

AGRI Crop Research Grant

2020 Request for Proposals

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Grant Summary

Application and Award Details

Grant funds are available for applied crop research that will improve agricultural product quality, quantity, or value. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) anticipates awarding up to \$1,050,000 in this round using a competitive review process. No more than \$250,000 will be awarded per proposal. Eligibility and award restrictions are detailed in this request for proposals.

Your application must be received by 4:00 p.m. CST on Tuesday, November 26, 2019 to be included in this grant cycle. Once we receive your completed application through our online system, we will send you an email confirmation.

Applicants must submit proposals through our [online application system](#).

Contact Information

Direct questions about the grant program, completing the application, or additional accommodations to:

MDA Grants Line at 651-201-6500

or

Michael Greene

Michael.Greene@state.mn.us

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

625 Robert St N

St. Paul, MN 55155-2538

Eligibility and Application Instructions

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must:

- Represent a Minnesota-based organization, research entity, individual, or business with agricultural research capability.
- Be in good standing with the State of Minnesota (no back taxes). Subcontractors must also be in good standing.
- Not be an employee of the MDA.

Examples of applicants:

Farmer networks, institutions of higher education, research institutions, non-profit organizations, agricultural cooperatives, and agricultural businesses with research capabilities.

Eligible Projects

Projects must be:

- Applied crop research with near-term (3 to 7 year) benefits for Minnesota agriculture, its producers, and associated industries.
 - **Applied research** is research that utilizes existing scientific knowledge to develop practical applications, like technology, techniques, or inventions.
 - **Basic research** is research aimed to improve scientific theories for improved understanding or prediction of phenomena. It advances fundamental knowledge of the world. Basic research is not funded through this program.
- Widely beneficial to groups beyond the grantee.
- Conducted in Minnesota.
- Three years or less in duration.

Project examples include but are not limited to projects that:

- Increase crop yield or quality.
- Improve or develop traits desired for a specific market or climate.
- Develop new crops.
- Advance new uses for crops.
- Involve crop breeding.

A project will receive preference if it includes:

- Research on crops with limited access to other research funds.
- Matching funds, in-kind support, or an investment in the research from other sources.
- An outreach plan describing how results will be used to address inequities and/or disparities experienced by diverse populations such as:
 - Racial and ethnic communities including Native American tribal communities.
 - Rural communities with limited economic opportunities.

Ineligible Expenses

- General operations, overhead, and indirect costs.
- Project expenses incurred before grant agreement signed by all parties.
- Capital improvements such as construction of buildings, land purchases, or building/laboratory improvements.
- Equipment costing over \$5,000 unless included in the proposal and essential to the proposed research.
- International travel unless explicitly approved.
- Airfare costs that exceed the customary standard commercial airfare (coach or equivalent).
- Donated or volunteer (in-kind) services. While the project can receive unpaid services, the value of these services is not reimbursable either as a direct or indirect cost.
- Donations or in-kind contributions made by the applicant, including property and services, regardless of the recipient.
- Fines, penalties, or other settlement expenses resulting from violations (or alleged violations) of, or failure of the applicant to comply with, Federal, State, local, or Indian tribal laws and regulations.
- Investment management costs, including costs of investment counsel and staff, and similar expenses incurred to enhance income from investments.
- Advertising and marketing expenses not detailed in the outreach plan.
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges or contingency funds.
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services.
- Entertainment, amusement, diversion, social activities, gifts, or any costs directly associated with such purchases (such as tickets to shows or sports events, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, alcohol, and gratuities).
- Fundraising expenditures (financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts or bequests, etc.) to raise capital or obtain contributions, regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used.
- Lobbying, including costs of membership in organizations substantially engaged in lobbying.
- Political activities.

Project Duration

Projects can last between one and three years. Contracts cannot be extended beyond three years. Grantees unable to complete their projects within three years are permitted to apply for the AGRI Crop Research Grant for funding to finish addressing their objectives. However, the new project must have objectives not included in the previously funded project and a wider scope.

Funding

Funding Availability

The MDA anticipates awarding up to \$1,050,000. Approximately seven to twelve grants will be awarded. The final number of awarded grants depends on the size of awards. The maximum grant award is \$250,000.

Matching Funds

Sources of the matching funds may include non-state funds (funds that were not obtained through the budgeting process of the Minnesota Legislature or granted by a State agency) in the form of cash, loans, other grants, or liquid capital assets dedicated to the project.

Application Instructions

Grant applicants are required to submit proposals through our [online application system](#).

All applications must be received by 4:00 p.m. CST, on November 26, 2019. Late applications will not be considered. The MDA is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems resulting in the MDA not receiving the application on time. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that submission is received by the MDA before the deadline.

Application Guidelines

- Write for reviewers who are generally knowledgeable but may not have a thorough or deep understanding of your proposed research area. Use plain, easily understood language.
- Answer all questions completely within the character or page limits specified in the grant application. Use 12 point font, single spacing.
- The Project Evaluation Profile included in this document will be used to score and compare the grant applications.

Questions

Questions must be submitted in writing via email to Michael.Greene@state.mn.us with by 4:00 p.m. CST on November 21, 2019. Answers will be posted on the [Questions and Answers](#) portion of the AGRI Crop Research Grant webpage.

Questions should not be submitted through other means. MDA employees are not authorized to provide advice on any applications. Applicants who solicit or receive advice from unauthorized MDA employees may be disqualified from eligibility for a grant award.

Application Review Process and Timeline

A review committee, composed of MDA staff and external reviewers, evaluates all eligible applications. Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding of a project. The Commissioner of Agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and is responsible for award decisions. The review committee and Commissioner may use rural/urban and geographic diversity when making their decisions. We will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

RFP posted on the MDA web site.....	September 9, 2019
Questions due no later than 4:00 pm CST.....	November 21, 2019
Applications due no later than 4:00 pm CST.....	November 26, 2019
Committee begins review of applications.....	December 1, 2019
Committee recommendations submitted to Commissioner for review.....	January 22, 2020
Applicants notified of decisions; Grant agreement negotiations begin.....	February 1, 2020

Application Review Policies

Conflicts of Interest

The State will take steps to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers per [Minn. Stat.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making \(PDF\)](#).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.
- A grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Privacy Notice and Data Classification

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under the AGRI Program. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Data Practices Act as private or non public, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or non public data is limited by law to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant or by a valid court order, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, MDA may also share the data with law enforcement.

Per [Minn. Stat. 13.599](#):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed.
- Trade secret information (as defined in [Minn. Stat. § 13.37](#)) is classified as private or nonpublic. In order for an applicant to protect data submitted as part of this application as trade secret information, the applicant must identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant wishes to protect, and provide an explanation of the economic value of keeping the data from being generally known to other persons. Determining what constitutes trade secret information is ultimately the responsibility of MDA, and MDA cannot guarantee that data marked by an applicant as trade secret information or marked “confidential” will be classified as such. If MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, that data will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Pre-Award Financial Review

All Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) applying for grants from the State of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to a grant award made of \$25,000 and higher. The University of Minnesota is excluded from this requirement.

One of the following documents will be requested, based on the following criteria:

- Grant applicants with annual income of under \$50,000, or who have not been in existence long enough to have a completed IRS Form 990 or audit should submit their most recent board-reviewed financial statements.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of \$50,000 or more and less than \$750,000 should submit their most recent IRS Form 990.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of over \$750,000 should submit their most recent certified financial audit.

Grant Award Agreement and Payments

Upon approval of an application and prior to beginning work on the grant project(s) and receiving reimbursements, the applicant is required to do the following:

- Complete an IRS W-9 form or register as a vendor in SWIFT, the State's accounting system, and submit other required documentation within 30 days of award notification; and
- Sign a Grant Award Agreement indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks. The agreement also authorizes the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The grant award document must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

Grant funds are dispersed on a reimbursement basis. All grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget. To receive grant payments, grantees must provide proof that grant project work has been done by submitting details of each purchase on receipts or invoices, and proof that the vendors have been paid. Annual progress reports are required to be submitted during the duration of the project. Upon completion of the grant project, a final progress report is required to receive the last 10% of the award.

Site Visits, Financial Reconciliations, and Follow-ups

The grant agreement allows the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The MDA will perform a monitoring visit for all grantees with awards of \$25,000 or more before a final payment is approved. Other grantees may receive monitoring visits at the discretion of the MDA.

The MDA will perform a financial reconciliation of at least one invoice on grants greater than or equal to \$50,000. For this purpose, the grantee provides expense receipts, employee timesheets, invoices, and any other supporting documents requested by the state.

Follow-up surveys are required to help us determine the long-term impacts of the grant. Grantees are required to respond to requests for follow-up information for three years beyond the term of the grant agreement. Failure to respond to these in a timely manner may impact your ability to secure future funding from the MDA.

Bidding Requirements

All funded applicants will be required to abide by the state's bidding requirements for larger purchases. See a detailed list of the state's [bidding requirements](#) for details.

Audits of Project

Per [Minn. Stat. 16B.98, subdivision 8](#), the grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Voter Registration Requirement

The grantee will comply with [Minn. Stat. 201.162](#) by providing voter registration services for its employees.

Affirmative Action and Non-Discrimination Policy

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([Minn. Stat. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

AGRI Background and Program Goals

The Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program (AGRI) was established to advance Minnesota's agricultural and renewable energy industries ([Minn. Stat. 41A.12](#)). This program focuses on areas of greatest opportunity and potential economic impact to create agricultural jobs and profitable businesses. The primary goal of the AGRI Crop Research Grant is promote economic growth as well as environmentally friendly practices in Minnesota's \$10 billion crop production industry. The MDA also aims to support research that addresses the crop production needs of Minnesota farmers that have experienced inequities or disparities.

Project Evaluation Profile

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Score
<p>Proposed project objectives align with the objectives of the AGRI Crop Research Grant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research improves the quality, quantity, and/or value of crops grown in Minnesota • Creates public, transferable information that has near-term (3 to 7 year) benefits for Minnesota farmers and the state’s economy • Research is timely and important 	10
<p>Potential economic impact on Minnesota agriculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiaries of research are clearly stated • Research aims to develop new or enhanced tools that improve agricultural outcomes • Substantial benefits will likely be realized by Minnesota farmers and associated industries beyond the grantee 	15
<p>Measurable objectives and outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives are measurable, specific, and clearly stated • Plan to measure outcomes is detailed and actionable • Measured outcomes are appropriate to evaluate progress and success 	10
<p>Soundness and rigor of methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimental designs and methods are appropriate to meet proposed objectives • Research plans are clear, descriptive, and address each objective • Project is achievable in the projected timeline 	10
<p>Outreach component of research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research results will be widely disseminated to appropriate audiences • Outreach plan is clear and comprehensive • Proposal includes collaboration with agricultural educators in order to maximize the impact of research through organized and intentional outreach (e.g. on-farm research networks, extension educators, crop councils, farmer groups, etc.) 	15
<p>Qualifications of research team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of research team are identified and their roles are defined and realistic • Skills and experience of individuals matches their proposed involvement • Research team is sufficient to accomplish the proposed research 	10
<p>Budget detail and justification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget narrative clearly details and justifies all project costs • Budget fully addresses the needs of each objective 	10
<p>Preferred projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is on a crop with limited access to other research funds (5 pts) • Project has matching funds (5 pts) • Research and outreach addresses inequities and/or disparities experienced by diverse populations (10 pts) 	20
<p>Total</p>	100

Application Questions

Contact Information

Applicant Information

- Applicant Name
- Organization Name
- Mailing Address
- Telephone
- Email

Authorized Representative

- Name
- Telephone
- Email

Eligibility

Please confirm that the following statements apply to your organization. You must respond “Yes” to all of the statements to be eligible to apply for this grant.

- The organization applying is based in Minnesota and has agricultural research capabilities.
- The organization applying is in good standing with the State of Minnesota (no back taxes).
- No one involved in the project or the application for the grant is an employee of the MDA.

Project Proposal

Grant Request Summary

- Project Title
- Expected Project Start Date
- Expected Project End Date
- Amount of Grant Request (Total Project Cost)
- Applicant’s Matching Funds – If the proposed project has been submitted to or funded by a Federal grant program, please specify the grantor, the funding amount, and the purpose of that grant funding. *(500 characters, including spaces)*

Abstract

Summarize your proposal. Include a succinct account of the project's objectives, a description of the approach and methodology, and the anticipated outcomes or products. *(2,500 characters, including spaces)*

Rationale and Beneficiaries

Provide the background and need for the proposed work. Explain why the research you are proposing is important and timely. Include references to relevant supporting literature. *(1,500 characters, including spaces)*

Explain who stands to benefit, directly or indirectly, from your project. If applicable, describe how the research stands to address inequities and/or disparities experienced by farmers in Minnesota. *(1,500 characters, including spaces)*

Approach, Methodology, and Timeline

Describe your approach; scientific methodology (proposed treatments and reason for selection); plot/sample size; lab procedures or protocols; experimental design; and measurements that will be used to evaluate the project. Explain how these methods are appropriate for the research project. Include a timeline for the research. Charts, graphs, or pictures are allowed. *(10,000 characters, including spaces)*

Research Outcomes

For each of your objectives, describe the near-term (3 to 7 years) outcomes you expect from the proposed research. Outcomes include but are not limited to technology, techniques, and inventions. Outcomes should be specific, clear, and measurable. *(2,500 characters, including spaces)*

Outreach Plan

Research results must be widely and publicly disseminated. Explain how you will inform others, especially farmers, about your results and findings. Be specific about the audience you will target and the methods you will use. Describe any proposed collaborations with agricultural communicators (on-farm research networks, extension educators, crop councils, farmers groups, etc.) that will help to communicate the results to the target audience. *(2,500 characters, including spaces)*

Qualifications of Applicant and Other Key Participants

Provide the qualifications of all individuals who will participate in the project, including principal investigator and any collaborators. Do not include extensive resumes or biographies, but rather a short description of their relevant abilities and qualifications. *(1,000 characters, including spaces for each participant)*

- Participant Name
- Organization Affiliation
- Occupation
- Email Address
- Brief Summary: Relevant abilities and qualifications

Letters of Commitment and Support

We require letters of commitment from each key participant (except the applicant). Letters should indicate that each person listed understands her or his role and is willing to participate and commit adequate time to the project. Letters of support from organizations or individuals that are not directly involved in the project are not required, but they may be helpful in justifying the need for your project. *(No page or character limit)*

Budget Narrative

Provide a budget narrative that:

- Provides detail and justifies expenditures in each budget category.
- Explains how the budget items connect to the project's results.
- Explains how you arrived at the budget estimates.

When applicable, identify the dollar value and source of current or pending cash match and/or in-kind contribution. *(10,000 character limit, including spaces)*

Note: a match is not required; however, proposals that have in-kind support or an investment in the research from other sources are preferred.

Definitions:

Current Matching Funds – If the proposed project has confirmed funding through another source, please specify the grantor, the funding amount and the purpose of that grant funding.

Pending Matching Funds – List other proposals that have been submitted for this project and where applications were submitted. Does this project depend on additional, unsecured funding?

Budget Categories:

Personnel – List names and titles of participants who will receive a salary from this project.

Equipment – List equipment (useful life over one year and a cost over \$5,000) with justification for each item.

- You may only lease or rent general purpose equipment, and the agreement must terminate at the end of the grant cycle. General purpose equipment is not limited to a narrow technical activity. Examples include tractors, skid loaders, trailers, etc.
- We allow rental or purchase of special purpose equipment with prior MDA approval. Special purpose equipment is narrowly used for a single research, scientific, or technical activity. Examples include grape harvesters, high tunnels, fruit or vegetable coolers, vegetable washing machines, fruit or vegetable processing equipment, etc.

Supplies – Provide a general list of types of supplies. Justify the purchase of electronic supplies such as computers and tablets.

Analysis – List any laboratory or statistical analyses and their purpose.

Contractual Services – List any entities outside your organization that you plan to retain on a temporary basis to work the project or provide a specific service. Include contractor’s name and a short description of services to be provided. Provide the flat rate fee or total hourly rate for each contract.

Travel – List anticipated destination, number of trips, purpose of trips, mode of travel and anticipated cost per trip. Base cost on the current federal rate. Provide justification for out-of-state travel.

Communication – List type of expenses and estimated costs.

Other – List expenses that don’t fit any of the budget categories. Identify each item and justify the expense.

Budget Summary

Upload a budget using the following format.

Category	Year One (\$)	Year Two (\$)	Year Three (\$)	Total (\$)
Personnel – Salaries				
Personnel – Fringe Benefits				
Equipment (over \$5000)				
Supplies				
Analysis				
Contracted Services				
Travel				
Communications				
Other				
Total Request				
Matching Funds (Optional)				