Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions

Request for Applications (RFA) for Fiscal Years (FY) 2020

APPLICATION DEADLINES: FY2020: February 27, 2020

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

INTEGRATED RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND EXTENSION COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROGRAM – ORGANIC TRANSITIONS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number 10.303.

DATES: This RFA solicits application for two funding cycles (FY 2019 or FY2020). Applications for FY 2019 funding cycle must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on May 16, 2019. Applications for FY 2020 funding cycle must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on February 27, 2020. 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 (6) months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: 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 Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions RFA.

Visit the NIFA website to access a factsheet on the Center of Excellence (COE) designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE. You may also review a recording of COE outreach and COE implementation webinars on the site. We will update COE webpages as appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program – Organic Transitions (ORG) for two funding cycles, fiscal years (FY) 2019 or 2020, to solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems. Applicants considering applying to the second year should check the Organic Transitions (ORG) web page to access the RFA and check for updates. The anticipated amounts available for grants in FY 2019 and FY 2020 are approximately $5,800,000 each year.

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY2020. Enactment of continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program in FY2020.

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

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626), as reauthorized by the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a competitive grants program that provides funding for integrated, multifunctional agricultural research, extension, and education activities. Subject to the availability of appropriations to carry out this program, the Secretary may award grants to colleges and universities [as defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (7 U.S.C. 3103)], as amended, on a competitive basis for projects that address priorities in United States agriculture and involve integrated research, education, and extension activities, as determined by the Secretary in consultation with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB).

The RFA will be developed every two fiscal years based on these established priorities and approaches to solving the critical agricultural issues. Section 7206 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 amended section 406(b) of AREERA to add the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions as eligible to apply for grants under this authority. Section 7129 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246) amended section 406(b) of AREERA (7 U.S.C. 7626(b)), adding Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (HSACU) as eligible entities for competitive funds awarded under this authority (see Part III, A of this RFA for more information).

B. Purpose and Priorities

In FY 2019 and FY2020, ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed $200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed $500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of ten to eleven awards each year.

Practices and systems to be addressed include those associated with organic crops, organic animal production, and organic systems that integrate crop and animal production.

ORG strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with: small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities; 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are engaged in organic agriculture research, education, and outreach. International partnerships, linkages, and exchanges that contribute to solving or solve critical organic agriculture issues, priorities, or problems in the United States are also encouraged.

Applications are expected to contain descriptions of stakeholder involvement in the research process from problem identification, planning, implementation, transfer of knowledge and technology, and evaluation. Applicants are strongly encouraged to assemble project teams that include those with expertise in research, education, extension, and evaluation, and to utilize a systems approach. Projects should plan to deliver applied production information to

producers, students, or their information providers, such as extension agents/educators, agricultural consultants and other service providers, or college teaching faculty.
Organic agricultural systems and practices provide many ecosystem services, and natural resources stewardship is a key principle in organic farming. For example, the use of cover crops, crop rotations, and erosion control measures; proper manure management practices; and humane livestock operation guidelines are cross-compliant with many Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) practice standards. How specific practices and combinations of practices interact in organic systems—including their contributions to conservation outcomes and climate change mitigation potential—is neither well documented nor understood, especially in the case of long-term soil management under organic production conditions. The most meaningful metrics or models to quantify these services in organic systems are also not clear. A better understanding is needed and documentation of these outcomes will allow for the adjustment of organic practices to optimize ecosystem services and to quantify and document those services in the areas of conservation practices, pollinator health, and climate change mitigation, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This information will help farmers better assess the financial benefits and costs of their practices and improve their ability to qualify effects for current and possible future incentives in conservation program payments and climate change markets, and sustainability labeling premiums. This process will also help justify consumer expectations that organically-grown and certified food, feed, fiber, or other value-added organic products are produced using the most environmentally-sound and sustainable production practices possible.

To be successful, organic agriculture also needs to contribute towards essential ecosystem processes and components, such as biodiversity. This requires better understanding and assessment of the contribution of organic agricultural systems to maintaining biodiversity. However, for organic agriculture to provide these ecosystem benefits, producers need economically viable crop and livestock management tools. The National Organic Program (NOP) maintains a list of management tools for certified organic producers. Recommendation for removal of certain tools from the NOP creates the need for research-based alternatives.

The NOP has specifically requested research directed to finding replacements for listed prohibited substances that are critical for many segments of the industry—from producers already certified for organic production to those in transition or considering transition. 7 CFR Part 205 – the National Organic Program lists the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (see National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances).

The NOP National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) maintains a list of research priorities that is updated annually. The NOP Research priorities for **2018** can be accessed here: NOP Research Priorities.

Research findings will not have their intended impact on the organic agriculture industry unless they reach and are adopted by producers. Effective extension or other outreach efforts are required. Because few extension tools and other information resources are available to organic farmers and ranchers, producers and their advisors have cited the need for these to help guide transitioning during this critical period.

Priority Areas for FY 2019 and 2020: Proposals consistent with the Legislative Authority (see Part A of this RFA) will be accepted for the competitive peer review process involving an

external panel of experts. NIFA is soliciting applications for ORG in the following areas (not listed in order of importance):

Priority 1: Document and understand the effects of organic practices including, but not limited to: crop rotation; livestock feeding and management; livestock-crop system integration; organic manure, mulch, and/or compost additions; cover crops; effects of reduced or conservation tillage on soil health and fertility; greenhouse gas mitigation; enhanced biodiversity; and understanding of weeds, pests and diseases dynamics for better management.

Priority 2: Develop improved technologies, methods, models, and metrics to document, describe, and optimize the ecosystem services and the climate variability adaptation and mitigation ability of organic crop, livestock, and integrated crop-livestock production systems.

Priority 3: Develop cultural practices and other allowable alternatives to substances recommended for removal from NOP's National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances. This may include effective substitutes or new technologies, cultural practices, cultivars, or breeds that render the NOP-cited substance in question less limiting to production under organic growing conditions. Studies of alternatives should include evaluation of efficacy based on resulting productivity, profitability, and natural resources stewardship effects. We encourage a sustainable whole-systems approach, but will also consider proposals that are narrower in scope.

Priority 4: Overcome barriers to organic transition. Projects under this priority should address major barriers that limit the transition to organic agriculture in a specific region, crop, or animal production systems, and develop practical information and tools for producer use. These can include, but are not limited to, production challenges during the transition period, local and regional infrastructure constraints, marketplace challenges, and administrative or policy barriers. Any constraint must be acknowledged by growers and other stakeholders. Proposals to improve organic animal or crop production management strategies and production systems should be submitted to the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI). Lobbying and advocacy activities are not allowed.

Important Notes for All Priorities:

1) Fieldwork to set up treatments or collect data on organic practices must be done on certified organic land. Refer to the USDA National Organic Program for organic production standards. However, as appropriate to project objectives, comparisons can include land in transition to organic certification and land not managed using organic practices. If land in transition is to be used, documentation should be provided from the certifying agent confirming a transition plan has been developed and is in progress. In addition, the use of conventional production technologies (including the use of GMOs) for comparative purposes or proof of concept is permissible, if cross-contamination with the organic and transitional treatments is prevented.

2) Projects must use combinations of research plus education and/or extension activities and describe expected outcomes and impacts. All projects must develop and implement an evaluation plan that captures project outcomes and demonstrates the impact of the project.

The evaluation section must describe how the project evaluator or evaluation team will determine whether project goals have been met and their impacts. Evaluation must be based on benchmarks, indicators, or expected outcomes related to project goals and activities. Project goals are expected to be related to immediate, short-term, and intermediate-term expected changes that result from the project activities and measured outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The budget must include adequate resources for project evaluation, and evaluation procedures must be adequately described in the methods section.

Applicants must not submit proposals with significant overlap in objectives and scope to both ORG and OREI programs. If proposals with significant overlap are submitted to both ORG and OREI, the second proposal submitted will be rejected. Additional information on the scope of OREI and ORG is available at NIFA Organic Agriculture under: "Program Specific Resources."

The ORG program directly aligns with the USDA Strategic Plan FY 2018 –FY 2022 and specifically the following: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-strategic-plan-2018-2022.pdf

- *Strategic Goal 2,* Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers to Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World, Objective 2.1, Provide an Effective Financial Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers to Sustain Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Support Rural Jobs and Economic Growth.
- *Strategic Goal 5*, Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands through Technology Research, Objective 5.1 Enhance Conservation Planning With Science-Based Tools and Information; and
- *Strategic Goal 7*, Provide All Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply, Objective 7.1. Prevent Food Born Illness and Protect Public Health

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for ORG grants in FY 2019 and FY2020 is approximately $5,800,000 each year. The funds will be awarded through a competitive grants process described in this RFA. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY2020. Enactment of continuing resolutions or an appropriations act in FY 2020 may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. 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 Automated Standard Application for Payments.

B. Types of Applications

In FY **2019 or FY2020**, you may submit one of the following two types of applications to the **ORG** Program:

New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to ORG 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 of this RFA, Application Review Requirements. NIFA may choose to issue a new award on a continuation basis. A continuation award is an award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the federal government and the public.

Resubmitted application. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the NIFA but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Part IV of this RFA, Response to Previous Review). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. 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 of this RFA) 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

ORG anticipates funding standard Integrated Research, Education, and Extension projects with a project period of 1 to 3 years. Budgets may not exceed $200,000 per year with the total amount awarded not to exceed $500,000. NIFA expects to make a total of ten to eleven awards each FY.

Integrated projects aim to resolve problems through the application of science-based knowledge and address needs identified by stakeholders. Integrated projects clearly identify anticipated

outcomes and have a plan for evaluating and documenting the success of the project. ORG projects should include *research* and at least one of the other two functions of the agricultural knowledge system (Extension, and Education) focused around a problem or issue. However, single-function projects with sufficient justification will be considered. The functions addressed in the project should be interwoven throughout the life of the project; complement and reinforce each other; and be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project. Integrated projects must include a data management plan that clearly describes how the data will be disseminated and accessible to the public.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may only be submitted by colleges and universities as defined in section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA, 7 U.S.C. 3103). 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. Section 1404 of NARETPA was amended by sections 7101 and 7129 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246), sections 7101, 7129 (c) (4)) to define Hispanic-serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs) and to include research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities (see Definitions in Part VIII, E of this RFA.) Applications may also be submitted by 1994 Land-Grant Institutions (defined in 7 CFR 3430), HSACUs, and research foundations maintained by eligible colleges or universities.

For the purposes of this program, the terms "college" and "university" mean an educational institution in any state which (1) admits as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; (2) is legally authorized within such state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provides an educational program for which a bachelor's degree or any other higher degree is awarded; (4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

Pursuant to section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7626) which authorized the Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grant Program, all four year Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) are eligible to apply for Integrated Projects as identified in the FY 2019 or FY2020 ORG RFA. Two year HSIs may be eligible to apply only if the institution has been certified as a HSACU for the fiscal year in which funding is being provided.

Approximately by April 2019, a list of the institutions certified and therefore eligible to apply as HSACUs for grants under FY 2019 RFAs, including this RFA, will be made available at Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities. Institutions appearing on this list are granted HSACU certification by the Secretary for the period starting October 1, 2019, and ending September 30, 2020. Certifications are valid for FY 2019 only. For FY 2020 applications, this list will be made available on Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities approximately by April 2020. Additional questions on HSACU eligibility can be addressed to hsacu@nifa.usda.gov. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline will result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334) removed the matching requirements for some NIFA competitive grant programs imposed by the Agricultural Act of 2014. While this matching requirement was removed, the program is still subject to the matching requirements of 7 USC 7626(d). See below for further details.

For FY 2020, when a grant provides a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, the grant recipient must match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources (see Part IV, B, item 6 for details).

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if we determine that:

1. the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or

2. the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

C. Multiple Submissions

An applicant may apply to ORG, OREI, and another NIFA program, as applicable, in any one FY. However, proposals must not be duplicated, essentially duplicated, or predominantly overlapping. If multiple submissions are received that duplicate, essentially duplicate, or predominantly overlap, one or both applications will be rejected. If duplicate proposals are submitted to both ORG and OREI, the second submission will be rejected**.**

D. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will recognize and provide priority in the receipt of funding to applications from "centers of excellence" that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. NIFA held listening sessions in July 2014 and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA's implementation of the COE provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input are available on NIFA's website at Centers of Excellence. A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE:

1. State agricultural experiment stations;
2. Colleges and universities;
3. University research foundations;
4. Other research institutions and organizations;
5. Federal agencies;
6. National laboratories;
7. Private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
8. Individuals; or
9. Any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

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/search-opportunity-package.html and enter the funding opportunity number where appropriate

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-ICGP-007010

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. ET).
Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic applications are to be prepared 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.
The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of **ORG** Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 20 pages of written text including figures and tables. We have established this maximum 20 pages to ensure fair and equitable competition.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following: Applicants requesting consideration of COE status must include their justification at the end of their Project Narratives and within the page limits provided for the project narratives.

See Part III, Section 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for detailed instruction on page and text formatting. Margins, in all directions, must be at least one inch and font size at least 11 points. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

1. Introduction: Include a clear statement of the long-term goals and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities substantiating the need for the proposed project. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed activity, including the work of key project personnel. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. In addition, include in-depth information on the following, when applicable:
   a. Estimates of the magnitude of the issues and their relevance to stakeholders and to ongoing state-federal food and agricultural Research, Education, and Extension programs;
   b. Description of the role stakeholders, including end users, play in problem identification, planning, and implementation and evaluation as appropriate; and
   c. Reasons for performing the work at the proposing institution.

2. Objectives: Include clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statements of specific aims of the proposed effort, including the suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale. Projects must include specific objectives for Research, Education, and Extension functions (as appropriate); include evidence of necessary involvement from interdisciplinary teams; and demonstrate the

extent to which partnerships with other institutions (federal, state, other) are developed.

3. Methods: Explicitly state the procedures or methods to be applied to the proposed effort. Include, but do not necessarily limit to:
   a. Description of how the project will solicit and use stakeholder involvement;
   b. Description of the proposed project activities and the sequence in which they are to be carried out;
   c. Review of Co-PD roles will be included in project review. Please be clear about Co- PDs vs sub-contractors.
   d. Techniques and methodology to be employed in the project, including their feasibility and rationale;
   e. Results expected within a reasonable time frame;
   f. How you will monitor and evaluate (as appropriate) Research, Extension, and Education activities;
   g. How you will analyze and interpret data;
   h. Limitations to proposed procedures;
   i. Pitfalls that might be encountered;
   j. Suitability of scale and transferability of project results or developed materials beyond the project scale;
   k. Details of plans to communicate results to stakeholders and the public; and
   l. Plan to sustain activities beyond this funding period

4. Project Timetable: Outline all important phases as a function of time, year-by-year, for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period. Include specific, measurable goals or projected accomplishments for each year of ORG funding and expected impacts or outcomes of the work.

Response to the previous panel review: An application with substantive similarities to a prior, unsuccessful application should be presented as a resubmission. Resubmitted applications must provide a response to the previous panel review. The response should be as concise as possible, and limited to a maximum of three pages. The response to the previous review is not counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative. A NIFA-issued proposal number must be included in the response to the previous review.

Center of Excellence Justification

Only Integrated Project Proposals applicants may be considered for centers of excellence designation. In addition to meeting the other requirements detailed in Part IV, C of this RFA, eligible applicants who wish to be considered as centers of excellence must provide a brief justification statement, as part of your Project Narrative and within the page limits provided, which describes how you meet the standards of a COE, based on the following criteria:

1. The ability of the COE to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts in the research, teaching, and extension activities outlined in this application;

2. In addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the COE to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups,

institutions of higher education, and the federal government in the proposed research and/or extension activities outlined in this application. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award;

3. The planned scope and capability of the COE to implement teaching initiatives that increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and
4. The ability or capacity of the COE to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

Additionally, where practicable (not required), center of excellence applicants should describe proposed efforts to improve teaching capacity and infrastructure at colleges and universities (including land-grant colleges and universities, cooperating forestry schools, certified Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) (list of certified NLGCA is available at https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nlgca-list), and schools of veterinary medicine).

c. 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.

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.**

Data Management Plan PDF Attachment. Required for all ORG proposals. Two-Page Limit. Title the attachment as 'Data Management Plan' and save file as 'Management Plan'. Projects must budget sufficient resources to develop and implement the proposed data management plan. Letters of support are welcome but not required.

The requirement for preparation and inclusion of a DMP in your application is included here: Data Management Plan for NIFA-Funded Research, Education, and Extension 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.

Matching. For grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B of this RFA, the Budget Justification must list matching sources along with the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match as well as the total dollar amount being pledged. NIFA is no longer requiring written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement). However, you are still subject to documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, etc. as specified in 2 CFR Part 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (the Uniform Guidance)," 7 CFR 3430, "Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions," and program-specific regulations, as applicable. In instances where match is required, any resulting award will require the signature of an Authorized Representative. Only when NIFA receives the award signed by the AR will award funds be released and available for drawdown.

Summarize on a separate page the sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution and place that information in the proposal as part of the Budget Narrative.

Additional Budget Information

ORG Project Directors must attend at least two Project Directors' Workshops during the term of their project. Sufficient funds should be budgeted in the proposal and reserved in the course of the project for the PD to attend the workshops in the Washington, DC area, each lasting 2 days. The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the Budget Narrative (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Publication costs may include the additional cost of open-source publication if that is an option for the journal. Open source availability will increase the visibility and citation rate for NIFA-funded research publications and should be chosen if it is an appropriate option.

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.

1. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code **Organic Transitions**") and the program code (i.e., enter "**112.E**"). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.
2. **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 Grant.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

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.

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

This RFA solicits application for two funding cycles (FY 2019 or FY2020). Applications for FY 2019 funding cycle must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on May 16, 2019. Applications for FY 2020 funding cycle must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time** on February 27, 2020. Applications received after these deadlines will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C of this RFA).

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

Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) limits indirect costs for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum indirect cost rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of indirect costs using:

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

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

If the results of 1), is the lesser of the two, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated indirect cost rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee's negotiated indirect cost rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated indirect cost rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the indirect cost rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of 2), is the lesser of the two, then the maximum indirect cost rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the indirect costs of the prime awardee plus the sum of the indirect costs charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

You may not use grant funds awarded under this authority to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or the plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construction of buildings or facilities

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:

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

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

ORG reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

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 evaluation by the technical review panel entails two levels of assessment. The panel of reviewers will first evaluate applications independently. The reviewers will assess how well the application addresses each evaluation criterion identified in this RFA, assess the overall strength and weaknesses of each criterion, and evaluate the overall likelihood that the project will have

significant outcomes and impacts. The reviewers will then summarize their review and assign a review score based on the criteria in this RFA.

After the independent reviews are completed, the peer panel is convened. This level of peer review includes a discussion with other reviewers serving on the peer review panel. The panel uses the summarized reviews to facilitate these discussions. Through these discussions, peer review panelists come to consensus on the final rating and ranking of proposals. See a complete description of NIFA's peer review process here: The NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications.

NIFA will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. Technical merit of all aspects of the application, including research, education, and extension components, as appropriate (50 points).

   a. Degree of integration of research, education, and extension (10 pts);

   b. Extent to which proposed work addresses identified organic stakeholder needs in the priority areas described above (10 pts);

   c. Suitability and feasibility of methodology for successfully completing work in the allotted time (10 pts);

   d. Quality of monitoring, data management and evaluation plans (10 pts); and

   e. Qualifications of key project personnel and institutions, including institutional experience and competence in the proposed area of work, and adequacy of available support personnel, equipment, and facilities (10 pts);

2. Relevance of proposed project to ORG purpose (see Part I, B.) (50 points).

   a. Justification for problem addressed (10 pts);
   b. Evidence of appropriate involvement with interdisciplinary teams and institutional partners (federal, state, other) (10 pts);
   c. Extent to which stakeholders, including end users, were and will be involved in future problem identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation (10 pts);
   d. Probability that the project will be successful, have documentable impact, and produce transferable results (10 pts); and
   e. Likelihood that the project will fill knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of organic practices and programs in the priority areas listed previously (10 pts).

Centers of Excellence Status

All eligible applicants will be competitively peer reviewed (as described in Part V, A and B of this RFA), and ranked in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Those that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a COE will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be a COE (Part III, D and Part IV, B). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-COE, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the COE criteria. NIFA will effectively use the COE prioritization as a "tie breaker." Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a COE or who are not deemed to have met the COE standards may still receive funding.

In addition, the applicant's Notice of Award will reflect that, for the particular grant program, the applicant meets all of the requirements of a COE. Entities recognized as COE will maintain that distinction for the duration of their period of performance or as identified in the terms and conditions of that award.

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 NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications 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 ORG 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 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 – 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 Policy Guide.

Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

Refer to Part II, D of this RFA for more information.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see 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 are to use REEport, NIFA's electronic, web-based inventory system to submit an initial project initiation which documents expected products and outcomes of the project. Additionally, annual progress report documenting realized project outcomes must be submitted to the electronic system. The web-based system facilitates an electronic workflow between grantees and NIFA for project accomplishments to be easily searchable and allows for public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements, including those specific to the annual and final technical reports, are included in the award terms and conditions.

PDs are required to attend at least two PD workshops at a location and time to be designated at a later date. Budget amount should be sufficient to attend the 2-day workshops in the Washington, DC area. In the early years of a multiyear project, participation may be in the form of a poster presentation and submission of an abstract. In the final year of the project, an oral presentation should be made and a written report submitted.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Dr. Mathieu Ngouajio
National Science Liaison, Plant Systems-Production Division, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 305-A Whitten Building
12th Street, SW, and Jefferson Drive Washington, DC
Telephone: (202) 570-1915
E-mail: mathieu.ngouajio@usda.gov

Dr. Steve Smith
National Program Leader, Animal Systems Division, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 6501 Beacon Drive, Kansas City, MO 64133
Telephone: (202)-445-5480
E-mail: steven.i.smith@usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contact –

Awards Management Division (AMD)
Email: SM.AMDAdministrativeContacts@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 sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount sub-awards. 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

Refer to 7 CFR 3430 for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

Information about the Organic Transitions program is available online at:
https://nifa.usda.gov/program/agriculture-and-food-research-initiative-afri