



Guide to Preproposals

Research and Education and Professional Development Grants

to submit a Research and Education preproposal

www.ciids.org/nesare/REpre/

to submit a Professional Development preproposal

www.ciids.org/nesare/PDPpre/

Deadline: August 1, 2011 for 2012 awards

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About Northeast SARE

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) is a USDA program that offers competitive grants for new ideas in farming that improve profits, promote stewardship, and create positive connections between farms and their communities. SARE offers grants to farmers, researchers, farm service providers, agricultural organizations and graduate students, with an emphasis on projects that show clear benefit to commercial farmers and their advisors.

There are four SARE regions—Northeast, North Central, South, and West—and a national SARE office in Washington, D.C. The Northeast SARE region includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

About preproposals

Preproposals are required for the Northeast SARE Research and Education and Professional Development grants. Once you have read through these instructions carefully and feel you understand what is expected, we strongly suggest that you prepare your preproposal in a word-processing program so you can refine your narratives, seek feedback from others involved in the project, and make sure you are within the word count restrictions for each section.

When your preproposal is complete, submit using an online template at www.ciids.org/nesare/REpre/ (Research and Education) or www.ciids.org/nesare/PDPpre/ (Professional Development). You will need to register with the site before copying and pasting your final preproposal material into the submission template.

Preproposals are submitted in the summer; typically, about a third of these are invited to submit full proposals in the fall. Only applicants with an approved preproposal can submit a full proposal. Review of full proposals takes place over the winter and awards are announced in late winter or early spring.

Research and Education Grants fund **outcome-based** projects offering research, education, and demonstration projects that engage farmers as cooperators in the exploration of sustainable farm practices. Projects should be directed toward results that will translate into measurable benefits for farmers. Successful projects involve farmers, Cooperative Extension staff, and other stakeholders in planning project content and outcomes.

Professional Development Grants fund **outcome-based** projects that educate Cooperative Extension personnel, USDA agency 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 be directed toward increasing the service providers' skill, understanding, and ability to teach farmers about new sustainable practices and approaches, and then motivate their adoption of new practices.

About outcome funding

Northeast SARE uses outcome funding for its Research and Education and Professional Development grant programs. This approach places a project's focus on helping the project participants make measurable changes and achieve measurable benefits from those changes. This approach also shapes the way an application is written, how applications are reviewed, and how projects are carried out. To obtain funding and be successful, applicants must understand how to use an outcome-focused approach for their projects.

Outcome funding is also a system for assuring measurable results; it 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, and for the grantee the focus is on obtaining results for the farmers or agricultural service providers participating in the project. Proposals must clearly contribute to the outcome statement that defines the results Northeast SARE is seeking. The Northeast SARE 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 appropriateness of proposed project outcomes – the performance targets—submitted by applicants.

For grant applicants, the key components of projects using the outcome funding approach include:

- Engagement of project **beneficiaries**, who participate in the project and reach specific, essential **milestones** in learning and skill development that prepare and motivate them to take specific actions described in the **performance target**;
- **Verification** of beneficiary progress in achieving **milestones** and accomplishing the target outcomes; and
- **Key individuals** who will make the project successful.

Successful projects demonstrate a good grasp of the clear and measurable actions their beneficiaries will take towards solving a defined problem, and the measurable benefits that will result from the actions taken. These actions and resulting 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 behavior change to become prepared to accomplish 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 target audience of farmers or agricultural service providers), 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 terminology used in the outcome funding model is further defined below:

- **Beneficiaries**—these are the target audience of farmers or agricultural service providers who participate in and benefit in a specific, measurable way from a project's research, training, and outreach efforts. Beneficiaries vary according to the type of grant—for Research and Education grants, the beneficiaries must be farmers; for Professional Development grants, the beneficiaries must be agricultural service providers. Farmers may also be trainee participants (and described as secondary beneficiaries) in Professional Development projects, but the primary purpose of the Professional Development program is to train service providers who work in the farm community.
- **Performance Target**—this is the project goal that describes the changes beneficiaries will make, or the actions they will take, as a result of participation in the project. The performance target also includes a description of the measurable benefits that accrue from the change or action. It is the end result that a project strives to achieve.
- **Milestones**—these are the 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**—are the people who will conduct or contribute significantly to the project
- **Verification**—is the process of asking questions and finding out (verifying) the accomplishments of the beneficiaries as described in the milestones and the performance target.

Don't be put off by the terminology of outcome funding; it describes straightforward and logical concepts. Further explanation of these terms is included below in descriptions of the components in a Northeast SARE proposal.

Preproposal content overview

The preproposal is a preliminary concept document that allows SARE reviewers to select the most innovative projects with strong justifications and effective approaches. It is a brief but content-rich document.

The strict limit on preproposal length requires that applicants have clarity about their project as well as an understanding of the outcome funding process. Successful preproposals are not written hastily, nor are they vague; applicants should spend time developing the basic ideas and approaches for the proposed project well ahead of time, get feedback, make edits, and only then submit the preproposal. The goal is to make the best use of the allowable text to clearly convey preliminary plans and the proposed outcome.

The online preproposal application asks for the following information, with a word limit for each section. Guidance for each section is provided below.

1. Problem to be addressed (125 words)

2. Solutions and benefits (125 words)
3. Interest of beneficiaries (100 words)
4. Approach to solving the problem (100 words)
5. Measurable performance target (50 words)
6. Learning and skill milestones (150 words)
7. Verification plan (100 words)
8. Research description - for Research and Education proposals that include a research component: hypothesis, treatments and experimental design (100 words)
9. Key individuals: project leader description, leadership team, and organizations involved (100 words)
10. Budget description (50 words)

1. Problem to be addressed (125 words)

In this section, describe the problem and the harm, adverse effect, or missed opportunity caused by the problem. A description of the problem and its context should include:

- A clear, concise explanation of the problem and the cause(s) or hypothesized cause(s) for the problem.
- Where the problem occurs, what type of agriculture is affected, for example, the number 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, etc., or the cost to the environment or the social fabric of farm families or farm communities.

Please provide numerical information to justify the claims made above. Sources of justification may include literature citations, farmer surveys, extension surveys, census data, etc.

Example: Cover crops offer many well-known potential benefits for maintaining soil health on vegetable farms, including organic matter enrichment, weed suppression, nutrient recycling and nitrogen fixation. However, despite significant investments by Cooperative Extension, NRCS, SARE, and others to promote their adoption, cover crops are not widely used by vegetable farmers in New England, where the 2007 Ag Census reports there are over 3,000 vegetable farms with 40,000 acres. A 2009 survey by New England Extension asked 400 of these farmers about cover crop use; only 10 percent of the 240 respondents used cover crops routinely on their farms and only 20 percent said they felt confident about making appropriate cover crop choices for their farms.

2. Solutions and benefits (125 words)

This section should contain a brief description of:

- The solution to the problem
- The benefits expected to farmers from solving the problem

- Known or anticipated obstacles or challenges to be addressed to encourage farmer adoption of the recommended solution

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.

Example: This project will engage New England vegetable farmers in a program of education and research about cover crops and cover cropping innovations that emphasizes the multiple benefits of cover crops (Legume N additions of up to 120 lbs. per acre or \$60 an acres). Farmers currently planting cover crops will teach others about their benefits and challenges. The education and research program will address the top management constraints to cover crop use such as timing of seeding, mowing and killing, establishment, and rotations; on-farm demonstrations will show how constraints can be overcome, and a cover crop decision tool will be provided to farmers with hands-on training in its use.

3. Interest of beneficiaries (100 words)

Please estimate the number of farmers or service providers who are interested in participating in solving the problem with you, and describe how you have gauged this interest. Data from surveys—conducted by you or others—that demonstrate an interest by farmers or service providers in solving the problem will demonstrate for reviewers that you have a realistic, interested beneficiary audience.

Example: The 2009 survey found that 284, or 80 percent of the 240 responding vegetable farmers had an interest in learning more about how to select a cover crop and integrate cover crops into their vegetable production system;. Their specific interests were also identified—192, or 80 percent of the farmers responding rated the ability of legume crops to provide fixed nitrogen for crops as a high-value benefit, 188, or 75 percent, rated adding organic matter as a high-value benefit, and 168, or 78 percent, rated weed suppression as a high-value benefit.

4. Approach to solving the problem (100 words)

This section provides a synopsis of the research and educational approach being proposed to mitigate or solve the problem described above. The approach must lead to changes that can realistically be achieved by farmers or agricultural service providers, and the approach must be one they will accept. The approach should also describe the key steps in an educational program or research effort that logically leads to the realization of the performance target, which is submitted in the next section. You should briefly describe the curriculum for your education program, including the topics, format (workshop, demonstration trial, etc.), and the sequence of the topics and formats. If there is a critical role for other key collaborators who might have a stake in the problem (regulators, food buyers, farmworkers, etc.), this should be mentioned.

It is not possible to write the rest of the preproposal if the problem is not specifically described and the approach to developing a solution is not articulated clearly. However, once you clearly define the

problem and the proposed approach to a solution, the rest of the preproposal should follow naturally.

Beneficiaries should always be involved in the proposal planning process, especially with regard to clearly describing the problem and the proposed approach to addressing it. While extensive involvement with beneficiaries is not always needed at the preproposal stage, sufficient input from farmers and agricultural service providers about their concerns, perceptions, interests, and goals should be obtained to ensure the accurate description of the problem and the credibility of the proposed solution.

Example: After gauging the current knowledge, practices, and desired benefits of cover crops among vegetable farmers, we will offer webinars to increase participants' understanding of cover cropping options and related project goals. Lead farmers will establish on-farm demonstrations, research trials will be set up at the university farm, and workshops will be held at all sites for participants to learn best practices and identify cover crops that will work on their farms. Farmers will receive templates for data collection. Winter meetings, webinars, short video clips, and project team site visits over two years will support adoption and adjustment of cover crop practices.

5. Measurable performance target (50 words)

The measurable change that a project strives to achieve is set forth in the performance target. Each project must have a performance target that defines three components:

1. A **specific, verifiable change** in beneficiaries' actions or behavior that the project proposes to accomplish.
2. The **scale or degree of change** – i.e., a number (not a percentage) of people who change, and a number of farms, acres, animals, enterprises, etc. affected by the change.
3. The **measurable benefit(s)** that will result from the beneficiaries making the change.

The change must also be achievable by the end of the project so it can be verified and reported in the final project report.

For **Research & Education** projects:

1. The **specific, verifiable change** described in the performance target may include things such as adoption of a new production practice, marketing strategy, or business management tool; the establishment of a new crop or farm enterprise; a change in farm organization or labor management; or creation of business or farm transfer plans.
2. The **scale of change** is defined by the number of beneficiaries who will make the desired change, and some measurable indicator(s) of the degree or extent of change they make such as the total number of acres or animal units they switched to a new practice, or the total number of new markets, plans, or enterprises developed.

3. Examples of the resulting **benefit** that a Research and Education performance target. These might include:
- Pounds of excess nutrients removed from livestock diet and waste products as a result of adopting recommended practices to improve nutrient balance of feed rations.
 - The dollar value of input costs reduced from adoption of the recommended pest control or nutrient management strategies.
 - The dollar value of increased sales from acres of land planted to a new crop, adoption of a new marketing strategy, or development of a new enterprise.
 - Farmer-assessed improvements in quality of life and lifestyle satisfaction, such as increased number of vacation days, or improvements in farm efficiency (from changes in farm organization or labor management)
 - Acres of farmland passed on to younger farmers (from the creation of farm transfer plans).

Please note that you may not have to directly measure the benefits from adoption of a new practice. Often you can extrapolate the benefits from your measurements or from values in the literature. For example, if your data shows that dairy farmers in your project reduced P in the diet of their cows from 0.49 percent P to 0.38 percent, you can calculate a result in annual savings of \$25 per cow in feed costs. Or if you want to describe the benefit to farmers from no-till grain in terms of the fuel savings, you won't have to measure the amount of fuel saved in gallons because there are values in the literature for converting acres of no-till production into gallons of fuel saved when switching from various types of tillage. If you obtain from the farmers the number of acres in no-till, and the type of tillage previously used, you can credibly extrapolate the fuel savings in your project by using the values in the literature.

A robust performance target combines the three components listed: A specific verifiable change, the scale of that change, and the resulting measurable benefits. Here are three examples of a performance target for a Research and Education project.

Example 1

Ten dairy farmers implement nutrient management plans on a total of 1,000 acres, reducing annual fertilizer applications of N by an average of 50 lb. per acre.

Example 2

Twenty vegetable farmers adopt no-till or zone-till practices on a total of 1,000 acres to reduce soil compaction by an average of 50 p.s.i. per farm and to reduce annual fuel use for field preparation by an average of 100 gallons per farm.

Example 3

Twenty-five farmers with average direct market annual sales of \$150,000 per farm conduct market analyses then develop and implement marketing plans that lead to an average increase in annual sales of \$15,000 per farm.

For **Professional Development** projects a performance target must include numbers 1 and 2 below, but number 3, measuring farmer adoption and benefits, is optional.

1. The **specific, verifiable change** described should be agricultural service providers using new knowledge and skills learned through the project to teach farmers about beneficial changes they can make to their farms – e.g. new practices, tools, or strategies.
2. The **scale-of-change** indicators would include the number of educators conducting programs, the total number of programs conducted, the total number of farmers educated or assisted, and the number of acres, animal units, markets, etc., that these farmers manage.

And, optionally,

3. The **adoption by farmers and measurable benefits** described in a Professional Development performance target can also include the number of farmers who adopt the recommended change. This option strengthens the target by including a measurable on-farm benefit.

Professional Development performance targets do not always include option 3 and extend beyond measuring the specific, verifiable change and the scale of change as described in 1 and 2 above. However, the implications for potential farm benefit are clear—if farmers learn about and understand the benefits of new farm practices, it's likely that some of them will adopt the practices on their farms.

Because the ultimate beneficiaries of all training 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 feel sure they will be able to measure the benefits to farmers. Obtaining this type of data about adoption and farmer benefit is not feasible for all projects, but it is possible, especially when the service providers are fully engaged in the project and are working intensely with a small number of farmers.

Here are two examples of a performance target for a Professional Development project.

Example 1

Twelve agricultural service providers develop and conduct an education program 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 1 with option 3

Twelve agricultural service providers develop and conduct an education program where 60 dairy farmers who cultivate 5,000 acres of corn for silage learn about techniques, benefits, and challenges of planting cover crops in fields harvested for corn silage, 30 of these farmers will adopt a new cover crop or cover crop practice on a total of 1,200 acres, reducing N use by 50 lbs, per acre or \$25 per acre.

Example 2

Twenty extension agents develop and deliver education programs where 600 vegetable farmers who cultivate 4,500 acres learn about the techniques, benefits, and challenges of no-till and reduced tillage vegetable production.

The example performance targets above do not say what the grant applicant would do. Instead, the targets describe changes or actions by people – the farmer and service provider beneficiaries—who are outside the applicant’s direct control. This change in focus can be a source of discomfort to some applicants, especially applicants who are 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. But outcome funding means that reviewers look beyond the research, services, bulletins, or educational events developed by the grantee to see whether the beneficiaries actually did something differently as a result of the project.

Bang for the buck

Accomplishing significant, useful change requires a more intense engagement strategy than achieving a change that is, relatively speaking, easier to accomplish and often more incremental — soil testing as opposed to switching to an entirely new kind of tillage system, for example. Similarly, it’s harder to engage many people in change than it is to get a few people to do something differently. 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 being pursued, 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 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 performance target says that 200 farmers will attend a workshop to learn about managing pastures, reviewers will ask, *so what?* The farmers may have a wonderful educational experience, but that experience alone is not enough to meet the outcome-funding standard of measurable change. The target may go on to say that 30 farmers will call the presenters after the workshop to get assistance with writing pasture management plans. *So what?* This may be an indication of interest and intention to change that is important to capture, but these phone calls alone do not indicate that any change has occurred. But if the target says that ten farmers with a total of 800 cows will implement a pasture-management program that reduces their feed costs by an average of \$10,000 per farm per year, now reviewers understand that the goal is to achieve a specific, measurable change with positive financial benefits for a known number of beneficiaries. The preceding intermediary steps—the ones that do not quite pass the *so-what?* test — are important stages the beneficiaries must go through along the way to achieving the target. They are called milestones, and are described next.

6. Learning and Skill Milestones (150 words)

To achieve a performance target, beneficiaries must proceed through a number of well-connected, logical, intermediate events and developmental steps called milestones. Milestones are not 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.

Milestone statements in the preproposal should describe the critical learning events during which beneficiaries will acquire key knowledge and build essential skills. These events should be designed to prepare the beneficiaries to make the change (take the action) described in the project's performance target. The milestones should be verifiable, and verified, as a project progresses. The performance target is the last step in this chain of learning and skill development, and may be thought of as the final milestone of a project.

The milestones should include three components:

1. The number of beneficiaries (farmers for Research and Education, and agricultural service providers for Professional Development).
2. The project activities or educational experiences the beneficiaries participate in to learn.
3. The key, specific knowledge or skills beneficiaries will learn.

Here are some milestones and a performance target for a Research and Education project on cover crops.

- 1. A thousand vegetable farmers learn about cover crop education program and receive an online survey about their current practices.*
- 2. Two hundred vegetable farmers return the survey; 180 agree to participate in the education program, and 20 agree to host on-farm demonstrations.*
- 3. One hundred and sixty of these farmers attend two three-hour workshops in each state that explain the performance target and the known benefits of cover crops.*
- 4. One hundred and fifty of these farmers attend a field day at the university and learn about new and existing cover crops; 20 farmers plant on-farm demonstration trials.*
- 5. One hundred farmers submit cover crop plans for their farms to the project team for review.*
- 6. Sixty of these 100 farmers attend on-farm demonstrations and consult with project team by phone, e-mail, blog, and with other farmers via the blog about planting cover crops.*

Performance Target: *Ninety vegetable farmers adopt legume and non-legume cover crops or improved cover crop management practices on a total of 900 acres, reducing historical N applications by 50 lb. per acre per year without reducing yields.*

Here are milestones and the performance target for a different Research and Education project.

- 1. Five hundred dairy farmers learn about nutrient management education opportunities offered by this project through a direct mailing.*
- 2. Two hundred dairy farmers attend nutrient management workshops and learn about sources and economic and environmental costs of excess N and P accumulated in the soils of their farms.*
- 3. Sixty of these farmers attend field days demonstrating nutrient planning and record-keeping techniques, and learn about practical management tools they can use on their farms.*
- 4. Twenty-five of these farmers receive individual advice from the project team members as they work on writing a nutrient management plan.*
- 5. Fifteen farmers complete nutrient management plans that include their specific intentions for improving N fertilizer management; these plans are shared with the project team leaders.*

Performance target: *Ten dairy farmers implement nutrient management plans on a total of 1,000 acres, reducing annual fertilizer applications of N by an average of 50 lb. per acre.*

Here is an example of Professional Development milestones and performance target:

- 1. Fifty agricultural service providers who work with dairy farms in Pennsylvania and New York receive invitations to participate in this professional development training on cover cropping systems for corn silage production.*
- 2. Twenty agricultural service providers attend workshops and learn about economic and environmental costs of N loss from corn silage fields, the beneficial roles of cover crops, and suitable cover crops for regional conditions.*
- 3. Fifteen agricultural service providers attend field demonstrations and learn about fall cover crop planting techniques, how to evaluate overwintered cover crops, and techniques for killing cover crops.*
- 4. Fourteen agricultural service providers join the cover crops education team and attend a workshop to learn how to establish on-farm demonstrations to teach farmers about cover crops on dairy farms.*

Performance target: *Ten agricultural service providers develop and conduct an education program 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.*

When writing milestones, applicants should be realistic about beneficiary engagement over time and recognize that not every person who begins a given phase of the project will see it through to the end. 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. The participation goals for milestones should be based on the applicant's knowledge of the beneficiaries and proposed targeted behavior, the ease or difficulty of accomplishing that behavior, and the anticipated needs, interests, and motivation of the beneficiaries. The participation numbers included in milestones are not viewed by reviewers as guarantees, but informed estimates of participation.

A clear set of milestones serves as a useful tool for confirming that a project stays on track, and provides a set of checkpoints throughout the project. If milestones are not being achieved by the expected number of participants, it is an indication that course corrections are needed if the performance target is to be met.

7. Verification (100 words)

Milestones and performance targets must be verified to show the progress and benefits of SARE-funded projects. **Verification of milestones** documents whether or not a project is on track, and how well beneficiaries are progressing in their knowledge and preparation to make the change described in the performance target. **Verification of the performance target** means asking questions and collecting data after all milestones are complete to measure the changes made by beneficiaries, the degree or extent of these changes, and the benefits that resulted.

Effective verification requires planning well before project implementation. A complete verification plan includes the methods to be used and a clear set of questions to obtain the necessary verification data. Successful verification of a performance target is much easier when the project beneficiaries agree from the start to let you know how the project benefitted them; beneficiaries will also be more likely provide complete and accurate data if they know ahead of time what kinds of data will be gathered as the project progresses.

In the preproposal verification section, applicants are asked to write two or three of the most important questions asked of beneficiaries to verify the **performance target**. Writing these questions should be simple and straightforward if the performance target is specific. For example:

- Which recommended practices were adopted?
- How many acres (or animals, or customers, etc.) were affected by the practices?
- How much money (or time, or input costs) were saved?
- What specific improvements in yield, quality, animal health, or productivity resulted?
- Was there an increase in annual sales or net profits and if so by how many dollars ?

These questions should be tailored closely to your project content; these are merely examples.

8. Research Description (100 words)

Preproposal applicants for the Research and Education program who intend to conduct research as part of their project should provide a brief description of the research. Include enough key details to allow reviewers to understand the question(s) that will be researched, the methods that will be employed, and the data that will be collected. State the hypothesis to be tested and briefly describe the key treatments and the proposed experimental design.

How outcome funding connects to research

Under outcome funding, all Research and Education proposals must include a strong educational component to assure that some action or change takes place. Proposals that offer only research results will not be funded. Some researchers ask, “How can I promise a performance target for change based on my research when I don’t have the results yet?” This is a legitimate question.

The answer is that a performance target does not have to be directly dependent on new information arising from the research, but can be based on existing knowledge that sets the stage for the proposed research.

For example, research focused on new cover crops for the Northeast could be coupled with a more general education program promoting the use of both new and proven cover crops. The performance target might be that x number farmers who have never used cover crops will begin using them on x number of acres, or that x number of farmers will try a new cover crop. This new cover crop may or may not be one of the ones being developed in the research component of the project.

Connecting research to outreach keeps projects grounded in reality, but time constraints may require that researchers applying for SARE grants team up with an extension or other education specialist. The researcher leading the project can request funds for others to implement the education program, which should be closely linked to the research.

Outcome funding can seem like a burdensome requirement to those who only want to do research. However, many researchers have found this approach benefits their work by improving the design of their projects based on beneficiary input. It has also increased the awareness and level of support for their work among farmers and facilitated rapid adoption of research-generated information.

Research and Education educational programs should be robust, as opposed to being merely tacked on to the research effort. Reviewers will expect to see a clear commitment to beneficiary education using a variety of methods, usually through some combination of events (workshops, conferences, webinars, etc.) and outreach products (fact sheets, videos, journal articles, or other publications). It is often helpful for applicants to establish an advisory group of beneficiaries who meet regularly to advise the project during the planning stage, and later, should the project be funded, during implementation.

9. Key Individuals (100 words)

In this section, applicants provide a brief description of the project leader, key individuals, and organizations that will play an essential role in the project to assure reviewers that there is credible, capable project management. Reviewers also consider whether a key cooperators is obviously missing from the list—grower organizations, nonprofits, or government agencies, for example, or some other entity with a well-known record of activity in the proposed area of work.

Describe the **project leader's** background and experience relevant to this project. Also list anticipated **key collaborators** or team members. It may be that the specific names or titles of potential collaborators are not yet known, but applicants should have an outline of the potential leadership team needed for a successful project. An acceptable entry might say, “six growers in Orange County,” or, “two extension agents with experience teaching about water quality.” However, if specific individuals are known, list them. List no more than six of the primary team members, their organizational affiliation, and use no more than a dozen words to describe each team member's role. Lastly, applicants should list any **other organizations**, outside of their own, that will be

collaborating, receiving some of the money from SARE to carry out the project, or contributing money, personnel time, or facilities and equipment to the project.

Example: Dr. Jane Jones is the project leader; she has 20 years of experience working with family farm businesses to improve their recordkeeping and financial planning skills. Mr. Ralph Rogers is a key collaborator; he has been a loan officer at Central Farm Bank for the past 15 years, where he has helped farmers with business planning, tax planning, and accounting. Three extension agents specializing in farm management, one from each participating state, will assist with outreach and on-farm consultation. An advisory team of six farmers, two from each state, will help guide the project planning and provide feedback on progress.

10. Budget and Budget Description (50 words)

The preproposal budget is a draft, and not the final budget an applicant would submit in a full proposal, should one be invited. It is an estimate, in 50 words or less, of the anticipated funding needed for salaries, equipment, travel, printing, administrative costs, supplies, and other expenses.

Applicants should be aware there are specific restrictions on how funds can be used, and one of these restrictions differs according to the type of grant. Specifically, USDA allows indirect costs of up to 10 percent of direct costs for Research and Education grants, but not for Professional Development grants. This difference is embedded in the federal legislation that authorizes the SARE program.

SARE funds can be used for direct project costs—direct costs are the legitimate, over-and-above operating costs that are specifically associated with the project and would not be there in the absence of the project. These categories include personnel, travel, materials and supplies, communications, and other direct costs. Estimate these as accurately as possible in the preproposal budget.

SARE funds cannot be used for large capital expenditures, which includes things like machinery, land, buildings, livestock, greenhouses, and other major fixtures and improvements that will outlive the project and have a wide range of uses outside of it. Expenditures for specific or unique equipment needed for a project that may also have a life outside and after the project will not be favorably reviewed unless the applicant clearly makes a case for their essential need and unique application.

SARE cannot pay tuition remission. SARE funds can be used to pay graduate students for their work on a project, but SARE funds cannot be used to fund any sort of institutional tuition or curriculum fee waiver; instead, students involved in the project should be paid at an hourly or salaried rate.

Here's a sample preproposal budget description:

10 percent FTE project manager, 4 farmers @ \$240/day for 15 days, 50 percent education coordinator, 20 percent staff: \$54,600. 2,000 miles to farms and field day: \$1,000. Ultrasound equipment rental, including software training: \$10,500. Four on-farm workshops @ \$600 per workshop or \$2,400. Two bulk mailings, long-distance telephone: \$2,200. 2000 handouts @ \$0.26: \$520. Total: \$71,220.

Reviewers understand that the budget offered in the preproposal is an early draft, but applicants must show they understand the kinds of costs involved in carrying out the project.

Preproposal selection process

Preproposal selection is competitive—in recent years, only about a third of all preproposal applications have been invited to submit full proposals. A review team made up of SARE administrative council and technical committee members works with staff to review preproposals and identify the strongest for further consideration.

This review team often provides feedback on rejected preproposals with a focus on key concerns or omissions. Feedback may also be provided on accepted preproposals to point out areas of relatively minor concern that should be addressed in the full proposal.

If a preproposal is accepted, the full application materials will be e-mailed to the applicant, usually by the first of September, and full proposals are normally submitted online by late October.

Evaluation criteria summary

Reviewers use the following criteria to evaluate and rank preproposals:

- The problem is clearly described
- The need to address the problem is significant and supported with data
- The solution and benefits are feasible and supported with data
- The approach to developing a solution is clearly described, credible, realistic, and achievable
- The beneficiary audience and interest is clearly described and is appropriate to the grant program
- The performance target is specific, measurable, and meaningful
- The performance target describes a change, the extent of the change, and the benefits of the change
- The performance target is sufficiently ambitious for the funds requested
- The milestones describe acquisition of knowledge and skills that logically lead to the performance target
- The project leader and cooperators are capable and appropriate for the project and its objectives and, if applicable, the applicant has managed past SARE awards compliantly
- The budget estimate is realistic in terms of the intensity of the proposed work and the expected outcome

Appendix A

Useful resources

Agriculture Network Information Center

News, bulletins, and topics of interest to extension and farmers.

<http://www.agnic.org>

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center

A national resource for producers and agricultural professionals interested in value-added agriculture.
<http://www.agmrc.org>

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

Resources related to alternative agricultural enterprises and crops as well as alternative cropping systems.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic>

American Farmland Trust Farmland Information Library

A clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship.

<http://www.farmlandinfo.org>

ATTRA—Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas

A resource for bulletins, fact sheets, and publications.

<http://www.attra.org>

Building Better Rural Places

A guide to federal funding for sustainable agriculture, forestry, conservation, and community development.

<http://attra.ncat.org/guide/index.html>

National Agroforestry Center

An agency that advocates combining agriculture and forestry technologies to create sustainable land-use systems.

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/>

Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship

Providing assistance to beginning and established food entrepreneurs and supporting sustainable economic development of rural communities.

<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/necfe/>

Northeast Integrated Pest Management

A group that fosters the development and adoption of science-based approaches to managing pests in ways that benefit the economy, the environment, and human health.

<http://northeastipm.org/>

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

An agency addressing policy issues that affect rural areas.

<http://nercrd.psu.edu/>

Organic Farmers Research Foundation

Research on production, economic data, research results, farmer anecdotes, certification information, transition strategies, and other subjects related to organic agriculture.

<http://www.ofrf.org>

Small Farms Web Site

Resources for small farm operators. The focus is on New York, but the information is relevant throughout the Northeast.

<http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu>

Soil and Water Conservation Society

Professionals who advocate for science-based conservation practice, programs, and policy.

<http://www.swcs.org>

Questions?

call the Northeast SARE office at 802/656-0471

send e-mail to nesare.uvm.edu

go to www.nesare.org

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