



How It Works

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

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**Get Southern SARE Calls for Proposals at
<https://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:

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<https://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.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online pre-proposal/full proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System, <https://projects.sare.org>) for Research and Education grants. Each year that Research and Education 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 as well as via press releases. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <https://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The process begins by clicking on the R&E call at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, and how the proposal is reviewed.

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

- Projects must be relevant to sustainable agriculture and outcomes must focus on developing sustainable ag systems or moving existing systems toward sustainable ag.
- Per USDA-NIFA, proposals must not promote, support, or take part in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected characteristic.
- Emphasis in Research and Education Grants is placed on farmer participation. Farmers are a required component of the project. At least three (3) cooperating farmers must be involved in the project, each with a unique and detailed role. For farmers involved in your project, the primary occupation is farming/ranching or part-time farming. Producers run their farm alone or with family or partners and have a least \$1,000 of documented annual income from the operation, as defined by USDA.
- The project's central purpose must be research-based with an educational/outreach component to extend the project findings to the public, with specific applicability for and potential adoption by farmers.
- Projects must involve a holistic approach to sustainable agriculture, covering the three pillars of sustainability: farmer profit, environmental stewardship, and community quality of life.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 on whether or not a pre-proposal should move forward to the full proposal stage.

Full proposal invite is based on the following review criteria:

- **A Systems Approach to Sustainable Agriculture:** The pre-proposal demonstrates a whole systems approach to sustainable agriculture, focusing on more than one component system and including SARE's three pillars of sustainability.
- **Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture:** The pre-proposal focuses on sustainable agricultural systems and makes a clear, well-thought case of either making existing systems more sustainable, or creates a new and innovative method for sustainability. The project meets SARE goals of sustainable agriculture.
- **Multi-institutional/Multi-disciplinary Collaborations:** The pre-proposal includes meaningful multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaborations with their roles in the project relevant to the three pillars of sustainability.
- **Farmer Participation:** The project includes the required number of farmer collaborators with direct and meaningful involvement in the project. Farmer roles in the project are clear.
- **Appropriate Research-based Project Design/Methods with an Educational/Outreach Component:** The Approaches and Methods are clear and reasonable and are capable of meeting the objectives. The project design is realistic based on the timeline, with regional and/or national adaptability of the findings and outcomes of the project. An educational component is included with usable findings by farmers/ranchers and other intended audiences.
- **Objectives:** The pre-proposal includes clear objectives that indicate a systems approach to the research.

Each criteria is scored on a scale of One to Four (1-4) with the scores averaged for a final score. Each pre-proposal is scored as described:

- **Four (4): High Priority. Invite for Full Proposal:** Pre-Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE's three pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Pre-Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sustainable ag solution. The Technical Reviewers should provide information on the Objectives and Methods.
- **Three (3): May Be Invited for Full Proposal But Not as Strong as High Priority Pre-Proposals:** Pre-Proposals are not as strong as high priority pre-proposals, but there are elements that might make them worth seeing again. Pre-Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Improvements are evident before they go through a technical review.
- **Two (2): Revise and Resubmit:** Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program and pertains to sustainable agriculture, but there are sections of the proposal that don't fulfill review criteria or not all requirements of Call for Proposals have been met. Applicant is encouraged to Revise and Resubmit for the next grant cycle per the Administrative Council reviewer's comments to strengthen the proposal.
- **One (1). Do Not Invite for Full Proposal:** Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program; does not pertain to sustainable agriculture; and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals.

A brief written explanation is also included in the review process. Based on this final score and the comments, the Administrative Council makes a recommendation to invite pre-proposal applicants to submit a full proposal. 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.

After the full Administrative Council makes its recommendation on the pre-proposals, the Project Review Committee, a subcommittee of the full Administrative Council, meets to discuss which pre-proposals to invite for full proposals based on the scores, comments, and recommendations put forth by the Administrative Council. The purpose of this review step is to ensure that pre-proposals recommended to submit a full proposal meet the conceptual requirements of the program and are technically feasible. It is at this time that final selections are made and are presented for a vote at the winter Administrative Council meeting.

Applicants will not be given a full review of their proposal at the pre-proposal stage. At this pre-proposal stage, it is not the intent to conduct a full review with comments. This stage is to identify those projects the Administrative Council wishes to explore more fully. Comprehensive reviews are undertaken at the full proposal stage.

Those invited to submit a full proposal will be notified via email in August following the summer Administrative Council meeting. At that time, specific directions will be given regarding submission and review procedures for full proposals. Full proposals will be required to be much more in depth, longer and require much more detail than the pre-proposals.

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.

Technical reviewers score and comment on proposals based on the following weighted review criteria (Total 100 points):

Qualifications of Applicant and Major Participants	5
Participation of Farmers, Diverse Institutions, Multiple Disciplines	5
An Approach to Systems Research	15
Statement of Problem, Rationale and Significance	10
Objectives	20
Approaches and Methods	20
Outreach Plan	10
Evaluation and Impact	10
Budget	5

- Reviewing the Ability of Project Investigators and Major Participants to Achieve Stated Goals to determine if the investigators are qualified to conduct the proposed project. Are the roles of all investigators and participants adequately defined and appropriate?
- Reviewing to determine if farmers (minimum three farmer cooperators), multiple and diverse institutions, community organizations, and interdisciplinary approaches are meaningfully and functionally integrated into the research and education plan. Does the proposal have a realistic plan for assembling an appropriate team of participants and devising an effective team strategy for successful project outcomes?
- Determining if the project demonstrates a whole systems approach to sustainable agriculture, and incorporates the three pillars of sustainability: profit, people, places.
- Reviewing the Statement of Problem, Rationale and Significance to determine if project goals can be attained and how the project outcomes contribute to sustainable agriculture and the priorities of Southern SARE.
- Reviewing the Objectives to ensure that they can realistically be completed within the proposed time frame, and project goals are feasible to obtain by the methods stated.

- Reviewing the Approaches and Methods to determine if the project experiment is clear, well designed and thought out so that useful and applicable results can be obtained. Are the proposed methods and experimental design adequate to meet project objectives? Are they technically sound?
- Determining the effectiveness of the outreach plan. Project results should have specific applicability for farmers and be presented in a way that could be adopted or implemented. Is the outreach plan well thought out and a benefit to its intended audience? Are the methods for implementing the outreach plan the most effective way of reaching farmers and ranchers?
- Reviewing the assessment plan of Evaluation and Impact to determine if it's an integral part of the development of each objective and is evident in conducting the project. How will the benefits be measured? How do farmers benefit from the project? What is the environmental benefit of the project? What are the potential economic and social benefits of the project?
- Evaluating the project's budget to determine if the requested amount is reasonable and realistic, and is clear on what the funds will be spent on. Are the requested funds allowable? Are budget items itemized with clear descriptions on how they will be used in the project?

Each proposal is scored as described:

- 100-75 = High priority: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE's pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sustainable ag solution. Depending on funding levels, not all high priority proposals may be funded.
- 74-50 = Fundable: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met, but could be improved. While fundable, the proposal may not receive funding due to competition from other proposals.
- 49-25 = Revise and resubmit: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program and pertains to sustainable agriculture, but there are sections of the proposal that don't fulfill review criteria or not all requirements of Call for Proposals have been met. Author is encouraged to revise and resubmit for the next year's competition per the reviewer's comments to strengthen the proposal.
- 24-0 = Not fundable: Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program, does not pertain to sustainable agriculture, and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals. The applicant has applied to the wrong grant program.

At the winter AC meeting, the Project Review Committee, informed by the Technical Review Committee rankings 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 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), and the subaward contract issued. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org>) as soon as the project is selected as approved for funding in the online system. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. 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. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects>). Charts, tables, project products, and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of Research and Education 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

Education Grants

Education Grants are 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. Projects are awarded for a maximum of \$50,000 for two years.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online full proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System, <https://projects.sare.org>) for Education grants. Each year that Education 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, as well as via press releases. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <https://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The process begins by clicking on the Education Grant call at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, and how the proposal is reviewed.

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

- Education Grants strictly fund education and outreach activities related to sustainable agriculture whose outcomes are intended to benefit farmers/ranchers and the communities they serve.
- Per USDA-NIFA, proposals must not promote, support, or take part in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected characteristic.
- Projects must clearly articulate what is being taught, to whom, and how the project will accomplish these goals.
- Results must be realistic, acceptable to farmers, logical, and capable of leading to the actions and benefits described in the proposal.

Education Grants should focus on a topic area of sustainable agriculture relevance that meets SARE's program goals. In addition, the proposed project should comprise education/outreach efforts/activities that support the research/education foundation of the institution/organization, and must clearly articulate how those education/outreach efforts/activities will be implemented and evaluated.

Examples of Education Grant projects can include one or more of the following, but are not limited to:

- Experiential (Demonstrations, on-farm tours, field days, workshops, trainings, case studies);
- Integrative (Seminars, course curriculum);
- Reinforcement (Fact sheets, bulletins, books, manuals, videos, online technologies, guidebooks).

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

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.

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.

Priority should be given to projects that:

- Indicate how findings will be made readily usable by farmers/ranchers and other intended audiences;
- Focus on developing sustainable agriculture systems or moving existing systems toward sustainable agriculture.
- Articulate what is being taught, to whom, how the project will accomplish that goal, and how the project outcomes will be evaluated.

The review process involves the Project Review Committee of the Administrative Council (AC). 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 Project Review Committee scores and comments proposals using the following weighted review criteria (Total 100 points):

Qualifications of the Applicant	5
Statement of Need, Rationale, and Significance	10
Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture	15
Objectives	10
Approaches and Methods	25
Budget	10
Outreach Plan	10
Evaluation	15

- Reviewing the qualifications of the applicant. Is the applicant eligible and have the experience, skills, knowledge and resources to complete the project?
- Reviewing the Need, Rationale and Significance of the project based on skills and knowledge gaps that can be fulfilled through a “teachable” project whose success can be effectively measured through evaluation.
- Determining how the Project is Relevant to Sustainable Agriculture. How does the project and its expected results contribute to sustainable agriculture? Is the project and its expected results a new and creative innovation? Does the project contribute to the growth of sustainable agriculture by building on and/or adding to existing knowledge? Is it a band-aid to conventional agriculture or does it move the needle in more sustainable farming practices?
- Reviewing the Objectives to ensure that they can realistically be completed within the proposed time frame, and project goals are feasible to obtain by the methods stated.
- Reviewing the Approaches and Methods to determine if the proposed educational approach is clear, well designed and thought out so that it solves a problem or encourages farmer adoption of recommended practices or strategies.
- Evaluating the project’s Budget to determine if the requested amount is reasonable and realistic, and is clear on what the funds will be spent on. Are the requested funds allowable? Are budget items itemized with clear descriptions on how they will be used in the project?
- Reviewing the Outreach Plan for applicability for farmers/ranchers and their ability to adopt or implement project results.
- Reviewing the Evaluation to ensure methods demonstrate project process, outcome, and success of implementation or adoption of skills, knowledge, strategies or other educational resources.

Each proposal is scored as described:

- 100-75 = High priority: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE’s pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sustainable ag solution. Depending on funding levels, not all high priority proposals may be

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- 74-50 = Fundable: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met, but could be improved. While fundable, the proposal may not receive funding due to competition from other proposals.
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- 24-0 = Not fundable: Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program, does not pertain to sustainable agriculture, and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals. The applicant has applied to the wrong grant program.

The selected projects for funding are presented to and voted on by the full Administrative Council during the winter Administrative Council meeting, which is held in February.

By late February, applicants are contacted by e-mail regarding the status of the proposal, and review comments on the proposal are made available. If awarded an Education Grant, the institution/organization will be asked to sign a contract prior to receiving any funds. Once the contract is signed, the Principal Investigator (PI) agrees to conduct the activities outlined in the proposal. Any changes in budget or activities must receive prior approval from Southern SARE. The award funding will be paid through reimbursement of allowable project expenses.

The time from submission of a proposal to announcement of awards is from May 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), and the sub-award contract is issued. 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.

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of Education 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

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 \$22,000 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, <https://projects.sare.org>) 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.

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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. Farmer participation is encouraged, but not required.

The process begins by clicking on the Graduate Student Grant call at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, and how the proposal is reviewed.

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

- Master's and PhD students enrolled full-time at accredited institutions in the Southern region at the time of proposal submission.
- A graduate student may receive only one Graduate Student Grant during a Master's program, and only one Graduate Student Grant during a PhD program. Graduate Students who received a SARE grant under their Master's program may apply for a Graduate Student Grant under a PhD program.
- Per USDA-NIFA, proposals must not promote, support, or take part in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected characteristic.
- Graduate Student Grant projects must address sustainable agriculture issues of current and potential importance to the Southern region.

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

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.

Technical reviewers score and comment on proposals for technical merit and relevancy of the project to sustainable agriculture based on the following review criteria:

Qualifications of the Graduate Student	5
Statement of the Problem	15
Objectives	10
Approaches and Methods	25
Project Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture	20
Timetable	10
Literature Cited	5
Budget	10

- Reviewing the Qualifications of the Graduate Student to determine that the student (with the major professor's support) has the experience and qualifications to conduct the proposed work and can complete the work within proposed timetable.
- Reviewing the Statement of the Problem to ensure that the applicant clearly describes the problem and why the problem needs to be addressed.
- Reviewing the Objectives to ensure that they can realistically be completed within the proposed time frame, and project goals are feasible to obtain by the methods stated.
- Reviewing the Approaches and Methods to determine if the project experiment is clear, well designed and thought out so that useful and applicable results can be obtained.
- Determining how the Project is Relevant to Sustainable Agriculture. How does the project and its expected results contribute to sustainable agriculture? Is the project and its expected results a new and creative innovation? Does the project contribute to the growth of sustainable agriculture by building on and/or adding to existing knowledge? Is it a band-aid to conventional agriculture or does it move the needle in more sustainable farming practices?
- Reviewing the Timetable to determine if the project can be effectively completed in the time provided based on the research proposed. Does the graduate student demonstrate the ability to complete the proposed project?
- Reviewing the Literature Cited to determine how well the applicant prepared their proposal based on published literature on the research topic.
- Evaluating the project's Budget to determine if the requested amount is reasonable and realistic, and is clear on what the funds will be spent on. Are the requested funds allowable? Are budget items itemized with clear descriptions on how they will be used in the project?

Once the technical reviewers complete their reviews, the Project Review Committee of Southern SARE's Administrative Council (Southern SARE's governing body) reads the high scoring proposals and meets virtually to discuss fundable proposals. This process roughly takes two weeks. The Project Review Committee convenes at the summer Administrative Council (AC) meeting (late July/early August) to finalize selections. Those are then recommended to the full Administrative Council and voted on for funding.

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

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), and the sub-award contract is issued. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org>) as soon as the project is selected as approved for funding in the online system. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects>). Charts, tables, project products, 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

Professional Development Program Grants

Professional Development Program Grant (PDP) projects train agricultural information providers in sustainable agriculture techniques and concepts. Grant projects can be funded up to \$100,000.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online pre-proposal/full proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System, <https://projects.sare.org>) for PDP grants. Each year Professional Development Program 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, NGO representatives, and current and former project investigators. The release of each CFP is also announced in our newsletter, and on social media sites as well as via press releases. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <https://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The process begins by clicking on the Professional Development Program Grant Call for Pre-proposals at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, and how the proposal is reviewed.

To be considered for funding, a project must meet the following criteria:

- 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.

Pre-Proposal Call

The pre-proposal process incorporates two entities within SSARE: the Administrative Council Executive Committee (EC) and the PDP Committee of the AC.

The Pre-Proposal call provides 6 criteria to include:

1. Collaboration of diverse groups
2. Project Summary
3. Project Objectives
4. Project Activities
5. Project Evaluation
6. Project Timeline
7. Estimated budget.

The CFP details the pre-proposal format and outline and provides directions for submission, as well as program goals and review criteria.

Review Process

Professional Development Program Grants reviews are a two-stage pre-proposal and full proposal process. Roughly 30 percent of pre-proposals are invited to submit a full proposal.

The Southern SARE PDP Committee of the AC is involved in screening the pre-proposasl at the close of the pre-proposal grant deadline. All pre-proposals are reviewed by three PDP Committee members who vote on whether or not the pre-proposal should move forward to the full proposal stage.

The pre-proposals are scored on a scale of One to Four (1-4) with the scores averaged for a final score. Each pre-proposal is scored as described in the call:

- Four (4): High Priority. Invite for Full Proposal
- Three (3): May Be Invited for Full Proposal but not as strong as High Priority
- Two (2): Revise and Resubmit
- One (1) Do Not Invite for a Full Proposal

Based on the final score and comments, the Executive Council makes a final recommendation to invite pre-proposal applicants to submit a full proposal.

The full proposal process incorporates three entities within SSARE: the Administrative Council (AC), the PDP Committee of the AC, and a technical Review Team.

The full proposals are reviewed by the outside review team made up individuals 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 reviews the full proposals based on the following criteria:

1. Farmer/Producer Participation
2. Collaboration of Diverse Groups
3. Behavior-based Objectives
4. Project Activities- Makes a case for relevancy to sustainable agriculture in the Southern SARE service region.
5. A coherent evaluation plan
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

Proposals are rated High Priority(4), Fundable (3), Revisions Required (2) or Non-Fundable (1). 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 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), and the subaward contract is issued. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org>) as soon as the project is selected as approved for funding in the online system. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. 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. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects>). Charts, tables, project products, and other supporting data may be submitted electronically.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Management of Professional Development Program 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

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 \$20,000 limit for funding proposals submitted by an individual producer and a \$25,000 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, <https://projects.sare.org>) 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

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 as well as via press releases. Interested individuals are encouraged to join our e-mailing list for distribution of calls, as well as other Southern SARE news, at our website: <https://www.southern.sare.org>.

Contents of Call

The Producer Grant program is a grant program for farmers and ranchers. Producer Grants give farmers and ranchers the opportunity to conduct their own research projects to develop sustainable production and marketing practices.

The goal of the Producer Grant Program is simple: Empower farmers to test, on a small scale, a practice or technology to a production or marketing problem (either as an individual or as a group), evaluate whether the results sustainably address the problem, and share how those efforts can benefit other farmers. Successful projects can then be applied by the farmer applicant or by others on a larger scale.

The process begins by clicking on the Producer Grant call at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, sample timetable and budget illustrations and how the proposal is reviewed.

To be considered for funding, a project must meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must be a full time or part-time commercial farm business owner, or be part of a farmer organization, such as a cooperative. Farmer organizations must be comprised primarily of farmers/ranchers and must have majority farmer representation on their governing boards.
- Applicants must be located in the Southern SARE region.
- Per USDA-NIFA, proposals must not promote, support, or take part in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected characteristic.
- There is no restriction on farm size or the length of time an individual has been farming. Farmers must have at least \$1,000 in documented annual income from the operation.
- Farm workers are eligible to apply as long as the production activity meets the minimum annual value of \$1,000.
- Applicants may only submit one Producer Grant proposal per farm per year.

Review Process

Upon closure of the grant deadline, proposals receive a technical review by the Producer Grant Committee of Southern SARE's Administrative Council, the program's governing body.

The Producer Grant Committee evaluates the proposal using the following criteria:

Qualifications of the Applicant	5
Statement of the Problem	15

Statement of the Proposed Solution	15
Approaches and Methods	25
Timetable	10
Outreach Plan	20
Budget	10

- Reviewing the qualifications of the applicant. Is the applicant eligible and have the experience, skills, knowledge and resources to complete the project? Does the applicant describe the farm operation and the role on the farm?
- Reviewing the Statement of the Problem to ensure that the applicant clearly describes the problem and why the problem needs to be addressed.
- Reviewing the Statement of the Proposed Solution for relevance to sustainable agriculture and how it's an improvement over the current problem. Does the solution contribute to the growth of sustainable agriculture by building on and/or adding to existing knowledge? Is it a band-aid to conventional agriculture or does it move the needle in more sustainable farming practices?
- Reviewing the Approaches and Methods to determine if the project experiment is clear, well designed and thought out so that useful and applicable results can be obtained.
- Reviewing the timetable to determine if the project can be effectively completed in the time provided based on the research proposed.
- Determining the effectiveness of the outreach plan. Is the outreach plan well thought out and a benefit to its intended audience? Are the methods for implementing the outreach plan the most effective way of reaching farmers and ranchers?
- Evaluating the project's budget to determine if the requested amount is reasonable and realistic, and is clear on what the funds will be spent on. Are the requested funds allowable? Are budget items itemized with clear descriptions on how they will be used in the project?

Each proposal is scored as described:

- 100-75 = High priority: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE's pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sustainable ag solution. Depending on funding levels, not all high priority proposals may be funded.
- 74-50 = Fundable: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met, but could be improved. While fundable, the proposal may not receive funding due to competition from other proposals.
- 49-25 = Revise and resubmit: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program and pertains to sustainable agriculture, but there are sections of the proposal that don't fulfill review criteria or not all requirements of Call for Proposals have been met. Author is encouraged to revise and resubmit for the next year's competition per the reviewer's comments to strengthen the proposal.
- 24-0 = Not fundable: Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program, does not pertain to sustainable agriculture, and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals. The applicant has applied to the wrong grant program.

Once the Producer Grant Committee completes its technical review, it meets by conference call to discuss fundable proposals, and then again at the February Administrative Council (AC) meeting to select fundable projects. Those are then presented to the full Administrative Council for funding.

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 it is reviewed and for-

warded to the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs Office. The department reviews the proposal and then sends an email to the producer with a copy of the MOU, an audit certification form, and the link to University of Georgia's vendor registration system. The MOU is the producer's grant subaward contract. It describes the rights and responsibilities as a SARE Producer Grant recipient. The MOU must be signed and returned to UGA Sponsored Projects.

In addition, an audit certification form must be filled out and returned to UGA Sponsored Projects, and the producer must register in UGA's vendor registration system. The vendor registration is required in order to process invoices for reimbursement.

Once the MOU, audit certification and vendor registration are filled out and returned, and the producer is registered in the vendor registration system, there is one more final review before the MOU is signed by the Assistant Director of Sponsored Projects at UGA. The MOU won't be executed until it has been entered into the procurement (PO) system. A signed, fully executed copy of the MOU is then sent to the producer for record keeping.

Once the award process is finalized, the 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 (<https://projects.sare.org>) as soon as the project is selected as approved for funding in the online system. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. 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. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects>). Charts, tables, project products, 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

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 \$30,000 for two years of activities.

Proposal Process

Southern SARE uses an online proposal submission system (SARE Grant Management System, <https://projects.sare.org>) for On-Farm Research Grants. Each year 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 as well as via press releases. 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; and they are required to work with at least one producer on their project.

The process begins by clicking on the On-Farm Research Grant call at the Southern SARE website: <https://www.southern.sare.org/grants>. The CFP provides a description of the USDA SARE program including the grant program overview, definition of sustainable agriculture found in the SARE authorizing legislation, instructions for online submission, allowable project expenses, and how the proposal is reviewed.

To be considered for funding, a project must meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must work directly with farmers/ranchers in their profession.
- Applicants must be located in the Southern region.
- Applicants must identify at least one farmer/rancher cooperator in the proposed projects, and the work must be conducted on farm (either on the cooperator's farm, or on a research farm with the cooperator's involvement).
- The farmer/rancher cooperator's primary occupation must be farming or ranching or they are a part-time producer. They run their own farm alone or with family or partners and have at least \$1,000 of documented annual income from their operation, as defined by USDA.
- Applicants may only submit one On-Farm Research Grant proposal per year.

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. Technical reviewers are assigned proposals based on their area(s) of expertise.

Technical reviewers score and comment on proposals based on the following review criteria:

Statement of the Problem	15
Statement of the Proposed Solution and Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture	15
Approaches and Methods	25
Timetable	10
Literature Cited	5

Outreach Plan	20
Budget	10

- Reviewing the Statement of the Problem to ensure that the applicant clearly describes the problem and why the problem needs to be addressed.
- Reviewing the Statement of the Proposed Solution and Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture to demonstrate an improvement over the current problem and how the project and its expected results contribute to sustainable agriculture. Is the solution a new and creative innovation? Does the solution contribute to the growth of sustainable agriculture by building on and/or adding to existing knowledge? Is it a band-aid to conventional agriculture or does it move the needle in more sustainable farming practices?
- Reviewing the Approaches and Methods to determine if the project experiment is clear, well designed and thought out so that useful and applicable results can be obtained. Approaches and Methods align with the budget request.
- Reviewing the timetable to determine if the project can be effectively completed in the time provided based on the research proposed.
- Reviewing the literature cited to demonstrate how well the applicant prepared their proposal based on published literature of the research topic.
- Determining the effectiveness of the outreach plan. Is the outreach plan well thought out and a benefit to its intended audience? Are the methods for implementing the outreach plan the most effective way of reaching farmers and ranchers?
- Evaluating the project's budget to determine if the requested amount is reasonable and realistic, and is clear on what the funds will be spent on. Are the requested funds allowable? Are budget items itemized with clear justifications on how they will be used in the project?

Each proposal is scored as described:

- 100-75 = High priority: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, addresses SARE's pillars of sustainability, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met and addresses a topic of need with a unique, innovative, sustainable ag solution. Depending on funding levels, not all high priority proposals may be funded.
- 74-50 = Fundable: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program, pertains to sustainable agriculture, and fulfills the review criteria. Proposal requirements are met, but could be improved. While fundable, the proposal may not receive funding due to competition from other proposals.
- 49-25 = Revise and resubmit: Proposal meets the mission/vision of the SARE program and pertains to sustainable agriculture, but there are sections of the proposal that don't fulfill review criteria or not all requirements of Call for Proposals have been met. Author is encouraged to revise and resubmit for the next year's competition per the reviewer's comments to strengthen the proposal.
- 24-0 = Not fundable: Proposal does not fit into the grant program applied for; proposal does not meet the mission/vision of the SARE program, does not pertain to sustainable agriculture, and/or does not meet the requirements of the Call for Proposals. The applicant has applied to the wrong grant program.

Once the technical reviewers complete their reviews, the Producer Grant Committee of Southern SARE's Administrative Council (Southern SARE's governing body) reads the high scoring proposals and meets virtually to discuss fundable proposals. This process roughly takes two weeks. The Producer Grant Committee convenes at the February Administrative Council (AC) meeting to finalize selections. Those are then recommended to the full Administrative Council and voted on for funding.

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.

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), and a subaward contract is issued. 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 (<https://projects.sare.org>) as soon as the project is selected as approved for funding in the online system. The project investigator receives an e-mail from the SARE Grant Management System granting access to the online project. It is through the SARE Grant Management System where project investigators will report on the progress of their project.

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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 (<https://projects.sare.org/search-projects>). Charts, tables, project products, 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.

Project evaluation and impacts are accomplished through the reporting requirements of the online system and made publicly available when the project is completed.

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.

2026-2027 Southern SARE Grants Schedule

Research and Education Grants

2026

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

2027

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Graduate Student Grants

2026

February Call for proposal released

May Proposals due

August Administrative Council announces awards

Professional Development Program Grants

2026

July Call for pre-proposals released

August Pre-proposals due

October Full proposals requested

November Full proposals due

2027

February Full proposals awarded

Producer Grants

2026

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2027

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

On-Farm Research Grants

2026

September Call for proposals released

November Proposals due

2027

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Education Grants

2026

May Call for proposals released

August Proposals due

2027

February Administrative Council announces grant awards