

ILLINOIS NREC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PARTNERS PROGRAM (OEPP) REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS – MARCH 2023

Full Proposal Due Date: **MAY 15, 2023 at 5 pm CST to julie@illinoisnrec.org**

OVERVIEW

Since 2012, Illinois NREC has funded over \$30 million in applied research addressing nutrient loss across the state of Illinois. This research has sought to further understand the agronomic, economic and environmental aspects of practices and products that are available to Illinois farmers, retailers and other conservation practitioners. The focus of the first phase of funding has been on building a robust research portfolio, providing opportunities for University researchers to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals and building the body of work to confirm efficacy of practices outlined in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and provide scientific basis for adding additional practices.

As we head into the next phase of NREC, the focus remains on applied research with an added emphasis on knowledge transfer. This grant seeks opportunities to partner with other organizations, working in the nutrient space, to increase the exposure to NREC funded research and drive change in the countryside.

Grant recipients will provide educational opportunities to farmers and retailers to increase best practice awareness, increase conservation/nutrient management cultural practices, and share their experiences and lessons learned. This work may include soil health, carbon sequestration awareness/education, social, economic and agronomic benefits, etc. but **MUST** include discussion/education related to water quality, in keeping with Illinois NREC's stated mission, while providing important social and economic benefits to agricultural producers. Approximately \$50,000 in grant funding is available under this funding opportunity.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

This funding opportunity will provide grants for projects that are located within Illinois. Additional priority may be given to projects that are focused on priority watersheds as defined in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Illinois NREC has a broad research portfolio that sets the basis for best management practices related to nutrient efficiency work. Communications and outreach grants will be awarded to organizations who are committed to leveraging existing and ongoing research, utilizing subject matter experts, and collaborating with Illinois NREC staff and contractors.

Illinois NREC research funding has been focused on four main categories and program priorities will be driven off of these main areas.

- 1) Maximize the efficiency of nutrient applications through focusing on 4R's.
- 2) Utilize cover crops to capture any excess nutrients not utilized by the cash crop.
- 3) Utilize edge of field practices to prevent the transport of nutrients into waterways.
- 4) Explore new and novel practices and products which identify "next generation" approaches to preventing nutrient loss.

PROJECT METRICS

Applicants should include success metrics most relevant to their proposed projects, and **all applicants are required to include the following metrics:**

- # FTE (full time equivalent) positions working on this grant
- # of people reached through outreach activities
- Outreach program evaluation/measure of success
- Intended deliverable(s)

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, tribal governments and organizations, and educational institutions. To be competitive, applicant organizations must demonstrate capacity and experience commensurate with the scale of the project being proposed and the funding being requested.
- Individuals, federal government agencies, and for-profit entities are not eligible to apply for grant funding.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- **Equipment:** Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases.
- NREC funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities, or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NREC funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation, and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Approximately \$50,000 in grant funding is available under this funding opportunity. Typical grant awards will range from \$2,500 - \$10,000 with an estimated average grant size of approximately \$5,000.

This funding opportunity requires a minimum 1:1 matching contribution.

Higher match ratios and contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and may help a project be more competitive during application review. Matching contributions may include cash, in-kind contributions of staff and volunteer time, work performed, materials and services donated, or other tangible contributions to the project objectives and outcomes. In addition, eligible indirect costs (not to exceed 10% of total grant funds) may be applied as a match.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM NREC

Illinois NREC values the relationships that each of our partners have with their existing networks and stakeholders. We also recognize that many of our partners have extensive communications channels that are recognized throughout the industry for their expertise and timely information distribution. The scope and design of each project will vary and we will work to identify how to best leverage the available resources between all parties. We will commit to providing access to experts, data, field research sites or other resources that will support the ongoing efforts of the projects. If needed, we can provide graphic design or writing assistance but do not need to have creative control over deliverables. We will provide a graphic standards guide to all grant partners and require that any NREC investments are properly credited.

PROJECT TIMING

Grant period will align with the 2024 crop year. Grant money will be awarded in October of 2023 and final projects must be complete by September 30, 2024.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness, and compliance with NREC funding policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Priorities – Project addresses one or more of the funding opportunity priorities and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success.

Partnership and Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project.

Budget – Costs are allowable, reasonable, and budgeted in accordance with NREC's budget guidelines.

Cost-Effectiveness – Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the most economically efficient way to meet project objectives. Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Project budgets will be compared to similar projects to ensure proposed costs across all budget categories are reasonable for the activities being performed and the outcomes proposed.

Transferability and Expansion – Project has potential to apply lessons learned to other communities and catalyze broader practice adoption.

Funding Need – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

Monitoring – Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during and after the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Past Success – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing other relevant projects with specific and measurable results.

Partnership – Relationships are in place to implement the project and the project is supported by relevant stakeholders, constituents, and communities. Project identifies key partners (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementation, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships.

OTHER

Publicity and Acknowledgment of Support – Award recipients will be required to grant NREC the right and authority to publicize the project and NREC financial support for the grant in press releases, publications, and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NREC to provide high-

resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project. Recipients will follow the NREC brand standards guide and utilize NREC logos and resources according to that guide.

Receiving Award Funds – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Grantees may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NREC. So as to not create an overly burdensome reporting process, requests for reimbursement against the grant can be made at any time and require a summary of reimbursable expenses in the following categories: Personnel, Travel/Mileage, Supplies/Consumables (food, drinks, etc), equipment (requires prior approval), indirect costs (not to exceed 10% of total funds awarded) request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

Intellectual Property – Intellectual property created using NREC awards may be copyrighted or otherwise legally protected by award recipients. NREC reserves the right to use, publish, and copy materials created under awards, including posting such material on NREC’s website and featuring it in publications. NREC may use project metrics and data from awards to estimate societal benefits that result and to report these results to funding partners.

TIMELINE

Full Proposals Due:	Monday, May 15 ^h by 5:00 CST
Review Period:	May - July
Awards Announced:	Early-Mid August

After award announcements, NREC staff will work with grantees to prepare grant agreements and other necessary paperwork. Once grant agreements are finalized, funds will typically be paid to grantees on a reimbursable basis. Funds may be advanced to qualified grantees on an as-needed basis.

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through our Google form account.

1. The form is available at: <https://forms.gle/qtPBm3mssEbYNSVK6>. Please complete each section of the form and submit when complete.
2. Upload your full proposal at the end of the form as indicated. If you are unable to attach the file, you can email to julie@illinoisnrec.org. Please combine program details and budget into one pdf file for ease of review. Proposals should not exceed a total of four pages – three for project details and one for budget.