



Southern SARE State Coordinator Guide:

Your role as a SARE State Coordinator in Promoting Sustainable Agriculture

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www.southern.sare.org

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Welcome

Dear SARE State Coordinator:

You are reading this because you have been selected to be a SARE State Coordinator. You may have been delighted about this appointment or you may be dismayed at finding yourself the head of something you know very little about. The odds are excellent that you think you don't have time to do a good job at it. But you can do a good job. There are a lot of resources and a staff of committed people who are happy to work with you.

This guide will help answer some of your questions and stimulate you to ask new questions that will help us further shape the SARE program to meet the needs of the researchers, farmers, rural communities and consumers in your state.

Our job as the management team for SARE PDP is to support you in your position as a SARE State Coordinator. The SARE program has been built on cooperation and sharing, and you will find that there are a lot of resources available to you.

Feel free to drop us a line with input, questions or suggestions. Direct your input to PDP Regional Coordinator, David Redhage, at 918-647-9123 or dredhage@kerrcenter.com. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

David Redhage
Regional Coordinator
Southern Region SARE Professional Development Program

SARE PDP—Part of a bigger picture

History of SARE

Since 1988, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has helped advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities through a nationwide research and education grants program. The program, part of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), funds projects and conducts outreach designed to improve agricultural systems.

History of PDP

Begun in 1994, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program provides sustainable agriculture education and outreach strategies for Cooperative Extension System and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff and other agricultural educators who work directly with farmers and ranchers. Administered and funded by each SARE region, the annual budget allocations for PDP in the Southern region generally falls in the range of \$700,000.

SARE's Professional Development Program funds activities that educate ag professionals in up-to-date strategies and technologies to help farmers and ranchers increase profits and lessen environmental impacts. Funded through a competitive process in SARE's four regions, PDP grants sponsor activities such as producing workshops, creating educational manuals and videos, and conducting on-farm tours and demonstrations. In addition to the competitive grants, each state is responsible for conducting sustainable ag training through the SARE State Coordinator(s).

Organizational Structure in the Southern Region

Southern Region SARE is administered by a host consortium consisting of the University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University with staff located at the University of Georgia-Griffin Campus and Fort Valley State University. The Professional Development Program is located at the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Oklahoma. The 1862 Land Grant liaison is located at University of Kentucky and the 1890 Land Grant Liaison is located at Fort Valley State University in Georgia.

The Southern Region includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

State Structure

SARE State Coordinators are vital for expanding sustainable agriculture training for Extension, NRCS, and other agricultural professionals, who will then help producers transition to a more sustainable agriculture. The SARE PDP program is a "train-the-trainer" program. As a result, farmers are not the focus of the training, but are the ultimate beneficiaries. Due to the diversity of the Southern region, each state develops its own methods for disseminating SARE program opportunities, as well as the results of research and education grants. The SARE State Coordinator is a 25 percent (25%) minimum position within the 1862 or 1890 colleges in the state. However, to maintain eligibility to apply for competitive SARE grants, Model State Program grant funds may not be used to cover any part of a State Coordinator's salary or benefits.

SARE State Coordinators

Selecting State Coordinators

The position of the State Coordinator, previously known as the Extension Professional Development Coordinator, is a result of Public Law 101-624 (Nov. 28, 1990), or the 1990 Farm Bill. As part of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program (Subtitle B, 7 USC 1619), a National Training Program was established (Sec. 1629). The Secretary of Agriculture was directed to designate an individual from the Cooperative Extension Service in each state to coordinate the National Training Program. Recognizing that the 1890 and 1862 institutions in a state may have different research or information needs, SARE has a coordinator stationed at each one. State Coordinators may also be stationed at 1994 land-grant institutions as they are established in the Southern region.

SARE State Coordinators in the Southern region provide information for the entire SARE program, not just the Professional Development Program.

Qualities of a State Coordinator

Most SARE State Coordinators will have a minimum of a MS degree in Agriculture, Education, or a related field of study.

In addition, the SARE State Coordinator will:

- Be familiar with both the background and philosophy of sustainable agriculture.
- Demonstrate strong leadership, outreach and communications skills.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the entire spectrum of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE).
- Demonstrate the ability to disseminate educational information to Extension and other appropriate personnel within their state.
- Demonstrate an ability and willingness to be an enthusiastic ambassador for sustainable agriculture.

Role of State Coordinators

According to the 1990 Farm Bill legislation the SARE State Coordinator is responsible for developing and implementing a statewide training program for field office personnel including employees of the Extension Service, NRCS and other educators who provide information to producers about agricultural production and conservation. In working toward this broad goal, day-to-day activities would likely include these main areas:

1) Training program development and delivery appropriate for both new and current personnel making use of SARE grantees, particularly producer cooperators, and partnering with NGOs and farmer organizations for activities such as farm tours and field days. Training topics are open to anything that will help farmers transition to a more sustainable agriculture and can include technical assistance in areas such as water quality, nutrient management, whole-farm systems, marketing or understanding farm policy.

2) Promotion, networking and coordination of SARE grant opportunities and training activities, as well as materials and opportunities provided by SARE Outreach, Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) and other NGOs.

SARE Coordinators will solicit input from field staff and other educators about sustainable ag training needs and shared program opportunities.

3) Communication, reporting and evaluation. SARE PDP strives for a minimum of paperwork, so, annual reports are submitted online in the Grant Management System to document training efforts in your state.

While still leaving plenty of room for individual creativity within each state, the SARE program has defined a set of responsibilities for all state coordinators. They include:

- Attending an annual meeting of state coordinators.
- Establishing a state advisory council and meeting at least once each year to develop strategies for sustainable agriculture outreach and education in the state.
- Submitting an annual report and budget on the Model State Program. An annual report should include all sustainable agriculture training activities, and activities designed to raise the visibility of SARE in the state.
- Leading the effort to bring sustainable agriculture training to every county agent.
- Raising the visibility of SARE in the state.
- Sponsoring sustainable agriculture conferences and/or training in the state.
- Eligible to submit a PDP competitive enhancement grant when a Model State Program is in place.
- Encourage Extension, NRCS, NGO's, CBO's and other appropriate organizations to submit proposals to all SARE competitive grants programs.
- Reaching out to mainstream agriculture and creating new networks including farm organizations, state and federal agencies, and NGO's.
- Building and maintaining strong ties between 1862, 1890 and 1994 institutions in the state.

All this seems like an ambitious list even for such outstanding people as our State Coordinators, so, there are SARE resources to help. PDP staff, Communication staff, SARE Outreach and other resources are at your disposal. Funding to achieve the set of responsibilities for State Coordinators is available through State Coordinator funds and also competitive grants.

SARE Funds for Your State

State Coordinator Funds

Historically, SARE funds have been made available to each state and territory based on an acceptable plan of work. Each state sets its own priorities and approaches to sustainable agricultural training. Institutions have had considerable flexibility in developing training programs and in the level of collaboration between 1862 and 1890 land grants. Various activities funded include statewide training sessions, on-farm workshops, travel to out-of-state workshops, and purchase of educational materials.

Model State Program (MSP) funding is up to \$55,000 per year per university, \$110,000 maximum per state. Plus, state coordinators have the opportunity to apply for additional funds through Model State Program enhancement funding when available

Model State Program funding requires that an advisory team and an active training program be in place. Each land grant university submits a plan of work, and if acceptable, is funded.

With Model State Program approval, each university may receive up to \$22,000 for program activities and \$33,000 for a program assistant (.5 FTE). These amounts will be contracted as separate sub-awards.

How to Submit for State Coordinator Funding

By January each year SARE State Coordinators should have submitted a Model State Program proposal in the Grant Management System. Upon approval, funds of up to \$22,000 are released for planned training in a state. States approved for a MSP will receive the base of up to \$22,000 and up to \$33,000 to fund a program assistant position (.5 FTE).

Each year SARE State Coordinator(s) will be required to submit an annual report of progress and outcomes of grant activities. Pending report approval, funds will be available the following year.

Funds for the upcoming year can't be released until an institution's balance from the prior year falls below \$15,000. For example, funding for 2026 would depend on the balance remaining from funding prior to 2025.

To sum up, funding depends on three requirements being met:

1. Approved Model State Program proposal.
2. Approved annual report of previous year's training activities.
3. Budget balances below the thresholds listed above.

Competitive Grants

One responsibility of SARE State Coordinators is to encourage appropriate applicants to apply for SARE grants. State Coordinators are also eligible to submit proposals themselves. Your job as a SARE State Coordinator is to assist potential applicants to understand the philosophy behind SARE grants and direct them to the appropriate Calls for Proposals.

What Kinds of Grants Does SARE Fund?

The regions vary in the kinds of grants they fund, with the Southern Region having the most variety-five different categories.

- **Professional Development Program Grant (PDP)** projects train agricultural information providers (including farmers who will serve as trainers) in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts. State coordinators would most likely be interested in this grant opportunity.
- **Research and Education Grants Program-** These projects generally are conducted by interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, and often, multi- state research teams coordinated by a principal investigator from a non-governmental organization, university or governmental agency. These projects include farmers as participants. The program includes both an opportunity to conduct research as well as an opportunity to lead education/outreach projects.
- **Education Grant Program-** Open to academic institutions and organizations, such as nonprofits and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who are interested in conducting education and outreach activities for the benefit of the greater sustainable ag community, and promote efforts in farmer innovations, community resilience, business success, agricultural diversification, and best management practices. Non-governmental organizations and 1890 land-grant university faculty/extension cooperators are especially encouraged to apply for this grant for their education and outreach activities. Up to \$50,000 will be awarded to each successful applicant.
- **Graduate Student Grants** are intended for full-time graduate students (Masters or PhD.) enrolled at accredited colleges and universities in the Southern Region. Up to \$22,00 will be awarded to each successful applicant for up to two years of project activities. The funds are paid directly to the university for use on the graduate student's project.
- **On-Farm Research Grant** projects are conducted by agricultural professionals such as extension agents, NRCS and/or NGO personnel who currently work with farmers and ranchers. Cooperators must include at least one producer at all stages of the project. Funded for a maximum of \$30,000 for up to two years of activities.
- **Producer Grant** projects are developed, coordinated and conducted by producers or producer organizations. These projects are generally located in one state, often on one farm. Projects are limited to \$20,000 if submitted by an individual producer or \$25,000 if submitted by producer organizations for up to two years of activities.

What Else Does SARE Do Besides Funding Competitive Projects?

SARE publishes materials about sustainable agriculture, most often from SARE-funded research.

SARE also promotes sustainable agriculture by supporting both regional and national conferences, providing speakers and presentations for non-SARE meetings, and providing scholarships for farmers and agents to attend sustainable agriculture gatherings. People from the national SARE office and the regions serve on committees that affect national policy concerning agriculture.

Best Practices for SARE State Advisory Committees

Written by: Lee Meyer

Advisory committees are an essential element for Professional Development Programs (PDPs) to produce effective trainings targeted to the needs of your state's agricultural clientele. SARE PDP coordinators in all four regions share many of the same practices when working with advisory committees. The primary purpose of the AC is to gather insights from the clientele perspective about their needs. The ultimate clients are farmers, but since our PDP programs are targeted to "professionals," Extension agents are the direct clients of PDP programs and, so, need to be well represented. To accomplish this goal, it is obvious that the ACs must have a strong clientele representation, but that is not always easy to accomplish.

In the Southern SARE region, ACs have 10 to 30 members, with about 20-25 probably being the most effective size. For an AC of 20, seven to 10 should be farmers or clientele. Three to five should be Extension agents. The remaining 8 to 10 should be partners – from other agencies, community-based organizations and from the universities. One plan is to have "ex officio" members (i.e. reps from specific organizations, such as: organic grower's associations, Farm Bureaus, NGOs, and most importantly, NRCS). Remember that just as SARE serves "all of agriculture," so should each state's advisory committee.

While the structure of the advisory committee is important, the critical factor is engagement. Engagement is the result of usefulness and organization. The AC members must feel like they are making a contribution. Members will be folks with busy schedules. Most states have learned that busy members will be active members as long as they are contributing. One "best practice" is for the advisory committee to produce a tangible list of training topics to be implemented each year. Another useful practice is to include an educational element in each meeting. Good meeting practices are also important: Having agendas prepared in advance; giving each member the opportunity to be involved (not just as a spectator); and following up meetings with summaries and action plans.

How often and in what format should your advisory committees meet? It depends on the needs of the state program. Twice a year is probably best in the longer run. But if there is real work to be done, quarterly may work. Some states which are redesigning their programs may have their advisory committees meet quarterly for a year to get feedback and advice. Several states are experimenting with conference calls or online meetings, and find that format valuable when the committee members know each other. It is probably best to have at least one face to face meeting per year to build positive group camaraderie.

Formal governance rules are rare among Southern SARE advisory committees, but have been considered. The most important need is to keep the input fresh and relevant and members engaged. While the organizational ("ex officio") committee members may rarely change, it is useful to have farmer and Extension agent members change on a regular basis. A three- to four-year rotation can help accomplish this goal.

(Lee Meyer, Southern SARE 1862 Land Grant University Liaison, Ret.)

Resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture supports three major programs (SARE along with its publishing subsidiary SARE Outreach, AFSIC and ATTRA) that offer sustainable agriculture information and assistance. Farmers, educators and researchers can find information about sustainable agriculture in general, about a specific crop, or help with a specific problem.

SARE -- As a State Coordinator you are part of the SARE resource base. Become familiar with the national website (<http://www.sare.org>) and the regional website (<http://www.southern.sare.org>), especially the project database.

SARE Outreach -- The publishing arm of SARE, with its own budget and staff, in Washington D.C. separate from the national SARE office. SARE Outreach publishes free high quality information bulletins and inexpensive practical books based on SARE research. Browse or order at any time from <https://www.sare.org/resources/>.

AFSIC -- Alternative Farming Systems Information Center collects, organizes and distributes information on alternative agriculture and provides high-level searching and reference services from the National Agricultural Library's vast collection and world-wide databases. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic>, email: afsic@nal.usda.gov, Ph: (301) 504-6559.

ATTRA -- Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas is a national sustainable agriculture information service that answers questions about specific farming practices and innovative marketing approaches, including organic production. More than 200 free publications on farming and marketing are available. Features include a website with daily brief updates, specialized responses to sustainable agriculture questions, toll-free phone service in English (800) 346-9140 and Spanish (800) 411-3222, speakers for workshops and conferences, free bi-monthly newsletter, and weekly e-newsletter. <http://www.attra.ncat.org>

www.southern.sare.org

The Southern SARE website has the answer to just about any question that you or your constituents may ask. You will benefit from browsing the site and getting familiar with the links.

Some of the most common questions asked by SARE project investigators are answered on the Southern SARE website under Grants/Manage a Grant/Financial Requirements. These include:

- Changing the Principal Investigator or State Ag Coordinator
- Changing the Project Scope or Objectives
- Modifying or Revising Project Budgets
- Changing or Adding Project Subcontracts
- Purchasing Equipment over \$5,000
- Filing a No-cost Extension
- Getting Reimbursed for Allowable Expenses
- Closing Out Your Project

Another example: When someone asks what SARE has funded in their state, they can get state grant portfolio summaries and a grants funding list under their respective state page. If you can't find the answer you need on the website, call a staff person with your question and they'll be happy to help.

About Those Acronyms

SARE is known as a user-friendly program. We try to keep the paperwork and jargon to a minimum. However, some of the terms we use most frequently are quite wordy. So, to make talking about our program easier, we resort to using a few acronyms.

AC: Administrative Council, the regional board that guides SARE through administrative and funding decisions.

ARS: USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Chapter 1: Section of the 1985 Farm bill that governs the research and education part of SARE, which has been funded since 1988. Chapter 3 is a section of the Farm Bill that governs the Professional Development Program. SARE recently combined the research and education and PDP under Chapter 1.

ECS: Economic and Community Systems, the home unit of SARE within NIFA EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).

NACAA: National Association of County Ag Agents.

NIFA: USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture, the administrative home of SARE NRCS (USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service).

SAC: Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

TAC: Technical Advisory Committee that reviews proposals submitted to Southern SARE.

Who to Contact

You can email any of these people plus all of your fellow state coordinators from our website at <https://www.southern.sare.org/sare-in-your-state/>

Questions about PDP Calls for Proposals -- David Redhage dredhage@kerrcenter.com

Questions about any other SARE Calls for Proposals except PDP -- Candace Pollock-Moore cpollock@uga.edu

No-Cost Extensions: State Coordinators often get questions from SARE project investigators about requesting a No-cost extension. Refer requests related to PDP grants to David Redhage. All other requests, refer to Tydaisha White at tydaisha.white@uga.edu

Budget questions for administering state plans or other expenses related to the business of the state coordinator -- Denise Quick at denise.quick@uga.edu

Reporting questions. First, check the website at <https://southern.sare.org/grants/manage-a-grant/reporting-requirements/>

If that doesn't answer your question, contact:

PDP grants or state annual reports -- David Redhage
All grants except PDP -- Candace Pollock-Moore

SARE travel -- See travel guidelines at <https://southern.sare.org/about/sare-travel/> for regulations about how much you can spend on meals, what receipts are needed, etc.

Contact Information

Southern SARE Professional Development Program

Southern SARE PDP
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Jamie Storrow
Digital Media Specialist
(802) 387-0330
media@sare.org

State Coordinator contacts: <https://southern.sare.org/sare-in-your-state/>

Annual SARE PDP Calendar

Model State Programs

Submit Model State Programs (MSP)	January
Submit Annual Reports for previous year(s)	July - June
Subcontract balances below required amount *	February
MSP Enhancement Funds	February

General State Coordinator Meetings

State Coordinators/AC meeting and tour	Annually at Summer AC Meeting
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SARE PDP Competitive Grants

Release PDP Competitive Grant Pre-Proposal Call	July
PDP Competitive Grants – Annual Reports Due	April
PDP Competitive Grants Pre-proposals due	August
PDP Competitive Grants Full Proposals Requested	October
PDP Competitive Grants Full Proposals Due	November
PDP Competitive Grants Awarded	February

* Each institution's total balance on all active subcontracts (not including the current year's contract) is below \$15,000