2021 Call for Preproposals: Professional Development Grant Program

Important Dates
The online system opens for submissions: May 5, 2020
Professional Development Grant preproposals are due: July 23, 2020, 5:00 p.m. ET

Applications are submitted online at: projects.sare.org

Questions?
Visit our website at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP.
Contact Katie Campbell-Nelson at kcampbel@umass.edu or 403-834-1090.

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. Northeast SARE is one of four regional SARE programs funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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.


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Northeast SARE
University of Vermont
140 Kennedy Drive, Suite 201
South Burlington, VT 05403
802/651-8335
northeastsare@uvm.edu
www.northeastsare.org

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.

Revised 04 May 2020
About Northeast SARE Professional Development Grants

Overview
The Northeast SARE Professional Development Grant program funds projects that develop the knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes of agricultural and non-agricultural service providers about sustainable agriculture practices to teach, advise, or assist farmers. An agricultural service provider is a professional who assists farmers as part of their work. Projects that develop the ability of non-agricultural service providers (e.g., real estate agents, bankers, or attorneys) to work with farmers are also eligible. These service providers then use their new knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes in their work with farmers.

The Professional Development Grant Program uses an outcome funding approach with a “performance target” to describe the changes in practices, behaviors or conditions among beneficiaries (in this case, service providers) that are expected to result from the proposed project. To learn more about outcome funding and the use of performance targets, visit our “Outcome Funding Guide” at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP.

About Preproposals
Preproposals are required for the Professional Development Grant Program, as well as for Northeast SARE’s two other larger grant programs, Research and Education and Research for Novel Approaches Grant Programs.

The preproposal is a preliminary concept document. Reviewers select those that best meet the review criteria to be invited to submit full proposals. A preproposal is only invited if it has strong justification, a clear and measurable performance target, and effective approaches to achieving the target. In general, about one-third of preproposals are invited to submit full proposals and about one-third of full proposals are approved for funding by the Northeast SARE Administrative Council.

Eligible Applicants
Professional Development Grants are open to agricultural service providers, including personnel at colleges and universities, Cooperative Extension, agricultural and community nonprofit organizations, municipalities, state departments of agriculture, federal agencies like NRCS, for-profit entities (such as private consultants, veterinary practices and other businesses that serve the farming community), and others who work with service providers.

Northeast SARE encourages projects submitted from or in collaboration with Minority Serving Institutions (including 1890s and other historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions and tribal colleges and universities) and other organizations in the Northeast region that work with socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Projects are invited to include funding to specifically address or assess social dimensions of the proposed work.

Your organization must have the legal structure and financial capacity in place to receive and execute a Northeast SARE contract, including expending funds needed for the project prior to receiving reimbursements from Northeast SARE; advance payments are not possible.

Projects must take place within the Northeast region which includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.
An individual project leader (Principal Investigator) may not submit more than two preproposals per grant program per year. If you submit multiple preproposals and more than one is invited to submit a full proposal, you may submit only one full proposal. Current SARE grant recipients who are behind in their reporting will not be invited to apply for full proposals.

Northeast SARE will not fund proposals that appear to duplicate work that has been approved for funding by another grant program (within or external to SARE).

**Funding Available**
There is approximately $1,000,000 available to fund projects for this cycle of Professional Development Grants. Proposals funded typically range from $30,000 to $150,000; we estimate that 8 to 12 awards will be made. Funding requests should align with project duration, scope of the work, and intensity of the education program for beneficiaries. Budgets at the higher end of the range will be considered for projects that include multi-disciplinary or multi-institutional efforts.

Matching funds are not required for SARE grants.

**Project Duration**
Typical project length is 2 to 3 years. All projects must be completed by November 30, 2024.

**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 members or advisers, former graduate student advisees, business partners or close personal friends and family.

**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 (including educational materials and project reports), exclusive or proprietary processes, procedures or techniques developed with SARE funds will be in the public domain.

**Grant Timeline**
Online application system opens for submissions ................................................................. May 5, 2020
Preproposal submission deadline ...................................................................................... 5 p.m. ET, July 23, 2020
Applicants notified whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal ............... August 24, 2020
Feedback sent to applicants ................................................................................................. September 2020
Full proposal submission deadline .................................................................................. 5 p.m. ET, October 20, 2020
Award decisions announced to applicants ........................................................................ Late February 2021
Contract start date for awarded projects ............................................................................. March 1, 2021
Pre-award conference calls with Northeast SARE staff .................................................... March 2021
SARE’s Grant Management System

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

The online application system will be open for submissions from May 5, 2020 until the deadline, 5 p.m. ET on Thursday, July 23, 2020. Staff are available to answer questions until 5 p.m. ET on the due date.

Getting a User Account

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 application at projects.sare.org.

All new users should go projects.sare.org and select “Create an account” to complete the registration information. The system will send you an email with instructions to create your password.

Logging In

From the SARE Grant Management System landing page at projects.sare.org, select “Log in”. Select “Start a new grant proposal”. Grant opportunities for all four SARE regions will be listed; scroll down until you see “Northeast” and click the “+” button. Under “2021 Northeast SARE Professional Development Program Preproposal”, select “Begin a New Proposal”.

Entering your Preproposal

Preproposals must be submitted by you, the project leader (Principal Investigator). They do not require authorized signature by an institutional official.

Start the application by clicking “Edit Title” and enter a clear, succinct title, in title case, of under 150 characters, including spaces, that captures the essence of the project’s intent. Avoid acronyms, jargon or unnecessary words. Next, provide a brief “Proposal Description” of 300 characters or less, used by SARE for search engine optimization purposes. Be sure to click “Save” after each entry.

Under “Principal Investigator”, please do not use the “Change PI” button as you, the person submitting the preproposal, must be the Principal Investigator.

Next, complete the “Basic Information” and “Preproposal Questions” sections. To enter information, click “Edit Answer” for each question and be sure to click “Save” after each entry. See the Step-by-step Application Instructions for more guidance on these sections. At any time during the writing of your preproposal, you may preview a draft from the Proposal Overview Page by clicking “View Draft”. Once there, you can also share your preproposal draft with collaborators by either 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 and select “I understand” to confirm the submission. 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.
Step-by-Step Application Instructions

There are word limits for all entries. You may choose to develop your preproposal offline, ensuring it is accurate and complies with the word limits before pasting into the online system. To that end, a Word document of the proposal questions is available at: www.northeastsare.org/PDP.

The online application is divided into sections that contain multiple questions to answer. Instructions for all questions follow.

Keep your writing clear and simple. Avoid jargon and write for a mixed audience that includes farmers, researchers, extension staff and other agricultural service providers. You can assume that grant reviewers have solid agricultural knowledge, but may not necessarily have deep expertise in your subject area.

- No attachments are allowed in the preproposal application.
- Do not include links to external sites in the preproposal application as they will not be considered by reviewers.
- No authorized signatures are required for preproposal submission.

Basic Information

Answer the four questions: 1) Name of Organization or Institution hosting this project (if different from the applicant’s institution; the applicant’s institution is automatically populated), 2) List the State or States where this project will take place, 3) Anticipated project length in years, and 4) Was a full proposal of this work submitted previously to Northeast SARE?

Preproposal Questions

Responses are entered online by clicking “Edit Answer” after each question—be sure to click “Save” after each entry. Preproposals are evaluated using the review criteria that appear in the boxes to the right. Answers entered in response to the prompts below must adequately address review criteria for an application to be invited for a full proposal.

1. Performance Target (100-word limit)

The performance target is the core statement in the preproposal. It defines the specific, beneficial and verifiable actions that service providers take as a result of participating in the project; therefore, you may wish to finalize this section of the preproposal last.

The performance target is a project’s measurable goal, not a guarantee. The target should be an ambitious but realistic and logical outcome you expect service providers to achieve as a result from their participation in the project’s education program.

Write the following four required components of your performance target as one to two sentences.

1) The **number of service providers** who will acquire new knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes, equipping them to take action to teach, advise and/or assist farmers.

   *Please use a number **not** a percentage here.*

2) The **specific knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes** that service providers will acquire.

   *Review criteria:*
   The performance target describes: 1) the number of service providers; 2) the specific new knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes that the service providers will acquire; 3) the quantifiable actions that the service providers will take to teach, advise and/or assist farmers; and 4) the total number of farmers they will engage.

   If included, the number of farmers adopting new practices or behaviors is measurable within the project timeframe.

   The performance target is specific, meaningful, measurable, and realistic but ambitious.
3) The **quantifiable actions** that service providers will take to use their new knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes to teach, advise and/or assist farmers.

*Examples include: the number of new classroom programs delivered, educational curricula or materials developed, number of farmers mentored, new networks developed, etc.*

4) The **total number of farmers** that the service providers teach, advise and/or assist through their actions.

**Optional** – Farmer performance target, written as another one to two sentences:

5) The **number of farmers who will take action to adopt** new practices or behaviors as a result of learning, advice and/or assistance from the service providers.

*If this component is included, it must be measured within the timeline of the project.*

**2. Statement of Need (200-word limit)**

Explain the problem or opportunity for farmers in the Northeast that the project will address and why it is important to sustainable agriculture. Provide the number, type, size, and location of farms potentially affected in the Northeast. State how the education program proposed will benefit service providers in a way that improves their ability to serve farmers.

Note: Citations are not required in the preproposal.

**Review criteria:**
The problem or opportunity is clearly described, and it is clear that addressing it will enhance sustainable agriculture in the Northeast. The number, type, size and location of farms potentially affected are adequately described. The proposed education plan clearly benefits the ability of service providers to serve farmers.

**3. Service Provider Interest (200-word limit)**

Describe the service providers who will benefit from this project, and their interest in helping farmers address the problem or opportunity through participation in the project. Provide evidence you have that service providers need or want the work proposed by your project.

If you have data about service provider interest in the project, summarize this information. If not, describe how you will collect this data if you are invited to submit a full proposal.

**Review criteria:**
Service providers, as the project’s beneficiaries, are described. Their educational needs and interests are clearly explained, supported with data if available. If not, the proposal describes a plan to assess service provider interest with data to be presented in the full proposal. There is evidence that service providers need or want the service proposed by this project.
4. Education Plan (250-word limit)
Describe the education plan you will conduct to teach service providers. Describe the knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes that service providers will acquire, and the support you will provide to them in their efforts to help farmers address the problem or opportunity. Describe the process you will use to verify the extent to which the performance target is achieved.

Review criteria:
The education plan offers a realistic approach to meet service provider needs; appropriate and effective educational approaches are clearly described; the knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes to be gained by service providers are likely to lead to the performance target. It is clear how project verification will be conducted.

5. Key Individuals (150-word limit)
Use the following format to describe people with essential roles in this project. Start with yourself, then list other key individuals.

Name, title, business or organization. Describe this person’s skills, relevant experience and primary responsibilities on the project.

If some team members have not yet been identified, provide an outline of the potential leadership team. Include descriptions of those roles as placeholders. For example, 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.”

Review criteria:
The key individuals have the skills and experience to conduct the project. Their roles are well defined.

6. Funding request estimate (select category)
Select a range that estimates the total budget request you anticipate for this project (include the allowed indirect to your institution, limited to 10% of the total, in your estimate): “Under $50,000;” “$50,000 to $99,999;” “$100,000 to $149,999;” or “Over $150,000.”

Review criteria:
The estimate of funds needed appears realistic and reasonable for the performance target proposed and the work described.

Next Steps: Planning for Full Proposal Submission
Applicants will be notified if they are invited to submit a full proposal by August 24, 2020. Feedback that may be used to strengthen a full proposal will be provided to applicants with invited preproposals in September 2020.

Full proposal instructions will be sent directly to invited applicants; full proposals are due by 5 p.m. ET on October 20, 2020.

Full proposals require more detailed information for all sections of the preproposal, including documentation of service provider interest. The full proposal requires additional information including: a list of milestones, recruitment and verification plan, a project advisory committee, literature review and citation list. Letters of commitment from key individuals, a draft verification tool, a complete project budget with justification, and a grant commitment form with authorized signature will also be required.