

Notice of Funding Opportunity Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: September 14, 2026

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$1,905,210

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD \$25,000 - \$200,000
RANGE:

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-WAMS-011117

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.318

ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields (STEM) program is listed in the Assistance Listings under the number 10.318.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, September 14, 2026
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (<i>NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month</i>)

The use of preferences based solely upon a person's inclusion in a racial or ethnic group without any showing of a discriminatory act towards such person is not consistent with the opinion issued in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, 600 U.S. 181 (2023). Accordingly, in issuing grants pursuant to this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), grants will not be awarded through the use of racial, ethnic, or sex preferences. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will not 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.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to advancing these principles and encourages applicants to actively engage farmers, ranchers, and foresters when applying for funding opportunities to ensure relevancy and adherence to them. NIFA also encourages agricultural leaders to engage in the peer review panel process to ensure American producers are better served through research, education, and extension activities.

Projects submitted under this NOFO should align with [USDA Secretary's Memorandum 1078-020](#) Directive on Departmental Research and Development Priorities:

1. Increasing Profitability of Farmers and Ranchers
2. Expanding Markets and Creating New Uses of U.S. Agricultural Products
3. Protecting the Integrity of American Agriculture from Invasive Species
4. Promoting Soil Health to Regenerate Long-Term Productivity of Land
5. Improving Human Health through Precision Nutrition and Food Quality

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all NOFO so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing NOFOs and uses comments to help meet the requirements of Section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 ([7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)](#)). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov. Please use the following subject line: Response to the STEM NOFO.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NIFA requests applications for the STEM program for FY 2026. The approximate amount available for grants is \$1,905,210.

This notice identifies the objectives for projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions. NIFA requests applications to support research, extension, and integrated activities. These activities aim to increase the number of individuals from rural areas who will pursue and complete a postsecondary degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The goal is for these individuals to join the agricultural workforce to make contributions in research, education, extension related activities, and other areas.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Section 1672 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 ([7 U.S.C. 5925\(d\)\(7\)](#)).

B. Purpose and Priorities

The STEM program, under assistance listing number 10.318, will support projects that increase participation from rural areas. NIFA intends for this program to address educational needs through research and extension activities within broadly defined areas of the food and agricultural sciences and their allied disciplines. Projects must focus on an audience of K-14 students (kindergarten through twelfth grade plus two years of postsecondary schooling (e.g., vocational technical institutions or community or junior colleges). NIFA strongly encourages Project Directors to limit student stipends, tuition, or educational costs of the award to citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States. This ensures grant supported training activities directly contribute to strengthening the domestic workforce pipeline.

Applications must highlight and emphasize the development of a competent and qualified workforce in the food and agricultural enterprises. Funded projects should improve the economic health and viability of rural communities by developing research and Extension initiatives that focus on new and emerging employment opportunities in STEM occupations.

Leadership Skills Development. The development of leadership skills, knowledge, and qualities are necessary to prepare students for agricultural and related careers in the private sector, government, and academia. Applications must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to equip students with technical and leadership abilities through their participation in this project. Specific activities may include:

1. Developing practical applications to increase understanding of leadership roles, including critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills; ethics and professionalism; and working in teams
2. Connecting the academic classroom experience with daily leadership roles and organizational activities
3. Providing opportunities for mentoring and shadowing; and
4. Organizing leadership academies, workshops, trainings, and related activities.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	WAMS
Program Name:	STEM
ALN:	10.318
Project Type:	Research Extension Integrated Research and Extension Projects
Grant Type:	Standard Grants
Application Deadline:	September 14, 2026
Grant Duration:	24-36 Months
Anticipated # of Awards/Fiscal Year:	9
Maximum Award Amount:	\$25,000 to \$200,000 total
Proposal Submission Limitations:	Two applications per eligible institution

C. Program Area Description

A proposed project must address one or more Focus Area that addresses extension and research conducted to benefit the communities served, especially that of their students.

1. Focus Areas. Projects must focus on the purpose of one or more of the Focus Areas below.

a. **Student Experiential Learning.** Furthers the development of student scientific and professional competencies through hands-on experiential learning projects (inside or outside of the classroom) that provide students with opportunities to solve complex problems in the context of real-world situations. Applications may emphasize but are not limited to: introducing and expanding students' knowledge of STEM and other technologies supportive of solutions to pressing challenges influencing food and agriculture, creating more and better markets for producers and consumers; and addressing food and nutrition insecurity and food safety. Projects should focus on advancing student decision making and communications skills, data and analytical skills, and improving their interest in STEM disciplines as they relate to the food and agricultural enterprise through extension and research activities. Activities may include, but are not limited to, internships, practicum experiences, and leadership skill development.

b. **Student Recruitment, Retention, and Mentoring.** Strengthens student recruitment and retention programs to promote the future strength of the Nation's scientific, professional, and technical workforce in the food and agricultural sciences. Research and extension activities under this need area may include the provision of student financial assistance to support the recruitment and retention of students. Applications may emphasize, but are not limited to:

- (1) Initiating new projects or supplementing current efforts to attract and enroll an increased number of students in education programs in STEM disciplines as they relate to food and agricultural sciences. These efforts may provide outreach to students' families and communities to engage in a robust exchange of ideas on using the full breadth of the Nation's intellectual resources more effectively.

- (2) Developing or supplementing agricultural and science literacy programs at the K-14 education levels (kindergarten through twelfth grade plus two years of postsecondary schooling (e.g., vocational technical institutions or community or junior colleges)) that attract students to credentialing or degree-granting programs and careers in the food and agricultural sciences; and providing mentoring, hands-on learning enrichment programs, student financial support to attend credentialing or degree-granting programs, or other initiatives for student retention.
 - c. **Curriculum Design and Materials Development.** This Focus Area promotes the development of alternative courses of study and degree programs, new and improved curricula and instructional materials, delivery systems, and technology that respond to differences in student learning styles, or increased awareness of the role of STEM disciplines in the food and agricultural sciences. Projects including curriculum development components must be led by or include key personnel with curriculum development credentials to ensure materials produced comply with the most appropriate pedagogy, teaching standards, and other applicable institutional, state, and national accreditation requirements.
2. **Expected Products and Results.** The program requires appropriate metrics and expected products and results, outcomes, and their potential impact on strengthening food and agricultural science education, research and Extension in the United States. Metrics to assess products, outputs, and outcomes are to be clearly delineated in the proposal. Metrics to be captured include, but are not limited to, the number of scholarships provided, internships and fellowships completed, participants in career development activities, and training opportunities. Please be as specific as possible in describing the linkages among activities, outputs, and different types of outcomes (e.g., changes in: (1) participant knowledge and awareness of careers in agriculture and training, (2) technical and leadership skills, or (3) participant statistics supportive of this program's goals; (recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement rates; partnerships formed) and the relevance and potential impact on successfully preparing and supporting students and other communities of learners to enter the food and agricultural workforce.
 3. **Evaluation Plan.** All projects must have a plan that includes both a strategy for monitoring the project as it evolves (to provide feedback to guide these efforts), as well as a strategy for evaluating the project's effectiveness in achieving its goals and for identifying positive and negative findings when the project is completed. The complexity of the evaluation will depend on the project's scope. NIFA encourages grantees to obtain an independent evaluation to secure appropriate documentation of the project's outputs and outcomes. Such efforts should be led by knowledgeable and experienced individuals. As a guide, up to 10% of the grant funds may be used to support this purpose.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for the program in FY 2026 is approximately \$1,905,210. USDA is not committed to funding any particular application or to making a specific number of awards.

The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this NOFO.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO.

Applications for FY 2026 are limited to the following application types:

1. **New application.** New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) of this NOFO for definition).
2. **Resubmitted application.** Resubmitted applications must include responses to the previous review panel summary within a 1-page limit in addition to the allowed project narrative length and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field* (**Field 4**) on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) of this NOFO for definition).

C. Project and Grant Types

The following describes the types of projects or grants that are eligible for funding:

1. **Project Types.** Applicants must propose one of the following:
 - a. **Extension Projects.** Single-function Extension Projects conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal lesson programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. Extension Projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, in-service training, client recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative instructional methodologies appropriate to informal lesson programs.
 - b. **Research Projects.** Single-function Research Projects support applied research conducted by individual investigators, co-investigators within the same discipline, or multidisciplinary teams.

Applied research means research that includes expansion of the findings of fundamental research to uncover practical ways in which new knowledge can be advanced to benefit individuals and society. Multi-disciplinary research projects are those in which investigators from two or more food, agriculture, human, and natural resource science disciplines collaborate closely to address a common problem.
 - c. **Integrated Research and Extension Projects.** For this program, an integrated project includes research and extension functions (components) within the project.

Functions should be focused on the problem or issue and should be interwoven throughout the life of the project to complement and reinforce one another. The research and extension functions should be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project, and no more than two-thirds of the project's budget may be focused on a single function.

Integrated project applicants are encouraged to review [NIFA's Integrated Programs Application Information webpage](#) for additional information on Integrated programs, including tips for writing Integrated project applications and an example of an Integrated application.

2. **Grant Types.** Standard grant is the grant instrument for this NOFO. This is an award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined project period without the announced intention of providing additional support at a future date.

D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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

E. Proposal Submission Limitations

For FY 2026, an **eligible applicant may not submit more than two applications** to this program as a lead institution/applicant and **no more than one award will be made per lead institution /applicant**. Prospective project directors are advised to contact their institutional office of sponsored programs (or similar, if applicable) regarding institutional processes used to select proposals for submission.

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the program must meet all the requirements discussed in this NOFO. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's [Grants Overview](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

As contained in Section 7204 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) (Pub. L. 110-246 which amends Section 1672 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 ([7 U.S.C. 5925](#))), applications may only be submitted by the following eligible applicants:

- (a) State agricultural experiment stations
- (b) Colleges and universities
- (c) University research foundations
- (d) Other research institutions and organizations
- (e) Federal agencies
- (f) National laboratories
- (g) Private organizations or corporations
- (h) Individuals or any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in subparagraphs (a) through (h).

USDA **will not accept** competitive applications for grants and cooperative agreements submitted for dangerous gain-of-function research, as defined in [Section 8 of E.O. 14292](#).

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions. Submissions of duplicate (other than revisions) or predominantly overlapping applications are not allowed. An eligible applicant may submit up to two applications whereas they are not essentially duplications of the same project or portions of the same project to multiple programs. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate submissions. For additional information or clarification, please contact the NIFA point of contact (POC) listed in this NOFO.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

In accordance with [7 U.S.C. 5925\(a\)\(2\)\(A\)](#) the grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions (see [Part IV](#) of this NOFO, R&R Budget. 3. for details).

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if NIFA determines 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.

Please reach out to the program contact listed in [Appendix I](#) of this NOFO with any questions regarding possible cost sharing or match requirements to your specific project.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this NOFO electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this NOFO and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 3** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process. The NIFA Grants Application Guide is contained in the specific funding opportunity package, or a sample of the guide can be found [here](#). When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	<i>New Users</i> to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number, USDA-NIFA-WAMS-011117, search for application here: Opportunity Package .
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 4: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer-based support: Grants.gov iPortal Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays	Email: grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov Key Information: Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

B. Content and Form of the Application

The NIFA Grants Application Guide is part of the corresponding application package for this NOFO. The NOFO overrides the NIFA Grants Application Guide if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. Applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this NOFO. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References (All references are to the NIFA Grants Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF).	Part IV
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify that attachments are in the correct format.	Part IV
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part IV
Follow the submission instructions.	Part IV
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	Part V
Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support and keep a record of the correspondence.	N/A
Contact NIFA if applicant does not receive correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 45 days of the application deadline.	N/A

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances.

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

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

1. **Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract.** – The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the STEM Program. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates. In the Project Summary please include the following information:
 - a. Focus Area(s) Supported
 - b. Project Partners, if applicable
 - c. Location of the Rural Area Involved (See [Appendix III](#) of this NOFO for definition)
 - d. Number of Students Supported
2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).**—The PN must not exceed **10 single-spaced (46 lines per page)** pages of written text, including figures and tables. The font size should be no smaller than 12 points, Times New Roman, and the page margins no smaller than 1 inch. The page limits outlined here ensure fair competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all the following:
 - a. **Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem**
 - i. **Identification of Problem and Project Impact.** Briefly state: (1) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (2) the

anticipated project audience; and (3) the project's objectives and its anticipated, overall impact on improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences .

Clearly identify and explain how the proposed project will address your Focus Area(s) described in Part I.

- ii. **Project Justification.** Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Describe any ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project for which funding was received under a previous program awards or other sources.

- iii. **Institutional Goals.** Demonstrate how the project will: (1) contribute to the achievement of the institution/organization's long-term (5- to 10-year) goals; (2) help satisfy the institution's high-priority objectives; and (3) be linked to/supported by the institution's strategic plan.

Innovation. Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences and solving a problem for eligible individuals.

Using either actual experiences or literature background information, show why you selected this approach.

b. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages

- i. **Plan of Operation and Methodology.** Describe procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the project. Describe plans for the management of the project to ensure its proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.
- ii. **Timetable.** Identify all important project milestones and dates as they relate to project startup, execution, evaluation, and closeout.
- iii. **Products, Results, Measurable Outcomes and Impacts.** Outline the expected products/results and their outcome and impact on strengthening access to food and agricultural sciences for eligible individuals in the United States. Make sure to differentiate among the terms and provide metrics to be tracked.
- iv. **Evaluation Plans.** State the methodologies to be used in assessing the accomplishment of the project's stated products, results, and measurable impacts. Discuss the strategies and metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the Program Goals from Part I. Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. This section shall clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts.
- v. **Dissemination Plans.** The application must document how project accomplishments will be disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the community. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify audiences and explain methods of communication.
- vi. **Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts (if applicable).** Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education. It is highly encouraged for applicants to provide evidence via letters of support from the parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.

c. Institutional Capability and Capacity Building

- i. **Institutional/Organizational Commitment and Capability.** Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.

- ii. **Institutional/Organizational Resources.** Document that necessary institutional/organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and management of generated data and/or materials), and other appropriate resources, will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how the institutional/organizational resources will be made available to the project, and when combined with the support requested from USDA, will be adequate to carry out the project's activities.
 - iii. **Continuation Plans.** Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, the project's continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support. For example, detail whether: (1) the institution's/organization's long-range budget or academic plan provides for the realistic continuation or expansion of the initiative undertaken by this project after the grant period ends; (2) plans for eventual self- support are built into the project; (3) plans are being made to institutionalize the program if it meets with success; and/or (4) there are indications of other continuing non-Federal support.
 - iv. **Key Personnel.** Discuss the adequacy and specific attributes and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project. Include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.
- d. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness**
- i. **Budget.** In addition to the required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how such budget items as professional or technical staff time and salary, participant support costs, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. If applicable, justify that the total budget is allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s) and will be appropriate to carry out the activities of the project.
 - ii. **Cost-Effectiveness.** Justify the project's cost-effectiveness. Show how the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, or leverages additional funds.
3. **Field 12. Add Other Attachments.** See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.
- a. **Data Management Plan (DMP); 2-page limit.** A DMP is required for this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see [Part V, B](#) of this NOFO, [NIFA's Data Management Plan](#)).
 - b. **Response to Previous Review (1-page limit).** Title the attachment "Response to Previous Review" in the document header and save file as "Response to Previous Review." This requirement only applies to "Resubmitted Applications" as described under [Part II, B](#) of this NOFO. PDs must respond to the previous review panel summary on no more than 1 page. If desired, additional comments may be included in the text of the PN, subject to the page limitations of that section.

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

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

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

1. **Match** – If an applicant concludes that the matching requirements described under [Part III, B](#) of this NOFO are not applicable to them, the applicant must include an explanation of their conclusion in the *budget justification*. NIFA will consider this justification when determining final matching requirements or if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements. Grants that require matching funds as specified under [Part III, B](#) of this NOFO must list in their *budget justification* the matching sources, the identification of the entity(ies) providing the match, and the total pledged amount. A written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement) is not required. However, applicants are subject to the documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, as specified in [2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(the Uniform Guidance\),”](#) and [7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions.”](#)
2. **Indirect Costs (IDC)** – See [Part IV, C](#) of this NOFO for funding restrictions regarding IDC, and **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for additional information.
3. During the tenure of a grant, PDs must attend one National PD Meeting/Conference, if offered, in Kansas City, Missouri, or any other announced location. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss project and grant management, opportunities for collaborative efforts, future directions for education reform, and opportunities to enhance dissemination of exemplary end products/results of the projects. Reasonable travel expenses to attend this meeting may be included in the application’s budget under travel expenses. While budgets should account for this travel, NIFA may consider virtual or hybrid meetings.

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

1. **Field 2. The program to which the applicant is applying.** Enter the program name, “STEM” and the program code “WAMS.” Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

C. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Cost (IDC) is not to exceed 30 percent of the recipient’s Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA). [7 U.S.C. 3310](#) limits the recovery of IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of the TFFA under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum allowable IDC amount recoverable under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the following and is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

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

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

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

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

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant may request an IDC rate. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process and need only to calculate a rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate may elect the de minimis rate ([2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#)). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de minimis rate of 15 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC), which may be used indefinitely. As described above and in [2 CFR 200.403](#), costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double-charged or inconsistently charged as both. If selected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

See [NIFA Indirect Costs](#) for information including [additional resources](#) and [NIFA Indirect Cost Guidance Chart](#).

2. NIFA awards may not be used to support the procurement of unmanned aircraft systems to process, store, or transmit Federal information (as defined in [OMB Circular A-130](#)) unless the grant is specifically available for procurement of such equipment and grantees describe in their application how they will comply with the information security requirements outlined in Appendix B of [M-26-02 Ensuring Government Use of Secure Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Supporting United States Producers](#) and develop a risk-

based approach to applying those requirements to procurement solicitations to potential vendors under the resulting Federal award. This information, if provided, will be evaluated by NIFA as part of its evaluation process. If such procurement is approved, specific information security requirements may be included in the terms and conditions of the grant to ensure that the grantees will incorporate those requirements in procurement solicitations of unmanned aircraft systems under the Federal award. Additionally, projects must ensure that they are in adherence to [Secretary's Memorandum \(SM\) 1078-014](#) and are not using unallowable 3-D printers which can be found at [National Security and Unallowable Costs](#).

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this NOFO. All administrative requirements must be met in order for the application to proceed to the next level of review. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that have met the administrative requirements using a review panel (see [NIFA Peer Review Process](#)).

Scientific Peer Review Process

NIFA selects reviewers for the review panel based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

1. The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities.
2. The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields.
3. The need to include other experts (e.g., agricultural producers, range or forest managers/operators, researchers, educators, evaluators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to 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 the reviewer's area of expertise, geographic area, and entity type, as appropriate.
6. The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

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

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

After the review process has been completed, NIFA sends copies of reviews, *not* including the identity of reviewers, and a summary (if applicable) of the review panel comments to the PD.

Conflicts of interest.—NIFA takes extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may influence the review or evaluation (see [NIFA Peer Review Process for Competitive Grant Applications](#)).

B. Evaluation Criteria

NIFA will use the following criteria, listed in order of importance, to evaluate applications to this program:

1. **Potential for Advancing Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem.** This criterion is used to assess if the research/extension project will have an impact upon and advance the quality of the food and agricultural sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals; Program's goals; identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed; justification for the project; innovation; multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus; and potential for adoption by other institutions.
2. **Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages.** This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach, including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, logic model, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or outreach support provided to the applicant institution through, if applicable, its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project.
3. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building.** This criterion relates to the institution's capability to perform the project and the degree to which the project will strengthen its teaching or outreach capacity to recruit and retain eligible students. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, data generation and management, and/or other materials) available to carry out the project, potential for institutional adoption of project objectives and outputs, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support.
4. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness.** This criterion relates to how well the total budget supports the project and is cost-effective. Elements considered include the necessity and reasonableness of costs to carry out project activities and achieve project objectives; the appropriateness of budget allocations between the applicant and any collaborating institution(s); the adequacy of time committed to the project by key project personnel; and the degree to which the project maximizes the use of limited resources, optimizes educational value for the dollar, achieves economies of scale, and focuses expertise and activity on high-priority Focus Areas.
5. **Key Personnel.** This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number and qualifications of key persons who will develop and carry out the project, and the qualifications of project personnel who will provide for the assessment of project results and impacts and dissemination of these findings.

C. Organizational Management Information

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

D. Application Disposition

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

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds authorized, the NIFA awarding official will make grants to responsible and eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this NOFO. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the grant must be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period.

All funds granted by NIFA under this NOFO may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the program-specific laws and regulations, NIFA General Awards Administrative Provisions ([7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E](#)), USDA Regulations for Grants and Agreements ([2 CFR Chapter IV](#)), Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance ([2 CFR part 200](#)), [NIFA-specific terms and conditions](#), [USDA General Terms and Conditions for Federal Awards](#), and approved budget and project plans.

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Output and reporting requirements are included in the [award terms and conditions](#). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, they will be identified in the Award Notice.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

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

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

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision required);
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the Federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project;
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), or [2 CFR Part 300 Appendix IX](#), (Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals), or [48 CFR](#), unless waived by the Federal awarding agency, [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
5. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
6. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a Federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved Federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
7. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-Federal entity;
8. The need for additional Federal funds to complete the project;
9. Salary rates of pay exceeding an Executive Level IV salary range (see “Rates of Pay for the Executive Schedule” under the “Executive & Senior Level Employee Pay Tables” header at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>) require prior NIFA approval. This rate does not include any fringe benefits, general and administrative (G&A), overhead, or other expenses. Requests for approval must include the salary rate of pay and a justification for the rate and be sent to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) to awards@usda.gov;
10. No more than 50 percent of the total dollars of this award may be subcontracted to another party(ies) without prior written approval of the ADO, except subcontracts to Federal agencies;
11. Transferring funds between the construction and non-construction work under a Federal award; and
12. A no-cost extension (meaning, an extension of time that does not require the obligation of additional Federal funds) of the period of performance, other than any one-time extension authorized by the Federal agency in accordance with paragraph 2 CFR 200.308(g)(2). All requests for no-cost extensions should be submitted at least 10 calendar days before the conclusion of the period of performance. The Federal agency may approve multiple no-cost extensions under a Federal award if not prohibited by Federal statute or regulation.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

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

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. Language Access Services

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit [NIFA Language Access Services](#).

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

For inquiries related to this NOFO, please send your questions to:
Christopher Green, National Program Leader, at christoper.green@usda.gov.

For administrative questions related to:

1. Grants.gov, see [Part IV](#) of this NOFO
2. Other NOFO or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this NOFO, please email awards@usda.gov

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

Authorized Representative – AR

Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Data Management Plan – DMP

Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences – FANH

Food, Conservation, and Energy Act – FCEA

Indirect Cost – IDC

National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act – NARETPA

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO

Research, Education, and Economics – REE

Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics – STEM

Total Federal Funds Awarded – TFFA

United States Department of Agriculture – USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

Refer to [7 CFR 3430 Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions](#) for additional definitions.

Definitions

Matching:

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

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Resubmitted Application:

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

Integrated Research and Extension Project:

For this program, an Integrated Project includes Research and Extension functions (components) within the project. Functions should be focused on the problem or issue and should be interwoven throughout the life of the project to complement and reinforce one another. The functions should be interdependent and necessary for the success of the project and no more than two-thirds of the project's budget may be focused on a single function.

Colleges and Universities:

An educational institution in any State that:

1. Admits as regular students those 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 the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree
4. Is a public or other nonprofit institution
5. Is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association, or if not so accredited, is an institution that has been granted pre-accreditation status by such an agency or association that has been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the granting of pre-accreditation status, and the Secretary of Education has determined that there is satisfactory assurance that the institution will meet the accreditation standards of such an agency or association within a reasonable time

K-14:

Kindergarten through twelfth grade plus 2 years of postsecondary schooling (e.g., vocational technical institutions or community or junior colleges); it does not include 4-year colleges or universities.

Partnership:

Requires that all partners have substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership between multiple entities is proposed, the proposal should clearly identify the following:

1. A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project

2. How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to the execution of project objectives, determine experimental design, develop the project work plan and timetable, and submit collaborative, timely reports
3. A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or in-kind contribution to the total project budget costs

Rural Area:

Any area with less than 2,000 housing units or has a population less than 5,000. for further defined <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural>.

Training:

The planned and systematic acquisition of practical knowledge, skills, or competencies required for a trade, occupation, or profession delivered by formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, or practicum experience that prepares students from rural areas for participation in STEM fields.