

Stakeholder Questions: USDA NIFA/ERS Relocation

The following questions and concerns have been raised within the research community and must be addressed before any subsequent funding is appropriated for any potential relocation of NIFA:

- How will the proposed move affect NIFA's budget, and ultimate cost to taxpayers, in both the short and long-term?
- How much will the relocation cost? What will be the return on investment?
- What is the projected cost-savings for moving three, five, and ten years out?
- What data does USDA have about recruitment and turnover that indicate a move is the best option?
- What evidence is there that staff retention will be higher at a different location?
- What impact has the hiring freeze had with the current location?
- What procedures are in place to ensure an open and transparent site selection process?
- Will there be a comment period for final candidates in the site selection process?
- Will there be a stakeholder meeting to address these questions and more prior to the September 14, 2018 deadline for EOIs?
- If USDA plans to offer incentives for recruitment to employees in the new location, why can't it offer incentives here?
- Are there plans to splinter NIFA and ERS beyond just one or two headquarters (i.e. the ARS model)?
- How would having multiple NIFA or ERS sites save money and administrative burden?
- What are the estimates for staff retention during the relocation?
- What staff (specifically) will be based in DC and what staff at the new HQ?
- What will be the role of the DC based staff? What will be their accessibility to the stakeholder community? Will they remain at the Whitten building or will NIFA need to lease space elsewhere?
- How will NIFA handle this transition given the rapid timeframe in which the move has been proposed?

- How will the core functions of the agency be impacted given the likely shortage of trained personnel in the immediate term after a relocation?
- What is the timeline for filling vacancies resulting from a relocation, and does NIFA have the Human Resources staff required to adequately recruit, hire, and train new staff?
- What are your plans to ensure continuity of expertise—what are the training programs in place to ensure expertise is retained and transferred, that ongoing research and extension programs are not interrupted? That new programs and grants can still move forward without delays?
- What are the evaluation tools/metrics in place to ensure NIFA is meeting critical benchmarks in running fair competitions, getting funding out the door, and continuing education and training of its entire workforce once the relocation has started?
- How will the proposed relocation affect NIFA’s relationship with other federal research agencies and policymakers?
- To ensure federal agencies are not duplicating efforts and leveraging resources and thus saving taxpayer money, what is the plan for program officers to continue relationships with NSF, NIH, DOE, USAID, and DOD experts for joint funding opportunities and information sharing? Who will facilitate new relationships if existing staff are not retained?
- Will the status of agricultural issues become weakened with NIFA unable to easily participate in person at White House and interagency meetings?
- How does USDA plan to ensure NIFA still has access to strategic coordination with other federal entities and is actively encouraged to collaborate on joint initiatives?
 - Here is a list of some of the interagency programs that NIFA is currently involved in:
 - NSF/NIH/NIFA: Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Disease: https://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=243614
 - NSF/NIFA: Plant Biotic Interactions: https://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=242569; <https://nifa.usda.gov/announcement/usda-announces-72-million-research-plant-biotic-interactions>; INFEWS: https://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=242998
 - NIH/NIFA: Comparative Genomics: <https://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/comparative-genomics-research-program>
 - DOE/NIFA: <https://genomicscience.energy.gov/research/DOEUSDA/>

- If academia/industry is involved in hosting of site, what procedures will be in place to ensure eligibility will not be affected if university/industry hosts NIFA? To protect from potential bias?
- How will NIFA ensure diversity within their staff at the new location, including diversity of thought relative to disciplinary education and geographical representation?