

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program

Request for Applications (RFA) to serve as a Regional Host Institution or the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office for Fiscal Years (FYs) 2018 - 2022

APPLICATION DEADLINE: September 28, 2017

ELIGIBILITY: See Part III, A of RFA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.215**.

DATES: Applications must be received by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on September 28, 2017**. Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding (see Part IV, C of this RFA). Comments regarding this request for applications (RFA) are requested within six (6) months from the issuance of this notice. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: We at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) seek your comments about this RFA. We will consider your comments when we develop the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and we'll use them to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). Submit your written stakeholder comments by the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this notice via email to Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This email address is only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and *not* for requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA is soliciting applications under the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) program from institutions to serve as a:

- Regional Host Institution (RHI) or the
- National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO).

No awards will be issued as a direct response to this RFA nor will funding be made available. This RFA is to select the institution that will serve as a regional SARE host institution (one in each of the four regions) and the institution that will serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office for the program. Selected institutions are expected to serve in the role for FYs 2018 through 2022. Minimal budgetary information is being requested at this time; only enough in order to assess the staff, contractual and equipment costs that will be needed if the institution is selected. For each of the fiscal years, the selected institutions are expected to submit a non-competing application with a comprehensive 5-year budget; a separate award will be issued for each fiscal year and each award will be for a 5-year period. While no award or funding will be issued as a direct response to this RFA, information (e.g., Part VI, Award Administration) is included in this RFA so applicants can anticipate award matters should they be a selected institution.

Applications are solicited to serve as a SARE host institution; one in each of the four regions (Northeast, North Central, South and West). Subject to appropriations each fiscal year, approximately \$5.5 million will be awarded to each Regional Host Institution through a cooperative agreement.

Applications are also solicited to serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office for the SARE program. Subject to appropriations, each fiscal year, approximately \$1.1 million will be awarded to the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office through a cooperative agreement.

Each Regional Host Institution works in cooperation with NIFA to implement regional competitive grant and outreach programs as directed by the Regional Administrative Council. The National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office works in close cooperation with NIFA and the national SARE Operations Committee to administer the national reporting, coordination and communications functions. Individuals and organizations interested in applying for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) project grants should NOT respond to this funding opportunity; they should apply to the appropriate SARE regional program. (<http://www.sare.org/Grants/Grants-Information>).

The purpose of the SARE program is to encourage research and outreach designed to increase knowledge concerning agricultural production systems that: (1) maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of the soil; (2) conserve soil, water, energy, natural resources, and fish and wildlife habitat; (3) maintain and enhance the quality of surface and ground water; (4) protect the health and safety of persons involved in the food and farm system; (5) promote the well-being of animals; and (6) increase employment opportunities in agriculture (7 U.S.C. 5801 and 5811).

This notice identifies the objectives for the **SARE** program, deadline dates, funding information, eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and application forms and associated instructions needed to apply to this RFA.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) was originally authorized in Chapter 1, sections 1621-1624 and Chapter 3, sections 1628 and 1629 of Subtitle B, of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (FACT Act), Public Law 101-624 (7 U.S.C. 5811, 5812, 5813, 5814, 5831 and 5832).

Historically SARE received its annual funding under two separate budget lines, Chapter 1 (7 USC 5811-5814) for Research and Education activities and Chapter 3 (7 U.S.C. 5831 and 5832) for Extension activities until the two funding lines were combined in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Public Law No. 113-76). The annual funding for this well-established program was \$24,667,000 in FY 2016 and \$27,000,000 in FY 2017.

Background

The Chapter 1 (R&E) portion of the SARE legislation authorizes the overall program structure to be administered by USDA-NIFA in conjunction with four regional Administrative Councils (ACs) and implemented by the regional host institutions. It also authorizes a Federal-State matching grant program (7 U.S.C. 5813) which has not been implemented to date; but may be in the future. The R&E program in each region now includes a portfolio of four competitive grant types that are regionally administered.

The Chapter 3 portion of the SARE legislation, The Sustainable Agriculture Technology Development and Transfer Program, has two key components. One is the production of technical guides and handbooks which has evolved into the SARE Outreach Program administered by the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO). The other is a National Training Program, known as the Professional Development Program (PDP) that is administered through the four SARE regions. The PDP is a train the trainer program designed to provide education and training for extension agents and other professionals. The PDP programs in each region include both a regional competitive grants program and state programs that are led by State Coordinators appointed from the Cooperative Extension Service in each state.

Administration

SARE is a regionally delivered program with four regions (Northeast, North Central, South and West). Each region offers a portfolio of five core competitive grant programs and administers the PDP state programs. Specific information on each region's competitive grant programs, the PDP state programs and the current staffing can be found on the regions' websites.

The address for the Northeast region website is: <http://www.nesare.org>. The address for the North Central region website is: <http://www.northcentralsare.org>. The address for the Southern region website is: <http://www.southernsare.org>. The address for the Western region website is: <http://www.westernsare.org>.

SARE is a collaborative program that engages USDA-NIFA, the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO), the regional Administrative Council (AC), the Regional Host Institutions (RHI), the Regional Coordinators (RC), the Regional PDP Coordinators (RPDPC) and the National Operations Committee to manage the program.

The SARE legislation requires USDA to carry out the program through agreements with land grant colleges or universities, other universities, State agricultural experiment stations, the State cooperative extension services, nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise, or Federal or State governmental entities. NIFA provides funding to the four Regional Host Institutions (RHI) and the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO) via annual cooperative agreements that each last up to five years such that the RHI and NRCCO administer multiple agreements concurrently.

The Regional Host Institutions (RHI) have the operational responsibility to carry out the competitive grant programs that are established for the region and each regional host institution employs a Regional Coordinator (RC) to oversee the program. The RHIs contract with other persons or organizations as needed to carry out the program. This can include contracting with other organizations to administer the Professional Development Program (PDP) and engage the Regional PDP Coordinators (RPDPC). The RHIs also provide an active communications program supervised by a Regional Communications Coordinator working collaboratively with National SARE Outreach.

The Regional Host Institutions (RHI), convene Administrative Council (AC) meetings and provide staff support to the AC and its subcommittees, identify appropriate people to serve on the technical committee appointed by the AC, and facilitate recruitment and rotation of the AC membership. Each region hosts two face to face AC meetings each year with approximately 25 participants at each meeting. The RHI arranges and supports all accommodations and reimburses all travel expenses for meeting participants. The number and type of technical committees varies by region.

The Regional Host Institutions (RHI) have cooperative agreements with NIFA to carry out the regional competitive grants programs established by the Administrative Councils. The cooperative agreements include “streamline” provisions for most programs such that the process of soliciting, reviewing and selecting proposals, administering sub-awards and review of project reports may be conducted at the regional level by the RHI. Currently each region makes between 60-120 new sub-awards per year that vary in size and duration.

The Regional Coordinator (RC) and Regional PDP Coordinators (RPDPC) are key positions in each region. They have a demonstrated understanding of sustainable agriculture principles and practices with significant professional experience in sustainable agriculture, as educators, researchers and administrators. They are committed to engaging with a diversity of views and have the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders. They have strong organizational and people management skills and are respected members of their institution and professional community. The RPDPC have especially strong records of effective outreach in the agricultural community.

The National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office

The National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO) works in close collaboration with the SARE National Director at NIFA to provide overarching service to the entire SARE program. The core reporting services are to design, build and maintain the projects database and oversee implementation of the established evaluation system. The core coordinating functions are to facilitate national planning meetings for the National Operations Committee and the SARE Outreach Steering Committee, to work in coordination with the four SARE regions to organize national conferences and workshops, to represent SARE at national conferences and events sponsored by other organizations and to implement special projects as requested by the SARE National Director or the SARE Operations Committee. The core communications services are to design, build and maintain the national SARE website, to produce and distribute high quality publications including books, bulletins, fact sheets and videos, and to make all materials available in multiple print and electronic formats. The communications function includes preparing periodic reports on program activities and accomplishments. The address for the national SARE Website is <http://www.sare.org> and information on the SARE Outreach Staff can be found at: <http://www.sare.org/About-SARE/SARE-Outreach/SARE-Outreach-Staff>.

The Project Director for the NRCCO and the Communications Director in the NRCCO are key positions for the SARE program. The Project Director for the NRCCO works directly with the SARE National Director to manage many aspects of program coordination and communication including attendance at national and regional meetings and workshops. The Communications Director has responsibility to provide overall leadership for the SARE Outreach program which includes working closely with all of the regional Communications Coordinators, convening the SARE Outreach Steering Committee and overseeing a high performing staff.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the SARE program is to encourage research and extension projects designed to increase knowledge concerning agricultural production systems that: (1) maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of the soil; (2) conserve soil, water, energy, natural resources, and fish and wildlife habitat; (3) maintain and enhance the quality of surface and ground water; (4) protect the health and safety of persons involved in the food and farm system; (5) promote the well-being of animals; and (6) increase employment opportunities in agriculture.

For purposes of this program, sustainable agriculture is defined by section 1404 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 USC 3103(19)) as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that over the long-term will satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends; make the most efficient use of non-renewable and on farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm and ranch operations; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and ranchers and society as a whole.

For additional background information on the SARE program go to:

<https://nifa.usda.gov/program/sustainable-agriculture-program>

Alignment with USDA, REE and NIFA Goals

SARE is inclusive of research and extension for all types of farming, large or small, organic or conventional, urban or rural, row crop, livestock, small fruit and vegetable and aquaculture. It is inclusive of multiple agricultural science disciplines and it addresses multiple points on the value chain including production, processing, distribution and marketing. As such, SARE aligns with multiple goals and objectives in the USDA Strategic Plan (<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/usda-strategic-plan-fy-2014-2018>), the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Action Plan (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/ree-action-plan>) and the NIFA Strategic Plan (<http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-strategic-plan-fy2014-fy2018>).

SARE aligns well with the USDA Strategic Plan Objectives 1,1.2, 1.3, 2.1- and 2.3. SARE aligns well with the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Action Plan Goal 1, Goal 2 and Goal 3.. The specific subgoals that include actions performed by SARE are Subgoal 1A, Subgoal 1B, Subgoal 1C, Subgoal 1D , Subgoal 2A, Subgoal 2B, Subgoal 3A and Subgoal 3B.

SARE aligns well with NIFA Strategic Plan Subgoal 1.1 – Advance our Nation’s ability to achieve global food security and fight hunger; Subgoal 1.2 – Advance the development and delivery of science for agricultural, forest and range systems adapted to climate variability and to mitigate climate impacts; Subgoal 1.3 – Optimize the production of goods and services from working lands while protecting the Nation’s natural resource base and environment and Subgoal 1.7 – Ensure the development of human capital, communities and a diverse workforce through research, education extension and engagement programs in food and agricultural science to support sustainable agricultural systems.

C. Program Area Description

NIFA is soliciting applications for the SARE program under the following areas:

1. Regional Host Institutions

Program Code – RHI

Proposed Funding Allocation – approximately \$5.5 Million per region per year

Project Duration – Five (5) years for each funding allocation

Applications to serve as a Regional Host Institution must address the following requirements:

- The Regional Coordinator (RC) must have demonstrated capacity to administer programs, experience in agricultural research and extension and proven ability to work with and lead diverse groups to successful outcomes.

- The Regional Professional Development Program Coordinator (RPDPC) must have demonstrated capacity to administer projects, experience in agricultural extension work and proven ability to work with and lead diverse groups to successful outcomes.
- Applicants will be required to propose staffing levels and the distribution of roles that are appropriate to the coordinating, administrative and communications functions needed in the region and demonstrate awareness of approaches to staffing used by other SARE regions. Staffing information for each region can be found at www.sare.org.
- Applicants will be required to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable agriculture science through prior research and extension work.
- Applicants will be required to present their vision of the objectives and desired outcomes for the regional SARE program. Attention to the diverse audiences in the region including mainstream and alternative agricultural producers and business, the Land Grant University System, socially disadvantaged and limited resource individuals and communities, and Minority Serving Institutions will be required.
- The applicant will serve as the primary spokesperson for the regional SARE program. Applicants will be expected to build a regional network to engage with producers and producer organizations, researchers and extension specialists, federal and state agencies, agribusiness and nongovernmental and community based organizations.
- Each Regional Coordinator will be required to ensure that all necessary processes for proposal solicitation, proposal review, project selection, granting and oversight of sub-awards and project reporting for the region's grant programs are established and followed. They will work closely with the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office to ensure project information is publically available, to aggregate and communicate results and conduct National impact evaluations of the SARE Program.
- The host institution should have a good record of administering federally funded programs and the capacity and control systems necessary to administer the regional streamlining agreements used by the SARE program. This includes administering the application, review and award processes for 5 or more grant programs and 60-100 sub-awards per region per year.
- Host institutions should demonstrate ability to convene, budget and facilitate meetings such as the regional Administrative Council and Technical Committee meetings.
- Host institutions will be required to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable agriculture.
- The Host Institution will establish processes for managing the SARE funds awarded from NIFA and the regionally selected and streamlined sub-awards.
- Using the funds received from NIFA, each regional host institution will provide sufficient staff, facilities, equipment, and administrative services needed for effective delivery of the SARE regional program.
- The Host Institution should have a good track record of constructive engagement with other regional institutions and organizations which are engaged in agricultural research, education and extension in the region.

2. National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office

Program Code – NRCCO

Proposed Funding Allocation – approximately \$1.1 Million per year

Project Duration – Five (5) years for each funding allocation

Applications to serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office must address the following:

- The Project Director (PD) should have demonstrated capacity to administer programs, experience in agricultural research and extension and proven ability to work with and lead diverse groups to successful outcomes.
- The Communications Director (CD) should have demonstrated capacity to administer projects, experience in agricultural science and communications and proven ability to work with scientists, writers, editors, printers, web designers and consultants to produce high quality publications and communications materials.
- Applicants will be required to present their vision of the objectives and desired outcomes for the NRCCO, including the reporting, coordinating and communications functions. Attention to the diverse audiences, including mainstream and alternative agricultural producers and businesses, socially disadvantaged and limited resource individuals and communities, the Land Grant University System, Minority Serving Institutions and NIFA will be required.
- The Project Director for the NRCCO works directly with the SARE National Director to manage many aspects of program coordination and communication including attendance at national and regional meetings and workshops. Applicants will be expected to have a national network to engage producers and producer organizations, researchers and extension specialists, federal and state agencies, agribusiness, nongovernmental and community based organizations.
- Applicants will be required to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable agriculture science through prior research, education, extension or administrative work.
- Applicants will be required to propose staffing levels that are appropriate to the reporting, coordinating, communications and administrative functions needed in the NRCCO and to demonstrate awareness of the current staffing roles for the program.
- Applicants should demonstrate the ability to convene, budget and facilitate meetings such as the SARE Outreach Steering Committee meetings.
- Applicants should be knowledgeable of SARE's current communications portfolio including books, bulletins, fact sheets, websites and social media. They should be knowledgeable of the SARE projects database and the IT capacity necessary for continued upgrades and support.
- The National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office will work closely with the four (4) Regional Coordinators to ensure project reports are completed and project information is publically available. They will aggregate, evaluate and communicate project results and programmatic impact for the national SARE program.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

No awards will be issued as a direct response to this RFA nor will funding be made available. This RFA is to select the institution that will serve as a regional SARE host institution (one in each of the four regions) and the institution that will serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office for the program. Selected institutions are expected to serve in the role for FYs 2018 through 2022. Minimal budgetary information is being requested at this time; only enough in order to assess the staff, contractual and equipment costs that will be needed if the institution is selected. The selected institutions will be expected to submit a non-competing application with a comprehensive 5-year budget in each of the fiscal years 2018-2022; a separate award will issued for each fiscal year and each award will be for a 5-year period. While no award or funding will be issued as a direct response to this RFA, information (e.g., Part VI, Award Administration) is included in this RFA so applicants can anticipate award matters should they be a selected institution.

Applications are solicited to serve as a SARE host institution; one in each of the four regions (Northeast, North Central, South and West). Subject to appropriations, each FY approximately \$5.5 million will be awarded to each Regional Host Institution through a cooperative agreement.

Applications are also solicited to serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office for the SARE program. Subject to appropriations, each fiscal year approximately \$1.1 million will be awarded to the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office through a cooperative agreement.

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards.

The Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is the designated payment system for awards resulting from this RFA. For more information see https://www.fiscal.treasury.gov/fsservices/gov/pmt/asap/asap_home.htm.

B. Types of Applications

For FY 2018, you may only submit a new application to the SARE Program:

New application. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the SARE Program. We will review all new applications competitively using the screening for administrative requirements, review panel evaluation of proposals using evaluation criteria and selection process described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Project Types

Regional Host Institutions (RHI)

Applicants must indicate in the Project Summary that their submission is to serve as a Regional Host Institution. See Part II, A. for funding details.

National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO)

Applicants must indicate in the Project Summary that their submission is to serve as the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office. See Part II, A. for funding details.

D. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

In accordance with sections 2, 3, and 8 of 2 CFR Part 422, institutions that conduct USDA-funded extramural research must foster an atmosphere conducive to research integrity, bear primary responsibility for prevention and detection of research misconduct, and maintain and effectively communicate and train their staff regarding policies and procedures. In the event an application to NIFA results in an award, the Authorized Representative (AR) assures, through acceptance of the award that the institution will comply with the above requirements. Award recipients shall, upon request, make available to NIFA the policies, procedures, and documentation to support the conduct of the training.

For information about the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research, see <http://nifa.usda.gov/responsible-and-ethical-conduct-research>.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

The SARE legislation requires USDA to carry out the program through agreements entered into with land grant colleges or universities, other universities, State agricultural experiment stations, the State cooperative extension services, nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise, or Federal or State governmental entities. Applications may only be submitted by these types of organizations. Failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. We urge you to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For information about the pre-award phase of the grant lifecycle see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/pre-award-phase.html>.

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, we recommend that the Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) first contact an Authorized Representative (AR, also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative, or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grants.gov. If not (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as long as two (2) weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations, the AR should go to **“Register,” in the top right corner of the Grants.gov web page (or go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>), for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov.** Part II,1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains detailed information regarding the registration process. Refer to item 2, below, to locate the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

To receive application materials:

1. You must download and install a version of [Adobe Reader](#) compatible with Grants.gov to access, complete, and submit applications. For basic system requirements and download instructions, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>. Grants.gov has a test package that will help you determine whether your current version of Adobe Reader is compatible.

To obtain the application package from Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/download-application-package.html> and enter the **Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-NIFA-OP-006363** from the search result, click “Select Package” to access the application package.

A Grant Application Package is tied to a particular funding opportunity. You may submit an application ONLY to the particular funding opportunity to which the Grant Application Package is associated.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” This guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If you require assistance to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms) **or submitting the application**, refer to resources available on the Grants.gov website: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/home.html>.

Grants.gov assistance is also available at:

Grants.gov customer support

800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [federal holidays](#).

Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal (see <https://grants-portal.psc.gov/Welcome.aspx?pt=Grants>):

Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self-service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7 a.m. - 9 p.m. EST).

Have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Name of agency you are applying to
- Specific area of concern

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

You should prepare electronic applications following Parts V and VI of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A of this part). The following is **additional information** you need to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is a discrepancy between the two (2) documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., PDF) in Part III, Section 3 of the guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (e.g., content format, PDF file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Grants.gov does not check for NIFA required attachments or whether attachments are in PDF format; see Part III, Section 6.1 of the guide for how to check the manifest of submitted files. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. We will accept subsequent submissions of an application until close of business on the closing date in the RFA (see Part V, 2.1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further information).

For any questions related to the preparation of an application, review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable RFA. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. EST, excluding [federal holidays](#).

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. See Part V, Section 2.18 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for the required certifications and assurances (e.g., Prohibition Against Entities Requiring Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements).

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 3 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 4 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract.

The Project Summary is limited to 500 words. Title the attachment as 'Project Summary' in the document header and save file as 'Project Summary'.

The Project Summary should indicate which specific Program Area and project type the proposed project addresses. For RHI applications the Project Summary must list the names and institutions of the RC and RPDPC. For NRCCO applications the Project Summary must list the names and institutions of the Project Director and the Communications Director. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of the SARE program. It is important that the Project Summary be concise and informative.

See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative section for all SARE program applications may not exceed a total of 20 single-spaced pages, including figures and tables with font size no smaller than 12 point. We have established this maximum to ensure fair and equitable competition.

For RHI the Project Narrative must include all of the following:

- (1) Discussion of the vision, objectives and desired outcomes of the regional SARE program.
- (2) Discussion of the projected applicants, the beneficiaries the program should reach and the key audiences the program leaders should engage.
- (3) Listing of the key personnel (or positions) including organizational affiliation. At a minimum, the key personnel that must be specifically identified are the RC and RPDPC. Additional key positions to fulfill roles such as communications and business management should be listed. The identification of the individuals in these roles is welcome and encouraged, but not required. Letters of Commitment should be included as

“Other Attachments” under Field 12 for all individuals or organizations included in the proposal that are external to the RHI.

- (4) Discussion of the RC’s and RPDPC’s experience and skills working with and leading diverse groups and how the experience and skills can be applied to the SARE program. Discussion of the experience and skills of people in other key roles is encouraged but not required.
- (5) Discussion of the management and coordination processes that will be used to ensure sustained engagement of key individuals, institutions and organizations that are directly and indirectly associated with the program.
- (6) Discussion of the management processes that will be used to ensure open and fair access to regional grant opportunities, including solicitation and review of proposals and administration of oversight of sub-awards.
- (7) Discussion of the management processes that will be used to ensure proper accounting and reporting for the use of Federal funds.

For NRCCO Applications the Project Narrative must include all of the following:

- (1) Discussion of the PD’s and CD’s experience and skills working with and leading diverse groups and how the skills and experience can be applied to the SARE program.
- (2) Discussion of the vision, objectives and desired outcomes of the NRCCO.
- (3) Discussion of the beneficiaries and key audiences the program should reach and engage.
- (4) Listing of the key personnel (or positions) including organizational affiliation. At a minimum the key personnel that must be specifically identified are the PD and the CD. Additional key positions to fulfill roles such as information management, content development and product promotion should be listed. The identification of individuals in such roles and discussion of their skills and experience is encouraged, but not required.
- (5) Discussion of the management and coordination processes to ensure inclusion of multiple diverse perspectives to guide the NRCCO and SARE Outreach and to ensure sustained engagement of key individuals, institutions and organizations that are directly and indirectly associated with the program.
- (6) Discussion of the management processes that will be used to ensure proper accounting and reporting for the use of Federal funds.

c. Field 12. Add Other Attachments

See Part V. Section 4.12 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide (Field 12 on the form) for instructions regarding mandatory Felony Convictions or Tax Delinquent Status.

Other attachments should be assembled into a single indexed PDF if possible. If not possible or practical, applicants are encouraged to combine relevant attachments into indexed PDF files and minimize the total number of files attached. Additional attachments to consider:

Other Attachments to Consider For Regional Host Institution (RHI):

- (1) Letters of Commitment should be included for all individuals or organizations included in the proposal that are external to the RHI.
- (2) Letters of support from relevant organizations are not required but may be included. Individual letters of support should not exceed a single page.
- (3) Prior relevant program evaluations for comparable programs led or managed by the RC, the RPDPC or the RHI may be included but are not required.

Other Attachments to Consider For National Reporting Coordinating and Communications Office NRCCO:

- (1) Letters of Commitment should be included for all individuals or organizations included in the proposal that are external to the applicant Institution.
- (2) Prior communications products developed by the CD can be referenced by a list of citations and links to websites where they can be examined. A limited number [six (6) or less] of short documents such as newsletters and fact sheets may be included as PDFs.
- (3) Prior relevant program evaluations for comparable programs led or managed by the PD or CD may be included but are not required.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 5 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. This section of the guide includes instructions about senior/key person profile requirements, and details about the biographical sketch and the current and pending support, including a link to a suggested template for the current and pending support.

5. R&R Personal Data – As noted in Part V, 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award. Part V.6 also notes the importance and use of the information.

6. R&R Budget

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part V, 7 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. The following are additional instructions.

The budget submitted with this application should be for only one year. It should include the Senior/Key personnel, other personnel that will be direct charged, employee fringe benefits and the contractual or consulting costs necessary to provide the proposed staffing levels. It should include allowable and necessary equipment and other direct costs necessary to fulfill the reporting, coordinating, communications and administration requirements. Budget Justification is required. **Do not include travel or participant/trainee costs.**

For further information and instructions regarding indirect costs, refer to Part V, section 7.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. For indirect cost funding restrictions, refer to Part IV, D. of this RFA.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Detailed information related to the questions on this form is available in Part VI, 1 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

- a. Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name (i.e., enter “Sustainable Agriculture Regional Centers”) and the program code (i.e., enter “MA.1”). Note that accurate entry of the program code is very important for proper and timely processing of an application.
- b. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.8 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

C. Submission Dates and Times

We recommend that you conduct an administrative review of the application before submission of it via Grants.gov to ensure that it complies with all preparation instructions. An application checklist is included in Part VII of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide to assist with this review.

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by **5 p.m. Eastern Time on September 28, 2017.**

Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

If you have trouble submitting an application to Grants.gov, you should FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A for Grants.gov contact information.

We send email correspondence to the AR regarding the status of submitted applications. We strongly encourage you to provide accurate email addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 30 days of the established deadline, contact the Agency Contact identified in Part VII of the RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, you should cite this number on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

The maximum indirect cost recovery rate for such cooperative agreements has been specified in annual appropriations bills For FY 2017 and all recent years this rate was not to exceed 10% of the total cost of the agreement, if made with a non-profit institution (this includes educational institutions).

E. Other Submission Requirements

You should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, Section 1.9 in the document entitled “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III, Section 6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Regional Host Institution Applications (RHI)

The authorizing legislation for the SARE Program requires USDA to work in conjunction with the four (4) regional Administrative Councils (ACs) to identify the regional host institutions (RHIs). To do so, NIFA will evaluate each RHI application in a three-step process.

As the first step, NIFA will screen each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements set forth in this RFA. Next, the regional ACs will review and rate the accepted proposals using the criteria in Part V, section B and prepare summary comments of the AC review.

- Next, all proposals will be reviewed by an expert panel established by NIFA. NIFA will select reviewers for the expert panel based upon their experience in relevant scientific, extension, communications or administrative fields, taking into account the following factors: Inclusion of one representative from each regional AC on the panel;
- The formal experience of selected individuals and the extent to which they are engaged in relevant research, extension, communications or administrative activities;
- The need to include other experts (e.g., farmers, ranchers and land managers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and program needs;
- The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) who can assess the applicants' ability to administer the program and sub-awards on behalf of NIFA.
- The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, age and geography;

The expert panel will review each proposal using the criteria in Part V, section B plus the ratings and comments from the regional AC to rank the proposals within each region. The expert panel will have discretion to interview up to three (3) finalists per region with such interviews open to participation by members of the regional administrative council.

After the expert panel has reviewed and ranked the proposals in each region the SARE National Director will recommend to NIFA leadership the projects which should be selected as the RHI for each region for a period of five (5) years; and competing proposals which are not reviewed as highly or which receive an unfavorable review will be declined.

SARE reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for approval.

NIFA will share the summaries of the AC and expert panel comments with the PD after the review process has been completed.

National Reporting Coordinating and Communications Office Applications (NRCCO)

NIFA will evaluate each NRCCO application in a two-part process. First, NIFA screens each application to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, an expert review panel established by NIFA will evaluate applications that meet the administrative requirements.

NIFA will select reviewers based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, education, communications or administration, taking into account the following factors:

- Inclusion of one representative from each regional AC on the panel
- The formal experience of selected individuals and the extent to which they are engaged in relevant research, extension, communications or administrative activities;
- The need to include other experts (e.g., farmers, ranchers and land managers) and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs;
- The need to include experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and federal agencies, and private profit and non-profit organizations) who can assess the applicants' ability to administer the program and sub-awards on behalf of NIFA;
- The need to maintain a balanced composition with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, age and geography;

After the expert panel has completed its deliberations, the SARE National Director will recommend to NIFA leadership the project to be selected as the NRCCO for a period of five (5) years. Competing proposals which are not reviewed as highly or which receive an unfavorable review will be declined.

SARE reserves the right to negotiate with the PD/PI and/or with the submitting organization or institution regarding project revisions (e.g., reductions in the scope of work, funding level, period, or method of support) prior to recommending any project for funding.

NIFA will share the summaries of the AC and expert panel comments with the PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Evaluation Criteria

We will use the evaluation criteria below to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

For RHI Applications:

Key Personnel and Program Leadership – 75%

- The Regional Coordinator is well qualified to lead and coordinate the regional SARE program and has a strong record of performance.
- The Regional Professional Development Program Coordinator is well qualified to lead and coordinate the regional Professional Development Program and has a strong record of performance.
- Roles and levels of commitment of key personnel are clearly defined, key personnel have appropriate expertise for their identified roles, and as a team the key personnel have well-balanced breadth and depth.
- The leadership, coordination, communications and administrative functions of the program are considered and addressed well. Appropriate partnerships with other organizations or institutions have been established where needed.
- Vision, objectives, beneficiaries, audiences and desired outcomes are appropriate and clearly expressed with a high probability of success.
- The applicant demonstrates understanding of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program in their region and has sufficient knowledge of the program in other regions to facilitate effective collaboration.

Host Institution – 25%

- The Host Institution demonstrates a good record of administering federally funded programs and the capacity and control systems necessary to administer the regional streamlining agreements used by the SARE program.
- The Host Institution demonstrates a good record of research and education related to sustainable agriculture science.
- The proposed staffing levels and the distribution of roles are appropriate.
- The proposed one year budget is well prepared and costs are appropriate for the work which will be performed.
- The Host Institution has experience developing and managing processes to administer Federal funds and sub-awards.
- The Host Institution has proposed sufficient staff, facilities, equipment and administrative support.
- The Host Institution is constructively engaged with other institutions and organizations engaged in agricultural research, education and extension in the region.

For NRCCO Applications:

- The PD is well qualified to lead and coordinate the NRCCO and has a strong record of performance.
- The Communications Director is well qualified to lead and coordinate SARE Outreach and has a strong record of performance.

- Roles and levels of commitment of key personnel are clearly defined, key personnel have appropriate expertise for their identified roles, and as a team the key personnel have well-balanced breadth and depth.
- The proposed staffing levels and the distribution of roles are appropriate.
- The proposed one year budget is well prepared and costs are appropriate for the work which will be performed.
- The reporting, coordination and communications functions of the program, as well as the administrative requirements for the office, are well considered and addressed. Appropriate partnerships with other organizations or institutions have been established where needed.
- Vision, objectives, beneficiaries, audiences and desired outcomes are appropriate and clearly expressed with a high probability of success.
- The applicant demonstrates understanding of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program and has sufficient knowledge of the program to lead effective reporting, coordination and communications efforts.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, we take extreme care to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. See http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/competitive_peer_review.html for further information about conflicts of interest and confidentiality as related to the peer review process.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted one-time, with updates on an as-needed basis. This requirement is part of the responsibility determined prior to the award of a cooperative agreement identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. We will provide you copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the pre-award process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors that may exclude an applicant from receiving federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

E. Application Disposition

An application may be withdrawn at any time before a final funding decision is made regarding the application. Each application that is not selected for funding, including those that are withdrawn, will be retained by SARE for a period of three (3) years.

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the NIFA awarding official shall make awards to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the NIFA awarding official as the effective date of the cooperative agreement shall be no later than September 30 of the federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. The project need not be initiated on the effective date of the cooperative agreement, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA may be used only for the purpose for which they are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, regulations, terms and conditions of the award, applicable federal cost principles, USDA assistance regulations, and NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR 200.210](#).

See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view current NIFA award terms and conditions.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These may include, but are not limited to, the ones listed on the NIFA web page – <http://nifa.usda.gov/federal-regulations>.

NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide—a compendium of basic NIFA policies and procedures that apply to all NIFA awards, unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary—is available at <http://nifa.usda.gov/policy-guide>.

Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research

Refer to Part II, D for more information.

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

The output and reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms). If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those, if any, will be identified in the award.

When streamlining has been approved for a program, grantees are required to provide an annual program report listing all sub-awards including their identifying proposal number, the sub-awardee institution, the title of the project, the project director's name, the recipient's state and the award amount. No funds can be released in subsequent years until this list has been provided.

Grantees are also required to oversee submission of project reports to the SARE Projects database from the streamlined sub-awards.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACTS

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Programmatic Contacts:

Rob Hedberg

Title: National Program Leader

Unit: Division of Agricultural Systems

Location: 3432 Waterfront Centre National Institute of Food and Agriculture; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Stop 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2240

Phone: (202) 720 -5384

Fax: (202) 401 - 1782

Email: rhedberg@nifa.usda.gov

Wesley Dean

Title: National Program Leader

Unit: Division of Agricultural Systems

Location: 3109 Waterfront Centre National Institute of Food and Agriculture; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Stop 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2240

Phone: 202-689-4286

Fax: (202) 401 - 1782

Email: Wesley.Dean@nifa.usda.gov

Administrative/Business Contact:

Adriene Woodin

Title: Branch Chief

Unit: Awards Management Division, Office of Grants and Financial Management

Location: 2182 Waterfront Centre National Institute of Food and Agriculture; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Stop 2240; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2240

Phone: (202) 401 - 4320

Fax: (202) 401 - 6271

Email: awoodin@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, awardees may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Budget or Project Plans

In accordance with [2 CFR 200.308](#), awardees must request prior approval from NIFA for the following program or budget-related reasons:

- (i) Change in the scope or the objective of the project or program (even if there is no associated budget revision requiring prior written approval).
- (ii) Change in a key person specified in the application or the federal award.
- (iii) The disengagement from the project for more than three (3) months, or a 25 percent reduction in time devoted to the project, by the approved project director or principal investigator.
- (iv) The inclusion, unless waived by the federal awarding agency, of costs that require prior approval in accordance with 2 CFR 200 Subpart E—Cost Principles of this part or 45 CFR Part 75 Appendix IX, “Principles for Determining Costs Applicable to Research and Development under Awards and Contracts with Hospitals,” or 48 CFR Part 31, “Contract Cost Principles and Procedures,” as applicable.
- (v) The transfer of funds budgeted for participant support costs as defined in §200.75 Participant support costs to other categories of expense.
- (vi) Unless described in the application and funded in the approved federal awards, the subawarding, transferring or contracting out of any work under a federal award, including fixed amount subawards as described in §200.332 Fixed amount subawards. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of supplies, material, equipment, or general support services.
- (vii) Changes in the approved cost-sharing or matching provided by the non-federal entity.
- (viii) The need arises for additional federal funds to complete the project.

The awardee will be subject to the terms and conditions identified in the award. See <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> for information about NIFA award terms.

B. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary of Agriculture determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have

considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. We will retain for three (3) years a copy of an application that does not result in an award. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

C. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 2 CFR Part 415, Subpart C, this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

D. Definitions

Please refer to [7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Financial Assistance Programs--General Award Administrative Provisions](#), for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.

E. Materials Available on the Internet

Extensive information regarding Grants and Education to Advance Innovation in Sustainable Agriculture is available at the following website: <http://www.sare.org>