

# **Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship (NNF) Grants Program**

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## **2014 Request for Applications**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: September 30, 2014**



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

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

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES NATIONAL NEEDS GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE FELLOWSHIP GRANTS PROGRAM**

**INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE:** This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under 10.210.

**DATES:** Applications must be received by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 30, 2014**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C. of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within 6 months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**STAKEHOLDER INPUT:** The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seeks your comments about this RFA. We will consider the comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: [Policy@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:Policy@nifa.usda.gov). (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the **Food and Agricultural National Needs Fellowship Grants Program RFA**.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** NIFA requests applications for the **Food and Agricultural National Needs Fellowship (NNF) Grants Program** for fiscal year (FY) 2014 to provide traineeship programs to eligible institutions for meeting the national need to develop scientific and professional expertise in the **Food, Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences**, through graduate level training programs. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2014 is approximately \$2.8 million.

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

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## PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

### A. Legislative Authority and Background

Section 7106 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (FCEA) of 2008 (P.L. 110-246) amends the legislative authority for this program contained in section 1417 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) (99 Stat. 1548; 7 U.S.C. 3152) to include the University of the District of Columbia as an eligible applicant.

NIFA administers this Federal assistance grant program specifically designated for graduate degree programs and postgraduate training of the next generation of policy makers, researchers, and educators in the Food and Agricultural Sciences. This program, in collaboration with eligible higher education institutions, is developing intellectual capital to ensure the preeminence of U.S. food and agricultural systems. **This program is subject to federal regulations**

<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=1&SID=ef28f3782ead5c2e2410ef58abec6082&ty=HTML&h=L&r=PART&n=7y15.1.12.2.3> as outlined in administrative provisions that can be found in 7 CFR 3402.

### B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the NNF Grants Program is to provide funding to support students' training and completion of Master's and/or doctoral degree programs in identified national need areas within the **Food, Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences**. Awards made under NNF are specifically intended to support traineeship programs that engage outstanding students to pursue and complete their degrees in areas where there is a national need for the development of scientific and professional expertise in the food and agricultural sciences. NNF awards invest in graduate training and relevant international experiential learning for a cadre of diverse individuals who demonstrate their potential to successfully complete graduate degree programs in disciplines relevant to the mission of the USDA.

For the FY 2014 award cycle, NIFA intends to support graduate Fellowship training grants for both Master's and doctoral levels of study only. **Post-doctoral Fellowships will not be awarded** under this grant announcement. Those interested in pre-doctoral and post-doctoral Fellowships for **individuals** should visit the website for the AFRI NIFA Fellowships Grant Program at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/fellowshipsgrantprogramafri.cfm>

**Applications are being solicited for the Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grants Program under the following areas:**

**(1) Graduate Fellowships to support the training for and completion of Master's and doctoral degree programs in the Food, Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences, and;**

**(2) Special International Study or Thesis/Dissertation Research Travel Allowances (IRTA) for eligible Master's and doctoral USDA Fellows or current applicants.**

Working collaboratively with eligible institutions, the objectives of the FY 2014 NNF program are:

- (1) To support the training of students at the Master's and doctoral levels, in order to fill nationally identified expertise shortage areas in the food and agricultural sciences.
- (2) To increase the number, quality and diversity of students in the food, agricultural and related sciences by recruiting outstanding students, particularly those from traditionally underrepresented groups to enter and complete graduate training in these areas.
- (3) To ensure that the National Needs Fellows build science competencies through actual research and extension activities and experience and engagement in an international setting within the Targeted Expertise Shortage Area (TESA) in food and agricultural sciences through the IRTA awards.

The Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant Program contributes to the development of a strong food and agricultural sciences workforce, which is needed to keep this Nation's competitiveness, through the research and academic training of graduate students.

The importance of this workforce development cannot be overemphasized, and is the focus of many education programs addressing various academic levels from P-20. In 2009, a report by the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences entitled "*A New Biology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Ensuring the United States Leads the Coming Revolution*," recognized that the most effective leveraging of investments would come from a coordinated, interagency effort to encourage the emergence of a New Biology to address broad and challenging societal problems. The four societal challenges identified are: (1) *Generate food plants to adapt and grow sustainably in changing environments*; (2) *Understand and sustain ecosystem function and biodiversity in the face of rapid change*; (3) *Expand sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels*; and (4) *Understand individual health*.

In response to and building upon these societal challenges, USDA/NIFA has refocused its mission to direct food and agricultural sciences research, education, and extension programs on addressing the following five *Challenge Areas*:

- 1. Food Security**
- 2. Climate Change**
- 3. Sustainable Bioenergy**
- 4. Childhood Obesity**
- 5. Food Safety**

The NNF grant program responds to the need for expanding the intellectual capital of the food and agricultural sciences workforce in areas relevant to USDA priorities identified by the Secretary: (i) Promotion of a safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply for all Americans and for people around the world; (ii) Sustainable agricultural policies that foster economic viability for

small and mid-sized farms and rural businesses, protect natural resources, and promote value-added agriculture; (iii) National leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation; (iv) Building a modern workplace with a modern workforce; and (v) Support for 21<sup>st</sup> century rural communities. For more information see <http://www.usda.gov/documents/VilsackLetter.pdf>.

NNF projects will give grantees the ability to address complex issues, including food security and hunger, nutrition and obesity, renewable energy, climate change, and food safety. The NNF grants program is an opportunity to give attention to the recommendations and influence future innovations and innovators integral to the food and agricultural systems domain.

In preparing applications in response to this FY 2014 NNF RFA, applicants are strongly encouraged to look into these publications and use them as a guide for developing approaches and strategies in the training of students, set their program goals and objectives, and identify their measurable outcomes. In addition, proposed projects should include evidence-based practices and interventions shown to improve both technical and soft skills of the students in order to better prepare them for the workforce.

### **C. Program Area Description**

NNF grants will support Master's and doctoral levels of study with NNF and/or IRTA awards for eligible USDA Fellows and current applicants.

NNF supports NIFA's goal to increase human resource diversity in the agricultural enterprise by providing funds for eligible full-time students pursuing graduate studies at the Master's and doctoral levels within the **Food, Agricultural, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences** disciplines identified as national needs or expertise shortage areas. The IRTA component also supports NIFA's goal by allowing students to have additional training through experiential learning or research opportunities and travel awards that are expected to expand the competencies and skills of USDA Fellows and eventually lead to their completion of advanced degrees in the food and agriculture sciences. IRTA grants are provided to recipients who must be current National Needs Fellows, or those proposed under current applications to allow them to conduct thesis/dissertation research or undertake studies outside the United States.

#### **1. Student Eligibility**

a) Eligibility for NNF – The grantee institutions develop the selection criteria and it is their responsibility to award fellowships to high caliber students in good academic standing. Only individuals who meet the eligibility requirements listed below will be awarded fellowships. In order for individuals to receive Fellowship stipend support they must:

- i. Be citizens or nationals of the United States of America.
- ii. Have strong interest as judged by the institution, in pursuing a degree in a national TESA, are preparing for a career as a food or agricultural or natural resources scientist or professional, are registered as full-time students; and

- iii. Not have:
  - a) Completed more than one semester or equivalent hours of full-time study as defined by the institution, or
  - b) Been enrolled previously in the academic program at the same degree level.

b) Eligibility for IRTA – At the time of travel under the IRTA grant award, USDA Fellows conducting research at alternate locations or outside the United States must:

- i. Be supported under a USDA NNF grant and be registered as a full-time student;
- ii. Have completed one academic year of full-time study, as defined by the institution under the fellowship appointment;
- iii. Have formalized arrangements to study and/or conduct research in the foreign/alternate location(s) (see Part IV, B, 3, (b));
- iv. Have sufficient time remaining in their fellowship award to complete the proposed IRTA travel or research; and
- v. Have a completed NIFA Form 2010 – Fellowship Appointment Form on file with the funding agency (NIFA).

## **2. FY 2014 Targeted Expertise Shortage Areas (TESA)**

Applicants should propose training projects at the Master's and/or doctoral levels to support graduate fellowship stipends for NNF and/or IRTA in ONE of the following **TESAs**:

**(a) Animal and Plant Production**

**(b) Forest Resources**

**(c) Agricultural Educators and Communicators**

**(d) Agricultural Management and Economics**

**(e) Food Science, Human Nutrition and Human Sciences**

**(f) Sciences for Agricultural Biosecurity**

**(g) Integrative Biosciences for Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems** – (integrative training in food and agricultural, social and economic disciplines).

Institutions that have not previously applied are especially encouraged to do so. (See eligibility information in Part III of this RFA). **Applicants should be institutions that confer a graduate**

**degree in at least one of the TESAs listed above.** Awards are made to eligible colleges and universities. **Individuals are not eligible to apply for these grants to support their graduate education.**

**Successful applications must select and identify Fellows and award Fellowships within eighteen (18) months of the effective date of a grant.** Institutions that fail to meet this deadline will be required to refund monies associated with unawarded Fellowships to NIFA. Graduate fellowship appointments must be awarded only to registered students who are pursuing full-time study in graduate programs in the TESA and at the degree level supported by the grant.

Applicants may not request partial fellowships. A USDA Fellow at the Master's degree level who maintains satisfactory progress is eligible to receive grant support for a maximum of twenty-four (24) months during a thirty (30) month period. A USDA Fellow at the doctoral degree level who maintains satisfactory progress is eligible to receive grant support for a maximum of thirty-six (36) months within a forty-two (42) month period.

It is the intent of this program that Graduate Fellows pursue full-time uninterrupted study or thesis/dissertation research, including time spent pursuing USDA-funded special international study or thesis/dissertation research activities. Graduate Fellows in academic institutions are not entitled to regular annual leave but are entitled to the normal student holidays observed by the institution. The time between academic semesters or quarters is to be utilized as an active part of the grant period. During the period of support, USDA Graduate Fellows, at the discretion of their institutions, may accept additional supplemental employment that would positively contribute to their training or research and would make them eligible for tuition waivers (e.g., full or partial tuition waivers with research or teaching assignments).

A Graduate Fellow who finds it necessary to interrupt his/her program of study because of health, personal, or other reasonable non-academic and non-disciplinary cause(s) must be allowed to resume funded study at any time within 6 months of the interruption, **provided there is adequate time remaining** before the award expires (i.e. within the 30-month total funding period for a Master's Fellow, and 42-month total funding period for a Doctoral Fellow). A Graduate Fellow who finds it necessary to interrupt his/her program of study more than one time cannot exceed 6 total months of cumulative leave without forfeiting NNF eligibility.

### **3. Funding preference**

Funding preference will be given to applications that propose to:

(a) Establish innovative and evidence-based frameworks for graduate training with collaborative research and technology transfer components that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries in agriculture (NOTE: innovative means new or unique or creative approaches to training students in order for them to develop not only core competencies or skills, but also excel in their abilities and expertise to join the scientific workforce and meet the needs identified in the TESA);

(b) Establish Master's degree programs where Fellows can pursue related summer research opportunities (especially at other colleges/universities, industry or federal agencies); or establish doctoral programs with teaching and/or extension opportunities in related topics;

(c) Establish multidisciplinary graduate training programs in areas of: bio-security; food, agricultural and environmental sustainability, including renewable energy; human nutrition and obesity;

(d) Increase the multicultural (economic, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, geographical, gender, traditionally underserved populations) diversity of the nation's scientific and professional expertise in the food and agricultural sciences;

(e) Partner with teaching/research/extension or across colleges/institutions or public/private sectors in order to provide exceptional graduate training in the food and agricultural sciences to develop human capital while meeting the mission of the USDA;

(f) Provide relevant leadership, teaching, research, extension, management and international learning experiences for graduate training in such a way as to demonstrate the potential for USDA Fellows to effectively communicate, in any audience, and become emerging knowledge experts in food and agricultural science disciplines; and

(g) Develop performance measures for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the graduate training that USDA National Needs Fellows receive, the development of expertise in the TESAs listed above, the proficiency with which they pipeline to associated areas of the workforce or further related training; and the conveyance of identified core competencies for: (i) subject matter and related disciplines; (ii) skilled communication; and (iii) aptitude to be effective in a globally-oriented and technologically-driven world economy.

**The anticipated start date for successful applications under this RFA is January 15, 2015 and the duration is 60 months.**

Applicants are required to provide a 5-year budget with a zero dollar budget for any year where support is not allocated (i.e., recruitment activities are only sponsored activities that year). Applicants should factor into their application a recruitment interval to meet the program requirements. **Due to statutory restrictions, no extensions beyond the 5-year period are allowed.** Any eligible institution may, however, apply for a new award with a different scope of work in any fiscal year(s) in which appropriated funds are available for this program. The title of the application should be different from the program code name. The program code name is National Needs Graduate Fellowship Program.

**NNF** encourages projects that develop content and programs suitable for delivery through the Cooperative Extension System's eXtension Initiative. You may use funds to contribute to existing Communities of Practice (CoP) or to form a new CoP focused on **postsecondary education**. Projects must align with the eXtension vision, mission, and values. You must have a letter of acknowledgement from eXtension; you may also need a letter of support from one or more of the Communities of Practice. For detailed guidance on how to partner with eXtension, go to <http://create.extension.org/node/2057>.

## **PART II—AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Available Funding**

The amount available for NIFA support of this program in FY **2014** is approximately **\$2.8 million**. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method\\_of\\_payment.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html).

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

In FY 2014 you may submit applications to the **NNF** Program as one of the following types of requests:

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

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

### **C. Project Types**

A single application may propose funding under any single TESA for any of the Award Categories listed below, either singly or in any combination, **up to a maximum of \$262,500 per application**. Applicants may not request partial fellowships.

**Award Category No. 1 -- Master's Level Training**: Funding at \$41,000 for each Fellow. This consists of a student stipend of \$18,500 per year for two years, plus \$2,000 per year cost-of-education allowance.

**Award Category No. 2 -- Doctoral Level Training**: Funding at \$79,500 for each Fellow. This consists of a student stipend of \$24,500 per year for three years, plus \$2,000 per year cost-of-education allowance.

**Award Category No. 3 -- Special International Study or Thesis/Dissertation Research Travel Allowances (IRTA):** One-time award of \$4,500 for an eligible USDA National Needs Master's Fellow and/or one-time award \$8,000 for an eligible USDA National Needs Doctoral Fellow.

There is no limit to the number of applications an eligible institution may submit; however, **an institution may only receive support up to a maximum of \$525,000 in awards.** This support may be provided through multiple grant awards.

Each application may request any combination of Award Category No. 1 (Master's), Award Category No. 2 (doctoral) or Award Category No. 3 (IRTA) funds, not to exceed \$262,500. A separate application must be submitted for each Targeted Expertise Shortage Area (see Part I, C. 2.) for which support is requested. NIFA reserves the right to fund fewer Fellows than requested in an application, and to partially fund IRTA requests.

Project Directors with an active NNF award from a previous year may submit application(s) requesting funds to support IRTA(s) ONLY for current, eligible National Needs Fellow(s). Such Award Category No. 3 (IRTA) applications must be clearly identified as requesting support ONLY for current, eligible National Needs Fellow(s) and will be evaluated as described in Part V, B. 2.

#### **D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research**

The responsible and ethical conduct of research (RCR) is critical for excellence, as well as public trust, in science and engineering. Consequently, we consider education in RCR essential to the preparation of future scientists. In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 7 CFR Part 3022, 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. Per award terms and conditions, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

Note that the training referred to herein shall be either on-campus or off-campus training. The general content of the ethics training will, at a minimum, emphasize three key areas of research ethics: authorship and plagiarism, data and research integration, and reporting misconduct. Each institution will be responsible for developing its own training system, as schools will need flexibility to develop training tailored to their specific student needs. Grantees should consider the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program for RCR (<https://www.citiprogram.org/rcrpage.asp>). Typically this RCR education addresses the topics of: Data Acquisition and Management - collection, accuracy, security, access; Authorship and Publication; Peer Review; Mentor/Trainee Responsibilities; Collaboration; Conflict of Interest; Research Misconduct; Human Subject Research; and Use of Animals in Research.

## **PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION**

### **A. Eligible Applicants**

Pursuant to section 1417 of the NARETPA of 1977 (99 Stat. 1548; 7 U.S.C. 3152), and administrative provisions that can be found in 7 CFR 3402 applications may be submitted by:

- (1) Land-grant institutions including the University of the District of Columbia;
- (2) Colleges and universities having significant minority enrollments and a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food and agricultural sciences; and
- (3) Other colleges and universities having a demonstrable capacity to carry out the teaching of food, and agricultural sciences.

Research foundations maintained by an eligible college or university are eligible to submit graduate training proposals under this RFA. **Applicants should be institutions that confer a graduate degree in at least one of the TESAs.** Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an 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**

There are no matching requirements and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

## **PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **A. Electronic Application Package**

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

#### **New Users of Grants.gov**

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

#### **Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials**

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/adobe-reader-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.
2. To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>. Under Step 1 click on “Download a Grant Application Package,” and enter the funding opportunity number **USDA-NIFA-HEP-004635** in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

**If you require assistance to access the application package** (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on

the Grants.gov website (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-resources.html>). Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support

800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).

Email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov)

Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. ET). Get help now!

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

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

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

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

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

**Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III section 3. of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. 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).**

**Grants.gov provides online tools to assist if you do not own PDF-generating software. You will find PDF conversion software at <http://test.grants.gov/web/grants/support/technical-support/software/pdf-conversion-software.html>.**

**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. ET, excluding federal holidays.

### **1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

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

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

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

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

**a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.** The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of NNF. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

**IMPORTANT** – All summaries/abstracts must contain the following information at the top of the page:

- (1) List the proposal title;
- (2) List the names of Project Director(s) and institution(s);
- (3) Identify the single Targeted Expertise Shortage Area (TESA) being addressed (see following) – **applicants must select only ONE TESA per application;**
- (4) Identify the major academic program or discipline being addressed (see following) – applicants may indicate a single or multiple discipline code(s);
- (5) Clearly indicate the number of Fellows and degree level(s) to be supported under the application; and
- (6) Clearly indicate the number and degree level of IRTAs to be supported.

In addition to the above, the rest of the *Project Summary* should:

- (1) Be concise and precise at no more than 250 words;
- (2) Provide a clear description of the type of project proposed (fellowships and/or IRTA), succinctly providing information about its major features and a specific description of the activities to be undertaken;
- (3) Identify the Farm Bill Priority Area(s) targeted by the project. Choose from:
  - a. Plant Health and Plant Production;
  - b. Animal Health and Animal Production;
  - c. Renewable Bioenergy, Natural Resources, and Environment;
  - d. Food Safety, Nutrition, and Health;
  - e. Agriculture Systems and Technology;
  - f. Agriculture Economics and Rural Communities
- (4) State the overall project **goal(s)** and supporting measurable **objectives**;
- (5) Give a concise **overview** of plans for training project to accomplish project goal(s) for national targeted expertise shortage area, include measurable targets, in specified timeline, to meet proposed objectives;

- (6) State the **relevance** of the project to the NNF program goals, and the USDA Strategic Goals and Objectives [http://www.NIFA.usda.gov/about/strat\\_plan.html](http://www.NIFA.usda.gov/about/strat_plan.html); and
- (7) State the anticipated, measurable **national impact(s)** on the Targeted Expertise Shortage Areas (TESAs).

The importance of a concise, informative *Project Summary* cannot be overemphasized. If the *Project Summary* does not include the information above or does not specifically address the relevance, merit, and broader impacts on the USDA Fellows' program for meeting the TESAs, the application may be rejected.

<b>Targeted Expertise Shortage Area (TESA) FY 2014 Funding Cycle</b>
<b>Animal and Plant Production</b>
<b>Forest Resources</b>
<b>Agricultural Educators and Communicators</b>
<b>Agricultural Management and Economics</b>
<b>Food Science, Human Sciences, and Human Nutrition</b>
<b>Sciences for Agricultural Biosecurity</b>
<b>Integrative Biosciences for Sustainable Food and Agricultural Systems</b> – (integrative training in food and agricultural, social and economic disciplines)

<b>Relevant Disciplines for the FY 2014 Funding Cycle</b>	<b>Code</b>
Animal Science	A
Biotechnology, Biochemistry and Microbiology	B
Plant Sciences and Horticulture (includes Turf Grass/Weed Science/Plant Breeding)	P
Conservation and Renewable Natural Resources (including Forestry, Air Quality, Sustainable Agriculture, Climatology/Climate Change or Biofuels)	C
Environmental Sciences/Management (includes Economics, Decision Management and Biometry)	L
Soil Sciences (includes Soil Quality; Processes)	D
Water Sciences/Resources (includes Water Quality)	W
Agricultural/Biological Engineering (includes Rangeland, Urban/Rural Technology)	E
Agricultural Marketing and Management (includes Agricultural Economics)	M
Food Science/Technology/Manufacturing/Safety	F
Human Nutrition (includes obesity and relevant to USDA Strategic Goals)	N
International Agriculture (includes Disciplines Related to Global Food and Agricultural Systems and Competitiveness)	I
Agricultural Social Sciences (includes Rural Sociology)	S
Veterinary Medicine (graduate degree training)	V
Interdisciplinary, Sustainable Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Social Sciences and Economics Graduate Degree Programs	G
Agricultural Biosecurity	X

## **b. Field 8. Project Narrative.**

NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed **15** pages of written text and up to **5** additional pages for figures and tables. Formatting shall be **one inch margins, no smaller than 12 point font (Times New Roman or similar), and double-spaced**. We have established this maximum (**20** pages) to ensure fair and equitable competition. Appendices, as well as web links and search suggestions included in the narrative, should not be used to circumvent the page limit. Reviewers are instructed **not** to review appended materials in excess of this limit.

**The *Project Narrative* must include and be organized into the four sections identified.** A description of the information that must be included in each section is outlined below.

### **Section 1:**

#### **Institutional Data and Profile**

(1) Discuss the quality of education for all students in the graduate program, describe aligned data, accountability and knowledge management to support graduate training program development for improvement in practice, policy, and strategy to increase achievement, graduation and post-graduation success in the targeted expertise shortage areas. Provide supporting data with numbers, demographics, and results from Program Quality Review(s). Describe curriculum and instructional approaches, the availability of research training opportunities, and strategies or activities for developing the leadership, management, critical thinking and problem-solving skills of students or unique mentoring experiences that may assist in preparing students for placement following graduation. **Where the applicant is a past recipient of an NNF award, information is required about progress and outcomes from prior funding, including impacts on workforce expertise. Failure to provide this information about prior NNF awards will result in the application not being reviewed.**

(2) Present evidence that the overall academic program has an established record that recognizes and addresses current trends and future needs, and prepares students for the national targeted expertise shortage area of the application and successful careers in the food and agricultural sciences professional and scientific workplaces; (Education Reporting Logic Model is a resource: [http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/nnf/pdf/education\\_logic\\_model.pdf](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/nnf/pdf/education_logic_model.pdf)).

(3) Discuss current or planned programs at the institution designed to engage outstanding graduate students, especially from traditionally underrepresented groups, to pursue and complete further graduate/professional studies to pipeline into the workforce, filling areas of management and leadership in food and agricultural sciences disciplines and how these programs will be synergistic or augment the current application.

(4) Substantiate clearly, with data indicating prior graduate training success in the TESA, the quality of graduate training and/or international experiential learning available through the institution's graduate teaching, research and experiential program(s) in the food and agricultural sciences in the discipline(s) for which Fellows are being recruited.

(5) Supportive information should also include the following institutional data and may be presented in table format:

- (a) Student enrollment, retention and graduation rates by gender, racial groups, socio-economic groups, and ethnic groups for the past five years;
- (b) Mean standardized college entrance exam scores of students from traditionally underrepresented groups and of other students admitted to the institution(s) for the past five years;
- (c) Placement of graduates during the past five years; and
- (d) Enrollment, graduation rates and placement of students from traditionally underserved groups and first generation college students and/or past Fellows.

(6) Demonstrate the likelihood that the proposed program of graduate study will result in the development of outstanding graduates with effective leadership and communication skills and the technical and functional competence to meet the future needs of a globally interconnected, technologically advanced, rapidly diversifying and stakeholder-driven food and agricultural industry.

(7) If funds requested in this application fall under Award Category 3 (International Research and/or Thesis/Dissertation Allowance) are requested, please include the information below:

- (a) When applying for an IRTA award for a **Current Eligible USDA National Needs Fellow** (or multiple Current Fellows) the *Project Narrative* should include all of the following:
  - i. The anticipated, specific destination(s) and duration of the travel;
  - ii. Information about the objectives, timeline, expected outcomes and deliverables from the participating, eligible USDA Fellow(s);
  - iii. The specific study or thesis/dissertation research activities (specific tasks) in which USDA Fellows will be engaged;
  - iv. The NIFA award number which supports the Fellowship activities of the student;
  - v. Explanation about how the experience will contribute to the USDA Fellow's program of study;
  - vi. A budget narrative specifying and justifying the dollar amount requested for the travel;
  - vii. The contact personnel where Fellowship and/or IRTA activity will be undertaken; include the summary credentials of both the U.S. and international faculty or other professionals with whom the USDA Fellow will be working during the international experience and the nature of support to be provided to insure success of the Fellow's experience;
  - viii. A letter from the dean of the USDA Fellow's college or equivalent administrative unit supporting the USDA Fellow's travel request and certifying that the travel experience will not jeopardize the USDA Fellow's satisfactory progress toward degree completion;

- ix. A letter from the fellowship’s grant project director certifying the USDA Fellow’s eligibility, the accuracy of the USDA Fellow’s travel request, and the relevance of the travel to the USDA Fellow’s advanced degree objectives;
  - x. The criteria that will be used to evaluate success of the Fellowship and/or IRTA; and
  - xi. A copy of an updated NIFA Form 2010 – Fellowship Appointment Form for any current USDA Fellow participating in the proposed Fellowships and/or IRTA opportunity should be attached to Field 12 (see Part VI, D).
- (b) Should the proposed IRTA be for **To-Be-Recruited USDA National Needs Fellows**, the Project Director should provide in the narrative the following information:
- i. A brief description of example projects the proposed Fellows would be encouraged to undertake;
  - ii. Anticipated objectives relating how the proposed IRTAs will contribute to the program of study; and
  - iii. At least 90 days prior to travel, the specific documents for the IRTA outlined in section (a) above for Current USDA National Needs Fellows (Part IV, B, 3(b), 1(7), (a), i-xi).

## **Section 2: Proposed activities**

Describe in detail the proposed activities and strategies that will be employed to carry out the following:

### (1) Recruitment and selection of Fellows

- a) Describe the plans for the recruitment of outstanding Fellows, **especially from traditionally underrepresented groups**, including a brief justification for focusing recruitment efforts on any particular group(s), and if recruiting from specific colleges and universities include institutional letters of support from targeted institutions; the rationale for using proposed strategies and procedures should be provided.
- b) Discuss the strategies and procedures for **recruiting and selecting** students committed to the TESA as participants in the Fellowship program, including selection criteria for choosing outstanding Fellows who are considered likely to pursue degrees in national targeted expertise shortage areas.

### (2) Academic advising, research training, professional counseling, mentoring, pipelining

- a) Describe the organization and philosophy of the proposed graduate training program relative to the TESA, identify the core competencies that each Fellow will be expected to attain; and how these will be evaluated as part of the Fellowship outcome measures.
- a) Describe plans and procedures for assessing, monitoring, counseling, guiding, and sustaining Fellows’ continued commitment and progress toward securing an education with the core competencies to be attained in preparation for a career that meets the need of national targeted expertise shortage areas.

- b) Describe the nature of **professional mentoring** to be provided to Fellows and the subsequent follow up on their graduation and further training or entry into the workforce; identify the specific type(s) of workforce positions the NNF Fellows are being trained for.
- c) Provide evidence based on research, published materials and common practices that the proposed strategies above are effective.

(3) Experiential learning: hands-on research, extension, teaching and other activities

- a) Discuss the plans that will allow the Fellows to be engaged in experiential learning such as hands-on research, teaching practicum, extension experience and other learning activities (written and oral communication skills, leadership training, service learning) that will enhance the academic experience of the fellows. Develop activities that are feasible, effective (based on studies or common practices), and realistic based on the resources available at the institution(s).
- b) Describe plans for mentorship and scholarship during the experiential learning opportunity.
- c) Identify the goals of the experiential learning opportunity and their relevance to the TESA and overall objectives of the training project.

(4) Measuring performance outcomes

Using the mean of two years prior to project start as the baseline data, and demonstrating how the training project will help increase the number and/or percentage of students graduating with Master's or doctoral degrees in Food and Agricultural Sciences versus the normal outcome without a grant award. Include:

- a) Plans for achieving a **completion rate of greater than the institutional average** for the specific graduate program of study. Completion rate is computed as number of Fellows graduated divided by number of Fellows recruited, expressed as a percentage;
- b) Description of the institution's mentoring and other support services and how they **promote and achieve successful** multicultural and/or first-generation college graduate student retention through graduation and pipelining to further graduate training or the workforce; and
- c) Plans and procedures to **measure and report** performance outcomes and impacts; describe ongoing evaluation of the graduate training project implementation and effectiveness, measuring program outcomes and impacts (e.g., technical competence; scholarly contributions), pipelining, and tracking Fellows' accomplishments up to five (5) years after graduation. Provide details of how the proposed graduate training will lead to achieving the goals of the NNF grants program. The applicant should project a goal for tracking (e.g. expressed as a less than 10 percent "unable-to-contact" rate during the 36-month post-graduation follow-up phase). As an example, the Unable-to-Track Rate is computed as the number of "unable-to-contact" graduated USDA Fellows divided by the number of graduated Fellows, expressed as a percentage. An escalating unable-to-contact rate is of considerable concern.

The project evaluation should describe a plan for assessment of outcomes and impacts for the TESA that includes: entry of Fellow(s) into a specific TESA; assessment if the training is well-tailored for the Fellow and should lead to expected outcomes, as well as meeting the needs of the TESA; determination of measurable change due to the training; and the accrued changes in the TESA due to the training program proposed. Describe the strategy or approach that will be used to evaluate project implementation and how success will be measured. Include a discussion of how evaluation findings would be used to modify and improve future opportunities for Fellows.

(5) Dissemination of results and/or impacts

Wide dissemination of results and/or impacts of the graduate training program including student achievements, should be provided to NIFA and other interested parties including the general citizenry. Make clear what specific avenues will be used and identify the expected impacts. Include plans for:

- a) Output and outcomes reporting, including impacts of experiential learning activities, of fellowship recipients; and
- b) Disseminating project outcomes, impacts and achievements and relevance to meeting the program purpose and goals of the funding agency to a wide audience. Indicate in plan how dissemination of project outcomes will be broadened.

**Section 3: Institutional resources, support, and commitment**

Substantiate clearly, with supporting documentation, that:

(1) Processes, facilities and equipment, instructional, professional mentoring, and research support resources and other attributes (e.g., professional ranking of department, other funding sources, and NIFA program evaluation) are excellent for providing outstanding teaching, research and/or extension at the forefront of science and technology related to the chosen discipline for the TESA(s).

(2) Fellowship recipients will be provided with curricula and experiential learning opportunities, including travel activities that are relevant to their course of study to prepare graduates to gain expertise and meet the national need.

(3) Demonstrate institutional commitment to supporting the Fellows' education and research over and beyond the funds provided by USDA. Such support beyond the USDA funding should be documented with signed letters of support.

(4) Describe support to matriculate knowledge experts and indicate plans to challenge the NNF Fellows in problem-solving and critical thinking in a broader context beyond TESA.

#### **Section 4: Other supporting information**

Identify practices and innovations in training and learning that have shown substantial achievement gains in knowledge, skills and competencies in the targeted expertise shortage area. Describe any **innovative** and special features of the proposed project that will be available to USDA Fellows, or required as a part of their degree programs. Such features may include:

(1) Developing intellectual capital – increase in knowledge and skills – for advancement in higher education, development of a creative and innovative workforce, and informed participation in civic life. Specifically identify experiences and expected qualitative and quantitative outcomes from Fellows.

(2) Including holistic concepts and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines to address sciences (environmental, social and economic) for sustainability and increase USDA mission science content in cyberlearning materials - based on how students learn - with deeper study of statistics, data analysis to ensure rigorous learning to advance STEM achievement of K-12 students. Specifically identify experiences and expected qualitative and quantitative outcomes from Fellows.

(3) Providing intentional leadership, management and communication experiences for the Fellows that enhance the skills of the emerging professional to contribute to areas of national targeted expertise shortage in the food and agricultural sciences and advance America's competitiveness. Specifically identify experiences and expected qualitative and quantitative outcomes from Fellows.

(4) Describing the wider array of resources (such as private-sector companies; K-12 educational system; consulting firms; universities) that will be leveraged to increase educational assets and expand Fellows' professional development and intellectual capacity to impact the TESA as creative and innovative thinkers. Specifically identify experiences and expected qualitative and quantitative outcomes from Fellows.

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

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

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

#### **6. R&R Budget**

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This form (accompanied by the required Budget Justification

attachment) contains the itemized listing and description of your project's budget. Complete all applicable fields and:

- (a) Submit one R&R Budget Form for each 12-month period, plus a cumulative budget and narrative for the entire project detailing the requested total support for the overall project period. **Applicants are required to provide a 5-year budget with a zero dollar budget for any year where support is not allocated.** Planning will allow efficient recruitment and appointment of Graduate Fellows within the stipulated 18-month interval. Due to statutory restriction no extensions beyond the 5-year period are allowed.
- (b) On the R&R Budget Form, under Field E (Participant/Trainee Support Costs), enter the amount of funds to be allocated to stipends on Line 2 "Stipends." The cost-of-education allowance (CoE) funds should be entered on Line 5 "Other." The IRTA, if applicable, should be entered on Line 3 "Travel." Costs in other sections of the budget, including PD salaries in Field A, items in Field F "Other Direct Costs," or Field H "Indirect Costs" are not allowed.
- (c) All costs listed in the form should be fully explained and justified in the **Budget Justification**. Attach this as a PDF document in Field K.

Cost of Education Allowance. In lieu of indirect costs, institutions receive a \$2,000 per year cost-of-education (CoE) allowance for each Fellow supported by a Master's or Doctoral award. **The Project Director is required to use part of this allowance to attend at least one NIFA-sponsored Project Directors' Conference held during the life of the grant.** In addition, institutions may use the CoE to defray program-related expenses including, but not limited to, program evaluation, program personnel salaries, student retention and mentoring programs, Fellows travel to attend professional meetings, publications fees, laboratory fees, and educational expenses (e.g., university fees, books and supplies). An institution may elect to apply the cost-of-education institutional allowance to a Fellow's tuition and fees; however, such is not required.

### **7. Supplemental Information Form**

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

- a. **Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "National Needs Graduate Fellowship Program") and the program code (i.e., enter "KK").
- b. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

### **C. Submission Dates and Times**

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

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 30, 2014.** Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

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

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

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

#### **D. Funding Restrictions**

**No indirect costs allowed.** NIFA provides the \$2,000 per year per Fellow cost-of-education allowance in lieu of indirect costs.

Fellows are not allowed to accept direct support from any other federal agency during their tenure as a USDA National Needs Fellow.

NNF stipend funds for fellowships must be used to: (1) support the same Fellow at the Master's degree level who maintains satisfactory progress and is eligible to receive grant support for a **maximum of twenty-four (24) months** during a thirty-month period, and/or (2) support the same Fellow at the doctoral degree level who maintains satisfactory progress and is eligible to receive grant support for a **maximum of thirty-six (36) months** within a forty-two-month period. Institutions must use a stipend amount of \$18,500 per year for Master's Fellows and \$24,500 per year for Doctoral Fellows.

If funds remain as a result of USDA Fellows completing their studies early (less than twenty-four months for a Master's degree or less than thirty-six months for a doctoral degree) or Fellowships being terminated prematurely, such funds may be used, within the time remaining on the award, to support: (1) pursuit of a doctoral degree in a TESA in the food and agricultural sciences by a Master's degree level Fellow at the grantee institution, or (2) a Replacement Fellow. The tenure of such a Replacement Fellow is limited to whatever time is remaining on the grant before it expires; an institution may not appoint a Replacement Fellow unless there is time for the student to complete at least one semester/quarter of study before the expiration date of the grant.

Replacement Fellows must meet all of the eligibility criteria and other requirements established for Fellow selection and are subject to the same provisions as other Fellows during their tenure in the program. Replacement Fellows are entitled, during their tenure, to the same benefits that other Fellows receive from the grant award and National Needs Graduate and Postdoctoral

Fellowship Grants Program. Institutions may, but are not required to, continue a Replacement Fellow's tuition and other benefits beyond the expiration date of the grant using institutional or other funds.

Remaining funds cannot be used to increase annual Fellowship stipends provided to existing Fellows. If less than one semester/quarter remains on the award, the grantee must refund unexpended monies to NIFA.

Should a USDA Fellow require additional time beyond the grant period to complete his or her degree, it is expected that the grantee will consider alternatives to continue supporting the Fellow through other means.

Tuition and fees are the responsibility of the Fellow unless an institution elects to use its cost-of-education institutional allowance for this purpose or elects to pay such costs out of non-USDA monies. No dependency allowances are provided to any USDA Graduate Fellows. Stipend payments and special international study or thesis/dissertation research travel allowances may be made to Fellows by the institution, in accordance with standard institutional procedures for graduate fellowships and assistantships.

IRTA funds for To-Be-Recruited fellows will be withheld until the Project Director has submitted to the NIFA Program Office all of the required documentation outlined previously in this RFA. The information must be submitted for approval no less than 90 days prior to the use of the IRTA funds (see Part IV, B, 3, b, Section 1). **This requirement will become a condition of the award.**

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

We select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers 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; (d) the need to include as reviewers 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; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

### **B. Evaluation Criteria**

The review criteria in Section 1 below will be used in reviewing applications for Master's and Doctoral traineeship projects (Category 1 and/or Category 2 projects with or without IRTA) to determine the intrinsic merit and alignment of proposed projects to the purpose, priorities and objectives of the NNF grants program. The criteria in Section 2 below will be used when project directors with a current NNF award submit application(s) requesting funds **ONLY** to support IRTA(s) for current, eligible National Needs Fellow(s).

#### **Section 1: Applications for Graduate Training (Category 1 and/or Category 2)**

The review criteria and point values listed below will be used in reviewing all applications submitted in response to this RFA, **except** those requesting funds only for IRTA awards for current USDA Fellows:

##### **(a) Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education (25 Points)**

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the proposed program of graduate study (training) will result in the development of outstanding graduates to meet the future needs of a globally interconnected, technologically advanced, rapidly diversifying and consumer driven food and agricultural or forestry industry. Elements include: quality (demonstrated track record or plan with high probability for successful completion) of the chosen academic training program to prepare experts in the national targeted expertise shortage area, current and future demand for

knowledgeable, multicultural graduates in chosen discipline(s), strength of the curriculum, instructional approaches, identification of the technical core and functional competencies that each Fellow will be expected to attain, strategies for developing critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills, and prior success in or potential for graduating Fellows to meet the purpose and goals of the NNF grant program.

**(b) Proposed Approach (30 Points)**

**(i) Recruitment and selection:** The applicant's strategies, procedures and established relationships for successfully identifying and recruiting outstanding student beneficiaries who are committed to careers in food and agricultural sciences, and forest resources as appropriate, and for pipelining into further graduate training or professions to increase the multicultural diversity of the workforce in the TESA.

**(ii) Academic advising, professional mentoring, and student support services:** The applicant's plans and procedures for assessing, monitoring, guiding, and sustaining a Fellow's continued commitment, and securing successful progress toward an education in preparation for a career in the TESA, and for providing appropriate career counseling, mentoring, support services, and persistence of Fellows to further professional opportunities are supported by evidence-based studies, publications, or practices.

**(iii) Program evaluation and dissemination:** The adequacy and reasonableness of the applicant's plans, as reflected in the proposal, for (1) evaluating project management; (2) determining overall effectiveness of the graduate training in areas of national targeted expertise shortage to prepare Fellows for careers as food and agricultural scientists or professionals; (3) tracking Fellows' accomplishments after graduation; (4) measuring performance outcomes that evaluate how the training project increases the number and/or percentage of students graduating, above the numbers that would result without the grant measure impacts at both the funded project level and this NNF funding opportunity at the program level; and (5) disseminating project outcomes and achievements to a wide audience of educators and policy makers, in order to expand the pipeline of outstanding students entering further graduate training or workforce in support of the TESA in food and agricultural sciences.

**(c) Institutional Commitment and Resources (20 Points)**

The degree to which the proposal substantiates clearly: (1) that the environment, facilities and equipment, instructional support resources, and other academic attributes are excellent for providing outstanding teaching and research at the forefront of science and technology related to the chosen discipline; and (2) the commitment to support the Fellow's education and research over and beyond the funds provided by NIFA during the grant, and continued support through other means, should a Fellow require additional time beyond the grant period.

**(d) Key Personnel (15 Points)**

The expertise, qualifications, and roles of key staff assigned to the project, particularly the project director and faculty or staff having the most frequent or influential contacts with Fellows. Elements include such attributes as competence and/or experience in graduating post-baccalaureate students, research, teaching, community service, working with diverse cultural groups, students at risk of not completing their degree programs, and leading similar projects.

**(e) Broader Context Impacts (10 points)**

The degree to which the proposal provides training to impact the broader context of the development of the Fellow for overall success in the next generation work force. It will include: any innovative (see **Part IV, B. 3, b, Section 4**) special features of the academic program(s) that will be available *especially* to Fellows or required as a part of their degree program(s), including: an integrative interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, or cross-disciplinary approach; a focus on innovative, multi-disciplinary education programs, material, or curricula; a multi-university collaborative approach; an emphasis on a collateral specialization or minor in a related discipline; development of policy, research opportunities, internships, practicum, experiential learning opportunities, developing leadership, management, critical thinking and problem solving skills that may integrally incorporate science and values for sustainability in food and agricultural sciences; international research/educational training; and related work experiences to effectively matriculate Fellows with the expertise and proficiency to meet the needs of the targeted expertise shortage areas.

**Section 2: Applications for Special International Study or Thesis/Dissertation Research Travel Allowances (IRTA)**

The following criteria will be used to review applications requesting IRTA funds only (for current National Needs Fellows).

**(a) Potential for Advancing the Quality of Education (20 Points)**

This criterion is used to assess the likelihood that the proposed international/research learning experience for the eligible graduate Fellow(s) will contribute to training and will result in the development of outstanding graduates to meet the future needs of a globally interconnected, technologically advanced, rapidly diversifying and consumer driven food and agricultural industry. Elements include: quality of the chosen travel/research activity to enhance the graduate training program of the Fellow; and destination and duration - the degree to which the destination and duration of the travel experience is appropriate for enhancing the Fellow's academic program.

**(b) Proposed Approach (40 Points)**

**(i) Advanced preparation** – the degree to which the proposed study or research activities are well-planned, including the likelihood that these activities will come to fruition and that the

participation of identified personnel will materialize based on: (1) the clarity of the learning objectives; (2) the planned activity(s); (3) established and documented evidence of availability of facilities and personnel at host institution; and (4) the completeness of arrangements for the travel and the stay.

**(ii) Academic advising, professional counseling, mentoring, student support and pipelining** – the applicant's plans and procedures for assessing, monitoring, guiding, and sustaining a Fellow's progress in the research/international experiential activities toward securing a positive impact on the academic program of the Fellow(s); strategies for application of critical thinking and problem solving skills in Fellows; and development of skills to sustain the discipline(s) and entry into the workforce or further graduate training.

**(iii) Program evaluation and dissemination** – the plans for (1) an *Outcomes Report* to be submitted to NIFA that describes accomplishments of the Fellow(s) after completing the IRTA - **this is not an activity report with a daily log of tasks**; (2) clear documenting of progress from entry to exit of training program to meet the needs of the TESA; and (3) disseminating impacts and achievements to a wide audience of educators and policy makers, in order to expand the pipeline of outstanding students interested in careers in food and agricultural sciences.

**(c) Institutional Commitment and Resources (10 Points)**

The degree to which the proposal substantiates clearly: (1) that the facilities and equipment, instructional/learning support resources and other academic attributes are excellent for providing outstanding international/research experiential learning opportunities at the forefront of science and technology related to the academic program of the Fellow(s); and (2) the documented commitment (letters) to support the Fellow(s) in the educational value of the international research experience.

**(d) Key Personnel (10 Points)**

The degree to which the personnel, both U.S. and international, involved with the research and/or travel experience have the appropriate credentials and experience to direct the Fellow's international experience, and the likelihood that their participation as mentors, trainers, advisors, or teachers will contribute to the educational value of the travel experiences.

**(e) Broader Context Impacts (20 points)**

The degree to which the proposal provides training to impact the broader context of the development of NNF Fellow for overall successful performance in the next generation workforce. Include such special features that will focus on: (1) innovative approaches to generating a new body of knowledge that strengthens the academic program of the Fellow(s), (2) establishing a framework for overall success with a rigorous plan for assessment of outcomes and impacts, and; (3) an emphasis on learning and understanding global influences and competitiveness in a fast-evolving sphere.

### **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. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, we determine the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 555, Reston, VA, 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, are kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process, to the extent permitted by law; therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

### **D. Organizational Management Information**

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward 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).

## **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 (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

### **B. Award Notice**

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

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

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

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

### **C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements**

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 220—Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225—Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Part 230—Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122, now codified at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225 and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016—USDA Implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3022—Research Institutions Conducting USDA-Funded Extramural Research; Research Misconduct.

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—USDA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions.

7 CFR 3402 - Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in federally-assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in federally-assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

## **D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements**

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions.

### **1. Documentation of Progress on Funded Projects**

Pursuant to 7 CFR Part 3402.23, Project Directors will be required to:

#### **(a) Reporting on Individual Student Beneficiaries**

(i) Student Appointment - Project Directors are required to complete and submit, to the NNF Program Office ([NNF@NIFA.usda.gov](mailto:NNF@NIFA.usda.gov)), a Fellowships/Scholarships Entry Form, [Page 1 of Form NIFA-2010, [http://www.NIFA.usda.gov/funding/all\\_forms.html](http://www.NIFA.usda.gov/funding/all_forms.html)] when eligible, committed students are appointed as National Needs Graduate Fellows under an award. This information must also be provided for replacement Fellows appointed under the program.

(ii) Annual Student Progress in Training Program - Project Directors are required to complete and submit, to the NNF Program Office, an Annual Update Form, [Page 2 of Form NIFA-2010] that provides information about the academic accomplishment including products, recognitions and professional mentoring outcomes, for each Fellow supported. This information is treated as confidential. The Annual Update is used to assess the continuing progress of Fellows through their graduate training program to meet the Targeted Expertise Shortage Area for the funded graduate training project.

(iii) Exit and/or Termination - Project Directors are required to complete and submit, to the NNF Program Office, a Fellowships/Scholarships Exit Form, [Page 3 of Form NIFA-2010] as soon as a Fellow either (1) graduates; (2) is officially terminated from the Fellowship or the academic program due to unsatisfactory academic progress or disciplinary action; or (3) voluntarily withdraws from the Fellowship or academic program. If a Fellow has not completed all degree requirements at the end of the 5-year award duration, NIFA may request a preliminary Fellowships/Scholarships Exit Form (Annual Update and Exit Reports). In such a case, a final Fellowships/Scholarships Exit Form would be required at a later date.

#### **(b) Reporting on IRTA Activity(s)**

If applicable, an Outcomes Report must be submitted to the USDA program contact personnel within 90 days of completion of the IRTA. This report is prepared by the USDA Fellow and submitted through the Project Director of the active Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postdoctoral Fellowship Grant Program award. ***This is not an activity report with a daily log of tasks.*** The Outcomes Report describes accomplishments and may include images. USDA Graduate Fellows selected to utilize IRTA funding should note that specific program evaluation and dissemination will include the following – the plans for: (1) an *Outcomes Report* to be submitted to the USDA that describes accomplishments of the Fellow(s) after completing the IRTA - *this is not an activity report with a daily log of tasks; and* (2) disseminating impacts and achievements to a wide audience of educators and policy makers, in order to expand the pipeline of outstanding students interested in careers in the food and agricultural sciences.

#### **(c) Annual Performance Report**

Annual performance reports are due 90 days after the anniversary date of the award and should be submitted to NIFA.

Annual performance reports must:

- (1) Identify each participant in advancing from the baseline established in funded objectives;
- (2) Provide a comparison of actual accomplishments as gains in USDA mission area STEM fields knowledge, skills, and capabilities, as well as new participants in USDA mission area science through outreach activities, new careers or advanced or graduate training with the goals established for the reporting period;
- (3) If established goals were not met, give the reasons;
- (4) Include documentation of outputs; i.e. significant activities, including dissemination activities, events, services or products that contribute toward achieving the goals and objectives of the project;
- (5) Include documentation on the impact to institution of having a NNF grants program including participation of non-NNF students in program activities, or interactions of NNF with non-NNF students;
- (6) Include outcomes/impacts; i.e. a change in knowledge, actions or conditions; and
- (7) Include any other indication of each Fellow's increased capacity for carrying out the USDA mission.

#### **(d) Final Technical Report**

A final technical report must be submitted within 90 days after the expiration date of the project. The expiration date is specified in the award documents and modifications thereto, if any. Generally, the final technical report should be a summary of the completed project, including:

- 1) Identification of all of the NNF project participants from the target audience who were recruited, trained and gainfully employed and or pursuing further graduate education (full funding details and funds aligned to each beneficiary for the target audience will be needed);
- 2) A review of project objectives and accomplishments;
- 3) A description of outcomes resulting from the project, including impacts at the institutional level, and activities undertaken to disseminate these outcomes;
- 4) An explanation of partnerships and new collaborations that resulted from the project, including future initiatives that are planned as a result of the project;
- 5) A description of the project's impact on the Fellows, PD(s), the institution(s) involved, and the community;
- 6) Any pertinent data on project personnel and beneficiaries. The final technical report also must contain any other information specified in the terms and conditions of the award; and,
- 7) Soft and/or hard copies or samples of products or publications resulting from this project must be sent to the NIFA National Program Leader overseeing NNF (see Part VII).

When NIFA has accepted a Final Technical Report **and** the Fellowships/Scholarships Exit Form (OMB No. 0524-0039) for **each Fellow** supported by an award, the grantee has satisfied the requirements of the final performance reporting for the award. Additional follow-up reports to track Scholars' career patterns also may be requested.

**(e) Project Director's Conference**

The Project Director is required to use part of the CoE to attend at least one NIFA-sponsored Project Directors' Conference held during the life of the grant.

## **PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT**

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contact –

**Ray A. Ali, Ed.D., National Program Leader**  
Division of Community and Education  
Institute of Youth, Family and Community

National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 2251  
Washington, DC 20250-2251

Telephone: 202-720-2727  
Fax: 202-720-2030  
E-mail: [NNF@NIFA.usda.gov](mailto:NNF@NIFA.usda.gov)

Administrative/Business Contact –

**Duane Alphs**  
Title: Team Leader  
Unit: Office of Grants and Financial Management  
Location: 2152 Waterfront Centre  
Phone: (202) 401-4326  
Email: [dalphs@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:dalphs@nifa.usda.gov)

**Rochelle McCrea**  
Title: Team Leader, Team I  
Unit: Office of Grants and Financial Management  
Location: 2160 Waterfront Centre  
Phone: (202) 401-2880  
Email: [rmccrea@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:rmccrea@nifa.usda.gov)

## **PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION**

### **A. Access to Review Information**

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

### **B. Use of Funds; Changes**

#### **1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility**

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

#### **2. Changes in Project Plans**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards**

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

### **D. Regulatory Information**

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

### **E. Definitions**

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#) and [7 CFR 3402, Food and Agricultural Sciences National Needs Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship Grants Program](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

First generation means an individual neither of whose parents completed a baccalaureate degree, or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.

Minority means Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Black (African-American), Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or any other group underrepresented in undergraduate and first professional degree study in the food and agricultural sciences as indicated in standard statistical references, or as documented on a case-by-case basis by national survey data submitted to and accepted by the Secretary.

Multi-institutional means a request for funding for a single academic program or an interdisciplinary program involving two or more institutions in a graduate training program.

Traditionally underrepresented in the food and agricultural sciences means groups that have been historically, and are currently, underrepresented among recipients of undergraduate and first professional degrees in the food and agricultural sciences.

Underrepresented means proportionate representation as measured by degree recipients that is less than the proportionate representation in the general population--(i) As indicated by (A) The most current edition of the Department of Education's Digest of Education Statistics; (B) The National Research Council's Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities; or (C) Other standard statistical references, as documented by national survey data submitted to and accepted by the Secretary on a case-by-case basis.