



Call for 2020 Preproposals Professional Development Grant Program

About this Call

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program invites preproposals to its Professional Development Grant Program for the 2020 grant cycle. This call includes information about the grant program, how to apply, and submission instructions.

Important Dates

The online system will open for submissions:

May, 31, 2019

Professional Development Grant preproposal submissions are due: **June 25, 2019, 5:00 p.m. ET**

Questions?

Visit our website at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP. Specific questions should be directed to Janet McAllister at janet.mcallister@uconn.edu or 860/486-1950.

About Northeast SARE

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program offers competitive grants to farmers, educators, agricultural service providers, researchers, graduate students, and others 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 the Northeast SARE **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.

Inside	
About the Grant Program	2
Grant Timeline	3
Navigating the Online Submission System	4
Preparing Your Answers to Preproposal Questions	4
Next Steps: Planning for Full Proposal Submission	8
Resources	8

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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 educators, nonprofit organization staff, state department of agriculture personnel, crop consultants, farm advisors with private businesses, and veterinarians about sustainable practices and approaches so that they can, in turn, educate farmers.

Projects must seek wider adoption of sustainable practices or approaches through education. Practices or approaches taught must address one or more of the three tenets of sustainable agriculture: environmental quality, financial viability, and social sustainability including farm succession/transfer, farmer health and well-being and quality of life.

New for the 2020 Cycle

The time applications are due has been moved to 5:00 p.m. ET.

Northeast SARE has recently migrated its online grant submissions to projects.sare.org, SARE's national grant management system.

Instructions on how to access and submit preproposals in the system are included on page 4.

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 Professional Development grants is the performance target, a statement that describes the changes in behavior among project beneficiaries (in this case, agricultural service providers) that are expected as a result from the proposed project. Applicants are strongly urged to become familiar with outcome funding. Learn more from 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. If multiple preproposals are approved and invited as full proposals, *only one* full proposal may be submitted per year, regardless of how many preproposals are approved.

The preproposal is a preliminary concept document. Reviewers select the most promising projects to invite 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.

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

Eligible Applicants

Project leaders must have the skills, experience and institutional capacity necessary to carry out the project. Northeast SARE welcomes preproposals from a wide range of stakeholders including university and extension staff, agricultural nonprofits, research farm and experiment station personnel, private consultants, agriculture related businesses and organizations, government agencies, and others who work in farming and food systems.

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 Minority Serving Institutions (including 1890s and other historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, etc.) and other organizations in the Northeast region that work with diverse communities. 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. All projects must be completed by November 30, 2023.

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, business partners or close personal friends.

Public Domain

Applications and reviews are kept confidential, shared only among Northeast SARE staff, Administrative Council members, and grant program reviewers. However, Northeast SARE, as a USDA NIFA program, is committed to public access of results of funded projects; therefore, information on funded projects, their reports, and related information will be in the public domain.

Grant Timeline

Online application system opens for submissions	May 31, 2019
Preproposal submission deadline	June 25, 2019
Project leaders notified whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal	August 12, 2019
Feedback provided to invited preproposals to strengthen full proposal	August 30, 2019
Feedback provided to preproposals not invited	September 30, 2019
Full proposal submission deadline	October 29, 2019
Awards announced to project leaders.....	Late February 2020
Earliest start date for projects, with contracts from UVM to follow shortly	Late February 2020
Grant management conference calls with Northeast SARE staff.....	March 2020

Navigating the Online Submission System

Preproposals are submitted online at: projects.sare.org.

The online application system will be open for submissions from May 31, 2019 until the deadline, **5:00 p.m. ET on June 25, 2019**. Staff support to answer questions or deal with technical submission issues will be available until 5:00 p.m. ET on the due date. Applications submitted after 5:00 p.m. ET on June 25 will not be accepted.

Northeast SARE has recently migrated its online grant submissions to projects.sare.org, SARE's national grant management system. If you have previously received SARE grants and submitted reports, you are registered as a user in the system and should use your account to submit your preproposal(s). New users should select "Create an account" and follow the prompts.

From the SARE Grant Management System landing page, select "Log in." Once logged in, select "Start a new grant proposal." Grant opportunities for all four SARE regions will be listed; scroll down until you see **Northeast**. Under "**2020 Northeast SARE Professional Development Program (preproposal)**" choose "Begin a New Proposal."

Start the application by clicking "Edit Title" and 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.

There are two sections of the preproposal:

- **Basic Information.** Here, enter the organization or institution hosting the project, and whether a full proposal for this work was submitted previously to Northeast SARE.
- **Preproposal Questions.** See pages 5-7 for instructions for this section.

To enter information, click "Edit Answer" for each question and be sure to click "Save" after each entry. At any time during the writing of your preproposal, you can preview a draft from the proposal overview page by clicking "View Draft." You can also share the draft of your preproposal with collaborators by sending the "link to share" found at the top of the draft page or by creating and sending a PDF of the preproposal.

When all preproposal questions are answered to your satisfaction, click the "Submit Proposal" button. Prior to the deadline, you may "unsubmit" to revise the preproposal, but if you do so, don't forget to submit it again when you are done, otherwise it will not go forward to review. Each time you submit or unsubmit the preproposal, you will receive an email confirmation.

Remember, individual applicants may submit up to two preproposals per Northeast SARE grant program (Research and Education, Novel Approaches for Research, and/or Professional Development) in a single year. However, only one full proposal may be submitted per year, regardless of how many preproposals are approved.

Preparing Your Answers to Preproposal Questions

There are word limits for all entries in the Preproposal Questions section. It is advisable to use a word processing program to develop the preproposal, ensuring it is accurate and complies with the word limits.

No attachments are allowed in the preproposal application.

No authorized signatures are required for preproposal submission.

Instructions for Preproposal Questions

Each numbered section below appears as a “Preproposal Question” in the online submission system along with its associated review criteria. Responses are entered online by clicking “Edit Answer” after each question. Preproposals are evaluated using the review criteria and answers entered in response to the prompts below must adequately address review criteria for an application to approved.

1. Problem, solution and benefits (200 words)

Explain the problem or missed opportunity for farmers, the causes (or hypothesized causes) of the problem, and why, in the context of sustainability, 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 to social, economic and/or environmental sustainability 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 problem is important to advance 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. The benefits to farmers from solving the problem are meaningful, and the benefits to service providers from learning are explained. Descriptions are clear and claims made about the problem and solution are supported by specific evidence (data).

2. Project beneficiaries and their needs and interests (125 words)

Describe the population of agricultural service providers targeted for participation, and their need for education to help farmers address the problem described in Question 1. 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 provider educational needs and willingness to participate in the project, provide this information. If you do not have these data yet, describe how you will obtain numerical data that substantiate agricultural service providers’ willingness to take part in the project; this information is required in a full proposal.

Review criteria:

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

3. Education program (150 words)

Describe the outcome-focused education program you will conduct to teach agricultural service providers, and motivate and support them to teach or advise farmers about the problem and proposed solution(s). The description must include a realistic number of service provider beneficiaries who participate; the type of educational experiences and project interactions in which the service providers participate; and the specific knowledge and skills they acquire as a result of participating.

Review criteria:

The education plan offers a realistic and credible approach to meet the educational need; appropriate and effective educational experiences and project interactions to teach and support action are clearly described; the knowledge and skills to be gained by service providers are likely to lead to the performance target.

4. Performance target (75 words)

The performance target is the primary element of the preproposal reviewers use to evaluate the merit of the project. The performance target should be a realistic and logical outcome for service providers that results from their participation in the education program. It has three required components and one optional component:

Review criteria:

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

Required – performance target for service providers:

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

Optional – performance target for farmers:

- d. The number of farmers who will take action to adopt 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.

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

Briefly describe essential team members who will devote significant time to the project, including the project leader (coordinator) and other key individuals (cooperators). Descriptions should demonstrate the ability to manage the project and conduct its activities. Name the individuals, their organizational affiliations, and their primary responsibilities in the project.

If some key individuals have not yet been identified, provide an outline of the potential leadership team. An acceptable entry might say, “a veterinarian with poultry expertise who works in the target states,” or “two health department personnel with experience in water quality.”

Lastly, 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.

6. Funding request estimate (select category)

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 for the work described and the performance target proposed.

Next Steps: Planning for Full Proposal Submission

Applicants will be notified if they are invited to submit a full proposal on August 12, 2019. Feedback that may be used to strengthen a full proposal will be provided to project leaders with invited preproposals by August 30, 2019. For preproposals not invited to submit full proposals, feedback will be provided to project leaders by the end of September.

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

The full proposal will require additional information in all sections of the preproposal plus additional questions including milestones, a verification plan, a Project Advisory Committee, literature review and citation list. Attachments such as letters of commitment from key individuals, and a draft verification tool will also be required.

Budget planning

Full proposals will require a detailed Excel spreadsheet of the funding needs with justification for each item requested. Invited project leaders will receive a budget template to complete. 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, farm equipment rental, 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; incentive offers and promotional items; most international travel; purchase of motorized vehicles and equipment; cell phone charges; food expenses (unless necessary for the continuity of a training event or project meeting); and machinery not essential to the project.

Resources

The following resources may help you as plan your project.

- [Outcome Funding Guide](#). This guide, developed by Northeast SARE staff, provides an introduction to the concept of outcome funding, describes key terms like milestones and performance targets, and provides guidance on constructing outcome funding proposals.
- [Project Verification Guide](#). This guide contains tips on developing project verification questions and includes real-world examples of verification for Northeast SARE outcome-funded Research and Education and Professional Development projects.
- [Adult Learning Guide for Educators](#). This guide introduces educators to five best practices for adult learning that may be used in the design and delivery of engaging and productive learning experiences that help farmers make changes. The principles are based on research in a variety of fields and their application is relevant for a range of learning environments, from farm field days to classroom workshops and webinars.
- Visit [SARE's national database of projects](#) to discover the types of projects that have been funded. Go to: projects.sare.org/search-projects/ and select "Northeast" region and "Professional Development Program" project type.
- The [Alternative Farming Systems Information Center \(AFSIC\)](#) at the National Agricultural Library specializes in identifying resources about sustainable food systems and practices: www.nal.usda.gov/afsic.
- Specific questions about Northeast SARE's Professional Development Grant Program should be directed to Janet McAllister at janet.mcallister@uconn.edu or 860/486-1950.