



# Call for 2020 Preproposals Research and Education Grant Program

## About this Call

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program invites preproposals to its Research and Education 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**  
Research and Education Grant Preproposal submissions are due: **June 25, 2019, 5:00 p.m. ET**

## Questions?

Visit our website at: [www.northeastsare.org/ResearchEducationGrant](http://www.northeastsare.org/ResearchEducationGrant). Specific questions should be directed to David Holm at [northeastsare@uvm.edu](mailto: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, agricultural service providers, researchers, graduate students, 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.

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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 Research and Education Grants

### Overview

The Research and Education Grant Program funds sustainable agriculture projects that result in gains in farmer knowledge and skills applied to make verifiable (measurable) changes that lead to greater sustainability throughout the Northeast region.

Projects may be submitted with or without an applied research component but all projects must have an outcome-based education program for farmers.

Projects must explore, improve or expand on practices and approaches that 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](https://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

Research and Education projects 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 and conditions among project beneficiaries (in this case, farmers) 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/ResearchEducationGrant](http://www.northeastsare.org/ResearchEducationGrant).

### About Preproposals

Preproposals are required for Research and Education grants, as well as for Northeast SARE’s two other major grant programs, Research for Novel Approaches and the Professional Development Program. 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-third of full proposal submissions have been awarded grants. About ten Research and Education awards are expected to be made this year, depending on available funding.

### Eligible Applicants

Applicants must have the institutional capacity and support networks 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 \$250,000 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 research and 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 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 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](https://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](https://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 Research and Education (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; answers entered in response to the prompts below must adequately address these review criteria.

### 1. Problem, solution and benefits (150 words)

Explain the problem, harm, or missed opportunity for farmers that the project will address; the causes (or hypothesized causes) of the problem and why, in the context of sustainability, it is important to address.

Describe the number, type, and size of farms and the extent of agricultural production affected by the problem.

Briefly state the project’s proposed solution and describe the expected measurable benefits to social, economic and/or environmental sustainability the solution offers farmers.

Provide numerical data to justify the statements made about the items above. Data sources that provide justification may include references in literature, the work of others, farmer and 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; the type, number and scale of farms affected is described; the need to address the problem is significant. 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).

### 2. Description of project beneficiaries (100 words)

Describe the population of farmers targeted for participation in this project and how you will know by the time of a full proposal submission whether farmers will take part in your project. These should be farmers who experience the problem or seek the opportunity, and can benefit from the proposed solution.

If you have formal or informal survey data about farmers’ concerns or willingness to participate in the project, provide that information. If you do not have data yet, state how you will obtain numerical data for a full proposal that substantiates farmers’ interest and their willingness to take part in the project.

#### Review criteria:

The targeted beneficiaries are farmers, and their interest is clearly described and can be supported with data, or there is a plan to assess their interest with data to be presented in the full proposal.

### 3. Research (if applicable, 150 words)

This section is required for projects with an applied research component. Projects that do not include research components should write “Not Applicable” in this section.

Briefly state:

- 1) The research objective and why it is relevant to the problem or opportunity described earlier.
- 2) The main treatments (field research) or target population (social science research).
- 3) Key data to be collected.

#### Review criteria:

If there is a research component, the research objective clearly addresses the problem or opportunity, and the treatments or audience and data to be collected are appropriate to developing the solution described earlier.

#### 4. Education program (150 words)

Describe the outcome-focused education program you will conduct to teach farmers about the problem, the recommended solution, and the benefits from adopting the solution. The description should include a realistic number of farmer beneficiaries who participate; the type of project interactions and educational experiences in which the farmers participate; and the specific knowledge and skills they acquire as a result of participating.

##### Review criteria:

A realistic number of farmers will be engaged; appropriate and effective educational methods are clearly described; the knowledge and skills gained by farmers are likely to lead to the performance target.

#### 5. Performance target (50 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 the realistic and logical outcome for farmers that results from their participation in the education program. It has three required components:

a. *A specific, verifiable practice or strategy that farmers will adopt by the end of the project as a result of their participation in the education program.*

For example, these may include adoption of a new or improved:

- crop, or livestock production practice;
- system for food safety, product processing, pest management;
- approach to business management, marketing, or value-added enterprise; and
- plan for intergenerational farm transfer, human resource management, etc.

b. *The number (not a percentage) of farmers who will adopt the practice or strategy, and the extent of their adoption, expressed in measurable units.*

Examples of measurable units include the total number of:

- acres, animals, or other units of production switched to a new practice;
- new markets, products or enterprises developed;
- new farm management plans or strategies implemented;
- employees, farm families, or communities affected by a new plan, practice or strategy.

c. *The measurable benefit(s) that result from farmers' adoption of new practices or strategies.* These must be able to be measured directly or calculated from values already established in the literature. Resulting measurable benefits should include environmental, financial, and/or social factors.

Examples of measurable benefits:

- Pounds of excess nutrients avoided in livestock diet and manure after adoption of practices that improve feed rations.

##### Review criteria:

The performance target describes adoption of a beneficial new practice, strategy, or behavior by farmers, and it describes the extent of that adoption and the benefits resulting from the adoption. The performance target is specific, meaningful, measurable, and ambitious.

- Dollar savings in input costs after adopting new pest control or nutrient management strategies.
- Dollar value of increased sales resulting from planting a new crop, adopting a new marketing strategy, or developing a new enterprise.
- Farmer-reported improvements in quality of life, such as improved family communication, increased number of vacation days, improved insurance protection, or improved labor retention resulting from changes in farm management.
- Acres and value of farmland passed on to younger farmers after creation and implementation of farm transfer plans.

Note that a performance target must not be dependent on research results. The proposed research should complement the learning participants will engage in as they participate in the education program and progress to the performance target, but the extent to which participants achieve the performance target must not depend on the findings of the research program.

## **6. 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 funds requested from SARE to carry out the project, and/or those contributing significant money, personnel time, facilities, or equipment to the project.

## **7. 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;” “\$150,000 to \$199,000;” “\$200,000 to \$249,000;” or “Over \$250,000.”

### **Review criteria:**

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

### **Review criteria:**

The estimate of funds needed appears realistic and appropriate 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 sections including milestones, a verification plan, a Project Advisory Committee, literature review and citation list. Attachments such as letters of commitment from key individuals, a draft verification tool, and a research plot plan or experiment diagram (if conducting research) will also be required.

### Budget planning

A full proposal submission 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/](http://projects.sare.org/search-projects/) and select "Northeast" region and "Research and Education" 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](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic).
- Specific questions about Northeast SARE's Research and Education Grant Program should be directed to David Holm at [northeastsare@uvm.edu](mailto:northeastsare@uvm.edu) or 802/651-8335.