REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center

MODIFICATIONS: 06/06/2024 – This RFA has been modified from the original announcement. Edits are indicated using track changes and red font so the public/potential applicants can identify the changes within the solicitation.

Edits appear on pages: 18 and 19

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2024
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	July 1, 2024
ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING:	$10,000,000
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-WICWD-010773
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.244

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.244.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, July 1, 2024 [*Ref to Part I, C of this RFA*]
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (*NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month*)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when programs are grounded in DEIA. NIFA is committed to enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all Request for Applications (RFA) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing RFAs, and 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 WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This notice identifies the objectives for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, hereafter referred to as WIC, is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and serves to safeguard the health of eligible women who are pregnant, postpartum, and/or breastfeeding, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) requests new applications for the Women, Infants, and Children Workforce Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) Cooperative Agreement. The amount available in FY2024 is approximately $10,000,000 for a Cooperative Agreement.

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will provide technical assistance and evaluation oversight to implementation projects that are funded to respond to the National WIC Workforce Strategy. For each implementation project, the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will support the development and implementation of a management and outreach plan for engaging with WIC State and local agencies, Tribal Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutes (MSIs) and/or underserved communities to include the incorporation of DEIA outcomes and activities (e.g., Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)). The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will ensure rigorous and consistent evaluation and reporting across implementation projects funded to cultivate comprehensive and sustained solutions to increase the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce. The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will also establish and oversee a National WIC Workforce Advisory Workgroup to help inform project components throughout the entire period of performance. Furthermore, the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will work closely with applicants, grantees, and with NIFA and FNS, as appropriate to ensure engagement, alignment, and appropriate aggregation and reporting of data. Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, P.L. 117-2, §1106) will be used to invest in research, education, and Extension to increase the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce. This work will be one component of the WIC outreach, modernization and innovation initiative authorized through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, P.L. 117-2. The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will also participate in the overall ARPA WIC modernization evaluation led by FNS.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, P.L. 117-2 provided USDA with approximately $390 million to carry out WIC outreach, innovation, and program modernization efforts to increase participation and benefit redemption. One aspect of WIC modernization is developing a diverse workforce that provides culturally responsive care to participants. This project, the WIC Workforce Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will be supported through an Inter-Agency Agreement between FNS and NIFA using ARPA funds.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The National Workforce Strategy (assistance listing 10.244) is part of a joint agency initiative between FNS and NIFA that is expected to cultivate comprehensive and sustained solutions for WIC workforce development. The joint agency initiative aims to strengthen the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce, with the ultimate goals of increasing: 1) WIC participation through reaching those populations that are eligible, but not enrolled; and 2) WIC participants use of benefits and services, including nutrition education and breastfeeding support.

ARPA provided FNS with $390 million to carry out WIC outreach, innovation, and program modernization efforts to increase participation and benefit redemption. To determine how it would invest these funds, FNS conducted more than 30 listening sessions with WIC stakeholders from around the country. FNS used this input, along with research gathered from the US Digital Service (USDS), to establish a goal-driven investment framework to increase WIC participation and retention and reduce participation and retention disparities in program delivery.

One of the pillars of the WIC modernization investment framework focuses on developing and strengthening the WIC workforce. For decades, WIC clinics have strived to meet the comprehensive set of needs of their service community while providing culturally responsive care. During the listening sessions, stakeholders conveyed that increasing diversity and cultural competency in the WIC workforce could potentially increase WIC participation and retention, particularly among historically underrepresented communities. Indeed, recruiting, training, and retaining a WIC workforce that is representative of the WIC population is a promising approach to maximizing WIC's full potential to support healthy development of infants and children, pregnancies, as well as postpartum recovery.

Stakeholders voiced support for workforce development initiatives such as developing educational and career pipelines for WIC staff, providing resources and training to support improved cultural competency, and strategically addressing concerns around staff retention. Given the feedback received on this topic, FNS invested a portion of the ARPA funds into a collaborative effort that will support a diverse WIC workforce trained to provide culturally responsive services and evaluate the impact of investing in this pillar of the modernization framework. An important first step was to fuel change and address the concerns heard in the listening sessions was to develop the National WIC Workforce Strategy, which the University of Minnesota developed with funding provided by the USDA FNS under cooperative agreement with USDA NIFA. Two RFAs directly support implementation of the National WIC Workforce Strategy: 1) the WIC Workforce Implementation Projects RFA funds implementation grantees

focusing on specific aspects of the National WIC Workforce Strategy; and 2) this WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center RFA which oversees and evaluates the implementation grantees. Outcomes of this work are intended to serve as a workforce model for the broader nutrition education workforce at local, state agency, and federal levels.

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will align with the five-year National WIC Workforce Strategy carried out through implementation projects funded through the WIC Workforce Implementation Projects RFA, and shape investments in supporting the current and future WIC workforce. The National WIC Workforce Strategy focuses on cultural representation and culturally responsive care, including cultural competency to serve underserved populations participating in WIC and include strategies for State/local agencies, which include Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and territories, to identify and meet targeted needs. Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of WIC program services and territories. Implementation projects informed by the National WIC Workforce Strategy and funded by the WIC Workforce Implementation Projects RFA must take into account training and technical assistance needs and preferences of WIC State and local agencies.

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will:

a. Develop an evaluation strategy based on the National WIC Workforce Strategy and specific to the implementation projects (WIC Workforce Implementation Projects RFA).
b. Ensure the evaluation strategy aligns with ARPA goals that supports the application of the most rigorous evaluation methods appropriate for implementation projects.
c. Assist each implementation project with the development of a project-specific evaluation plan.
d. Ensure rigorous and consistent evaluation and reporting across all implementation projects (WIC Workforce Implementation Projects RFA).
e. Offer training, technical assistance, evaluation oversight, and informational support services to implementation grantees.
f. Support the development and implementation of each implementation project's management and outreach plan for engaging with WIC State and local agencies, Tribal Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) and/or underserved communities.
g. Ensure engagement and outreach plan (e.g., Traditional Ecological Knowledge) incorporates activities and outcomes that support the strategy and result in a more diverse WIC workforce that provides culturally responsive care in a variety of different settings.

Specific to the evaluation strategy, the overall goal of the evaluation component is to establish and carry out an evaluation strategy that will ensure data is collected and analyzed to identify outcomes and impacts of ARPA funding supporting the WIC workforce strategy through the implementation grants. FNS has already awarded a contract to conduct an overarching evaluation of all ARPA-funded WIC modernization efforts, including WIC workforce development. As

such, the Cooperator will be expected to coordinate with this larger evaluation and may be asked to participate in related FNS-sponsored surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In its application, the Cooperator shall affirm willingness to participate in any data collection activities related to the overarching evaluation. The Cooperator may also be expected to provide data collected under the scope of this RFA directly to FNS. Furthermore, the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will work closely with the implementation project grantees and with NIFA, FNS and the overall WIC ARPA evaluation contractor, as appropriate, to ensure engagement, alignment, and appropriate aggregation and reporting of data. NIFA encourages pursuing these priorities through TEK where consistent with the above goals and priorities.

The Cooperative Agreement will be between NIFA and the Cooperator. NIFA and FNS will provide additional context, content, and contacts, as needed, along with agency liaisons to address questions and help inform the process. NIFA will assign a National Program Leader (NPL) with appropriate expertise to monitor the project, make recommendations concerning planning and procedures to be followed and ensure that objectives are fulfilled. The NPL will work closely with the Cooperator to facilitate communication with FNS and others involved in the project through regular virtual meetings. The NPL will also facilitate communication between the Cooperator for this project and those involved in other parts of the joint agency initiative to facilitate synergy in accomplishing the goals of the joint agency initiative. NIFA and FNS will be directly involved in reviewing all project plans to ensure that projects meet WIC's needs. FNS must review all surveys, questionnaires, or other research instruments that will be sent to WIC State and local agencies in advance. FNS will also review all resources developed by the Cooperator and provide guidance and technical assistance as needed. All requests for information from WIC State and local agencies are subject to FNS review and approval and must include sufficient lead times for State and local agency response, to be provided by FNS.

FNS must review at least 2 drafts and final deliverables for all materials that will be disseminated to State and local agencies and all materials that will be posted/made available publicly. This includes, but is not limited to, any presentation materials, website content, training and technical assistance resources, and deliverables in narrative/report form, including annual and final reports. Additionally, the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will also participate in the overall ARPA WIC modernization evaluation led by FNS. Additional details will be noted in the Cooperative Agreement, once finalized.

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center is aligned with the following:
USDA Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026 goals:

1. Goal 4: Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans and
2. Goal 6: Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA

USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026 priorities:

1. Priority 3: Bolstering Nutrition Security & Health
2. Priority 5: Translating Research into Action

For a program informational webinar please visit the NIFA calendar for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	WETAC
Program Code Name:	WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center
ALN:	10.244
Grant Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Application Deadline	July 1, 2024
Grant Duration:	60 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	1
Maximum Award Amount:	$10,000,000

C. Program Area Description

In alignment with the National WIC Workforce Strategy, the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center must provide services related to technical assistance, evaluation, and informational support services to the implementation projects.

Program Evaluation and Technical Assistance

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will design and carry out an overarching evaluation of the work carried out by the WIC workforce implementation project grantees. The evaluation strategy must also align with FNS's overall ARPA evaluation strategy (see below). The evaluation plan will include an assessment of the impact of all recommendations and strategies implemented based on the National WIC Workforce Strategy. In alignment with the National WIC Workforce Strategy, it is expected that taken together the implementation projects will result in:

1. A WIC program that is innovative in meeting the changing needs of families
2. A supported WIC Workforce
3. The ability to hire and retain the best talent
4. Improved reach to populations that are eligible for WIC, but not yet enrolled
5. Enhanced likelihood that WIC participants adopt nutrition education and breastfeeding support recommendations

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will also work with each WIC Workforce implementation project grantees to develop an evaluation and reporting plan and metrics. The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center must establish an evaluation strategy to support data collection, evaluation, and reporting within and across the implementation projects. All data generated by the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center must be made publicly available and conform with best practices for data safety and accessibility, including ensuring it does not implicitly or explicitly release Personally Identifying Information (PII). Data assets must be made publicly accessible and/or any exemptions to the public access policy described in approved data management plans.

Technical assistance is encouraged to include the following components, but is not limited to using these approaches:

a) Supporting each implementation project grantee in developing and implementing a project-specific evaluation plan, including compiling project data from each implementation project grantee and providing additional statistical expertise to evaluate project performance that complements individual project evaluation teams;
b) Providing guidance to each of the implementation project grantees on protections for human subjects and the proposed protections from research risk relating to their participation, which includes working with tribal communities; and
c) Providing guidance to each of the implementation project grantees on intellectual property protections for TEK.

About FNS's Overall ARPA Evaluation Strategy

In September 2023, FNS awarded a contract to the research firm Mathematica® for a comprehensive evaluation of ARPA-funded WIC and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) modernization projects being implemented between 2022 and 2029. This work will tap into and build upon project-specific evaluation activities to help us understand the *cumulative* impact of *all* the efforts to modernize the programs. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the ARPA evaluation are 1) enrollment, 2) participation, 3) retention, 4) benefit redemption, and 5) participant experience.

The evaluation will include both process evaluation *and* outcome evaluation.

a. The process evaluation will involve tracking project implementation to understand reach, dose, waiver use, and the different technical or programmatic approaches being used.
b. The outcome evaluation will assess whether the modernization projects are associated with increases in enrollment, participation, retention, and benefit redemption; improvements to the participant experience; and/or reductions in disparities in program delivery in WIC and FMNP.

The contractor will collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources including:

1. Project-level documentation;
2. Surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with participants, vendors, and State and local agency staff;
3. Site visits;
4. State Management Information Systems (MIS) and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) data, levering existing data collection efforts to minimize burden on State agencies;
5. And other WIC administrative data, as needed to support the evaluation.

FNS will coordinate all communication/collaboration between Mathematica® and the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center cooperator. All requests for data available from FNS must be requested directly from FNS in writing.

Program Training and Technical Assistance

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center Cooperator is responsible for training and technical assistance for implementation grantees that should include but that are not limited to the following key components:

a) Providing direct technical assistance to implementation grantees related to WIC program requirements, needs, and operational practices, as needed, at any point during the implementation project;
b) Ensuring that each implementation project grantee has a consistent understanding of WIC and delivers information in a manner that demonstrates appropriate understanding of WIC State and local agency operations;
c) Collecting and providing information on best practices for implementation project grantees;
d) Disseminating information and assisting with collaboration among the implementation project grantees and WIC State and Local agency operations;
e) Coordinating communication between the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center, implementation project grantees and WIC Local, State, National, and Tribal agencies;
f) Developing and implementing national, regional, state, and local trainings in alignment with the National WIC Workforce Strategy and identified needs of the implementation project grantees, in partnership with WIC Local, State, National, and Tribal agencies as appropriate;
g) Building capacity and sustainability through development and dissemination of resources in a variety of formats as appropriate to the strategy and implementation projects, including but not limited to webinars, toolkits, service blueprints, journey maps, etc. of WIC Local, State, National, and Tribal agencies to strengthen the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce. Practical tools and resources that are easily accessible and practical for State and local agencies to use, in addition to formal reports, are encouraged; and
h) Development of all technical assistance tools and resources, including surveys, must include a human-centered design approach. Requests to reach out to WIC State and local agencies for participation and development and design of technical assistance must go through FNS and must include appropriate response time frames for State and local agencies (a minimum of 2 weeks, ideally 3 weeks or longer).

Requirements for National WIC Workforce Advisory Workgroup

The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center must also establish and oversee a National WIC Workforce Advisory Workgroup to help inform project components throughout the entire period of performance. The Workgroup should be comprised of representative stakeholders and project implementors, current and potential workforce stakeholders (e.g., peer educators, paraprofessionals, Registered Dietitians, students, etc.), and local, state, national and tribal stakeholders who possess some WIC experience/knowledge. NIFA and FNS staff members should be included (e.g., champion, liaison, ex officio, and active members). Members from stakeholder organizations should also be considered (e.g., National WIC Association (NWA), National Indian and Native American WIC Coalition (NINAWC), and Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN), etc.).

The subject matter knowledge of each member of the Workgroup should reflect one or more of the following areas:

1. Development and execution of workforce development programs in similar fields to those included in WIC Competent Professional Authority (CPA) requirements (e.g., federal nutrition programs, public health, or maternal and child health).
2. Development and execution of workforce development programs among culturally diverse populations and communities of color.
3. Development and execution of SNAP ED and EFNEP workforce development programs to train individuals for customer service positions.
4. Development and implementation of similar strategies through Land-grant and Tribal colleges and universities.
5. Development and execution of cultural competency training in related fields.
6. Development and implementation of staffing patterns/efficiencies.

The Workgroup will be charged with providing input into the evaluation and reporting plan and metrics, addressing technical assistance needs of implementation project grantees, trainings, and soliciting feedback from others in the WIC community, as needed. A primary goal of the Workgroup is to ensure that all efforts align within any applicable WIC program requirements, needs, and operational practices, are feasible, and enhance sustainability of the implementation of the National WIC Workforce Strategy for WIC Local, State, National, and Tribal agencies to improve workforce retention, cultural engagement, and participant enrollment based on review of implementation project results and models developed.

Applicants must also describe and demonstrate in their application that:

a) The project team has experience conducting high-quality evaluations of similar scope and scale in partnership with WIC, similar public health programs, or federally funded programs (as evidenced by reports, publications, and/or other materials), and the team has capacity to design and carry out the required evaluation activities;
b) The project team demonstrates prior WIC experience and expertise;
c) Plans or strategies to strengthen or further develop partnerships with WIC Local, State, National, and Tribal agencies will be implemented as needed to sufficiently oversee implementation of the National WIC Workforce Strategy,
d) They will ensure training is culturally competent and centered on DEIA principles; and
e) They will engage in ongoing consultation with FNS and NIFA Leadership, which may include: 1) Monthly or bi-monthly dialogues; and 2) Project Director focused national meetings (2–3-day focused events).

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The amount available for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) in FY2024 is approximately $10,000,000. USDA is not committed to fund any application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Application for Payments, operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA. Application for FY2024 is limited to the following application types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in Part V of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see Appendix III for definition).

C. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

Applicants for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) must meet all the requirements discussed in this RFA. Failure to meet the eligibility criteria by the application deadline may result in exclusion from consideration or, preclude NIFA from making an award. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

Eligible institutions include:

a. State Agricultural Experiment Station;
b. colleges and universities, including junior colleges offering associate degrees or higher, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges, 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities (HSACUs, see NIFA's Hispanic Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities page);
c. university research foundations;
d. other research institutions and organizations;
e. non-profit organizations;
f. Federal agencies;
g. Governmental agencies;
h. Tribal organizations;
i. national laboratories;
j. private organizations or corporations;
k. individuals who are U.S. citizens, nationals, or permanent residents; or
l. any group consisting of two or more entities identified in a) through j).

Eligible institutions do not include foreign or international organizations.

Duplicate or Multiple Submissions – duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions. For those new to Federal financial assistance, NIFA's Grants Overview provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No Match Required - The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC Workforce – Education and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center) has no matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and Grants 101. **Table 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 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	*New Users* to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements).
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-WICWD-010773**, 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 Key Information: 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 RFA. The RFA 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 RFA. 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) format.	Part IV
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	Part IV
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part IV
Follow the submission instructions.	Part 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 30 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 Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Workforce - Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center). See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for instructions and suggested templates.
2. **Field 8**. **Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must not exceed 20 *1.5 spaced* pages of written text, figures, and tables with 1-inch margins. The font size for text should be no smaller than 12 points, Times New Roman (the font size for figures and tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. **PNs that exceed the page limits will not be reviewed.** 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. **Introduction.** The introduction must include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) of the proposed WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center. Show evidence of direct experience providing training, technical assistance, evaluation, and informational support services. Cite relevant previous accomplishments related to WIC as well as past accomplishments of similar work.
b. **Project goals and intended outcomes.** Concisely present the goals, associated objectives, and expected outputs and outcomes of the project necessary to address the long-term goal(s) outlined in the introduction and to achieve the deliverables outlined in the RFA. Outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely; and should describe specific changes in knowledge, actions, or conditions that will occur because of the project.
c. **Personnel, organizations, and resources involved.** Describe in detail the relevant experience and qualifications of the project team serving WIC State and local agency operations, other Federal nutrition programs (e.g., EFNEP), Extension, underserved communities, or other similar audiences. The capacity to provide training and technical assistance should be clearly identified. Describe the method of selection and membership of the National WIC Advisory Workgroup, roles, and responsibilities. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed center, and their impacts. The information may include: the years and locations of prior activities; number of training and technical assistance activities provided along with evaluation activities carried out; the success rate of the training and technical assistance provided and the types of evaluation outcomes and impacts.
d. **Approach.** The activities proposed to meet the project requirements and deliverables must be clearly stated. Discuss how the proposed outcomes will be realized by providing a systematic description and timeline for how the most important steps or milestones will be accomplished and the level and types of involvement of key stakeholders and partners at WIC State and local agencies, including ITOs and territories. Attention should be given to DEIA principles, cultural responsiveness, and competency to serve underserved populations and others participating in WIC. Cultural competency in this context is broader than race or ethnicity and includes socioeconomic and other cultural factors that may affect the efficacy of program services. Include a description of any proposed innovative product development. Subawardees: Include details of the roles and responsibilities of subawardees. Include time commitments, goals, and objectives of each subawardee. In addition to these descriptions, it is recommended that a table be provided with implementation details for these activities, including: (a) specific steps and achievements; (b) timetables for milestones, and (c) entities involved at each step. These should align with the logic model that is also required.
g. **Cooperation and institutional/organizational involvement.** Provide a statement of commitment to communicating regularly with NIFA as per the Cooperative Agreement, FNS, the WIC Workforce implementation project grantees, and others who are part of the joint agency initiative where appropriate. Briefly indicate the commitment of other involved entities and organizations for the

completion of this project. Letters of commitment must be included in the Appendices. A sampling of letters of commitment from members of the proposed National WIC Workforce Advisory Workgroup must be provided.

h. **Logic Model.** A logic model is required and is limited to one-page. Title the attachment as 'Logic Model' in the document header and save file as 'LogicModel'. This logic model must align with what is proposed in this application**.**

i. **Data Management Plan (DMP).** 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. Describe how data assets will be made publicly accessible and/or describe any exemptions to the public access policy. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V, B of this RFA, NIFA's Data Management Plan).

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

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 is not a precondition of award (see **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide).

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

1. Indirect costs (IDC) – See Part IV, C of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding IDC, and **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide for additional information.

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

1. **Field 2**. **Program to which the applicant is applying.** Enter the program name "*WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center*" and the program code "WETAC". Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8**. **Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

C. Funding Restrictions

Fully Negotiated Rate. Applicants must use the current negotiated Indirect Cost (IDC) rate established by its cognizant Federal agency (the agency that provides the most funds). If awarded, the applicant will be required to produce a negotiated IDC rate agreement from the cognizant agency to recover IDC.

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)). Currently the Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. OMB has updated the 2 CFR allowing an indirect cost de minimis rate increase

from 10 to 15 percent effective October 1, 2024. Budgets for indirect costs will be increased accordingly if the recipient selects the de minimis indirect cost recovery option. 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 elected, 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

~~***Legislative mandated Indirect Cost (IDC)***. Section 704 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, limits IDC for Cooperative Agreements with nonprofit institutions, including colleges and universities, to 10% of total federal funds awarded. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants that are nonprofit institutions must limit their requests for recovery of IDC to 10 percent of the total funds requested.~~

~~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)). Currently the Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. OMB has updated the 2 CFR allowing an indirect cost de minimis rate increase from 10 to 15 percent effective October 1, 2024. Budgets for indirect costs will be increased accordingly if the recipient selects the de minimis indirect cost recovery option. 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 elected, 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.~~

~~***Sub-award Restriction***. The applicant is expected to perform a substantive portion of the project and no more than 33 percent, as determined by budget expenditures, may be sub-awarded. NIFA will allow applicants to indicate in their proposal if they intend to sub-award more than 33% of the total award. This deviation will require NIFA pre-approval. If pre-approval is desired, contact the National Program Leader that oversees this program (see Appendix I: Agency Contact). Projects may divide their budget allocations between partners as it fits their work plan. (For additional knowledge or expertise that is not available within the applicant organization, funds for expert consultation may be included in the "All Other Direct Costs" section of the proposed budget.)~~

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

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

Scientific Peer Review Process:

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA.

Initial Screening Criteria:
To avoid any misunderstandings, applicants should be aware that applications that do not satisfy all the screening criteria are at risk of being returned to the proposing entity without review. Returned applications may not be resubmitted (with or without revision) under this solicitation. The initial screening criteria are the following:

1. The applicant must be an eligible entity as described in this RFA.
2. The application must meet the Application Content and Format requirements as described in this RFA. This includes page length requirements all required forms and all files in PDF.
3. The application must include a Data Management Plan in PDF.
4. The application must include a Logic Model in PDF.

Program Area Evaluation Criteria:
NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA:

1. Relevancy - The proposed work will have an impact on the joint agency initiative to strengthen the diversity and cultural competency of the WIC workforce. The proposed project will clearly demonstrate in partnership with NIFA and FNS, the capacity to effectively offer training, technical assistance, evaluation, and informational support services to the implementation project grantees related to the program and priorities identified in the RFA. In addition, the relevancy will be evaluated by the quality and thoroughness of the description of the National WIC Workforce Advisory Workgroup and its membership.
2. Technical Merit - (a) Activities, objectives, outcomes, and potential impacts are clear and achievable within the project period as well as adequate to fulfill the purpose and priorities of the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center; (b) approach is technologically, geographically, linguistically, and culturally suitable and feasible; (c) innovation and originality; (d) evaluation plan for the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center outcomes is adequate, appropriate, measurable, and achievable; (e) evaluation plan for use of common metrics to assess program outcomes is aligned with the logic model; (f) a clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, management of the Advisory Workgroup and maintenance of partnerships with stakeholders and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing concerning outcomes including changes in learning, actions or conditions, and reporting among the implementation project grantees and members of the project team.
3. Qualifications of Project Team, Partners, and Collaborators - Participating organizations, institutions, and key personnel roles are clearly defined. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership reflects the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed activities or similar types of activities, including knowledge and experience with WIC and related maternal and child health or public health initiatives. Participating organizations, institutions, and key personnel sufficiently represent broad experts and practitioners, and demonstrate substantial and effective collaborations or partnerships necessary to fulfill the purpose and priorities of the WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center, including with WIC State and local agencies in the U.S. Experience in and connections with the community and a demonstrated

dedication to serving residents living under the Federal poverty line will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard. Ability to establish evaluation strategy, develop an evaluation plan and conduct formative and summative evaluation as it relates to National WIC Workforce Strategy. This capability includes demonstrated success with large data sets using quantitative and qualitative methods. The ability to provide professional development technical assistance, ensure training is culturally competent and centered on DEIA principles, and through different formats, including capability to implement training on a large scale. The capability to assess, implement and evaluate training and programs on a large scale at the regional and national levels. Evidenced capability to work with staff across multiple sites and regions. Additionally, the ability to interpret large-scale data and disseminate it in a readable format for reporting purposes.

4. Project Management Plan and Data Management Plan - Involves stakeholders in the project design, development, implementation, data sharing, and reporting; and clearly articulates a plan to accomplish the project objectives, such as sufficient time allocated to accomplish each objective, clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key personnel and collaborators plan for decision-making, and plan for project administration and data-sharing. Proposed project also employs an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process. Professional salaries are in balance with compensation given to residents for their participation in the initiative. Proposed budget aligns with the project narrative. The plan shows evidence of successful management of subawards, if applicable. The plan shows evidence of managing diverse demographic and geographic populations at regional or national levels.

D. 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 award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

E. Application Disposition

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

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

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

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: Federal Regulations). Unless specifically noted by statue or award-specific requirements, NIFA 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. The WIC Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center will complete an annual project report that includes: 1) an outline of information for all funded implementation projects to include objectives, goals, and outcomes; 2) a concise description of individual project progress; 3) how the work aligns with the goals of the National WIC Workforce Strategy, and USDA, FNS, and NIFA strategic goals; and 4) evaluation findings to date, as available. Additionally, a final report should be produced that synthesizes findings, makes recommendations for future related projects, and includes a sustainability plan. If a model proves successful for improving program delivery, then the plan will include recommendations for sustainability. All reports published on the Internet must comply with Section 508 of the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794d). The draft report should be reviewed by the NPL prior to being submitted as the final report. Participation in a final closeout session with NIFA and FNS to include presentations from the WIC Workforce implementation project grantees.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

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

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

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring).
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project.
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E (Cost Principles), or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, (Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals), or 48 CFR, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, 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; and
8. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

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

C. Regulatory Information

This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

D. Limited English Proficiency

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 or contact Lois Tuttle, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov or (443) 386-9488.

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Program Contacts
Carinthia Cherry, PhD, RDN
National Program Leader
carinthia.cherry@usda.gov

Yamilis Ocasio, MS
Program Specialist
yamilis.ocasio@usda.gov

For administrative questions related to:

1. Grants.gov, see Part IV of this RFA
2. Other RFA or application questions, please email grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov
3. Awards under this RFA, please email awards@usda.gov

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

Courier/Package Delivery Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 – ARPA
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists – ASPHN
Authorized Representative – AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 – AREERA
Assistance Listing Number – ALN
Competent Professional Authority – CPA
Data Management Plan – DMP
Electronic Benefits Transfer – EBT
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility – DEIA
Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program – EFNEP
Food and Nutrition Service – FNS
Historically Black Colleges and Universities – HBCU
Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities – HSACU
Indian Tribal Organizations – ITOs
Indirect Cost – IDC
Key Performance Indicator - KPI
Land Grant University – LGU
Management Information System - MIS
Minority Serving Institution – MSI
Modified Total Direct Costs – MTDC
National Indian and Native American WIC Coalition – NINAWC
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA
National Program Leader – NPL
National WIC Association – NWA
Request for Application – RFA
Personally Identifiable Information – PII
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children – WIC
Traditional Ecological Knowledge – TEK
United States Department of Agriculture – USDA
United States Digital Service – USDS
WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program – FMNP

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 match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.

New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge:

A body of observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. It is applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural, and spiritual systems. TEK has evolved over millennia, continues to evolve, and includes insights based on evidence acquired through direct contact with the environment and long-term experiences, as well as extensive observations, lessons, and skills passed from generation to generation. TEK is owned by Indigenous people—including, but not limited to, Tribal Nations, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.