



Professional Development Grant 2019 Preproposal Instructions

Important Dates

The online system will open for submissions: **June 1, 2018**

Preproposal submissions are due: **July 10, 2018, 11:59 p.m. ET**

Applications are submitted online at: www.ciids.org/nesare/PDPpre.

Questions?

Visit our website at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP

Contact the Northeast SARE office at northeastsare@uvm.edu or 802/651-8335.

About Northeast SARE

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program offers competitive grants to farmers, educators, service providers, researchers, and graduate students to address key issues affecting the sustainability of agriculture throughout our region. With funding from the USDA, Northeast SARE is one of four regional SARE programs that aims to improve farm profits, stewardship, and quality of life for farmers.

The program—including funding decisions—is driven by our **outcome statement**:

Agriculture in the Northeast will be diversified and profitable, providing healthful products to its customers; it will be conducted by farmers who manage resources wisely, who are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment.



The Northeast region includes: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.

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Northeast SARE, one of four regional SARE programs, is hosted by the University of Vermont and is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Northeast SARE programs are offered to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.

About Northeast SARE Professional Development Grants

Overview

The Professional Development grant program funds projects that train agricultural service providers such as Cooperative Extension, state department of agriculture personnel, crop consultants, veterinarians, farm advisors with private businesses, and nonprofit organizations about sustainable practices and approaches so that they, in turn, can educate farmers.

Outcome Funding

Professional Development projects must use an outcome funding approach that directly connects project activities to measurable goals. Central to this approach for Northeast SARE grants is the performance target, a statement that describes the changes in behavior or conditions among project beneficiaries that are expected as a result from the proposed project. To learn more about outcome funding, download our “*Guide to Outcome Funding*” at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP.

About Preproposals

Preproposals are required for Professional Development grants, as well as for Northeast SARE’s two other major grant programs: Research and Education and Research for Novel Approaches. An individual project leader may submit no more than two preproposals per grant program per year.

The preproposal is a preliminary concept document that allows SARE reviewers to select the most promising projects to be invited to submit full proposals. Proposals are only invited if they have strong, data-based justification, a clear and measurable performance target, and effective approaches to achieving the target. Projects must seek wider adoption of sustainable practices through education. Practices may be related to production, marketing, finances, or social/quality of life issues.

In previous years, about one-third of preproposals have been invited to submit full proposals, and about one-third of full proposal submissions have been awarded. Three to six awards are made each year, depending on available funding.

Eligible Applicants

There is no requirement that project leaders have a specific affiliation, but they must have the institutional capacity and support networks necessary to carry out the project. They should also have experience with and responsibilities for delivering agricultural education to extension and other agricultural service providers. Typically, proposals come from university and extension staff, the agricultural nonprofit sector, and people who work on research farms and experiment stations, but proposals from private consultants or agriculture related businesses will be considered. Project leaders must have the skills and experience needed to oversee and carry out their proposed work.

Funding Available

Reviewers prefer projects in the \$30,000 to \$150,000 range. Funding requests should align with project duration, scope of the work, and intensity of interaction with beneficiaries. Amounts higher than the typical range will be considered for projects that include multi-disciplinary or multi-institutional education networks, especially when those networks enable a more comprehensive systems approach to addressing challenges or opportunities.

Northeast SARE encourages projects to request the funding necessary to support collaboration with 1890 land grant universities. Projects are also encouraged to include funding to specifically address or assess social dimensions of the proposed work.

Project Duration

Typical project length is 2 to 3 years. The maximum project length allowed is 3.5 years.

Conflict of Interest

Members of the Northeast SARE Administrative Council and their immediate family members or business associates are not permitted to apply for or receive funding from SARE grants. Members of proposal review teams are not permitted to discuss or vote on proposals that involve institutions they work for, organizations for which they serve as board member or adviser, former graduate student advisees, or close personal friends.

Public Domain

While applications and reviews will remain confidential, Northeast SARE considers funded projects, subsequent reports, and related information to be in the public domain.

Grant Timeline

Online application system opens for submissions	June 1, 2018
Preproposal submission deadline.....	July 10, 2018
Project leaders notified whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal	August 17, 2018
Feedback provided to invited preproposals to strengthen full proposal	September 7, 2018
Feedback provided to preproposals not invited	late September 2018
Full proposal submission deadline	October 30, 2018
Awards announced to project leaders.....	February 22, 2019
Earliest start date for projects, with contracts from UVM to follow shortly.....	February 25, 2019
Grant management conference calls with Northeast SARE staff.....	March 2019

Preparing Your Preproposal

Preproposals are submitted online at: www.ciids.org/nesare/PDPpre/. The online application system will be open for submissions from June 1 until the deadline, 11:59 p.m. ET on July 10, 2018. Staff support to answer questions or deal with technical submission issues will be available until 5:00 p.m. ET on the due date. Preproposals submitted after 11:59 p.m. on July 10 will not be accepted.

There are word limits for all sections of the preproposal. It is highly advisable to use a word processing program to develop the application offline, ensuring it is accurate and complies with the word limits. Do not use special formatting or symbols. These will be lost when you paste the text into the online application. Use only the keyboard symbols.

No attachments are allowed in the preproposal application.

No authorized signatures are required for preproposal submission.

The online application system will prompt you to set up an account and log you into the site. If you have applied in a previous year and are using the same email, the system may remember your account from before.

You will start the application by entering a clear, succinct title of under 120 characters, including spaces, that captures the essence of the project's intent. Avoid acronyms, jargon, or unnecessary words.

Next, enter your project's expected project start and end dates, your name, organization, and contact information.

Examples for each section of the preproposal are included in the appendix.

Step by Step Instructions

Refer to the appendix for examples of each section of the preproposal. Note that grant review criteria appear next to related sections. All preproposals are evaluated using these criteria and they must be adequately addressed for an application to be funded.

1. Performance target (75 words)

The performance target is the core of the project preproposal; it is the primary item reviewers use to evaluate the merit of the project. The performance target includes the following three required components and one optional component:

Review criteria:

The performance target describes actions service providers will take to educate farmers, the number of farmers they teach and a descriptive measure of the scale of production the farmers manage, if appropriate; the performance target is specific, measurable, and ambitious.

Required – performance target for service providers:

- The number (not an undefined percentage) of agricultural service providers who will take action to teach, advise or assist farmers after learning through the project.
- The specific, verifiable action(s) the service providers will take for teaching, advising, and assisting farmers.
- The total number of farmers the agricultural service providers will educate or assist,

and when appropriate,

additional descriptors of the extent of farm production these farmers manage, such as the total number of acres, animal units, markets, enterprises, etc. the farmers manage.

Optional – performance target for farmers:

- The number of farmers who will make the recommended change or action as a result of learning from the agricultural service providers.

This optional component should be part of the target only if you feel confident you will be able to measure or collect data about the farmer actions before the end of the project. Projects that include farmers as co-learners and/or that have agricultural service providers working intensively with farmers throughout the project sometimes choose to include this optional component.

2. Milestones (250 words)

Milestones describe and quantify what agricultural service providers will experience throughout the project, in sequence. Milestones must describe: 1) Recruitment to participate, 2) Pre-training engagement, 3) Learning through the education program, 4) Engagement to support follow-up action, and 5) Verification of actions or changes.

If funded, milestones will become the benchmarks for required progress reports, and must be verifiable (measurable).

Milestones are written in terms of what the agricultural service providers will do and learn, rather than as a plan of work or list of activities that the project team will perform.

Each milestone is written as a statement with three components:

- A realistic number of service provider beneficiaries who participate;
- The project activities or educational experiences in which the service providers take part; and
- The specific knowledge or skills they learn or the intermediate action step they complete as a result of participating.

Reviewers look for realistic levels of participation sufficient to accomplish the performance target, a strong, logical relationship between the milestones and performance target, and a progression of milestones capable of preparing beneficiaries for the performance target.

3. Problem, solution and benefits (225 words)

- Explain the problem or missed opportunity for farmers, the causes (or hypothesized causes) of the problem, and why it is important to address.
- State the number, type, and size of farms and the extent of agricultural production affected by the problem.
- Briefly state the proposed solution for farmers that will be the focus of the project's education, and the potential benefits the solution offers farmers.
- Explain the expected benefits for agricultural service providers from participating in the project to learn about the problem and solution.

Provide numerical data to justify the statements made about the items above. Sources of justification data may include references in literature, the work of others, farmer surveys, extension surveys, census data, etc.

Citations are not required in the preproposal, but will be required in a full proposal.

Review criteria:

The milestones describe a sequence of knowledge and skills acquisition by service providers, and the changes they make or steps they take that lead—logically and realistically—to the performance target. The milestones describe how project personnel and beneficiaries interact for: 1) Project recruitment, 2) Pre-training engagement, 3) Learning during education program, 4) Engagement to support action, and 5) Verification of actions and changes.

Review criteria:

The problem is important to sustainable agriculture in the Northeast and the need to address it is important; the type, number and scale of farms affected is described. The solution clearly has potential to address the problem, and the benefits to farmers from solving the problem are meaningful. Descriptions are clear and claims made about the problem and solution are supported by specific evidence (data).

4. Project beneficiaries and their need for education (125 words)

Describe the population of agricultural service providers targeted for participation, their need for education to help farmers address the problem described in section 3. These should be service providers who are concerned about the problem, in a position to teach or advise farmers, and likely to participate in the project if it is funded.

If you have formal or informal survey data about agricultural service providers' concerns, educational needs and willingness to participate in the project, then provide that information. If you do not have data yet, state how you will obtain numerical data that substantiates agricultural service providers' willingness to take part in the project for a full proposal.

Review criteria:

The targeted beneficiaries are agricultural service providers; their educational need and interest is clearly described and supported with data, or there is a plan to assess their interest with data to be presented in the full proposal.

5. Education plan (200 words)

Provide a summary of the proposed plan to teach agricultural service providers and motivate them to teach or advise farmers about the problem and proposed solution. This plan must be realistic, describe content and methods appropriate to engaging the service providers, and be likely to lead to achievement of the performance target.

The education plan must include:

- The areas in which service providers will increase their knowledge and skills as a result of participating in the project.
- Methods for instruction and beneficiary support (workshops, demonstrations, meetings, etc.).
- Known challenges to farmer adoption that will be addressed.
- Roles of collaborators (regulators, educators, farmers, consultants, buyers, etc.) who are critical to the success of the project.

Review criteria:

The education plan offers a realistic and credible approach to meet the need; specific curriculum topics are listed and the key instructional and support methods are clearly described.

6. Key individuals – coordinator and cooperators (125 words)

Key individuals are essential team members who devote significant time to the project.

Provide a brief description of the project leader (coordinator) and other key individuals (cooperators) who will play an essential role leading the project. Name the individuals and state their affiliations, qualifications and the primary role they will play in the project. If names of some key individuals are not yet known, provide an outline of the potential leadership team.

Name any other organizations, outside of your own, that will be receiving some of the money requested from SARE to carry out the project, or contributing significant money, personnel time, facilities, or equipment to the project.

Review criteria:

The project leader and other key individuals have the capacity and appropriate experience to conduct the project.

7. Funding request estimate (3 words)

Select a range that estimates the total budget request you anticipate for this project including the allowed indirect to your institution (limited to 10% of the total): “Under \$50,000;” “\$50,000 to \$99,000;” “\$100,000 to \$149,000;” or “Over \$150,000.”

Review criteria:

The estimate of funds needed appears realistic and reasonable per the work described.

Next Steps: Planning for Full Proposal Submission

As a reminder, an individual project leader may submit no more than two preproposals per grant program (includes this Research and Education program, Research for Novel Approaches, and Professional Development Program) per year.

Only project leaders with an invited preproposal may submit a full proposal. A project leader may submit **only one full proposal per year**, selecting just one of Northeast SARE's major grant programs, even if more than one preproposal was invited to submit a full proposal.

Project leaders will be notified as to whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal on August 17, 2018. Feedback that may be used to strengthen a full proposal will be provided to project leaders with invited preproposals by September 7, 2018. For preproposals not invited to submit full proposals, feedback will be provided to project leaders in late September.

Full proposal instructions will be sent to invited preproposal project leaders.

The full proposal will require additional information for all sections included in the preproposal plus the addition of a verification plan, a listing members of a Project Advisory Committee, literature review and citation list, attachments such as letters of commitment from key individuals and Current and Pending support of the project leader, and a complete project budget.

Budget planning

While the preproposal only asks for an estimate of the project budget, the full proposal will require a detailed Excel spreadsheet of the funding needs with justification for each item requested. Invited project leaders will receive a budget template. Full proposal budgets should not differ significantly from the preproposal estimates.

SARE funds can be used for the following project expenses: personnel, travel, materials and supplies, communications, and other direct costs. USDA currently allows indirect costs up to 10% of total funds, which may be estimated as 11.11% of direct costs.

SARE funds cannot be used for the following: capital expenditures--items like land, buildings, livestock, greenhouses, other major fixtures and improvements, general use items, and machinery not essential to the project.

Appendix: Examples of Preproposal Sections

The following examples are meant to be used for illustrative purposes only.

1. Performance target examples

20 agricultural service providers will provide one-on-one intensive consultations intensively with 35 farmers helping them develop marketing plans to start a new value-added product. 25 of the farmers will complete their marketing plans.

12 agricultural service providers teach a total of 250 dairy farmers who cultivate 18,000 acres of corn for silage about techniques, benefits, and challenges of planting cover crops in fields harvested for corn silage.

8 extension educators develop and deliver education where 320 sheep farmers who raise 6,000 sheep learn about integrated parasite management and how to use the FAMACHA system of barber pole parasite management.

25 agricultural service providers provide education and advice about plant pathogenic nematode assessment and management, which includes new integrated production practices to manage nematodes, to 250 vegetable farmers who manage 3,000 acres.

2. Example milestones

See the example milestones below leading to a performance target with types of interaction indicated in bold. The interaction types are included here for your guidance and would not be included (not required) in the preproposal.

Recruitment to participate and	120 agricultural service providers learn about the market planning education program through invitations and receive an online survey about their current level of knowledge and learning needs.
Pre-training engagement	60 agricultural service providers return the survey; 30 agree to participate in the education program and recruit two farmer co-learners.
Learning through education program	25 service providers and 50 farmers attend the first webinar about market assessment and learn about identifying potential customers and sales regions and how to determine product demand and specifications.
	The 25 service providers and 50 farmers attend the remaining three webinars and learn about product development, market competition and positioning, and market connection, advertisement, and promotion.
	20 of the service providers and 35 of the farmers attend the one-and-a-half-day workshop where they apply case studies to learn how to use market planning worksheets.
Engagement to support follow-up action	20 service providers request and receive telephone, e-mail, or in-person support from the project team as they continue working with farmers on development of value-added marketing plans.
Verification of actions or changes	20 service providers respond to verification survey or interview request and report on their actions advising farmers and on farmers' progress towards marketing plan completion.
Performance target	<p>Twenty agricultural service providers will consult intensively with 35 farmers helping them develop business plans to start a new value-added product. 25 of the farmers will complete their business plans.</p> <p><i>Note: The performance target does <u>not</u> need to be included in the preproposal milestones. It is provided here for reference only.</i></p>

3. Example statement of problem, solution and benefits

In 2000, U.S. consumers spent more than \$650 million on food. A 2005 USDA analysis estimates that less than 7 percent of every food dollar spent remains in the local community, and the challenge for farmers is finding ways to capture a larger share of the food dollar.

Adding value to farm products through processing, packaging, or refining can garner a higher profit on food products for all farms. Data from a 2006 study of the returns from various value-added products showed that direct sales of value-added beef and lamb garnered an average premium of \$2.75 per lb. over wholesale prices, and value-added fruit and vegetable products netted from \$2 to \$20 per lb. more than raw products. Maryland's 1,200 small fruit, vegetable, and livestock farmers, many of whom rely primarily on direct sales, can potentially benefit from learning about and adopting value-added strategies.

This project will offer comprehensive training to agricultural service providers and farmer learning partners about how to develop value-added marketing plans. The agricultural service providers who participate in this project will improve their capabilities to advise the farmers who participate with them, and additional farmers also, about whether and how to develop value-added businesses.

4. Example of project beneficiaries

Maryland extension personnel and agricultural service providers including personnel from Department of Agriculture, FSA, and non-profit organizations represent the beneficiaries for this project.

In an informal survey of 55 Maryland Extension personnel at a 2011 in-service training, 49 educators reported receiving requests from farmers for information about value-added products, but only 10 felt confident to teach farmers how to assess, develop, and market value-added products. These extension personnel and additional service providers throughout the state will be surveyed about their interest to participate in an intensive educational program and their willingness to recruit farmer co-learners and teach them about value-added market planning.

5. Example of an education plan

After an online baseline knowledge assessment of enrolled participants, this project will offer an education program that includes a webinar series followed by a one-and-a-half-day interactive workshop and individualized support from the project team. The webinar series will contain four modules presented one month apart, and topics will include market assessment and competition, product development, positioning, and market connection and promotion. At the workshop participants will analyze case studies and learn how to use market planning tools.

The agricultural service providers will identify two farmers who are interested in developing value-added products to attend the webinars and the follow-up workshop with them. After the workshop, as the service providers continue working with their farmer learning partners and developing education programs for other farmers, they will receive support from the project team through individual phone, email and in-person consultations, and from each other through an online educators' forum.

6. Example of key individuals – coordinator and cooperators

Dr. Selena Garcia, the project leader, is a Delta University Extension specialist with 20 years of experience working with family farm businesses to improve their recordkeeping and business planning skills. Dr. Garcia has also organized workshops for agricultural service providers on similar topics.

Darnell Jones is a marketing specialist who works with the non-profit Maryland Entrepreneur Institute, an organization that provides business and market planning support to small business entrepreneurs. Darnell will help develop the educational curriculum and planning tools, and provide instruction.

Lia Nguyen is an Extension educator with advanced training and experience in food safety practices and regulations; Lia will provide instruction and support related to food safety considerations.