

Reviewer Information

2026 IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) is requesting nominations of qualified individuals active in the specialty crop industry, academia and public sectors to establish a professionally diverse Review Committee for the upcoming IDALS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (IDALS SCBGP). Members of the Review Committee will review, evaluate and make recommendations to IDALS on submitted Iowa Specialty Crop Block Grant Program proposals.

Reviewers should have knowledge of specialty crops, and/or grant writing or grant management experience, and the ability to devote the necessary time to complete the review process. Reviewers will be appointed by Iowa Secretary of Agriculture.

Reviewers will provide their time and service as a volunteer with no compensation.

Reviewers will not be allowed to submit a grant proposal in which they are listed as the Principle Investigator while serving on the Review Committee. This does not include open grants that have already been approved.

To nominate yourself as a potential reviewer, complete and sign the online reviewer application form <https://idals.fillout.com/scbg-reviewer-application>

Application deadline is February 20, 2026, at 4:00 pm.

Definition

“Specialty Crops” are identified as: fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture.” A list is provided at www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp and contains commonly considered specialty crops and also a list of ineligible commodities.

The Review Process:

- Reviewers will be notified by February 27, 2026, of their selection to serve on the Review Committee.
- Upon selection, you will be sent a link to a training video on how to score and evaluate projects and how to complete the online scoring sheet.
- Reviewers will be provided with electronic copies of all qualifying grant proposals to evaluate and approximately one month in which to review them. The grant application deadline is March 6, 2026. Each reviewer will review and grade all proposals and submit their evaluation and scores in an online score sheet. This review includes at least three comments for each proposal.

- The grant administrator will compile the scores from all of the reviewers to submit to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval. Should there be a need to discuss projects similar in score, a conference call or Zoom will be used.

Responsibilities

- Reviewers should be dedicated to high quality, fair reviews, and be able to devote sufficient time to the review process.
- Reviewers will utilize their knowledge and expertise to evaluate grant proposals and provide scores and written comments about proposals from eligible entities that are applying for IDALS SCBGP grants.
- Objective and impartial
- Free of organization, project, or racial biases
- Able to maintain confidentiality
- Forthcoming in declaring conflicts of interest

Reviewers should be knowledgeable of how to objectively evaluate and assess grant proposals for objectives, work plans and expected results in determining the potential for project success.

Reviewers must write comments to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each application. The review criteria is specific to the IDALS SCBGP, meets the needs of the specialty crop stakeholder priorities identified by outreach activities, and IDALS goals and objectives.

Reviewers rank proposals against the evaluation criteria and make recommendations to the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture. Reviewers DO NOT choose the proposals which will be funded by IDALS and the USDA.

Reviewers must sign the Policy on Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality Form. The confidentiality policy requires that Reviewers refrain from sharing with anyone the discussions, comments, scores, recommendations, selections or non-selections made before, during or after the IDALS SCBGP proposal review process.

Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), applicants may request a copy of the materials documenting the Grant Review Committee's evaluation/comments of their application. Applicants are entitled to this information. In these situations, reviewers' information is removed from the evaluation/comments.