RFA Easy-Access Guide

Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive (AgVets) Grants Program

(USDA-NIFA-OP-007512)
CDFA Number: 10.334

Departments:

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Funding Amount:
FY20: $9.595 million
FY21: $4.845 million

Maximum Award Amount:
$250,000/year for up to 3 years for large
standard grants
$100,000/year for up to 3 years for small
standard grants

Deadline:
FY20: June 26, 2020, 5:00 P.M. ET
FY21: February 5, 2021, 5:00 P.M. ET

Letter of Intent Deadline:
Not required

Start Date:
September 15

Cost share:
Not Required

Programmatic Contacts		
Name	**E-mail**	**Telephone**
Brent Elrod	richard.elrod@usda.gov	816-926-2535
Sydney Turner	sydney.turner@usda.gov	816-926-2500

NIFA's Mailing Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road
Mail Stop 10000 (ten thousand)
Kansas City, MO 64131

Eligibility Requirements:

- Eligible recipients are **non-profits serving veteran populations**. Only non-profits, with proper documentation, may apply. Collaborators and project partners do not need to be eligible to apply. Additionally, the grant recipient is allowed to sub-contract a non-eligible entity to do work under the awarded grant funds.

  Essentially, the party applying must be a non-profit entity, but is freely allowed to work on the project with other entities that are not non-profits.

Other notes, Including previously funded projects, can be found here.

Project Purpose

- Increase the number of military veterans gaining knowledge and skills through comprehensive, hands-on, and immersive model farm and ranch programs leading to careers in the food and ag sector.

  This purpose should be achieved through the following.

  - Onsite, hands on training
  - Classroom education

- The project is aligned with **USDA's Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development.** Strong applications will touch on some of the below:

  1. Transitioning service members and Veterans are aware of opportunities available to them in employment, education, and entrepreneurship (3 Es)
  2. Transitioning service members and Veterans understand how they can contribute and benefit from the food and agricultural sectors, and communities in rural America
  3. Veterans know about, and use, programs and incentives offered by USDA

- Comprehensive understanding of successful farm and ranch operation and management
- May also offer workforce readiness and employment prospects for service-disabled veterans.
- Include outreach to vets who may have previously participated in Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRFP), or regional equivalent.

Project Types:

- <u>Extension Projects</u> **must** be proposed, addressing one or more of the following:
    - o Non-formal education or increase food and ag literacy
    - o Promote science-based ag literacy by increasing literacy of science data, information, and programs.
    - o Build science-based capability in people to engage audiences and inform
    - o Develop new applications of instructional tools and curriculums that increase technically competency and ensure global competitiveness
    - o Offer non-formal learning programs to increase accessibility to new audiences
    - o Develop programs that increase public knowledge and citizen engagement, leading to actions that protect or enhance the nation's food and ag sectors, including environmental quality, community vitality, and/or public health and well-being.

- <u>Grant Type:</u> Applicants **must** select standard when applying.

Emphasized Deliverables:

Strong applications will focus on finding ways to engage in collaboration with other veteran assistance programs to offer effective education and outreach to enhance or create spaces for veterans to engage in agriculture and food-related careers. These education and outreach activities should offer **both** classroom and hands-on training opportunities leading to a comprehensive understanding of successful agribusiness management practices.

Below is a list of opportunities to strengthen your application and encouraged activities from USDA and NIFA.

<u>Personnel</u>:

Project Team should have demonstrated competency in implementing projects of comparable size and complexity to the one they are proposing, and experience in one or more of these areas:

1. Veteran engagement in agricultural pursuits
2. On the job training and education, apprenticeship, and business development activities for veterans
3. Efforts to enhance and increase workforce readiness and employment prospects for service-disabled veterans, including efforts that promote **nature-based reintegration.**
    a. This is an excellent space for nature-based healing activities that bring Native veterans closer towards traditional practices such as farming, berry picking, and livestock management.

<u>Collaboration</u>:

- Include outreach to veterans who may have participated in projects funded by:
    - o *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program* (BFRDP)

- o *Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program* (also known as The 2501 Program)
- Connect with existing *AgriBility* programming
  - o This is agricultural programming for disable persons, aka making agriculture more accessible.
- Create Partnerships with:
  - o *Extension Risk Management Education Centers* (ERMEs)
  - o *Regional Rural Development Centers* (RRDCs)
  - o Similar regional equivalents
- Collaborate with **Department of Veteran Affairs** (regional, state, and local) and engage with **Small Business Administration** (SBA) and their resource partners:
  - o *Veterans Business Outreach Center* (VBOC)
  - o *Small Business Development Centers* (SMDC)
  - o *Women's Business Centers* (WBC)
  - o *Service-Disabled Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program*
- Engage with the **Development of Labor's** *Veterans Employment and Training Service*
- Share program info and resources to *Farm Answers*

Deliverables:

- Outreach, selection of participants, and retention of participants
  - o **Special focus on diverse and underrepresented groups**
- Creating collaborations or partnerships with minority serving academic institutions (TCUs)
- Documenting development or utilization of the curriculum used in the program
- Emphasis on aligning education materials and training goals with understanding USDA programming, especially *Natural Resource Conservation Service* (NRCS), *Farm Service Agency* (FSA), and *Rural Development* (RD)
- Generate recommendations at the state or federal level to strengthen collaboration on transitioning Service members into the ag sector.
- Encourages projects that develop content suitable for delivery through eXtension.
- Generate recommendations at the state and/or federal level to strengthen collaborations for transitioning Service member's programs (e.g. using GI Bill benefits) to promote the food and ag sector as viable career options.
- An evaluation of the programs models to monitor and measure impacts and effectiveness, such as tracking the following:
  - o Team meetings
  - o Conference calls
  - o Partner engagement

Required Application Forms

NIFA has provided an [Application Guide](), which acts as a reference for more technical aspects of the application.

This application guide is quite dense and long, at 69 pages. When applicable, sections of the guide will be referenced below.

Applications should have the following:

- **Project Narrative**   Suggested Number of Pages
    - Introduction   [2 pages]
    - Objectives and Outcome   [2 pages]
    - Approach   [4 pages]
    - Personnel and Resources   [2 pages]
    - Plan for Outcome Based Reporting   [4 pages]
    - Management, Collaboration, and Partnership Plan   [2 pages]
- **Additional Attachments**
    - Commitment Letters
        - Title as: "*Letter of Commitment – Organization Name*"
        - Save File as: *LetterofCommitment_OrganizationName*
    - Fiscal Agent Letters, if necessary (i.e. if the grant recipient is unable to accept federal funding
        - Title as: "*Fiscal Agent*" within the header of the document
        - Save File as: *FiscalAgent*
    - Non-Profit Status Letter

- **Research & Related Senior/Key Person Profile** (See *Part V § 5* of the application guide, *Pg. 37*)
    - Attachments
        - Biographical Sketch
        - Current and Pending Support for the Project Director (PD)/Principal Investigator (PI), even if they receive no salary
            - Template: https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/current_pending_0.doc

- **Research & Related Personal Data** (See Part *V § 6* of the application guide, *Pg. 40*)
    - This info is voluntary and not required

- **Research and Related Budget** (See *Part V § 7* of the application guide, *Pg. 42*)
  - Maximum <u>indirect costs</u> (IDC) can be calculated using the methods below and may not exceed 30%. The lesser of the two rates will be utilized for the project.
    - The sum of the institutions negotiated IDC cost rate + the IDC rate charged by a sub-awardee, if any; or
    - 30% of the Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA)

- **Data Management Plan** (See *Part III § 3.1* of the application guide, *Pg. 11*)
  - [Click here](#) for all data management information necessary to fill out this application.
  - [Click here](#) for a Data Management Plan FAQ.

- **Supplemental Information Form** (See *Part VI § 1* of the application guide, *Pg. 54*)
  - Field 2: Enter "*Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) Competitive Grants Program*" and the program code "*AgVet*"
    - Accurate entry is essential, please enter it exactly
  - Field 8: Conflict of Interest List. See *Part VI § 1.8* of the application guide, *Pg. 56*)
    - **Each individual listed in the Senior/Key Person Profile must have a Conflict of Interest form filled out.** Each form must then be combined into one .PDF file.
      - Ex) 4 key persons are identified as project staff. 4 unique Conflict of Interest forms will be filled out, then combined into 1 .PDF file and uploaded.
    - [Find the template here](#).

- **Representations Regarding Felony Conviction and Tax Delinquent Status for Corporate Applicants** (See *Part VI § 2* of the application guide, *Pg. 57*)
  - Must be completed by a corporate applicant.

Evaluation Criteria

NIFA evaluates your proposal in two steps. The first evaluates that your proposal meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. **If your application does not meet the administrative requirements, the application will be immediately disqualified**. In other words, if the application is not filled out the way USDA-NIFA requests or you are missing forms, your application will be cut and not move on to actual evaluation for content.

This first evaluation is why it is incredibly important to follow the formatting rules that USDA-NIFA requests and to triple check your work. The second evaluation is performed by a review panel that utilizes a scientific peer-review process.

Criteria

1) **Partnerships and Collaborations**
   a. Used to determine to what extent your application represents a substantial and effective collaborative network or partnership. Reviewers will determine if your proposal includes partnerships necessary to meet the training and workforce development needs of veterans and if the project makes appropriate use of the expertise and strengths of listed partners

      Partners must also have been involved and played an important (not necessarily large) role in project design and development.

      Finally, projects must employ equitable and appropriate decision making and an oversight process that includes all partners.

2) **Relevancy**
   a. Based on the explanation and relevant documentation that demonstrate that the project is directed toward increasing the numbers of veterans seeking and securing educational, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the food and ag sector.

      Additionally, relevancy is evaluated by describing the necessity of the project based on the needs identified for the target audience, the inclusion of veterans in the conceptualization and development of project activities, and the degree to which the project builds upon past or current work or partnerships examining veteran workforce needs.

      Projects that involve veteran organizations in the planning and implementation process will have a strong case for showing their project is relevant to real interests and needs of veterans.

3) **Technical Merit**
   a. Will be evaluated on the basis of:
      i. Clarity and delineation of objectives, activities, and outcomes
      ii. How adequate the project concept is to meet the needs of the targeted audience, including sustainability and feasibility of the approach (e.g. social, economic, and cultural relevance, distance based vs. face-to-face)
      iii. Innovation and originality of objectives and activities
      iv. Expected performance targets, outcomes and impacts as indicated in the Plan for Outcome Based Reporting
      v. Ability for project to adapt to other locations, communities, and/or agricultural products and technologies
      vi. Sustainability of the project partnerships and collaborations beyond the life of the grant, or a compelling explanation of how the project impact will be lasting if the collaboration itself is not sustained; and
      vii. How reasonable the budget is for planned activities (i.e., whether the budget matches logically with the program described in the narrative)

4) **Achievability**
   a. Based on a review of the probability of the success of the project. This factor includes the appropriate level of originality, target audience and budget for each activity.
   b. The extent to which the applicant identifies potential pitfalls and how they will be addressed is also included, so gap analysis is important.
   c. Include a description of sufficient time commitment for all project directors and co-directors for the stated project activities, including project management.
   d. Plans should be adequate for the management and collaborative arrangements of the proposed projects, e.g;
      i. sufficient time allocated for the systemic attainment of objectives
      ii. clearly defined project roles and relationships among the key participants and collaborators
      iii. plan for decision-making; and
      iv. plan for administration of the proposed project and its maintenance, partnerships, and collaborative efforts

5) **Expertise and Track Record**
   a. Proposal should demonstrate the expertise of the project team. This includes successful multi-year experience in education, outreach, mentoring and/or technical assistance which addresses Veteran workforce concerns, especially as it relates to food and agriculture. The experience can be demonstrated by the following:
      i. numbers of training, assistance, or education activities previously carried out

    ii.   number of participants or graduates of a program or activity that has been offered

    iii. success rates and current occupations of graduates or participants of previously offered programs

    iv. number of years a program or activity was offered

    b. The adequacy of the qualifications of the PD and team to conduct the proposed project activities, and to evaluate project outcomes, must be demonstrated.

6) **Adequacy of Plans for Evaluation, Reporting, Data Management, and Communicating Findings and Results Beyond the Immediate Target Audience**
    a. Based on the expertise and time commitment of the evaluation team members who have agreed to serve, or who have been identified.

7) **Adequacy of Available Support**
    a. Based on the expertise of consultants and collaborators, sufficiency of the educational facilities and equipment for the proposed on-site and/or distance education, and outreach methods.

Prior to fully recommending your project, NIFA reserves the right to negotiate with the PI/PD or the submitting organization or institution regarding revising the project, such as reduction in project scope, funding level, project period, or the particular method of supporting the Veteran population.

After the review process, a copy of the review with the decision to support or reject your proposal will be sent alongside a summary of comments from the review panel.

Award Administration

The date specified 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. The project does not need to be started on that date, but soon enough after to remain practical so that project goals can be attained. All funds granted must be utilized for project activities.

The award notice document will provide instructions and information as to how to collect your granted funds.

Unless specified by statute or award-specific requirements, all awards must follow the NIFA Policy Guide.

Reporting

Output and Reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. If there are any program or award-specific terms, they will be identified in your award.

Grantees will be expected to the provide the following information in REEport, NIFA's reporting system:

1) Non-technical summary; a brief statement of the issue or problem that the project addresses and why the issue is significant.

2) A description of the activity or activities being taken to address the issues, including the number of anticipated and actual beneficiaries (where applicable)

3) A description of the changes in knowledges, behaviors, or conditions that occurred, supported by quantitative and qualitative data.

Changes in Budget or Project Plans

If your program finds the need to make changes to your award, whether that be changing the PI/PD or your project scope, your program must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons:

1) Change in the scope or change of objective of the project or program, even without a budget revision;

2) Change in a key person identified in the application or award;

3) Disengagement from the project for than 3 months, OR a 25% 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) Part 31, Contract Cost Principles and Procedures;

6) Transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs to other categories of expense (§200.75 Participant support costs);

7) Sub-awarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount sub-awards (see §200.332, 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.