

*Please note that awards provided under these Calls are contingent upon USDA-NIFA authorizing the funding to our Host Institution, Montana State University.*



# Graduate Student Grant Program

## 2027 Call for Proposals

### Submission Deadline:

**October 28, 2026, 12:00pm (Noon) MDT**

Submit online at [www.projects.sare.org](http://www.projects.sare.org)

**Project team:** Graduate student, researcher (PI), and at least one producer

**Project funding limit:** \$30,000

**Project time limit:** three (3) years

**Funding decisions announced:** March 2027

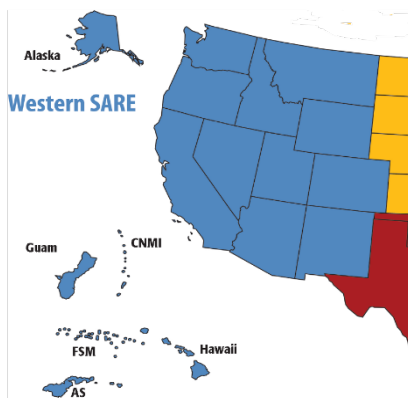
**Contact Program Manager:** [wsare-gs@sare.org](mailto:wsare-gs@sare.org)

### ***Graduate Student Grant Program***

Western SARE funds proposals that present innovative research and educational outreach for advancing sustainable agriculture practices in the Western U.S. Any graduate student enrolled at accredited universities in the Western region are eligible to receive funds. At the time of proposal submission, the student must be enrolled or admitted to a graduate program. The goal of this grant program is to obtain results that apply to agricultural production, sustain and improve the environmental quality and natural resources upon which agriculture depends, improve the profitability of farmers/ranchers and associated agricultural businesses, and enhance the quality of life of agricultural communities.

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#### **The Western region includes:**

Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Micronesia, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

Western SARE  
Montana State University  
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Bozeman, MT 59717-2840  
[wsare@montana.edu](mailto:wsare@montana.edu)

Western SARE, one of four regional SARE programs, is hosted by Montana State University and is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## About Western SARE

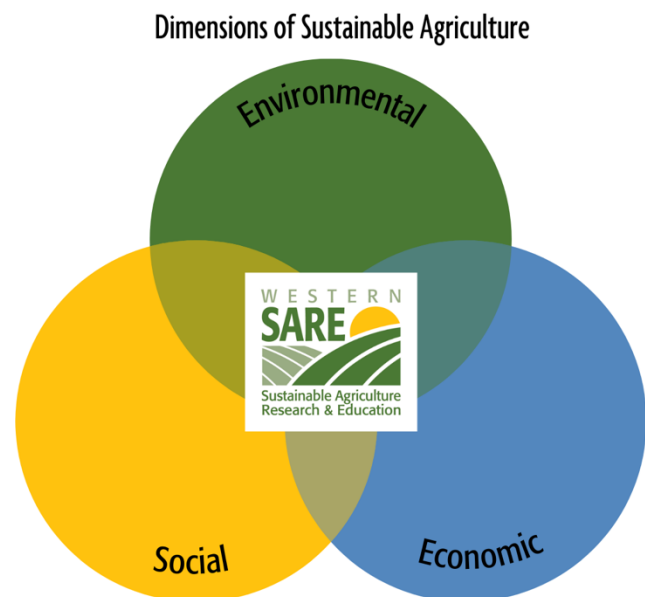
The Western SARE Administrative Council funds grant proposals that include creative and innovative on-farm/ranch research and educational outreach to advance Western SARE goals. All Western SARE projects ***must contain both research and education components***. Western SARE is one of four regional SARE programs funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

### What is Sustainable Agriculture?

Congress has defined sustainable agriculture as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term, satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and enhance the quality of life for producers and society as a whole.

### Western SARE Goals

- Promote ***stewardship*** of the nation's natural resources by providing site-specific profitable sustainable farming and ranching methods that strengthen agricultural competitiveness; satisfy human food and fiber needs; maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of soil; conserve soil, water, natural resources and fish and wildlife habitat; and maintain and improve the quality of surface and ground water.
- Enhance the ***quality of life*** of farmers and ranchers and ensure the viability of rural communities, for example, by increasing income and employment, profitable self-employment, and innovative marketing opportunities in agricultural communities.
- Protect the ***health and safety*** of those involved in food and farm systems by reducing, where feasible and practical, the use of toxic materials in agricultural production, and by optimizing on-farm resources and integrating, where appropriate, biological cycles and controls.
- Promote crop, livestock, and enterprise variety.
- Examine the regional, economic, social, and environmental implications of adopting sustainable agriculture practices and systems.



## ***Program Overview***

**Project Team:** Western SARE requires that agricultural producers be involved from inception to finish in the planning, design, implementation, and educational outreach of any Western SARE-funded project, keeping in mind the inherently interdisciplinary nature of sustainable agriculture. The proposal must be written by the applicant graduate student and is not transferable to another non-applicant student.

Graduate Student projects require a team of at least three (3) people, including a Graduate Student (Applicant), a Researcher (Principal Investigator, typically the applicant's major advisor), and at least one (1) Producer. The Graduate Student leads all parts of the project with support from their major professor and any additional, relevant advisors.

- Graduate Student: Students must be enrolled in a graduate degree program in an accredited university or college in the Western U.S. at the starting time of the project and may receive only one Western SARE Graduate Student Grant award during their graduate studies.
- Principal Investigator (PI): A researcher who usually serves as the graduate student's major advisor. The PI is responsible for carrying out its contractual provisions, all project's expenditures, and for achieving the stated research and education objectives. The PI must be associated with an organization in the Western region.
- Producer: A person qualifies as a Producer (farmer/rancher) if he/she has a for-profit operation and:
  - Her/his primary occupation is farming or ranching and have a farm/ranch taxpayer identification number (TIN); or
  - Is a part-time producer with at least \$1,000 documented annual income or equivalent from farming or ranching activities. An equivalent of \$1,000 of agricultural production is acceptable under circumstances where food is not sold, such as through cultural/indigenous farming operations.

**Project Time Limit:** Projects cannot exceed three (3) years (36 months). Please choose a start date that corresponds with the first of the month. Start dates must be no earlier than August 1, 2027, and no later than October 1, 2027.

**Project Funding Limit:** Western SARE Graduate Student Grants provide a maximum of \$30,000 (including Indirect Costs) for up to three years. Because universities typically do not allow students to manage institutional grant awards, the student's major professor/advisor will be the Principal Investigator (PI) and the graduate student the applicant. For successful proposals, the PI's institution (entity) will enter into a cost-reimbursable subaward agreement with Montana State University. The awarded entity is responsible for incurring approved project-related costs and regularly billing Western SARE / MSU to be reimbursed.

## ***Proposal Instructions***

Proposals are submitted online at <https://projects.sare.org>. To strengthen your submission, check the information located in the [Documents for Applying](#) section of the Western SARE website.

To ensure your submission is complete, please review the submission checklist at the end of this Call of Proposal, on page 16.

***Western SARE will disqualify proposals before review if applicants do not follow the instructions of the Call for Proposals or submit incomplete Supporting Documents. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure all sections of the proposal are submitted online before the due date.***

Multiple submissions are accepted, but only one application (from any one individual applicant) can be awarded funding in any of the Western SARE competitive programs in one grant-funding cycle. An exception to this rule is proposals submitted to the Graduate Student program, where more than one project can be awarded to a PI who acts as the main advisor of the graduate student(s). Additionally, obtaining Graduate Student awards does not exclude the PI to be awarded in other Western SARE Research and Education or Professional Development grant programs for the same funding cycle. Multiple simultaneous projects corresponding to different grant cycles may be funded, conditional upon fulfillment of all reporting expectations, including yearly objectives and milestones being met (as listed in the approved proposal or a Project Modification).

## **Project Basic Information**

This section prompts for general information about the project including:

- The ***main*** subject matter of the project
- The commodities and agricultural practices of the proposed project
- A list of research and educational objectives
- Proposed starting and ending dates
- Brief description of the agricultural business and/or operation of the project's producers
- The state(s) where the work will be conducted
- Additional partner institution(s) or organization(s).

## **Summary (Limit 250 words)**

A clear and concise summary is important for the review process. The summary must include a brief description of the problem and a creative approach to solving it. This summary will be available to the public should the proposal receive funding. In the summary:

- Identify a problem and research question(s)
- Describe the research components and explain how your project will creatively address the identified problem
- Describe the outreach components and explain how your project will creatively address the identified problem
- Identify the potential significance of the project and its expected outcomes.

## **Project Narrative**

The project narrative includes the following sections: 1) Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture and Project Value and Benefits, 2) Stakeholder Needs and Support, 3) Project Team Member List, 4) Project Team Members Roles, 5) Research Plan, 6) Educational Plan, 7) Timeline, and 8) Evaluation and Producer Adoption.

***Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture, Project Value, and Benefits*** (15% of review criteria; word limit: 1000)

Explain why this project is necessary and how it addresses a critical need in sustainable agriculture. Identify any limitations in the current system and how your project will address them. Cite evidence of need, including results and recommendations from related SARE projects ([www.sare.org/Project-Reports](http://www.sare.org/Project-Reports)) and other studies or reports. ***The proposal must address the three pillars of sustainable agriculture (social, environmental, and economic) defined on page 2.***

Describe the potential benefits for producers and sustainable-agriculture. For example, provide an economic analysis and explain how your project would affect overall farm/ranch productivity, operational profits, soil or water quality, or their usage, etc. Where possible, use specific estimates of impacts, such as dollars saved per acre, tons of soil protected from erosion, pounds of reduced chemical inputs, number of acres affected, markets expanded, jobs created, etc.

***Stakeholder Needs and Support*** (5% of review criteria; word limit: 500)

Western SARE is committed to addressing the needs of agricultural stakeholders. Proposals must include evidence that stakeholders identified the needs being addressed, as well as stakeholder support for the project beyond the project collaborators. Describing and documenting stakeholders' needs and support demonstrates that the proposed project is relevant and timely. Evidence of stakeholder-identified needs and support may include, but are not limited to:

- Reference to letters of support or recommendations from individuals or stakeholder groups/organizations, such as farmers, grower cooperatives, or other agricultural professionals or farmer groups (letters to be uploaded in the "Supporting Documents" section of the online submission site).
- References and citations to other studies/reports that encourage future research.
- Needs assessment results related to the project topic(s).

## ***Project Team Member List***

The project team must be a minimum of three (3) people and must include: A Graduate Student (Applicant), a Researcher (Principal Investigator and typically the applicant's major professor), and at least one (1) Producer (see definition of Producer in page 3). The team may also include the following additional collaborators,

- Extension/Outreach specialist: The outreach specialist may be an Extension agent, educator, or equivalent. This person could be involved in implementing the education plan and outreach activities.
- Agricultural professionals: An agricultural professional is any professional assisting producers at the local level, such as Cooperative Extension agents, university faculty or researchers, USDA-NRCS field staff, agricultural consultants, nonprofit organization staff members, etc.
- Researchers, educators, and other collaborators with appropriate expertise for the project scope.
- Producers: If more than one producer is included, each producer must be an independent and separate operator.

***Project Team Members' Roles*** (5% of the review criteria; word limit: 600)

For each project objective, indicate who will be responsible and who will be involved in the execution of activities.

- Provide a brief description of each team member's background and expertise to demonstrate that she/he has the appropriate skills to complete the proposed task.
- Detail the role of the Principal Investigator, the Graduate Student, and the Producer(s), and if applicable, the role of other project team members. Indicate their level of involvement at all stages of the project.

The application ***must*** include a Letter of Producer Cooperation for each producer involved in the project, uploaded in the Supporting Documents section. ***Failure to provide signed and dated letters of producer cooperation will disqualify the proposal before review.***

***Research Plan*** (30% of review criteria; word limit: 2000)

Clearly state and define the **research objectives**. Each objective should be a clear statement describing an intended achievement. Objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. For more details, see [Successful Objectives](#).

For each objective, describe what will be done including **methods** and **materials**. What treatments or technique(s) will be tested? What materials will be used? Describe the project site, research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Include sufficient detail so that reviewers can determine if the approaches are suitable to achieve your objectives. Avoid the use of jargon and define all acronyms.

If proposed research activities meet the definition of [Human Subject Research](#) (such as social science investigations, additional surveys, questionnaires, taste tests, focus groups, etc.) applicants must seek approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or provide a document indicating that the IRB process has been initiated. For more details about the IRB approval requirement, see the Supporting Documents section below.

***Educational Plan*** (30% of review criteria; word limit: 2000)

Clearly state and define the **educational objectives**. Each objective should be a clear statement describing an intended achievement. Objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. For more details, see [Successful Objectives](#).

For each objective, describe the **outreach activities**, including **methods** and **materials**. Describe how, when, and where you will conduct outreach activities (e.g., field days, demonstrations, workshops, presentations, websites, etc.). Describe the target audience (e.g., producers, other agricultural professionals, students, etc.). Explain how you will reach and communicate your project's findings to producers (specifically) and the general public.

Provide a list of educational resources (e.g., factsheets, PowerPoint presentations, videoclips, podcasts, handouts, brochures, 4-H publications, surveys, etc.) you plan to produce. Describe plans for any scholarly outputs (e.g., academic journals and conferences, departmental seminars, capstone projects, classroom presentations). Digital outcomes (e.g., podcasts, videos, blogs, web-based materials, and social media) are encouraged but should not be the sole outreach approach. Multiple communication materials and multiple communication styles are strongly encouraged. For more details, see [Conducting Successful Outreach](#).

***Timeline*** (5% of review criteria; word limit: 500)

Provide a timeline, such as a [Gantt Chart](#), for accomplishing each objective of the Research Plan and Education Plan. Identify the major milestones and activities that will be completed and when each of those milestones will occur.

***Evaluation and Producer Adoption*** (5% of review criteria; word limit: 500)

Develop an evaluation plan that explains how the project's research and educational objectives will be assessed for their impact on sustainable agriculture. All methods and analyses proposed for evaluation of research and educational objectives must be described. Table 1 provides examples of what evaluation plans might include.

The [Western SARE Survey and Evaluation Tool](#) is expected to be filled out by participants at each outreach activity in addition to any other evaluation form. Western SARE requires evaluation results as part of the required annual progress and final reports. Ensure your evaluation plan includes methods for evaluating the following required criteria for WSARE reporting:

- Number of farmers/ranchers participating in research
- Number of farmers/ranchers participating in education and outreach events
- Number of farmers/ranchers who gained knowledge, skills or awareness as a result of the project
- Number of farmers/ranchers who have changed a practice as a result of the project

Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements: The [Western SARE Survey and Evaluation Tool](#) is considered program evaluation only and does not qualify as human subject research. If the



evaluation will use additional surveys or methods, applicants must include approval from an IRB or a document indicating that the IRB process has been initiated. If your proposal is selected for funding, funds will not be deployed until the IRB process is complete.

| Expected Outcomes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Inputs and activities                                                                                                                                            | Outputs (what's produced)                                                                                                                                 | Evaluation and measurement methods (how do you know you are impacting agriculture?)                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the effects of different compost types on soil health</li> <li>Develop guidance for applying compost</li> </ul> Farmers will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn best practices for applying compost</li> <li>Share their experiences with others</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soil health metrics</li> <li>Data analysis</li> <li>Personal time</li> <li>Outreach and recruitment of farmers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experimental data</li> <li>Peer-reviewed journal article</li> <li>Workshop or Field day</li> <li>Survey</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secondary county level data on compost application</li> <li>Survey farmers before and after participation in field day</li> <li>Analyze survey results for behavioral change indicators</li> </ul> |

### Budget and Budget Justification (5% of review criteria)

Provide a detailed budget and budget justification that are appropriate to the proposed project. The budget must be submitted on the [Western SARE Budget Workbook \(MS Excel file\)](#) provided on the proposal site. ***Please note that because Western SARE budget requirements change, applicants must use the current [Western SARE Budget Workbook](#).*** Previous versions of the workbook will NOT be accepted. For the “Total Budget” field in the online proposal form, enter the total funds requested; this amount must match the total funds resulting from the calculation in the Western SARE Budget Workbook. Enter the Budget Justification in the space provided on the proposal site.

If the applicant’s institution will be issuing lower-tier subawards to other entities, the applicant must provide a detailed budget and justification for each proposed lower-tier subaward. For each lower-tier subaward, use one of the designated “LT Subaward” worksheets found within the Western SARE Budget Workbook (navigate to the worksheets tabs found at the bottom). A



budget justification must accompany each proposed lower-tier subaward. Upload a budget justification for each lower-tier subaward as a separate PDF in the section designated for lower-tier subaward budget justification(s) on the online proposal site. A complete application must include the applicant institution's Western SARE Budget Workbook and budget justification, and those of any proposed lower-tier subawards to be issued.

Additionally, matching funds are not required for Western SARE grant programs. Please do NOT include matching funds in your budget or justification. However, if there are additional project-related expenses that are not requested in the proposal budget, this may be clarified on the online proposal site.

***Graduate Student Grant funds must be budgeted in the following categories*** (please also see the Budget Categories and Guidance tab found within the Western SARE Budget Workbook)

Salaries and Benefits: the applicant may request compensation for performing work directly related to the project. Salary support for other employees of the applicant's institution working on the project, including students, is acceptable. Provide base salary, FTEs, fringe benefit rates, and salary/benefits amounts requested.

Lower-tier Subawards: for each proposed lower-tier subaward, include brief details, e.g., lower-tier subaward PI, institution and budget amounts, by project year. Additionally, a detailed budget and justification for each proposed lower-tier subaward is required. For each lower-tier subaward, use one of the designated "LT Subaward" worksheets found within the Western SARE Budget Workbook (navigate to the worksheets tabs found at the bottom). Upload a budget justification for each lower-tier subaward as a separate PDF in the section designated for lower-tier subaward budget justification(s) on the online proposal site.

Contracted Services: includes paying for professional services such as testing and analysis services, survey development and administration, computational services, website development or maintenance, professional production services (e.g., videographer), consultants, honoraria, speaker fees, producer labor, etc. Including commensurate payment to producers involved in the project as a honoraria or stipend payment is encouraged and should be included here.

Supplies: includes paying for basic supplies and materials needed to carry out the project. Examples include agricultural supplies (fencing, seeds, plants, fertilizer), field and lab supplies, minor equipment and tools that cost less than \$5,000 (see note below regarding Capital Equipment), paper/envelopes, in-house photocopying of materials for workshops/meetings, software, books, shipping materials, etc. Any shipping costs associated with the purchase of supplies/materials should be included as supply costs. The purchase of food/refreshments for meetings/field days are only allowed if it is necessary to maintain the continuity of the project activity and is considered a supply cost. Please also include non-capital rental costs as a supply cost, e.g., rental of facilities, meeting space, land, etc.

Note: Capital Equipment purchases are generally not allowed under the SARE program and should be essential for the completion of the proposed activities. Capital Equipment is defined as a single, autonomous piece of equipment that costs \$5,000 or more and has a useful life of more than one year. Equipment expenses over \$5,000 may be leveraged by non-Western SARE funds. Purchasing multiple components of single equipment that cost under \$5,000 in an attempt to circumvent the \$5,000 cap is not allowed. Purchases of minor equipment under \$5,000 is allowed. Please include minor equipment and/or leveraged capital equipment purchases in the Supplies budget category.

Communication: includes paying for postage and mailing expenses (including shipping samples for analysis), and printed materials (flyers, brochures, posters). This category also includes expenses for publishing articles in scientific journals or other types of publications, or for commercial photocopying (Note: in-house photocopying falls under supplies).

Travel: must be directly related to the project and includes mileage reimbursement, airfare, lodging, meal per diem, car rental, taxi, bus, shuttle expenses and parking, conference and registration fees, etc. Please note that travel per diem and mileage must comply with your institution's approved rates. If no rate is available, use the Federal Government rate listed on the U.S General Services Administration (GSA) website. Additionally, lodging costs/reimbursements must be limited to the Federally approved rate listed on the GSA website for the travel destination. Note: international travel is typically NOT allowed under the SARE program except in cases where sufficient justification has been provided and requires pre-approval by the Western SARE Regional Coordinator. Pre-approval is not given at the submission stage. If international travel is included, it will be considered as part of the entire proposal. If the proposal is selected for funding, the PI will be informed at that time as to whether the international travel is approved. All international travel must be directly related to the project must be essential for project completion, and well justified (e.g., explain why this activity cannot be done in the U.S., relevance to sustainable agriculture in the Western U.S., foreign institution's/ colleague's qualifications, etc.). International travel includes any travel outside North America and/or U.S. Possessions. Travel to the Freely Associated States - Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau- is considered international. USDA-NIFA requires that international travel be done in a U.S. flag air carrier.

Rent: Only includes the rental of capital/major equipment which is capped at \$4,999 for the entire duration of the project. For other rental costs, e.g., facilities, meeting space, land, etc., please budget for those costs under supplies.

Participant / Trainee Support: A participant is defined as a non-employee of the applicant's institution who is the recipient, not the provider, of a service or training opportunity such as participation in a workshop, conference, seminar, symposium or other short-term instructional or information-sharing activity to be funded by this award. Participant support may be paid to nonemployees to help offset the cost of travel/lodging and meeting/training fees and/or as a

stipend for participating in a training. Participant/trainee support should NOT be used: to reimburse or pay employees of the applicant's institution; to pay research subjects/participants (unallowable expense under the SARE program); for honoraria/speaker fees (contracted services expense); or, if travel expenses for a non-employee will be directly reimbursed by the institution (travel expense). The applicant's institution must maintain back-up documentation for all participant support costs in accordance with their institution's policy.

**Indirect Costs (IDCs) Recovery:** The below criteria must be followed by both the primary applicant and any proposed lower-tier subaward recipient(s) for determining IDC recovery.:

- Under the SARE program, NIFA stipulates indirect cost recovery is capped at 10% of the Total Direct Costs (TDC) requested.
- The 10% TDC cap should be consistently applied to both the primary applicant and any proposed lower-tier subrecipients.
- Important note: if the applicant's institution has a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), the IDC base should be Total Direct Costs, including the TOTAL COSTS of any/all proposed lower-tier subrecipient(s). Excluding all or a portion of any proposed lower-tier subaward(s) in the IDC base will result in a re-budget request should the proposal be funded.
- Some institutions may NOT be eligible for IDC recovery or may be limited to the de minimis rate. Please note: the Federal de minimis rate has increased to up to 15% of Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC). If the applicant (or a proposed lower-tier subrecipient) is requesting the de minimis, be aware of the following condition: IDC recovery in excess of 10% Total Direct Costs (TDC) is not allowed. Therefore, if using up to 15% of the MTDC will exceed 10% of TDC, applicant should use 10% TDC as their IDC recovery base.
- Applicants must limit their request for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 10% of Total Direct Costs.

Applicants must indicate the IDC rate used on the *Western SARE Budget Workbook*. Detailed information about [IDC](#) recovery and calculations can be found on the Western SARE [website](#) and on the *Western SARE Budget Workbook*.

***Graduate Student Grant funds may NOT be used for the following purposes:***

*Note: this list is not exhaustive; budgets/expenses are reviewed for allowability/allocability in relation to the proposed project activities.*

- Tuition and fees
- Preparation of thesis/dissertation copy
- Purchase of classroom books
- Capital Equipment purchases – see above for more information.
- Starting or expanding a farm or farm operation.

- Major renovations/permanent improvements to a farm or ranch, such as constructing or remodeling a building.
- Repairs/Maintenance of equipment or buildings/facilities.
- Providing meals during events that are not necessary to maintain the continuity of a scheduled meeting; breakfasts and dinners typically do not qualify.
- Testing of commercial products.
- Incentives: providing cash or cash value items to individuals to incentivize behavior
- The purchase and distribution of gifts, gift cards, etc. for any purpose.
- Promotional items to give away, e.g., swag, mugs, clothes, bags, pens, pencils, etc.

Additionally, matching funds are not required or requested of Western SARE grant recipients. Please do NOT include matching funds in your budget or justification.

#### Other Funding Sources (optional; word limit: 150)

If other resources are necessary for the success of the project (not requested in SARE budget), how will they be provided? Note: Your proposal will not be scored based on outside funding. This information helps our grant review panel determine the feasibility of proposed project outcomes.

### **Supporting Documents**

All supporting documents must be attached to the Supporting Documents section of the online application site. PDF documents are preferred but images in .jpg format are accepted. ***Failure to provide all the required supporting documents will disqualify the proposal before review.***

**Signature Page:** This form affirms the PI (student's major professor/advisor/researcher) is responsible for all expenditures. This form must be signed by the PI and the PI's Authorized Organizational Representative. For a college or university, this person is usually the Director of the Sponsored Programs Office. For non-profits or other organizations, this is typically the Executive Director, CEO, or CFO. This form may be downloaded from the online application site and is also included in this Call for Proposals.

**Current Resume:** The PI, graduate student, and all other project team members who are NOT producers must submit a current 2-page resume.

**Letters of Recommendation of the graduate student from Major Professor:** The major professor (PI) must send a letter of recommendation for the graduate student. This letter should verify that the student will be enrolled in a graduate program by the project start date, and describe the graduate student's ability to lead both the research and education components of the project. If the Graduate Student is co-advised only one advisor is required to submit this letter.

**Letters of Cooperation from Producers:** Each producer who is part of the project team must send a dated and signed letter of cooperation. This letter should verify their willingness to participate, indicate the resources committed to this project, and describe their role in the project.

**Letters of Commitment from Partner Institutions:** If the proposal includes issuing lower-tier subawards to partner institutions, attach a letter of commitment from each institution. The letter of commitment must be dated and signed by the lower-tier subrecipient's PI (usually listed as a Co-PI of the project) and include the following information: period of performance, total funds requested, and a Scope of Work outlining activities to be performed, the deliverables, and the project timeline.

**Letters of Support from Stakeholders:** Attach letters of support from stakeholder individuals and/or organizations that support the proposed research and education activities.

**Current and Pending Support Form:** The PI, and other project team members who are NOT producers or students must submit a Current and Pending Support form. This form may be downloaded from the online application site and is also included in this Call for Proposals.

**Institutional Review Board Approval Document for Working with Human Subjects:** For guidance on what meets the requirements for Human Subject Research please see [here](#).

If your project meets the definition of Human Subjects Research, you will need to provide documentation from your Institutional Review Board (IRB) demonstrating you have received approval or exemption for your project, or at a minimum, you have submitted your protocol for review by your IRB. At the time of submission, proof that you initiated the IRB process is acceptable; however, if awarded, the Subaward Agreement will not be executed until IRB approval/exemption documentation is provided.

An IRB is not required to be in place before the proposal submission, but if selected for funding, documentation of IRB approval must be complete before recruiting or interacting with human subjects.

**Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee Document for Working with Animals:** For guidance on what meets the requirements for the care and use of agricultural animals in research and teaching please see [here](#).

If your proposal involves vertebrate animals, you must provide documentation from your Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) demonstrating you have received approval or exemption for your project, or at a minimum you have submitted your protocol for review by your IACUC. However, if awarded, the Subaward Agreement will not be executed until IACUC approval or exemption documentation is provided.

An IACUC is not required to be in place before the proposal submission, but if selected for funding, documentation of IACUC approval must be complete before the Subaward Agreement will be executed.

**Conflict of Interest:** A potential for conflict of interest (CoI) is when project awardees' external activities or personal interests could influence -or appear to influence- the manner or extent to which those individuals carry out their project responsibilities. Such influences could diminish

the awardees' ability to accomplish the project objectives and goals, and violate state or federal law. Typically, conflicts of interest can be dealt with effectively through disclosure and a plan to manage the conflict. If your proposal is selected for funding, you will be expected to develop and implement a CoI management plan at the time of the subaward execution with Montana State University. Please disclose on the online submission site whether you have a CoI under the following circumstances:

- Does any project investigator(s), including their family members, have any financial interest (income greater than \$5,000 in the last 12 months when aggregated with family members, consulting agreements, management responsibilities, or ownership interest in publicly traded companies of greater than \$5,000 or any ownership interest in a non-publicly traded company, when aggregated with family members) that is related to the proposed project?
- Does any project investigator(s), have a relationship, as defined by the list of [conflicts of interest in the workplace](#), with other individuals listed in the submission, or plan to employ or have a contract with a family member or partner?

**Citations:** If you cited previous studies, include a citation list in the Supporting Documents section of the online submission. The citation list has no word limit.

**Other Documents:** (Optional): Attach any other documents that might strengthen the proposal. These other documents may not be used to lengthen the proposal under the Project Narrative.

## ***Review Process***

Eligible proposals received before the due date with all supporting documents will be evaluated by a Technical Review Panel, a group of reviewers from the Western SARE region with broad agricultural production, scientific, and educational expertise. The Technical Review Panel evaluates the proposals based on the review criteria stated below and meets to discuss and appraise the merits of each proposal. Their recommendations are forwarded to the Western SARE Administrative Council for additional review and final selection. Reviewers' and Western SARE Administrative Council recommendations are then shared with the applicants.

Proposals are evaluated based on the following criteria:

|                                                                  |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture, Project Value and Benefits | 15%  |
| Stakeholder Needs and Support                                    | 5%   |
| Project Team                                                     | 5%   |
| Research Plan                                                    | 30%  |
| Educational Plan                                                 | 30%  |
| Timeline                                                         | 5%   |
| Evaluation & Producer Adoption                                   | 5%   |
| Budget & Justification                                           | 5%   |
| Total                                                            | 100% |

## ***Selected Proposals***

If the PI of a new Western SARE grant proposal has an active Western SARE award, funding decisions will be contingent upon fulfillment of the reporting requirements of the active award as specified in the active Subaward Agreement.

To learn more about the Western SARE subaward process and project management expectations please go [here](#). If the Western SARE Administrative Council selects your project for funding, you may expect the following:

**Public Domain:** While proposals and reviews will remain confidential, the Western SARE program considers all funded proposals, subsequent reports, and related information to be in the public domain. See details of this stipulation in the *Research Results: Publications, Intellectual Property Rights, and Sharing Research Resources* section in [the NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide](#).

**Notification:** The Western SARE Administrative Council will select proposals for funding in early March 2027. The Administrative Council reserves the right to restructure or reduce the budget of any grant proposal before final approval. Western SARE staff will notify applicants of the status of their proposals by March 2027.

**Award:** A Subaward Agreement between the applicant's institution and Montana State University will be initiated. The Subaward Agreement will identify all Terms and Conditions for the award, including reporting requirements. Learn more about the Subaward Process [here](#).

*Note: All proposals from Micronesia (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, Marshall Islands and Palau) are required to have the College of Micronesia (at Pohnpei) serve as the subrecipient and manage award funds.*

**Funds:** The Subaward Agreement is cost-reimbursable. Subrecipients will be responsible for incurring approved project-related costs and subsequently invoicing Western SARE/MSU for all expenses to be reimbursed. Invoices are to be submitted according to the instructions provided in the Subaward Agreement. Invoice payment will be subject to the submission and approval of annual progress reports. Late, unapproved, or submitted progress reports will result in pausing invoice payment for expenses incurred from the progress report due date forward; invoice payment will resume once the outstanding progress report is approved. Western SARE holds the last 10% of the awarded amount pending approval of the final report.

**Photographs and Videos:** Grant recipients are invited to document their project with photographs and/or videos, which can be useful to them and help Western SARE highlight and promote their work on its website and publications. Please contact us if you need assistance to promote your funded project through a press release. Digital photographs and videos are preferred. It is expected that the outreach/educational material produced by Western SARE-



supported projects will be ADA-compliant, including closed captions to visual and audio deliverables.

**Proper Citation:** The Western SARE program must be credited as the funding source in all publications and outreach materials generated by the project. Information pertaining to citing Western SARE will be included in the Subaward Service Agreement and can be found [here](#) under “Guidelines for Acknowledging Funds.”

**Site visits:** Western SARE recognizes there are limits to what can be accomplished, measured, and reported during the life of a project. As a result, along with project reporting, Western SARE staff may visit ongoing or finalized projects to assess the impact on Western SARE grants.

**Project Modification and Changes:** Certain changes to the project as originally proposed or as written in the subaward agreement require **prior approval** by Western SARE. Changes that require prior approval include, but are not limited to:

- Lead PI (if the applicant/named lead PI can no longer fulfill their obligations as PI and must step down)
- Awarded applicant institution/entity
- Re-budgeting more than 10% of the total budget and/or introducing a new budget category
- Scope of work (significant changes to the research or education plan)
- Project extension (no-cost extension)

Project changes must be submitted to the grant program manager via email with a complete [Project Modification Form](#) attached for consideration and approval by the Western SARE Regional Coordinator. Not seeking prior approval for the aforementioned changes may result in the disruption of invoice payment. Upon approval of the requested changes, Western SARE staff will notify the PI and update the SARE project profile at [projects.sare.org](http://projects.sare.org) and an amended subaward agreement will be issued.

## ***Reporting Requirements for Awarded Proposals***

An annual report will be required each year of the project. Progress reports should describe the progress made on the project for the reporting period. The final report should report on the overall project period achievements. Include detailed research and educational results, describe the educational outreach activities, attach the material produced by the project, and document the project’s impact. All outreach activities should include an evaluation component that measures changes in knowledge or awareness, attitudes, and opinions, and/or the adoption of new practices by producers or other agricultural professionals. If the project is one year in length, only a final report will be required. Approved project reports will be posted on the national SARE website, and shared with producers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. All educational materials and products must have an electronic version and be included in reports.

***Annual Reports are due on May 1<sup>st</sup> of each year of the project. The graduate student and PI will have up to 60 days from the Period of Performance's end date to submit the Final Report.***

Grantees must maintain up-to-date contact information (e.g., address, phone number, email, etc.) for all project team members in the online submission portal. Please review the documents located in the Western SARE [Reporting Documents for Grantees](#) section to understand what will be expected if your project is awarded.

## ***How to Apply***

We strongly encourage applicants to read the entire Call for Proposals before beginning to write the proposal and refer to it regularly in proposal development.

**Proposals are due by 12:00 pm (Noon) MDT – October 28, 2026**

Go to: <https://projects.sare.org>

Look for programs under “Western” [region]

| Graduate Student Grant Program Schedule                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 28, 2026 – Proposals are due by 12:00 PM (noon) MDT.                          |
| January 2027 – A Technical Review Panel reviews and recommends proposals for funding. |
| March 2027–Western SARE Administrative Council selects proposals for funding.         |
| March 2027 – Applicants are informed about their proposal status                      |
| August 1, 2027 – First allowed project start date                                     |

## **Online Submission Checklist**

### **Project Basic Information**

- Project Subject Matter
- Project Start Date
- Project End Date
- Primary State
- Project Commodities
- Project Practices
- Project Objectives
- How did you learn about this CFP?
- Usefulness of Western SARE Resources

### **Summary**

- Summary

### **Narrative**

- Relevance to Sustainable Agriculture, Project Value and Benefits
- Stakeholders Needs and Support
- Project Team Members and Roles
- Research Plan
- Education Plan
- Timeline
- Evaluation and Producer Adoption
- **Budget and Budget Justification**
- Total Budget Amount
- Budget Worksheet for and Budget Justification Awarded Institution
- Budget Worksheet and Budget Justification for each proposed Lower-tier Subaward
- Authorized Organizational Representative Information

#### **Supporting Documents**

- Signature Page
- Current Resume for all team members except producers
- Current and Pending for all team members except producers and students
- Letters of Cooperation from Producer(s)
- Letter of Recommendation from Major Professor
- Letter of Commitment from Partner Institution(s) (if applicable)
- Letters of Support from Stakeholders
- IACUC Statement (if applicable)
- IRB Statement (if applicable)
- Conflict of Interest (if applicable)
- Citations

## ***Resources***

Check the resources in the [Western SARE Proposal Preparation Documents](#) section.

If you have further questions contact the Program Manager, [wsare-gs@sare.org](mailto:wsare-gs@sare.org) or 406-994-4789.

***Information on past projects*** including summaries and reports can be found [here](#). We encourage you to visit our [website](#) to learn more about the Western SARE programs and access learning resources; tips for writing proposals are available [here](#).

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) at the National Agricultural Library specializes in locating, collecting, and providing information about sustainable agriculture. AFSIC resources are available at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/> or contact AFSIC at 301-504-6559 or by e-mail, [afsic@nal.usda.gov](mailto:afsic@nal.usda.gov).

In compliance with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, this material can be made available in other formats upon request.

**The mission of Western SARE is to advance innovations that improve profitability, stewardship of natural resources, and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking research and education.**

*Please note that awards provided under these Calls are contingent upon USDA-NIFA authorizing the funding to our Host Institution, Montana State University*

## ***Statement from USDA NIFA***

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to the extent permitted by law, will no longer make grants or otherwise fund programs or activities that improperly discriminate on the basis of race or sex, including discrimination in the name of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies. Instead, USDA will prioritize merit and efficiency. USDA recognizes programs and initiatives will have the greatest impact when these programs and initiatives put American farmers, ranchers, and foresters first by:

- solving the most pressing challenges they face;
- protecting America's food, fuel, and fiber supply to enhance national security;
- supporting production of healthy and safe food for consumers;
- expanding and developing domestic markets;
- training the next generation of agriculturalists; and
- fueling innovation to keep American farmers at the forefront of productivity.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to advancing these principles and encourages applicants to actively engage farmers, ranchers, and foresters when applying for funding opportunities to ensure relevancy and adherence to them. NIFA also encourages agricultural leaders to engage in the peer review panel process to ensure American producers are better served through research, education, and extension activities.



## Signature Page

Please print this document, obtain **BOTH** required signatures and upload into the Supporting Documents section of your online grant application.

**Project Title:**

---

**Total Funds Requested:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Requested Project Period:**

Start Date (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_ End date (MM/DD/YYYY): \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Investigator**

USDA defines a Principal Investigator as one who has the authority to write and submit a proposal and carry out its contractual provisions.

As the project PI, I affirm I am responsible for all expenditures and achieving the stated research and education objectives of the proposal.

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature: Principal Investigator*

*Date*

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Authorized Organizational Representative**

USDA defines the Authorized Organizational Representative as one who has authority to enter into contractual agreements with the Western SARE Host Institution, Montana State University.

As the AOR for the institution/organization project of the PI submitting this proposal, I affirm that [enter institution/organization name here] has authority to enter into a contractual agreement with Montana State University.

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature: Authorized Organizational Representative*

*Date*

Printed Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_



## Current & Pending

Project Team Member Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### How this template is completed:

- Record information for active and pending projects, including this proposal.
- All current efforts to which PD/PI(s) and other senior personnel have committed a portion of their time must be listed, whether or not the salary for the person involved is included in the budgets of the various projects.
- Provide analogous information for all proposed work that is being considered by, or which will be submitted in the near future to, other possible sponsors, including other USDA programs.
- For concurrent projects, the percent of time committed must not exceed 100%.

| NAME<br>(List/PI<br>first) | SUPPORTING<br>AGENCY AND<br>AWARD/PENDING<br>PROPOSAL<br>NUMBER | TOTAL \$<br>AMOUNT | EXPIRATION<br>DATES | % OF TIME<br>COMMITTED | TITLE OF<br>PROJECT |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
|                            | Active                                                          |                    |                     |                        |                     |

|  |         |  |  |  |  |
|--|---------|--|--|--|--|
|  | Pending |  |  |  |  |
|--|---------|--|--|--|--|

**This document MUST be converted to PDF prior to attachment in the electronic application package.**