



**Minnesota's Agricultural Fertilizer
*Research & Education Council***

a farmer-led program to advance soil fertility research,
technology development, and education

Agricultural Research and Education Council (AFREC)

2022-2023 Request for Proposals

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GRANT SUMMARY

IMPORTANT DATES AND INFORMATION

- **Proposals Due: November 23, 2022** by 11:59 p.m. CST in the MDA online application system
- Available AFREC Funding: Up to \$1,000,000.00
- **AFREC reviews RFP applications: January 6, 2023¹**

GRANT OVERVIEW

The Minnesota Legislature established the Minnesota Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Program for identifying soil fertility priorities and providing funding for fertilizer research and outreach programs. Enabling legislation establishing the governing Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Council (referred to as “AFREC” or “Council”) and associated program are in MN Statute 18C.70, 18C.71, and 18C.80.

Additional information about AFREC, its membership, and funded projects is available at the following websites: www.mda.state.mn.us/afrec (Minnesota Department of Agriculture) and mnsoilfertility.com (AFREC Agricultural Fertilizer Research & Education Council).

ELIGIBILITY

Representatives of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) will evaluate all proposals received by the deadline. Proposals that fail to meet minimum requirements will not advance to the next phase of the evaluation.

Responders shall be in good standing with the State of Minnesota (no back taxes or compliance issues).

Any organization, research entity, individual, or business with agricultural research capability is eligible to apply and receive funding. This includes individuals, farmers/farmer networks, institutions of higher education, research institutions, nonprofit organizations, agricultural cooperatives, and agricultural businesses with research capabilities.

All costs incurred in responding to this RFP will be borne by the responder(s).

FUND AVAILABILITY

The Minnesota Legislature also established the funding mechanism for the AFREC program. This year, approximately \$1,000,000 will be available from fertilizer sales sold from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Please note that there are two separate RFPs described within this document. In the first RFP, there will be approximately \$970,000 available for research and/or education and outreach projects. In the second RFP, a maximum of \$30,000 has been set aside for the Research and Outreach Coordinator position for a one-year duration. Only one award will be made for the Research and Outreach Coordinator position. For those considering submitting a new project proposal, the project must be highly specific to the priorities provided under PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION/OUTREACH GRANTS. The vast majority of the available 2022-2023 funding will be used for "Continuations" (which is defined on the next page).

The Council will review, score, consider guidance regarding technical aspects of the proposed research design, then vote on funding allocation for each project. The Council's goal is to have projects selected and grants executed prior to the 2023 cropping/planting season. Interested parties need to be aware of the timelines for the development of proposals, the review process, and the grant documentation process.

¹ Due to accepted Covid-19 Social Distancing guidelines as of RFP release date, oral presentations may not be required for this funding round. The Council may request a one-two page summary of continuations (currently funded projects) for review.

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 establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities. The grant program aims to provide near-term and long-term benefits for Minnesota agriculture, its producers, and associated industries.

Grant outcomes will include:

- Develop fertilizer research and management recommendations for crops and cropping systems from across Minnesota including multiple geographic regions.
- Measure how the grant serves a geographically diverse set of people to include historically underrepresented groups and Tribal nations.
- Provide transferrable and beneficial outcomes for groups other than the grantee.

PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION/OUTREACH GRANTS

Continuation studies will have priority for 2022-2023 funding for only the time/length and dollars stated in original RFP approved for funding. “Continuations” are defined in this RFP as projects that have been previously funded by AFREC for shorter durations than the length specified in the original proposal. Adjustments to the original budget due to inflation or other increased costs are acceptable and should be explained. If the current project has not completed goals, timetables and reporting, the project will not be considered for continuation status.

RFP priorities for new research and education grants in 2022-2023 include:

1. Research to reevaluate/revise current fertilizer recommendations for Minnesota’s secondary crops defined as those with acreage of less than 2% of MN’s cropland acres (such as edible beans, sunflowers, potatoes, etc.).
2. Fertilizer or manure research on yields and crop quality in a sugarbeet rotation. Objectives of this research should include fertilizer impacts on the level of residue production prior to sugar beets, as well as, managing the fallow syndrome effects on crops following sugar beets.
3. Continued AFREC Research Outreach Coordinator support to 1) Develop and implement a work plan for the annual research RFP, 2) Facilitate AFREC Council meetings and conference calls, 3) Assist with technical aspects of the RFP and assemble a peer review committee, 4) Coordinate various information outlets with AFREC 5) Formal reporting between the Council and MDA, 6) Represent AFREC and MDA at related soil fertility research meetings, and 7) Coordinate partnerships.

RESEARCH and OUTREACH COORDINATOR (ROC)

The “Components” listed below are the fundamental elements that must be completed over the life of the project. All components listed below must be addressed in the proposal. Respondents are encouraged to consider additional components and/or propose additional tasks that are related and consistent with AFREC’s mission.

Component 1-Develop and implement a work plan for the annual research Request for Proposals

Component 2-Facilitate AFREC Council meetings and conference calls

Component 3-Assist with technical aspects of the RFP and assemble a peer review committee

Component 4-Coordinate various information outlets with AFREC

Component 5-Formal reporting between the Council and MDA

Component 6-Represent AFREC and MDA at related soil fertility research meetings

Component 7-Coordinate partnerships

Component 8-Additional related tasks developed by the respondent

RATING CRITERIA

- Criteria used for rating Research Applications provided in Table 1.
- Criteria used for rating Education and Outreach Applications provided in Table 2.
- Criteria used for rating Research and Outreach Coordinator provided in Table 3.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must meet the minimum requirements as outlined in this RFP to be considered for this grant opportunity.

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

<https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=statemn>. Hand delivered; hard copies will not be accepted.

All applications must be received online by 11:59 p.m. CST on November 23, 2022. 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.

See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for Application Selection Criteria and Weight.

See Tables 4 and 5 for additional dates and details regarding the application process.

APPLICATION CONTENT

Select and complete the appropriate forms which are available online:

- RFP 1: Research Education and Outreach Application form
- RFP 2: Research and Outreach Coordinator (ROC) Application form
- Affidavit of Non-collusion form and Veteran's Preference form

Additional information

- Attachment A AFREC Guidelines on use of products from U.S. Department of Commerce trade blacklist
- ** When the successful grant applicants are a nongovernmental organization, applicable financial statements required in Policy on the Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations will be requested before grant agreement documents are generated. These documents will not be required as part of the grant application.

Do not submit any other materials (binders, photos, etc.). Unrequested materials will not be reviewed.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

All applications must be received no later than 11:59 p.m. on November 23, 2022 to be considered. Grant applications are to be submitted through our online system. The application is accessed through a link on the MDA's AFREC Request for Proposals webpage at www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/afrec-request-proposals

QUESTIONS

Questions must be submitted via email to Margaret.Wagner@state.mn.us by 4:00 p.m. Central Standard Time, on November 10, 2022. Questions should not be submitted through other means. Answers will be posted on the "AFREC RFP Questions and Answers webpage", located at: www.mda.state.mn.us/afrec-rfp-questions-answers.

Responders should **NOT** contact unauthorized Minnesota Department of Agriculture personnel nor list them as a collaborator or partner anywhere within the proposal. Contact regarding this RFP with any MDA personnel not listed above could result in disqualification.

SELECTION CRITERIA AND WEIGHT

The review committee will be reviewing each response on a 100-point scale. This year \$1,000,000 is available for AFREC grant funding through this RFP.

A "Peer Review Team" will make technical recommendations to the AFREC council prior to completion of their initial scoring. AFREC reserves the right, based on the scores of the proposals, to create a short-listing of Responders who have received the highest scores to make an oral presentation. However, due to Covid-19 safety guidelines as of RFP release date, oral presentations may or may not be required for this funding round. The Council may request a two-page summary of Continuation projects in lieu of the normal oral presentation or possible virtual presentation. The 100-point scale used to create the final evaluation recommendation is as follows: Table 1. Scoring Criteria for Rating Research Proposals, Table 2. Scoring Criteria for Rating Educational and Outreach Proposals, Table 3. Scoring Criteria for Rating Research and Outreach Coordinator.

Table 1. Scoring Criteria for Rating Research Proposals

Criteria for RESEARCH Projects Only	Points
Relation to Council priorities	20
Technical soundness and scientific merit	15
Capabilities of investigator and collaborators	10
Economic impact on expected return	10
Outreach component and networking abilities	15
Overall rating relative to other projects	10
Relevance and transferability to Minnesota agriculture	10
Presentation and responses	10
Total Points	100
Preference for Targeted Group businesses, Economically Disadvantaged businesses, or Veteran Owned businesses	Possible 6 bonus points
Total Possible Points	106

Table 2. Scoring Criteria for Rating Educational Proposals

Criteria for EDUCATION AND OUTREACH Projects Only	Points
Innovation and approach	15
Likelihood of influencing a behavioral change	20
Relevance and transferability to Minnesota agriculture	15
Audience consideration and size	10
Capabilities of proposer and collaborators	10
Integration into existing outreach networks	10
Overall rating relative to other projects	10
Presentation and responses	10
Total Points	100
Preference for Targeting businesses, Economically Disadvantaged business, or Veteran Owned businesses	Possible 6 bonus points
Total Possible Points	106

Table 3. Scoring Criteria for Research and Outreach Coordinator (ROC) Proposals

Criteria for RESEARCH AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR (ROC) Only	Points
Does this responder clearly understand the mission and nature of the Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Council (AFREC)?	5
Does this responder have experience in facilitating discussion with a broad range of audiences to include geographic, cultural, language, cropping system, farming size/style and successfully extracting opinions and attitudes in a constructive and interactive fashion?	5
Does responder have a highly advanced understanding of the fertilizer industry, a network of state and national industry contacts, and an apparent high level of respect/trust?	5
Does responder have the ability to gather and synthesize a wide variety of opinions and visions into a structured set of recommendations?	5
Does responder have a highly advanced understanding of soil fertility research needs and technology advancements?	5
Does responder have a strong record of accomplishment in working cooperatively with land grant universities, private research firms, and other potential research partners?	5
Are the responses for Mandatory Components 1-5 reasonable, complete, and logical?	30
Are the responses to the Optional Components reasonable and do they add overall value to the program?	10
Project Cost	30
Total Points	100
Preference for Targeted Group business, Economically Disadvantaged business, or veteran owned businesses	Possible 6 bonus points
Total Possible Points	106

(c) 18C.71 required that 'each project meeting the basic qualifications is subject to a "yes" or "no" vote by each Council member. Projects chosen to receive funding must achieve an affirmative vote from at least eight of the 12 Council members or two-thirds of the voting members present.

REVIEW PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The Evaluation Committee will review all eligible and complete applications received by the deadline. Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) will review all committee recommendations and is responsible for award decisions. **The award decisions of AFREC are final and not subject to appeal. This Request for Proposals (RFP) does not obligate the State to award a grantee or complete the project.**

Table 5. Timetable for the Application Process

Order	Steps	Associated Date(s)
Step 1	RFP posted on the State Register and the MDA website	September 26, 2022
Order	Steps	Associated Date(s)
Step 2	Questions due no later than 4:00 p.m. Central Time deadline.	November 10, 2022
Step 3	Grant proposals submitted to the MDA no later than 4:00 p.m. Central Time deadline.	November 23, 2022
Step 4	MDA staff eliminates any “ineligible projects” using MN Statutes 18C.70 and 18C.71 as guidance and forwards all eligible projects to the Council.	November 28-December 2, 2022
Step 5	Technical Review committee completes reviews of applications	December 5-23, 2022
Step 6	Each Council member completes the reviews for all projects making the first cut and does the initial ranking for projects using a standardized method.	December 6, 2022-January 4, 2023
Step 7	Council forwards initial rankings to MDA. MDA staff combines the rankings from the entire Council.	January 3-4, 2023
Step 8	The Council finalizes their individual and group rankings. Council deliberates and conducts official vote on each project. Council selects projects until the available funding spent.	January 6, 2023 Alternate January 13, 2023
Step 10	Successful proposers contacted. Successful responder should go to Table 6.	January 16-20, 2023

Table 6. Timetable for Successful Applicants

(Specific dates for Quarterly Progress Reports and Annual Reports will be included in the actual grant/work plan)

Order	Proposed Steps	Associated Date(s)
Step 1	MDA assists successful applicants in the development of the work plan and budget needed for the grant.	January 23, 2023
Step 2	All proposal and budget adjustments finalized. Grant paperwork begins.	February 10, 2023
Step 3	Work plans, associated budgets, and grants finalized with the MDA.	March 3, 2023 or sooner
Step 4	Projects from successful grant applications begin	April 1, 2023 or Upon negotiated grant execution whichever is later
Step 5	Quarterly Progress Reports and Billings	July, Oct, Jan, and April during the life of the project
Step 6	Annual oral or written presentation to the Council	August or Early December
Order	Proposed Steps	Associated Date(s)
Step 7	Submission of annual written report	March 1st of each year or one month after negotiated end date of the grant agreement
Step 8	Final Report and budget Statements to MDA	Submission 30 days after the end of the grant period

PRE-AWARD FINANCIAL REVIEW PROCESS

All Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) applying for grants in 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. In order to comply with [Policy on the Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations](#)

Successful RFP applicants will be required to provide one on the requested documents, 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.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when

- a grantee or responder is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the Department due to competing duties or loyalties
- a grantees or responder'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.

PUBLIC DATA

Per Minn.Stat. § [13.599](#)

- Names and addresses of grant applicants will be public data once proposal responses are opened.
- All remaining data in proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn.Stat. §[13.37](#)) will be 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 Minnesota Department of Agriculture as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn.Stat. §[13.37](#)) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).

GRANT PROVISIONS

The enabling legislation establishing AFREC are MN Statute 18C.70, 18C.71, and 18C.80.

Grant agreement templates are available for review at: [Office of Grants Management- Grant Agreement Templates](#)

Ineligible expenses include but are not limited to the following:

- Fundraising
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Lobbyists, political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, or contingency funds
- Parking or traffic violations
- Out of state transportation and travel expenses, (Minnesota considered the home state for determining whether travel is out of state).
- **The respondent will incur all costs incurred in applying to this RFP.**
-

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING

MDA staff will work with successful responders to schedule payments and deliverables. Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, grantees must provide an IRS W-9 form and sign a grant award agreement with the MDA indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks and authorizing the MDA to monitor the progress of the project.

Grant award agreements must be signed and returned to the MDA within 30 days of receipt. Failure to submit an executed copy of the grant award agreement within 30 days of receipt may jeopardize the award.

All information submitted becomes a public record. However, if the grant recipient considers any information to be trade secret protected, the grant recipient may request trade-secret information be kept confidential and must specifically label the information for which the claim is made. If a data requestor challenges a grant recipient's trade-secret designation, the grant recipient will be responsible for defending the trade-secret designation.

Successful grantees are required to respond to requests for follow-up information beyond the term of the grant agreement for evaluation purposes.

GRANT PAYMENTS

MDA staff will work with successful respondent to generate project budget to include payment schedule and work plan that will include project deliverables. All grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget.

Per [State Policy on Grant Payments](#), reimbursement is the preferred method for making grant payments. To receive payments, grantees must provide written progress reports and clearly detailed expenditures on an invoice(s) submitted to the MDA as directed in the grant agreement. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports. **The final 10% of the award will be withheld until a final report or documentation is received and approved by the MDA.** The MDA reserves the right to require additional reporting during the project.

GRANT MONITORING

MN Statute [§16B.97](#) and [Policy on Grant Monitoring](#) require the following:

- One monitoring visit during the grant period on all state grants of \$50,000 and higher
- Annual monitoring visits during the grant period on all grants of \$250,000 and higher
- Conducting a financial reconciliation of grantee's expenditures at least once during the grant period on grants of \$50,000 and higher. For this purpose, the grantee must make expense receipts, employee timesheets, invoices, and any other supporting documents available upon request by the State.

GRANTEE BIDDING REQUIREMENTS FOR NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Any grant-funded services and/or materials that are expected to cost:

- \$100,000 or more must undergo a formal notice and bidding process.
- Between \$25,000 and \$99,999 must be competitively awarded based on a minimum of three (3) verbal quotes or bids.
- Between \$10,000 and \$24,999 must be competitively awarded based on a minimum of two (2) verbal quotes or bids or awarded to a targeted vendor.

For grant-funded projects that include construction work of \$25,000 or more, prevailing wage rules apply per; [Minn. Stat. §§177.41](#) through [177.44](#). These rules require that the wages of laborers and workers should be comparable to wages paid for similar work in the community as a whole.

The grantee must take all necessary affirmative steps to assure that targeted vendors from businesses with active certifications through these entities are used when possible:

- [State Department of Administration's Certified Targeted Group, Economically Disadvantaged and Veteran-Owned Vendor List](#)
- Metropolitan Council's Targeted Vendor list: [Minnesota Unified Certification Program](#)
- Small Business Certification Program through Hennepin County, Ramsey County, and City of St. Paul: [Central Certification Program](#)

The grantee must maintain:

- Written standards of conduct covering conflicts of interest and governing the actions of its employees engaged in the selection, award, and administration of contracts.
- Support documentation of the purchasing and/or bidding process utilized to contract services in their financial records, including support documentation justifying a single/sole source bid, if applicable.

The grantee must not contract with vendors who are suspended or debarred in Minnesota:

<http://www.mmd.admin.state.mn.us/debarredreport.asp>

AUDITS

Per MN Statute §[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 to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL GRANTEES:

- A. 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.
- B. 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](#)
- C. 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.

VOTER REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT:

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

ATTACHMENT A

AFREC Guidelines on use of products from U.S. Department of Commerce trade blacklist

Background:

Concerns have increased on the need to protect U.S. intellectual properties and crop production technologies from misuse by foreign companies that appear on the U.S. Department of Commerce trade blacklist. Projects funded by AFREC are requested not to use products from these companies. The blacklist of companies appears on the commerce department web site. AFREC funded projects that do not follow these AFREC guidelines risk losing funding from AFREC.

AFREC GUIDELINE STATEMENT:

AFREC funded projects or new projects requesting funding from AFREC are advised to follow AFREC guidelines when using various types of research tools. To protect U.S. intellectual properties and crop production technologies, project leaders should not use products/programs from companies that appear on U.S. Department of Commerce trade blacklist. Examples could include drones, software to interpret drone flight data, chips and semiconductors, software for data collection, field locations, interpretation of data and other tools that could be used by other countries to leverage U.S. agricultural information and technologies.