

# Utah Agricultural Experiment Station Seed Grant Program 2026 General Guidelines

## Background and Purpose

The goal of the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station (UAES) Seed Grant program is to place USU faculty in a strong leadership position to address critical issues identified in **Utah State University's NIFA Plan of Work**, specifically:

- Global Food Security and Hunger
- Climate Change and Management of Natural Resources
- Nutrition and Health
- Food Safety
- Healthy, Financially Secure Families
- Youth Development
- Community Resilience

The UAES has identified additional priority areas important to the state of Utah, including:

- Climate Smart Agriculture – managing land and water resources in agricultural systems to conserve natural resources and improve ecosystem services (may include topics related to water use, livestock and/or plant systems)
- Food and Human Health – systems that improve safety, quality, and access to healthy, nutritious food.
- Climate Change and Management of Natural Resources
- Local Regional Food Systems - including supply chains and processing.
- Improved Fertilizer Efficiency and Alternatives.
- Economic Prosperity through Bio-Based Systems – systems that support the expansion and implementation of a robust and sustainable bioeconomy, including renewable energy systems.
- Any area which fits USDA priorities and results in a strengthened leadership position for USU.

These priority areas demonstrate areas of need important for the State of Utah and the nation as a whole. A successful UAES Seed Grant proposal must effectively articulate how the proposed research will address one or more of the priority areas from each of the NIFA and UAES priority areas listed above. Cross-disciplinary collaboration may play an essential role in achieving these goals.

Recipients of the UAES Seed Grant are expected to utilize the funds to develop novel basic and/or applied research projects that can lead to significant external funding for the continuation of the projects, either from the USDA or from other sources. While the proposed research should generate refereed publications, presentations, and student training, it should also benefit society, contribute to scientific knowledge, strengthen the UAES, and enhance USU's leadership in these crucial areas.

## Eligibility Criteria

All applications must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Project Directors (PDs) must be USU employees with faculty appointments.
- PDs who received a UAES Seed Grant in the previous fiscal year are ineligible to be PDs for this round of funding but may be co-Project Directors (co-PDs) for multiple other projects.
- Applicants may apply each year until awarded a grant, after which the award recipients are ineligible to submit a new application the following year.
- Co-PDs of UAES Seed Grants funded in the previous fiscal year are eligible to be PDs; however, the proposed project must be unrelated to the previously funded project.
- UAES Seed Grants are *not* intended to provide ongoing support for research previously funded by

the program.

## Timeline

- Proposals must be submitted electronically before 5:00 p.m. on **Friday January 30, 2026**, without exceptions.
- Notification of awards following review and selection will be provided to the applicant and their department head by the UAES Associate Director approximately one month after the submission deadline.

## General Guidelines

- Proposals are limited to no more than \$80,000 in total for the entire grant period. See additional budget requirements below in the Budget instructions.
- These awards provide "seed money" and represent an opportunity to strengthen the position of USU and the UAES in the scientific community. The probability of establishing a pathway leading to "external" funding is a primary goal for making these awards.
- PDs are encouraged to include both senior and junior faculty members in their research team.
- All expenditures must be made according to university policies and procedures and within the fiscal year(s) for which funding was approved. Any funds remaining in your account at the end of the project period will be returned to the UAES for reallocation (no-cost extensions are not generally granted).
- A review panel of experts will make recommendations for funding projects to the UAES Director. Funding is based on available resources and the scientific merit of the proposals submitted. The Director reserves the right to fund or not fund projects recommended by the panel, to fund projects fully or partially depending upon the appropriateness of the budget and justification, and to fund projects in some or all of this round's UAES priority areas.
- Project reports: *Annual* written progress reports for the project must be submitted in Digital Measures for review by your Department Head and the UAES Associate Director. A final report must be submitted in Digital Measures within one month after the completion of the project. No new grants will be awarded until past reports have been received.

## Application

**Formatting:** Times New Roman, 12-point font, with one-inch margins on all sides. Figures and tables may use a reasonably smaller font size, but generally no less than a 10-point font.

**Submission:** Proposals are due before 5:00 p.m. on **Friday, January 30, 2026**, without exceptions. Submit your applications electronically at <https://qanr.usu.edu/uaes/internal-resources/uaes-grant-support> as a single PDF document assembled in the following order:

### 1. Cover page (PDF form)

- a. Title: A concise descriptive title of the project.
- b. Priority Area(s): Select at least one of the USDA/NIFA Critical Issues and at least one of the UAES priority areas to be addressed by the proposed project.
- c. Personnel: Identify the Project Director, his/her Banner identification number, academic title, department, and any Co-PDs and their respective departments.
- d. Project Duration: Specify the project period beginning March 1, 2026 and ending on or before June 30, 2028. *Seed grant projects must be approved by UAES and entered into Digital Measures as new UAES projects before funding for the UAES Seed Grant begins.*
- e. Total Requested Amount: Up to \$80,000 for the entire grant period.

- f. Signatures of the Project Director and their Department Head are required.

## 2. Project Summary or abstract (1 page)

- a. Provide a *non-technical* project summary of no more than 400 words.

## 3. Project Narrative (6-8 pages)

- a. Introduction: Describe in clear, concise language: (1) the critical need or background information that justifies or explains the proposed project; (2) the target audience for the project; and (3) the scientific hypothesis and/or research objectives addressed by the project. Most importantly, briefly explain how the proposed research activities will position USU for significant external funding in the future and/or considerably strengthen UAES capabilities in an area of critical need to the state of Utah.
- b. Background: Provide a concise review of the relevant literature. Discuss the emerging research needs in this area, the current state of scientific research in the area, and USU's current position in the research area. Include a brief theoretical or conceptual framework if appropriate.
- c. Objectives: Describe the specific objectives and the methods for accomplishing those objectives, including research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and reporting.
- d. Anticipated Outcomes: Explain the expected results of the project such as refereed publications, presentations, and more importantly, how the outcome of the project is expected to make a real difference in USU's efforts in this research area. *Explain how data from your project will be used to support an external grant proposal and give a timetable for submission of an external grant. Include the target agency, funding program, etc. Describe how the proposed project makes USU more competitive for this funding than if your proposed project were not funded.* Discuss the potential broader societal impacts of USU's involvement and leadership in this area. Consider who will be impacted, to what extent your project will make an impact, and how this work could be shared with communities.
- e. Metrics for Success: Identify specific metrics to evaluate where USU was at the start of your project and where USU is expected to be at the end of the project in terms of our competitive position, including, but not limited to, publication in peer-reviewed journals, grant funding, conferences and presentations, research impact, student involvement and mentoring, intellectual property and technology transfer, community engagement, outreach, broader impacts, stakeholder feedback and evaluation, etc.
- f. Management plan: Describe the role of each researcher and any graduate and/or undergraduate students participating in the project. Explain how students and junior faculty members will gain valuable experience in research and project management.

## 4. References Cited (No page limit)

## 5. Budget (Excel spreadsheet)

- a. *Total funds requested for faculty and staff contract salaries and benefits may not exceed 25% of the total budget requested.* However, this does not apply to students and non-contract hourly employees. Furthermore, funds may not be used to augment faculty base salaries or cover summer salaries. Funds may only be applied to non-tenure track faculty who are in soft-money positions or who do not have a research component in their role statement (signed and in effect as of January 1, 2026).
- b. Benefits must be calculated at 48% for contract employees, 8.0% for payroll personnel (including unenrolled students during summer months), and 0.8% for enrolled

undergraduate and graduate students, plus \$170.17 per month (\$2,042 annually) for the university's portion of graduate student health insurance (see [current rates](#)); an 8% inflationary factor is recommended for student health insurance.

- c. Requests for graduate student support will be considered but require a 50% match, which may come from UAES sources, and a total stipend of at least \$24,000 per year.
- d. Tuition and fees are not allowable expenses as they are not considered research-related expenses.
- e. Requests for undergraduate interns may be made without matching funds.
- f. In-state, out-of-state, and international travel may be included in the budget only if justifiable as a critical need to conduct research. Travel costs for research conferences are not allowable expenses.
- g. Funds for the purchase of capital equipment (equipment costing \$5,000) essential for the proposed project may be included but require a 50% match from a non-UAES source. An index number for the source of the matching funds must be provided. Shipping costs may be included in the budget.
- h. If selected for an award, budget deviations of more than 10% must receive prior written approval from the Associate Director of the UAES.
- i. Collaborators may be individuals from outside of USU, but subawards are not allowed, meaning funds may not cover salaries for non-USU personnel. However, if USU does not have the capacity to perform a particular analysis, funds may be used to cover the cost of analysis by an external service provider.

#### **6. Budget Justification (No page limit)**

- a. Provide justification for each of the expenses listed in the budget. Explain the source of the 50% matching funds for graduate assistantships and/or capital equipment and provide the corresponding index number.

#### **7. Biosketches (4 pages each)**

- a. Include a brief biosketch (limited to 4 pages each) for the PD and each Co-PD using a typical USDA, NIH, or NSF format.

### **Evaluation criteria**

A panel of research experts will evaluate each submitted proposal for its scientific merit and will make recommendations to the Director of the UAES based on the following criteria:

- Quality of the proposed activities in terms of scientific merit, innovation, etc.
- Probability the proposed research activities will position USU for significant external funding in the future and/or considerably strengthen UAES capabilities in an area of critical need to the state of Utah.
- Anticipated outcomes (journal articles, presentations, student training, broader impacts, etc.).
- Quality of research team, collaborations, etc. as they relate to ability to address one of this round's targeted UAES priority areas.
- The quality of the management plan.
- Contribution of the proposed project to build the capacity of junior faculty in research and project management skills, and/or positioning senior faculty to move into a new area of research.
- Appropriateness of proposed budget and explanation of budgeted activities in achieving the goals and objectives of the proposed project.

## Questions

For any questions regarding the UAES Seed Grant Program or how to submit a proposal, please contact Cody Bills, QANR Proposal Specialist (email: [cody.bills@usu.edu](mailto:cody.bills@usu.edu); phone: 435-797-1929).

## FAQ

1. I've been asked to submit a project report for UAES Hatch funds. How is this different from the UAES Seed Grant?
  - Hatch funds are the funds appropriated to the UAES by the federal government to cover salaries and operational funds. Each faculty member with a UAES appointment or a UAES *project* will receive Hatch funds. The UAES Seed Grant funds new projects proposed by any USU faculty that align with the NIFA and UAES priority areas. A recipient of a UAES Seed Grant will have to submit an initial project report for approval.
2. If I cannot meet the submission deadline, when is the next funding cycle?
  - Updated RFPs for the UAES Seed Grant program are posted annually in November and due in January. Applicants must wait until the following year to apply if they are unable to apply for this round of funding.
3. Can collaborators be from outside USU?
  - Collaborators may be individuals from outside of USU, but subawards are not allowed, meaning funds may not cover salaries for non-USU personnel. However, if USU does not have the capacity to perform a particular analysis, funds may be used to cover the cost of analysis by an external service provider.
4. Should my project align with a priority area from both of the NIFA and UAES priority areas?
  - Yes, your project should involve at least one point from each of the NIFA and UAES priority areas listed in the Background and Purpose.