

# **Notice of Funding Opportunity Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program**

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

APPLICATION DEADLINE: July 31, 2026

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$2,853,000

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD RANGE: \$300,000-\$750,000

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-OP-011940

ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.334

## ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture

**Assistance Listing Number (ALN):** The Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program (AgVets) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.334.

**Table 1:** Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
<b>Application:</b>	5:00 P.M. Eastern Time, July 31, 2026 [Ref to <a href="#">Part I, C</a> of this NOFO]
<b>Applicants Comments:</b>	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

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](mailto:Policy@usda.gov). Please use the following subject line: Response to the AgVets NOFO.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

NIFA will use this solicitation to request applications to provide grants to non-profit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans. Institutions of higher education are not eligible to apply as lead applicants. The funding amount available is approximately \$2,853,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for AgVets projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects, applicants, application forms, and associated instructions.

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## PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority

The AgVets program was originally authorized under Section 760 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017 (Pub. L. 115-31) and reauthorized under the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026 (Pub. L. 119-37), as incorporated through the Senate Explanatory Statement. This authority provides funds to NIFA for a pilot program to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans.

### B. Purpose and Priorities

The USDA and NIFA continue to take a leadership role in assisting veterans who are interested in pursuing careers in agriculture, while also supporting military families in rural America. As military members complete their tours of duty or transition to Veteran status, many return to rural America ready to farm, ranch, and start new businesses. Job and career opportunities can be difficult to locate. Connecting interested military veterans with meaningful employment is key.

The AgVets program, under assistance listing 10.334, focuses on military veterans interested in pursuing careers across the food and agricultural sector and equipping them with the necessary skills, training, and experience that leads to meaningful employment opportunities, and in turn, strengthens farm finances and rural economies.

**Table 2:** Program Key Information

Title	Description
<b>Program Code:</b>	AGVETS
<b>Program Code Name:</b>	Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans
<b>ALN:</b>	10.334
<b>Project Type:</b>	Extension Projects
<b>Grant Type:</b>	Standard Grants
<b>Application Deadline</b>	July 31, 2026
<b>Grant Duration:</b>	24-36 Months
<b>Anticipated # of Awards:</b>	3-4
<b>Minimum Award Amount:</b>	\$300,000
<b>Maximum Award Amount:</b>	\$750,000

The goal of the AgVets Program is to increase veteran participation in agricultural careers. To help achieve the program goal, standard AgVets grants support new and established local and regional projects that will develop training programs with model farms and ranches (see [Appendix III](#) for definition). The training programs:

1. Offer training and classroom education that leads to a comprehensive understanding of successful farm/ranch/business operation/management practices aligned to the veteran cohort's interests.
2. Develop or identify the curriculum to be used for the program, including new technologies and innovations that producers can adopt to help manage their enterprise.
3. Describe the types of education, workshops, tours, and instructor-supervised field experiences offered.

4. Are led and managed by a project team that has experience in one or more areas that include:
  - a. Veteran engagement in agricultural management and leadership, particularly concerning small and medium-size farms and agribusiness, such as the provision of education and training to veterans and the development of skills leading to job placement and career opportunities in farming and ranching, including access to land, equipment, and capital.
  - b. On-the-job training and education, apprenticeship, and business development activities for veterans pursuing vocational and entrepreneurial interests that support and grow the domestic food supply chain; and/or
  - c. Strategies to enhance and increase workforce readiness and employment prospects for service-disabled veterans through volunteer engagement and leadership development efforts that promote earning farm and off-farm income.
5. Are led and managed by a project team that has demonstrated competency to implement a project of comparable size and complexity, demonstrates effective fiscal management, collects data, and prepares reports and other necessary documentation.
6. Provide support for veteran participation. Successful applications will include a sound approach to outreach, selection, and retention of participants.
7. Include outreach to veterans who may have previously participated in projects funded by the [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program \(BFRDP\)](#) and/or the [Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program](#).
8. Align the identified service area with the goals and objectives of [AgrAbility](#), as appropriate.
9. Create alliances and partnerships with academic institutions, [Extension Risk Management Education Centers](#), [Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network](#), Regional Rural Development Centers, or other regional entities to meet the requirements of program and project evaluation and dissemination of findings, recommendations, and impacts, including scalability.
10. Evaluate the identified curriculum and participate in cross-program evaluation to assess the collective impact toward shared performance measures and outcome goals through activities that include project team meetings, conference calls, and engagement with federal agency partners as appropriate.
11. Ensure results are disseminated through an effective communication plan.
12. Align education and training goals with USDA programs and resources to increase awareness and engagement with state and local offices of the Cooperative Extension Service, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, and Rural Development, including potential job and career opportunities within the USDA.
13. Collaborate with the Department of Veteran Affairs at the regional, state, or local level to promote referrals, access to healthcare and other benefits to improve the Veteran experience and quality of service to Veterans.
14. Collaborate with the Small Business Administration and its resourced partners at the regional and local level.
15. Collaborate with the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service; and
16. Generate recommendations at the state and/or federal level that strengthen collaboration on transitioning Service members' education, training, and apprenticeship programs, including use of GI Bill benefits, to promote the food and agricultural sector as a viable career option.

## **PART II. AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for AgVets in FY2026 is approximately \$2,853,000. USDA is not committed to fund any particular 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 NOFO.

### **B. Application Restrictions**

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this NOFO. Application for FY2026 is 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 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).

### **C. Project and Grant Types**

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

**Project Types.** Applicants must propose an Extension Project.

Extension Projects must conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to people, enabling them to make practical decisions. Program delivery may range from community-based to national audiences and use communication methods from face-to-face to electronic or combinations thereof. Extension projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, instructional materials and innovative instructional methods appropriate to informal educational programs.

**Extension Projects address one or more of the following key strategic actions:**

1. Support non-formal education to increase food and agricultural literacy in adults;
2. Promote science-based agricultural literacy by increasing understanding and use of food and agricultural science data, information, and programs;
3. Build science-based capability in people to engage audiences and allow informed decision making;
4. Develop new applications of instructional tools and curriculum structures that increase technical competency and ensure global competitiveness;
5. Offer non-formal learning programs that increase accessibility to new audiences at the rate at which new ideas and technologies are tested and/or developed at the community-scale; and
6. Develop programs that increase public knowledge and citizen engagement leading to actions that protect or enhance the nation's food supply, agricultural productivity, farm profitability, and the production of food.

**Grant Types.** Applicants must select the Standard Grant Type.

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

AgVets applicants must be non-profit organizations. A letter stating the non-profit status should be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments ([Part IV.B.](#)). Institutions of higher education (i.e., universities, community colleges) are not eligible to apply as lead applicants.

Only the applicant must meet the eligibility requirement. Project partners and collaborators need not meet this eligibility requirement. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the successful completion of the project, subject to NIFA approval.

Applications submitted by individuals are not eligible for consideration under any category applicable to AgVets.

Applicants with current and/or active AgVets awards are ineligible to apply.

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** – Duplicate or multiple submissions are not allowed. NIFA will disqualify both applications if an applicant submits duplicate or multiple submissions.

### **B. Cost Sharing or Matching**

**No Match Required** - The AgVets 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
<b>Step One: Register</b>	<i>New Users</i> to <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> must register early with <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov</a> prior to submitting an application.
<b>Step Two: Download Adobe</b>	Download and Install <a href="#">Adobe Reader</a> (see <a href="#">Adobe Software Compatibility</a> for basic system requirements).
<b>Step Three: Find Application</b>	Using this funding opportunity number <b>USDA-NIFA-OP-011940</b> search for application here: <a href="#">Opportunity Package</a> .
<b>Step Four: Assess Readiness</b>	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
<a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov Online Support</a> Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035  Email support: <a href="mailto:support@grants.gov">support@grants.gov</a> Self-service customer-based support: <a href="https://www.grants.gov">Grants.gov iPortal</a>  Customer service business Hours 24/7, except <a href="#">Federal holidays</a> .	Email: <a href="mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov">grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov</a>  Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except <a href="#">Federal holidays</a> .

### 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 <a href="#">NIFA Grants Application Guide</a> )
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 <a href="#">Grants.gov helpdesk</a> 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 AgVets Program. See Part V of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#) for instructions and suggested templates.
2. **Field 8. Project Narrative (PN).** The PN must be submitted as a PDF document. The PN must not exceed 16, 1.5 spaced pages of written text and up to three, 1.5 spaced, additional pages for figures and tables (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly relevant to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to avoid the page limit. Your application will be reviewed and scored according to the quality of your responses to the requirements in Sections A-F detailed below. In developing the Project Narrative section of your application, use the sections headings listed below. Indicate the section letter and number in your response, e.g., type “A.1,” “A.2,” etc., before your response to each question. Do not combine two or more questions or refer to another section of the project narrative in your response, such as indicating that the response for B.2 is in C.7.

The PN must include all the following:

- a. **Introduction:** The introduction should include a clear statement of the long-term goal(s) of the proposed project. Justify the need for the program by identifying the target audience and explaining their needs; and by summarizing how the program has and will offer a comprehensive, immersive learning experience that becomes a model for veterans pursuing opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness, and facilitates connections to USDA field offices, and/or other federal entities at the regional, state or local level. Show evidence that the project has a clear plan to recruit and seek qualified referrals to the project to meet the projected number of veterans served. As a pilot, discuss how the project builds upon or relates to other models or systems that support service members transitioning to veteran status. Describe how the program will benefit rural communities and economies. All works cited should be referenced. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the sixteen pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria [see [Part V, Section B](#) (Relevancy)])
- b. **Objectives and Outcomes:** Concisely present the goals, associated objectives, and expected outputs and outcomes of the project in relation to the audience and needs identified in the introduction. Provide the number of veterans that will be served. Estimate how many of them will attain specific, anticipated knowledge gains or actions (e.g., job placement and career advancement in farming and ranching, vocational and entrepreneurial achievements across the food supply chain; or volunteer and workforce readiness opportunities) and demonstrate how program participants have been informed about and connected with resources that can assist their chosen endeavors. Discuss whether and how this program can be adapted to other regions, communities and/or agricultural systems. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the sixteen pages for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit.)
- c. **Approach:** The activities proposed to achieve each objective must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the sixteen pages for this section. Specifically, this section must include the following:
  - i. Description of the activities proposed for each objective.
  - ii. Timeline of the proposed project, including activities and major outputs and associated outcomes for each year of the project.
  - iii. How and where the activities will be provided and the appropriateness of the approach for the veteran audience served.
  - iv. The referral and recruitment process for the veteran audience, including service disabled, and how you will identify possible challenges to your proposed strategy and your plan to address those challenges.
  - v. Description of the pilot farm/ranch/agribusiness, including acreage, facilities and equipment, spectrum of agricultural activities offered, e.g., row crops, livestock, orchards, gardens, apiaries, commercial kitchens, ag engineering.
  - vi. Description of any non-formal curriculum, programs, resources, and other materials developed/used.
  - vii. Description of the outreach and selection process for students who will be provided support to participate in training.
  - viii. Demonstration of engagement with federal agency partners at the regional, state, and/or local level.

- ix. How will the project, and its partnerships and collaborations be sustained beyond the life of the grant (e.g., plans for eventual self-support or institutionalization or other sources of support)? If there are no plans to sustain the effort, explain why not, and how the impact of the project will be lasting.
  - x. What makes this pilot unique or different from existing similar efforts if any.
  - xi. Barriers that may be encountered and limitations to proposed procedures, and how you will address them. (Related evaluation criteria: Technical merit: Achievability.)
- d. **Personnel and Resources:** Describe in detail the Key Personnel’s experience working with military veterans and the ability to provide effective education, training, outreach, and mentoring programs through a comprehensive, immersive farm/ranch field experience. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project, and how they promoted workforce development in the agricultural sector. This information may include: the years and locations of prior activities; number of training assistance or education activities previously carried out; number of participants and graduates from the program; success rate in completing the program; percentage of graduates who are still engaged in agricultural production and related fields; and/or percentages of those who improved their operations. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately two of the sixteen pages (of the Project Narrative) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Expertise and track record; Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel.)
- e. **Plan for Outcome Based Reporting:** Third-party evaluators are required. Be sure the budget reflects work to be completed by professional evaluators. Participatory evaluation, and formative as well as summative evaluation, are encouraged. All projects must describe methods and resources for documenting and evaluating their outcomes and impacts. Clearly identify a minimum of two expected outcomes within the life of the project and explain the plan to document and evaluate these outcomes. At a minimum, the plan should include:
- i. A completed logic model or alternative schematic that illustrates the causal linkages between planned activities and desired outcomes. A logic model template and explanation of its components can be located at Integrated Programs’ Logic Model Planning Process.
  - ii. A description of anticipated outcomes, their significance, and potential beneficiaries.
  - iii. A list and description of project performance measures (also referred to as indicators of success) by which your progress will be measured and success determined.
  - iv. Identify who will be responsible for overseeing and measuring performance for the project and link to the overall project plan and timeline for completion.
  - v. Indicate the amount of funding that will be set aside for monitoring and performance measurement.
  - vi. Applicants are encouraged to use approximately four of the sixteen pages (of the PN) for this section. (Related evaluation criteria: Adequacy of plans for the participatory evaluation process.)
- f. **Management, Collaboration and Partnership Plan:** A clear management plan must be provided that describes the roles and functions of all partnerships, collaborators, and organizations, involved in the proposed project. Strong partnerships among complementary organizations with shared leadership are essential to successful and sustainable projects, see “Definitions” (See Appendix III, Definitions) for definitions of



**R&R Budget.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

**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.

**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 “*Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) Competitive Grants Program*” and the program code “*AGVET*”. Accurate entry is critical.
2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See **Part V** of the [NIFA Grants Application Guide](#).

### **C. Funding Restrictions**

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

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 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 direct 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](#).

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

#### **Scientific Peer Review Process:**

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 equally weighted criteria to evaluate applications to this program:

1. **Partnerships and Collaborations** will be reviewed to determine to what extent the application represents a substantial and effective collaborative network or partnership of public and/or private entities. Reviewers will evaluate whether or not the proposal includes the necessary partnerships to meet the training and workforce development needs of veterans, and whether the project makes appropriate use of the expertise and other strengths of each of the partners. In addition, these partner organizations must have been involved and played an important role in the project design and development. Projects must also employ an equitable and appropriate decision-making and oversight process that includes all partners.
2. **Relevancy** will be evaluated based on the explanation and relevant documentation that demonstrate that the project is directed toward increasing the numbers of veterans seeking and securing educational, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the food and agriculture sector. In addition, the relevancy will be evaluated by the description of the necessity of the project based on the needs identified for the audience, the inclusion of veterans in the conceptualization and development of project activities, and the degree to which the project builds upon past or current work or partnerships examining veteran workforce needs.
3. **Technical merit** will be evaluated on the basis of:
  - a. Clarity and explanation of objectives, activities, and outcomes
  - b. Conceptual adequacy of the proposed activities to meet the needs of the targeted audience including suitability and feasibility of the approach
  - c. Innovation and originality of objectives and activities
  - d. Expected performance targets, outcomes and impacts as indicated in the Plan for Outcome Based Reporting
  - e. Adaptability to other locations, communities, and/or agricultural products and technologies
  - f. Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the grant, or a compelling explanation of how the project impact will be lasting if the collaboration itself is not sustained; and
  - g. Reasonableness of the budget for planned activities (i.e., whether the budget matches logically with the program described in the narrative)
4. **Achievability** is based on the review of the probability of success of the project. The probability of success includes the appropriate level of originality, target audience and budget for each activity. The extent to which the applicant identifies potential pitfalls and how they will be addressed is also included. There should be sufficient time commitment of all project directors and co-directors for the stated project activities, including project management. The plans for management and collaborative arrangements of the proposed project should be adequate, e.g., sufficient time allocated for systematic attainment of objectives; clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key participants and collaborators; plan for decision-making; and plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, and collaborative efforts.
5. **Expertise and track record of the applicants** is based on the demonstrated expertise of the project team. This includes successful multi-year experience in education, outreach, mentoring and/or technical assistance addressing Veteran workforce concerns, especially related to food and agriculture. The successful multi-year experience can be demonstrated by the number of trainings, assistance, or education activities previously carried out;

number of participants or graduates of the program, success rate and their current occupation; the number of years a program or activity has been offered. The adequacy of the qualifications of the project director and team to conduct the proposed project activities and to evaluate project outcomes must be demonstrated. The applicant's demonstration of experience and competence in serving the needs of the identified target audience are also evaluated under this criterion.

6. **Adequacy of evaluation process, outcome-based reporting, and data management** is based on the expertise and time commitment of evaluation team members who have agreed to serve or who have been identified.
7. **Adequacy of available or obtainable support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation** is based on the expertise of consultants and collaborators, sufficiency of the educational facilities and equipment for the proposed on-site and distance education and outreach methods.

### **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 non-financial 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](#) (see [NIFA's Terms and Conditions](#)).

**Fiscal Agent:** If an applicant cannot accept Federal funds directly, a letter must be included in the application stating that in the event the application results in an award, the award funds must be administered through a fiscal agent organization on their behalf. This agent must be identified in the letter from the applicant, and the letter must be countersigned by an authorized representative of the fiscal agent organization. The letter should include the fiscal agent's point of contact, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. This letter is to be included as an attachment to Field 12, Other Attachments ([Part IV, Section B](#)). In the event an application is recommended for funding, NIFA will request that both the applicant or institution/organization and the fiscal agent organization submit complete management information (see [Part V, Section D](#)).

### **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](mailto: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**

For Programmatic questions please email.

[SM.IF.AGVETS@usda.gov](mailto:SM.IF.AGVETS@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](mailto:grantapplicationquestions@usda.gov)
3. Awards under this NOFO, please email [awards@usda.gov](mailto: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**

Assistance Listing Number – ALN

Authorized Departmental Officer – ADO

Authorized Representative – AR

Data Management Plan – DMP

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA

Notice of Funding Opportunity – NOFO

United States Department of Agriculture – USDA

## APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

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

### Definitions

#### Matching:

The process through which a grant recipient 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.

#### Veteran:

A person who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and/or who was discharged or released from the service under conditions other than dishonorable.

#### Model Farms or Ranches:

Sites that enroll veterans in comprehensive, immersive training programs that offer a blend of formal education and instructor-supervised field experience leading to practical knowledge gain and experience in production agriculture and/or business and entrepreneurial skills necessary to obtain employment or start/manage a business in the agricultural sector. Such farms or ranches may offer a full- or part-time residency component.

#### New Application:

An application not previously submitted to a program.

#### Non-Profit Organization:

Any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization that:

- Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest;
- Is not organized primarily for profit; and
- Uses net proceeds to maintain, improve, or expand the operations.

The term non-profit organization includes non-profit institutions of higher education and hospitals.

\*For this request for application, institutions of higher education are not eligible to apply as lead applicants.

#### Partnership:

A relationship involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities in the management of the project.

#### Producer:

An individual, family, or other entity in the U.S. engaged in the business of agriculture, crop, livestock, forestry, and range production, management, and marketing.

**Resubmitted Application:**

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