



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food
and Agriculture

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NIFA

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year 2021

APPLICATION DEADLINE: May 21, 2021

LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not required

AWARD AMOUNT: \$76,000,000

CATALOGUE OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE NUMBER: 10.309

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

National Institute of Food and Agriculture United States Department of Agriculture

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is listed in the Assistance Listings under the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number 10.309.

Table 1: Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern, May 21, 2021 [<i>Ref to Part I § C of this RFA</i>]
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

Stakeholder Input. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks comments on all request for applications (RFAs) so it can deliver programs efficiently, effectively, with integrity, and with a focus on customer service. NIFA considers comments, to the extent possible when developing RFAs and use comments to help meet the requirements of [Section 103\(c\)\(2\) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 \(7 U.S.C. 7613\(c\)\(2\)\)](#). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) RFA.

Centers of Excellence. Applicants are encouraged to visit the NIFA's [Center of Excellence \(COE\)](#) for information on COE designation process, including COE criteria, and a list of programs offering COE opportunities. A recording of COE outreach and COE implementation webinars are also available.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NIFA requests invited applications for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) for fiscal year (FY) 2021. The anticipated amount available for grants in FY 2021 is approximately \$76,000,000.

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.

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PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is reauthorized by Section 7305 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 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 will review and rank SCRI applications for merit, relevance, and impact.

The regulations for SCRI may be found in Subpart F of [7 CFR 3430](#).

B. Purpose and Priorities

In FY 2021, applicants are competing for the SCRI program in two stages. Applicants were required to submit a pre-application containing a Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS). Panels of industry representatives from various specialty crop sectors reviewed and ranked the pre-applications for merit, relevance and impact. The industry representatives for each specialty crop sector decided which pre-applicants are being invited to submit full applications. NIFA is providing details of the full-application process to invitees in this separate RFA.

The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in Part VIII, E of this RFA) 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.

A thorough discussion of using systems science in agriculture can be found at: <https://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Systems-Research-for-Agriculture>

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 <https://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. They are:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:
 - a. product, taste, quality, and appearance;
 - b. size-controlling rootstocks for perennial crops;
 - c. environmental responses and tolerances;
 - d. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency;
 - e. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
 - f. enhanced phytonutrient content.
2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including
 - a. threats to specialty crop pollinators;
 - b. emerging and invasive species; and
 - c. a more effective understanding and utilization of existing natural enemy complexes.
3. Efforts
 - a. to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing); and
 - b. to achieve a better understanding of
 - i. the soil rhizosphere microbiome;
 - ii. pesticide application systems and certified drift-reduction technologies; and
 - iii. systems to improve and extend the storage life of specialty crops
4. New innovations and technology, including –
 - a. Mechanization and automation of labor-intensive tasks in production and processing;
 - b. Technologies that delay or inhibit ripening;
 - c. Decision support systems driven by phenology and environmental factors;

- d. Improved monitoring systems for agricultural pests; and
 - e. Effective systems for pre-harvest and postharvest management of quarantine pests
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 either organic or conventional production systems. NIFA also recognizes the importance of specialty crops in enhancing human nutrition and health.

eXtension. SCRI encourages (but does not require) projects that develop content suitable for delivery through [eXtension](#).

Global Engagement. NIFA supports global engagement that advances U.S. agricultural goals. NIFA recognizes that collaboration with international partners may be necessary to attain the agency's goals for U.S. agriculture, promote global competence of our nation's future agricultural workforce, and promote safe and nutritious food security in a growing world. Therefore, although application to this RFA is limited to eligible U.S. institutions, applicants may collaborate with international partners, to include subcontracts to international partners or other institutions. Applications must clearly demonstrate benefits to the U.S.

The SCRI is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Goals:

1. Strategic Goal 1: Ensure USDA Programs Are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, With Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service;
2. Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers To Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World;
3. Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development;
4. Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research;
5. Strategic Goal 7: Provide all Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply.

SCRI fulfills 5(a) of the United State Trade Representative's joint plan with the U.S. Department of Commerce and USDA entitled ***Plan to Support American Producers of Seasonal and Perishable Fruits and Vegetables***, as published in the September 2020 [Report on Seasonal and Perishable Products in U.S. Commerce](#), as SCRI expands research opportunities for seasonal and perishable products, as well as supports projects intended to increase the competitiveness of seasonal produce through new innovations and technology.

Table 2: Program Key Information

Title	Description
Program Code:	SCRI
Program Code Name:	Specialty Crop Research Initiative
CFDA Number	10.309
Application Deadline	May 21, 2021
Grant Duration:	12-48 Months
Anticipated # of Awards:	25

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

The anticipated amount available for SCRI in FY2021 is approximately \$76 million. USDA is not committed to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. The [Automated Standard Application for Payments](#), operated by the Department of Treasury, Bureau of Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA.

B. Application Restrictions

NIFA will evaluate applications using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA. Application for FY2021 is limited to the following applications types:

1. *New application*: New applications will be evaluated using the criteria described in [Part V](#) of this RFA and are subject to the due dates herein (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
2. *Resubmitted application*: Resubmitted applications must include the respond to the previous review panel summary, and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Resubmitted applicants must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously submitted application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
3. *Renewal application*. Renewal applications must contain the same information as required for new applications and must contain a *progress report*. The progress report must include the implementation of the data management plan (DMP) of the previously funded project. Renewal applications are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. Applicants submitting a renewal application must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously approved application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).
4. *Resubmitted renewal application*. Resubmitted renewal applicants must provide a *progress report*, respond to the previous review's panel summary, and are subject to the same criteria and due dates herein. The progress report must include the implementation of the data management plan (DMP) of the previously funded project. Applicants submitting a renewal application must enter the NIFA-assigned proposal number of the previously approved application in the *Federal Field (Field 4)* on the application form (see [Appendix III](#) for definition).

C. Project Types

The SCRI program offers the following three project types in FY 2021. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a 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 approximately \$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 2008-2020). It is anticipated that most funded SREPs for FY 2021 will be close to the historical median:

- i. Mean award: \$2,268,961
- ii. Median award: \$1,911,869
- 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

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 2008-2018). It is anticipated that most funded CAPs for FY 2021 will be close to the historical median.
 - i. Mean award: \$5,578,284
 - ii. Median award: \$5,661,050
 - iii. Minimum award: \$1,912,178
 - iv. 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. 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. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligibility Requirements

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

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

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

The matching requirement for SCRI awards has been waived for FY 2021 using authority granted by The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260, General Provision 752), which states: “The Secretary of Agriculture may waive the matching funds requirement under Section 412(g) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C.7632(g)).” This means that no matching funds will be required of FY 2021 applicants or awardees, and applicants will not need to submit a waiver request with their application.

C. Centers of Excellence

Pursuant to [Section 7214 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 \(Pub. L. 113-79\)](#), NIFA will recognize and prioritize COE applicants that carry out research, extension, and education activities that relate to the food and agricultural sciences. A COE is composed of one or more of the following.

1. State agricultural experiment stations;
2. Colleges and universities;
3. University research foundations;
4. Other research institutions and organizations;
5. Federal agencies;
6. National laboratories;
7. Private organizations, foundations, or corporations;
8. Individuals; or
9. Any group consisting of two or more of the entities described in (1) through (8).

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFA and additional resources are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [Grants 101](#). **Table 4** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part II § 1** of the [NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide](#) (Application Guide) contains detailed information regarding the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) registration process.

Table 3: Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	<i>New Users</i> to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements)
Step Three: Find Application	Using this funding opportunity number USDA-NIFA-SCRI-008300 , search for application here: Opportunity Package .
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 4: Help and Resources

Grants.gov Support	NIFA Support
Grants.gov Online Support Telephone support: 800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035 Email support: support@grants.gov Self-service customer based support: Grants.gov iPortal Key Information: Customer service business Hours 24/7, except federal holidays .	Email: Policy@usda.gov <i>Key Information:</i> Business hours: Monday thru Friday, 7a.m. – 5p.m. ET, except federal holidays

B. Content and Form of the Application

The [Application Guide](#) is part of the corresponding application package for this RFA. The RFA overrides the [Application Guide](#) if there is a discrepancy between the two documents. NIFA will accept subsequent submissions to an application until the application deadline. However, applicants that do not meet the application requirements, to include partial applications, risk being excluded from NIFA's review. NIFA will assign a proposal number to all applications that

meet the requirements of this RFA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 5** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 5: Key Application Instructions

Instruction	References (All references are to the Application Guide)
Attachments must be in a portable document format (PDF) format.	Part III § 3
Check the manifest of submitted files to verify attachments are in the correct format.	Part III § 6.1
Conduct an administrative review of the application before submission.	Part VII and
Follow the submission instructions.	Part IV § 1.5
Provide an accurate email address, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R.	Part IV § 1.5
Contact the Grants.gov helpdesk for technical support, and keep a record of the correspondence.	
Contact NIFA if applicant does not received correspondence from NIFA regarding an application within 10 business days of the application deadline.	

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. See **Part V § 2** and **Part V § 2.17** of the [Application Guide](#) for the required certifications and assurances.

SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s). See **Part V § 3** of the [Application Guide](#).

R&R Other Project Information Form. See **Part V § 4** of the [Application Guide](#).

1. Field 7. Project Summary (PS)/Abstract. The PS must show how the project goals align with the project goals of the SCRI. See **Part V § 4.7** of the [Application Guide](#) for instructions and required templates. The template found at <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/application-support-templates> **must** be used.
2. Field 8. Project Narrative (PN). The PN for Planning Projects must not exceed 12 single-spaced pages of written text. For Standard Research and Extension Projects and for Coordinated Agricultural Projects the PN must not exceed 20 single-spaced pages of written text and up to 2 additional pages for figures and tables (the font size for tables should be no smaller than 11 points, Times New Roman). The page limits outlined here ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices to the PN are allowed if they are directly germane to the proposed project. Do not add appendices to circumvent the page limit. The PN must include all of the following:

- i. 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. 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.
- ii. 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.

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. The following format **MUST** be used for the Executive Summary. A link to this template can be found at the bottom of the SCRI home page, located at: <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/specialty-crop-research-initiative-scri>

1. Project Title

2. Project Type (Planning, SREP, or CAP)

3. Legislatively-Mandated Focus Areas

Table 6: Legislatively-Mandated Focus Areas

<u>Focus area</u>	<u>Percentage addressed in this proposal</u>
Plant Breeding and Genetics	
Pest Management	
Plant Production and Production Efficiency	
Technology	
Food Safety	

4. Program Staff (expand table as necessary to list additional staffs)

Table 7: List of Program Staff

Role	Name	Title	Institution	City, State	Email
Project Director (PD)					
Co-Project Director (Co-PD)					
PI					
Co-Project Investigator (Co-PI)					
Collaborator					

5. Critical stakeholder needs and long-term goals

6. Outreach plan summary

7. Potential benefits

8. Logic Model

PLEASE NOTE: As stated in the definitions at the end of this RFA, the PD is that person who is legally responsible for ensuring that project funds are used to accomplish the project objectives. A Co-Project Director (Co-PD) is someone who could assume those responsibilities in the event that the PD has to step out of that role prior to completion of the term of the project. Bear in mind when listing Co-PDs that NIFA makes awards to institutions, not individuals. In most cases, the institution receiving an award will not want to transfer the award to another institution, so the most realistic persons to list as Co-PDs are those who are at the same institution as the PD. Listing more than 3 Co-PDs is not necessary. Scientists who will have the main responsibility for achieving specific objectives should be listed as Principal Investigators (PI) and those who will be part of an objective team should be listed as Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PI). These scientists have the same status as a Co-PD in terms of recognition of value to the project. These individuals are not, however, in a position to assume the responsibilities of the PD.

You were asked to list up to 6 scientists on your Stakeholder Relevance Statement. **There is no limit on the number to list in your full application.** Please note that an important use of this information, in addition to allowing reviewers to quickly see who is on the project team, is to check for conflicts of interest as part of the peer review panel planning process. It is important to list the **full name** of all essential personnel and the person's **institution**, along with the **city and state**. **Be sure that this information is clearly stated.** The Executive Summary is NOT the place to include paragraphs of information about what each team member will bring to the project. That information goes in the narrative.

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.

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.

Approach – For CAPs and SREPs, (for Research and extension Planning Projects see 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.

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, and the industry reviewer scores and comments 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.

Applicants are required to provide a one-page response to the results of the industry relevance review. This response should be attached in Field 12 as Appendix A and labeled “Response to the Industry Relevance Review”.

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 <https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nlgca-list>), and schools of veterinary medicine).

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 for this field.

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.

R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded). See **Part V § 5** of the [Application Guide](#) for profile requirements, details about the biographical sketch, and suggested support templates.

R&R Personal Data. This information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award (see **Part V § 6** of the [Application Guide](#)).

R&R Budget. See **Part V § 7** of the [Application Guide](#).

Match – Not Required – The Budget Narrative must include justification for the value of all matching support. 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. A written verification of commitments of matching support (a pledge agreement) is not required. However, applicants are subject to the documentation, valuing and reporting requirements, as specified in [2 CFR Part 200, “Uniform Administrative Requirements,](#)

[Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(the Uniform Guidance\),” and 7 CFR 3430, “Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-Formula Federal Assistance Programs – General Award Administrative Provisions.”](#)

1. Indirect costs (IDC) – See [Part IV § C](#) of this RFA for funding restrictions regarding indirect cost, and **Part V 7.9** of the [Application Guide](#) for additional information

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part VI § 1** of the [Application Guide](#).

1. Field 2. Program to which the applicant is applying. Enter the program name Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the program code SCRI. Accurate entry is critical.
2. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See **Part VI § 1.8** of the [Application Guide](#).

Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants. This is required for corporate applicants. See **Part VI § 2** of the [Application Guide](#) for a description of the term, “corporation.”

C. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Cost (IDC) not to exceed 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) of the recipient. Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) limits IDC for the overall award to 30 percent of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum IDC rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of IDC using:

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

The maximum allowable IDC rate under the award, including the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates.

If the result of number one is the lesser of the two rates, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated IDC rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee’s negotiated IDC rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated IDC rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the IDC rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of number two is the lesser of the two rates, then the maximum IDC rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the IDC of the prime awardee plus the sum of the IDC charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

In the event of an award, the prime awardee is responsible for ensuring the maximum indirect cost allowed for the award is not exceeded when combining IDC for the Federal portion (i.e., prime and sub-awardee(s)) and any applicable cost-sharing (see 7 CFR 3430.52(b)). Amounts exceeding the maximum allowable IDC are considered unallowable. See sections 408 and 410 of 2 CFR 200.

Successful applicants must not use grant funds awarded under the authority of this RFA to renovate or refurbish research, education, or extension space; purchase or install fixed equipment in such space; or to plan, repair, rehabilitate, acquire, or construct buildings or facilities.

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

NIFA evaluates each application in a two-part process. First, we screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, a scientific peer-review process will be used to technically evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements using a review panel (see **NIFA Peer Review Process**).

Scientific Peer Review Process:

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

NIFA will use the following criteria to evaluate this RFA: **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 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, engineering disciplines, and 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. Demonstrates 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.

C. Center of Excellence

In addition to evaluating applicants using the criterion listed in [Part V § B](#) of this RFA, NIFA will use the COE standards described in this RFA to evaluate applicants that rank highly meritorious and requested to be considered as a COE. In instances where applicants are found to be equally meritorious with the application of a non-COE applicant, NIFA will prioritize the COE applicant 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.

Applicants that meet the COE requirements will have the COE designation in their notice of award. 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.

D. Organizational Management Information

Applicants must submit specific management information relating to an applicant prior to an award, and update the information as needed. Applicants may only have to update their information if they had previously provided the information under this or another NIFA program. NIFA provides the requisite forms during the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible for award under this program, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual, or a determination that an applicant is not responsible).

E. Application Disposition

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

PART VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

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

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications and the projects outlined in this RFA (some are listed here: [Federal Regulations](#)). Unless specifically noted by statute or award-specific requirements, [NIFA Policy Guide](#) applies to all NIFA awards.

PART VII. OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds and Changes in Budget

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

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

1. Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program without prior written approval (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring);
2. Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award;
3. Disengagement from the project for more than three months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project;
4. Inclusion of costs that require prior approval in accordance with [2 CFR 200 Subpart E \(Cost Principles\)](#), or [45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, \(Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals\)](#), or 48 CFR, unless waived by the federal awarding agency,
5. [48 CFR Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#);
6. Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense ([2 CFR 200.456 Participant support costs](#));
7. Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see [2 CFR 200.333, Fixed Amount Sub-awards](#)), unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services;
8. Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity; and
9. The need for additional federal funds to complete the project.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

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

C. Regulatory Information

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

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACT

Programmatic Contact

Name	Email	Telephone
Tom Bewick	tbewick@usda.gov	202-445-5392
Megan O'Reilly	megan.oreilly2@usda.gov	202-445-5410

For administrative questions related to:

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

National Institute of Food and Agriculture:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Name	Acronyms
Specialty Crop Research Initiative	SCRI
Authorized Representative	AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998	AREERA
Coordinated Agricultural Project	CAP
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance	CFDA
Center of Excellence	COE
Data Management Plan	DMP
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	NIFA
Request for Application	RFA
Research, Education, and Economics	REE
United States Department of Agriculture	USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

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

Terms	Definitions
Continuation Award	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.
Matching	The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources.
New Application	An application not previously submitted to a program.
Renewal Application	A project application that seeks additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in an original or amended award.
Resubmitted Application	A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.
Resubmitted Renewal Application	A project application that requests additional funding for a project beyond the period that was approved in the original award. This is an application that had previously been submitted for renewal to but not funded.
Project Director or PD	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.
Co-Project Director or Co-PD	Project participants who have been 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.