U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Wetland Mitigation Banking Program

Fiscal Year (FY) 2026
Wetland Mitigation Banking Program
Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
No. USDA-NRCS-NHQ-WMBP-NOFO0001458

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A. BASIC INFORMATION for Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Title: Wetland Mitigation Banking Program (WMBP)

1. Federal Awarding Agency Name

U.S. Department of Agriculture – *Natural Resources Conservation Service*

2. Announcement Type

Initial Announcement

3. Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number

USDA-NRCS-NHQ-WMBP-NOFO0001458

4. Assistance Listing

This opportunity is included under 10.933, searchable at: https://sam.gov/fal/69cb82cb214840c6805eda97ddd1adcc/view.

5. Funding Details

The amount of Federal funding expected to be available for award(s) is $3 million. However, the agency retains the discretion to award a larger or lesser amount.

The agency expects to make 7 awards(s).

The agency expects the amount of each award to range from $100,000 to $1 million.

Applicants should propose projects between *1* and *4* years in duration. Plan projects based on an estimated project start date of December 2026.

6. Key Dates

Application deadline: Submit via Grants.gov by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on September 8, 2026.

A webinar for WMBP applicants is scheduled for July 30, 2026 at 3 pm Eastern Time. Information on how to participate in the Microsoft Teams webinar can be obtained through the following link and phone number:

https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/4685b4dd-a1ce-4ad6-81e3-d4318799cb11@ed5b36e7-01ee-4ebc-867e-e03cfa0d4697

> **Join on your computer, mobile app or room device**
> Click here to join the meeting
>
> **Or call in (audio only)**
> +1 202-650-0123

Phone Conference ID: 621 758 351#

Email questions on this webinar to WMBP@usda.gov. Applicants are encouraged to visit the WMBP website to learn more about the program.

7. Executive Summary

NRCS is announcing the availability of $3 million in WMBP grant funds for the development and establishment of mitigation banks and banking opportunities solely for agricultural producers with wetlands subject to the wetland conservation compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 (as amended). WMBP is a competitive grants program accepting proposals from eligible entities as identified in Section B.1. Priority will be given to banks in states with significant numbers of individual wetlands, wetland acres, and conservation compliance requests. Based on NRCS data, these states are Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

8. Contact Information

Grants.gov issues - Contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

For all other questions, email FPAC-BC Grants and Agreements Division (GAD):

Email: tessa.garcia@usda.gov
Subject line of email: USDA-NRCS-NHQ-WMBP-NOFO0001458
Name: Tessa Garcia, Grants Management Specialist, FPAC Business Center (FPAC-BC)

The agency will not address questions about a potential applicant's eligibility nor the merits of a specific proposal.

To protect the integrity of the competitive process, applicants must not contact agency program staff with questions; contact GAD staff as directed above.

Subscribe to receive correspondence issued by GAD. Topics may highlight award-management issues, announce implementation of new policies or procedures, provide guides and tools for applying for awards, etc. To subscribe, visit https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFARMERS/subscriber/new?topic_id=USDAFARMERS_4170

B. ELIGIBILITY

1. Eligible Applicants

The following entity types are eligible to apply:

- City or township governments
- County governments

- For profit organizations other than small businesses
- Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)
- Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments)
- Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education)
- Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education)
- Private institutions of higher education
- Public and State-controlled institutions of higher education
- Small businesses
- Special district governments
- State governments

The following applicants are considered ineligible:

- Foreign organizations and foreign public entities
- "Partnerships" or other similar groupings (i.e., application must be submitted by a single entity; a partner may serve as a subrecipient).
- Individuals

2. Other Eligibility Considerations

Any award made pursuant to this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) will be made to a single entity. WMBP funding can be used to develop and establish a wetland mitigation bank only for use by agricultural producers. Agricultural wetlands that have previously been converted or manipulated are ideal candidates for mitigation bank development under this program. Eligible entities must operate and manage all aspects of the wetland mitigation bank with technical oversight by NRCS.

Federal funds awarded under this program may be used for financial assistance to awardees:

- Developing the mitigation banking instrument,
- Identifying suitable mitigation sites and performing functional assessments,
- Determining the available credits and a credit release schedule,
- Conducting market research and contracting for mitigation activities,
- Performing land surveys, permitting, and title searches,
- Designing and formulating mitigation plans,
- Restoring, enhancing, or creating wetland mitigation bank sites in accordance with NRCS conservation practice standards,
- Tracking and managing wetland mitigation data,
- Funding direct administrative costs associated with implementing the project; and
- Funding the indirect costs of the awardee .

Application Eligibility Considerations:

- Applications must meet submission requirements in Section E.

    - For new users of Grants.gov, see section E.2. of this document for information about steps required before submitting an application via Grants.gov.
- If the agency determines more than one version or substantially the same application has been submitted, the agency will only consider the last application submitted prior to the established deadline for purposes of the competition.
- An applicant organization may not submit more than one application for different projects or proposing different approaches.

Awards Eligibility Considerations:

- The agency will make awards only:
    - To a single entity
    - For projects selected following the competitive review process (see Section F.2.)
    - For projects that meet the 20 % of total budget cost share requirement
    - To entities that:
        - Meet the eligibility criteria (see section B.) by the application deadline (see section A.6.)
        - Are not debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded from receiving Federal awards ((2 CFR 200.206(d))
        - Have an active System for Award Management (SAM) registration (2 CFR part 25)
        - Exhibit limited risk review for proper management of a Federal award (2 CFR 200.206)
- Awards are not Farm Bill incentive contracts and therefore, not limited by the payment limitation in 16 USC Chapter 58.

Project Participant/Agricultural Producers Eligibility Considerations:

- Any producer receiving a payment through participation in a funded project must meet the eligibility requirements of 7 CFR Parts 12 and 1400 and have control of the land involved for the period of performance.
- Any producer receiving a payment through participation in a funded project is subject to the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation. In addition, they must have an AGI that does not exceed $900,000. If provided an award, the Recipient must self-certify and maintain records showing that participating producers receiving payments using Federal funding meet the eligibility and AGI requirements. Section 1704 (a)(3) of the 2018 Farm Bill states the Secretary may waive the AGI limit on a case-by-case basis if the Secretary determines that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected as a result of such waiver. Awardees may request waivers once their project commences.
- Section 1240B(d)(6) of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-2(6) prohibits duplicative payments. Accordingly, direct, or indirect payments cannot be made for a practice for which an individual or legal entity has already received funds or is contracted to receive funds through any USDA conservation program

(e.g., Conservation Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program). If provided an award, the recipient must self-certify that payments to producers using Federal funding are not duplicative.

3. Cost Sharing

Required Cost Share:

- 20 percent of total project costs (total project costs includes Federal and non-Federal funds) included in the application must be from non-federal funding. Proposals lacking cost share commitment will be ineligible.
- May be achieved with:
  - Contributions of cash, services, materials, equipment, or third-party in-kind contributions. *Recipients with unrecovered indirect costs may also use those to meet cost share obligations.*
  - Funds from another Federal source if the Federal statute authorizing that program specifically allows for it.
- See 2 CFR 200.306 for further details about cost share
- Must be met before the Federal award expires; pace of cost share may vary throughout award period which will be monitored for progress.

C. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The authorizing statutes and regulations for this opportunity are Section 1222(k) of the Food Security Act of 1985 (Pub. L. No. 99–198, also known as the 1985 U.S. Farm Bill), as amended. Funding has been authorized through the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-334) and the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026 (Public Law 119-37 Section 757).

For FY26, Unmanned aircraft systems are an unallowable expense.

Purchasing credits from a wetland mitigation bank provides a legal mechanism for agricultural producers to maintain their eligibility for USDA program benefits if they convert agricultural wetlands. A producer may offset the loss of wetland acres and functions resulting from conversion activity by restoring, enhancing, or creating wetland functions and values on a different site. Through a mitigation bank, producers can purchase offsetting wetland credits generated from previously drained (prior to 1985) wetlands that have been restored and approved for wetland mitigation. WMBP supports establishing and developing wetland mitigation banks to create credits for USDA program participants. WMBP awardees work with the NRCS to develop a mitigation banking instrument that provides details for developing, establishing, and operating a mitigation banking program. Mitigation banking instruments are developed with technical oversight from national and state NRCS staff and are subject to NRCS approval. Awardees must ensure the following wetland types receive priority for mitigation under the NRCS WMBP (note that the wetland designation labels are used by NRCS for implementing the wetland conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985):

- Farmed Wetland (FW)
- Farmed Wetland Pasture (FWP)
- Wetland (W) less than 5 acres in size that is predominantly bordered by land that has been cropped 8 of the past 10 years when the wetland is designated as degraded according to a functional assessment tool approved by NRCS
- Converted Wetland (CW) that, prior to conversion, qualified under one of the types above, as determined by NRCS staff.

Proposed projects must be performed in any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Caribbean (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Islands (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). NRCS is committed to the success of all our nation's producers, businesses, and partners.

D. APPLICATION CONTENTS AND FORMAT

1. Pre-Applications and Letters of Intent

This NOFO does not require pre-applications or letters of intent; do not submit a pre-application or a letter of intent.

2. Content and Form of Application Submission

Notes:

- Form instructions and any available templates are provided in the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide available in the Related Documents tab of the Grants.gov Application Package on Grants.gov. Instructions provided in this NOFO will reference guidance as appropriate in the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- To be considered for funding under this opportunity, an application must contain the documents identified below.

Document	Instructions
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	see section V.2.*
Project Narrative Attachment Form	see section V.3.*
Project Abstract	see section V.4*
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	see section V.5.*
Budget Narrative Attachment Form	see section V.6.*

Other Attachments Form • Current and Pending Support • GADSUM9, Applicant Contact(s) Information • NICRA, as applicable	see section V.7.* see section V.7.1* see section V.7.2* see section V.7.3.*
Attachments • Subawards, as applicable • Conflict of Interest, as applicable	 see section V.8.* see section V.8.1*
Grants.gov Lobbying Form	see section VI.9.*
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	see section VI.10.*
*Applicable section of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide	

a. **Application for Federal Assistance** (SF-424)
See section V.2. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

b. **Project Narrative Attachment Form**

- The following instructions are in addition to those included in section V.3. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The Project Narrative is subject to the attachment requirements noted in section III.2.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The project narrative must not exceed 10 pages. This page limitation applies to the project narrative only.

i. *Project Objectives and Deliverables*
Describe how NRCS funding will be used to establish and develop a wetland mitigation bank site available to agricultural producers. Provide an estimate of the number of acres the project proposes to restore, enhance, or create for inclusion in the mitigation bank. Include activities supported by partner funding (e.g., land or easement acquisition) and the number of credits that will be made available to agricultural producers. Describe the complexity of the planned restorations and the extent to which the project is “shovel ready.” If the site is not ready for construction or has not been secured, describe the plan to secure the land or easements, obtain necessary approvals, and begin construction. If sites have not been secured, describe the plan for locating and securing project sites without NRCS assistance.

ii. *Project Timeline*
Generally, all of the work needed for banks to offer mitigation credits to agricultural producers should be completed and the credits made available within 24 months. Provide a bulleted list of key project actions, milestones, and deliverables.

iii. *Project Management*
List key personnel and describe their qualifications, experience, and anticipated contributions to the project. Describe your organization's prior experience establishing and operating wetland mitigation banks.

iv. *Project Marketing*
It is critical that agricultural producers in the mitigation bank's service area are aware that the bank offers a mitigation option. Describe how the project will be marketed to USDA program participants. Describe your organization's plan to: (1) conduct engagement to producers who might have restorable wetlands or mitigation banking sites on their land, and (2) promote the availability of credits to producers.

v. *Project Evaluation*
Describe the methodology and procedures that will be used to evaluate the success of the project.

vi. *Assessment of Environmental Impact*
Describe the environmental impact of planned wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation and its extent. The description of the potential environmental impact must address both the beneficial effects and the possible adverse effects of the proposed action. The length of the description should be commensurate with the complexity of the proposed project and the natural resources effected directly, indirectly, or cumulatively. Where possible, information on environmental impacts should be quantified, such as the number of acres of wetlands impacted, the volume of dredging needed, the number of feet for ditch filled or the tile drains plugged, etc. Natural resources include soil, water, air, plants, and animals, as well as other resources protected by law, regulation, executive order, and agency policy. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that may result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

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The following documents do not count toward the above stated page limit.

c. Project Abstract
See section V.4. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

d. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
See section V.5. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

e. Budget Narrative

- The following instructions are in addition to those included in section V.6. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- The Budget Narrative is subject to the attachment requirements noted in section III.2.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- . Indirect Costs are an allowable cost. These costs should be limited to the 15% *De Minimus* rate unless an applicant has a Negotiated Indirect

Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). In these cases, the NICRA should be included with the application. See section V.6. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions on how to determine the allowable indirect costs when a statutory limitation is applicable.

- Cost sharing – Refer to section B.3. of this NOFO to determine applicability. If applicable, include details following budget narrative instructions (see section V.6. of the FPAC-BD Grants.gov Application Guide).

f. Other Attachments

- See section V.7. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- Current and Pending Support- See section V.7.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for link to available template and instructions.
- GADSUM9, Applicant Contact(s) Information – See section V.7.2 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for link to available template and instructions.
- Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) - See section V.7.3 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

g. Attachments

- See section V.8. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.
- Subawards – if the organization intends to have subawards, see section V.8.1 of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.
- Letters of Support - *Do not submit letters of support; they are not required.*
- Conflicts of Interest – see section j. of this part for further information.

h. Grants.gov Lobbying Form

See section V.9. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

i. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities

See section V.10. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide for instructions.

j. Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

2 CFR 400.2 states that applicants must maintain written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the performance of its employees in the selection, award, and administration of Federal awards. No employee, officer, or agent may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a Federal award if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest. Such a conflict of interest would arise when the employee, officer or agent, any member of his or her immediate family, his or her partner, or an organization which employs or is about to employ any of the parties referenced, has a financial or other interest in, or a tangible personal benefit from, an applicant

considered for a Federal award. The standards of conduct must provide for disciplinary actions to be applied for violations of such standards by officers, employees, or agents of the applicant.

If the applicant has a parent, affiliate, or subsidiary organization that is not a state, local government, or Indian tribe, the applicant must also maintain written standards of conduct covering organizational conflicts of interest. Organizational conflict of interest means that because of the relationships with a parent company, affiliate, or subsidiary organization, the applicant is unable or appears to be unable to be impartial in conducting a Federal award action involving a related organization.

Applicants must disclose in writing any potential conflicts of interest to the USDA awarding agency or pass-through entity. Include the name of the individual, the name of the entity with which the individual has a conflict, the nature of the financial or other interest, the value of the interest, and a description of how the interest relates to the application. Upload disclosures under Other Attachments (listed separately under Optional Forms) in Grants.gov. **If no conflict exists, no submission is required.**

k. Post Submission and Post Award Documentation

During the administrative review process (refer to section F.3. of this NOFO), it may be necessary to request further documentation from the applicant (e.g., organizational information as part of the risk assessment, more detail regarding proposed costs, revised documents).

E. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINE

1. Grants.gov Applications

- Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov.
- Grants.gov is a single site to find and apply for grant funding opportunities.
- All forms to prepare and submit an application are available through the funding opportunity on Grants.gov.

2. Grants.gov Requirements and General Guidance

Grants.gov has requirements (e.g., registration and software) that **must be met** ahead of being able to submit an application using Grants.gov. Refer to section II.1. of the FPAC-BC Grants.gov Application Guide.

- Applications must be received by Grants.gov by 11:59.59 pm Eastern Time (ET) on September 8, 2026; an application is considered late at 12:00 am ET and will be rejected.

- If the Apply button in the opportunity is not active (greyed out), see Unlock the Mystery of the Gray “Apply” Button: Four Scenarios. – Grants.gov Community Blog (wordpress.com) for possible scenarios.
- Grants.gov automatically records proof of submission by way of an electronic date/time stamp when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov.
- Grants.gov will send an email to the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) submitting an application when:
    - An error prevents the transmission of the application.
    - An application is successfully received by Grants.gov,
    - The agency retrieves and downloads the application from Grants.gov and download of submissions,
- For trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Applicant Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

F. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

1. Review and Selection Process

The following applications will be accepted for the competitive review process:

- Received by the established deadline,
- meet eligibility criteria,
- Contains the applicable documents identified in section D.2
- Compliant with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete, non-compliant, and/or applications not meeting the formatting criteria may be eliminated from competition.

Applicants that do not meet the above criteria will be ineligible for consideration. The agency will send notification of elimination to applicants not meeting the above criteria.

Merit/technical reviews will be conducted by a technical review board nominated by the approving official on the remaining applications.

The agency plans to select reviewers based on their training and experience in relevant fields, considering the following factors:

- The level of relevant formal experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant activities,
- The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant 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

Risk reviews will be conducted by the FPAC-BC, Grants and Agreements Division (GAD). The approving official will make the final award decisions. The approving official for this opportunity is the NRCS Chief.

2. **Merit/Technical Criteria**

   a. **Geographic Scope and Project Goals – 30 points**
      i. The proposal identifies clear, measurable, and achievable goals and deliverables, including the planned number of wetland acres to be restored, enhanced, or created for inclusion in the wetland bank with an estimate of the number of bank credits to be made available through the bank.
      ii. Priority will be given to banks based in locations with significant numbers of individual wetlands, wetland acres, and conservation compliance requests. According to NRCS data, these locations *are Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.*

   b. **Project Management – 30 points**
      i. The applicant has a proven track record of establishing and operating wetland mitigation banks, including experience in selling bank credits to agricultural producers.
      ii. The applicant describes a sound marketing plan for marketing the wetland bank to USDA program participants.
      iii. The budget is clearly justified, demonstrating efficient use of resources with minimal administrative overhead and a strong emphasis on cost-effective allocation in support of the project's goals, including proposed cost share above program minimums.

   c. **Bank Development and Operation – 40 points**
      i. The proposal has a specific plan for locating and securing potential wetland mitigation bank sites. Proposals that have already secured a mitigation site will receive priority consideration.
      ii. The proposal describes a reasonable approach to ensure that the land to be restored, enhanced, or created is appropriate for wetland mitigation.
      iii. The proposal includes a plan for accelerated development of one or more mitigation bank sites to make available mitigation credits within 24 months of project initiation.
      iv. If applicable, the application describes how NRCS conservation practice standards will be followed for wetland restoration activities.
      v. The bank description illustrates a high potential for successful establishment and operation of a mitigation bank for agricultural producers seeking to comply with Farm Bill wetlands compliance provisions.

3. **Administrative Review and Risk Criteria**

The following are criteria that may be reviewed/verified prior to making an award.

- Ensure applicants meet eligibility criteria
- Application was submitted via Grants.gov by the established deadline
- Risk review of applicant (see 2 CFR 200.206)
   - Check SAM to ensure the applicant is not suspended or debarred,

    - Review and consider information included in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (the Federal Awardee Performance Integrity Information System, FAPIIS) (see 41 USC 2313 and 2 CFR 200.206(a) (applies to applications to be supported with a total Federal share greater than $250,000),
    - Assess financial stability of applicant,
    - Determine if applicant has a financial management system adequate to manage and track federal funds,
    - Review history of Federal financial assistance award performance,
- Proposed costs are allowable, allocable, and necessary

Based on risk assessment, the agency may impose specific award conditions in accordance with 2 CFR 200.208.

G. FEDERAL AWARD NOTICES

Successful Project Notification: The agency will provide notice that an application has been selected before it actually issues the Federal award. **The selection notification does not authorize the applicant to begin performance.** If the applicant chooses to begin project activities, it does so at its own risk; the risk that costs may not be reimbursed.
Notice of Award: The Notice of Grant and Agreement Award (ADS-093) contains information identified in 2 CFR 200.211 and is signed by the authorized agency official; it is the only authorizing document and will be provided electronically to the entity's authorized official for signature.

Unsuccessful Project Notification: The agency will provide notice to unsuccessful applicants via an email to the individual listed as the Program Director. This notification will occur following the processing of successful applications.

H. POST-AWARD REQUIREMENTS (ADMINISTRATIVE & NATIONAL POLICY)

All project funds will be used in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200 and the General Terms and Conditions, which are available at the following website: https://www.fpacbc.usda.gov/about/grants-and-agreements/award-terms-and-conditions/index.html. The award terms and conditions include, but are not limited to:

- Unallowable costs;
- National policy requirements
    - If projects performed pursuant to this opportunity are subject to any of the following, the agency must work with the awardees on related matters before commencement of activities.
        - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
        - National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
        - Endangered Species Act (ESA)

- Build America, Buy America for Construction;
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 compliance requirements;
- Reporting requirements
    - Addresses financial and performance requirements and the reporting frequency, means of submission.
    - Reporting of matters related to recipient integrity and performance.
    - Reporting subaward and executive compensation information.
- 2 CFR 180 - 2 CFR 180.335 and 180.350, includes reporting requirements regarding debarment and suspension audit requirements, and
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:
    - Solving the most pressing challenges they face;
    - Protecting America's food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
    - Supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
    - Expanding and developing domestic markets;
    - Training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
    - Fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

I. OTHER INFORMATION

1. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Applications are considered confidential information. Applications are not shared with individuals or entities seeking public disclosure through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) without the consent of the applicant. More specifically, Executive Order 12600 and USDA FOIA regulation 7 CFR Part 1, Subpart A requires the awarding agency to provide notice to applicants that a third party has requested copies of their business information and requires the awarding agency to consult with applicants regarding the releasing their records.

2. Government Obligation

The Federal Government is not obligated to make any Federal award as a result of this opportunity. Only authorized federal officials can bind the Federal Government to the expenditure of funds.

3. Award Counterparts

Any award made pursuant to this NOFO may be executed in any number of counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Non-Discrimination Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Non-Discrimination Statement is incorporated by reference and can be accessed at the following location: https://www.usda.gov/non-discrimination-statement