NIFA Update 3/26/20 from J Scott Angle, Director

On March 19, 2020, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued M-20-17 (memorandum), “Administrative Relief for Recipients and Applicants of Federal Financial Assistance Directly Impacted by the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) due to Loss of Operations.” The memorandum broadens the scope of a March 9th memorandum (M-20-11) and allows Federal awarding agencies the ability to provide administrative relief in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

NIFA is particularly concerned about institutions with faculty, staff, and students who depend on grant funding for their livelihood and are required to shelter in place. However, the OMB memo specifically states: Awarding agencies may allow recipients to continue to charge salaries and benefits to currently active Federal awards consistent with the recipients' policy of paying salaries (under unexpected or extraordinary circumstances) from all funding sources, Federal and non-Federal (Appendix A, No. 6).

OMB’s March 19th memorandum bolsters NIFA’s continued response to COVID-19 as it allows the agency to also provide flexibilities for recipient organizations affected by the loss of operational capacity. Appendix A of the memorandum details administrative relief actions and procedures Federal awarding agencies are authorized to take.

NIFA is exploring other ways that it can support our colleagues in the important work that they do to advance science and agriculture during this unprecedented time and will continue to do so.

- For example, last week, NIFA granted proposal deadline extensions for some programs to provide more time to partners as they work through organizational social distancing efforts.
- NIFA is also exploring a process for supplementing competitive awards where increased otherwise allowable costs are required to fulfill research objects during this time.

NIFA is committed to adhering to OMB’s memorandum while simultaneously working with recipient organizations to provide the right solutions as deemed appropriate and to the extent permitted by law.

Questions regarding the applicability of the memorandum’s administrative relief provisions should be directed to NIFA’s Awards Management Division at awards@usda.gov. For more information, see (OMB’s M-20-17).