



How It Works

Southern SARE's guide to proposal submission, review process
and grant administration of the region's grants programs

Research & Education Grants	page 3
Graduate Student Grants	page 6
Professional Development Program Grants	page 8
Producer Grants	page 11
On-Farm Research Grants	page 13
Conflict of Interest Policy	page 15
Grants Schedule	page 16

Get Southern SARE Calls for Proposals at
<http://www.southern.sare.org>
All proposals must be submitted online.

Since its inception, the goal of the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program has been to support farmers, researchers, community organizations and educators as they explore practices that improve stewardship, profitability, and the social and economic health of rural and urban communities.

The primary tools of the SARE program are grants, which are offered annually, and are understood to be the chief lubricant in the development of new approaches and new ideas. SARE seeks out innovation in sustainable agriculture, and rewards grant applicants who offer up interesting, potentially workable ideas.

Southern SARE funds several different competitive grant programs, and each type of grant benefits a different constituency.

The Southern SARE **vision statement**, or overarching goal, says that agriculture in the Southern region will be diversified, profitable and fully integrated into the community providing healthy food and fiber by farmers who preserve and restore our natural resources.

In order to help reach that goal the Southern SARE **mission** is to expand knowledge and adoption of sustainable agriculture practices that are economically viable, environmentally sound and good for all members of the community.

These statements guide the grant process. At Southern SARE we continually look for ways to make our grant programs easier to navigate. Grant funds are a boon to researchers, farmers, educators and communities, but the paperwork can be intimidating. This guide will answer questions you may never have thought to ask about how a grant program works.

For more information about Southern region SARE grants,
free publications, research results or educational opportunities:

Phone: 770-229-3100

E-mail: ssare@uga.edu

<http://www.southern.sare.org>

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Research and Education Grants

Research and Education Grants generally are conducted by teams coordinated by a principal investigator from a university, governmental agency or non-governmental organization. These projects include farmers as participants, and can range up to \$400,000 for up to a three-year project. The Research & Education Grants program also includes Education Grants, specifically intended for Education-based activities. Up to \$50,000 can be awarded for these grants.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online pre-proposal/proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System) for Research and Education grants. Each year input is solicited from the Administrative Council (AC) on changes needed for the next year's call, including changes in priority areas.

Distribution of Call

A Southern SARE release schedule of all Calls for Proposals is maintained on the Southern SARE website and also appears in How It Works. CFP distribution includes announcements posted to the website as well as announcements sent by e-mail to Southern Region AC members, state sustainable ag coordinators and current and former project investigators. The release of each CFP is also announced in our newsletter, and on social media sites (<http://www.twitter.com/southernsare>) as well as via press releases. Each one is also sent to ATTRA for inclusion in Weekly Harvest, an e-mail service to more than 300 print and online agriculture publications, as well as National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. For more specialized audiences, some non-public e-mail lists including USDA-ARS and NRCS offices are used when appropriate. The national SARE Outreach Communications Manager has a master distribution list that goes to dozens of lists for specific academic disciplines, RC&Ds, non-profit groups and media outlets. The regional Public Relations Coordinator and the national Outreach Communications Manager coordinate which lists are most appropriate for each CFP. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <http://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The process begins by clicking on the R&E call at the Southern SARE website: <http://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, the program objectives and instructions for online submission.

The CFP notes that all projects must meet the following criteria:

- Project outcomes must focus on developing sustainable agriculture systems or moving existing systems toward sustainable agriculture as first defined in the 1990 Farm Bill.
- The project's central purpose should be research-based with an educational/outreach component to extend the project findings to the public.
- The project should take a systems research approach.

SSARE uses seven priority areas to point applicants to the research topics desired by the AC:

- minority and limited resource farmers;
- organic farming systems;
- environmentally sound practices/agricultural ecosystems;
- marketing/economic development;
- policy, program evaluation and quality of life;
- women in sustainable agriculture
- emerging area

The CFP also notes that reviewers will pay attention to the outcomes of the research project and how they meet the mission of the SARE program.

The CFP provides a discussion of the review process that stresses that projects should be research-based, that farmers and end-user involvement are critical, and an outreach component is required.

The CFP includes "Eleven Tips for Writing a Stronger SARE Proposal."

Review Process

In general, the SSARE review process meets the criteria for evaluation of projects as specified in the Operational Guidelines of the SARE program as authorized by legislation. These include:

Priority for funding projects will be based on needs and opportunities identified by the regional Administrative Council (AC). In general, selection should be on the basis of:

- Relevance of the project to the goals of the program;
- Appropriateness of the design of the project;
- National or regional adaptability of the findings and outcomes of the project [7 USC 5811(c)(1)].

Priority should be given to projects that:

- Closely coordinate research and Extension activities;
- Indicate how findings will be made readily usable by farmers/ranchers and other intended audiences;
- Maximize the direct and meaningful involvement of farmer/ranchers;
- Involve cooperation between farmers/ranchers, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities, and government agencies [7 USC 5811(c)(2)].

The review process incorporates three entities within SSARE: the Administrative Council (AC), the Project Review Committee of the AC (made up of AC members only), and outside technical reviewers. The Project Review Committee is constituted to reflect the composition of the AC. Specifically, the members are made up of at least three farmers, one NGO representative, one from 1890 and one from 1862 institutions, one from the PDP Leadership Committee, one government agency representative, one Quality of Life or Agribusiness representative, and one reviewer from the national SARE office.

The full Administrative Council is involved in screening pre-proposals. All pre-proposals are reviewed by four AC members who vote “yes” or “no.” The four reviewers are assigned in a completely random fashion so the same four people are not reading identical proposals. After they have voted “yes” or “no”, each AC member provides a brief written explanation for his/her vote -- limited to 50 words. After the AC votes on the pre-proposals, members of the Project Review Committee meet to decide which of the pre-proposals to invite for full proposals. Ordinarily, only those pre-proposals that received votes of 4 “yes” and 0 “no” or 3 “yes” and 1 “no” are considered for full proposal invitation.

During the preproposal review stage, the Southern SARE Administrative Council (AC) seeks to invite about one-third of the submissions for the full-proposal stage. The Project Review Committee recommends to the AC which projects to invite for full proposals. Not all 4-0, 3-1 preproposals are necessarily invited for further submission.

In deciding which pre-proposals to invite for full proposals, the members of the Project Review Committee first focus primarily on CONCEPTUAL issues:

1. Does the pre-proposal focus on sustainable agricultural systems or make existing systems more sustainable?
2. Is the central purpose research-based with an educational outreach component to extend the project findings to the public?
3. Do the objectives indicate a systems approach to the research?
4. Are farmers integrated into the R&E plan?
5. Are the objectives clear?
6. Are the methods clear and reasonable to meet the objectives?
7. Should the PI be invited to submit a full proposal?

PRC reviewers will concentrate on the non-technically reviewed parts of the proposals (i.e. farming systems, relevance to sustainable agriculture, outreach and evaluation).

PIs will not be given a full review of their proposal at the pre-proposal stage. PIs will be able to see the comments written by each of the four AC members who reviewed the proposal.

Comprehensive reviews are undertaken at the full proposal stage. For those submissions invited to the full proposal stage, instructions for online submissions will be provided. When PIs submit their full proposals, the appropriate indirect cost allocations should be added to the budget.

The invited full proposals are submitted in November. Three outside reviewers, selected for their disciplinary expertise, read and comment on each proposal and enter their recommendations in the on-line system. Attention is paid to selecting these members from as many different institutions, disciplines and backgrounds as possible. A breadth of reviewers is desired. Outside technical reviewers will only review the technical sections of the proposal and not the relevance to sustainable agriculture, outreach or evaluation sections. The outside reviewers will be asked to rate each proposal as High Priority, Fundable, Revise/Re-submit in subsequent years with specific suggestions or Not Fundable.

At the winter AC meeting, the Project Review Committee, informed by the Technical Review Committee rankings

Research and Education Grants

and review comments, recommends to the full AC those projects to be funded from the list of proposals. At this stage, budgets are examined. The AC is responsible for ensuring that the selected projects reflect not only scientific merit, but include projects from as many priority areas as possible, from across states, institutions, stakeholder groups and NGOs. In short, the AC looks to approve a diverse and inclusive set of funded projects each year. The comments given to PIs are constructive and explicit. It is important that the review comments be of adequate substance to assist an author in meaningful revision.

The time from submission of a pre-proposal to announcement of awards is from March to February.

Award Process

Award letters are sent to each new project investigator along with any budget alterations. The project investigator revises the project design and budget to reflect the comments and submits this along with a letter of acceptance. All new grantees are given contact information regarding SARE-sponsored projects within their state, state coordinator contacts and other information to facilitate communication among all grant programs.

The SSARE office checks the approved proposal budgets for any mathematical errors and required budgetary detail. Once reviewed, the awarded proposal is sent to the College of Agriculture Business Office where they are reviewed and forwarded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The Sponsored Programs office verifies the grant recipient has an audit on file at the University. A sub-award agreement and a Federal Form 1048 (USDA Certification regarding Debarment) are sent to the grant recipients to be signed. If the project involves animals, the PI must send verification that the project has been reviewed and approved by their university's animal care committee (or the University of Georgia animal care committee if the PI's institution or agency is not affiliated with a university). The verification does not require a site visit by the university animal care committee but is simply a form they complete based on details provided in the proposal. Upon receipt of all necessary completed and signed forms, Sponsored Programs issues the original purchase order to encumber the awarded funds. These forms, along with the sub-award, are forwarded to the UGA Agricultural Business Office.

The Agricultural Business Office verifies the awarded amount and that it was part of the SSARE prime cooperative agreement with USDA and forwards the sub-award to the Contracts and Grants Office. It is here that all sub-award information is entered into the UGA accounting system (i.e., sub-recipient name, address, amount, and period of award). This process may take approximately three months from the time the grant proposal is approved to be funded by SSARE. Grant recipients can begin to expend funds when notified by the SSARE office. However, invoices for reimbursements cannot be accepted and processed until the finalized award process is complete.

Once the award process is finalized, the sub-recipients must submit invoices and supporting documentation for reimbursement. Upon receipt of an invoice, the SSARE accountant will review the invoice for details and allowable charges, update the balance to be paid on the grant, and initiate the process for payment. Grant recipients can expect to receive payment within four weeks. This time period may fluctuate if an invoice is held due to missing information.

Reporting Requirements

The new project is created in the SARE Grant Management System as soon as the contract is signed. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. Project Investigators are instructed to set up an online presence in the reporting system. It is through the SARE Grant Management System where project investigators will report on the progress of their project.

Annual Progress Reports are due in April each year until project activities are completed, at which time a Final Report is due. The project's final invoice cannot be paid until the report is submitted and approved. A request for reports is e-mailed to project investigators in February. Annual Reports are due the first week of April every year. Final Reports are due 45 days after the project ends.

As soon as the Regional Administrator approves the electronic submission, the report is available for public consumption on the internet through the SARE Projects Database. Charts, tables and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Graduate Student Grants

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 \$16,500 will be awarded to each successful applicant for two years of project activities. The funds are paid directly to the university for use on the graduate student's project.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System) for Graduate Student Grants. Each year that Graduate Student Grants are offered, input is solicited from the Administrative Council (AC) on changes needed for the call.

Distribution of Call

A Southern SARE release schedule of all Calls for Proposals is maintained on the Southern SARE website and also appears in How It Works. CFP distribution includes announcements posted to the website as well as announcements sent by e-mail to Southern Region AC members, state sustainable ag coordinators and current and former project investigators. The release of each CFP is also announced in our newsletter, and on social media sites (<http://www.twitter.com/southernzare>) as well as via press releases. Each one is also sent to ATTRA for inclusion in Weekly Harvest, an e-mail service to more than 300 print and online agriculture publications, as well as National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. For more specialized audiences, some non-public e-mail lists including USDA-ARS and NRCS offices are used when appropriate. The national SARE Outreach Communications Manager has a master distribution list that goes to dozens of lists for specific academic disciplines, RC&Ds, non-profit groups and media outlets. The regional Public Relations Coordinator and the national Outreach Communications Manager coordinate which lists are most appropriate for each CFP. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <http://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The Graduate Student Grant CFP is designed to solicit proposals from Master's and PhD students to conduct research projects that promote sustainable agriculture. Because graduate student research projects are, by nature, relatively small and focused research projects, there are no requirements on cooperators other than the student's major professor, who is a co-applicant and the Project Investigator on the proposal.

The CFP provides the USDA definition of sustainable agriculture and a format for proposal submission. It also informs applicants what things are and are not fundable with a Graduate Student Grant. The CFP provides the criteria for proposal review so applicants know how their proposals will be reviewed.

The CFP is released in February and completed proposals are due in May. Awards are made in mid August and announced by September.

The CFP is revised, to some extent, each year based upon the input of the Project Review Committee. Once the committee's input has been incorporated into the new CFP, it is brought before the whole AC for comment, amendment if needed, and approval at the summer AC meeting.

Review Process

Once the proposal submission deadline passes, the Graduate Student Grant proposals are assigned to external technical reviewers through the SARE Grant Management System. Each year, a request is sent out to SSARE e-mail lists for technical reviewers willing to review proposals.

The technical reviewers review the proposals to which they are assigned in the SARE Grant Management System. The proposals scored are based on a series of questions weighted by percentages equal to 100. The higher the score, the more fundable the project, with 100 being a perfect score. They also write review summaries which are used to inform the reviews of the Project Review Committee of the Administrative Council (AC). The review summaries are also ultimately sent out to all applicants with the award notifications.

After the technical reviewers have completed their reviews, the Project Review Committee of the Administrative Council, informed by the technical review rankings and review comments, is assigned as Final Reviewer of the proposals in the SARE Online Management System. The Committee provides a Final Review score of 1-4 (1=nonfundable, 2=marginal funding, 3=fundable, 4=high priority funding). The Final Review scores are used at the AC meeting to select proposals to be recommended for funding. Later, at the same AC meeting, the AC votes on the slate of proposals put forward by the Project Review Committee and approves the proposals to be funded.

The time from submission of a proposal to announcement of awards is from February to August.

Award Process

Award e-mails and letters are sent to each new project investigator along with the technical reviewer comments. State coordinators from the awardee's state are copied so they will know who in their state has received a SSARE grant.

The SSARE office checks the approved proposal budgets for any mathematical errors and required budgetary detail. Once reviewed, the awarded proposal is sent to the College of Agriculture Business Office where it is reviewed and forwarded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The Sponsored Programs Office verifies the grant recipient has an audit on file at the University. A sub-award agreement and a Federal Form 1048 (USDA Certification regarding Debarment) are sent to the grant recipients to be signed. If the project involves animals, the PI must send verification that the project has been reviewed and approved by their university's animal care committee (or the University of Georgia animal care committee if the PI's institution or agency is not affiliated with a university). The verification does not require a site visit by the university animal care committee but is simply a form they complete based on details provided in the proposal. Upon receipt of all necessary completed and signed forms, Sponsored Programs issues the original purchase order to encumber the awarded funds. These forms, along with the sub-award, are forwarded to the UGA Agricultural Business Office.

The Agricultural Business Office verifies the awarded amount and that it was part of the SSARE prime cooperative agreement with USDA and forwards the sub-award to the Contracts and Grants Office. It is here that all sub-award information is entered into the UGA accounting system (i.e., sub-recipient name, address, amount, and period of award). This process may take approximately three months from the time the grant proposal is approved to be funded by SSARE. Grant recipients can begin to expend funds from the date of the award. However, invoices for reimbursements cannot be accepted and processed until the finalized award process is complete.

Once the award process is finalized, the sub-recipients must submit invoices and supporting documentation for reimbursement. Upon receipt of an invoice, the SSARE accountant will review the invoice for details and allowable charges, update the balance to be paid on the grant, and initiate the process for payment. Grant recipients can expect to receive payment within four weeks. This time period may fluctuate if an invoice is held due to missing information.

Reporting Requirements

The new project is created in the SARE Grant Management System as soon as the contract is signed. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. Project Investigators are instructed to set up an online presence in the reporting system. It is through the SARE Grant Management System where project investigators will report on the progress of their project.

Annual Progress Reports are due in April each year until project activities are completed, at which time a Final Report is due. The project's final invoice cannot be paid until the report is submitted and approved. A request for reports is e-mailed to project investigators in February. Annual Reports are due the first week of April every year. Final Reports are due 45 days after the project ends.

As soon as the Regional Administrator approves the electronic submission, the report is available for public consumption on the internet through the SARE Projects Database. Charts, tables and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of Graduate Student Grant-funded projects is accomplished through telephone and e-mail communication and, if needed, no-cost extensions, budget evaluations and/or adjustments. These methods are used to help Graduate Student grant recipients, as best as is practicable, successfully carry out the objectives of their projects.

Professional Development Program Grants

Professional Development Program Grant projects train agricultural information providers in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts.

Proposal Process

The PDP program uses the pre-proposal/proposal format and adheres to a similar timetable as the R&E program. As of 2005, submission and review at the full proposals stage have been conducted online. Instructions will be mailed to successful pre-proposal applicants.

Distribution of Call

A Southern SARE schedule of release of all Calls for Proposals is maintained on the Southern SARE website and also appears in How It Works. CFP distribution includes announcements posted to the website as well as announcements sent by e-mail to Southern Region AC members, state sustainable ag coordinators, NGO representatives, and current and former project investigators. The release of each CFP is also announced in our newsletter, and on social media sites (<http://www.twitter.com/southernsare>) as well as via press releases. Each one is also sent to ATTRA for inclusion in Weekly Harvest, an e-mail service to more than 300 print and online agriculture publications, as well as National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. For more specialized audiences, some non-public e-mail lists including USDA-ARS and NRCS offices are used when appropriate. The national SARE Outreach Communications Manager has a master distribution list that goes to dozens of lists for specific academic disciplines, RC&Ds, non-profit groups and media outlets. The regional Public Relations Coordinator and the national Outreach Communications Manager coordinate which lists are most appropriate for each CFP. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <http://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The CFP uses a pass/fail criterion for considering projects:

- Project outcomes must address economic, environmental, and social issues in agriculture, focusing on developing sustainable agriculture systems or moving existing systems toward sustainability as defined in the 1990 Farm Bill.
- A project's central purpose must be to provide or enable training to Cooperative Extension Service agents; USDA field personnel from the Natural Resources Conservation Services, the Farm Services Agency, and other agencies; and other educators, including farmers who, will themselves, serve as trainers. Research projects and farmer-outreach or education projects do not qualify for this funding.

The call provides 9 scoring criteria to include:

1. Farmer participation
2. Collaboration of diverse groups
3. Uses behavior-based objectives
4. A coherent evaluation plan
5. Makes a case for relevancy to agriculture and Southern agriculture; project uses systems approaches that consider broad impacts.
6. Leverage other inputs and sustain outcomes in the future.
7. Appropriate educational methodology.
8. Realistic timelines and cost effective budget.
9. Develop linkages to other SARE proposals.

The CFP details the pre-proposal format and outline and provides directions for submission (with cover page and budget page templates).

Review Process

The process incorporates three entities within SSARE: the Administrative Council (AC), the PDP Committee of the AC, and an outside review team.

The AC/PDP Committee reviews pre-proposals. The PDP Review Committee completes a conceptual review that ad-

dresses the following criteria:

1. Does the proposal address all components of sustainable agriculture?
2. Is the proposal for training of agricultural professionals?
3. Does the proposal reflect a collaborative model with significant players?
4. Are the objectives clear?
5. Is there linkage to other SARE projects?
6. Is there a coherent evaluation plan for project activities?
7. Does the proposal define project resources and abilities of participating organizations?
8. Is the educational methodology clearly presented and appropriate to achieve the proposal objectives?
9. Does the proposal provide a realistic timeline and budget for project activities and objectives?

At the culmination of the review, the AC selects the pre-proposals to submit full proposals. The full proposals are then reviewed by the outside review team made up people who are trained and experienced in developing educational programs for agricultural professionals.

The role of the Outside Review Team is to focus on the theoretical approach of the program design, review the objectives, methods, approaches, design, timeline, and evaluation plan.

The Outside Review Team provides a written review that concentrates on:

- Methods and appropriateness of project design (including objectives and timeline)
- Evaluation and impact design
- Ability of project director and major participants

The AC/PDP Review Team provides the full AC a YES (the theoretical approach to planning design, implementation and evaluation of the educational program is sound) or NO (the theoretical approach to planning design, implementation and evaluation of the educational program is not sound) based on how each proposal measures up to the nine criteria. Proposals are rated High Priority, Fundable, Revisions Required or Non-Fundable. The strength and weakness of each proposal is clearly stated.

Feedback is restricted to written comments from the Outside Review Team and the AC-PDP Committee. Review feedback is provided to proposal authors only. The AC makes the final decision on funding.

The time from submission of a pre-proposal to announcement of awards is from July to February.

Award Process

Award letters are sent to each new project investigator along with the Project Review Committee comments and any budget alterations. The project investigator revises the project design and budget to reflect the comments and submits this along with a letter of acceptance. All new grantees are given contact information regarding SARE-sponsored projects within their state, state coordinator contacts and other information to facilitate communication among all grant programs.

The PDP Coordinator reviews the budgets and then the S-SARE office checks the approved proposal budgets for any mathematical errors and required budgetary detail. Once reviewed, the awarded proposal is sent to the College of Agriculture Business Office where it is reviewed and forwarded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The Sponsored Programs Office verifies the grant recipient has an audit on file at the University. A sub-award agreement and a Federal Form 1048 (USDA Certification regarding Debarment) are sent to the grant recipients to be signed. If the project involves animals, the PI must send verification that the project has been reviewed and approved by their university's animal care committee (or the University of Georgia animal care committee if the PI's institution or agency is not affiliated with a university). The verification does not require a site visit by the university animal care committee but is simply a form they complete based on details provided in the proposal. Upon receipt of all necessary completed and signed forms, Sponsored Programs issues the original purchase order to encumber the awarded funds. These forms, along with the sub-award, are forwarded to the UGA Agricultural Business Office.

The Agricultural Business Office verifies the awarded amount and that it was part of the SSARE prime cooperative agreement with USDA and forwards the sub-award to the Contracts and Grants Office. It is here that all sub-award

information is entered into the UGA accounting system (i.e., sub-recipient name, address, amount, and period of award). This process may take approximately three months from the time the grant proposal is approved to be funded by SSARE. Grant recipients can begin to expend funds from the date of the award. However, invoices for reimbursements cannot be accepted and processed until the finalized award process is complete.

Once the award process is finalized, the sub-recipients must submit invoices and supporting documentation for reimbursement. Upon receipt of an invoice, the SSARE accountant will review the invoice for details and allowable charges, update the balance to be paid on the grant, and initiate the process for payment. Grant recipients can expect to receive payment within four weeks. This time period may fluctuate if an invoice is held due to missing information.

Reporting Requirements

The new project is created in the SARE Grant Management System as soon as the contract is signed. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. Project Investigators are instructed to set up an online presence in the reporting system. It is through the SARE Grant Management System where project investigators will report on the progress of their project.

Annual Progress Reports are due in April each year until project activities are completed, at which time a Final Report is due. The project's final invoice cannot be paid until the report is submitted and approved. A request for reports is e-mailed to project investigators in February. Annual Reports are due the first week of April every year. Final Reports are due 45 days after the project ends.

As soon as the Regional Administrator approves the electronic submission, the report is available for public consumption on the internet through the SARE Projects Database. Charts, tables and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Producer Grants

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. There is a \$15,000 limit for funding proposals submitted by an individual producer and a \$20,000 limit on proposals submitted by producer organizations. Projects are limited to two years.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System) for Producer Grants. Each year that Producer Grants are offered, input is solicited from the Administrative Council (AC) on changes needed for the call.

Distribution of Call

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Contents of Call

The Producer Grant program is a grant program for farmers and/or ranchers. The Call for Proposals (CFP) poses a series of questions and then informs the farmer/rancher applicant of the allowable amount of space they have in which to answer each question. The Producer Grant CFP includes information about a proposal check list for applicants, a sample budget, the guidelines of allowable expenses and review criteria the reviewers use to evaluate each proposal so that the applicants are aware of the criteria upon which their proposals are being reviewed.

The CFP is revised each year based upon the input of the Administrative Council (AC) Producer Grant Committee. Once the CFP is prepared, it is sent to the committee for comments and ultimately, approval. Once the Producer Grant Committee has approved the call, it is presented to the full Administrative Council for approval at the August AC meeting.

Review Process

Once the proposal submission deadline passes, the Producer Grant Committee of the Administrative Council (AC) conducts an initial technical review of the proposals in the SARE Grant Management System. The scores are based on a series of “yes” and “no” questions, as well as questions weighted by percentages equal to 100. The higher the score, the more fundable the project, with 100 being a perfect score. The Committee then meets via conference call ahead of the AC meeting to discuss proposals that received high scores (generally 80 and higher). The Committee also writes review summaries which are sent out to all applicants with the award notifications. They further review the proposals based on whether or not the proposal is from a farmer or farmer organization and if the proposed project is relevant to sustainable agriculture.

A few weeks after the technical review, the Producer Grant Committee of the AC, informed by its technical review rankings and review comments, meets at the February Administrative Council meeting. The Committee is assigned as Final Reviewer in the SARE Grant Management System and provides a Final Review score of 1-4 (1=nonfundable, 2=marginal funding, 3=fundable, 4=high priority funding). The Final Review scores are used at the AC meeting to fund proposals. The Committee then conducts a second review of the ranked proposals and selects the proposals to be recommended for funding. Later, at the same AC meeting, the AC votes on the slate of proposals put forward by the Producer Grant Committee and approves the proposals to be funded.

The time from submission of a proposal to announcement of awards is from September to February.

Award Process

Award e-mails and letters are sent to each new project investigator along with the technical review comments. State coordinators from the awardee's state are copied so they will know who in their state has received a SSARE grant.

The SSARE office checks the approved proposal budgets for any mathematical errors and required budgetary detail. Once reviewed, the awarded proposal is sent to the College of Agriculture Business Office where they are reviewed and forwarded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The Sponsored Programs Office verifies the grant recipient has an audit on file at the University. A sub-award agreement and a Federal Form 1048 (USDA Certification regarding Debarment) are sent to the grant recipients to be signed. If the project involves animals, the PI must send verification that the project has been reviewed and approved by their university's animal care committee (or the University of Georgia animal care committee if the PI's institution or agency is not affiliated with a university). The verification does not require a site visit by the university animal care committee but is simply a form they complete based on details provided in the proposal. Upon receipt of all necessary completed and signed forms, Sponsored Programs issues the original purchase order to encumber the awarded funds. These forms, along with the sub-award, are forwarded to the UGA Agricultural Business Office.

The Agricultural Business Office verifies the awarded amount and that it was part of the SSARE prime cooperative agreement with USDA and forwards the sub-award to the Contracts and Grants Office. It is here that all sub-award information is entered into the UGA accounting system (i.e., sub-recipient name, address, amount, and period of award). This process may take approximately three months from the time the grant proposal is approved to be funded by SSARE. Grant recipients can begin to expend funds from the date of the award. However, invoices for reimbursements cannot be accepted and processed until the finalized award process is complete.

Once the award process is finalized, the sub-recipients must submit invoices and supporting documentation for reimbursement. Upon receipt of an invoice, the SSARE accountant will review the invoice for details and allowable charges, update the balance to be paid on the grant, and initiate the process for payment. Grant recipients can expect to receive payment within four weeks. This time period may fluctuate if an invoice is held due to missing information.

Reporting Requirements

The new project is created in the SARE Grant Management System as soon as the contract is signed. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. Project Investigators are instructed to set up an online presence in the reporting system. It is through the SARE Grant Management System where project investigators will report on the progress of their project.

Annual Progress Reports are due in April each year until project activities are completed, at which time a Final Report is due. The project's final invoice cannot be paid until the report is submitted and approved. A request for reports is e-mailed to project investigators in February. Annual Reports are due the first week of April every year. Final Reports are due 45 days after the project ends.

As soon as the Regional Administrator approves the electronic submission, the report is available for public consumption on the internet through the SARE Projects Database. Charts, tables and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of Producer Grant-funded projects is accomplished through telephone and e-mail communication and, if needed, no-cost extensions, budget evaluations and/or adjustments. These methods are used to help Producer Grant recipients, as best as is practicable, successfully carry out the objectives of their projects.

On-Farm Research Grants

On-Farm Research Grant projects are conducted by agricultural professionals such as Extension agents, NRCS and/or NGO personnel who directly work with farmers and ranchers. Cooperators must include at least one producer at all stages of the project. These grants are funded for a maximum of \$20,000 for two years of activities.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System) for On-Farm Research Grants. Each year that On-Farm Research Grants are offered, input is solicited from the Administrative Council (AC) on changes needed for the call.

Distribution of Call

A Southern SARE schedule of release of all Calls for Proposals is maintained on the Southern SARE website and also appears in How It Works. CFP distribution includes announcements posted to the website as well as announcements sent by e-mail to Southern Region AC members, state sustainable ag coordinators and current and former project investigators. The release of each CFP is also announced in our newsletter, and on our social media sites (<http://www.twitter.com/southernare>) as well as via press releases. Each one is also sent to ATTRA for inclusion in Weekly Harvest, an e-mail service to more than 300 print and online agriculture publications, as well as National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. For more specialized audiences, some non-public e-mail lists including USDA-ARS and NRCS offices are used when appropriate. The national SARE Outreach Communications Manager has a master distribution list that goes to dozens of lists for specific academic disciplines, RC&Ds, non-profit groups and media outlets. The regional Public Relations Coordinator and the national Outreach Communications Manager coordinate which lists are most appropriate for each CFP. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <http://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The On-farm Research Grant Call for Proposals (CFP) is similar to the Producer Grant CFP with two major exceptions. On-Farm Research Grant PI's are expected to be Extension, NRCS, University, Governmental or NGO personnel who regularly work with producers. Further, they are required to work with at least one producer on their project.

The On-Farm Research Grant program Call for Proposals (CFP) poses a series of questions and then informs the proposal writer of the allowable amount of space they have in which to answer each question. The CFP includes a proposal check list for applicants, the guidelines of allowable expenses, and review criteria the reviewers use to evaluate each proposal so that the applicants are aware of the criteria upon which their proposals are being reviewed.

The CFP is revised each year based upon the input of the Administrative Council (AC) Producer Grant Committee. Once the CFP is prepared, it is sent to the committee for comments and ultimately, approval. Once the Producer Grant Committee has approved the call, it is presented to the Administrative Council for approval at the August AC meeting.

Review Process

Once the proposal submission deadline passes, the On-Farm Research Grant proposals are assigned to external technical reviewers through the SARE Grant Management System. Each year, a request is sent out to SSARE e-mail lists for technical reviewers willing to review proposals.

The technical reviewers review the proposals to which they are assigned in the SARE Grant Management System. The proposals scored are based on a series of questions weighted by percentages equal to 100. The higher the score, the more fundable the project, with 100 being a perfect score. They also write review summaries which are used to inform the reviews of the Producer Grant Committee of the Administrative Council (AC). The review summaries are also ultimately sent out to all applicants with the award notifications.

After the technical reviewers have completed their reviews, the Producer Grant Committee of the Administrative Council, informed by the technical review rankings and review comments, is assigned as Final Reviewer of the proposals in the SARE Online Management System. The Committee provides a Final Review score of 1-4 (1=nonfundable, 2=marginal funding, 3=fundable, 4=high priority funding). The Final Review scores are used at the AC meeting to select proposals to be recommended for funding. Later, at the same AC meeting, the AC votes on the slate of proposals put forward by the Producer Grant Committee and approves the proposals to be funded.

The time from submission of a proposal to announcement of awards is from September to February.

Award Process

Award e-mails and letters are sent to each new project investigator along with the technical reviewer comments. State coordinators from the awardee's state are copied so they will know who in their state has received a SSARE grant.

The SSARE office checks the approved proposal budgets for any mathematical errors and required budgetary detail. Once reviewed, the awarded proposal is sent to the College of Agriculture Business Office where it is reviewed and forwarded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The Sponsored Programs Office verifies the grant recipient has an audit on file at the University. A sub-award agreement and a Federal Form 1048 (USDA Certification regarding Debarment) are sent to the grant recipients to be signed. If the project involves animals, the PI must send verification that the project has been reviewed and approved by their university's animal care committee (or the University of Georgia animal care committee if the PI's institution or agency is not affiliated with a university). The verification does not require a site visit by the university animal care committee but is simply a form they complete based on details provided in the proposal. Upon receipt of all necessary completed and signed forms, Sponsored Programs issues the original purchase order to encumber the awarded funds. These forms, along with the sub-award, are forwarded to the UGA Agricultural Business Office.

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As soon as the Regional Administrator approves the electronic submission, the report is available for public consumption on the internet through the SARE Projects Database. Charts, tables and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of On-Farm Research Grant-funded projects is accomplished through telephone and e-mail communication and, if needed, no cost extensions, budget evaluations and/or adjustments. These methods are used to help grant recipients, as best as is practicable, successfully carry out the objectives of their projects.

Conflict Of Interest Policy

As Adopted November 22, 2002

According to the legislation, a member of an AC or technical committee may not participate in the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects if the member has, or had, a professional or business interest in the organization whose grant application is under review. (7USC 5812(c). This language is interpreted and operationalized as follows.

To avoid any conflict of interest, a member of the Administrative Council (AC), Technical Committee, or any AC-appointed committees or panels, or staff may not review or participate in the discussion or recommendation regarding any competitive grant proposal with any of the following characteristics:

1. From that member's home institution or organization;
2. From institutions or organizations for which he/she acts as a paid consultant, or board member;
3. From applicants for whom he/she has served as a thesis advisor (or advisee) or a postdoctoral advisor (or advisee) within the past five years;
4. From applicants with whom he/she has served as a collaborator on a research proposal or publication within the past five years;
5. From applicants for whom he/she has acted as a paid consultant within the past five years;
6. From applicants for whom he/she will be a project participant during the current grant cycle;
7. That Administrative Council, Technical Committee members, any AC-appointed committees or panels, or staff may not be listed as participants on competitive grant proposals (including producer grants and PDP proposals) under consideration by the committee or panel on which the person serves where they could potentially gain monetary benefits to themselves or other program (benefits do not mean compensation for travel or per diem);
8. The statement applies to current members. Those wanting to submit proposals must resign their memberships.
9. During the discussion or recommendations of proposed projects, any members with a conflict of interest must leave the room. This applies to the regional coordinators and senior staff.
10. Discussion and recommendation should involve individual projects. When a large slate of projects (for example, the Producer Grants) is being voted upon – and individual projects are not being discussed – members with a conflict of interest do not need to leave the room.

2022-2023 Southern SARE Grants Schedule

Research and Education Grants

2022

March Call for R&E pre-proposals released

June R&E pre-proposals due

August Full R&E proposals requested

November Full R&E proposals due

2023

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Graduate Student Grants

2022

February Call for proposal released

May Proposals due

August Administrative Council announces awards

Professional Development Program Grants

2022

July Call for pre-proposals released

August Pre-proposals due

October Full proposals requested

November Full proposals due

2023

February Full proposals awarded

Producer Grants

2022

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2023

March Administrative Council announces grant awards

On-Farm Research Grants

2022

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2023

March Administrative Council announces grant awards