1. **Introduction**

The Regional Nutrition Education Center for Excellence – West (RNECE-West), funded through a collaboration between the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) at USDA, seeks research proposals to enhance the effectiveness of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) and other similar programs in the context of the community social-ecological framework. The mission of the RNECE-West is to improve the health of low-income Americans, especially Hispanics, through multiple strategies, including complementary nutrition education and public health approaches at the individual and environmental levels of the social-ecological framework.

RNECE-West’s Western Region consists of 13 Western States plus territories: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. The RNECE-West will build the evidence-base for nutrition education and obesity prevention strategies and interventions that produce measurable improvements in health, nutrition (food behavior), and physical activity related outcomes of interest to USDA. The RNECE-West will also develop effective education, policy, systems and environmental translational activities that promote health and prevent/reduce obesity in disadvantaged low-income families and children.

The goals of the RNECE-West are to 1) improve the evidence-base of adult nutrition education programming, specifically those using the *Eating Smart • Being Active* curriculum; 2) address community and public health approaches to prevent obesity and improve nutrition through policy, systems and environmental change; 3) provide professional and paraprofessional staff development opportunities; and 4) develop management tools related to adult direct nutrition education and policy, systems, and environment evaluation.

2. **General Information**

**Who may apply:** Applications may only be submitted by land-grant institutions that have EFNEP programs, SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies, and/or other non-profit organizations/agencies that have developed and/or delivered and/or evaluated similar low-income nutrition education/obesity prevention programs. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude RNECE-West from making an award.
Applications must include justification of eligibility to be considered for an award. Examples of eligibility would include: 1) being an 1862 or 1890 land-grant university, 2) having received SNAP-Ed funding from the state SNAP-Agency to implement SNAP-Ed in FY 2014; and/or 3) evidence that they are a non-profit organization/agency along with a description of the similar type of low-income nutrition education/obesity prevention program that they developed, delivered, and/or evaluated – including a program description, audience reached, action taken, and results achieved.

Further, the Primary Investigator (PI) for each application must be located in one of the states/territories in RNECE-West’s Western Region (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands). Applicants must obtain a Federal DUNS number and be registered in SAM.gov. Applicants must be able to agree to the terms and conditions of the prime USDA-NIFA award, including financial reporting requirements.

**Project Types:** Applications, including a proposed budget, should be submitted for a 12 month period, with funding starting **July 15th, 2015** and ending **July 15th, 2016** with final reports due **August 10th, 2016**. No award can exceed this time limitation. The RNECE-West encourages projects that specifically target the Hispanic audience. Projects should demonstrate an understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that program leaders, implementers and target audiences face in RNECE-West’s Western Region.

**Available funds:** Total funding in the amount of $124,167 is available for this competitive grant program, with each individual proposal receiving up to $45,000. Budgets may include indirect costs of no more than 26% modified total direct costs. Only applicants who have federally-negotiated rate agreements may include indirect costs. The RNECE-West reserves the right to fund proposals fully or partially, depending on the quality of submission and available funding.

**Proposal submission:** All applications will be submitted to chhs-fshn_wrnece@mail.colostate.edu in a PDF format. Proposals must be received by **5pm mountain time June 1st, 2015**.

**Proposal timeline:** Projects are to begin **July 15th, 2015** and all funds must be expended by **July 15th, 2016**.

**Applicant Requirements:** Institutions receiving USDA funding for research are responsible for protecting human subjects. To provide for the adequate discharge of this responsibility, NIFA policy requires an assurance by Colorado State University’s Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) that each project/research plan has received Institutional Review Board approval. Applicants should disclose in their proposal if they plan to use human subjects and be prepared to submit a protocol for review promptly. Further instruction will be issued once the protocol has been submitted. Colorado State University will not issue the subcontracts without documented IRB approvals.

Further, 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 RNECE-West results in an award, grant recipients shall, upon request, make available to Research Integrity and Compliance Review Office (RICRO) at Colorado State University (CSU) the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training or complete training through CSU RICRO. Additionally, each organization will be responsible for completing human subject training and submitting the relevant documentation to CSU.

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.

3. Regional Importance

The RNECE-West has conducted a preliminary needs assessment to identify the unique challenges and opportunities that RNECE-West’s Western Region nutrition education program leaders, staff and target audiences face. The results of this assessment indicated specific needs described below. All applicants must document their project’s relevance to RNECE-West’s Western Region by citing how their proposed project will address specific RNECE-West identified regional needs.

Adequate physical activity and healthy eating are critical for good health. Yet, many in RNECE-West’s Western Region have poor eating habits, lead sedentary lives and have limited access to healthy food. Inactivity and poor food choices contribute significantly to the development of obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. More than one-third (34.9% or 78.6 million) of U.S. adults are obese. In 2013, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, of the thirteen states in RNECE-West’s Western Region, Colorado has the lowest prevalence of self-reported obesity among all adults and Idaho had the highest, 21.3% and 29.6%, respectively.\(^1\) The state of Washington had the highest prevalence of obesity among white non-Hispanic adults (27.5%) while Colorado had the lowest (18.8%).\(^2\) Among Hispanic adults, the target audience of the RNECE-West, Idaho had the highest prevalence of obesity (35.3%) while Utah had the lowest prevalence, 26.1%.\(^3\) According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2014, all states in RNECE-West’s Western Region, with the exception of Wyoming, had a lower percentage of adults who reported no leisure-time physical activity as compared to the national average of 25.4%.\(^4\) The number of adults who reported meeting the

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The food environment has changed dramatically over the past 20 years and parallels the increased obesity rates. Marketing and media messages, “super-sized” portions and promotional pricing encourage the consumption of foods high in calories, sugar and fat. The abundance of fast-food restaurants, vending machines, and convenience stores make poor food choices easily accessible. In 2013, the national average of adults who reported consuming fruit and vegetables at least once per day was 37.7% and 22.6%, respectively. Only 30.4% of adults in California reported eating fruit at least once per day while nearly 40% of adults in Hawaii reported consuming fruit once a day. Oregon had the lowest percentage of adults consuming vegetables daily, while Nevada had the highest in the region, 15.3% and 24.4%, respectively.

Oregon has the highest (77.1) and Alaska the lowest (48.5) percentage of census tracts in the state that have a typical healthier food retailer (at least one supermarket, supercenter, larger grocery store, warehouse club, or F&V specialty store) located within the tract or within a 1/2-mile of tract boundaries. The number of farmers markets per 100,000 state residents provides a broad estimate of the availability of fruits and vegetables from farmers markets: Arizona and Utah have a low of 1.3 while Wyoming has the highest at 7.6. Farmer’s markets accepting SNAP benefits range from 7% in Wyoming to 47.8% in New Mexico. Only two states, California and Nevada, have state-level policies that support healthier food retail, which has the potential to increase fruit and vegetable access and improve nutrition among adults and children.

Colorado State University recently completed the Best Practices in Nutrition Education for Low-Income Audiences project. Best practices were compiled into an inventory, which has been added to the current SNAP-Ed Connection Resource Finder - an online database funded by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) - which is searchable by keyword, topic, or audience. In conjunction with FNS, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), consulting experts, and the research literature, CSU researchers developed criteria for best practices. Once the best practices were developed, a national survey of SNAP-Ed implementing agencies was completed. Results of the survey indicated that SNAP-Ed program leaders would like additional information/staff development opportunities related to the social-ecological framework and behavior change theories as they relate to program design and evaluation. With regards to program delivery, the topic of collaboration (within and among national, state, and local health promotion initiatives to reach participants in multiple settings) was identified as an interest for

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additional staff development. Notably, 85% of respondents indicated the need for additional information/training in both teaching methodologies and ongoing training for educators.6

Hispanic Audience

From 2000 to 2010, RNECE-West’s Western Region (excluding American Samoa, Federated State of Micronesia, Guam, and the Northern Marianas), experienced a 34% increase in Hispanic residents. Some states within the region have seen a growth in this population of over 70%, including Idaho, Utah and Washington and most notably Nevada, with an increase in the Hispanic population of 80% (US Census Bureau). In 2010, individuals who self-identified as Hispanic accounted for over 20% of the total population of five states within RNECE-West’s Western Region: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico.

Nutrition education with environmental supports tailored to this specific population will not only benefit the western states, but is relevant to the nation as a whole as Hispanics accounted for over 15% of the national population in 2010, and make up the largest minority population.7,8 Within the EFNEP program, 28% of the participants self-identified as Hispanic or Latino in 2012.9 All applicants must document their project’s relevance or applicability to the Hispanic audience or justify why there is not a focus on the Hispanic audience.

4. RNECE-West Signature Research Program

Beyond the RFAs, the RNECE-West signature program (see RNECE-WEST Logic Model at http://wrnece.colostate.edu/) will strengthen the evidence-base of existing nutrition education programs by testing strategies for assessing long term outcome evaluations, and testing strategies for assessing and implementing environmental change through public health approaches. Relevant goals of the RNECE-West are provided below (see wrnece.colostate.edu for complete description of RNECE-West goals).

i. Develop and implement a signature research program to strengthen the evidence-base of effective nutrition education/obesity prevention programs for diverse population groups:


a. Conduct rigorous short- and long-term evaluation to assess program outcomes;
b. Focus evaluation efforts in the areas of diet quality, physical activity, and food resource management;
c. Target disadvantaged and underserved populations, especially Hispanics; and
d. Provide opportunities for new research. Identify and create research collaborations and synergistic relationships among researchers and EFNEP and SNAP-Ed program directors, universities and other implementers, and state and federal agencies.

ii. Address the individual and environmental levels of the social-ecological framework through nutrition education and policy, systems and environmental change (PSE) by incorporating public health approaches.

iii. Coordinate RNECE-West research and programs with ongoing work of existing EFNEP and SNAP-Ed committees, multi-state projects and other regional and national teams/committees.

iv. Direct the collection and consolidation of data related to target audiences, learning/behavior change objectives, evaluation tools, and outcomes from RNECE-West’s Western Region SNAP-Ed implementing agencies (IAs).

5. **Project Description**

Please respond to **ONE** of the following research questions/topics within EFNEP, SNAP-Ed, and/or similar programs:

a. Test medium term evaluation methods and measures for environmental change efforts complementing direct education.

    OR

b. Test long-term (6 and/or 12 months post-graduation) evaluation methods and measures of direct nutrition education targeting behavior change among Hispanics and where possible include short and/or medium term complementary PSE efforts.

    OR

c. To build the evidence-base for program outcomes, test/evaluate existing dietary screening tools for feasibility as a potential assessment tool with participants of EFNEP, SNAP-Ed and other similar programs, particularly Hispanics.

    OR

d. Evaluate the use of technology in the delivery and/or evaluation of direct nutrition education and where possible include complementary PSEs. Alternative approaches that contribute to the understanding of the current use of technology will also be considered.

The RNECE-West encourages applicants to align their work with the **Western Region SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework**, specifically with the 14 preferred indicators for FFY 2015 and the CNE
Logic Model. Additionally, the RNECE-West strongly encourages research projects using an integrated approach including direct education and complementary environmental change efforts.

6. **Matching Funds**
No matching funds are required.

7. **Evaluation and Selection Criteria**
Each application will be evaluated in a two-part process. First, each application will be screened by the RNECE-West Leadership Team to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements (see below) as set forth in the RFA. Applications that do not meet these requirements will be eliminated from program competition and will not be reviewed by the review panel. Second, a review panel will further evaluate applications that meet these requirements (see RFA Review Criteria). The PIs of the applications not reviewed by the panel will be contacted to explain the reason(s) their proposal did not meet the minimum administrative requirements, as listed below. The PIs of reviewed applications will be notified of funding decisions.

In order for an application to be considered for panel review, all of the following requirements must be met:

**Administrative Requirements**

i. Applications may only be submitted by land-grant institutions that have EFNEP programs, SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies, and/or other non-profit organizations/agencies that have developed and/or delivered and/or evaluated similar low-income nutrition education/obesity prevention programs. Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude RNECE-West from making an award.

ii. Applications must include justification of eligibility to be considered for an award. Examples of eligibility would include: 1) being an 1862 or 1890 land-grant university, 2) having received SNAP-Ed funding from the state SNAP-Agency to implement SNAP-Ed in FY 2014; and/or 3) evidence that they are a non-profit organization/agency along with a description of the similar type of low-income nutrition education/obesity prevention program that they developed, delivered, and/or evaluated – including a program description, audience reached, action taken, and results achieved.


iv. For SNAP-Ed, must incorporate at least two of the following approaches:
   a. Individual, or group-based education, health promotion, and intervention strategies;
   b. Comprehensive, multi-level interventions as multiple complementary organizational and institutional levels; and
   c. Community and public health approaches to prevent obesity and improve nutrition.
v. For EFNEP, must incorporate at least two levels of the social-ecological framework for change: individual, environmental settings, and/or sectors of influence (see Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010); and must include at least two of four core areas of the Community Nutrition Education (CNE) Logic Model:
   a. Diet quality and physical activity (required) - Improved diets and nutritional and physical well-being through the adoption of federal food and physical activity recommendations. Note: diet quality and physical activity are considered one core area;
   b. Food Security (optional) - Increased ability to get food directly—and from food assistance programs where necessary—to ensure having enough healthy food to eat;
   c. Food Resource Management (optional) - Increased ability to buy, grow, or otherwise appropriately obtain, prepare, and store food that meets nutritional needs; and/or
   d. Food Safety (optional) –Improved food safety and sanitation practices.

vi. Demonstrate that processes are broadly transferable – can be used by others.

vii. Must include an evaluation component – process and outcome.

viii. Clearly delineate research expenditures in the budget narrative.

Application and Submission Information
Applications must be submitted electronically and all components must be in portable document format (PDF). Incomplete applications or those not following all directions and requirements will not be considered.

Applications must be typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins.

Applications are due by 5 p.m. mountain time, June 1st, 2015. This RFA may be accessed at http://wrnece.colostate.edu.

Questions are encouraged and can be directed to Katie McGirr at chhs-fshn_WRNECE@mail.colostate.edu or 970-491-3642.

Application Must Include:

A. A summary of the project, its objectives, and procedures for accomplishing the objectives. Include a brief statement of how the proposed project meets the RNECE-West goals (see http://wrnece.colostate.edu). If applicable, state that the project will involve human subjects. The summary must not exceed 300 words and is not included in the project narrative page limit.

B. The project narrative is limited to 10 pages and should be submitted as a separate PDF. It must include:
   i. Demonstrated support of RNECE-West's focus on long-term evaluation of direct education and/or environmental change.
   ii. A description of the objectives of the project and process for meeting objectives. This needs to include a summary of the activities, outputs and outcomes of the proposed project as well as an evaluation plan.
   iii. A description of expected accomplishments, implications and potential next steps to further achieve the goals and objectives of the RNECE-West.
iv. A description of the applicability of project outputs/outcomes to RNECE-West’s Western Region and nationally.

C. In addition to the project narrative, please submit the following appendices (does not count towards 10-page limit of project narrative). All appendices must be combined into a single PDF document.
   i. A logic model of proposed project (a template can be found here).
   ii. A listing of key personnel and partners.
   iii. Letters of support from partners.
   iv. A timeline, including milestones, to assess progress and accomplishments.
   v. Reference list with full citations for all relevant literature. References do not count towards the Project Narrative 10 page limit.
   vi. A short CV or biosketch for all key personnel (limit to 4 pages per individual).
   vii. A completed current and pending support form for key personnel (a sample form can be found here).
   viii. A completed conflict of interest form for key personnel (a sample form can be found here).
   ix. A budget and budget narrative. Indirect costs must be limited to 26% of modified total direct costs. The budget form can be found here.

**Evaluation criteria**
Once the RNECE-West Leadership Team have determined that the above criteria have been met, the review panel will evaluate and rank qualified applications. Each qualified applicant will be evaluated based on the following criteria, weighted accordingly:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RNECE-West RFA Review Criteria</th>
<th>Total Possible Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Address EFNEP, SNAP-Ed, and/or similar programs’ needs</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicability to proposed target audience and demonstrate working with current EFNEP, SNAP-Ed or similar programs</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to support RNECE-West’s focus in long-term evaluation of direct nutrition education and/or PSE change (as addressed in project narrative) and address at least one of the priority areas of the Western Region’s SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention Outcomes</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Adequacy of the proposal response to:</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Objectives of project(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Process(es) for meeting objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Description of expected accomplishments and implications</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Logic model of the project</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Applicability of the outputs/outcomes to RNECE-West’s Western Region and nationally</td>
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● Timeline of proposal
● Appropriateness of key personnel and partners

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<tr>
<td>Strength of Evaluation Plan (process and outcome)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrated capacity (expertise and resources) to complete the proposed project</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Appropriateness of requested budget</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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1 Includes 13 Western States plus territories: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

8. Progress and Final Reporting
Progress reports will be submitted quarterly and will need to follow the format of the RNECE-West Progress Report form, found at http://wrnece.colostate.edu. An expenditure report will need to be submitted quarterly (template will be available on the website). A final budget form will need to be submitted at the end of the funding period and will be located on the website. All products and project deliverables (evaluation tools, research results, etc.) must be submitted to the RNECE-West by the end of the funding period as these products will be made widely available by USDA. Additionally, informal calls with awardees will be conducted to monitor progress. A final report must be submitted to RNECE-West no later than 30 days after the expiration of the project. The final report must use the RNECE-West Final Report form, found at http://WRNECE.colostate.edu.

Project Administrative Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Deliverable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Funding notification</td>
<td><strong>July 1st, 2015</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit notification of IRB approval to CSU</td>
<td>By <strong>August 15th, 2015</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit quarterly reports (process, outcomes/progress and budget)</td>
<td><strong>October 2015, January 2016, April 2016</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit final report (process, outcomes/accomplishments, products/project deliverables and budget)</td>
<td><strong>August 10th, 2016</strong></td>
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9. Submission of Applications
Applications must be submitted electronically to chhs-fshn_wrnece@mail.colostate.edu, and all components must be in portable document format (PDF).

RNECE-West welcomes your questions about the RFA or the submission process. Please contact:

Katie McGirr, MS, RD
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Regional Nutrition Education Center of Excellence - West
(970) 491-3642
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