REQUEST FOR PRE-APPLICATIONS
Specialty Crop Research Initiative

FUNDING YEAR:	Fiscal Year (FY) 2024
PRE-APPLICATION DEADLINE:	December 8, 2023
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE:	Not Required
ANTICIPATED AVAILABLE FUNDING:	$75,440,000
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER:	10.309
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER:	USDA-NIFA-SCRI-010311
PROGRAM CODE:	SCRI

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture

Assistance Listing. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is listed in the Assistance Listings under number 10.309.

Table 1. Key Dates and Deadlines

Task Description	Deadline
Application:	5:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, December 8, 2023
Letter of Intent:	Not Required
Applicants Comments:	Within six months from the issuance of this notice (NIFA may not consider comments received after the sixth month)

Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recognizes research, education, and extension efforts will have the greatest impacts when programs are grounded in DEIA. NIFA is committed to enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of programs and encourages individuals, institutions, and organizations from underserved communities to apply to funding opportunities as lead, co-lead, or subaward recipient(s), and to engage as leaders in the peer panel review process to support the development of strong networks and collaborations. NIFA encourages applications that engage diverse communities and have broad impacts through research, education, extension, and integrated activities to address current and future challenges.

Stakeholder Input. NIFA seeks comments on all Request for Applications (RFA). NIFA considers comments to the extent possible when developing RFAs, and uses comments to help meet the requirements of Section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Applicants may submit written comments to Policy@usda.gov (email is for comments only). Please use the following subject line: Response to SCRI request for pre-applications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2024 is approximately $75,440,000.

This notice identifies the objectives for SCRI projects, deadlines, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions. NIFA requests pre-applications for the SCRI for fiscal year (FY) 2024 to solve critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities that use systems-based, transdisciplinary approaches.

The intent of the SCRI program is to address the needs of the various specialty crop industries through the promotion of collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information, and the development of resources that accelerate application of scientific discovery and technology. The priorities of SCRI reflects the needs of the specialty crops industries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

TABLE OF FIGURES 5

PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION 6
A. Legislative Authority 6
B. Purpose and Priorities 6

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION 10
A. Available Funding 10
B. ProjectTypes 10
C. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects 12

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION 13
A. Eligible Applicants 13
B. Cost Sharing or Matching 13
C. Centers of Excellence 13

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION 14
A. Method of Application 14
B. Content and Form of the Pre-Application 14
C. Funding Restrictions 17

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS 18
A. NIFA's Evaluation Process 18
B. Evaluation Criteria 18

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACTS 20

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS 21

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS 22

APPENDIX IV: KEYWORDS 24

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1. Key Dates and Deadlines 2
Table 2. Steps to Obtain Application Materials 14
Table 3. Help and Resources 14
Table 4. Key Application Instructions 15

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.Three Main Sectors of the Specialty Crop Industry 7

PART I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The SCRI was reauthorized by Section 7305 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, which amends Section 412 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7632). Section 412 of the AREERA of 1998 established a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions. Section 7306 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 added a requirement that, in addition to the scientific peer review NIFA regularly conducts, a panel of specialty crop industry representatives review and rank SCRI applications for merit, relevance, and impact. The regulations for SCRI may be found in Subpart F of 7 CFR 3430.

B. Purpose and Priorities

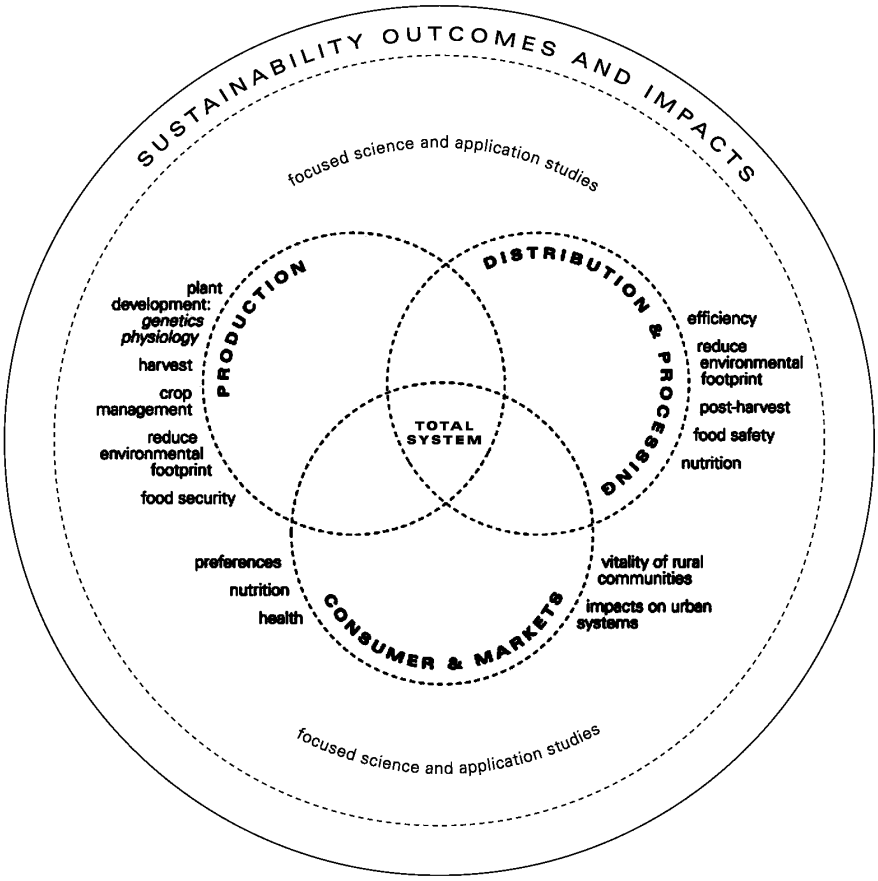
In FY 2024, applicants will compete for the SCRI program in two stages. Applicants will be required to submit a pre-application containing a Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS). The content required in an SRS is described in Part IV § B of this Request for Pre-Applications (RFPA). Panels of industry representatives from various specialty crop sectors will conduct a review on the pre-applications and submit recommendations about which applicants should be invited to apply in the full application process. NIFA will provide details of the full-application process to invitees in a separate RFA. Review criteria for the SRS can be found in Part V § A of this RFPA.

The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry (as defined in Appendix III) by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems. The program recognizes that for some specialty crops which are grown in a limited number of states, the multi-state nature of projects can be difficult to address. Except for Research and Extension Planning Projects, the SCRI program only considers projects that integrate research *and* extension activities. Applicants are strongly encouraged to propose a unique approach to solving problems facing the specialty crop industry using a systems approach.

The philosophy of the SCRI program is: Truly effective, long-term solutions to specialty crop industry challenges can best be achieved by understanding and treating those problems as complex systems of many interacting components. This perspective requires projects that are larger in scope and complexity, and that demand more resources than have traditionally been allocated to individual research and extension projects. In doing so, projects should focus on entire primary systems, including the production system, the processing and distribution system, and the consumer and marketing system, (as defined in Appendix III) or on areas where two or more primary systems overlap.

Meeting the challenges faced by these industries can best be handled by considering the full breadth of system components (see example components listed for each primary system), rather than treating each component in isolation and ignoring important interactions and conflicts among components that may reduce the viability of component-specific solutions in the long term.

Figure 1. Three Main Sectors/Primary Systems of the Specialty Crop Industry



Specialty crops are defined in law as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. USDA developed a detailed definition of specialty crops that is now in use by USDA agencies. Collectively, these crops face many challenges. The SCRI program seeks to address these challenges by funding systems-based, transdisciplinary approaches (as defined in Appendix III). It is anticipated that successful applications will:

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

The SCRI program has five legislatively mandated focus areas to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions, including the following:

1. Research in plant breeding, genetics, genomics, and other methods to improve crop characteristics, such as:

a. product, taste, quality, and appearance:
b. size-controlling rootstocks for perennial crops:
c. climate adaptation, environmental responses, and tolerances:
d. nutrient management, including plant nutrient uptake efficiency:
e. pest and disease management, including resistance to pests and diseases resulting in reduced application management strategies; and
f. enhanced phytonutrient content.

2. Efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including:
    a. threats to specialty crop pollinators:
    b. emerging and invasive species; and
    c. a more effective understanding and utilization of existing natural enemy complexes.
3. Efforts
    a. to improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity, competitiveness in trade, and profitability over the long term (including specialty crop policy and marketing); and
    b. to achieve a better understanding of
        i. the soil rhizosphere microbiome;
        ii. pesticide application systems and certified drift-reduction technologies; and
        iii. systems to improve and extend the storage life of specialty crops.
4. New innovations, data-driven predictive tools using Artificial Intelligence, and technology, including –
    a. mechanization and automation of labor-intensive tasks in production and processing:
    b. technologies that delay or inhibit ripening:
    c. decision support systems driven by phenology and environmental factors.
    d. improved monitoring systems for agricultural pests; and
    e. effective systems for pre-harvest and postharvest management of quarantine pests.
5. Methods to prevent, detect, monitor, control, and respond to potential food safety hazards in the production and processing of specialty crops, including fresh produce.

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

In an increasingly interconnected world, scientific advances have global importance, and may require information and cooperation from beyond our borders. To address critical United States specialty crop issues, priorities, or problems through the integration of research and extension activities, applicants are encouraged to include international partnerships or engagement in proposals, as appropriate. Any proposed activity (e.g., partnerships, exchanges, training, and/or travel), must support the domestic objectives of SCRI. Applicants must clearly describe and demonstrate how international activities proposed in applications submitted to SCRI will contribute to advances in U.S. specialty crop industries. When proposing international activities,

applicants must describe the metrics that will be used for reporting beneficial outputs and outcomes. These metrics should reflect how the proposed international collaboration adds value to achieving the SCRI program's objectives by introducing innovative technologies/approaches, promoting synergistic science, addressing issues of mutual concern, or other means. Additional guidance on including international activities in SCRI applications is provided on the Center for International Programs webpage that includes Frequently Asked Questions, descriptions of existing MOUs, and other resources to assist applicants interested in enhancing the potential for global engagement.

The intent of this program is not to fund start-up businesses; however, a small business may apply. Projects must address only scientific research and extension activities. A small business must not propose technical assistance, demonstration projects, classified research, or financial assistance to start, create, or expand a company or submit patent applications.

Rapidly changing climate is one of the most pressing issues facing farmers, ranchers, landowners, households, and communities. Decreased rainfall, increased carbon dioxide (CO2), and increased temperatures reduce the productivity of farms, ranches, and forests, which affect food supply and raise prices. NIFA encourages proposals for projects that help the nation mitigate climate change and adapt to conditions such as drought, flood, and extreme temperatures.

The SCRI program is aligned with the following USDA Strategic Plan:

1. Strategic Goal 1: Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities.
2. Strategic Goal 2: Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous.
3. Strategic Goal 3: Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers.
4. Strategic Goal 4: Provide All Americans Safe, Nutritious Food.
5. Strategic Goal 5: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities.

The SCRI Program is aligned with the following USDA Science and Research Strategy, 2023–2026 goals:

1. Priority 1: Accelerating Innovative Technologies & Practices
2. Priority 2: Driving Climate-Smart Solutions
3. Priority 4: Cultivating Resilient Ecosystems
4. Priority 5: Translating Research Into Action

For a program informational webinar please visit the NIFA calendar for dates, event registration, and link. If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of the informational webinars listed, please contact the event host listed no later than 10 days prior to the event.

NIFA offers language access services, such as interpretation and translation of vital information, free of charge. If you need interpretation or translation services, please visit NIFA Language Access Services or contact Lois Tuttle, Equal Opportunity Specialist, at Lois.Tuttle@usda.gov or (443) 386-9488.

PART II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

This RFA is being released prior to the passage of a full appropriations act for FY 2024. Enactment of a continuing resolution, appropriations act, or other authorizing legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2024 is approximately $75,440,000. The SCRI Pre-Application process does not result in award recommendations. However, an estimate of project costs is required. Applicants must use the information in Part II § B of this RFPA to develop the estimate.

B. Project Types

The SCRI program offers three project types in FY 2024. Applicants should decide which project type is best suited to the objectives of their research and extension project and develop a preliminary budget that fits the objectives. Applicants are discouraged from developing a project (and selecting a project type) based on a budget request target. The three SCRI project types include:

1. *Standard Research and Extension Projects (SREPs)*
    a. Project Period – Up to five years.
    b. Budget – Normally, Federal funds will not exceed $1,000,000 per year. Requests less than $250,000 per project are discouraged.
    c. Purpose – To support targeted problem-solving efforts that would not qualify in scope for support as a Coordinated Agricultural Project (CAP).
    d. Statistical Analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2022). It is anticipated that the total multi-year funding for most funded SREP awards for FY2024 will be close to the historical median:
        i. Mean award: $2,461,152
        ii. Median award: $2,032,727
        iii. Minimum award: $226,905
        iv. Maximum award: $6,242,957

SREP awards will support targeted problem-solving efforts that contribute to the overall sustainability of a primary system or one of its components (see Figure I), and that would not otherwise qualify in scope and effort for support as a CAP. Applications should bring together both research and extension components of the agricultural knowledge system around a problem area or activity. For each SREP award, there is an expectation that an advisory panel will be formed to inform the project throughout its life, including the identification and prioritization of research and extension objectives. SREPs represent the "focused science and application studies" portion of Figure 1.

2. *Coordinated Agricultural Projects (CAPs)*
    a. Project Period – Up to five years.
    b. Budget – Normally, Federal funds will not exceed $2,000,000 per year.
    c. Purpose – To address specific multiple components of a primary system or multiple components of areas where primary systems overlap (see Figure 1).
    d. Statistical analysis of previous funding (FY 2008-2022). It is anticipated that the total multi-year funding for most funded CAP awards for FY 2024 will be close to

the historical median.

i. Mean award: $5,815,695
ii. Median award: $5,778,830
iii. Minimum award: $1,912,178
iv. Maximum award: $10,898,772

CAPs will be awarded to consortia or groups of qualified applicants to address multiple components of a primary system, an entire primary system or problems that cut across primary systems, with the expectation that the project will make significant contributions to the sustainability of the system or system component (see Figure 1). CAP applications are expected to demonstrate coherent and complementary integrated activities with the goal of developing a strategy or solution that could be implemented for specialty crops. Applications are expected to take advantage of recent advances in biological, physical, and social and economic sciences and to translate basic discoveries and knowledge to practical applications. Applications are expected to demonstrate the potential to develop a national strategy or solution as a goal. This would include the intent to promote collaboration, open communication, the exchange of information and development of resources that accelerate the application of scientific discovery and technology to address the needs of various specialty crop industries. Such a national CAP should aim to reduce duplication of efforts and integrate activities among individuals, institutions, states, and regions.

3. *Research and Extension Planning Projects*
    a. Project period – One year.
    b. Budget – Federal funds up to $50,000 per project
    c. Purpose – To provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning). Funds may also be requested to provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning). The expectation is that developed plans could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications.

        i. Research and Extension Planning Projects are intended to support two types of activities, either to:
            1. provide assistance to applicants in the development of quality future SREP or CAP proposals (grant planning) or
            2. provide assistance to consumer, producer, or industry groups for developing strategic research and extension plans—including goals, objectives, priorities, etc. (strategic planning).

        The expectation is that developed "plans" could provide the relevance bases for future SCRI grant applications.

        ii. Priority will be given to applicants who can:
            1. demonstrate limited resources for either submitting large grant applications or for supporting strategic planning activities on their own,
            2. articulate benefits to be accrued from formal planning activities, and
            3. provide evidence of a high likelihood that quality future applications would be submitted for SCRI projects (desired for grant planning) or would result in a publicly available strategic plan, which could be used

to support a variety of industry-relevant research and extension activities, including development of one or more future SCRI grant applications (desired for strategic planning).

Research and Extension Planning Project grants do not support preliminary research. However, support for stakeholder survey activities may be requested, where appropriate and necessary.

C. Ethical Conduct of Funded Projects

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

PART III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

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

For those new to Federal financial assistance, a grants overview page is available on the NIFA website. This page includes information about free Grants 101 Training and other resources that are highly recommended for those seeking an understanding of Federal awards.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

Section 7614 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) repealed Subtitle P of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3371) and made several conforming amendments, including adding a new paragraph to Section 412(g) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7632(g)) that added a matching requirement to SCRI. This language requires that, for grants awarded on or after December 20, 2018, the recipient of an award from the SCRI program must provide funds, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both, from sources other than funds provided through such grant in an amount that is at least equal to the amount awarded by NIFA. Matching funds may include, but are not limited to, funds or in-kind contributions from an agricultural commodity promotion, research, and information program.

However, for fiscal years 2019 through 2023, NIFA has waived the matching requirement when provided the authority by Congress through language in the appropriations bill. This pre-application is being released prior to an FY 2024 Appropriation Act, NIFA will revise the pre-application and full application RFA based on any changes to statutory authority. Should revisions be necessary all active applicants will be notified through grants.gov. Should any statutory changes, such as wavier authority, be included in the FY 2024 Appropriations Act prior to award but after the full application RFA closes, NIFA will include those changes in the final grants package.

C. Centers of Excellence

Centers of Excellence cannot be requested in the pre-application phase.

PART IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

A. Method of Application

Applicants must apply to this RFPA electronically; no other method or response is accepted. The electronic application for this RFPA and additional resources are available on Grants.gov and Grants 101. **Table 2** provides instructions on how to obtain an electronic application. **Part III** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the Grants.gov registration process. The NIFA Grants Application Guide is contained in the specific funding opportunity package or a sample of the guide can be found here. When applying for a NIFA award, it is important to reference the version of the guide that is included in the specific funding opportunity application package.

Table 2. Steps to Obtain Application Materials

Steps	Action
Step One: Register	*New Users* to Grants.gov must register early with Grants.gov prior to submitting an application (Register Here).
Step Two: Download Adobe	Download and Install Adobe Reader (see Adobe Software Compatibility for basic system requirements)
Step Three: Find Application	Using this Funding Opportunity Number **USDA-NIFA-SCRI-010311**, search for application here: Opportunity Package.
Step Four: Assess Readiness	Contact an AR prior to starting an application to assess the organization's readiness to submit an electronic application.

Table 3. Help and Resources

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

If you have trouble submitting a pre-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.

B. Content and Form of the Pre-Application

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

proposal number to all applications that meet the requirements of this RFPA. Applicants must refer to the proposal number when corresponding with NIFA. **Table 4** outlines other key instructions for applicants.

Table 4. Key Application Instructions

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

Stakeholder Relevance Statement (SRS)
SRSs are required for all SCRI project types.

Content of SRS for Research and Extension Planning Projects

1. Title of Project.
2. One to three keywords from the list in Appendix IV.
3. Type of planning activity to be undertaken (i.e., grant planning or strategic planning).
4. Estimated amount of funding to be requested.
5. Name, professional title, affiliation, and email address of the project director.
6. Name, professional title, and affiliation of all known collaborators, including industry stakeholders.
7. Brief description of the stakeholder problem being addressed.
8. Brief description of relevant expertise represented by project team.
9. Description of the planning activities to be undertaken and the expected outcomes of the planning process.
10. Brief description of the benefits to growers/processors/consumers and how that benefit will be documented and evaluated; and
11. Letters of collaboration from all known industry stakeholders.

SRSs for Planning Projects cannot exceed four (4) pages in length, excluding the letters of collaboration. Pages must be formatted with margins of at least 1 inch on all sides. Text must be 12 point or larger and must be left justified. Citations, cover letters, detailed budgets and budget narratives ARE NOT required in the SRS.

Content of the SRS for SREP and CAP Projects

1. Title of the project.
2. One to three keywords from the list in Appendix IV.
3. Type of project to be submitted (i.e., SREP, CAP).
4. Estimated amount of funding to be requested. Three figures should be provided: total project funding, federal funding request, and matching funding amount.
5. Economic/environmental/social significance of the problem being addressed.
6. Potential economic/environmental/social benefit to solving the problem being addressed.
7. How stakeholders were engaged in defining the problem being addressed and determining project objectives.
8. How stakeholders will continue to be engaged in project development and evaluation.
9. How information developed during project will be translated into actionable recommendations or products and delivered to end-users; and
10. Experience of PD and up to 6 key co-investigators in working with the specific stakeholder community and in dealing with the problem identified (a bio of up to 200 words can be included for each); more co-investigators are permitted and may be listed in the full application.
11. A list of project objectives with corresponding hypotheses to be tested. [Please note: Because the scientific merit review panel that examines subsequent full applications will help verify that the pre-application and full-application projects are essentially identical, the list of project objectives identified here must carry forward to a full application and the estimated budget should be commensurate with those objectives.]
12. Outline of methodology to be used to achieve project objectives. The list of objectives and the methodology outline, combined, should consume no more than one page.
13. Appendix_A_Logic_model_chart (one page limit for the chart, with an additional explanation of up to 250 words, if needed). More information about logic models can be found here; and
14. Appendix_B_Industry_stakeholder_support_letters

The SRS for SREP and CAP cannot exceed six (6) pages in length, excluding appendices. The SRS must be formatted with margins no less than 1 inch on all sides. Text must be 12 point or larger and must be left justified. Citations, cover letters, detailed budgets, and budget narratives ARE NOT required in the SRS. No appendices, other than the ones listed above, are allowed.

SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet. **See Part V of the** NIFA Grants Application Guide **for the required certifications and assurances. Do not include a cover letter.** The following are additional instructions:

a. **Field 1. Type of Submission.** Click the "Pre-application" box.
b. **Field 15. Enter Estimated Project Funding.** Enter the estimated amount of funding to be requested.
c. **Field 20. Pre-application**. Click on "Add Attachment" to attach the SRS.

Supplemental Information Form. See **Part V** of the NIFA Grants Application Guide.

1. **Field 2**. Enter the program code name (i.e., enter "**Specialty Crop Research Initiative**") and the program code (i.e., enter "**SCRI**"). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.

2. **Field 8. Conflict of Interest List. See Part V of the** NIFA Grants Application Guide.

C. Funding Restrictions

Section 1462(a) and (c) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA), 7 U.S.C. 3310 limits indirect costs for the overall award to **30 percent** of Total Federal Funds Awarded (TFFA) under a research, education, or extension grant. The maximum indirect cost rate allowed under the award is determined by calculating the amount of indirect costs using:

1) the sum of an institution's negotiated indirect cost rate and the indirect cost rate charged by sub-awardees, if any; or
2) 30 percent of TFFA (TFFA = Field K., Total Costs and Fee, on SF-424 R&R Budget). The maximum allowable indirect cost rate under the award, including the indirect costs charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, is the lesser of the two rates.

If the results of 1), is the lesser of the two, the grant recipient is allowed to charge the negotiated indirect cost rate on the prime award and the sub-award(s), if any. Any sub-awards would be subject to the sub-awardee's negotiated indirect cost rate. The sub-awardee may charge its negotiated indirect cost rate on its portion of the award, provided the sum of the indirect cost rate charged under the award by the prime awardee and the sub-awardee(s) does not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

If the result of 2), is the lesser of the two, then the maximum indirect cost rate allowed for the overall award, including any sub-award(s), is limited to 30 percent of the TFFA. That is, the indirect costs of the prime awardee plus the sum of the indirect costs charged by the sub-awardee(s), if any, may not exceed 30 percent of the TFFA.

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

If the applicant does not have a negotiated rate, and NIFA is the cognizant agency, the applicant must calculate an IDC rate in order to request IDC. Applicants are not required to complete the IDC package during the application process. Applicants need only to calculate an IDC rate to serve as a basis for requesting IDC, please see NIFA Indirect Costs for additional resources. If awarded, the applicant will be required to submit a complete IDC proposal package to obtain a negotiated rate.

Organizations that do not have a current negotiated (including provisional) rate, may elect the De Minimis rate (2 CFR 200.414). The Uniform Guidance offers the option of electing to charge a de Minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total indirect costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described in 2 CFR 200.403, costs must be charged consistently as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If elected, this methodology must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which it may do at any time.

PART V. APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. NIFA's Evaluation Process

SCRI has instituted a two-phase review process. The first phase of the review process is the Industry Relevance Review. Each Pre-Application containing an SRS will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each SRS will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFPA. Administrative requirements include meeting the application deadline; meeting eligibility requirements; satisfying program intent; inclusion of all required sections of the SRS package; and adherence to guidelines. Second, an SRS that meets these requirements will be evaluated for relevance by a panel of industry reviewers representing closely allied crops. The panel will recommend which applications to invite for submission of a full application. Invited applicants will be sent instructions on how to access the full RFA via email once the relevance review is completed. NIFA will send copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments to the PD after the review process has been completed.

NIFA selects reviewers for the SCRI relevance review based upon the crops and/or issues represented by the pre-applications. Industry reviewers will be selected from persons directly involved in the growing, handling and processing of specialty crops; or persons representing those interests through trade organizations or other professional associations.

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

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria herein, with relative weights in parentheses, will be used to review pre-applications submitted in response to this RFPA.

Criteria for Industry Relevance Review for Planning Projects

1. The problem being addressed is significant at a national or regional level. (25%)
2. The project will result in a partnership between a specialty crop sector and a scientific community. (25%)
3. The project fully integrates research and extension. (20%)
4. The project will result in a systems approach to insuring the sustainability of the targeted specialty crop sector. (15%)
5. The project uses transdisciplinary approaches by intentionally integrating knowledge from appropriate biological, economic, and social sciences with relevant stakeholders and community members to address challenges. (15%)

Criteria for Industry Relevance Review for SREP and CAP Projects

1. Stakeholder support letters clearly demonstrate that project goals and objectives arose from challenges identified by stakeholders and goal and objective development had significant input from industry. (25%)
2. Information developed by the project team will be delivered to stakeholders in ways that allow them to implement new and/or improved practices. (20%)

3. The described research and extension approach is likely to result in successful project completion. (20%)
4. Clear plans are in place for stakeholders to be engaged in project activities throughout the life of the project. (15%)
5. Stakeholders will be involved in establishing evaluation criteria and/or providing feedback on project success. (10%)
6. Engagement with stakeholders is likely to last beyond the length of the project. (5%)
7. Project team has at least some members who have worked with target stakeholders in the past and some who have experience with the described research and Extension approach. (5%)

APPENDIX I: AGENCY CONTACTS

Program Contacts
Tom Bewick
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Email to arrange telephone call.

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202-445-5410

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

U.S. Postal Mailing Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 419205, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-6205

Courier/Package Delivery Address:
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
2312 East Bannister Road, MS 10000
Kansas City, MO 64141-3061

APPENDIX II: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Authorized Representative – AR
Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education reform Act of 1998 – AREERA
Assistance Listing Number – ALN
Coordinated Agricultural Project – CAP
Centers of Excellence – COE
National Institute of Food and Agriculture – NIFA
Request for Pre-application – RFPA
Specialty Crop Research Initiative – SCRI
Standard Research and Extensions Project – SREP
Stakeholder Relevance Statement – SRS
United States Department of Agriculture – USDA

APPENDIX III: DEFINITIONS

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

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

Logic Model:
A logic model is a conceptual tool for planning and evaluation which displays the sequence of actions that describes what the science-based program is and will do. Learn more on the NIFA Logic Model website.

Matching:
The process through which a grant recipient match awarded USDA funds with cash and in-kind contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The matching funds must derive from non-Federal sources. Matching funding must follow the same allowability guidelines as Federal funds.

Multifunctional Research and Extension Activities:
Are research whose results are communicated via extension activities to stakeholders and the public in a coordinated manner during the life of a single project.

New Application:
An application not previously submitted to a program.

Resubmitted Application:
A project application that was previously submitted to a program, but the application was not funded.

Primary System:
One of the three main sectors of the specialty crop industry: the production system; the processing and distribution system; and the consumer and marketing system.

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

Specialty Crop:
Fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). More information about the definition of a specialty crop can be viewed here.

Systems Approach:
Any process of estimating or inferring how local policies, actions, or changes influence the state of the neighboring universe. It is a framework that is based on the belief that the component parts of a system can best be understood in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, rather than in isolation.

Transdisciplinary:
Transdisciplinary approaches intentionally integrate knowledge from different scientific disciplines with relevant stakeholders and community members to address societal

challenges. The development of transdisciplinary approaches engages these diverse teams from the onset of project conceptualization. Do not conflate transdisciplinary approaches with multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary.

APPENDIX IV: KEYWORDS

Identify up to three keywords that best fit your industry or issue(s) addressed from the following list:

1. Berries
2. Citrus
3. Cucurbits
4. Sweet corn
5. Controlled Environment/Greenhouse crops
6. Grapes
7. Nursery/Floriculture
8. Food Safety
9. Pollinators
10. Potatoes
11. Solanaceae
12. Strawberries
13. Tree fruit (not including citrus)
14. Tree nuts
15. Turfgrass
16. Beans/dry beans/pulses
17. Leafy vegetables
18. Underground vegetables (other than potatoes)
19. Other crop (please specify)