



# Professional Development Grant Program

## 2025 Call for Preproposals

**Preproposal Due Date: August 6, 2024 5:00 p.m. ET**  
**Proposals are submitted online at [projects.sare.org](https://projects.sare.org)**

### Questions?

Visit our website at: [northeastsare.org/PDP](https://northeastsare.org/PDP). For questions about this Call for Preproposals, contact Katie Campbell-Nelson and Nevin Dawson at: [northeast-pdp@sare.org](mailto:northeast-pdp@sare.org) or 413-834-1090.

### At a Glance

The Professional Development Grant program funds projects that develop the knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes of agricultural and other service providers about sustainable agriculture practices to teach, advise or assist farmers. A service provider is a professional who assists farmers as part of their work. Projects that develop the ability of other service providers (for example, real estate agents, bankers, and attorneys) to work with farmers are also eligible. These service providers then use what they've learned through participation in project activities in their work with farmers. Funding requests typically fall between \$30,000 and \$150,000 – though there is no cap.

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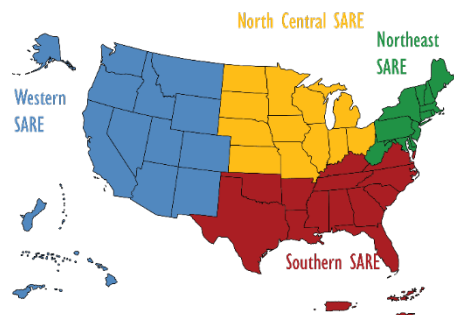
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### Recent Changes

We have added a new Farming and Service Provider Communities and Needs question. The format of the Historically Underserved Service Provider and Farming Communities question has changed, and this question is now required. Please expect our applications to continue to evolve and change.

### About Northeast SARE

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program offers competitive grants to farmers, educators, service providers, researchers, nonprofit staff, graduate students and others to address key issues affecting the sustainability of agriculture throughout our region. Northeast SARE is one of four regional SARE programs funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).



The program—including funding decisions—is driven by the Northeast SARE **outcome statement**: *Northeast agricultural communities honor the holistic connection among land, water, air, and all living beings. Agriculture in the Northeast is accessible, sustainable, and just, addressing historic and current inequities so all farmers and farm employees can steward resources to ensure sustainability, resilience, economic viability, and a high quality of life.*

The Northeast region includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, West Virginia, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.

**Northeast SARE**  
**University of Vermont**  
**140 Kennedy Drive, Suite 202**  
**South Burlington, VT 05403**  
**802/651-8335**  
[northeastsare@uvm.edu](mailto:northeastsare@uvm.edu)  
[www.northeastsare.org](https://www.northeastsare.org)

Northeast SARE, one of four regional SARE programs, is hosted by the University of Vermont and is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Northeast SARE programs are offered to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.



United States Department of Agriculture  
**National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

# About Northeast SARE Professional Development Grants

## Grant Timeline

Question and answer sessions (recordings will be available)	1-2 p.m. ET, June 18, June 26, July 10, and July 16, 2024
Suggested due date for <a href="#">accommodations requests</a> .	July 16, 2024
Preproposal submission due date	5 p.m. ET, August 6, 2024
Applicants notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal	Early September, 2024
Feedback sent to invited applicants	Early September 2024
Feedback sent to not invited applicants	Early October 2024
Full proposal submission deadline	5 p.m. ET, October 29, 2024
Tier 1 Review* decisions announced to applicants	Mid December 2024
Final award decisions announced to applicants	Late February 2025
Contract start date for awarded projects**	March 1, 2025
New grantee orientation meetings with Northeast SARE staff	March 2025
Contract finalized by SARE and awardee	April 2025

\*There are two tiers of full proposal review. Applicants will be notified whether their proposal moves on from Tier 1 to Tier 2 review.

\*\*All contracts will have a start date of March 1, 2025. However, it often takes about a month for Northeast SARE and the awardee organization to finalize the contract.

## Overview

The Professional Development Grant program funds projects that develop the knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes of agricultural and other service providers about sustainable agriculture practices to teach, advise or assist farmers. A service provider is a professional who assists farmers as part of their work. Projects that develop the ability of other service providers (for example, real estate agents, bankers, and attorneys) to work with farmers are also eligible. These service providers then use what they've learned through participation in project activities in their work with farmers.

Professional Development Grant projects use an outcome funding approach with a “performance target” to describe the changes in practices, behaviors or conditions among service providers expected to result from the proposed project. To learn more about outcome funding and the use of performance targets, visit our “Guide to Outcome Funding” at: [northeastsare.org/outcomefunding](https://northeastsare.org/outcomefunding).

A wide variety of topics can be funded by Northeast SARE, including marketing and business, crop production, raising livestock, aquaculture, social sustainability, urban farming and Indigenous food production and much more. Other eligible topics include climate-smart agriculture practices intended to improve ecological, social, and economic resilience to climate change; increase carbon sequestration; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-smart practices include reduced and no-till, cover crops, prescribed grazing, ruminant feed management, manure management, fertilizer management, and on-farm energy efficiency. In addition, projects may address traditional ecological knowledge. To see examples of funded Professional Development projects, visit the national SARE database at: [projects.sare.org/search-projects/](https://projects.sare.org/search-projects/). Select the Northeast Region and set project type to “Professional Development Program”.

## About Preproposals

Preproposals are required for Professional Development Grants, as well as for Northeast SARE’s Research for Novel Approaches and Research and Education Grant programs.

The preproposal is a preliminary concept document. They are intentionally designed to be brief and invited applicants will have the opportunity to expand upon their answers in the full proposal. In general, about one-third to one-half of preproposals are invited to submit full proposals and about one-third of full proposals are approved for funding by the Northeast SARE Administrative Council.

## Eligible Applicants

Professional Development Grants are open to anyone who works with service providers and farmers<sup>1</sup>, including personnel at nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, Cooperative Extension, municipalities, tribal governments, state departments of agriculture, federal agencies, research farms and experiment stations, for-profit business entities (such as private consultants, farmers and veterinary practices), etc.

Northeast SARE encourages projects submitted from or in collaboration with women, the LGBTQIA+ community, and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). Additionally, we encourage projects submitted from or in collaboration with Minority Serving Institutions (including 1890 land grant institutions and other historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and tribal colleges and universities) and other organizations in the Northeast that work with historically underserved communities.

Your organization must have the legal structure and financial capacity to receive and implement a Northeast SARE contract, including expending funds needed for the project prior to receiving reimbursements from Northeast SARE; advance payments are not possible.

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<sup>1</sup> View Northeast SARE’s Definition of a Farm at <https://northeast.sare.org/farmdefinition>.

Projects must take place within the Northeast region, described on [page 1](#). Applicants and host organizations may be located outside of the Northeast region if the project activities and the farmers served are located within the Northeast region.

An individual project leader may not submit more than two preproposals per grant program per year. If you submit multiple preproposals and more than one is invited to submit a full proposal, you may submit only one full proposal across the Research for Novel Approaches, Research and Education, and Professional Development Program grants.

Current SARE grant recipients who are behind in their reporting will not be invited to apply for full proposals. Northeast SARE will not fund proposals that appear to duplicate work that has been approved for funding by another grant program (within or external to SARE).

### **Accommodation Request**

Northeast SARE is committed to accessibility for all eligible applicants. We encourage you to reach out to us regarding any challenges you experience as you plan and submit your proposal. To do so or to specifically request a disability-related accommodation, please contact Northeast SARE as soon as possible at 802-656-7650 or [northeastsare@uvm.edu](mailto:northeastsare@uvm.edu). We ask that any accommodation request is made three weeks prior to the proposal deadline. Northeast SARE will do our best to address requests made with less notice but may not have the resources to do so.

### **Funding Available and Project Duration**

Approximately \$1.5 million has been allocated to fund projects for this cycle of Professional Development Grants. Funding requests typically fall between \$30,000 and \$150,000 – though there is no cap. Reviewers may increase scrutiny of proposals with budgets over \$150,000. Northeast SARE encourages project leaders to include the real costs to implement a project.

Project length can be 1, 2, or 3 years. One and two-year projects must be completed by November 30, 2027. Three-year projects must be completed by November 30, 2028.

We estimate that 8 to 12 awards will be made in 2025.

### **Public Domain**

Proposals and reviews are kept confidential, shared only among Northeast SARE staff, Administrative Council members, and grant program reviewers. However, Northeast SARE, as a USDA NIFA program, is committed to public accessibility of results of funded projects; therefore, funded proposal text and funded project reports will be in the public domain.

## Eligible Expenses

Funds may be used for the following expenses if they are specific to the project:

- Labor, including wages, stipends, salary, and fringe benefits for individuals working on the project
- Materials and supplies, including research and education supplies, outreach materials, and project-specific software
- Travel and per diem expenses necessary for the project
- Expenses to produce publications, like fact sheets, guides, flyers, etc., as well as copies, postage and other project communication expenses
- Compensation for services like farmer stipends, presenter fees and other services rendered, lab fees, as well as research incentives and compensation for interviewees, and subscriptions for project-specific services, e.g., for video conferencing or online data storage
- Meeting and training expenses, including facility rental and participant support costs
- Equipment purchases and fabrication necessary for, and specific to, the project; Equipment with general uses, like a computer or tractor, are not typically eligible — please see restrictions, described in the budget documents.
- Rental or operating charges for farm equipment, land, or greenhouse space
- Subawards for portions of the project conducted by other organizations
- Indirect costs up to 10 percent of total direct costs. Please note that for-profit businesses generally cannot include indirect costs in the budget

## Ineligible Expenses

Funds may not be used for:

- Capital costs including the purchase of land, buildings, livestock, general use machinery, orchards, greenhouses, and major improvements, fixtures or expansion expenses
- Normal operating expenses that would be incurred in the absence of the project such as utilities, general maintenance, or general supplies
- Promotional items, including clothing (hats, tee shirts, aprons, etc.), swag, giveaways, subsidies, raffles, and branded promotional material
- Travel to conferences and other meetings unless essential to the project's success, such as presentation of project results or to explicitly bring information back to project participants
- International travel unless integral to the project's success and described in the proposal (Note: There are certain restrictions on costs and carriers)
- Cell phone charges, even if cell phones are used during the course of the project
- Food expenses unless necessary for the continuity of a training event or project meeting; and
- Expenses outside of the grant period. SARE cannot pay for expenses incurred before the award start date or after the end date on the grant contract

Additionally, it is expected that costs for copiers, cameras, computers, video equipment, and other items that have uses beyond the project be provided by the applicant. To be considered as a direct cost, the item must be clearly essential and specific to the proposed project.

# Preproposal Questions and Instructions

The preproposal is divided into sections that contain multiple questions. Instructions for questions and the associated review criteria are presented below.

Please note:

- ✗ No attachments, including no budget, are allowed or required in the preproposal application
- ✗ Do not include links to external sites in your submission; they will not be considered by reviewers.
- ✗ No authorized signatures are required for preproposals

## Preproposal overview

Note: This section has no review criteria and is not scored by reviewers.

**Title:** The project title lets reviewers know what your project is about. Use words that are useful for finding your project in a website search. The maximum length is 150 characters which is about 35 words or less. Please use title case.

**Project Description:** Description to be used for search results if funded. Limit of 300 characters.

**Applicant:** Your name is automatically entered as the Applicant. Only the applicant can submit the preproposal in the online system, but the Project Leader will be able to edit the preproposal.

**Project Leader:** Your name is automatically entered as the Project Leader (PL). If it is necessary for the applicant and project leader to be different you can change it. The PL must have a projects.sare.org account to be added to the preproposal. They must complete their full profile information, including demographic information, before the preproposal can be submitted. The Project Leader is responsible for oversight of the project and must be housed at the same organization as the project's authorized official (the person authorized to sign for the organization hosting the grant, if funded).

## General Information

Note: This section has no review criteria and is not scored by reviewers.

**Primary State:** Select the state where most work will be done, i.e., the primary location of the grant activities. Usually this is the home state of the project leader.

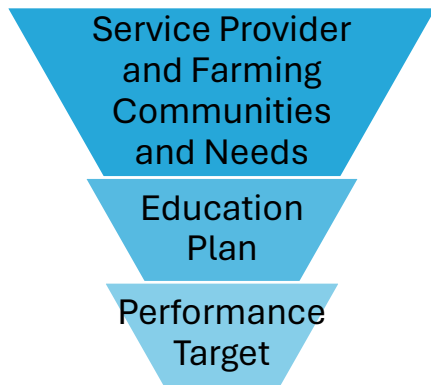
**Optional: Geographic Scope:** If this project will take place in more than just the primary state, list all the states where this project will take place.

**Project Length:** Enter the anticipated project length, in years (1, 2, or 3).

**Was a full proposal of this work submitted previously to Northeast SARE?** Answer yes or no.

**Optional: Additional Context (150-word limit):** If relevant, describe for reviewers any challenges or opportunities that you and others face in accessing resources for the type of work you intend to do.

## Plan of Work



When designing your preproposal and responding to the questions below, the Service Provider and Farming Communities and Needs section should include a description of the service provider and farmer communities the project seeks to serve, the Education Plan should describe how many service providers in that community will be reached by project activities, and the Performance Target describes the number of service providers reached by the education plan who actually make a verifiable change (often some subset of those who participate in the education plan).

It should be clear to reviewers how the information in the

Service Provider and Farming Communities and Needs section and the Education Plan flow and lead to the Performance Target.

## Performance Target (200-word limit)

### Service Provider<sup>2</sup> Performance Target:

The performance target defines the specific and verifiable change to service providers' work that will happen because of their participation in the project (you may wish to finalize this section of the proposal last). The performance target represents your best, informed estimate of what will happen if all goes according to plan. The performance target should be verifiable by the planned project end date.

Write your performance target in one to two sentences, using the following three required components. For example, "X number of service providers will take X action (or implement X new skills) to help X farmers (optional: who represent X units of production)." You can find specific examples by clicking on any funded projects from [this link](#) and scrolling down to see their "Performance Target".

1. The number (not a percentage) of service providers who will change their work with farmers.
2. The changes that service provider participants will implement to use their new knowledge, awareness,

### **Review Criteria:**

*The performance target describes:*

- 1) the number of service providers who will change their work with farmers;*
- 2) the changes they will implement to use their new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes to teach, advise, and/or assist farmers;*
- 3) the total number and type of farmers they will engage; and, optionally,*

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<sup>2</sup> An agricultural service provider is a professional who assists farmers as part of their work. Projects that develop the ability of other service providers (for example, real estate agents, bankers, and attorneys) to work with farmers are also eligible. These service providers then use what they've learned through participation in project activities in their work with farmers.



skills, and attitudes to teach, advise and/or assist farmers.

3. The total number and type of farmers who the service providers will teach and/or assist using their new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes.
  4. (Optional) The extent of farmer adoption, expressed in measurable units.
- ✓ You may have multiple service provider performance targets, especially if there are different types of outcomes.

#### (Optional) Farmer Performance Target

Enter a farmer performance target if it is practical to verify behavior change at the farmer level as a result of their direct participation in project activities or as a result of their contact with the project's service provider participants. If this component is included, it must be measured within the timeline of the project.

This optional performance target is written in one to two sentences, using the following two required components. For example, "X practice will be adopted by X number of farmers on X number of acres."

1. The specific practice or behavior farmers will adopt by the end of the project as a result of working with the service provider participants.
  2. The number and type of farmers who will adopt the new practice, change or behavior.
  3. (Optional) The extent of farmer adoption, expressed in measurable units.
- ✗ Do not include educational activities conducted by the project team in performance targets. These should be described in the Education Plan section.
  - ✗ Performance targets must not include percentages of unknown numbers.

4) the extent of farmer adoption, expressed in measurable units.

*If a farmer performance target is included, the number of farmers adopting new practices or behaviors is measurable within the project timeframe. The performance target/s is/are specific, verifiable, and ambitious yet realistic.*

### Service Provider and Farming Communities and Needs (400-word limit)

Describe the service providers the project team seeks to engage and their needs. Address the following:

- ✓ Who are the service providers served by the project?
- ✓ Who are the farmer clients who will benefit?

#### **Review Criteria:**

*The service provider and farming communities and their needs are described. It is*



- ✓ What are the needs of these communities, and what specific need will this project address?
- ✓ How do you know this is a need?
- ✓ How will the proposed project contribute to Northeast SARE's [outcome statement](#) and benefit service providers in a way that improves their ability to serve farmers?

*clear and compelling how the project team knows what they know. The project proposes a feasible and realistic benefit that will contribute to Northeast SARE's outcome statement.*

Please note: Those invited to submit full proposals will be expected to demonstrate an authentic connection with the service provider and farming communities this project will serve.

## Historically Underserved Service Provider and Farming Communities

Please check all relevant boxes below to indicate if the people served by the project are historically underserved as defined by the USDA. According to [Northeast SARE's values](#) we aim to elevate direct engagement with Black, Indigenous, and all Service Providers and Farmers of Color (BIPOC)\*:

- BIPOC (USDA socially disadvantaged)\*
- Women
- Beginning farmer or rancher
- Veteran
- Limited resource farmer or rancher
- None of the above

### Review Criteria:

*In order to receive the highest possible score, the project serves at least one underserved farming community. However, this is not a requirement to submit a proposal.*

\*Northeast SARE understands BIPOC to align with the USDA definition of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice, including but not limited to farmers who are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander.

## Key Individuals (200-word limit)

Briefly describe everyone who has an essential role in the project:

- ✓ Start with the Applicant and Project Leader, then list other key individuals.
- ✓ Descriptions include name, position or role, business or organization, skills, relevant experience (may include lived experience), and primary responsibilities on the project.
- ✓ If some key individuals have not yet been identified, provide a description of the role/qualifications of the persons who would be recruited to fill those positions.

### Review criteria:

*The key individuals have the skills and experience to conduct the project. Their roles are well defined.*

## Education Plan (400-word limit)

Describe the activities that will provide service provider education to address the needs of the service provider and farming communities described above. The description should include:

### Engagement:

- ✓ A realistic number of service providers expected to participate.
- ✓ How they will be recruited and retained.

### Learning:

- ✓ The type of project interactions and educational experiences in which they will participate.
- ✓ The specific knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes they will acquire from project activities that will lead to the performance target.
- ✓ The support you will provide to them in their efforts to help farmers address the problem or opportunity (e.g., coaching, software, record keeping tools, fact sheets, videos or other instructive materials and support).

### Evaluation:

- ✓ The process that will be used to verify the extent to which the performance target is achieved.

### Review criteria:

*The recruitment and education plan is appropriate and effective for the service providers who will benefit from the project. The knowledge, awareness, skills and attitudes to be gained by service providers are likely to lead to the performance target. Participants will receive the support they need to help farmers. It is clear how verification will be conducted.*

# Preparing and Submitting Your Preproposal

Submit your proposal online at: <https://projects.sare.org/>.

## Writing Suggestions

We recommend preparing your proposal well in advance of the deadline. A Word document with the proposal questions is available to prepare your proposal offline, ensuring it is accurate and complies with word limits before pasting into the Grant Management System at:

[northeastsare.org/ProfessionalDevelopmentPrep](https://northeastsare.org/ProfessionalDevelopmentPrep)

Keep your writing clear and simple. You can assume grant reviewers have solid sustainable agriculture knowledge, but not necessarily deep expertise in your subject area.

Do not include links to external sites as they will not be considered by reviewers.

## Online Submission System

Proposals must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. ET on August 6, 2024 to our Grant Management System online at: <https://projects.sare.org/>.

At least 1-2 weeks before the due date, go to [projects.sare.org](https://projects.sare.org) to set up a user account, log in, and begin to enter your proposal in the grant management system to ensure that you are able to use the system. If you have any questions about this process, or would like to request a PDF of detailed instructions on using the grant management system, contact Katie Campbell-Nelson and Nevin Dawson at: [northeast-pdp@sare.org](mailto:northeast-pdp@sare.org) or 413-834-1090.

## Entering your Preproposal

We recommend you allow for a full day to enter and submit your proposal online. Incomplete proposals will not be reviewed.

Complete the "Title" "Project Description" "Applicant" and "Project Leader" questions first. On the left, click on each section heading to answer questions. Press "Save" after every entry to store your text.

When you complete the required questions in each section, a "✓" appears. If an " \* " is there, it means a required question has not been completed. Your application cannot be submitted until all required questions have a response.

You may preview a draft of your proposal anytime by clicking "View Draft." You can share the draft with others with "Link to Share" at the top of the draft page.

You may log out and return later to work on your proposal. Log in and select "Manage Grant Proposals." Your draft proposal will be listed under "Unsubmitted Proposals."

When you have answered the last question and are ready to submit, click the "Proposal Overview" button to return to the proposal overview page. Then, click "Submit Proposal" at the bottom of the page. The button will not appear until you have answered all required questions. Click once to see the confirmation page, then make sure to select "Submit proposal" again. You will receive an email confirmation of your submission.

Prior to the deadline, you may unsubmit to revise your proposal. If you do so, remember to submit it again when you are done! Each time you submit or unsubmit the proposal, you will receive an email confirmation.

### **Next Steps**

Preproposals are evaluated by independent review teams made up of farmers, researchers, nonprofit staff and agricultural service providers. Reviewers assign a single score on a scale of 1 to 5 to the preproposal based on the extent to which it addressed review criteria listed above. Reviewers consider a preproposal's score, its contribution to Northeast SARE's [outcome statement](#), and fit with the grant program's goals and audience and determine which preproposal applicants to invite to submit a full proposal. Both invited and not-invited applicants will receive feedback from reviewers.

Applicants will be notified if they are invited to submit a full proposal by early September 2024. Feedback that may be used to strengthen a full proposal will be provided to applicants with invited preproposals in September 2024. Full proposal instructions will be sent directly to invited applicants; full proposals are due by 5 p.m. ET on October 29, 2024.

Full proposals require more detailed information for all sections of the preproposal. The full proposal also requires: a project advisory committee, literature review and citation list, letters of commitment from key individuals, a project budget with justification, and a grant commitment form with authorized official signature. While Call for Proposals may change annually, you may find it helpful to view the 2023 Call for Full Proposals available at [northeastsare.org/PDP](https://northeastsare.org/PDP).