

AGRI Crop Research Grant 2023 Request for Proposals

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Grant Summary

Overview

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's AGRI Crop Research Grant is intended to generate applied crop research that will improve agricultural product quality, quantity, or value. Competitive grants will be awarded for applied research that creates public, transferable information with near-term (3 to 7 years) benefits for Minnesota farmers and the state's economy. Proposals must include an outreach plan describing how results will be shared with appropriate audiences.

Funding availability

We anticipate awarding approximately \$1 million in this round using a competitive review process. No more than \$250k will be awarded per proposal. Eligibility and award restrictions are detailed in this request for proposals (RFP).

Priorities

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making.

[Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities. This grant program aims to provide near-term benefits for Minnesota agriculture, its producers, and associated industries.

This grant will prioritize:

- Research on crops with limited access to other research funds.
- An outreach plan describing how activities or outcomes of this project meaningfully involve or inform underserved agricultural producers such as:
 - [Emerging farmers](#) including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, immigrants, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, young and beginning farmers, LGBTQ+ farmers, and others.
 - Rural communities with limited economic opportunities.

Grant project outcomes

- Applied crop research with near-term (3 to 7 year) results or products that will benefit 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.
- Transferrable and beneficial outcomes for groups other than the grantee.
- Final progress report that documents research outcomes and outreach activities.

Applying for the Grant

How to submit questions

For questions about the RFP, grant program, or application:

- Submit your question in writing before **4:00 p.m. Central Time on November 23, 2023**.
 - Email Ian Kushner at Ian.Kushner@state.mn.us or grants staff at MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us with “AGRI Crop Research Grant” in the subject line.

We will post responses to all program questions on the Questions and Answers section of the AGRI Crop Research webpage.

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.

For help with the online application system:

- Contact Ian Kushner at 651-201-6652 or Ian.Kushner@state.mn.us or grants staff at 651-201-6500 or MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us.
 - Include “AGRI Crop Research Grant” in the subject line.

How to apply

- Apply for the AGRI Crop Research Grant through our [online application system](#).
 - We must receive your application by **4:00 p.m. Central Time (CT) on November 30, 2022**, to be considered for funding. We will not accept late applications.
 - You will receive an automated email when your application has been received.
- Be sure to apply early so there is enough time to get technical assistance if needed.
 - It’s best practice to submit your application at least 24 hours in advance.

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.

Timeline and deadlines

November 23, 2022, 4:00 p.m. CT.....Deadline to submit questions on the grant program

November 30, 2022, 4:00 p.m. CT.....Applications due

January 31, 2023.....Notification of decisions; start grant agreement negotiations

Application guidelines

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

Grant Eligibility

Eligible applicants

Applicants must:

- Represent a Minnesota-based organization or research entity with agricultural research capability.
- Be in good standing with the State of Minnesota, including not owing any back taxes. Subcontractors or sub-grantees must also be in good standing.
- Not be an employee of the MDA.

Examples of applicants:

- Farmer networks
- Institutions of higher education
- Research institutions
- Nonprofit organizations
- Agricultural cooperatives
- Agricultural businesses with research capabilities

Collaboration

Applicants are encouraged to work with other partners and stakeholders but are not required to do so.

Eligible projects and expenses

Projects must:

- Be applied crop research that has 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.
- Be completed in three years or less. Contracts cannot be extended beyond three years.
 - Continuation projects must have objectives that were not included in the previously funded project and a wider scope.
- Be conducted in Minnesota.

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.

Ineligible expenses

Ineligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- Expenditures incurred before the grant agreement is signed by all parties
- General operations, overhead, and indirect costs (expenses of doing business that are not readily identified with the project)
- Advertising and marketing expenses not detailed in the outreach plan
- Capital improvements such as construction of buildings, land purchases, and building or 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)
- Advertising, public relations, entertainment, and amusement costs
- Donated or volunteer (in-kind) services. While these may be furnished to an applicant by professional and technical personnel, consultants, and other skilled and unskilled labor, the value of these services is not an eligible cost.
- Donations and in-kind contributions, including property and services, made by the applicant (regardless of the recipient)
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expenses resulting from failure of the applicant to comply with federal, state, local, or Native American Tribal laws and regulations
- 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, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions, regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Lobbyists, including costs of membership in organizations substantially engaged in lobbying, and political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, legal costs, or contingency funds
- Parking or traffic violations

Matching funds

Applicants are not required to provide matching funds.

Application Review Policies

Review process

A review committee, composed of MDA staff and external reviewers, evaluates all eligible applications based on the criteria in the Project Evaluation Profile. 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, geographic distribution, crop(s) targeted by project, services to special populations, applicant's history as a state grantee, and capacity to perform the work when making their decisions. The MDA will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98](#) and [Policy 08-01: Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making \[Word\]](#)).

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 nonpublic, 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 nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([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.

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets: Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e. the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application: the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

All persons, businesses, and individuals applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must comply with applicable laws. Under the law titled Right of Setoff ([MINN STAT 270C.65, subd. 3](#)), a grantee consents to disclosure of its social security number, federal employer tax identification number, and/or Minnesota tax identification number, already provided to the State, to federal and state tax agencies, and to state personnel involved in the payment of state obligations. These identification numbers may be used in the enforcement of federal and state tax laws which could result in action requiring a grantee to file state tax returns and pay delinquent state tax liabilities, if any.

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Pre-award financial review

All non-profit organizations applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant award of \$25,000 or higher.

To comply with [Policy 08-06: Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations \(PDF\)](#), you may be asked to submit one of the following documents:

- 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.

Accountability and reporting

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.

Grant award agreement and payments

Grant contract agreement templates are available for review on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs](#) webpage

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.
- Sign a grant contract 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.

Eligible expenses may only be incurred after the contract has been signed by all parties. Applicants should anticipate that grant contracts will have an end date according to the end date entered in the application or in early 2026. Grant contracts may not extend beyond three years from the effective date of the contract.

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 descriptions of activities conducted and outcomes

achieved during the reporting period in an interim progress report and a transaction detail report. The MDA may request payroll reports and details of each purchase by submitting receipts, invoices, or other proof of each grant project expenditure that has been submitted for reimbursement with grant funds. Progress reports are required to be submitted with each invoice either two or four times per year 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. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

Site visits and financial reconciliations

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; grantees with awards of \$250,000 or more will receive annual monitoring visits. 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; financial reconciliation may be performed on additional payment requests at the discretion of the MDA. For this purpose, the grantee must provide expense receipts, invoices, or other source documents to show what was purchased with grant funds; payroll records showing employee hours spent working on the project and payment for that time; and any other source documents requested by the state to support the project expenditures claimed in an invoice for reimbursement.

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.

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](#).

Audits of project

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 ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 8](#)). 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 provide voter registration services for its employees ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).

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](#)). AGRI has made significant economic impacts by increasing productivity, improving efficiency, and assisting the development of agricultural products.

The primary goal of the AGRI Crop Research Grant is to 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 for 2023 AGRI Crop Research Grants	Maximum score
Proposed project objectives align with the objectives of the AGRI Crop Research Grant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research improves the quality, quantity, or value of crops grown in Minnesota Project 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 	12
Potential economic impact on Minnesota agriculture <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
Measurable objectives and outcomes <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 	15
Soundness and rigor of methodology <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 	15
Outreach component of research <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.) 	9
Priorities: beneficiaries and availability of funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and outreach plan will meaningfully include underserved agricultural producers in rural communities or emerging farmers (5 pts) Research project (type of crop or type of research) has limited access to other funding (5 pts) 	10
Qualifications of research team <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 	9
Budget detail and justification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget is complete and narrative clearly details out and justifies all project costs Budget is reasonable and fully addresses the needs to accomplish each objective 	15
Total	100

Application Questions

Contact information

Applicant information

- Applicant name
- Organization name
- Organization mailing address
- Organization telephone
- Organization email

Principle investigator

If awarded a grant, the person who will be responsible for leading the research project:

- Name
- Email
- Telephone

Authorized representative

If awarded a grant, the person that will sign the grant contract agreement for this organization:

- Name
- Email
- Telephone

Eligibility

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

- The organization applying is based in Minnesota, has agricultural research capabilities, and an adequate financial system.
- The organization applying is in good standing with the State of Minnesota (not debarred with the State and has acceptable performance on past MDA and other state-funded grants.)
- Personnel funded by this grant project are not employees of the MDA. Applicants may contract with the MDA to perform specific services.

Project proposal

Grant request summary

- Project title
- List the crop(s) targeted
- Expected project start date
- Expected project end date
- Amount of grant request (total project cost)
- Applicant's matching funds (If any, not required)
- Other funding – If the proposed project has been submitted to or funded by another state or a federal grant program, specify the grantor, the funding amount, and the purpose of that grant funding. Also indicate whether these funds are needed as matching funds to this proposal or not. *(1,000 characters, including spaces)*
 - **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?

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

Provide the background for this project and clearly elaborate the need for this proposed research. Explain why the research you are proposing is important and timely. Include references to relevant supporting literature. *(3,000 characters, including spaces and upload box for references)*

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)*

Approach, methodology, and timeline

Describe your approach, including scientific methodology (proposed treatments and reason for selection); plot or 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, and pictures are allowed. *(10,000 characters, including spaces, plus an upload box for supporting document)*

Outreach plan

Research results must be widely and publicly disseminated. Describe 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)*

Priorities: Beneficiaries and availability of funding

Describe who stands to benefit, directly or indirectly, from your project and how they will benefit. In addition, explain how the research design or outreach of this project meaningfully involves or informs [emerging farmers](#) or rural communities with limited economic opportunities. How could this project address inequities or disparities experienced by these communities? *(2,000 characters, including spaces)*

Explain why there are relatively few funding opportunities from commodity groups or other grant programs for this type of project or crop. *(1,500 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 per participant, including spaces)*

- Participant name
- Organization affiliation
- Occupation
- Email address
- Relevant abilities and qualifications (brief summary)

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 or demonstrating the potential economic impact of your project or showing other's involvement in outreach. *(No page or character limit)*

Budget narrative

Provide a budget narrative that:

- Provides detailed costs and justifies project expenditures in each budget category.
- Explains how the budget items connect to accomplishing the project's objectives and achieving the given outcomes.
- Explains how you arrived at the budget estimates.

When applicable, identify the dollar value and source of current or pending cash match or in-kind contribution. A match is not required. *(10,000 characters, including spaces)*

Budget categories

Personnel – List names and titles of all participants who will work on this project. Include the number of hours for hourly wage earners or percent of total salary of full-time employees for whom you’re requesting funding. Separate out the fringe benefits for each person that will be paid with Crop Research funds.

Equipment – List equipment (with a useful life over one year and a cost over \$5,000) and include 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, and trailers.
- 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 weather stations, equipment for data collection or analysis, post-harvest handling, and value-added processing.

Supplies – Provide a list of supplies and describe how each is needed to accomplish the project objectives. Examples include insect traps, seeds, plant growth production and protection supplies, trial inputs, sample collection materials, and lab supplies. Justify the purchase of electronic supplies such as computers, software, and tablets.

Analysis – List each type of laboratory or statistical analysis, the name and location of the lab or business doing the analysis, and the purpose of each type of analysis.

Contractual services – List any entities outside your organization that you plan to retain on a temporary basis to work on 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 of each trip or group of trips with a common purpose, number of trips, purpose of trips, mode of travel and anticipated cost per trip. Base your cost on the current federal rate. Provide justification for out-of-state travel.

Communication – List type of expenses and estimated costs. Examples include printing, social media, and publishing costs.

Other – List expenses that don’t fit any of the budget categories. Examples include greenhouse or plot rental fees, stipends to farmer cooperators, and items needed to conduct a field day or other outreach event. 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)				