Guide for Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant Technical Advisors

The Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program offers Farmer/Rancher Grants to eligible commercial agricultural producers to explore new sustainable production practices, marketing strategies, and other techniques. These projects help producers address issues that affect agriculture and the agricultural community with long-term sustainability in mind.

Securing a technical advisor is a requirement of the Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant Program. Therefore, this tip sheet provides information to clarify the roles and responsibilities of technical advisors on Farmer/Rancher Grant projects.

Why have a technical advisor?

All projects must enlist a technical advisor who provides a signed letter of cooperation to the Farmer/Rancher Grant applicant explaining their commitment and role in the project. While Western SARE recognizes the broad expertise that agricultural producers possess, the support that Farmer/Rancher Grant applicants receive from technical advisors can strengthen the proposal, enrich the integrity of the project's research methods, and extend the reach of project results. In addition, lasting relationships formed among agricultural producers and technical advisors often lead to additional research and other collaborations, helping to strengthen our region's agricultural community.

Who can be a technical advisor?

Technical advisors possess a wide range of experience and expertise, depending on the specific needs of the Farmer/Rancher applicant and their project. A technical advisor may be an Extension education, researcher, NRCS or other government employee, nonprofit staff, private consultant, veterinarian, other agricultural professional, or another experienced agricultural producer. The key is that the technical advisor provides a needed expertise to the proposed project.

Technical advisors must be independent of the producer. They should not be close friends or family members. Western SARE staff and Administrative Council members are not permitted to serve as technical advisors because of conflict of interest policies; however, these professionals may assist in identifying suitable technical advisor candidates to fit the needs of the applicant and their project.

What technical advisors do:

Learn about SARE. Technical advisors should become familiar with Western SARE and its grant programs, see western.sare.org. It is helpful to learn the types and scope of projects funded in the past; SARE's national database includes information on all projects funded since the program's start in 1988: projects.sare.org/search-projects.

Technical advisors should be sure to read through the current Farmer/Rancher Grant Call for Proposals posted at: western.sare.org/grants/farmer-rancher/ to understand what is involved in applying for the grant program.

Talk through the project. Before writing the proposal, Farmer/Rancher applicants are advised to talk through their proposal ideas with their technical advisor to discuss its feasibility and fit within the constraints and goals of the grant program.

Contribute background literature. Help agricultural producers provide evidence of past work or research that demonstrates that the proposed project will provide new information and be of help to other producers. Applicants are asked to provide citations in their proposal including and beyond past SARE

projects; some applicants may appreciate assistance with searching for relevant literature and other background information they can use.

Review the proposal. For many agricultural producers, the Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant is their first grant-writing experience. Conversely, many technical advisors have some level of familiarity with writing grants, implementing grant-funded projects, and filing reports. While the producer is expected to write their own Farmer/Rancher Grant, the technical advisor should review the producer's grant application and budget. An extra set of eyes from someone familiar with the project can improve the proposal by identifying sections that may be unclear, correcting errors, and providing feedback to strengthen areas that may need help.

Provide needed expertise. Farmer/Rancher applicants come to the program with a wide range of backgrounds and expertise. The Technical Advisor assists the Farmer/Rancher applicant with the specific expertise they need to develop and conduct a robust project. The following are common areas of expertise technical advisors provide:

- **Research methodology and analysis.** The technical advisor may be called upon for help with the experimental design of the study, data collection methods, and data analysis strategies. In some cases, technical advisors perform statistical analysis for the project.
- **Troubleshooting.** Some projects don't go as planned – this is the price of innovation. Technical advisors may help troubleshoot any problems that arise during the project and make suggestions for moving forward. Note that changes in the project plan or budget must be approved in advance by Western SARE (see [Requesting Project Modifications](#)). SARE accepts that new ideas are risky and not all new ideas work out. But keep in mind that discoveries some view as failures are valuable lessons; SARE asks that problems and unexpected results be reported so others can learn from them. Please note that technical advisors are not responsible for producers who fail to follow through on their projects – managing the grant is the producer's responsibility.
- **Outreach and promotion of project results**. Assisting with the education/outreach component of a Farmer/Rancher Grant can be a tremendous help to the project. The producer needs to include an education plan with outreach activities to share project findings with a diverse audience. Examples of outreach assistance include helping the producer develop a presentation for use at workshops or conferences; assisting with promotion and implementation of demonstration and field walks; reviewing and editing fact sheets, guides, and newsletter articles; and assisting producers with media coverage of the project.

What technical advisors do not do:

Although technical advisors play a major role in the Farmer/Rancher Grant, there are certain activities that technical advisors should not do, including:

- **Write the grant.** Producers need to develop their own ideas and write the grant application; the technical advisor reviews the proposal but ultimately, it is the producer's responsibility to write and submit the application.
- **Conduct the project.** It is the producer's responsibility to conduct the project and the technical advisor should not actively run the project. If the technical advisor wants to take the primary role in managing the project, then they should apply for a Western SARE Professional + Producer Grant, specifically designed for agricultural professionals who work with producers. For more information about the Professional + Producer Grant Program, see: [western.sare.org/grants/professional-producer](#).

How does the Farmer/Rancher Grant Program benefit technical advisors?

If needed, grant funds may be used to pay technical advisors for their time spent on the project. Since SARE's emphasis is on profitability, good stewardship, and strengthening the broader agricultural community, technical advisors share in supporting these goals. These grants also put new ideas into circulation, potentially enhancing the sustainability of other farms and/or ranches with which the technical advisor is connected. Helping producers get these grants is also a good way to achieve educational programming goals, and they can be an effective multiplier as producer-to-producer exchanges of information is an effective educational strategy.

What kind of time commitment is involved?

The Farmer/Rancher applicant will consult with the technical advisor in developing the grant application, and so the technical advisor should allow time to review carefully and provide feedback, provide a resume, and write a letter of cooperation to be submitted with the final proposal. Discussions about the role the technical advisor will play in the project should include consideration of time commitments. If the project is approved, the producer should substantially run the project.

What information is needed from the technical advisor for the proposal?

The following technical advisor information is needed to complete the Farmer/Rancher Grant application:

- Technical advisor name and contact information; this information is included in the Project Team Members and Roles section.
- A summary of the expertise the technical advisor will bring to the project and how they will be involved in the project; this information is included in the Project Team Members and Roles section.
- A resume (2-page max) that demonstrates the technical advisor's ability to assist with the technical capacities of the project; this is uploaded to the online application (applications with missing technical advisor resumes will be disqualified).
- A signed letter of cooperation outlining the technical advisor's willingness to participate in the project, their commitment in terms of resources, time, etc., and their role in the project. The letter is uploaded to the online application (applications with missing technical advisor letters will be disqualified).

For more information.

Questions about the roles and responsibilities of the technical advisor in the Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant program should be directed to wsare-fr@sare.org.

Checklist for Technical Advisors

If you are asked by a producer to be a technical advisor on a Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant, this checklist can help to cover your bases. Each step in the process is important and can make your producer's proposal more competitive.

- Read the Call for Proposals.
- Discuss the project with the applicant. Do you and the producer have a clear understanding of the project objectives? Does the project meet SARE criteria? Has the producer looked at what others have done to address the problem? Is the project innovative and potentially useful to other producers?
- Talk over your role as technical advisor with the applicant and make sure you both understand what that will be. Will you be helping with experimental design? Will you be running statistical analyses? Will you be helping with outreach and education? Does another expert need to be involved?
- Review the proposal, taking care to look for technical issues, errors, or problems with feasibility. If you do not know how to determine if there are technical or feasibility issues, talk with someone who does.
- Go over the budget, making sure it is consistent with SARE guidelines and that the costs seem reasonable and current.
- Ask for a second draft of the proposal, especially if there are technical problems to be addressed or if there are weak sections that need to be strengthened.
- Make a copy of the proposal for your records and for reference if the project is funded.
- Submit your resume and a signed letter of cooperation outlining your willingness to participate in the project, your commitment in terms of resources, time, etc., and your role in the project.