



**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

**Notice of Intent to Extend and Revise Previously Approved  
Information Collection**

**AGENCY:** National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice and request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations this notice announces the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) intention to extend and revise a previously approved information collection, entitled *NIFA Proposal Review Process*.

**DATES:** Written comments on this notice must be received by [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*] to be assured of consideration. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit comments through the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

*Instructions:* All comments received will be posted without change to <http://www.regulations.gov>, including any personal information provided.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Laura Givens, 816-527-5379, [Laura.Givens@usda.gov](mailto:Laura.Givens@usda.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

*Title of Collection:* NIFA Proposal Review Process.

*OMB Control Number:* 0524-0041.

*Expiration Date of Current Approval:* 9/30/2025.

*Type of Request:* Notice of intent to extend and revise a previously approved information collection. The burden for this collection remains unchanged.

NIFA is requesting a three-year extension for the current collection entitled "NIFA Proposal Review Process."

NIFA is also proposing to update the collection so that the previously approved Reviewer Questionnaire, as well as the Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Certification Form are both available on NIFA's Peer Review System (PRS) web-based portal. Additionally, NIFA is proposing some minor updates to the wording of questions in the Reviewer Questionnaire to ensure that peer review panels have the required scientific and technical expertise while remaining in compliance with statistical directives from OMB.

*Abstract:* The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is responsible for performing a review of proposals submitted to NIFA competitive award programs in accordance with section 103(a) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998, 7 U.S.C. 7613(a). Reviews are undertaken to ensure that projects supported by NIFA are of high quality and are consistent with the goals and requirements of the funding program.

Proposals submitted to NIFA undergo a programmatic evaluation to determine justification of Federal support. The evaluations consist of a peer panel review and may also entail an

assessment by Federal employees and electronically submitted (ad-hoc) reviews in the Peer Review System.

The information collected from the evaluations is used to support NIFA grant programs. NIFA uses the results of the proposal evaluation to determine whether a proposal should be declined or recommended for award. When NIFA has rendered a decision, copies of reviews (excluding the names of the reviewers) and summaries of review panel deliberations, if any, are provided to the submitting Project Director.

Given the highly technical nature of many of these proposals, the quality of the peer review greatly depends on the appropriate matching of the subject matter of the proposal with the scientific and technical expertise of the potential reviewer. To obtain this information, an electronic questionnaire is used to collect information about potential panel and ad-hoc reviewers. If the reviewer is already in the NIFA database, the questionnaire asks potential reviewers to update their basic biographical information including address, contact information, professional expertise, and their availability to review for NIFA in the future. If the reviewer is new, they are prompted to complete the questionnaire. This information has been invaluable in the NIFA review process, which has been recognized by the grantee and grantor community for its quality.

The applications and associated materials made available to reviewers, as well as the discussions that take place during panel review meetings, are strictly confidential and are not to be disclosed to or discussed with anyone who has not been

officially designated to participate in the review process. While each panelist certifies at the time of preparing a review they do not have a conflict-of-interest with a particular application and will maintain its confidentiality in the Peer Review System, a certification of their intent at the time of the panel review proceedings is collected to emphasize and reinforce confidentiality not only of applications and reviews but also panel discussions. On the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Certification form, the panelist affirms they understand the conflict-of-interest guidelines and will not be involved in the review of the application(s) where a conflict exists. The panelist also affirms their intent to maintain the confidentiality of the panel process and not disclose to another individual any information related to the peer review or use any information for personal benefit.

*Estimate of Burden:*

*Estimated number of respondents by form/process:*

*Reviewer Questionnaire: 1000*

*Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Certification: 1000*

*Proposal Review Process: 4600*

*The individual form/process burden hours are as follows:*

*Reviewer Questionnaire: 167 hours*

*Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Certification: 167  
hours*

*Proposal Review Process: 92,000 hours.*

*Estimated Total Annual Burden on the public for all forms and  
processes: 92,334 hours.*

*Comments:* Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request to OMB for approval. All comments will become a matter of public record.

*Obtaining a Copy of the Information Collection:* A copy of the information collection and related instructions may be obtained free of charge by contacting Laura Givens as directed above.

**Drenda Williams,**  
*Associate Director for Operations,  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture,  
U.S. Department of Agriculture.*