



Notice of Funding Opportunity Higher Education Challenge Grants Program

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: October 15, 2026

ANTICIPATED FUNDING: \$5,700,000

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-CGP-011315

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.217

ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing Number (ALN): The Higher Education Challenge (HEC) Grants Program is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.217.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, October 15, 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 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:

- solving the most pressing challenges they face;
- protecting America's food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
- supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
- expanding and developing domestic markets;
- training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
- fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

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 Notice of Funding Opportunity (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 HEC NOFO.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NIFA is soliciting applications for the FY 2026 HEC grants program. HEC supports U.S. colleges and universities in delivering high quality, evidence based academic programs that prepare citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States for leadership and professional roles in the Nation's food and agricultural sciences workforce.

Approximately \$5,700,000 will be available for awards in FY 2026. This notice provides funding information, deadlines, application forms, and instructions for HEC, as well as the program's funding objectives and eligibility requirements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION	7
A. Legislative Authority	7
B. Purpose and Priorities	7
PART II. AWARD INFORMATION	12
A. Available Funding	12
B. Application Restrictions	12
C. Project and Grant Types	12
D. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects	14
PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION.....	15
A. Eligibility Requirements.....	15
B. Cost Sharing or Matching.....	15
PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION	16
A. Method of Application	16
B. Content and Form of the Application	16
C. Funding Restrictions.....	26
PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS	28
A. NIFA's Evaluation Process	28
B. Evaluation Criteria.....	28
C. Organizational Management Information.....	29
D. Application Disposition.....	30
PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION	31
A. General	31
B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements.....	31
C. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements	31
PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION	32
A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget.....	32
B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	33
C. Regulatory Information	33
D. Language Access Services.....	33
APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT.....	34
APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....	35
APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS	36

TABLE OF KEY INFORMATION

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines.....	2
Table 2: Program Key Information.....	9
Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials.....	16
Table 4: Help and Resources	16
Table 5: Key Application Instructions.....	17
Table 6: Application Components	18
Table 7: Academic Codes and Disciplines	20
Table 8: Expected Outcomes	25

PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Section 1417 of National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA), codified at [7 U.S.C. 3152](#), authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to make competitive grants to colleges and universities for the purpose of furthering education in the food and agricultural sciences. Specifically, the Secretary may make grants to strengthen institutional capacities, including curriculum, faculty, scientific instrumentation, instruction delivery systems, and student recruitment and retention, to respond to identified State, regional, national, or international educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences, or in rural economic, community, and business development ([7 U.S.C. 3152 \(b\)\(1\)](#)).

NIFA administers this competitive grant program specifically designated to promote and strengthen higher education in the food and agricultural sciences. This program, in collaboration with eligible higher education institutions, is designed to develop the intellectual capital of citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States to ensure the preeminence of U.S. food and agricultural systems. This program is subject to federal regulations as outlined in administrative provisions that can be found in [7 CFR 3405—Higher Education Challenge Grants Program](#).

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of HEC, under assistance listing 10.217, is to strengthen institutional capacities, including curriculum, faculty, scientific instrumentation, and student recruitment and retention. Specifically, applications submitted to this program must state how the funded project will address the HEC program goals to:

1. Strengthen institutional capacities (curriculum, faculty, scientific instrumentation, instruction delivery systems, and student recruitment and retention) to address state, regional, or national educational needs in the food and agricultural sciences, with an emphasis on building U.S. capacity to engage and lead in a global context.
2. Attract and support citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States to pursue advanced degrees in food and agricultural sciences or in rural economic, community, and business development.
3. Facilitate cooperative initiatives between two or more eligible institutions, or between eligible institutions and units of the government or organizations in the private sector, to maximize the development and use of resources such as faculty, facilities, and equipment to improve food and agricultural sciences teaching programs, or teaching programs emphasizing rural economic, community, and business development.
4. Design and implement food and agricultural science programs, or programs emphasizing rural, economic, community, and business development, to build teaching, research, and extension capacity across a range of colleges and universities.
5. Advocate for scholarly initiatives for third and fourth year undergraduates to encourage students to consider pursuing advanced degrees to address demands for highly skilled workforce in food and agricultural sciences, as well as in rural economic, community, and business development.

6. Expand opportunities for skills-focused education that enable students to pursue and advanced degrees in the food and agricultural sciences, supporting the development of a skilled workforce.
7. Enhance the quality of instruction for graduate degrees in the food and agricultural sciences, as well as first professional degrees in the veterinary sciences to help meet current and future workforce needs in these areas.
8. Attract exceptionally talented citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States into research or academic careers in the food and agricultural sciences who will engage in graduate and postdoctoral fellowship programs.

The HEC program is focused on developing and improving formal master's or doctorate degree-level food and agricultural sciences education and first professional degree-level education in veterinary medicine, such as a doctorate in veterinary medicine (DVM). The HEC program provides eligible applicants with funding to help ensure that a competent and qualified workforce will exist to serve the food and agricultural sciences system. At the same time, HEC-funded projects improve the economic health and viability of communities through the development of degree programs emphasizing new and emerging employment opportunities. HEC projects address the national challenge to increase the number of advanced degree students entering the food and agricultural sciences.

HEC projects are expected to: (a) produce measurable impacts aligned with HEC program goals; (b) promote innovative educational practices within the food and agricultural sciences that improve how students learn; and (c) include a rigorous evaluation component to assess that project outcomes are met. Institutions must demonstrate capacity for, and a significant ongoing commitment to, the teaching of the food and agricultural sciences generally, and to the specific need and/or discipline(s) for which a grant is requested. Projects should encourage academic institutions, in partnership with organizations and employers, to collectively identify and address a state or regional challenge or opportunity facing the food and agricultural sciences education to further workforce development. Virtual education and extension/outreach techniques that broaden the reach and access to audiences are encouraged.

Projects must primarily focus on advanced baccalaureate (third and fourth year), graduate, or DVM-level education. However, a project may also include an ancillary target impact on either secondary or 2-year postsecondary students who are interested in graduate education in areas related to food and agricultural sciences. Projects with a primary target audience of K-14 students or teachers consider NIFA's [Secondary Education, Two-Year Postsecondary Education and Agriculture in the K-12 Classroom](#) program.

NIFA seeks to expand and strengthen the food and agricultural sectors, including the development of workforce with the training and credentials necessary to contribute to the food and agricultural sector. Project Directors (PD) are expected to limit trainee staffing roles - undergraduate, graduate, and/or postdoctoral- to citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States. This ensures that grant supported training activities directly contribute to strengthening the domestic workforce pipeline.

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. HEC teaching applications must demonstrably incorporate a leadership development component to equip students with technical and leadership abilities upon graduation. 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, etc.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	ER
Program Code Name:	Higher Education Challenge Grants Program
ALN:	10.217
Project Type:	Education Projects
Grant Type:	Standard Grant Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1) Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2)
Application Deadline	5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, October 15, 2026
Grant Duration:	Standard – 36 to 48 months Collaborative 1 (CG1) – 36 to 48 months Collaborative 2 (CG2) – 36 to 48 months
Anticipated # of Awards:	18
Approximate Maximum Award Amount:	Standard – \$150,000 Collaborative 1 (CG1) – \$300,000 Collaborative 2 (CG2) – \$750,000

Projects must focus on one or more of the Educational Need Areas listed below and engage more than a single course or individual instructor. The rationale for selecting the Educational Need Area(s) must be explained in the context of how the project can contribute to the development of a cadre of students who will either pursue higher degrees in the food and agricultural sciences or be prepared to enter the food and agricultural sciences workforce.

Educational Need Areas

1. Curriculum Development for Promoting Student Career Opportunities

Projects should promote new and improved curricula and materials to increase the quality of, and continuously renew, the Nation's academic programs in the food and agricultural sciences. Additionally, projects should stimulate the development, and facilitate the use, of exemplary education models and materials that incorporate the most recent advances in subject matter research, research on teaching and learning theory, and instructional technology. Projects may develop students' analytical, interpersonal, leadership, communication, problem-solving, computational, and decision-making skills and abilities.

Applicants should consider projects that focus on integrated, multidisciplinary, learner-centered instruction. Furthermore, NIFA expects projects to reach large audiences efficiently and effectively; reinforce recent research on how to motivate students to learn, retain, apply, and transfer knowledge, skills, and competencies; and integrate and synthesize knowledge from several disciplines.

Examples of eligible projects in this need area include:

- a. Development of courses of study, degree programs, and instructional materials;
- b. Use of new approaches to the study of traditional subjects; and
- c. Introduction of new subjects, or new applications of knowledge, pertaining to the food and agricultural sciences

2. Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching

Projects should advance faculty development in the areas of teaching competency, subject matter expertise, pedagogy, responsiveness to changes in student learning styles, student recruitment, and advising skills. Training of faculty must be relevant to the identified educational needs of students. Any individual recipient of Federal funds must be an "eligible participant" as defined in the definitions section of this NOFO ([Appendix III](#)). Examples of eligible projects in this need area include activities that enable teaching faculty to:

- a. Develop a self-sustaining model for faculty professional development that better prepares new faculty for teaching careers, or provides retraining for experienced faculty;
- b. Gain experience with recent developments or innovative technology relevant to their teaching responsibilities; expand competence with new methods of information delivery;
- c. Work with scientists or professionals in government, industry, or other colleges or universities to learn new applications in a field;
- d. Create assessments that document student learning outcomes or that identify conceptual areas or skills particularly challenging to students, followed by appropriate changes in instructional approaches to effectively address these issues;
- e. Increase utilization of teaching methods that address the special needs of nontraditional students or students from groups that are not well represented in the food and agricultural sciences workforce; and
- f. Career exploration activities that raise awareness and expose students to career options in food and agriculture and the skills required to succeed in the same.

3. Facilitating Interaction with Other Academic Institutions

This need area promotes linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to maximize the use of resources supporting outstanding education in the food and agricultural sciences. Additionally, this need area supports linkages between baccalaureate degree-granting institutions and secondary, and/or 2-year postsecondary, institutions to make instruction targeted at undergraduate students available to secondary students as advanced placement credit or as transfer credit from associate-degree programs into baccalaureate-level programs. Projects that create bridges for baccalaureate level students to pursue advanced degrees (including master's, doctorate and DVM) are also appropriate to this need area.

Examples of eligible projects in this need area may include collaborative activities to:

- a. Develop and implement articulation agreements, including 2+2, 2+2+2 and other such initiatives, advanced placement credit transfer mechanisms, and shared faculty or instructional facilities;

- b. Establish multi-institutional student pathway initiatives that coordinate recruitment and retention strategies for K–14 students and support their progression into four-year food and agricultural sciences programs eventually expanding the pool of students eligible for advanced degrees; and
- c. Reduce duplication of educational resources across institutions by creating joint curricula, faculty sharing arrangements, cross enrollment agreements, or joint and shared degree programs.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

In FY 2026, the total amount available for HEC is \$5,700,000. USDA is not committed to fund any specific application or to make a particular number of awards.

The [Automated Standard Application for Payments \(ASAP\)](#), 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](#) for definition).
2. **Resubmitted application.** Resubmitted applications (submitted to the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program) must include the response to the previous review panel summary 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](#) for definition). See the Project Narrative section ([Part IV, B](#)) for additional information related to resubmitted applications. Planning Activity application resubmissions will not be accepted.

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 Education Projects. An Education Project must develop human capital to help meet current and future national food and agricultural sciences workplace needs.
2. **Grant Types.** Applicants must select the appropriate grant type from below.
 - a. **Standard Grant**

Standard Grants support targeted original Education Projects. An eligible individual institution, independent branch campus, or branch institution of a State system may submit a grant application for project activities to be undertaken principally on behalf of its own students or faculty, and to be managed primarily by its own personnel. The applicant executes the project without the requirement of sharing grant funds with other project partners. Applicants may request a maximum of \$150,000 total (not per year) for a Standard Grant application.
 - b. **Collaborative Grant**

Collaborative Grants support projects that strengthen higher education in the food and agricultural sciences at the advanced baccalaureate level or above, including master's, doctorate, and DVM programs. Funding is intended to enhance academic quality through curriculum innovation, faculty development, experiential learning, and multi-institution collaboration. Collaborative Grants do not support extension/outreach activities, 12+2 programs, or other sub-baccalaureate pathways; however, applicants may collaborate with community colleges or K–12 partners solely to build recruitment pipelines into 4-year and graduate agricultural science programs. Collaborative Grants aim to expand institutional capacity, improve student

recruitment and retention, strengthen advanced agricultural science instruction, and build sustainable, multi-institution networks that address regional and national workforce needs.

- i. **Collaborative Grant Type 1 (CG1)** provides up to \$300,000 total for projects carried out by the applicant institution in partnership with at least one additional institution. Partners must share grant funds; however, the applicant may not transfer more than half of the total award to partner institutions. CG1 projects focus on strengthening upper division and graduate agricultural science education through activities such as curriculum modernization, faculty development, joint teaching initiatives, shared instructional resources, and recruitment-focused collaborations with lower-level partners. Expected outcomes include improved instructional quality, enhanced faculty expertise, stronger recruitment pipelines, and sustainable partnerships among degree-granting institutions.
- ii. **Collaborative Grant Type 2 (CG2)** provides up to \$750,000 total for larger, multi-partner initiatives involving the applicant and at least two additional institutions, each contributing distinct expertise. The applicant must retain 30–70 percent of the award, and each partner must receive at least 10 percent. CG2 projects must address a major state or regional challenge in agricultural science education at the baccalaureate, master's, doctorate, or DVM level and may include activities such as developing multi-institution consortia, creating aligned and stackable academic pathways, building shared instructional infrastructure, expanding experiential learning opportunities, supporting faculty exchanges, and strengthening recruitment pipelines. CG2 projects must also report specific impacts, including: progress toward increasing the number of higher degree agricultural science graduates; documented improvements in student retention; a comprehensive evaluation with dissemination of results; identification of activities that will be sustained after the grant ends; and descriptions of related activities expected to emerge from the project. Reported impacts of CG2 projects must include (but are not limited to) the following:
 - (a) Assessment of significant progress toward addressing the national challenge of increasing the number of food and agricultural sciences professionals with advanced degrees, while addressing the specific state or regional opportunity identified in the grant application;
 - (b) Documented enhanced retention rates of students in food and agricultural sciences majors exposed to CG2 project activities;
 - (c) A comprehensive project evaluation, using the indicators and methods defined in this NOFO, that informs the baccalaureate, master's, doctorate or DVM food and agricultural sciences community and others about the effectiveness of the CG2 project through the dissemination of results via publications, blogs, conferences/meetings, etc.;
 - (d) A description of completed or ongoing activities supported by the CG2 project accompanied with a description of those same activities that will be sustained once grant funds end; and/or
 - (e) A description of any related activities expected to occur as an outgrowth of the funded project.

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 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 HEC 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 [About Grants](#) provides highly recommended information about grants and other resources to help understand the Federal awards process.

1. Applicant Eligibility

Land-grant Institutions and other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences and confer a graduate degree in at least one discipline or area of food and agricultural sciences are eligible to apply. Institutions offering degrees should be accredited by an agency or association recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. Research foundations maintained by an eligible college or university are eligible.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply, provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project.

Individuals are not eligible to apply for these grants to support their own graduate education.

2. Eligible Participant

For purposes of Faculty Preparation and Enhancement for Teaching and Student Recruitment and Retention, an individual who: Is a citizen or national of the United States, as defined in [§ 3405.2\(e\)](#); or is a citizen of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Republic of Palau. Where eligibility is claimed under [§ 3405.2\(e\)\(2\)](#), documentary evidence from the Immigration and Naturalization Service as to such eligibility must be made available to NIFA upon request.

USDA **will not accept** 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

There is no limit on the number of applications that an institution may submit. However, under this program each institution or applicant group may receive no more than two awards per annual HEC competition. In addition, each institution or organization may receive only one CG2 grant per HEC competition. Individual academic or administrative units within an institution—such as colleges, schools of agriculture, or similar divisions—may serve as the lead institution on only one active CG2 grant at a time.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

No Match Required - The HEC program has no matching requirement. NIFA will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion. While not required, cost share is encouraged.

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-CGP-011315 , 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 Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.–5 p.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 <u>NIFA Grants Application Guide</u>)
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

Table 6: Application Components

Application Component	File Name	Designation	Page Limit/Max.
Grants.gov Forms			
SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet	N/A	Required	N/A
SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s) Form	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded).	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Personal Data	N/A	Recommended	N/A
SF-424 (Budget)	N/A	Required	N/A
R&R Sub-award Budget Attachment	N/A	Required (for CG1 and CG2)	N/A
Attachment Uploads			
1) Project Summary (PS)	ProjectSummary.pdf	Required	250 words
2) Project Narrative (PN)	ProjectNarrative.pdf	Required	20 pages
2a) Project Narrative Cover Page	N/A – Include as first page of PN upload.	Required	1 page
2b) Response to Previous Review	N/A – Include as first page of PN upload. See PN section for additional details.	Required (for resubmissions only)	2- pages
2c) Logic Model	Include as final page of Project Narrative.	Required	1 page
3) Budget Justification	BudgetJustification.pdf	Required	2 pages
4) Sub-award Budget Justification	SubawardName_justification.pdf	Required (for CG1 and CG2)	2 pages (per sub-awardee)
5) Mentoring Plan (MP)	MentoringPlan.pdf	Required	2 pages (per tier type)
6) Data Management Plan	DMP.pdf	Required	2 pages
7) Collaborative Arrangements	CollabArrangements.pdf	Required	N/A
8) Expected Outcomes	ExpectedOutcomes.pdf	Required	1 page
9) Biographical Sketch (BS)	KeyPersonnel.pdf	Required	2 pages (per BS)
10) Current and Pending Support for Key Personnel	PendingCurrent.pdf	Required	N/A
11) Conflict of Interest	PDLastName_COI.pdf	Required	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 goals of the Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC). The PS is limited to 250 words. See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates. The use of [NIFA Application Support Templates](#) is highly encouraged.
2. **Field 8: Project Narrative (PN).**—The attached file, named "ProjectNarrative.pdf," contains the project narrative (PN). The maximum length for the PN is 20 pages of written text, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and a font size of 12. In addition, up to 5 double-spaced pages can be used for figures and tables. Tables and figures with accompanying written text (e.g., image caption or figure description) should have a font size of at least 11 points and can be single-spaced. Appendices to the PN are allowed if these are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN attachment should include the logic model as the final page and will not count toward the page limit. The page limits outlined here ensure fair competition. The PN attachment must include the following:

a. Narrative Cover Page

In new applications, the Narrative Cover Page should come before the table of contents. In resubmitted applications, the Response to Previous Review should precede the Narrative Cover Page. The Narrative Cover Page must include the information below and will not count towards the page limit of the PN:

- i. Project Title
- ii. PD and Co-PD(s) and institutional affiliation for each
- iii. Educational Need Area ([Part II, C](#))
- iv. Projected number of students to be served by the project during the project period (i.e., using a new curriculum, student career opportunity; benefitting from a partnership between institutions; etc.).
- v. Primary Academic Code and Discipline (Select one from [Table 7](#))
- vi. Grant Type: Standard, CG1, or CG2
- vii. Total Funds Requested: List total Federal funds requested for this application. If this project is a CG1 or CG2 proposal, also list each partner's total funds requested next to the institution/organization's name.
- viii. Partners: If a CG1 or CG2 proposal, list all partner institutions/organizations that will share grant funding.

Table 7: Academic Codes and Disciplines

Discipline(s)	Code
Agricultural Biosecurity	X
Agricultural Marketing and Management (includes Agricultural Economics)	M
Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Rural Sociology)	S
Agricultural/Biological Engineering (includes Rangeland, Urban/Rural Technology)	E
Animal Sciences	A
Biotechnology, Biochemistry, and Microbiology	B
Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (including Forestry, Parks & Recreation, Biofuels, or Biobased Products)	C
Entomology	J
Environmental Sciences/Management (includes Economics, Decision Management, and Biometry)	L
Food Science/Technology/Manufacturing/Safety	F
Human Nutrition (includes Obesity and Relevance to USDA Research and Development Goals)	N
Human Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences	H
Interdisciplinary, Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Social Sciences, and Economics	G
Plant Sciences and Horticulture (includes Turf Grass/Weed Science/Plant Breeding)	P
Soil Sciences (includes Soil Quality, Processes)	D
Veterinary Medicine (graduate degree training)	V
Water Sciences/Resources (includes Water Quality)	W
Other (Describe only if not listed above)	O

An application must convince a peer panel of a compelling educational challenge, clearly indicate how the methodology is both unique and with merit, offer significant promise of adoption by others, and include a plan for how the project impacts will be sustained once grant funds end.

b. Response to Previous Review

This requirement only applies to resubmitted applications as described in [Part II, B](#). The Project Narrative attachment is to include two components: (1) a **double-spaced**, 2-page maximum of two-page response to the previous review. Title the first page, “Response to Previous Review” and include the previous proposal number in the first line (see [Part IV, B](#), above). The Response to Previous Review does not count against the 20-page limit of the PN.

c. Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education; Significance of the Problem

1) **Identification of Educational Problem and Project Impact.** Briefly state: (a) the specific instructional problem/challenge (or opportunity) to be addressed; (b) the anticipated project audience; and (c) the project’s target objectives (what

change in education is proposed?) and its anticipated, overall impact on improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education.

- 2) **Project Justification.** Summarize the body of knowledge justifying the need for the proposed project. Discuss how the project's Educational Need Area (Part II, C) will be of value at the state, regional, national, or international level(s). Where applicable, explain how it will improve the food and agricultural science capabilities of students. Describe any previously funded projects that are ongoing or recently completed that are related to the proposed project.
- 3) **Institutional Long-Range Goals.** Explain how the project will help satisfy the institution/organization's high-priority objectives, or how the project is linked to and supported by the institution/organization's strategic plan.
- 4) **Innovation.** Describe the proposal's creative approach to improving the quality of food and agricultural sciences education, solving an educational problem, or promoting programs that advance equal opportunity for all students. Support your choice, with actual experiences or literature.
- 5) **Multidisciplinary and/or Problem-based Focus.** Indicate how the project is relevant to multiple disciplines in food and agricultural sciences education and how the project will enhance students' understanding of complex agricultural systems. Also, discuss whether the project may be adapted or serve as a model for other institutions.

d. Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages

- 1) **Plan of Operation and Methodology.** Describe procedures for accomplishing the project objectives. Describe project management plans to ensure proper and efficient administration. Describe the way in which resources and personnel will be used to conduct the project.
- 2) **Timetable.** Identify all important project milestones (performance targets that indicate when project goals will be met) and dates as they relate to project startup, execution, evaluation, dissemination, and closeout.
- 3) **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 two HEC goals from [Part I, B](#). Describe any data to be collected and analyzed. Demonstrate how the project will improve education. This section must clearly indicate how you plan to measure impacts. The following guidance will assist you in developing your evaluation plan:
 - i. The evaluation may also include assessment of other outcomes, particularly if the project aims to change organizational structures, create cost-efficiencies, or achieve other ends. Explain the data gathering procedures that will be used to monitor and assess progress toward intended project goals. When describing the measurement instruments you plan to use (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, assessments of e-portfolios or capstone projects, measures of class performance, scores on standardized tests, cost-benefit analyses, etc.), be sure to mention why these are appropriate for gauging success.

- ii. The evaluation plan section should make a convincing case to reviewers that the grantee could report, at the conclusion of the grant, the extent to which learning and engagement outcomes, professional development goals, and/or organizational outcomes have been achieved. Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the applicant thought about how to measure both successes and failures and what adjustments could be made to enhance program outcomes in the future. Collection of this evidence is critical to achieving HEC's goal of making data about educational improvements and innovations available to the education community.
 - iii. The project budget must include funds to hire an external evaluator, or the evaluation plan must provide compelling evidence that a qualified evaluator is already on staff and available to support assessment and evaluation activities throughout the duration of the project. As a guide, applicants may allocate up to 10 percent of grant funds for this purpose. Applicants choosing to use an internal evaluator must ensure that no conflicts of interest exist.
- 4) **Dissemination Plans.** The application must document how project accomplishments (products, results, impacts, etc.) will be published or otherwise disseminated to the broadest extent throughout the academic community. This may include educational journals or other professional discipline publications, and presentations at regional or national conferences and workshops, including the HEC Project Directors' Meeting. Discuss the institution/organization's commitment to disseminate project results and products and the potential for institutionalization. Identify target audiences and explain methods of communication.
- 5) **Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts.** Explain how the project will maximize partnership and collaborative efforts to strengthen food and agricultural sciences education (e.g., involvement of faculty in related disciplines at the same institution, CG1 or CG2 projects with other educational institution/organizations, or cooperative activities with business or industry). Provide evidence via letters from parties involved in the partnership or collaborative arrangement.
- 6) **Potential Pitfalls, Limitations, and Alternatives (if applicable).** Identify and explain any potential challenges that might impede progress during the project's duration. Additionally, describe any potential strategies or alternatives that might be implemented to address such challenges. This section is optional for all applications and therefore, it will not count against the applicant during the evaluation process.
- e. **Institutional Capability and Capacity Building**
 - 1) **Institutional/Organizational Commitment and Capability.** Demonstrate that the program administration is committed to this project and has the capability to ensure its completion.
 - 2) **Institutional/Organizational Resources.** Document the necessary institutional/organizational resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials), and other appropriate resources that will be made available to the project. Demonstrate how these resources, when combined with the requested USDA support, will be adequate to carry out the project's activities.

- 3) **Academic Enhancement.** Document how this project will improve and strengthen teaching at the institution (including any partner institutions/organizations). Include how any project performance target(s) identified above ([b.2, Timetable](#)) will be incorporated into academic instruction at the institution. Discuss how the benefits to be derived from the project will transcend the applicant institution/organization or the grant period.
 - 4) **Continuation Plans.** Discuss the likelihood of, or specific plans for, continuation or expansion of the project beyond the period of USDA support. Describe how the institutions/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. Explain the plans for eventual self-support built into the project, and the plans to institutionalize the program if it is successful. Describe any indications of other continuing non-Federal support. Provide details of the expected outcomes and the target audience that would benefit from the continuation of this project.
- f. Key Personnel**
- Discuss the adequacy, specific attributes, and project responsibilities of each key person associated with the project. Also include the background and qualifications of those personnel who will be responsible for assessing project results and administering the project evaluation and reporting process.
- g. Budget and Cost-effectiveness**
- 1) **Budget.** In addition to the separate, required budget forms and budget justification, discuss how the budget specifically supports the proposed project activities. Explain how budget items such as professional or technical staff time and salary, travel, equipment, etc., are necessary and reasonable to achieve project objectives. Justify that all funds requested from USDA are allocated adequately between the applicant and any collaborating institution/organization(s) and will be appropriate to carry out the project's activities. If the application addresses more than one Educational Need Area (see [Part II, C](#)), you must include estimates of the proportion of the funds requested from USDA that will support each respective area.
 - 2) **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. For example, discuss how the project has the potential to generate a critical mass of expertise and activity focused on a need area.
- h. Logic Model**
- Applications must include a logic model detailing the proposed project's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, as well as potential external factors that may affect progress on the proposed project. This information should be formatted into a 1-page logic model chart. The logic model planning process is a tool that should be used in developing projects before writing the proposal. More information and resources related to the NIFA logic model are provided at [Logic Model Planning Process](#). The logic model should be the final page of the Project Narrative and will not count towards the page limit.
3. **Field 12: Add Other Attachments.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

- a. **Appendices to Project Narrative (PDF Attachment).** Title the attachment as “Appendices” in the document header and save file as “Appendices.” Appendices to the Project Narrative are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. The addition of appendices may not be used to circumvent the text and/or figures and tables page limitations.
- b. **Mentoring Plan (PDF Attachment).** If the proposal anticipates requesting funding for student stipend support, it must include a maximum 2-page Mentoring Plan (MP) for all recipients. All applicants must include a Mentoring Plan attachment. In cases when a mentoring plan is not deemed suitable, NIFA expects the PD will provide a written statement indicating that no student support is being requested, thereby rendering a mentoring plan unnecessary. Alternatively, the PD should provide a cogent rationale justifying the decision to not submit a mentoring plan. If various tiers of students or scholars are represented in the proposal, please provide separate mentoring plans for each educational or professional level targeted (e.g., high school students, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, etc.). Title the document header as “Mentoring Plan Undergraduate Students or Mentoring Plan Graduate Students or Mentoring Plan Postdoc” as applicable and save attachment as a PDF named “MentoringPlan.pdf” Each Mentoring Plan must address:
1. Roles and responsibilities: The responsibilities of the project director and co-project directors in managing the mentoring process
 2. Mentor Qualifications and Training: training and/or credentials of individuals serving as mentors. Mentors may include faculty, industry or government professionals, or trained peer mentors who provide guidance, cultural support, and community-building for mentees.
 3. Mentoring Activities: A description of planned mentoring activities, which may include peer mentoring, layered mentoring, or other structured approaches. These activities must be integrated into the overall project timeline. Incorporate these activities into the overall project timeline.
 4. Accessibility and Accommodations: Description of processes to ensure reasonable accommodations for program participants with disabilities or challenges with accessing program activities. Programs should include plans to accommodate students who find it necessary to interrupt their program of study because of health, personal, or other reasonable non-academic and non-disciplinary cause(s).
- c. **Data Management Plan (PDF Attachment).** A DMP is required for every submission to this program. Applicants should clearly articulate how the 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](#)). If you need help in preparing a data management plan or have questions about what constitutes a data management plan for this role (including questions about data privacy, etc.), please contact the NIFA program contacts listed in [Appendix I](#) of this NOFO
- d. **Collaborative Arrangements (PDF Attachment).** In the document heading, type “Collaborative Arrangements” and save the file as “CollabArrangement.” If it is necessary to enter into formal consulting or collaborative arrangements with others, such arrangements should be fully explained and justified. If the consultant(s) or collaborator(s) are known at the time of the application, a vita or resume should be

provided. In addition, evidence (e.g., letter of support signed by the AR of the consultant/collaborating organization) should be provided to show that the collaborators involved have agreed to render these services. The applicant also will be required to provide additional information on consultants and collaborators in the budget portion of the application

- e. **Expected Outcomes–PDF Attachment.**—Type "Expected Outcomes" in the document title and name the attached file "ExpectedOutcomes." Please submit projected outcomes in a format similar to that shown in [Table 8](#) and attach it as the final page of the application.

Table 8: Expected Outcomes

Total expected impact during entire grant period	Expected Number	Justification for Expected Numbers
Number of products to be developed through grant funds during the grant period (i.e., curricula, academic programs, recruitment/retention programs, materials, experiential learning opportunities)	-	-
Number of students who will indirectly benefit from the products produced from the grant during the grant period (i.e., using the curriculum/instrumentation, enrolled in the program, recruited, or retained but not paid by the grant with a stipend)	-	-

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). Provide a biographical sketch (BS) for each key personnel including PD/PI, Co-PD/PI, and Evaluator. Each BS is limited to 2 pages. See Part V of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for profile requirements, details about the BS, and suggested support templates. The use of [NIFA Application Support Templates](#) is highly encouraged.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and 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. Include the travel costs for the PD and any other key staff member(s) to attend at least one national project directors' meeting, if offered, in Kansas City, Missouri or other announced location during the lifetime of the grant.
2. Stipends may be provided only to support eligible students participating in experiential or academic learning activities conducted outside of the traditional classroom, provided such activities are clearly related to a student's degree program and are not extracurricular. Stipend requests may include costs for materials or supplies that facilitate students' exposure to research or field techniques and methodologies, as well as for reasonable travel expenses and per diem related to student educational experiences (e.g., field trips, data collection, and scientific meetings) that directly support the funded project. To receive a stipend, students must be currently matriculated at the institution(s) where the project is being implemented. Stipends may not be used for tuition or

scholarships. Applications that place primary emphasis on student stipends must include a plan describing how stipend support will be sustained after the expiration of grant funds. While budgets should account for necessary travel, virtual or hybrid meeting formats may also be considered.

3. **Budget Justification (PDF Attachment).** Consistent with the budget, the Budget Justification should be presented in the same sequence. It is essential to furnish relevant details pertaining to each component of the budget to ensure comprehensive budgetary documentation. Additionally, salaries (including the base annual salary for each key person), equipment, travel expenses, participant/trainee assistance, and other direct cost categories must be accounted for in the budget, as applicable. In addition to incorporating any requested supplementary information for each of the designated budget categories, the budget justification should encompass any other relevant documentation you deem essential for substantiating your budgetary appeal.
4. **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.
5. **R&R Subaward Budget (PDF Attachment).** This is only required if submitting a CG1 or CG2 project Proposal. Clearly identify the total grant funding anticipated for the applicant and each partner to demonstrate the required sharing percentage. Further itemize all expenditures for the applicant and all partners in the Budget Justification. Funds do not have to be divided equally among project years. Each subaward must have a budget and cumulative totals for each year of their participation in the grant project.

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 “Higher Education Challenge Grants Program (HEC)” and the program code “ER.” Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8: Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

C. Funding Restrictions

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:

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

If the result of number one above 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 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](#). See Part VI, H of the [NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide](#) for allowable and unallowable costs for all awards.

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.

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 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 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 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, weighted equally, to evaluate applications to this program:

1. **Potential for Advancing Quality of Education/Significance of the Problem.** This criterion is used to assess how the project will deliver a measurable impact upon, and advance the quality of food and agricultural sciences by strengthening institutional capacities to meet clearly delineated needs. Elements considered include institutional long-range goals, identification of a problem or opportunity to be addressed, justification for the project, innovation, multidisciplinary and/or problem-based focus, and the strategy for adoption by other institutions. The proposed project must demonstrate its relevance to the goals of HEC. Priority will be given to applications for teaching enhancement projects that:
 - a. Demonstrate enhanced coordination among all types of institutions eligible for funding under this section; and
 - b. Focus on innovative, multidisciplinary education programs, material, and curricula.
2. **Proposed Approach and Cooperative Linkages.** This criterion relates to the soundness of the proposed approach including objectives, methodology, plan of operation, timetable, expected products and results, evaluation, and dissemination plans. The approach must be based on sound research concepts and educational principles and may be documented through background literature or actual institutional data. Emphasis is placed on the quality of educational or research support provided to the applicant institution/ organization through its partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and on the potential cooperative linkages likely to evolve as a result of this project. Any perceived pitfalls and alternative strategies or approaches are addressed.
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 research capacity. Elements include the institution's commitment to the project, the adequacy of institutional resources (administrative, facilities, equipment, and/or materials) available to carry out the project, potential for academic or research enhancement, and plans for project continuation or expansion beyond the period of USDA support. Institutional data must be included to show the institution's ability to support the proposed project.
4. **Key Personnel.** This criterion relates to the adequacy of the number, qualifications, and expertise 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 the dissemination of these findings.
5. **Budget and Cost-Effectiveness.** This criterion relates to the extent to which the total adequately 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, leverages additional funds, and focuses expertise and activity on high priority educational or research need areas.

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 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).

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](#).

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 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. 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

Program Contacts

To contact HEC Program Staff, please use the email: hec@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

Refer to the [USDA NIFA Glossary](#) for additional terms.

Glossary of Terms

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Representative – AR

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

Automated Standard Application for Payments – ASAP

Collaborative Grant Type 1 – CG1

Collaborative Grant Type 2 – CG2

Data Management Plan – DMP

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine – DVM

Fiscal Year – FY

Higher Education Challenge Grant Program – HEC

Indirect Cost – IDC

Mentoring Plan – MP

National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 – NARETPA

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO

Project Director – PD

Project Narrative – PN

Project Summary – PS

Research, Education, and Economics – REE

Total Federal Funds Awarded – TFFA

United States – U.S.

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

Food and Agricultural Sciences:

Food and agricultural sciences means basic, applied, and developmental research, Extension/outreach, and teaching activities in food and fiber, agricultural, renewable energy and natural resources, forestry, and physical and social sciences, including activities relating to the following: (1) animal health, production, and well-being; (2) plant health and production; (3) animal and plant germplasm collection and reservation; (4) aquaculture; (5) food safety; (6) soil, water, and related resource conservation and improvement; (7) forestry, horticulture, and range management; (8) nutritional sciences and promotion; (9) farm enhancement, including financial management, input efficiency, and profitability; (10) home economics; (11) rural human ecology; (12) youth development and agricultural education, including 4-H clubs; (13) expansion of domestic and international markets for agricultural commodities and products, including agricultural trade barrier identification and analysis; (14) information management and technology transfer related to agriculture; (15) biotechnology related to agriculture; and (16) the processing, distributing, marketing, and utilization of food and agricultural products ([7 CFR 3430.2](#)).

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.

Project Participant:

An individual who is directly engaged in project activities and receives programmatic benefits, training, services, or support funded by the award. Participants may include students, trainees, producers, community members, or other beneficiaries who take part in project-supported events, workshops, educational activities, or services. Project Participants are not project staff or key personnel and do not have responsibility for managing or executing the award.

Resubmitted Application:

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

Standard Grant:

A proposal for a project: (1) where the applicant institution will be the sole entity involved in the execution of the project; or (2) which will involve the applicant institution and one or more other entities, but where the involvement of the other entity(ies) does not meet the requirements for a Collaborative Grant Type 1 or Collaborative Grant Type 2 project proposal as defined in this section.

Teaching and Education:

Per [7 U.S.C. 3103 \(20\)](#): “formal classroom instruction, laboratory instruction, and practicum experience in the food and agricultural sciences and matters relating thereto

(such as faculty development, student recruitment and services, curriculum development, instructional materials and equipment, and innovative teaching methodologies) conducted by colleges and universities offering baccalaureate or higher degrees.”