Guide for Applicants

Professional Development Proposals for 2012 funding year

Contents

The basics

This guide to Northeast SARE's Professional Development Grant is primarily for people who have submitted a preproposal and were notified by SARE that they can proceed to a full proposal. The goal is to clarify the components of a full proposal and to expand on and illustrate some key principles of outcome funding. This document may also be of general interest to people planning a future preproposal and for anyone interested in the focus and content of this grant program. This document can be copied freely for instructional purposes.

Professional Development grants use outcome funding

Northeast SARE funds Professional Development projects that educate Cooperative Extension staff, USDA personnel, and other agricultural service providers about sustainable practices and approaches, so that they, in turn, can educate farmers. These train-the-trainer projects must increase these service providers' skill, understanding, and ability to teach farmers about, and motivate them to adopt, new sustainable practices that lead to enhanced quality of life for farmers and rural communities.

To make sure projects yield verifiable results, Northeast SARE uses an outcome approach to grant selection and project management. This approach focuses on helping the project participants make measurable changes, or take measurable actions, and achieve measurable benefits. This approach also shapes the way an application is written, reviewed, and carried out. To succeed, applicants must understand how to use an outcome-based approach for their projects.

Outcome funding is useful for both the grantor and the grantee. For the grantor, outcome funding focuses efforts on obtaining a good return for the dollar invested; for the grantee it focuses on measurable results for the agricultural service providers participating in the project. Proposals are measured against an outcome statement that defines the results Northeast SARE is seeking. Northeast SARE's outcome statement is:

> **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, are satisfied with their lifestyles, and have a positive influence on their communities and the environment.**

This statement summarizes the kinds of change that the Northeast SARE program is committed to, and it is used to evaluate the proposed project outcomes—the performance targets—submitted by applicants. For grant applicants, the key components needed to meet the requirement of the outcome funding approach include:

- Engagement of project **beneficiaries**, who participate in the project and accomplish specific, essential **milestones** in learning and skill development that prepare them to take specific actions described in the **performance target**;

- **Verification** of beneficiary progress in achieving milestones and accomplishing target outcomes; and

- **Key individuals** who will make the project successful.

Successful applicants demonstrate a good grasp of the clear and measurable actions their beneficiaries will take towards solving a problem and the measurable benefits that will result from the actions taken. These actions and benefits are the **outcomes** of the project, and they are defined in the performance target, which is the primary element in a SARE application. But outcomes by beneficiaries don't happen on their own, or overnight. Beneficiaries need to experience interim steps in learning, attitude, and other changes to achieve the actions described in the **performance target,** and these interim steps are described in the project's **milestones.** Other key components of the application include descriptions of the project **beneficiaries,** the **key individuals** who will lead these beneficiaries through the milestones, and the **verification plan** needed to measure the beneficiaries' progress during the project and the outcomes they achieve.

The key terms used in outcome funding are:

- **Beneficiaries—**these are the target audience, specifically the agricultural service providers who participate in the project and change in a specific, measurable way as a result of a project's training, and educational efforts.
- **Performance target—**this is the outcome statement that defines the changes beneficiaries will make. For a Professional Development project, these are the actions agricultural service providers will take to educate and advise farmers as a result of participating in the project. Some Professional Development performance targets also include the number of farmers who adopt a change or action recommended by the beneficiaries and the benefits that accrue from that adoption. The performance target is the end result that a project strives to achieve.
- **Milestones—**these are necessary, interim measures of learning, skill building, and preparation that beneficiaries must accomplish to achieve the performance target. Beneficiaries accomplish milestones as they participate in project activities and events.
- **Key individuals—**these are the people who will guide the project or contribute significantly to it.
- **Verification—**this is the process of asking questions and finding out whether the accomplishments of the beneficiaries happened as described in the milestones and the performance target.

Don't be discouraged by the terminology of outcome funding; it describes straightforward and logical concepts.

Elements in a strong proposal

Collaboration with agricultural service providers and farmers during project planning is a key to successful projects that have a lasting impact. The best way to ensure strong education programs that lead to farmer adoption of sustainable practices is to engage both the service providers and the farmers in the planning and design of your proposal.

A strong application almost always involves **consultation with diverse interests**—land-grant universities, nonprofits, extension, farmers, agribusiness, and others—to assess the need for a project and to plan how to address that need. A strong application also demonstrates how project benefits will continue after SARE funding ends.

Strong projects tend to use **a variety of approaches for outreach and education**, from lectures to farm tours to study circles, depending on the project design. Approaches that combine direct interaction (meetings, workshops, etc.) with teaching tools (publications, web sites, etc.) are preferred over those that focus on only one approach.

Strong projects take a holistic approach. For example, pest management projects, while often targeted at an individual insect or disease, are strengthened by the adoption of a whole-farm approach that acknowledges the complexity of natural systems, and by connection to improved markets, better products, or other benefits.

Sustainability in agricultural production systems requires **profitability for farmers**. Successful projects teach how skills, technologies, or markets improve the producer's bottom line and build understanding about the costs, both in time and money, and risks farmers may face as they adopt a new technique or follow a new strategy,

Strong applications offer a **close fit between the project design—the activities and products developed—and the project outcome**. Make sure that the change in practices or conditions you seek have an obvious, compelling relationship with your efforts, and that you can later verify that those changes occurred because the project triggered or supported them.

Project verification must be integrated into the overall project design so that beneficiary information, feedback, milestone and performance target completion are easily gathered. Do not wait until the end of your project to verify your performance target. Instead, embed verification into your early milestones and continue it throughout so that it becomes integral to the project.

Clear, straightforward writing improves any application. Write for an audience that is generally knowledgeable but does not necessarily have a thorough or deep understanding of your area of expertise.

Size of awards

SARE's national budget, and thus Northeast SARE's budget, is determined annually by Congress, and the number of 2012 grant awards will be contingent on continuing appropriations.

Professional Development grants typically range from $30,000 to $150,000. Award amounts vary because some projects seek to create relatively small amounts of change and require a relatively small amount of funding; this is acceptable if the change is still meaningful and verifiable. Other projects seeking substantial change that requires more outreach or intensive education are more expensive. Reviewers pay close attention to the potential impact of a proposal and the size of its budget request.

Timeline

Online submission template opens: September 30, 2011
Online submission template closes: midnight, November 1
Postmark deadline for hard copy: November 16
Clarification questions: late November
Project selection: late February, 2012
Pre-award discussion with grantees: March and April

Contract period: May 2012 or later, to October 31, 2016 or earlier

Conflict of interest

Members of the Northeast SARE Administrative Council and their immediate family 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 academic institutions they work for, organizations where they serve as board member or adviser, former graduate student advisees, or close personal friends.

Planning with the end in mind

Professional Development projects are train-the-trainer education programs. It is essential that train-the-trainer projects be designed from the beginning with a clear picture of the problem or opportunity facing farmers and its causes, a strong grasp of the proposed solution, and a solid understanding of all the information and skills farmers must learn, be able to do, and be motivated to do to adopt the recommended solution. This is why Northeast SARE encourages the inclusion of farmers as co-learners and collaborators; including farmers helps agricultural service providers understand the problem farmers face and the best way to address them.

Before writing a proposal for a Professional Development project, it is essential to know:

- What social, economic, or environmental problem or opportunity your project aims to address for farmers, and what contributes to the problem or opportunity.
- What specific, measurable change or adoption of a practice by farmers will provide a credible, realistic and achievable solution to the problem. In other words, what do you want farmers to do as a result of learning from the agricultural service providers you teach?
- What potential benefits will occur for farmers from making this change, taking this action, or adopting this practice. In other words, what is the benefit that will motivate farmers to make the desired change?
- What obstacles or challenges to making the change or action farmers will likely face as they work to adopt the recommended solution or act on the opportunity. In other words, how will you address risks and barriers—real or perceived—through the education program?

Once the answers to these questions are known, it's possible to design an education program for agricultural service providers that allows them to be effective educators, establish a realistic performance target, develop logical milestones, and more easily recruit participants. Strong proposals will clearly and persuasively address these questions throughout the narrative and in all subsequent sections of the proposal.

What follows next is a detailed description and explanation of each component in a Professional Development proposal.

Cover page and project description

The first two pages of the full proposal are two forms that are generated automatically by the online proposal submission system. These forms are straightforward and self-explanatory—they identify the project leader and institution, the collaborating institutions if any, the geographical area of the project, and the funds requested. These forms are normally completed at the end of the proposal writing process, when all team members have been confirmed and the budget is complete. Use the cover page to collect authorizing signatures—the cover page, and the entire proposal, can be printed after the proposal is submitted so that these signatures can be collected.

Be sure to allow enough time to obtain the required authorizing signatures from the host institution. Sponsored programs offices typically require several weeks to review proposals before signing off on them, and at some institutions this process takes even longer. Share drafts of the proposal and budget with the sponsored programs office before the submission deadline, because changes cannot be made in the submission system after the deadline. Hard copies of the cover page and project description, complete with authorizing signatures, must be mailed to Northeast SARE within fifteen days of the online proposal submission deadline.

Changes to an approved preproposal

When writing a full proposal, applicants sometimes find there is a need for some minor revisions to the project title, performance target, milestones, key participants, or budget estimates since the preproposal was submitted and approved. This is expected—project ideas are often refined as key individuals and beneficiaries talk more specifically about the project design. Remember, though, that reviewers approved a particular project concept and will not accept a full proposal that differs significantly in concept from the preproposal. Reviewers will have access to the original preproposal and the suggestions and comments sent from the preproposal review team, so please use these comments to improve your project.

Title

The project title should be clear, succinct, and should capture the essence of the project's intent. Do not include unusual acronyms, jargon, or unnecessary words. Many search engines pick up on keywords in the title, so it should describe, briefly and appropriately, the primary focus of the project.

Abstract (400 words)

The abstract should serve as a standalone summary of the project. Include a brief description of the problem to be addressed and justification for the project's need, the beneficiary audience, the proposed solution to the identified problem or need, and the approach for reaching or carrying out the solution. The abstract must also include the anticipated measurable outcomes that will result from the project, stated as the performance target. The abstract should not refer to subsequent parts of the proposal by saying things like, "This will be described further in the narrative."

To help you understand how the different components of a proposal fit together, we have created a demonstration project that addresses certain issues of processing and adding value. Here is a sample abstract from that proposal:

USDA/ERS data shows that farmers' share of consumer food spending has declined over the last 30 years. Currently, the average farmers' share of every food dollar spent is 20 cents, with processing, distribution, marketing and retailing accounting for the remaining 80 cents. In addition, in 2005 USDA estimated that less than 7% of every food dollar spent remains in the local community. A 2009 survey of 500 Maryland farmers found that 171 (45%) of the 380 respondents were interested in learning about value-added product options that would allow them to increase profit margins by garnering a larger share of the food dollar. The benefits to farmers from adding value to farm products can be substantial. Returns on direct-sales value-added meat products can be greater than $1.50/lb, and price premiums for value-added fruit and vegetable products can range from $1.00 to $20.00/lb. However, agricultural service providers need education to prepare themselves to advise farmers on how to evaluate and implement value-added enterprises. A 2010 survey of 155 Maryland agricultural service providers found that 108 (90%) of 120 respondents received requests for information concerning value-added options for farms, but only 30 (25%) were confident or very confident about teaching farmers on this topic.

This project will engage Maryland extension educators, USDA and Department of Agricultural personnel and other agricultural service providers in a comprehensive education program about business planning for value-added farm products. Through a series of four webinars, an intensive 1.5 day workshop, and one-on-one consultations, this project will equip beneficiaries with the knowledge, skills, tools, and confidence to educate and advise farmers on the specific techniques that can be used to add value to farm products. The farmers they teach will then be equipped to decide whether or not to launch a value-added enterprise and to successfully manage and market thier products. Farmers who participate as co-learners in the project will develop production and marketing plans for their new farm products in a facilitated, supportive process.

Twenty agricultural service providers who receive training through this project will consult intensively with 35 farmers from the dairy, beef, small ruminant, fruit and vegetable sectors; 25 of these producers will complete business plans for a value-added product; 15 of the educators will develop new educational programs about value-added business planning and deliver them to 300 additional farmers.

Project narrative (2000 words)

The project narrative, not to exceed 2000 words, has four subsections.

1. Problem description
2. Solution and benefits
3. Beneficiaries
4. Project approach

These sections should guide reviewers through a logical and well-justified explanation of the problem or opportunity, the farmers who are affected by the problem or opportunity, and the agricultural service providers who are interested in working to address the issues and need the education the project will offer. The narrative also includes the solution that will be the focus of the education and the project's approach for teaching and progressing towards the solution with farmers. The narrative should put the project in a meaningful context and offer data and literature citations that support and justify its significance to farmers, the credibility of the solution, and the potential benefits of it, as well as the beneficiaries' need and desire to participate, learn, and work with farmers to reach the solution. Each of the narrative sections is described in more detail below.

1. Problem Description

Describe the problem and the harm, adverse effect, or missed opportunity affecting farmers. A description of the problem and its context for the project should include:

- A clear, concise explanation of the problem or opportunity and the cause(s) or hypothesized cause(s)
- Where the problem or opportunity occurs and what type of agriculture is affected. For example, describe the number and type of farms, their ranges of sales or net income, acreage, herd size, or number of employees
- Specific evidence about the quantity and value of agriculture affected in acres or dollars, and the cost to the environment or the social fabric of farm families or farm communities.

Offer numerical information to justify the claims; sources of this justification can include literature citations, farmer surveys, extension surveys, census data, or other sources. Below is another example drawn from the sample project; note how it quantifies and lays out the key aspects of the problem or opportunity.

Farmers throughout the country have experienced a decline over the last 30 or more years in the share they receive of each dollar spent on food. In 2000, U.S. consumers spent more than $650 million on food. The farm value of the food products was 20 cents for each dollar spent, with processing - most of it done at locations far distant from the food-source farms - ranging in value from 20 cents to 60 cents, and distribution, marketing and retailing accounting for the remaining food dollar(1). By contrast, the farm value for a dollar's worth of food in 1980 was 30 cents (1). In addition, since the majority of the food consumed today is purchased at grocery stores or markets, a 2005 USDA analysis estimates that less than 7% of every food dollar spent remains in the local community (2).

Some consumer and farm groups are advocating for increasing the percentage of food dollars spent locally. One example is a recently launched campaign in the greater Baltimore area called "Ten Percent Farm to Plate," that aims to increase purchases of local food by offering consumers a chance to pledge to spend 10% of their food dollars on locally produced foods and providing a website that shows consumers where they can purchase local foods (3). Initiatives like this offer promise of increased sales and market share for farmers in Maryland and other areas where they are found. Additional data that indicates a strong potential market for more local food is data regarding specialty food sales. Retail sales of specialty foods in the U.S. totaled $48 billion in 2009, with the Mid-Atlantic region, which includes Maryland, purchasing the largest share of these products in the country (4).

The challenge for the regions' farmers is finding ways to garner a larger share of the food dollars spent, and many farmers in Maryland are interested in both a larger share of food purchases and in increasing the profit margin for the crop and animal products they sell. Adding value to farm products through some type of processing, packaging, or refining is one approach to capture more profit. A survey of 500 farmers was conducted at multiple extension meetings throughout Maryland in 2009. The types of farmers surveyed included dairy, beef, sheep, fruit and vegetable producers. Of the 380 survey responses received, 171 farmers (45%) indicated that they might consider marketing a value-added product to increase revenue and profit margin sometime in the future, but only 14 (8%) of these potentially interested farmers thought they had enough knowledge to take this step. However, 130 (76%) of the 171 potentially interested farmers responded that they would like to learn more about value-added product options for their farms.

These numbers confirm what most farmers already know – farmers are much better at producing food products than they are at marketing them. The numbers also pointed to an educational need for farmers and a potential need for agricultural service provides who teach and assist farmers. To discover if Maryland agricultural service providers had a similar need and interest in education about value-added product development and marketing, a survey of 155 extension educators, department of agriculture, and USDA personnel was conducted in 2010. Ninety-six (80%) of 120 respondents considered new enterprise development and value-added marketing high priorities for their farmer clients and108 (90%) reported receiving requests for information concerning value-added product options for farms. But only 30 (25%) rated themselves as confident or very confident to teach and advise farmers about how to assess product options, develop products, and market value-added products.

2. Solution and Benefits

This section should describe—

- The solution to the problem or opportunity that will be the focus of the project's educational efforts
- The benefits expected for farmers from solving the problem or acting on the opportunity
- Known or anticipated obstacles or challenges that must be addressed to encourage farmer adoption of the recommended solution

Provide evidence for how and why the solution will be effective and beneficial. Sources of justification for claims made about the proposed solution and its efficacy and benefits may include literature citations, work of others, farmer surveys, extension surveys, census data, etc.

Below is example solution-and-benefits text for the problem or opportunity described above:

This project will engage Maryland agricultural service providers in a comprehensive education program about market planning for value-added farm products. The project will equip the service providers with the knowledge, skills, tools, and confidence to educate and advise farmers who are interested in adding value to one or more of their farm products. The potential benefit to farmers from adding value to farm products can be substantial. Data from a 2006 study (5) of the returns from various value-added products showed that direct sales of value-added (portioned and packaged) beef *and lamb products garnered an average premium of $2.75/lb over wholesale meat prices. Factoring in processing, transportation and marketing costs, the increased profit margin was still greater than $1.50/lb on average. Value-added fruit and vegetable products, including such items as pies, jams, salsas, chutneys and pesto, netted per pound sale prices that ranged from $2 to as much as $20 higher than raw product prices. Even simple value-added processes such as pitting cherries, drying herbs, and braiding garlic added an extra $1 to $5 per pound and increased the on-farm profit margins.*

This education program will address key steps in the market planning process, from market assessment and product development through market positioning, advertisement, and promotion. As the agricultural service providers build their skills, they will be better able to help farmers know what questions to ask and where to find answers. They will also be better able to help farmers identify value-added products that may be appropriate for their farm and family situation, understand processing requirements and facility needs, and make sound decisions about potential value-added products. For farmers to be successful in a value-added venture, it is essential that they know how to answer the questions below, which are at the core of market planning.

What will I market, and who will buy it?

Why will the market want my product?

How will the market know I have what it wants?

When agricultural service providers become more knowledgeable about teaching farmers how to gather information to answer these questions, the farmers they teach will be better equipped to decide whether to launch a value-added product, and if they decide to launch a product—how to make that product successful.

3. Beneficiaries

In this section, describe the number and type of agricultural service providers who will participate in the project. Describe their need for education about the problem and its solution, their interest in trying to solve the problem, and their willingness to work with the project to help farmers implement the solution. Service providers who are willing to participate in the project are the project's primary beneficiaries. Data from surveys conducted by others that demonstrate an interest by farmers and service providers in solving the problem will show reviewers that you have an engaged beneficiary audience.

After describing the beneficiaries in general, provide two brief profiles of typical or example agricultural service providers. These profiles can be based on real individuals or they can be composites, but please do not use real names. The goal is to give the reviewers a feel for the range and types of agricultural service providers who will engage with the project and why they want or need the education and support proposed by this project.

Professional Development projects may include farmers as co-learners, instruction partners, and as secondary beneficiaries but agricultural service providers must be the primary target audience. These secondary farmer beneficiaries can be mentioned in the beneficiaries section of the narrative, but the actual beneficiary profiles must describe the primary audience of agricultural service providers.

Here is a sample beneficiary description, followed by two beneficiary profiles:

The primary beneficiaries will be 40 extension educators, department of agriculture personnel, and representatives from the agricultural business and non-profit community organizations in Maryland who work with dairy, fruit, vegetable and small livestock farmers. Educators who work with all types of farmers will be recruited as the marketing principles can be applied to all types of food products. Interest in education about marketing and market planning is high among both agricultural service providers and farmers in the state. In the survey of 140 extension educators referenced earlier, 78 (65%) of the 120 respondents replied they were interested or very interested in obtaining more education about value-added product development and marketing. In addition, three non-profit groups that are committed to helping connect farmers with appropriate processing facilities have expressed interest in participating in the program.

Joan is an extension educator with responsibility for vegetable and small fruit crops. Over the last two years, she has received an increasing number of calls from farmers asking about food processing, regulations, and marketing opportunities. The information she has found to be readily available to answer these questions is either too general to be of much use or more complex than she is able to understand and use effectively. She would like to build her knowledge and skills on the topics of value-added farm products, food processing, and marketing.

Richard is a regional extension livestock specialist who is concerned about the decline in profitability among the beef farmers he serves. He is receiving inquiries from traditional cow-calf operators who are interested in increasing profits by farm-finishing their animals and selling the meat directly or through local channels. Richard, who is trained in animal production and not marketing, wants to learn more about the market opportunities for these farmers and how to advise them in transitioning their operations.

4. Project approach

This section should outline the proposed curriculum and approach to teach the defined group of agricultural service providers and prepare them to help farmers mitigate or solve the problem described above. Describe the plan for recruiting and enrolling beneficiaries, the curriculum, the proposed format and delivery methods (workshops, webinars, on-farm demonstrations, service provider-farmer learning teams, for example), and the sequence of instruction. If there are critical roles for collaborators who might have a stake in the problem (regulators, food buyers, farmers, farm workers, etc.), or a role in curriculum development and instruction, describe them.

The curriculum should be thorough and appropriate, and the delivery methods and beneficiary support mechanisms should prepare agricultural service providers to competently and confidently teach and advise farmers about the problem and encourage them to adopt the solution, thus reaching the performance target. Reviewers must be able to follow and understand the curriculum and planned approach and its linkage to the performance target.

Include in the plan:

- Steps for recruiting and enrolling beneficiaries

- The specific elements in the curriculum that will address the farmers' problem and prepare the agricultural service providers to teach farmers on the topic. Describe what new knowledge, skills, beliefs, and intentions about the problem the agricultural service providers will acquire as they progress through the project milestones

- The delivery methods and the types of activities where learning will occur, e.g., workshops, field day demonstrations, webinars, participatory meetings, etc., and the sequence for learning

- Methods for supporting beneficiaries as they learn and build skills, and afterwards as they take actions to teach and advise farmers. For example, providing one-on-one support after training sessions by phone, e-mail, or in-person visit; tools and templates for participants' record keeping; or fact sheets, videos or other instructive materials that explain the ideas or techniques taught in the education program for use as teaching aids.

Here is a sample approach:

This project will combine a series of webinars and a follow-up 1.5-day workshop to educate extension staff about the principles and practices of market planning. The agricultural service providers who participated in the survey about the interest level in this topic and the farmers who were surveyed about their needs will be contacted by e-mail, and regular mail and asked to participate in the project, and other agricultural service providers and farmers will be informed about this project by extension newsletters and by announcements at regularly scheduled extension and farmer meetings. The webinar curriculum will consist of four modules presented approximately one month apart. The agricultural service providers will be asked to identify two or more farmers who are interested in exploring value-added products to attend the webinars with them. The topics and learning objectives for each module are listed below. Each module will teach marketing fundamentals as applied to value-added farm products, and also introduce the service providers and farmers to worksheets that can be used as tools to conduct the market planning.

1. ***Market assessment—****agricultural service providers and their cooperating farmers will learn how to identify potential customers and sales areas, and how to assess product demand and specifications. (Tools: market analysis and assessment worksheets.)*

2. ***Product development—****participants will learn how to determine product feasibility based on production and management requirements, both on-farm and off, financial, personal, and family characteristics. (Tools: product development, cost of production, and enterprise budget worksheets.)*

3. ***Market competition, positioning—****participants will learn how to choose appropriate or best-fit market outlets including direct sales, internet sales, regional, and wholesale channels. They will also learn the how and why to develop a positioning statement and pricing strategy. (Tools: positioning, competition, and pricing worksheets)*

4. ***Market connection, advertising, promotion –*** *participants will learn the how-to's of branding, packaging, and promoting. They will learn how to determine advertisement needs and use different media. (Tools: distribution channels, communication and advertising worksheets.)*

After attending the webinar series, the agricultural service providers will convene for a 1.5-day workshop where, using case studies, they will get hands-on practice completing the worksheets discussed in the webinars. After this in-depth training each agricultural service provider agrees to conduct one-on-one market planning sessions with the farmers who attended the webinars with them or with other identified farmers. They will return home with a compilation of resource information from the webinars and the market planning worksheets and instructions for their use during the one-on-one market planning sessions with their recruited farmers. The project team will provide support for the service providers throughout their one-on-one planning work via telephone, e-mail, and in-person assistance when requested.

This approach will increase the service providers' knowledge about marketing principles and build their skills and confidence so they can help farmers work through the necessary steps for successful product launches. In addition, farmers who join the project as co-learners will have the opportunity to develop a marketing plan for their farm in a facilitated and supportive environment. Lecture slides, teaching case studies, and market planning worksheets will be also be compiled into a comprehensive teaching resource for agricultural service providers to use in future programs with farmers.

Milestones and performance target (400 words)

These sections outline the structure and proposed outcome of the project by listing its milestones and performance target. Although the milestones will be reached before the performance target, the two concepts are best understood by considering the performance target first. All project planning is best begun with a clear vision and understanding of the performance target.

Performance Target

Each project must have a performance target that defines a specific, beneficial, and verifiable outcome. This performance target should be identical to the target in the abstract. To fully and clearly describe the outcome, two key elements are necessary. They are:

1) **The specific, verifiable change in beneficiaries' actions or behavior** that your project proposes to accomplish. For Professional Development projects, this change is a number (*not* a percentage) of agricultural service providers who use new knowledge and skills learned through the project to teach farmers about beneficial changes they can make on their farms.

2) **The scale or degree of change** that will occur. Scale-of-change indicators include the number of educators conducting educational programs and the total number of farmers educated or assisted. Additional descriptors of the scale of change such as the number of acres, animal units, markets, etc., that these farmers manage should be included where appropriate to strengthen the performance target (see examples 2 and 3 below). *Strong engagement and input from project beneficiaries during proposal planning are essential for establishing an ambitious but realistic performance target.*

A third, optional component of a Professional Development performance target is a goal for:

3) **Farmer adoption of the project's recommended solution** on a number of farms, acres, animal units, market enterprises, etc. This optional element strengthens the target by including a measurable on-farm change. (See example 4 below.)

Because the ultimate beneficiaries of all SARE programs should be farmers, some applicants opt to predict how many farmers will make a change or perform an action as a result of what they learn from the agricultural service providers, and some feel confident they will be able to measure the benefits to those farmers. Obtaining this type of data about adoption and farmer benefit is not feasible for all projects, but it is possible, especially when the recommended on-farm change is specific, targeted, can be accomplished within a short time, and service providers are fully engaged in the project and are working intensely with a small number of farmers.

Here are four sample performance targets that might be used for a Professional Development project. Example 1 draws on the sample project above; the others are from projects with different content.

Example 1—without farmer adoption
Twenty agricultural service providers who receive training through this project will consult intensively with 35 farmers from the dairy, beef, small ruminant, fruit and vegetable sectors; 25 of these producers will complete business plans for a value-added product; 15 of the educators will develop new educational programs about value-added business planning and deliver them to 300 additional farmers.

Example 2—with an additional scale descriptor
Twelve agricultural service providers develop and conduct education programs where 250 dairy farmers ***who cultivate 18,000 acres of corn for silage*** *learn about techniques, benefits, and challenges of planting cover crops in fields harvested for corn silage.*

Example 3—with additional scale descriptor
Eight extension educators develop and deliver programs where 320 sheep farmers ***who raise 6,000 sheep*** *learn about the FAMACHA system of barber pole parasite management.*

Example 4—with optional farmer adoption
Twenty agricultural service providers who receive training through this project will consult intensively with 35 farmers from the dairy, beef, small ruminant, fruit and vegetable sectors; 25 of these producers will complete business plans for a value-added product; ***10 of the farmers launch a value-added product.*** *Fifteen of the educators will develop new educational programs about value-added business planning and deliver them to 300 additional farmers.*

All the examples above include the two essential elements of a Professional Development performance target, in that they describe the **specific action or change** and the **scale of change** that the agricultural service providers will make. Note that each example also specifies how many service providers are engaged and how many farmers they subsequently support using the project content.

Examples 2 and 3 include an additional descriptor of the scale of change—in this case, the **number of acres** cultivated and the **number of animals** raised are meaningful descriptors that make these targets more robust and compelling.

Example 4 shows the same target as example 1, but with the additional **optional measurement of farmer adoption** included. Including farmer adoption for this project may be feasible because the agricultural service providers will work closely with a small number of farmers.

Notice that none of the example performance targets say what you, the applicant, will do—and while all projects include activities conducted by the project leader and team, these activities do not belong in the performance target. Instead, performance targets describe precise changes and actions by the beneficiaries—people who are outside your direct control but are influenced by you through their participation. This change in focus—describing the actions of others rather than your own—can be a source of discomfort, especially for applicants familiar with a more standard funding approach where the grantee proposes to do specific tasks (hold a conference, do research, or develop a new publication, for example), using the grantor's money. Outcome funding requires that SARE look beyond the research, services, bulletins, or educational events developed by the grantee to see whether the beneficiaries made improvements as a result of the education program.

Writing a strong performance target

Bang for the buck

Educating service providers about complex, significant, and useful changes for farmers requires a more intense engagement strategy than teaching about an incremental change that is relatively easy to accomplish—soil testing as opposed to switching to an entirely new kind of tillage system, for example, or developing an enterprise budget as opposed to holistic whole-farm planning. Similarly, it's harder to engage many people in a change than it is to teach a few. The point is that a performance target describes the **intensity or scale** of change and this scale suggests the level of **effort and resources** needed to achieve it—if a dramatic change is proposed, it may require more funding, even if the numbers of people making the change are relatively small. It also follows that if a large number of beneficiaries are going to be involved in making a less demanding change, then a high level of funding may also be justified. SARE reviewers will sometimes approve smaller projects or those seeking modest levels of change, but only if they can be accomplished for a lower cost than more ambitious projects.

The so-what? test

A strong performance target also will pass the *so-what?* test. This is a mental test where reviewers ask: *Is it clear that anything meaningful will result from the effort described?*

For example, if a proposal says that 200 agricultural service providers will attend a workshop to learn about managing pastures, reviewers will ask, *so what?* The service providers may have a wonderful educational experience, but that experience alone is not enough to meet the outcome-funding standard of measurable change. The proposal may go on to say that 30 service providers call the presenters after the workshop to get pasture management reference materials. *So what?* This may be an indication of interest and intention to conduct education for farmers—a good first step, but these phone calls alone do not indicate that any change has taken place. But if the proposal says that 20 agricultural service providers will teach 60 farmers with a total of 900 cows how to implement pasture-management plans, now you have a specific, measurable action, and the scale of the action, and this meets requirements of a performance target. Depending on the intensity of engagement, this target might also be able to include the number of farmers who implement pasture management plans on a certain number of acres. The preceding intermediary steps—the ones that do not quite pass the *so-what?* test—are still important stages that the beneficiaries must go through to acquire knowledge, skills, and new attitudes along the way to achieving the target. These are called **milestones** and they are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Milestones

How milestones chart a plan for beneficiary learning

To prepare for the specific change (or to take an action) described in the performance target, beneficiaries must proceed through a number of critical steps in learning and skill development. These well-connected, logical, intermediate developmental steps are called milestones.
For SARE Professional Development projects, these milestones must include not only learning and skill development related to the project topic, problem, and solution, but also include learning and skill development for becoming effective teachers of farmers. The agricultural service providers must be prepared and confident to **effectively teach** farmers about the subject matter, help them **develop the necessary skills** for adopting the recommended practice or change, and **motivate them** take the recommended action. Successful projects will include activities and teaching resources so that service providers can be prepared and equipped to educate farmers effectively and confidently after the project's education program ends. The learning described in the milestones should reflect the educational topics described in the project approach subsection in the narrative.

Strong milestones will include steps such as:

- Agreeing the problem is a legitimate problem for farmers or society
  e.g., farmers are losing yield, product quality, market share; soil erosion is occurring and affecting water bodies and farm field productivity; farmers are purchasing unnecessary feed supplements for animals; farmers are stressed and unable to cope with changing market or labor conditions.
- Believing in the credibility and feasibility of the proposed solutions
  e.g., farmers can realistically improve yield or product quality or reduce erosion and feed supplement expenditures, or change farm management to reduce stress through the recommended solutions.
- Learning necessary content about the problem and solution
  e.g., the lifecycle of weed species, components of a marketing plan, environmental and agronomic benefits of cover crops, understanding the elements in a comprehensive plan.
- Building essential skills and capabilities to perform tasks related to the problem and solution
  e.g., how to calibrate a sprayer, conduct a soil assessment, write an enterprise budget, develop a whole farm management plan.
- Recognizing barriers and risks for farmers in adopting the proposed solution
  e.g., uncertainty of return on financial investment, labor and management time constraints, potential yield loss, limitations of crop rotations or planting schedules, etc., and identifying strategies for overcoming these barriers.
- Acquiring the intentions and motivation to teach farmers about the problem and its solution
  e.g,. believing the problem matters to farmers, the solution is feasible, and that they have an important role in educating farmers about it.

- Becoming prepared and confident to teach the content and skills farmers need to take the recommended action
  e.g., having strong content knowledge and understanding, appropriate equipment and resources for teaching, and adequate support from key individuals.

Milestones are not the same as the activities that the project leader and team perform; rather, milestones outline the framework and sequence of beneficiary learning that is directly linked to the activities and learning events you will schedule for the beneficiaries. They chart a timeline for when and where the learning occurs and establish participation goals for each phase of the project.

Milestones are stated in terms of **what a specified number** of beneficiaries learn and accomplish through participation in **specific project activities or learning experiences** within a defined **timeframe.** These activities and events are the means to the end, not ends in themselves.

Beneficiary learning and skill milestones must be considered in the design and implementation of all project activities if the activities are to be meaningful for the beneficiaries and the project, i.e., if they are to prepare beneficiaries for the performance target. They must also be verifiable (and verified) as a project progresses. The performance target is the last step in this chain of learning and preparation for beneficiaries, and in that sense, it is the final milestone of a project.

Milestones have four components:

1. The number and type of beneficiaries (agricultural service providers) who will participate,

2. The project activities or educational experiences the beneficiaries participate in,

3. The key, specific content that beneficiaries will learn, build skills for, and develop attitudes and intentions about, and

4. The schedule or timeframe for the learning.

Present milestones as a series of logical, sequential, and progressive steps taken by the beneficiaries. The number of beneficiaries who take each step should be realistic and sufficient for keeping the project on track to achieve the performance target. Each milestone should link with the one that follows and have a specific duration or a specific date, creating a timeline of beneficiary learning and progress. The performance target should always follow logically from the milestones that precede it. Reviewers will be rightly critical of vague milestones that show little or no connection to, or progression toward, the performance target.

When milestones are written in a logical and progressive sequence, they will provide a blueprint to follow as you carry out project activities. The milestones will also serve as check points for verification throughout the project. If the milestones are not being achieved by the expected number of participants, it's an indication that course corrections are needed if the performance target is to be met.

Below is a sample set of milestones for the Professional Development project you read about earlier:

1. *One hundred and twenty agricultural service providers learn about market planning education program and receive an online survey about their current level of knowledge and learning needs. (Nov - Dec '12)*
2. *Sixty service providers return the survey; 30 agree to participate in the education program and recruit two or more farmer co-learners. (Jan '13)*
3. *Twenty-five service providers and 50 farmers attend the first webinar and about market assessment and learn about identifying potential customers and sales regions and how to determine product demand and specifications. (Feb - Mar '13)*
4. *Twenty service providers and 35 farmers attend the remaining three webinar modules and learn about product development – including feasibility analysis and enterprise budgeting; market competition and positioning – including choosing appropriate markets, using them successfully, and developing a positioning and pricing strategy; and market connection, advertisement and promotion – including branding, packaging, advertising media and strategies. (Apr - Aug '13)*
5. *Twenty service providers attend the 1.5-day workshop where they use case studies to learn how to use market planning worksheet tools. (Nov '13)*
6. *Twenty service providers receive a comprehensive teaching resources kit including workshop/seminar outlines, lecture slides, teaching case studies, market planning workbooks, and verification surveys. (Nov '13)*
7. *Twenty service providers request and receive telephone, email and/or in-person educational support from the project team for their one-on-one market planning sessions with farmers. (Dec '13 – May '14)*
8. *Twenty service providers respond to verification survey and report on educational programs conducted and on value-added enterprises launched as a result of their educational efforts. (March '15 – April '15)*

Performance Target

Twenty agricultural service providers who receive training through this project will consult intensively with 35 farmers from the dairy, beef, small ruminant, fruit and vegetable sectors; 25 of these producers will complete business plans for a value-added product; 15 of the educators will develop new educational programs about value-added business planning and deliver them to 300 additional farmers.

These milestones and the resulting performance target describe what, how and when beneficiaries will learn and then do—as opposed to what project staff or project managers will do—and for some grant applicants this is a new way of thinking, requiring a shift in perspective. Learning to plan this way is a key to succeeding with outcome funding.

Milestones describe beneficiary engagement over time. It is important to be realistic and recognize that not every person who begins a given phase of the project will see it through to the end—note the anticipated drop from 30 agricultural service providers agreeing to participate to only 20 completing the education program and teaching farmers in the example above. It is relatively easy to engage a lot of people in activities; it is much harder to get people to implement a new practice or behavior, especially if the practice is complex and multifaceted, as is the case with the adoption of a new tillage system.

The number of participants included in the milestones and the final performance target should be based on your knowledge of the difficulty or complexity of the targeted change and the needs and interests of the beneficiaries. The participation numbers established in the milestones are not a guarantee, but an informed estimate of participation and engagement. They should also become goals, because, to reach the performance target, sufficient participation and engagement along the way is needed. **And, as was stated for performance targets, strong engagement and input from project beneficiaries during proposal planning is essential for establishing ambitious but realistic participation numbers in milestones.**

Verification plan (400 words)

In this section, describe the verification strategy and the tools that will be used for verification. Typical methods are interviews, observations, phone contact, e-mail or paper surveys, or other techniques that best suit the project design. A verification plan explains how the beneficiaries' progress through the milestones will be tracked and how the performance target will be verified.

For learning and skill milestone verification, the plan describes how changes in the participants' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and intentions to take action will be verified throughout the project. The information verified throughout the project should be directly linked to the milestones established in the proposal. Consistent wording and format are important so that responses can be compared reliably over time.

Assessment during the project should capture the relevant demographics of beneficiaries, evaluate participation levels, and gauge the effectiveness of the project's efforts to help beneficiaries reach their learning and skill milestones. Routine verification of milestones during the project will help identify problems with the plan or implementation that require a mid-course correction. If the numbers of participants start to vary significantly from the numbers in the proposal's milestones, or if gaps in understanding and skill acquisition emerge, then some kind of course correction will be required. It is important to maintain a high level of engagement with project beneficiaries and make sure that measurement tools (questionnaires, post-workshop surveys, or face-to-face follow-up) are consistent and relevant.

Verification of the performance target requires follow-up after the project activities are complete to find out how many beneficiaries made the desired change, the scale or extent of that change, and what measurable benefits were achieved as a result of the change. Writing these questions should be straightforward if the performance target is specific. The questions should be tailored closely to the project content and performance target. Examples of the types of questions to ask include:

- How many and what types of educational programs or teaching efforts were conducted?
- How many and what types of farmers were taught through these educational efforts?
- How many acres, animals, markets, enterprises, etc., do these farmers operate or manage?

- In some cases, what recommendations did farmers adopt as a result of the service providers' educational efforts?

Usually some time must elapse between completion of the project activities and verification of the performance target to allow changes in beneficiary behavior to occur. Tell beneficiaries, preferably more than once, that verification will be conducted even after the main project activities end – after they have had time to take actions based on their learning and participation in your project. Ask them to be prepared to answer follow-up questions about how, when, and whether they used the knowledge they learned through the project to teach farmers, and to report those encounters to you. Knowing about these questions ahead of time helps participants prepare and may improve the quality and quantity of responses. Providing a tool or form for record keeping, and sample verification instruments for their programs with farmers, may also help improve the quantity and quality of verification reporting you obtain.

Be aware that follow-up verifications become increasingly complex as more time goes by—people may be harder to find or slower to respond. For example, an end-of-project e-mail survey may need more than one follow-up and then a phone call to get an acceptable response rate; you may also need to track beneficiaries to new jobs or changes in location. Decide now what an acceptable response rate is and what resources you will commit to achieving it.

Northeast SARE recognizes that unforeseen circumstances or insurmountable barriers may prevent some projects from entirely meeting their performance target. SARE is looking for a frank, truthful assessment of what the actual outcomes were and whether the project approached, met, or even exceeded its original performance target.

Verification methods will vary according to the type of project, but planning and executing a sound verification strategy is essential to capturing the results of your project. The likelihood of reaching a milestone or achieving a performance target is improved by knowing what will be measured and how it will be measured before the project starts. Proposals that do not have a clear verification plan are often equally unclear about what specific changes are expected, since the two are tightly linked.

A common mistake project managers make is to postpone doing any verification work until the project is over. Logically, this might seem like the way to go—you can't know your results until the results are in. But there are usually several sequential stages to verification, from:

- Gathering baseline information about beneficiaries' demographics, pre-program knowledge and their understandings about the projects goals and expectations to

- Mid-project surveys to verify milestone progress, to

- Follow-up when the main project activities are over to verify the performance target.

There are a number of ways to gather verification information—sign-in sheets, workshop questionnaires, face-to-face discussion, or through some follow-up mechanism like direct mail, e-mail, telephone, or an electronic mailing list.

A draft of the performance target verification tool (as a .pdf, .doc, or .xls file) such as a survey or interview questions, must be uploaded as an attachment. Although a draft, this tool should be specific and detailed enough to assure reviewers that you understand the questions that must be asked and will be able to collect the information needed to verify the performance target. *No specific word limit for this attachment; be as concise as possible.*

Develop a follow-up tool that is straightforward and addresses your performance target. Consider these possible verification questions for the Professional Development performance target, listed above earlier:

> *Twenty agricultural service providers who receive training through this project will consult intensively with 35 farmers from the dairy, beef, small ruminant, fruit and vegetable sectors; 25 of these producers will complete business plans for a value-added product; 15 of the educators will develop new educational programs about value-added business planning and deliver them to 300 additional farmers.*

Please answer the following questions about your educational activities:

1. How many farmers have you conducted one-on-one market planning with?

2. For each farmer you conducted market planning with, please provide the information requested in the chart below.

Farmer	Main crop and/or livestock enterprises	Product or product type market planning was for
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

3. Besides the one-on-one market planning sessions, how many education programs about value-added market planning did you conduct in the past year?

4. For each education program you conducted, please provide the information requested in the chart below.

Program	Type of program, e.g. workshop, webinar, meeting, fact sheet, article, etc.	Attendance		
		Number of farmers	Farmers' main crop / livestock enterprises*	Number of ag service providers

1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

5. Do you have any thoughts or comments about the benefits and challenges use of the market planning process and tools you used with farmer?

6. Do you have any thoughts or comments about this project that you wish to share?

***** The information about farm type or farm enterprises can be easily obtained and compiled for educational events by providing places on event survey forms for farmers to fill in their main crop or livestock enterprises. Number of acres or animal units or some other meaningful descriptor could also be requested, depending on the project and performance target.

The information requested here could also be included in a recordkeeping template provided to the agricultural service providers at the training workshops for use throughout the project. This way, their educational efforts and outcomes could be recorded in real time. Verification would then involve collecting their recorded information after the project and during interim check-in contacts during the project.

It's important to use some open-ended questions like numbers 5 and 6—even though they can be difficult to analyze, they often contain important and even surprising information. If the final evaluation will be conducted by telephone, make sure to ask specific, fixed questions *and* give each participant a chance to speak freely about the project. It is sometimes best to have a third party conduct these interviews to avoid bias as much as possible. Unexpected outcomes can be interesting and often very gratifying, and the best way to tease them out is to listen actively to unstructured responses.

Northeast SARE has an extensive collection of verification guidance and example questions on its website at http://nesare.org/resources/verification-tools.html. Applicants are encouraged to review these resources and use ideas and question formats from the examples found there.

Below is a list of common obstacles to implementing a good verification program.

- The sign-up or registration material is incomplete, so that you don't have good contact information for participants, especially walk-ins and people who may have been registered by another party at their institution.
- Participants aren't always asked whether they understand the content or whether it will be useful to them.
- Mid-project verification is not used to identify participants who are having problems meeting the project's expectations and need help getting back on track.
- The time between the end of the project and the final verification is too long, so participants no longer have access to the necessary data, can't remember their experiences clearly, or have lost their enthusiasm.
- The verification format doesn't ask for the specific data needed to verify the performance target.
- Participants were not specifically informed in advance about the type of data they would need to collect in order to complete the verification questions.

Key individuals *(350 words)*

This section describes the key individuals playing an essential role in the project, including the project leader. These are the people who will have specifically assigned responsibilities for coordination, leadership, organizing, or training. For each key individual, write a brief description of their relevant abilities and qualifications and state the specific role they will play in the project. Avoid too much detail and emphasize only the background and skills that will most likely come into play in the course of the project. Here are some sample profiles:

Frances Jones is a marketing specialist and extension educator with 15 years of experience in farm marketing and financial planning. She has also led an interdisciplinary team that worked with dairy farmers on a cooperative, value-added marketing campaign. She will lead the project and perform recruiting, training, follow-up and assessment.

Jason Smith is an extension specialist in vegetables and small fruits. He has more than 10 years of experience working with vegetable and fruit farmers with operations of all sizes and scale. He will serve as chair of the planning committee and have responsibility for overall program organization, implementation and evaluation. Jason will also help conduct outreach and recruiting.

Martin Duke is the Maryland state extension dairy specialist. He is a planning committee member and will be responsible for outreach to extension and farmer audiences.

Jennifer Wilson is currently the coordinator of Green!, a producer-chef alliance that develops and sustains markets for fresh, local, and specialty food products. Before that, she spent four years with Diggers CSA where she managed fulfillment and marketing. She will provide instruction and will help prepare the case studies for workshop sessions.

Greg Hunt is an agricultural business educator with the Maryland state department of agriculture and has been involved for the past 13 years in a range of farm viability projects that focused on dairy farm diversification and management. He will conduct recruiting in the agriculture business sector, contribute to curriculum resources, and co-lead the training webinars.

If there is a key individual who is yet to be hired, describe the position and its duties very briefly:

The technical and administrative assistant will manage equipment and software for the webinars, workshops, and electronic surveys. This individual will also maintain project administrative records, including a participant database and financial records.

A letter of commitment from each key individual (except for you, the project leader) must be uploaded as an attachment to the proposal. These letters should indicate that each person listed on this page understands his or her role and is ready and is willing to participate. The letter should be written by these individuals, not by the project leader. Obviously, a project is most likely to succeed when its key cooperators understand and agree to their roles and time commitment before it even starts.

Literature review (2000 words)

The purpose of this section is to outline for reviewers the scientific foundation and merits of the project, and to identify and explain the references used to understand the problems, challenges and opportunities associated with the project,

The goal is not to create a long list of publications, but to include only those sources that are relevant to the credibility, design and goals of your project. This is the place where you convince reviewers that there is a body of knowledge that provides a compelling rationale for funding the performance target and milestones you are proposing.

Show that you are informed about previous grants from SARE and how your project will complement or build on results from previous SARE grants. To find SARE grants, search the project data base on the national website at www.sare.org. Select "project reports" from the top navigation bar. You can search by state, type of grant, and keyword. You will also want to cite other sources, since the goal is to describe past and current work related to your project.

Include a citation list at the end of the literature review. Below is an example of what a citation list entry should look like:

Anderson, Joan. *Sheep Herd Health Management.* 2004. Sustainable Agriculture Network. Includes a discussion the efficacy of alternative wormers and the managed reduction of antibiotic use.

Brown, Edgar. *A Producer's Guide to Whole-Herd Management.* 1998. Etherbooks. A holistic approach that encourages placing livestock in the context of overall farm management.

Chester, Anne. *"Breeding for Natural Resistance."* 2001. NRAES 8888. A bulletin on breed characteristics and management strategy.

Reviewers do not require (and do not want), a citation for every paper, web page, book chapter, bulletin, or other document you have researched in your interest area. The documents reviewed should be those that will place the project on a firm scientific footing and in a meaningful context, and should include sources that were genuinely useful for contributory knowledge, planning, and guidance.

Budget and budget justification narrative

Even the most persuasive proposal will fail to get funded if the budget is not clear, seems inappropriate (too high or too low for the effort described) or includes funding for items not described in the proposal or for items not allowed by SARE. Reviewers need to know specifically what SARE is paying for and why.

There are two broad rules that should govern budget preparation and presentation. First, the budget needs to reflect, with accuracy and transparency, the events and activities in the text portion of the proposal. Do not put items in the budget that do not appear in the narrative, and do not include something in the narrative that is not covered in the budget.

Second, the budget should inspire confidence. It should be orderly, easy to figure out, and have nothing hidden in it that would be unallowable or questionable. Common unallowable expenses include day-to-day operating expenses that would be there in the absence of the project, meals that are not legitimate working lunches or light refreshments, and expenses to set up labs or buildings. Other items that catch reviewers' attention are durable equipment like cameras, computers, and other items that have a life expectancy longer than the life of the project. Requests for these items must be clearly justified in the budget narrative.

Reviewers also need to understand how cost estimates were derived, and the place where this is shown is the budget justification narrative. The budget justification should provide an explanation for each line item in each year of the project. The line-item budget request should be justified by indicating the number of units times some cost, or, with personnel costs, as either a percentage of full-time equivalency or as an hourly wage, and these details should add up correctly and match the budget line request.

Show reviewers how each budget item was derived, and, where needed, some description of the purpose of that item. For example, the dollar request for travel must be fully justified as to the purpose of the trip, the distance or ticket cost, and these details must add up to the requested amount. Or if you're not sure what it costs to buy the twelve rolls of landscape cloth you need for a weed-suppression project, you should consult a catalog or call the farm supplier and ask. The resulting entry might look like this:

12 rolls 3' x 250' landscape cloth @ $70 each: $840

Other justifications might look like this:

2000 bulletins printed at $2.12 each: $4,240
two mailings of 2600 @$.31 per piece: $1,612
50% FTE of Entomology Dept. technician: $18,500

If the budget is not adequately justified, the competitiveness of the application will almost certainly be undermined. If $12,342 is requested for supplies, but the justification only details $8,615 worth of items, then the budget request of $12,342 is not justified. If $18,450 is budgeted for lab tests, but neither the proposal, nor the justification, provide explanation as to why these tests are needed, or why they are so costly, then justification is inadequate.

This itemization may seem tedious, but it shows reviewers that the applicant has thought through the project and the funding needed. Also, this level of detail is required by USDA/NIFA.

Exclusions

There are certain categories where SARE funds cannot be used. Capital expenses for things like land purchases, general farm improvements, and construction of buildings, greenhouses, and laboratories are not allowed. Costs for copiers, cameras, computers, video equipment, and other items that could have a wide range of uses beyond the boundaries of the project must be clearly essential to a particular project to be allowed. Applicants must make sure that these requests are reasonable, defensible, and not extravagant.

Food expenses are typically not allowed. Under certain circumstances—if it is a working meal as part of a meeting or training event, if the meeting is at a remote site where no restaurants are readily available and offering a meal is the only way to get people to a reconvene in a timely way—meals might be paid for with SARE funds. When SARE funds are used for meals, USDA employees should note this on their expense reports and deduct meal costs from any per diem reimbursements.

International travel is discouraged and, if proposed, must be integral to the project's success and described in your budget justification. There are certain restrictions on costs and carriers, and you can learn more about them by contacting SARE staff.

Graduate student tuition remission is not funded by SARE, but note that SARE funds can be used to compensate graduate students for project labor.

Items of clothing—hats, tee-shirts, aprons, etc.—cannot be purchased with SARE funds, as are giveaways, subsidies, and incentive payments.

Personnel costs

Personnel costs are salaries and wages, and the subcategories are major participants (people like the project manager and his or her associates), support staff (often administrative support), graduate students, and hourly labor. There is also a line in the personnel section for fringe benefits.

Please only list **personnel from the applicant's institution** under personnel costs. If other people are paid under the project, they may be paid by other institutions as a project collaborator subcontract, or paid directly by the applicant's institution as a consultant. For example, if an individual will be paid to help analyze an erosion problem, that person may be paid as a consultant. If consultants are hired or if a portion of the work will be subcontracted to another collaborating institution, enter those expenses under "other direct costs" as described below.

Non-personnel costs
There are several expense categories under non-personnel: travel, supplies, publications, and other direct costs. That's a lot of categories, so we'll look at them one at a time.

Travel
When requesting funds for travel by car, use the mileage reimbursement rate set by the institution administering the grant. If you are not associated with an institution, then you may use the rate established by the University of Vermont, which hosts the SARE program; this rate is adjusted each year to match the federal rate, and is currently $.55 a mile. For auto travel costs, indicate the destination, the number of trips, and the total anticipated mileage. Here are some sample budget justification lines:

Four trips to cooperating farm, 14 miles each, 56 miles @$0.55/mile: $30.00
Three trips to soil lab, 26 miles each, 78 miles @$0.55/mile: $43.00
One trip to workshop meeting, 104 miles @$0.55/mile: $57.00

If the budget includes air travel, make sure to price the request with the least expensive carrier. Federal regulations say U.S. carriers must be used for international travel. Long-distance trips must clearly be justified as central to the project.

Supplies
This section is for items that are specific to the project and have a reasonable useful life of less than three years. Supplies can include things like office supplies, project-specific software, specialized tools, measuring devices, and other materials that will be used and used up in the course of the project. Again, be specific:

4 test kits at $22 each: $88
mapping software: $420
10 reams of paper @ $2.60 each: $26

Publications
This budget item is specific to any publication development costs (editing, design, and printing) that you might incur. This would include the cost of developing web-based publications, but it does not include photocopying, which comes in the next section under direct costs. Show a per-piece cost for any publications you plan to develop. For example:

24-page resource directory, layout and design at $30/hour, five hours: $ 150
Printing at $1.12 each, 1000 pieces: $1,120

Other direct costs
This budget category is for communications costs like phone calls, postage, and photocopying, any subcontracts, any money paid to cooperating farmers, consultants, or trainers, and any other allowable direct costs.

Communications costs typically include postage, fax, and telephone expenses specific to the project. If you plan to mail 350 flyers to announce a field day, then your line item would read:

Postage for 350 flyers at .41 each: $143.50

If you plan to have ongoing long-distance telephone contact with cooperators or perhaps a consultant, make an educated guess what these will cost. For example:

Ten hours in-state evening long distance to cooperating farmers: $ 50
Four hours in-state daytime long distance to technical advisor: $ 45
Two conference calls with planning committee @ 1 hour each: $ 72

If you think you will be making copies in the course of the project, estimate how many and the cost per page. For example:

500 copies of the bulletin for distribution at field day @ .05 each: $25

Administrative copying costs can also be estimated based on past experience:

100 pages a month @ .05 each X 12 months: $60

Consultants

If an outside entity is hired on a temporary basis to carry out a specific task, they are normally paid as a consultant.

Jack Adams, WonderMark, education consultant, 4 meetings at $325 each: $1,300

Consultants tend to be outside advisors, speakers, trainers, and cooperating farmers. SARE feels strongly that farmers need to be paid for the time they contribute to a project at a reasonable rate—Northeast SARE itself compensates farmers who serve on its committees and review teams at $240 a day. Please note that there is a distinction between paying farmers to contribute to a project by participating in planning or project evaluation, or perhaps coming to a conference in the role of a trainer or presenter, which is appropriate and encouraged, versus paying farmers to receive the benefits of training, such as coming to a workshop or conference as a recipient. In this second case, payment would not be appropriate.

Miscellaneous

If you have a project expense that truly does not fit into any of the above categories, put it here. A possible miscellaneous expense could be a land lease.

Lease of two acres of sloped sandy pasture for demonstration site @ $60 each: $120

Avoid using this budget category as a portmanteau for items that really belong somewhere else, or as a place to stash items that SARE does not fund. The miscellaneous line item in the budget is often the target of unusual scrutiny. Each item must be identified; an unidentified or unjustified miscellaneous item will not be allowed.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are not allowed under Professional Development grants.

Subcontracts

If there is some project-related work that will be contracted out to an agency or vendor, list it here. Be clear about the scope of work and cost. If the subcontract is to another institution working as a collaborator on your project, provide a separate budget and budget justification for that institution.

Budget format

People often ask how to format and present their budgets. For guidance with this, look at the layout below and note the different categories—this gives an idea of how to set up columns and rows. To draft your budget, you are welcome to use your preferred spreadsheet software, making sure to use only the budget categories allowed by SARE and with content consistent with what you have read so far.

Personnel—salaries and wages
major participants
support staff
graduate assistants
hourly labor
subtotal, salaries and wages
fringe benefits
subtotal, including fringe

Non-personnel
travel
materials and supplies
publications
other direct costs
  communications (mail, telephone, postage)*
  photocopying
  subcontracts (includes any work performed by outside sources or other institutions)
  consultants
  service/maintenance costs for durable equipment
  conferences and meetings
  speaker/trainer fees
  honoraria
  office rental (office must off site and specific to this project)
  land-use charges
  other and miscellaneous (must specify)
subtotal, non-personnel

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indirect costs	excluded in Professional Development awards

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total
*cell phone expenses excluded

The online submission form will prompt you to enter a budget for each year of the project if it is a multi-year grant, and then a budget summary for the overall grant. If yours is a collaborative project involving multiple institutions, each getting support as subcontracts from your institution, then you'll be submitting a budget for each subcontract.

The justification part of the budget, sometimes called the budget narrative, is separate, but the items in the justification should appear in the same order as in the budget itself. This streamlines review—as you can imagine, it is very distracting for reviewers to have to hunt for items in the justification, and very satisfactory for them when budget content is set up consistently so that all proposed expenditures are perfectly clear.

If you have prepared spreadsheets with your budget and budget justification details, they can be uploaded in the attachments section, titled "budget" or "budget justification."

Attachments and other documentation

All proposals should have letters of commitment from the key individuals listed in the application. If your institution requires a Protection of Human Research Subjects review, SARE will need a completed approval document. Send review results to David Holm, Northeast SARE, 655 Spear Street, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0107.

Please do not submit any letters of general support, curricula vitae, or other documentation not specifically requested.

Review criteria

Below are the criteria used by reviewers to evaluate and select proposals to fund. Keep these criteria in mind as you plan the project and write the proposal application.

- The proposal addresses a clearly identified and compelling need; substantiating data is provided.
- Previous relevant work is described and connected to the proposed work.
- The project proposes a solution that is likely to yield outcomes that will have an enduring positive impact on the sustainability of agriculture in the Northeast.
- The proposal shows a strong understanding of the beneficiaries, clearly explains their relationship to the project, and offers evidence of their desire to engage with the project.
- The performance target is ambitious but achievable in the timeframe of the project.
- The performance target and milestones are clear, connected in logical sequence, measurable, and realistic.
- There is a specific and effective verification strategy for the performance target and milestones.
- Appropriate key individuals are involved and their participation is sufficient to accomplish the project.
- The methods and approach developed for the project are clearly described and well thought out; outreach activities are well planned so as to engage the target audience.

- Project leaders are capable, committed, and skilled in the area of proposed work.
- The budget reflects the realistic needs of the project and the total request is appropriate in terms of the magnitude of the project's expected results.

Useful resources

A competitive application tends to reflect a high state of knowledge about an issue, barrier, or opportunity in sustainable agriculture. Draw on the insights of colleagues and researchers and to find and use all the resources you can. A few things to consider are:

- Using the national SARE database of projects (www.sare.org) to explore what others are doing
- Asking the National Agricultural Library's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (301/504-6559, www.afsic.nal.usda.gov) for help with literature reviews
- Contacting Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (800/346-9140, http://attra.ncat.org) for information packets on relevant topics
- Consulting *Outcome Funding: A New Approach to Targeted Grantmaking, fourth edition*, by Harold Williams, Arthur Webb, and William Phillips, for background on the proposal process and the concepts of outcome funding

If you have questions about the application format, contact the Northeast SARE office at 802/656-0471 or send e-mail to nesare@uvm.edu

How to submit your proposal

Proposals are submitted on line at http://www.ciids.org/nesare/pdp; the deadline is midnight, **November 1, 2011**.

As with the preproposal, there are word restrictions on each section. You are strongly encouraged to use a word processing program to write and edit your proposal ahead of time to make sure it is accurate and complies with the word limits for each section.

Be sure to give a draft of your proposal to your sponsored programs or grants office well ahead of the November 1 due date to verify that your budget requests are in alignment with their policies. They usually require two to four weeks to review proposals before you can get their approval. After you submit your proposal online, you'll be able to print it out with a cover page to be signed by an approving official at your institution. There is also a place for you to sign.

A single printed copy with all required signatures (but excluding attachments) must be sent to Northeast SARE postmarked no later than **November 16.** Faxed hard-copy submissions will not be accepted.

Applicant checklist

- ☐ Submit all proposal components on line before the November 1 deadline
- ☐ Print out one copy of the proposal, excluding attachments
- ☐ Collect the authorizing signatures
- ☐ Send a hard copy of the proposal to Northeast SARE before the November 16 postmark deadline
- ☐ Other documents (specifically Protection of Human Research Subjects, if required) sent to Northeast SARE no later than December 1, 2011, or arrangements made by this date to provide this information at a later time.