

# Specialty Crop Research Initiative

---

## 2018 Request for Applications (RFA)

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: Mar 16, 2018**

**ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA**



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture

*Bring a copy of this to the session for a group activity.  
Print double sided to save paper.*

**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 p.m. Eastern Time** on Mar 16, 2018.

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 six months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**STAKEHOLDER INPUT:** We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider your 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 your written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to [Policy@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:Policy@nifa.usda.gov). (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and *not* for 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 that offered COE opportunities in FY 2018. You may also review a recording of COE outreach webinars held in February and March of 2015 and COE implementation webinars held in August and September of 2015 from the site. We will update COE webpages as appropriate.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2018. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2018 is approximately \$48,082,084. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2018. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a SCRI grants.

## Table of Contents

PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION .....	4
A. Legislative Authority .....	4
B. Purpose and Priorities .....	4
PART II—AWARD INFORMATION.....	8
A. Available Funding .....	8
B. Types of Applications.....	8
C. Project Types .....	9
D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research .....	11
PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION.....	12
A. Eligible Applicants .....	12
B. Cost Sharing or Matching .....	12
PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION .....	14
A. Electronic Application Package.....	15
B. Content and Form of Application Submission.....	16
C. Submission Dates and Times .....	23
D. Funding Restrictions.....	24
E. Other Submission Requirements.....	25
PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS .....	26
A. General.....	26
B. Evaluation Criteria.....	26
C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality .....	29
D. Organizational Management Information .....	29
E. Application Disposition .....	29
PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION .....	30
A. General.....	30
B. Award Notice.....	30
C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements .....	30
D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements .....	30
PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT .....	31
PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION .....	32
A. Use of Funds; Changes .....	32
B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards.....	32
C. Regulatory Information.....	33
D. Definitions .....	33
E. Materials Available on the Internet.....	34

## **PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Legislative Authority**

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 2016 competition occurred on August 29 and 30, 2017 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 Research and Extension Planning Projects, the SCRI program only considers projects that integrate research *and* extension activities.**

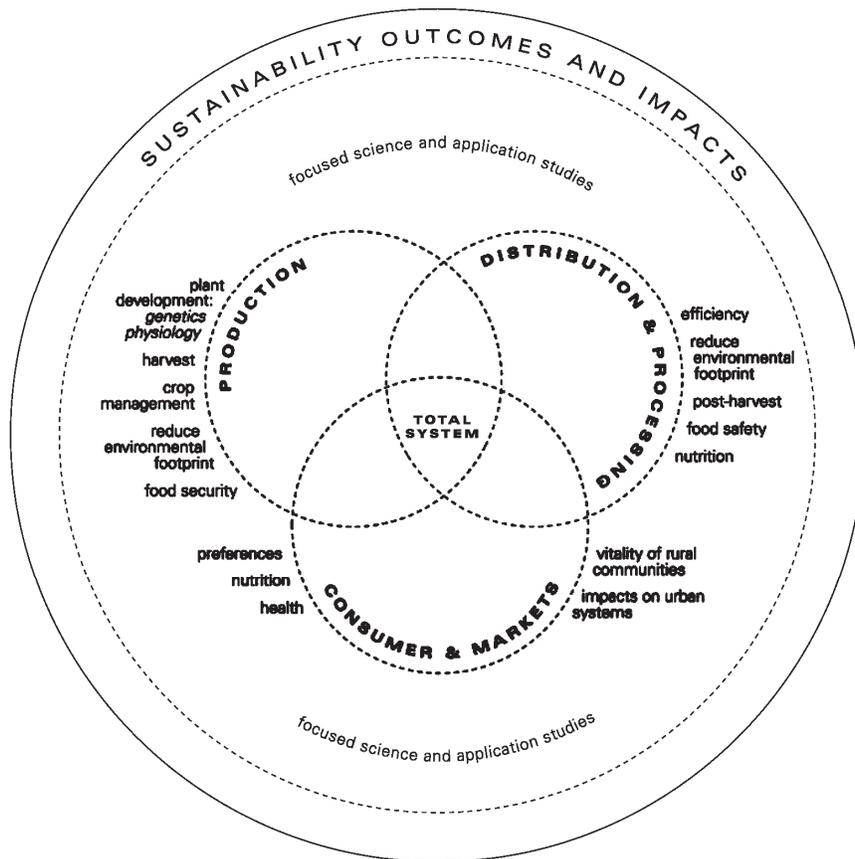
Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a systems approach:

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, projects 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 more information about this document at <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/specialty-crop-research-initiative>. 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.

The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas, which 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 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.

In an increasingly interconnected world, scientific advances have global importance, and may require information and cooperation from beyond our borders. To address critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities, applicants are encouraged to include international partnerships or engagement in proposals, as appropriate. Any proposed activity (e.g., partnerships, exchanges, training, and/or travel), must support the domestic objectives of SCRI. Applicants must clearly describe and demonstrate how international activities proposed in applications submitted to SCRI will contribute to advances in U.S. specialty crop industries. When proposing international activities, applicants must describe the metrics that will be used for reporting beneficial outputs and outcomes. These metrics should reflect how the proposed international collaboration adds value to achieving the SCRI program's objectives by introducing innovative technologies/approaches, promoting synergistic science, addressing issues of mutual concern, or other means. Additional guidance on including international activities in SCRI applications is provided on the [Center for](#)

[International Programs](#) webpage that includes Frequently Asked Questions, descriptions of existing MOUs and other resources to assist applicants interested in enhancing the potential for global engagement.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The anticipated amount available for SCRI grants in FY 2018 is approximately \$48,082,084. This RFA is being released prior to the passage of an appropriations act for FY 2018. Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. For more information see

[https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap\\_home.htm](https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm).

### **B. Types of Applications**

In FY 2018, you may submit applications to the SCRI Program as one of the following types of requests:

**New application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the SCRI Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

**Renewal application**. This is a project application that requests 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; they also must contain a Progress Report (see Project Narrative, Part IV). We must receive renewal applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate renewal applications in competition with other pending applications in the area to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B) as new applications. If you are submitting a renewal application, enter the NIFA-assigned award number of the previously-funded application in the Federal field (Field 4 on the form).

**Resubmitted application**. This is an application that had previously been submitted to the NIFA but not funded. Project Directors (PDs) must respond to the previous review panel summary (see Response to Previous Review, Part IV). We must receive resubmitted applications by the relevant due dates. We will evaluate resubmitted applications in competition with other pending applications in the appropriate area to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria (Part V, B) as new applications. If you are submitting a resubmission application, enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously-submitted application in the Federal field (Field 4 on the form).

**Resubmitted renewal application.** This is a project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. In addition, this is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to the SCRI Program but not funded. Therefore, PDs must provide a Progress Report (as required under the Project Narrative, Part IV) and must respond to the previous review’s panel summary as required under Response to Previous Review, Part IV. We must receive resubmitted renewal applications by the relevant due dates. We will be evaluate resubmitted renewal applications in competition with other pending applications in the areas to which they are assigned and review them according to the same evaluation criteria as new applications. If you are submitting a *resubmission renewal* application, select “resubmission” and enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously-submitted application in the Federal field (Field 4 on the form).

NIFA may choose to issue a new award on a continuation basis. A continuation award is an award instrument by which NIFA agrees to support a specified level of effort for a predetermined period of time with a statement of intention to provide additional support at a future date, provided that performance has been satisfactory, appropriations are available for this purpose, and continued support would be in the best interest of the federal government and the public.

### **C. Project Types**

The SCRI program offers the following three project types in FY 2018. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a preliminary budget that fits the objectives. Applicants are discouraged from developing a project (and selecting a project type) based on a budget request target.

#### **1. Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)**

- a. Project Period – Up to four years.
- b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed \$1,000,000 per year. Requests less than \$250,000 per project are discouraged.
- c. Purpose – To support targeted problem-solving efforts that would not qualify in scope for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP).
- d. Statistical Analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2014). It is anticipated that most funded SREPs for FY2018 will be close to the historical median:
  - i. Mean award: \$1,980,070
  - ii. Median award: \$1,846,428
  - iii. Minimum award: \$226,905
  - iv. Maximum award: \$6,010,232.

SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components (see Sustainability Outcomes and Impacts diagram in Part I,B), and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a CAP. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. 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. SREPs

represent the “focused science and application studies” portion of the systems diagram under Part I, B.

## **2. Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)**

- a. Project Period – Up to four years.
- b. Budget – Normally, federal funds will not exceed \$2,000,000 per year.
- c. Purpose – To address specific multiple components of a primary system or multiple components of areas where primary systems overlap (see diagram in Part I, B).
- d. Statistical analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2014). It is anticipated that most funded CAPs for FY 2018 will be close to the historical median.
  - v. Mean award: \$5,008,679
  - vi. Median award: \$4,438,003
  - vii. Minimum award: \$1,912,178
  - viii. Maximum award: \$10,898,772

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 (see Sustainability Outcomes and Impacts diagram in Part I,B). 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. 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 address 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.

## **3. Research and Extension Planning Projects**

- a. Project period – One year.
- b. Budget – Federal funds up to \$50,000 per project.
- c. Purpose – To provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning). Funds may also be requested to 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.

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 a variety of industry-relevant research and extension activities, including 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.

#### **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. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the 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 Oct. 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](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 U.S. 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, D., 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 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).

Proposal submissions to this RFA may indicate that multiple entities will complete work as a collaborative partnership. All partners must have a substantial involvement in the project throughout the life of the project. Proposals for partnerships among multiple entities must clearly identify the following:

- 1) A narrative that clearly establishes each entity's role in the project;
- 2) How each project partner will contribute to execution of project objectives; determine experimental design; develop the project work plan and time table; and submit 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 multiple entities, as partners, complete work on the project, and at least one entity is exempt from the matching requirement under #2 above, the entire project will be exempt from the matching requirement. Any partner entity may serve as the lead entity on the project. All partners must be significantly involved in the project.

NIFA will examine proposals recommended for award to determine if the proposed division of work reflects substantial involvement of all entities involved. If a proposal is recommended for award to a lead entity that is 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 for 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. Refer to the [2014 Research](#).

[Education and Economics Action Plan](#) to determine whether proposed activities are consistent with the priorities of the NAREEEAB. See R&R Budget under Part IV, B, 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 recognize and provide priority in the receipt of funding to applications from “centers of excellence” that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. NIFA held listening sessions in July 2014 and accepted written comments from stakeholders to inform NIFA’s implementation of the COE provision. Information from the webinars and a summary of the input are available on NIFA’s website at <http://nifa.usda.gov/centers-excellence>.

A COE is composed of one or more of the following entities that provide financial or in-kind support to the COE.

- (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 two or more of the entities described in (A) through (H).

**COE designation is available only to CAP and SREP applicants.**

## 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 information about the pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.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 two 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/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
1. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html> and enter the funding opportunity number where appropriate

#### **Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-SCRI-006529**

Click “Search.” On the displayed page, click the corresponding link to continue. A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

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 (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support.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](mailto: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. EST).

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

## **B. Content and Form of Application Submission**

Electronic applications are to be prepared 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** you need 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 whether 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](mailto:electronic@nifa.usda.gov)
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST, 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. See Part V, Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances (e.g., Prohibition Against Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements).

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

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

### **3. R&R Other Project Information Form**

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available 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. 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 shall not exceed 12 pages of written text, including tables and figures for Planning Projects. SREPs and CAPs shall not exceed 20 pages of written text and up to 2 additional pages for figures and tables. We have established this maximum (22 pages) 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](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/integrated/integrated_logic_model.html).
- (v) 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.
- (vi) 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.

(vii) Approach – **For CAPs and SREPs**, (*for Research and extension Planning Projects see (viii) 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.

(viii) 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.**

(ix) Center of Excellence Justification:

For consideration as a COE, you must provide a brief justification statement, as part of your Project Narrative and within the page limits provided, which describes how you meet the standards of a COE, based on the following criteria:

(A) The ability of the COE to ensure coordination and cost effectiveness by reducing unnecessarily duplicative efforts in the research, teaching, and extension activities outlined in this application;

(B) In addition to any applicable matching requirements, the ability of the COE to leverage available resources by using public-private partnerships among agricultural industry groups, institutions of higher education, and the federal government in the proposed research and/or extension activities outlined in this application. Resources leveraged be commensurate with the size of the award;

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

(D) The ability or capacity of the COE 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), COE 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](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/pdfs/nlgca_colleges.pdf)), and schools of veterinary medicine).

**c. Field 12. Add Other Attachments**

See Part V. Section 4.12 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the form) for instructions regarding mandatory Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status.

**Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture (NLGCA) Certification.** If you claim exemption from the new matching requirements as a NLGCA, then you must attach the NLGCA certification letter you requested and received from NIFA. Title the attachment ‘NLGCA Certification’ and save the file as ‘NLGCACertification.’ To request certification as an NLGCA, complete the form at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/form/form.html>. Note that certification can take up to 30 days from submission of request form. **See Part III Section 3.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for NIFA attachment specifications.**

**Data Management Plan.** A Data Management Plan (DMP) is required and is to clearly articulate how the project director (PD) and co-PDs plan to manage and disseminate the data generated by the project. The DMP will be considered during the merit review process (see Part V, B.). **See Part III Section 3.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for NIFA attachment specifications.**

The requirements for preparation and inclusion of a DMP in your application is included on the following web page, <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/data-management-plan-nifa-funded-research-projects>. Also included on the web page are FAQs and information about accessing examples of DMPs.

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

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the guide includes instructions about senior/key person profile requirements, 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. Part V.6 also notes the importance and use of the information.

## **6. R&R Budget Fed & Non-Fed**

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

If you conclude that matching funds are not required as specified under Part III, B Cost-Sharing or Matching, you must include a justification in the Budget Narrative. We will consider this justification when determining final matching requirements or if required matching can be waived. NIFA retains the right to make final determinations regarding matching requirements.

For grants that require matching funds as specified under Part III, B, the Budget Narrative should include written verification of commitments of matching support (including both cash and in-kind contributions) from third parties. Written verification means:

(a) For any third party cash contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each donation, signed by the authorized representatives of the donor organization (and the applicant organization ONLY if provided after submission of the application), must include:

- Donor's name, address, and telephone number;
- Name of the applicant organization;
- Title of the project;
- Dollar amount of the cash donation (the budget narrative must describe how the cash donation will be used);
- Statement that the donor will pay the cash contribution during the grant period; and
- Whether the applicant can designate cash as the applicant deems necessary or the cash contribution has been designated to a particular budget item.

(b) For any third party in-kind contributions, a separate pledge agreement for each contribution, signed by the authorized representatives of the donor organization (and the applicant organization ONLY if provided after submission of the application), must include:

- Donor's name, address, and telephone number;
- Name of the applicant organization;
- Title of the project;
- A good faith estimate of the current fair market value of the third party in-kind contribution and a description of how the fair market value was determined; and
- A statement that the donor will make the contribution during the grant period.

Summarize on a separate page the sources and amount of all matching support from outside the applicant institution and place that information in the proposal as part of the Budget Narrative. You must place all pledge agreements in the proposal immediately following the summary of matching support.

Establish the value of applicant contributions in accordance with applicable cost principles. Refer to 2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards,” for further guidance and other requirements relating to matching and allowable costs.

For further information and instructions regarding indirect costs, refer to Part V, section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. For indirect cost funding restrictions, refer to Part IV, D of this RFA.

### **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 their designees 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**

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part VI, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

1. **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.
2. **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. Submission Dates and Times**

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission of it via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all 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 an executive summary, so 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 p.m. Eastern Time** on March 16, 2018. 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. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email 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 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, you should cite this number 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 cost.

### **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**

We evaluate each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a technical review panel will evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors:

- 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;
- The need to include experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields;
- The need to include other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations;
- The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and
- The need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness of each application to producers and the general public.

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

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

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

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

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. The Data Management Plan is clearly described.
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. The Data Management Plan is adequately described.
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.

### **Center 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 COE will be further evaluated by the peer panel to determine whether they have met the standards to be a COE (Part III, C. and Part IV, B). In instances where they are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-COE, based on peer review, selection for funding will be weighed in favor of applicants meeting the COE criteria. NIFA will effectively use the COE prioritization as a “tie breaker.” Applicants that rank highly meritorious but who did not request consideration as a COE or who are not deemed to have met the COE 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 COE. Entities recognized as COE 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](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 one-time, with updates on an as-needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determined 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, the information described in [2 CFR 200.210](#).

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view current NIFA award terms and conditions.

### **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**

Refer to Part II, D 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, they will be identified in the award.

## **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) 445-5392; e-mail: [tbewick@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:tbewick@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](mailto: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](mailto:awoodin@nifa.usda.gov).

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

### **A. 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 Budget or Project Plans**

In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons:

(i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).

(ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.

(iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.

(iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, “Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals,” or 48 CFR Part 31, “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures,” as applicable.

(v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.

(vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.

(vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.

(viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.

The awardee will be subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award. See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms.

### **B. 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 of Agriculture 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. We will retain for three years a copy of an application that does not result in an award. 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.

### **C. Regulatory Information**

This program is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

### **D. Definitions**

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.

#### **E. 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 webcasts of grantsmanship workshops conducted in 2011 and 2012 that explore the concepts of transdisciplinary, systems research and partnership building
2. Links to abstracts and websites for previously funded projects.