under conditions other than dishonorable.

Nonprofit Organization: The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, 2 CFR part 200, defines the term "nonprofit organization" as follows:

> Nonprofit organization means any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization, not including IHEs, that:
>
> (a) Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest;
>
> (b) Is not organized primarily for profit; and
>
> (c) Uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operations of the organization.

Partnership: a relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.

Performance target: a specific, verifiable change in people's actions or conditions. It defines how many people will change and what degree of change constitutes success.

Model farms or ranches: Sites that enroll veterans in comprehensive, immersive training programs that offer a blend of formal education and instructor-supervised field experience leading to practical knowledge gain and experience in production agriculture and/or business and entrepreneurial skills necessary to obtain employment or start/manage a business in the agricultural sector. Such farms or ranches may offer a full- or part-time residency component.

Producer: an individual, family, or other entity in the U.S. engaged in the business of agriculture, crop, livestock, forestry, and range production, management and marketing.

Regions:
(1) The Northeast region consists of the 12 Northeast States and the District of Columbia (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia);

(2) The Southern Region consists of 13 States plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma);

(3) The North Central Region consists of 12 States (Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota); and

(4) The Western Region consists of 12 States and the American Territories in the Pacific (Hawaii, Alaska, Washington State, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Micronesia).

Veteran farmer or rancher: a farmer or rancher who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and/or who was discharged or released from the service under conditions other than dishonorable.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

Program information will be made available here: https://nifa.usda.gov/program/enhancing-agricultural-opportunities-military-veterans-agvets.