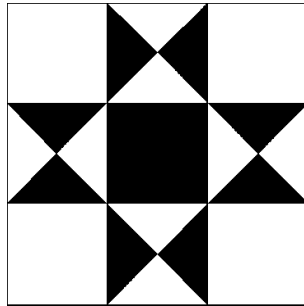


Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education
Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

2012 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GRANTS

Providing environmental, social, and economic benefits
to farmers and their communities



Proposals must be submitted on line by midnight on October 19, 2011.

To submit, go to www.ciids.org/NESARE/cg

By November 3, send one paper copy of the full proposal with all required signatures to:

Northeast SARE
655 Spear Street
University of Vermont
Burlington, Vermont 05405

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.

—Northeast SARE outcome statement



The Sustainable Community Grant is a collaborative project of the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD). These programs are funded by the USDA. Northeast SARE is hosted by the University of Vermont and NERCRD by the Pennsylvania State University. For more information on sustainable agriculture and Northeast SARE, go to www.nesare.org; for more information on rural development and NERCRD, go to www.nercrd.psu.edu.

Funding for the 2012 Sustainable Community Grants is contingent on continued federal appropriation for the USDA/NIFA SARE program.

Overview

Socially, economically, and environmentally healthy farms contribute to the well-being of communities, and the benefits are stronger still when communities recognize these contributions and collaborate with farmers. In this context Northeast SARE, in collaboration with the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, seeks innovative proposals that bring together farmers and community partners in ways that enhance and integrate the economic, social, and environmental well-being of farms, farmers, and communities.

Both communities and commercial farmers must benefit from all proposals. Funds are limited, so reviewers specifically want to see model projects others can replicate or build on. Reviewers also look for projects that are likely to bring about durable and positive institutional change and for projects that benefit more than one farm.

Proposals must address key economic, social, or environmental issues that impede farming as a viable livelihood, are a detriment to the quality of life for farmers, or limit healthy growth in agriculture. Identified topic areas are **finance, marketing, land use, water use, enterprise development, value-added product development, and labor.**

- Examples of issues in **finance** include the availability and access to credit, financial management training, lack of equity, and the establishment and competitiveness of microenterprises.
- Examples of issues in **marketing** include health and safety standards, food quality, consumer-farmer relationships, market partnerships, ethnic and specialty niche markets, value-added marketing, green industry identification and labeling, and e-commerce.
- Examples of issues of **land use** include tax policy, zoning, the consideration of agricultural soils in development criteria, and the status of agriculture and food systems in land-use and public planning decision-making processes.
- Examples of issues in **water use** include access, water quantity, quality, and rights to use.
- Examples of issues in **enterprise development** include management consulting, business planning, training (including train-the-trainer and entrepreneurship training), network development, product research, and business incubation.
- Examples of issues in **value-added product development** include market access, technical services, regulations (licensing, food safety), insurance, entry costs, and creating the conditions that allow businesses to work together to surmount problems of scale.
- Examples of issues in **labor** include availability, timing, quality, training, regulations, transportation, benefits, planning or facilitating time off, efficiency, distribution, the social impacts of technology, and other labor issues that affect workers and farm families.

Other topics may also be addressed provided the issue is substantive, farmers and the farm community benefit, and the approach explores new ways to advance sustainable commercial agriculture.

Projects must have a strong connection to farms, farmers, and the issues that affect them, and must support appropriate growth, improved farm profits, a better quality of life, a cleaner environment, enhanced networking and cooperation, or improved farm stewardship.

Proposals must demonstrate convincing and active involvement from farmers in project planning and implementation.

Excluded from this grant are projects that primarily address:

- Food donation programs
- Educational programs for non-farmers
- Public awareness campaigns about agriculture
- Community or school gardening projects
- Feasibility studies
- Ongoing operational support or personnel costs for existing work

As mentioned above, grants cannot be used to simply adopt practices or methods already in use—for ongoing support for farmers' markets, for example, or to establish another farm-to-school program that is not in some way innovative. Instead, proposals should break new ground in the target community and offer fresh approaches to enhancing sustainable commercial agriculture and community development.

Who can apply

Sustainable Community Grants are primarily for agriculturally oriented agencies and nonprofits (Cooperative Extension, NRCS, state departments of agriculture, or comparable entities), and community development groups with the capacity and experience to foster sustainable agriculture enterprise development. Other institutions and organizations—a farming cooperative or a town planning board, for example—may also apply, provided there is sufficient experience in sustainable agricultural enterprise development. Organizations must be linked to a specific town, township, watershed, county, or other delineated area, and must be able to engage this community and its farmers for participation and support.

Each proposal must have an individual project leader, affiliated with the applying organization, who is able to accept responsibility for the grant on behalf of the organization, manage the project, submit web-based annual and final reports, and respond to any inquiries. All applications must come from an individual on behalf of a qualified organization, and an authorized official from it must sign off on the application. Unaffiliated individuals may not apply, nor can any previous SARE grantee who is behind in reporting. If you have an open SARE grant, make sure all reports are up to date before applying again. There is a limit of one proposal per applicant per year.

The service area of the applying organization must be within the region served by Northeast SARE and the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development. This region is made up of Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Size and duration of awards

Last year, SARE awarded eight grants out of 26 proposals, for a total of \$112,580. Awards cannot exceed \$15,000 and cannot run longer than three years. In general, most projects run one or two years.

What funds can be used for

Grant funds can be used to pay for personnel costs, mileage, materials and supplies specific to the project, per-diem or consultant costs, and project-specific long distance, fax, and conference calls over land lines—cell phone costs are excluded. Grant funds can also be used to cover meeting expenses and printing, postage, or outreach costs associated with hosting an educational event or field day. Any equipment costs must be modest and project-specific; equipment rental is permitted and generally preferred. Costs incurred before the grant award date are not reimbursable.

What funds cannot be used for

Excluded are subsidy or incentive payments and capital costs such as the purchase of land or machinery or construction of building additions, barns, greenhouses, or other major fixtures. In the same vein, the grant cannot be used to start or expand a farm or fund the physical resources for the startup of a new organization. Indirect costs for things like heat, rent, maintenance, and utilities are also excluded, unless the applicant's organization

has a federally negotiated indirect rate agreement in place. These indirect costs cannot exceed 10 percent of the direct costs.

Computers, digital cameras, video equipment, copiers, and similar equipment that have a prolonged usefulness beyond the boundaries of the project are also excluded, as are costs associated with group meals that are not light refreshments or working lunches necessary for the continuity of a training or meeting. Northeast SARE also cannot fund items of apparel, awards, promotional tote bags, bumper stickers, giveaways, or prizes.

Review criteria

All proposals will be evaluated based on these criteria:

- 1. Key issues.** The proposal directly addresses a key issue as described under “Overview” on page 3 (finance, marketing, land use, water use, enterprise development, value-added product development, labor, or other as justified in the proposal), and it provides evidence that the project supports appropriate economic growth, improved farm profits, a better quality of life, a healthier environment, or improved farm stewardship.
- 2. Project effectiveness and direction.** Whether the proposal responds intelligently to the stated, demonstrated need or issue and connects community economic development with sustainable agriculture in a way that is likely to improve the lives of farmers and the wider community .
- 3. Sound methods.** How well the proposal describes methods that fit the problem to be addressed, and proposes to gather tangible and trustworthy results. How clearly the proposal defines who will do what and when and how farmers are involved.
- 4. Measurable results.** Whether the proposal will yield specific and measurable change, and has elements in place to monitor results and listen to feedback. As much as possible, set specific sustainability goals such as acres in conservation tillage or hours recaptured through improved labor practices or labor efficiencies. Include an appropriate, well-defined method for verifying the changes and improvements resulting from the project. This is often done through participant surveys, interviews, or review of farm or financial records. Verification methods should offer a close, logical fit with project goals and activities. You must include a draft end-of-project evaluation instrument or verification plan as an attachment to your proposal.
- 5. Improved sustainability.** How the project improves profits, quality of life, or the environment through the adoption of sustainable techniques. Also considered is the magnitude of the effect and the longer-term opportunities built into the project.
- 6. Outreach.** How you plan to inform others about the results of this project, whether this plan will be effective, and whether the project will invite adoption by others through compelling content; also reviewed is results dissemination once the project results are in, specific materials designed to assist with replication, and how quickly and easily others can benefit from the project results. Please note that outreach means results *dissemination*, not project or program *promotion*.
- 7. Capacity.** Whether the project leader and the collaborators have the expertise, capacity, and commitment to see the project through to its conclusion, and whether there is engagement with the community and a passion to succeed, and whether farmers are actively involved with project design, implementation, and evaluation.
- 8. Sensible budget.** Whether it is clearly explained and justified how the money will be spent, with allowable and reasonable budget items, and whether the amount requested is appropriate to the project’s scale, scope, and anticipated results.

How to apply

Applications are submitted on line. We strongly advise that you write your proposal in a word processing program and check your word counts before pasting into the submission template. Avoid symbols or formatting, since these will be lost when you paste text into the application template.

Clear, straightforward writing improves any proposal; avoid using agency or insider jargon. You may want to show a draft of your proposal to someone else to make sure the content is coherent and easy to understand. For guidance on how to respond to individual questions in a way that addresses SARE priorities, download and read “How to Write a Sustainable Community Grant,” available on the Northeast SARE website.

To apply, go to <http://www.ciids.org/NESARE/cg>. The online application template requires registration via a user name and password—use the “create account” button to create an identity in the system. This only takes a minute and you will be able to log in right away, but note that this registration is *specific to this grant application*—the submission interface won’t recognize reporting passwords, passwords from other grant proposals, or passwords from previous years unless you re-use them in this new registration.

Once you are registered and have logged in, the template will ask for the **project title** to begin a new proposal. (Note that the system will allow you to work on multiple proposals, but you may only submit one of them.) The online system will then ask for the name of the **project leader**—this should be you, the applicant—and some baseline **contact information**.

Next is a **project summary** page; here, you have 250 words to offer a brief outline of the project content. This summary is the first thing reviewers see, so take some time to make it compelling.

Following the summary are these seven narrative questions:

1. What is the problem and why is it important?

Briefly state the issue, its impact, and how it affects farmers and communities in the Northeast. The impact of the issue on the community should be spelled out so that an educated reader can evaluate it; don’t assume that reviewers are familiar with your situation or the details that prompted your proposal. Make sure you have clear evidence of project need and cite relevant work done by others, including past SARE projects. *No more than 500 words.*

2. How will your project address the issue?

Describe what you plan to do, tell reviewers what others have done and demonstrate that your approach is based on current, reliable information and expands on it, breaking new ground. Describe the specific institutional change you seek and the potential benefit for farmers and the community. Do not propose to replicate efforts that are already in general use; instead, offer a new idea or an interesting, localized adaptation to an established one that will strengthen the position of agriculture in your community. Requests for funds to support an existing or ongoing effort do not meet the criteria for innovation and have a substantially lower likelihood of being favorably reviewed. *No more than 500 words.*

3. What will your methods be?

Describe how you will run the project. Explain the roles of the participants and lay out the key activities and the milestones that must be reached in order for the project to succeed. Give a timeline with specific dates, make sure each step in the project builds on previous efforts, and that the plan makes sense. Describe the roles of farmers and how they contribute to project development, implementation, and evaluation. *No more than 1000 words.*

4. How will you measure your results?

Describe how you will gather data about the extent of change your project seeks and to what extent change actually occurred. Explain how you will quantify your results and how this data will allow you to determine what has happened, and why. If your plan for collecting results is very abstract or resists quantification, then your proposal is probably not competitive. Projects that promote “awareness of sustainable choices” or “appreciation of

the importance of farming” are seeking soft results that may be worthy but are not results this program is designed to fund. A measurable result would be “of the 10 farmers in the study, at least two will implement a succession plan that preserves a total of 500 acres of prime agricultural soils and allows for retirement without the sale of farmland.” Measuring results should verify the extent to which farmers and the community benefited (socially, economically, or environmentally) from the project. *No more than 500 words. In addition, you must upload a draft end-of-project evaluation instrument or verification plan as an attachment.*

5. How will the results make your community more sustainable?

Explain how your project will link sustainable agricultural enterprises and the social, economic, and environmental well-being of your community; and how it will improve the sustainability of the farm community through appropriate economic growth, improved farm profits, a better quality of life, a healthier environment, or improved farm stewardship. Focus on measurable change in institutions, policies, and systems that will strengthen the bonds between farm and community viability. *No more than 500 words.*

6. How will you package and disseminate your results?

Describe your outreach plan and techniques or media you intend to use so that other people can learn about, replicate, and expand on the project results. Outreach often includes field days, workshops, news releases, brochures, fact sheets, web sites, e-newsletters, or similar mechanisms. Describe outreach specific to results, which should not be confused with general outreach for your organization or the outreach needed to implement your project. Again, reviewers are looking for the dissemination of the results of your project, not how you will recruit participants or how you will promote your organization. *No more than 500 words.*

7. Who is the project leader? Who are the collaborators?

Describe the leader’s experience and what qualifies him or her to carry out the project. Relate the lead organization’s history with agriculture and community development issues (social, economic, or environmental), its grant management experience, and current administrative capacity. Describe your collaborators and make sure at least one collaborator is a commercial farmer. *No more than 500 words. In addition, you must upload a letter from each collaborator that briefly outlines his or her role and willingness to participate.*

8. Budget

Present your budget using the same categories (personnel, materials and supplies, travel, and printing and publications, and other direct costs) in the sample budget on page 9. If there is a category in the budget section that will have no expenditures, enter zero. *No word limit.* You may, as an option, also upload your budget and budget justification (see below) as an Excel file, but this is not required.

8a. Budget justification

For each item in your budget, show how you computed the expense by giving a unit cost times some quantity. For example, if, under materials, you are proposing to buy spiral bound notebooks, your budget line should specify how much and cost per unit (“Spiral bound notebooks, 150 @\$3 each, \$450”). For travel, please include who, where, and the distance per trip (“Four farmers, car travel to trainings, once per month for three months for 12 60-mile round trips @ .55/mile, \$396”). Show personnel costs—your time, or the time of any collaborators—as an hourly rate times anticipated time needed to complete the project. Provide a narrative description of the purpose of travel, labor, and items purchased. *No word limit; be as concise as possible.* You may, as an option, upload your budget and budget justification as an Excel file, but this is not required.

Submitting your application

Submit your application using the online submission system at <http://www.ciids.org/NESARE/cg>. This process is described starting on page 7.

Uploaded attachments: Along with the required commitment letters and your draft evaluation instrument, you may also upload relevant supporting material such as budget spreadsheets, maps, data, or photos. This material must be central to the project content and speak to some key component of it. Supported formats are .doc, .docx, .pdf, and .xls. Do not attach brochures, newsletters, news releases, letters of general support from unaffiliated parties, or another copy of the full proposal. When you send us the hard copy of the proposal, do not include any material not specifically requested, and do not send any material that you want returned.

Once the proposal has been submitted, print out the entire proposal from the online submission template. You will need to have the president of the governing board of your organization or comparable agency officer read and sign off on the proposal where indicated. The names of your collaborators—other groups or individuals involved—should also be listed on this page, including cooperating farmers. You then need to read and then sign your own name under “assurance.” Then, within two weeks of the submission deadline, mail the full signed proposal, including attachments, to **Northeast SARE, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont 05405-0107.**

Application time line

Applications must be submitted in the online submission system by midnight October 19, 2011. Late applications will not be accepted, nor will faxed proposals or proposals received only by mail. It is best to apply in advance of the deadline so you have time to gather materials such as letters and resolve any questions that arise. **The single printed copy of the entire proposal, including attachments, must be postmarked no later than November 3, 2011.**

If you notice an error in your submission or you need to make a change before the deadline, the only way to correct it is to submit the entire proposal again. You can then notify SARE staff to delete the earlier version.

Final project selections will be approved by the Northeast SARE Administrative Council at their winter meeting in late February 2012. All awards are contingent on continued federal funding for the SARE program.

Application checklist

Summary

- Answers to questions 1 to 7 within word limits
- Budget and budget justification consistent with allowable costs (see page 4)
- Draft verification plan or evaluation instrument uploaded as an attachment
- Letters of commitment from collaborators, including farmers, converted to supported electronic formats
- Proposal submitted on line at www.ciids.org/NESARE/cg before the deadline
- Hard copy sent to Northeast SARE within two weeks of the online submission deadline

How grant funds are paid

Grants are paid on a reimbursement basis, and successful grantees should plan on submitting regular invoices, usually monthly or quarterly, to access their funds. Please note that SARE will hold back ten percent of the total grant award until a satisfactory final report has been received and approved, and may also withhold funds if annual reporting is not timely and complete. All grantees must submit an annual progress report on or before December 31 of each year that the project is ongoing and a final report when the project is complete. If your proposal is funded, you will learn more about reporting and financial management requirements. Note that SARE cannot reimburse for any expenses incurred before the grant award is formally announced or after the grant contract ends.

Sample budget and budget justification

Before you prepare your own budget you may want to look at a sample to see how one fits together. Remember that every budget is different—yours should reflect how your project is designed and what you plan to do.

Personnel		2700.00
Mary Greene	\$ 1100.00	
Jack Smith	600.00	
Anna Banks	300.00	
Fringe on above	700.00	
Materials and supplies		2265.00
Travel		87.45
Printing & Publications		340.00
Other direct costs		1322.00
Consultants, Jerry Gray	960.00	
Postage	267.00	
Telephone (land-line only, no cell)	95.00	
TOTAL grant funds (rounded to nearest dollar)		\$6714.00

Budget Justification

Personnel		
Mary Greene, project leader: \$20/hr. for 55 hrs.	\$ 1100.00	
Jack Smith, community organizer: \$15/hr. for 40 hrs.	600.00	
Anna Banks, volunteer coordinator, \$15/hr for 20 hrs	300.00	
Fringe on above	700.00	
Materials and supplies		
Signage for FarmFest	480.00	
Banner	550.00	
Pencils (\$1.50), clipboards (8.50) for 10 volunteers	35.00	
Training materials, 120 spiral bound workbooks @ \$10 each	1200.00	
Travel		
Five round trips to cooperating farm: total 96 miles at 55 cents/mile	52.80	
Seven round trips to festival site: total 63 miles at 55 cents/mile	34.65	
Printing & Publications		
1000 flyers at .25 each	250.00	
1000 post cards at .09 each	90.00	
Other direct costs		
Jerry Gray, farmer, \$240 per diem, 4 days	960.00	
Postage, 100 mailings @ \$0.37, 1000 postcards @ \$0.23	267.00	
Telephone, land-line calls to collaborators, 2 conference calls	95.00	
TOTAL grant funds (rounded to nearest dollar)	\$6714.00	

Note: if this sample organization were eligible for indirect cost recovery, then an indirect charge of \$672 could be added to this budget for a total of \$7385.

Frequently asked questions

Q. *How do I print out the hard copy of my proposal so I can mail it in?*

A. After you submit, you will be able to print out the entire proposal as a PDF file. This PDF will be created by the online system.

Q. *Can I preview my proposal before I submit?*

A. You can, but it will be in an HTML format, so what you see may be formatted differently from the final PDF created by the online system. Reviewers are aware of how this system works and will not consider formatting when they evaluate proposals.

Q. *How do I know if my project is in keeping with priorities of Northeast SARE and Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development?*

A. Ask yourself if your project forges new or stronger connections between agriculture and the wider community and whether those connections will lead to appropriate growth, improved farm profits, a better quality of life, a cleaner environment, or improved farm stewardship. If the answer is yes, it's likely your project is an appropriate submission.

Q. *If I am funded, is there a lot of paperwork?*

A. Northeast SARE requires that you use a web-based template to file an annual report each December 31 and a final report when the project is over. These reports are very straightforward.

Q. *How are funds released?*

A. Northeast SARE releases funds on a reimbursement basis and successful applicants should plan on submitting regular invoices. We process these invoices as promptly as possible. SARE will always hold at least ten percent of the grant until a final report is received and approved, and may withhold funds if annual reports are not timely and complete.

Q. *What happens to the reports I send in and the information I uncover?*

A. Northeast SARE is committed to disseminating information about project outcomes to farmers, nonprofits, municipalities, and others with an interest in community and economic development and sustainable agriculture. Your application and reports will become part of searchable SARE databases and may be included in publications and informational campaigns.

Q. *What's the key to writing a strong application?*

A. Having a plan that addresses your goals and challenges clearly and in a way that is likely to get results. For a list of what reviewers are looking for, see "Review criteria" on page 5, and read the "How to Write a Sustainable Community Grant" booklet available on the Northeast SARE website.

Q. *I have questions about the best way to write my proposal. Can I get more information?*

A. Northeast SARE has posted a guide, "How to Write a Sustainable Community Grant," to www.nesare.org. If you still have questions after reading this publication, you can call the Northeast SARE office at 802/656-0471 or send e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu.

Need help?

**Download “How to Write a Sustainable Community Grant”
from the Northeast SARE website**

www.nesare.org

Ready to submit?

Go to <http://www.ciids.org/NESARE/cg>