

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

2016 Request for Applications (RFA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Complete, error-free invited full applications must be received by 5:00 pm Eastern Time on March 18, 2016

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SPECIALTY CROP RESEARCH INITIATIVE

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.309**.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 18, 2016**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Specialty Crop Research Initiative RFA.

Visit the [NIFA website](#) to access a factsheet on the Center of Excellence (COE) designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities in fiscal year 2016. You can also review a recording of COE outreach webinars held in February and March of 2015 from the site. The COE webpages will be updated throughout FY 2016 with additional information, such as a summary of comments received from stakeholders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA requests applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2016 to solve critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities that use systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. The intent of the SCRI program is to solve the needs of the various specialty crop industries through the promotion of collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology. The anticipated amount available to support grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$48 million.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an SCRI grant.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is reauthorized by Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 which amends Section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7632). Section 412 of the AREERA of 1998 established a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions. Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 added a requirement that, in addition to the scientific peer review NIFA regularly conducts, a panel of specialty crop industry representatives review and rank SCRI applications for merit, relevance, and impact. In addition, Section 7306 requires increased consultation between NIFA and the Specialty Crops Committee of the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board. The consultation after the FY 2015 competition occurred on October 14, 2015 and comments provided by the Committee were considered prior to finalizing this RFA.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in Part VIII, E) by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems. **Except for eXtension Project applications and Research and Extension Planning Project applications, the SCRI program only accepts applications that integrate research *and* extension activities.**

SCRI supports NIFA Strategic Plan (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>) sub-goals 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7. Further, SCRI supports REE Action Plan (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>) sub-goals 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 3A, 3B and Goals 4, 5 and 7.

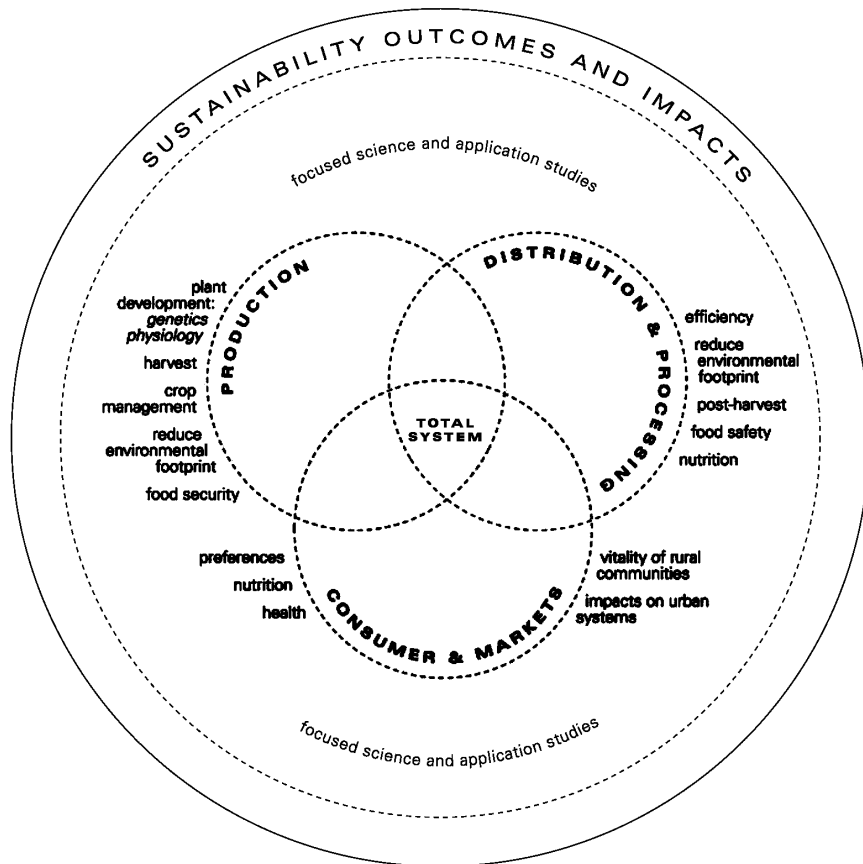
Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a systems approach:

A systems approach is any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation. The only way to fully understand why a problem or element occurs and persists is to understand the part in relation to the whole.

The philosophy of the SCRI program is that truly effective, long-term solutions to specialty crop industry challenges can best be achieved by understanding and treating those problems as

complex systems of many interacting components. This perspective requires projects that are larger in scope and complexity, and that demand more resources than have traditionally been allocated to individual research and extension projects.

In doing so, applications should focus on entire primary systems, or on areas where two or more primary systems overlap. For the purpose of this announcement, a primary system is one of the three main sectors of the specialty crop industry depicted in the graphic below: the production system; the processing and distribution system; and the consumer and marketing system. Meeting the challenges faced by these industries can best be handled by considering the full breadth of system components (see example components listed for each primary system), rather than treating each component in isolation and ignoring important interactions and conflicts among components that may reduce the viability of component-specific solutions in the long term.



Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. USDA has developed a more detailed description of specialty crops that is now in use by all USDA agencies. Please see the More Information link, www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/scr/scr.html, for guidance on crops designated as “specialty crop” by USDA. Collectively, these crops face many challenges. The SCRI program seeks to address these challenges by funding systems-based, trans-disciplinary approaches. **PLEASE NOTE: For purposes of the SCRI program, the term trans-disciplinary is defined as a multi-**

disciplinary approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner. It is anticipated that successful applications will:

1. Engage stakeholders in collaborative ways to identify those priorities of greatest need;
2. Bring together multi-state, multi-institutional teams of biological, physical, and social scientists to develop strategies and actions emphasizing **systems-based, trans-disciplinary** approaches for meeting the identified priorities;
3. Address priorities through research and extension;
4. Present plans for documenting the impacts of funded applications that include stakeholder involvement; and
5. Include explicit mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public.

SCRI Logic Model: NIFA developed a logic model for the SCRI program as part of the self-study document produced for the external review of the SCRI program in 2011. That logic model is found below. This logic model will guide the development of future SCRI RFAs and program funding priorities. It is also a tool that will be used to document the impact of future investments in the SCRI program. Applicants are now required to develop a logic model as part of each application (except Planning Grant applications) and to document how the project-specific logic model supports the programmatic logic model (see Application and Submission Information).

Program: Specialty Crop Research Initiative Logic Model

Situation: Specialty crops represent 50% of the farm gate value of crop plant agriculture in the U.S. To remain competitive in a global economy, all segments of U.S. specialty crop enterprises need scientific discovery, development and implementation.

| Inputs | Outputs | | Outcomes -- Impact | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|---|
| | Activities | Participation | Short | Medium | Long |
| Farm bill funding USDA coordination NIFA intra-agency coordination Program Directors Support Staff Panel Managers Review Panel members Stakeholder matching contributions | Consult with Specialty Crop Committee and Citrus Disease Subcommittee of NAREEEAB Publish Rules (Federal Register) Publish RFA Conduct PD workshops Conduct grantsmanship workshops Recruit panel managers, industry relevance reviewers and peer review panelists Conduct industry relevance and peer review panel meetings Award funds to meritorious applications Basic and applied research Outreach to producers, processors, and consumers Team building through planning-grant workshops | Specialty crop stakeholders Land-grant partners Federal agencies State agencies University scientists NGOs Consumers | Generate new knowledge for specialty crop systems Adapt existing knowledge to specialty crop systems Engage broadest possible scientific community in challenges faced by specialty crop industries Engage specialty crop industries in strategic planning Web based and other digital information that allows communication among the scientific community and between the scientific community and stakeholders | New professionals engaged in specialty crop systems New processes and products for specialty crop producers Producers and processors adopt newly developed technologies and innovations Demonstrate efficacy of a trans-disciplinary, system science approach to problem solving in agriculture Create a new generation of research and extension scientists capable of, and adept at, working in large, trans-disciplinary teams Networks that improve the flow of information among all components of specialty crop systems | Profitable systems for specialty crop production/processing Increased competitiveness of U.S. specialty crop producers and processors Abundant supply of safe, affordable, and high-quality specialty crops for consumers Energetically efficient systems for specialty crop production and processing Beneficial impacts on specialty crop agro-ecosystems Improved working conditions all along specialty crop value chain |

Assumptions

Sustainability is the foundation of SCRI
Trans-disciplinary teams will achieve impacts more thoroughly and rapidly than single or multi-disciplinary teams
A systems approach will achieve impacts more rapidly than a reductionist approach

External Factors

Congressional funding
Stakeholder input
Specialty/Crop Committee and Citrus Disease Subcommittee of NAREEEAB
Stakeholder matching contributions

Project Director (PD) Workshop: It is the intent of the SCRI program to require successful applicants, or a designee, to attend AT LEAST TWO PD WORKSHOPS during the term of their project. These workshops may be held in conjunction with another conference or may be held separate from any other meeting. **For the purpose of budget development, you are required to request funds necessary to attend at least two such workshops.** The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the budget narrative section of the application. Please note that this workshop requirement is waived for recipients of planning grants.

Support of Long-term, Systems-focused Research and Extension: The SCRI program is able to support long-term, systems-focused research and extension projects in limited cases where current, five-year project periods do not allow for the completion of project objectives. Breeding of woody plants and some ecological studies are examples of these types of projects. In order to be considered as a long-term project, you **MUST** request five years of funding and state in the **Project Summary** that you want your application to be considered as a long-term project. Only Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs) and Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs) may be considered as long-term projects. In the final year of the initial project period, you will be able to apply for additional funding (up to a 5-year increment of funds) as a **NEW** application, subject to congressional authorization and the availability of funds. The application for an additional five years of funding as a new award must document both progress during the initial five years and the ability to leverage gains in a second five years.

The SCRI program will give priority to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary, and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers and the public. Project applications must budget sufficient resources to carry out the proposed set of extension and research activities, must address at least one of the five legislatively mandated focus areas described below, and should describe the practical applications being sought. The intent of the SCRI program is to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology to solve the needs of various specialty crop industries. The SCRI program aims to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions. Therefore, applications should clearly articulate how an SCRI award will complement and/or link with existing programs or projects. The SCRI program will award funding to successful applicants under the five project types described in detail in Part II, C.

The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas. The legislatively mandated focus areas are:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:
 - a. product, taste, quality, and appearance;
 - b. environmental responses and tolerances;
 - c. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency;
 - d. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
 - e. enhanced phytonutrient content.
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators;
3. Efforts to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing);
4. New innovations and technology, including improved mechanization and technologies that delay or inhibit ripening; and
5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production efficiency, handling and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.

NIFA will address all focus areas by funding projects that emphasize **systems-based, trans-disciplinary** approaches. In addition, for the purposes of this program, NIFA interprets new innovations and technology to include, among other things, automation, robotics, sensor technology, and precision agriculture for specialty crops. NIFA also recognizes the importance of specialty crops in enhancing human nutrition and health.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative strongly encourages applicants to develop partnerships that include collaboration with: (1) small- or mid-sized, accredited colleges and universities, and/or (2) 1890 land-grant institutions, 1994 land-grant institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, and/or other institutions that serve high-risk, under-served, or hard-to-reach audiences, and/or (3) international partnerships, linkages, and exchanges that can positively impact critical specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems in the United States.

Please note: This program does not fund start-up businesses. Applications must address only scientific research and extension activities. A small business must not propose technical assistance, demonstration projects, classified research, or financial assistance to start or create a company or patent applications.

NIFA's programs are intended to promote advances in U.S. food, agriculture and forestry. Agriculture, for instance, is increasingly worldwide in scope and reach. If appropriate, applicants to SCRI may include international partnerships or engagement in proposals. In doing so, applicants are to keep in mind that any international activity included in a proposal (e.g., partnerships, exchanges, training, travel) must first and foremost support SCRI program goals. Applicants must clearly describe and demonstrate how international activities proposed in the application will contribute to and support the objectives and desired outcomes within the United States while also benefiting the international partner.

C. Program Area Description

Not Applicable

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available to support grants in FY 2016 is approximately \$51 million. The funds will be awarded through a grant. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see <http://fms.treas.gov/index1.html>.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2016, applications may be submitted to the SCRI program as one of the following three types of requests:

(1) **New application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the SCRI Program. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

(2) **Renewal application**. Renewal applications request additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award. Applications for renewed funding must contain the same information as required for new applications, and additionally must contain a Progress Report (see Part IV, D. 3(ii)), which demonstrates measurable progress. Renewal applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications. In FY 2016, the cumulative duration of any renewal application combined with the length of the initial project award cannot exceed five years. So, for example, if an initial project award was for four years, then a renewal application cannot exceed one year. Renewal applications can be submitted at any time during the original award period or after completion of the original award; however, to minimize potential lapses in project funding and to maximize reporting of accomplishments, renewal applications are typically submitted within the last year of an original award.

(3) **Resubmitted application**. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the SCRI Program but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV, D.). Resubmitted applications must be received by the relevant due dates, will be evaluated in competition with other pending applications in the area to which they are assigned, and will be reviewed according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications.

C. Project Types

Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs): SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components, and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP). Beginning with stakeholder-identified concerns, projects should seek solutions that lead to measurable benefit to producers and consumers. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. Partnerships with end-user groups (*e.g.*, industry, processors, manufacturers, growers, technology providers) are strongly encouraged, as is the use of students in key research and extension roles (*e.g.*, internships and other opportunities for students to engage with stakeholders and their needs or student exchange opportunities across collaborating institutions). For each SREP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will be formed to inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and extension objectives. Applications should detail the creation and functions of this panel. As part of industry communication, the project should publish a web site by the end of the first year that can inform a broad audience regarding ongoing progress and outcomes. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. Further, the project must bring together biological, physical, and social scientists, as appropriate to project goals and address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability. SREPs represent the “focused science and application studies” portion of the systems diagram on page four. SREPs will have a project period ranging up to five years.

Applications must include a timeline that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project. This description should also identify short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects.

Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs): CAPs will be awarded to consortia or groups of qualified applicants to address multiple components of a primary system, an entire primary system or problems that cut across primary systems, with the expectation that the project will make significant contributions to the sustainability of the system or system component. These projects should apply trans-disciplinary, multi-functional, and, where appropriate, multi-institutional approaches to provide viable solutions to the highest priority stakeholder needs. An aim of a CAP award is to encourage maximum flexibility in applied research and extension. Applications will be evaluated based on how well their goals and objectives respond to current stakeholder needs. It is recognized, however, that as a project's comprehensive approach unfolds, unexpected advances and promising leads, or unforeseen new national needs related to project goals and objectives, may be identified. CAPs will have a project period ranging from three to five years.

CAP applications are expected to demonstrate coherent and complementary integrated activities with the ultimate goal of developing a strategy or solution that could be implemented for

specialty crops. Applications are expected to take advantage of recent advances in biological, physical, and social and economic sciences and to translate basic discoveries and knowledge to practical applications. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. The application's methodology and analytical approach must be appropriate to project objectives and effectively combine research and extension activities. The continuity plan must describe how the partnership effort will continue beyond the period of NIFA funding and address future long-term plans for proposed activities. Applications are expected to demonstrate the potential to develop a national strategy or solution as an ultimate goal. This would include the intent to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information and development of resources that accelerate the application of scientific discovery and technology to solving the needs of various specialty crop industries. Such a national CAP should aim to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions. Therefore, applications should clearly articulate how the national-scope CAP they are proposing would complement and/or link with existing programs or projects.

A CAP must seek to bring together a multi-state, multi-institutional, and/or trans-disciplinary team to integrate scientific discoveries and technology with practical application; and provide complementary extension efforts to bring science-based information to relevant audiences that will allow them to make informed decisions. For each CAP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and/or extension objectives. Applications must detail the creation and functions of this panel. As part of industry communication, the project should publish a web site by the end of the first year that can inform a broad audience on progress and outcomes.

CAP teams should be comprised of members working in discovery, learning, and engagement to conduct research and extension utilizing systems science and trans-disciplinary approaches on an emerging or priority area important to specialty crops. This integrated team should contain expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science and engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as appropriate, as well as expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Partnerships with end-user groups (*e.g.*, industry, processors, manufacturers, growers, technology providers) are strongly encouraged, along with the use of undergraduate students in key research and extension roles (*e.g.*, internships and other opportunities for students to engage with stakeholders and their needs or student exchange opportunities across collaborating institutions). The application should outline the potential of the CAP team, its structure, coordination and plan of implementation.

As a result, there is an expectation that objectives may be redirected and/or new objectives may be developed with associated budget adjustments. To encourage flexibility, the program does not expect that all investigators associated with the proposed project will be supported throughout its duration.

Applications must include a budgeted project management plan and timeline to ensure efficient functioning of the CAP team. A timeline chart that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project is particularly helpful. This

plan should include an organizational chart, administrative timeline, a description of how the project will be governed, intellectual property management, and identification of short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects to include multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional, multi-state and trans-disciplinary collaborations. Given the size and scope of CAP projects, applicants are strongly encouraged to budget for a half-time or full-time (as appropriate) project management position to deal with day-to-day project operations and coordination. The management plan must include a strategy to become self-supporting by the end of the project period.

Applications must include a budgeted plan and timeline for an advisory group of principal stakeholders and scientists relevant to the proposed research and extension projects (*e.g.*, include letters of commitment and rationale for their role) to assess and evaluate the quality, potential outcomes, and impacts, and how they could function effectively to support the goals and objectives of the CAP).

Research and Extension Planning Projects. Research and Extension Planning Projects are intended to support two types of activities, either to: (1) provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning) or (2) provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed “plans” could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications. Priority will be given to applicants who can: (1) demonstrate limited resources for either submitting large grant applications or for supporting strategic planning activities on their own, (2) articulate benefits to be accrued from formal planning activities, and (3) provide evidence of a high likelihood that quality future applications would be submitted for SCRI projects (desired for grant planning) or would result in a publicly available strategic plan, which could be used to support development of one or more future SCRI grant applications (desired for strategic planning). Research and Extension Planning Project grants do not support preliminary research. However, support for stakeholder survey activities may be requested, where appropriate and necessary.

Grant planning applications are encouraged to bring together biological, physical, and socio-economic scientists and others, as appropriate, including end-users and technology providers, to identify research and/or extension needs, update information, and advance understanding of specialty crop issues and problems. This information should be used to build teams that can develop SCRI applications to address the identified challenges using a systems-based, trans-disciplinary approach. The application must develop a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems. Project goals must address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop sustainability. These activities can take the form of workshops or symposia and may constitute an initial step in preparing an SCRI application in subsequent years. Applicants should be careful to ensure that participants represent a broad range of expertise by detailing the types of participants who will be

invited. Note: The intent of these planning projects is to foster collaboration and networking opportunities to enhance the preparation of future high-quality grant applications. To convey to the review panel that grant planning can successfully lead to a quality grant application, the application should also incorporate the necessary activities and resources for grant development and writing.

Strategic planning applications are encouraged to bring together stakeholders representing various sizes of operations, scientific expertise, specialty crop associations, technology and service providers, and representation from entities along the product value chain, as appropriate, to develop a strategic plan that addresses short-, medium-, and long-term specialty crop interests. The key expected outcome from this planning effort will be a publicly available strategic planning document that could be used subsequently by eligible entities to develop SCRI applications that address the plan's stated goals and priorities. Applications should include the anticipated meeting schedule in detail, participants identified by organizational affiliation, proposed meetings and other activities, and how the plan will be produced and distributed. Strategic planning projects are sought particularly to address the needs of limited-acreage crops and under-served or under-represented populations of producers, processors, distributors, retailers, etc.

Research and Extension Planning Proposal awards of Federal funds will not exceed \$50,000, and are not renewable. It is expected that planning activities supported by this program will occur within 12 months of awards being issued. The 100 percent matching requirement also applies to these awards. Proposals should demonstrate measurable, cost effective benefits from any planning activities requested.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

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

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may only be submitted by Federal agencies, national laboratories, colleges and universities, research institutions and organizations, private organizations or corporations, State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension Services, individuals, or groups consisting of two or more of these entities.

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

In accordance with section 1492 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371), as added by section 7128 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), for grants awarded after October 1, 2014, the recipient of an award from the SCRI program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA unless one of the exemptions described herein is applicable. Note that NIFA included information at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/matching_require.html to further assist you in determining if you must meet the new matching requirement.

The matching funds requirement does not apply to grants awarded:

1. To a research agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); or
2. To an entity eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program (as defined in section 251(f)(1)(C) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, 7 U.S.C. 6971(f)(1)(C)), including a partner (see Part VIII, E. Definitions for definition of partnership) of such an entity.

Entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program and exempt from the matching funds requirement include:

- a. 1862 Land-grant Institutions, including State Agricultural Experiment Stations receiving funding under the Hatch Act of 1887
- b. 1890 Land-grant Institutions
- c. 1994 Land-grant Institutions
- d. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of Continuing Animal Health and Disease, Food Security, and Stewardship Research, Education, and Extension Program Funds — Capacity and Infrastructure Program (CIP)
- e. Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACU)

- f. Insular Area Schools Eligible to Receive Funds from the Distance Education/Resident Instruction Grant Programs
- g. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program Funds
- h. Non-Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (NLGCA) – (for exemption from the new matching requirement, these applications must include NLGCA certification, see instructions for requesting certifications at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>, and for attaching the certification in Part IV, B. of this RFA).
- i. Entities eligible to receive funds under the of funds under a program established under section 1417(b) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3152(b)), including: (1) 1890 Institution Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants Program; (2) Higher Education Challenge Grants Program; (3) Higher Education Multicultural Scholars Program; and (4) Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program.
- j. Individual public or private, nonprofit Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions of higher education (see 20 U.S.C. 1059d).

A proposal submitted in response to this RFA may indicate that the work will be completed by multiple entities as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. If a partnership among multiple entities is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;
- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or third party in-kind contribution (see section 2 of 7 CFR 3430 or section 96 of 2 CFR part 200) to the total project budget costs.

If a proposal indicates that the work on the project will be completed by multiple entities as partners, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement regardless of whether all entities involved are otherwise exempt. Any partner entity can serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

After proposals have been recommended for award, NIFA will determine if the submitted proposal and proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity not otherwise exempt from the matching requirement and the proposal does not reflect substantial involvement of at least one partner that is exempt under #2 above, then the matching requirement will

apply. Exemption from the matching requirement for an entity not otherwise exempt is limited to the project for which it is a partner.

Waiver of Match - NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a recipient for one year with respect to a competitive grant that involves research or extension activities that are consistent with the priorities established by the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) for the year involved. To determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB, please refer to the [2014 Research, Education and Economics Action Plan. Instructions for requesting a waiver are included in Part IV, C. of this RFA.](#)

C. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Pub. L. 113-79), beginning in Fiscal Year 2015, for applicable competitive research and extension programs, NIFA will be recognizing and providing priority in the receipt of funding to applications from “centers of excellence” that have been established for purposes of carrying out research, extension, and education activities relating to the food and agricultural sciences. In July of 2014, NIFA held listening sessions and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the centers of excellence (COE) provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input gathered are available on NIFA’s website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/centers-excellence-webinars>.

A COE is composed of 1 or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the center of excellence. Therefore, an eligible applicant who wishes to be considered as a center of excellence must be one of the following entities that provides financial or in-kind support to the Center being proposed, as described in the grant application.

- (A) State agricultural experiment stations;
- (B) colleges and universities;
- (C) university research foundations;
- (D) other research institutions and organizations;
- (E) Federal agencies;
- (F) national laboratories;
- (G) private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
- (H) individuals; or
- (I) any group consisting of 2 or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

Only CAP grants and SREP applicants may be considered for COE designation. See Part IV, C. of this RFA for additional requirements that eligible applicants must meet to be considered a center of excellence.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/grant-application-process.html>.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as long as 2 weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **“Register” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2. below to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide”.

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>. Under Step 1 click on “Download a Grant Application Package,” and enter the funding opportunity number

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-SCRI-005636

in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information

about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html>). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support
800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035
Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).
Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (see <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants>):
Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or that attachments are in PDF format; see Part III section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. ET, excluding federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. ***Be sure to include, in box 4b, the Grant number of your pre-application. This number will be in this format: “GRANTXXXXXXXX” and is NOT the same as the proposal number. Listing the correct number here is crucial to having your proposal reviewed.***

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of SCRI as well as a statement as to how industry stakeholders were involved in project development. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

NOTE: The Project Narrative section may not exceed a total of 20 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables. The Introduction may not exceed 5 pages. **Research and Extension Planning Project narratives may not exceed 12 single- or double-spaced pages, including figures and tables.** These SCRI page limitations apply regardless of whether figures or tables are included. All pages, including those with figures and tables, should be numbered sequentially. Applications exceeding the applicable page limitation will be at risk of being excluded from review. These maximums have been established to ensure fair and equitable competition.

The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(i) In addition to the other components of the Project Narrative, all applications must include a **one-page response** to the results of the industry relevancy review. The response to the industry relevancy review **is not** counted against the page limit.

(ii) In addition to the other components of the Project Narrative, resubmitted applications must provide a detailed response to the previous review. The response should be as concise as possible. There is a **five-page limit** to responses. If available, please include the Grants.gov number or NIFA proposal number of the previous submission. The response to the previous review **is not** counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative.

(iii) In addition to the other components of the Project Narrative, renewal applications must provide a progress report detailing, for each objective of the original project award: (1) project activities, both completed and continuing; (2) results and outputs from those activities; and (3) significant outcomes and impacts. The report should be as concise as possible, and is **limited to five pages**. If available, please include the NIFA proposal number or award number from the original project. The progress report **is not** counted against the page limit of the Project Narrative.

(iv) Immediately following the response to the industry relevancy review, and the response to the previous review of resubmitted applications, if applicable, or the progress report for renewal applications, all applications must include the following information in a combined executive summary and table of contents (table format preferred). The combined executive summary and table of contents **should not be more than five pages**, but **does not** count toward the narrative's page limitation. Applications without an executive summary will **NOT** be considered for funding.

1. Project title
2. Project type (see Part II, C)
3. List the legislatively mandated focus area(s) being addressed (see Part I, B), and provide an estimate of the percentage of effort/funds dedicated to each (sum of percentages should equal 100 percent).
4. Program Staff – include name, title, affiliation, address, and e-mail for PD(s), Co-PD(s) and Key Personnel (please see the definitions section for the role and responsibilities of PD, Co-PD, etc.).
5. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing the critical stakeholder need addressed by the project and the project's long-term goals (provide cross-references to full descriptions in the narrative).
6. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) of the outreach plan proposed by the project (provide a cross-reference to the full description in the narrative).
7. A brief summary (2-3 sentences) describing potential economic, social, and environmental benefits (Who benefits and how?).
8. Logic Model Requirement: Except for planning grant applications, projects must include the elements of a logic model detailing the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the proposed project. This information must be formatted into a logic model chart. More information and resources related to the logic model planning process are provided at www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/integrated/integrated_logic_model.html.

(iv) Introduction (may not exceed 5 pages). List the following:

1. Provide a clear statement of the long-term goal(s), the critical need(s) of specialty crop industries being addressed, and supporting outreach objectives or research questions.
2. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities that substantiate the need for the proposed project.
3. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed project including the work of key project personnel. Applications should also demonstrate how duplication of effort with similar activities by others will be avoided.

4. Preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed work should be included in this section. All works cited should be referenced and attached at Field 9 on the Form, Bibliography & Reference Cited. Refer to Part V, 4.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

(v) **Rationale and Significance.** Concisely present the rationale behind the proposed research and/or extension activities. The specific relationship of the project's objectives to one or more of the SCRI focus areas should be clearly shown. These purposes and focus areas are described under Part I, B, Purpose and Priorities. Any novel ideas or contributions that the proposed project offers should also be discussed in this section.

(vi) **Approach – For CAPs and SREPs, (for Research and extension Planning Projects see (vii) below.)** The activities proposed or problems being addressed must be clearly stated and the approaches being applied clearly described. Specifically, this section must include:

1. A description of the activities proposed, key personnel or institution roles in those activities, and the sequence in which the activities are to be performed (a Gant chart or other task X time representation of project activities is desirable);
2. Methods to be used in carrying out the proposed project, including the feasibility of the methods. Clearly describe the systems thinking used in the project methodology and the contribution of trans-disciplinary approaches;
3. Expected outcomes, including how the project contributes to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crops;
4. Means by which results will be analyzed, assessed, or interpreted;
5. How results or products will be used;
6. Outreach plan: including, how and where appropriate, science-based tools will be disseminated, participants involved in delivery, and how impacts will be measured;
7. Pitfalls that may be encountered;
8. Limitations to proposed procedures; and
9. A full explanation of any materials, procedures, situations, or activities related to the project that may be hazardous to personnel, along with an outline or precautions to be exercised to avoid or mitigate the effects of such hazards.
10. For **SREPs**, provide a timeline that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project. Also identify short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects. This description cannot exceed 3 pages in length and **does not** count against the page limit.
11. For **CAPs**, provide the details of a project management plan and timeline. A timeline chart that clearly identifies which key personnel are involved in which objectives during each time segment of the project is particularly helpful. This plan should include an organizational chart, administrative timeline, a description of how the project will be governed, intellectual property management, and identification of short-, medium- and long-term metrics that will be used in project evaluation, the expectations for each team member, a mechanism whereby progress metrics can be evaluated, and how the project will complement and/or link to existing programs or projects to include multi-disciplinary,

multi-institutional, multi-state and trans-disciplinary collaborations. The management plan must include a strategy to become self-supporting by the end of the project period. This description cannot exceed 5 pages and **does not** count against the page limit.

12. For all project types except Planning Projects, include a plan and timeline for the recruitment and functioning of an advisory group of principal stakeholders and scientists, as appropriate, relevant to the proposed research and extension projects to assess and evaluate the quality, potential outcomes, and impacts, and how they could function effectively to support the goals and objectives of the project. This description cannot exceed 3 pages and **does not** count against the page limit.

(vii) Approach – **For Research and Extension Planning Projects:**

1. A justification for the meeting (see Part II, C);
2. Recent meetings on the same subject with dates and locations;
3. Names and organizational affiliations of the chair and other members of the organizing committee;
4. A proposed program (or agenda) for the activity, including a listing of scheduled participants and their institutional affiliations (see Part II, C);
5. Expected outcomes, including how the planning project expects to contribute to the development of a successful application for a SCRI CAP, or SREP; and
6. The method of announcement or invitation that will be used.

PLEASE NOTE: The complete Stakeholder Relevance Statement, along with all letters of support and collaboration, the industry reviewer scores and comments, and the rank of each pre-application invited to submit a full application will be appended to the full application once it is accepted from grants.gov. Therefore, it is not necessary for applicants to include letters of support as part of the full application. **Letters of collaboration from individuals not identified in the SRS should be included in the full application.**

Centers of Excellence

Only CAP projects and Standard Research and Extension projects will be considered for COE designation.

In addition to meeting the other requirements detailed in Part IV, C., of this Request for Application (RFA), eligible applicants who wish to be considered as centers of excellence must provide a brief justification statement, on the last page of the Project Narratives and within the page limits provided, describing how they meet the standards of a center of excellence, based on the following criteria:

(A) the ability of the center of excellence to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts regarding research, teaching, and extension in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application;

(B) in addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the center of excellence to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry

groups, institutions of higher education, and the Federal Government in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application. Resources leveraged should be commensurate with the size of the award;

(C) the planned scope and capability of the center of excellence to implement teaching initiatives to increase awareness and effectively disseminate solutions to target audiences through extension activities in the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application; and

(D) the ability or capacity of the center of excellence to increase the economic returns to rural communities by identifying, attracting, and directing funds to high-priority agricultural issues in support of and as a result of the implementation of the proposed research and/or extension activity outlined in this application.

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

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the Guide includes information about the people who require a Senior/Key Person Profile, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support, including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Matching: Applications shall include written verification of commitments of matching support from all sources (including both cash and fair market value of in-kind contributions from third parties). The matching amount must be at least equal to the amount awarded through SCRI. All matching must be secured to be considered. The applicant must provide evidence of the required amount of matching prior to award and the information should be included in the proposal.

Written verification means:

For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, submitted on the donor organization's letterhead signed by the authorized representative of the donor organization and the applicant organization and to include the title of the person signing as the AR, which must include: (1) the name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name

of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) the dollar amount of the cash donation; and (5) a statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period and specifying the recipient may use the cash donation as they deem necessary or a statement on how the cash is to be used on the project. For cash matching to be used as deemed necessary, the applicant must provide details of how cash matching will be used e.g. salary details, time and/or effort, materials, supplies etc.

For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution submitted on Donor Organization letterhead and signed by the AR of the donor organization and the applicant organization, which must include: (1) The name, address, and telephone number of the donor; (2) the name of the applicant organization; (3) the title of the project for which the donation is made; (4) a good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution; and (5) a statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period. For in-kind donations of time, the donor's normal rate of pay should be used to value the contribution if the service provided is in the donor's normal line of work.

For in-kind donations involving the use of land or facilities, an explanation and documentation of how the value was determined should be provided.

The sources and the amount of all matching support from the applicant organization and outside the applicant organization shall be summarized on a separate page and placed in the application as a part of the Budget Justification attachment (see Field K on the Form SF 424 (R&R) Budget Fed & Non-Fed). Include the matching amount, the budget category for the match, and detail how the matching support, from each source, will be used (e.g., salary and position supported). Hourly rates for in-kind contributions of time should be based on the person's actual salary rate if the duties performed for the project are the same as his/her normal duties. If different, the hourly rate for the in-kind labor should be based on the going rate in the area for similar duties. Additionally, all pledge agreements must be included as a PDF attachment in Field K as well.

The value of applicant contributions to the project shall be established in accordance with the applicable cost principles. Applicants should refer to OMB Circulars 2 CFR 220, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions; 2 CFR 225, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Tribal Governments; 2 CFR 230, Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations; 2 CFR Part 215, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations; and the cost principles in the Federal Acquisition Regulation at 48 CFR 31.2 for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

Additional Budget Information

For Research and Extension Planning Projects: The budget for the planning activity may include an appropriate amount for transportation and subsistence costs for participants and for other related costs. Planning awards of federal funds will not exceed \$50,000 and are not renewable. Include an itemized breakdown of all support requested in the Budget Justification (Field K. of the R&R Budget).

Project Director Workshop: It is the intent of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to require successful applicants or a designee to attend at least two project director workshops during the term of their project. For the purposes of budget development, applicants are required to request funds for attending at least two such workshops. The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the budget narrative section of the application. Please note: this workshop requirement is waived for recipients of planning grant awards.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

- a. Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter “**Specialty Crop Research Initiative**”) and the program code (i.e., enter “**SCRI**”). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.
- b. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.
- c. Felony Tax and Certification Form.** This form will be required for processing of awards. Please include your institution’s tax and felony certification form with your application. See Part V., Section 4.12. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the Form) for instructions regarding Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Prior to electronic submission of the application via Grants.gov, it is strongly recommended that an administrative review be conducted to ensure that an application complies with all application preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review. SCRI also has unique requirements, such as the inclusion of a project logic model, and applicants should ensure that all required components are included.

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on March 18, 2016**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 10 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

1. Indirect Costs

Section 7132 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended the National Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3310(a)), limiting indirect costs to 22 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 22 percent of total Federal funds awarded. If no rate has been established the applicant may indicate "None—will negotiate" and a reasonable dollar amount for indirect costs may be requested, which will be subject to approval by USDA. In the latter case, if a proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted prior to award to support the amount of indirect costs requested. NIFA will request an indirect cost rate proposal and provide instructions, as necessary. An applicant may elect not to charge indirect costs and, instead, use all grant funds for direct costs. If indirect costs are not charged, the phrase "None requested" should be written in this space.

Special Notices:

1. NIFA will withhold all funds for a SCRI award to an applicant requesting indirect costs if the applicant has not negotiated an indirect cost rate with its cognizant federal agency.
2. If a grantee is in the process of negotiating an indirect cost rate with its federal agency, NIFA will withhold all funds from that grantee until the indirect cost rate has been established.
3. If an institution's indirect cost rate has expired or will expire in the near future, a clear statement on renegotiation efforts must be included in the application. (See Part IV, D.6. SF 424 (R&R) Budget Fed & Non-Fed).
4. It is incumbent on all applicants to have a current indirect cost rate or begin negotiations to establish an indirect cost rate prior to the SCRI submission deadline. Because it may take several months to obtain an indirect cost rate, applicants needing an indirect cost rate are encouraged to start work on establishing these rates well in advance of submitting a SCRI application.

5. In lieu of requesting indirect costs (if the applicant does not have a negotiated rate), an applicant may prepare a budget in which all charges in the budget are included as direct costs.

2. Construction and Renovation

Funds made available under SCRI shall not be used for the construction of a new building or facility or the acquisition, expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architect fees).

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, section 1.9 in the document entitled “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III., section 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

SCRI has instituted a two-phase review process. The first phase of the review process is the Industry Relevancy Review. The second phase of the SCRI review, which pertains to applications submitted in response to this RFA, will be a scientific peer review of invited full applications. Each full application will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Administrative requirements include: meeting the application deadline; evidence that the application was invited for submission; meeting eligibility requirements; satisfying program intent; providing evidence of 100 percent non-federal matching funds if the applicant is required to do so; and including all required sections of the application package. Applications that meet these requirements will be evaluated for technical merit by a scientific peer review panel.

Section 7301 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended section 103(a) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (7 U.S.C. 7613(a)) states that Peer and Merit review procedures *shall not* take the offer or availability of matching funds into consideration. Therefore, while matching is required for certain applicants under SCRI, it will only be considered as part of the administrative review of applications and will not be included in the Peer and Merit Review (see Part III, B for more information).

Scientific peer review panelists will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) 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; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (d) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and gender representation and age distribution; and (e) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria for Full Applications

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

Criteria for Scientific Peer Review

Criteria for Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)

1. Conceptual adequacy (20 points). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope and budget.

2. Design (40 points). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, and effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates understanding of a whole system(s) approach and discusses how the project will contribute to an integrated systems solution to the identified problem. Even if a single component is the focus of the project, the proposal must provide a thorough analysis of the broader systems context and why that component is critical and why the solution offered will lead to an improved system in economic, ecological, and social terms. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing, or marketing systems.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science and engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences, extension, and program evaluation, as appropriate, as well as expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, and social aspects of specialty crop.
4. Outreach plan (15 points). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured, including the likelihood that the project will provide solutions that lead to measurable benefits to producers and consumers.
5. Feasibility, probability of success, including the likelihood that the project will contribute to the overall sustainability of a component or primary system (10 points).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).

Criteria for Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)

1. Conceptual adequacy (20 points). Application clearly states objectives that are potentially attainable within project time, scope, and budget.
2. Design (40 points). The application's methodology and analytical approach are appropriate to project objectives, a continuity plan addresses future long-term plans for the proposed activities, and the project effectively combines research and extension activities. The application demonstrates an understanding of a whole system(s) approach and *applies* that approach to overcoming the identified problem. The project must contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems.
3. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise and use of trans-disciplinary approach (10 points). Application documents that the project brings together expertise in biological science disciplines, physical science, engineering disciplines, socio-economic sciences. The application should include appropriate extension activity, and program evaluation and the application documents should include expertise from principal stakeholders and partners. Project goals should address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
4. Outreach plan (15 points). Application includes a detailed outreach plan based on the project logic model that includes project benefits and a description of how impacts will be measured.

5. Feasibility, probability of success (10 points).
6. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).

Criteria for Research and Extension Planning Projects

1. Documented need (15 points). Application includes documentation substantiating that project is directed to current or likely future problems/challenges in specialty crop agriculture. Demonstrate specific need for planning activity, e.g., limited resources for submitting large grant applications (or for developing a strategic plan) and potential benefits accrued from formal planning activities.
2. Stakeholder involvement (30 points). Application includes information on how stakeholders will participate in the activity, including a listing of key participants who will be invited and their affiliations.
3. Conceptual adequacy and design (25 points). Application clearly states objectives and includes a preliminary agenda that addresses those objectives; Application demonstrates an understanding of and proposes to develop the application of a whole system(s) approach with the potential for the project to contribute to long-term profitability and sustainability of specialty crop production efficiency, handling and processing or marketing systems.
4. Involvement of appropriate, relevant expertise in planning activity committees, speakers, and attendees (15 points); Application documents that the project brings together biological, physical, and social scientists as appropriate to project goals to address economic, environmental, **and** social aspects of specialty crop sustainability.
5. Appropriateness of budget (5 points).
6. Feasibility (10 points). Likelihood that the effort will result in a future grant application to the SCRI and/or address the strategic plan goals.

Centers of Excellence Status

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

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

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by SCRI for a period of three years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

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

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to which the director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PDs chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number and the Federal Agency Identification Number assigned by NIFA;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time NIFA intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of financial assistance approved for the award;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);
- (10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, the ones listed on the NIFA web page - <http://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide—a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary is available at <http://nifa.usda.gov/policy-guide>.

Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

Please refer to Part II, C. for more information.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

Project Director (PD) Workshop: It is the intent of the SCRI program to require successful applicants, or a designee, to attend AT LEAST TWO PD WORKSHOPS during the term of their project. These workshops may be held in conjunction with another conference or may be held separate from any other meeting. **For the purpose of budget development, you are required to request funds necessary to attend at least two such workshops.** The request for these funds should be clearly indicated in the budget narrative section of the application. Please note that this workshop requirement is waived for recipients of planning grants.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

Tom Bewick; National Program Leader; Division of Plant Systems Production; Institute of Food Production and Sustainability; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-2240; telephone: (202) 401-3356; fax: (202) 401-4888; e-mail: tbewick@nifa.usda.gov.

OR

Daniel Schmoldt; National Program Leader; Division of Plant Systems Production; Institute of Food Production and Sustainability; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-2240; telephone: (202) 720-4807; fax: (202) 401-5179; e-mail: dschmoldt@nifa.usda.gov.

Administrative/Business Contact –

Susan Bowman, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4324; e-mail: sbowman@nifa.usda.gov.

OR

Adriene Woodin, Awards Management Division, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2271; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 202005-2271; telephone: (202) 401-4320; e-mail: awoodin@nifa.usda.gov.

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

We will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

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

2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved goals or objectives prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests be approved for changes that are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel, prior to effecting such changes.

d. The awardee must request, and the ADO must approve in writing, all transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not federal funds are involved, prior to instituting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. The terms and conditions of award include information about no-cost extensions of the award and when ADO's prior approval is necessary.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the

ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR part 415, subpart C , this program is excluded from the scope of the 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.

E. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

For the purpose of this program, the following additional definitions are applicable:

Director means the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and any other officer or employee of NIFA to whom the authority involved is delegated.

Multifunctional research and extension activities are those in which research results are communicated via extension activities to stakeholders and the public in a coordinated manner during the life of a single project.

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

- 1) A narrative of each entity's clearly established role in the project;

- 2) How each entity involved as a partner on the project will contribute to execution of project objectives, determination of experimental design, development of the project work plan and time table, and submission of collaborative, timely reports; and
- 3) A comprehensive project budget that reflects each entity's financial or in-kind contribution to the total project budget costs.

Project Director or PD means the single individual designated by the grantee in the grant application, who is responsible for the direction and management of the project and who is approved by the Authorized Departmental Officer. By extension of this definition, then, all project personnel listed as Co-PDs on an application are assumed to be approved by the grantee institution as ready and able to fulfill the role of PD in the event that the PD can no longer serve in that capacity. All other project personnel should be identified as co-principal investigators or key personnel.

Specialty crop means fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture).

Trans-disciplinary means a multi-discipline approach that brings biological and physical scientists together with economists and social scientists to address challenges in a holistic manner.

F. Materials Available on the Internet

There are additional materials available on the NIFA web site that applicants may find useful. These can be found at <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/specialty-crop-research-initiative>. The information available includes:

1. Links to web casts of grantsmanship workshops conducted in 2011 and 2012 that explore the concepts of transdisciplinary, systems research and partnership building
2. Links to abstracts and web sites for previously funded projects.