

GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL RESEARCH SUPPORT PROJECTS (NRSPs)

ADOPTED December 13, 2002,
BY THE EXPERIMENT STATION SECTION

Table of Contents

I.	Mission of National Research Support Projects	2
II.	General.....	2
III.	Organization: NRSP National Committee	3
	A. General	3
	B. The National Advisory Committee	3
	C. National Advisory Committee By-laws	4
IV.	Criteria for Establishing New NRSPs.....	5
	A. Relevance	5
	B. Management and Business Plan	5
	C. Objectives and Projected Outcomes.....	5
	D. Integration.....	6
	E. Outreach, Communications and Assessment.....	6
V.	Renewal of an NRSP.....	6
	A. General	7
	B. Relevance	7
	C. Assessment of Outcomes	7
	D. Objectives	7
	E. Management and Business Plan.....	7
	F. Integration	8
	G. Outreach and Communications.....	8
VI.	Review and Approval Timelines for New or Renewal NRSPs	8
	A. New NRSP Development.....	8
	B. During Project Term.....	10
	C. Renewal of an Existing NRSP.....	10
VII.	Annual Report of an NRSP.....	12

I. MISSION OF NATIONAL RESEARCH SUPPORT PROJECTS

The activity of an NRSP focuses on the development of enabling technologies, support activities (such as to collect, assemble, store, and distribute materials, resources and information), or the sharing of facilities needed to accomplish high priority research, but which is not of itself primarily research.

II. GENERAL

National Research Support Projects are created to conduct activities that enable other important research efforts. Ideally, an NRSP would facilitate a broad array of research activities. The primary purpose of NRSPs shall not be solely to conduct research as there are other available mechanisms for creating these types of projects including the multistate research projects and the National Research Project (NRP) options. Examples of NRSP activities might include collection of data that are widely used by other research groups and efforts; development of databases; or development of critical technologies.

All NRSPs must involve a national issue, relevant to and of use by most, if not all regions. These projects draw on the best minds and resources within and outside the State Agricultural Experiment Station (SAES) system to address the issues. All projects must pass scientific scrutiny as well as be an issue that has national significance. Where appropriate, linkages to similar international activities are encouraged.

Priority for funding will be given to NRSPs that address and meet one or more of the national priority areas identified by ESCOP. General consideration will be given to assuring that the portfolio of NRSP projects has sufficient diversity so as to make best use of limited funds.

NRSP are initiated by use of Hatch funds drawn from the total federal allocation prior to the formula distribution to state agricultural experiment stations (SAESs). This funding process is called "off-the-top" and in total represents about 1% of the federal formula funds to SAES.

III. ORGANIZATION: NRSP NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A. General

Since the dissolution of the Committee of Nine, there has been no single SAES entity with the general oversight responsibility for national research support projects. An NRSP National Advisory Committee (hereafter referred to as the committee) with broad oversight responsibility for the NRSP portfolio has been established and charged with providing general oversight,

consistency in review and approval processes, and a national perspective relative to research support needs. The committee does not have the responsibility to micromanage individual projects.

While playing a gatekeeper function for the SAES system, it is also important that the committee's role is clearly advisory to the system. It makes recommendations to the Experiment Station Section (ESS) concerning existing and new projects. A key component of their role is to oversee implementation of sunset clauses whereby an NRSP reduces or eliminates its dependence on off-the-top funding. The committee brings its recommendations to the annual ESS meeting, currently held in September.

One of the specific charges to the committee is to use the national priorities and needs as a basis for the review and evaluation of existing and new NRSP projects. It is responsible for assuring that the NRSP portfolio is monitored and is responsive to needs. The committee will identify specific areas of research support needs or at least utilize input from an established ESCOP mechanism such as the Planning Committee because of their focus on emerging issues and needs. The committee has the authority to proactively identify research support needs. The committee has access to resources available to seed the creation of new NRSPs responsive to emerging needs.

The committee is directly responsible for the annual review of progress and budget for existing NRSPs. It has the authority to ensure that the criteria contained in these guidelines are satisfactorily met by NRSPs.

Relative to the evaluation of revised and new projects, the committee oversees review by peer and merit panels. It develops criteria for the reviews, selects reviewers, assists in establishing protocols for review, and prepares the specific charge to the panels. Utilizing the results of the reviews and the committee's understanding of national research support needs, the committee makes recommendations concerning revised and proposed projects to the ESS.

A final role for the committee is one of broad advocacy for the NRSP system. It insures the documentation of system and individual project impacts. It serves as the point entity for marketing the system and bringing it to national level prominence.

B. The National Advisory Committee shall consist of:

1. One representative from each of the four SAES regions (1862 experiment stations) who is a current or past member of an MRC, and one from the ARD region (1890 research directors), appointed by the regional association chair. Each region will also designate an alternate to insure

representation.

2. One representative from Extension appointed by the ESCOP Chair following the recommendation of the ECOP Chair.
3. One representative from CSREES, preferably a National Program leader, recommended by the CSREES Administrator and appointed by the ESCOP Chair.
4. One stakeholder representative, possibly a CARET representative, appointed by the ESCOP Chair.
5. Two regional executive directors appointed by the ESCOP Chair. One of the executive directors should be from the same region as the chair of the committee and serve as executive vice chair to administratively support the committee.
6. Officers will include a chair and chair-elect chosen by the committee from the representatives four SAES regions.

C. National Advisory Committee By-Laws

1. Term of appointment to the committee will be three years. Terms of the four SAES regions' representatives will be staggered so as to provide continuity to deliberations.
2. The committee will meet face-to-face once per year prior to the September ESS meeting. Other business of the committee will be conducted electronically through conference calls and e-mails. All expenses will be borne by member's respective institutions.
3. The committee will coordinate peer reviews of new and revised NRSP proposals and associated five-year budgets.
4. The committee and CSREES jointly arrange for review of NRSPs at the beginning of year 5.
5. The committee reports at the ESS Fall meeting on new or revised NRSP project proposals and five-year budgets and makes a recommendation for approval or rejection.
6. The committee reviews annual reports and budgets of active NRSPs and approves annual budget if no increase is requested from initial five-year budget. If a budget increase is requested, the committee reports and makes a recommendation for approval or disapproval at the ESS Fall meeting.

IV. ESTABLISHING NEW NRSPs

In addition to addressing the criteria described in the General section above, a proposal for a new NRSP must contain the following elements:

A. Relevance

The proposal must identify stakeholders and indicate their involvement in project development, review and/or management plan. The proposal must indicate how the project meets stakeholder needs and indicate the relationship with the research to be supported. (The real stakeholders are the researchers and the funding agencies that will use the information or services generated.) The proposal must also include a mechanism for assessing stakeholder use of project outputs.

B. Management and Business Plan

Each NRSP should have a well-developed business plan that describes how the project will be managed and funded for a five-year period. This plan includes a management structure to adequately integrate the efforts of multiple participants. The plan should include provisions for linking multiple sources of funding and leveraging those sources with the limited off-the-top research funds. This plan should include efforts to bring in new agencies, organizations, industry, foundations, etc. to help address the issues and provide funding for the project.

All project proposals must provide evidence of contributions from experiment stations across the nation beyond what is available through off-the-top funds.

In general, NRSPs should expect a finite period of off-the-top funding. This is not a reflection of the quality of work being conducted or the research being supported by the project. Rather, this allows the SAES system to continually assess needs and develop new projects as necessary. For this reason, the business plan of project renewals must include a transition plan and provisions for developing alternative funding or reducing off-the-top funding to a minimal level.

C. Objectives and Projected Outcomes

Objectives, milestones and deliverables should be described in sufficient detail such that progress can be measured. Indicate the prospects for meaningful impacts within the proposed duration of the project. The proposal must indicate what approaches will be used to assess outcomes and how these assessments will be used in program planning.

D. Integration

Where applicable, projects should indicate how efforts are integrated with extension or academic programs and how results might be of use by other potential stakeholders.

E. Outreach, communications and assessment

All projects must have a sound outreach, communications and assessment plan that seeks to communicate the programs goals, accomplishments and outcomes/impacts. The communication plan must detail how results will be transferred to researchers and other end users and contain the following elements:

1. Clear identification of the intended audience(s) of the NRSP. Since this is a Research Support Project, in most instances the primary beneficiary of the results will be other scientists. However, careful consideration should be given to other possible users of the information (such as consumers, producers, governmental agencies (local, state and federal), general public, etc.)
2. Clear description of the engagement of stakeholders in the definition and/or conduct of the research support project.
3. Thorough description of the methodology to measure the accomplishments and impacts of the National Research Support Project. Methods such as surveys, town meetings, conferences, analyses of reference data (e.g. citation index, etc.), and use of professional evaluators should be considered.
4. Specific description for development of communication pieces describing the activities, accomplishments, and impacts of the NRSP. The communication pieces will be used with SAES/ARD directors, stakeholders and their organizations, funding sources and agencies, and congressional delegations.
5. Suggested mechanisms for distribution of the results of the research support project. Examples include sharing the results at annual meetings of stakeholders, providing material to the Budget and Advocacy Committee of the NASULGC Board on Agriculture Assembly and other appropriate committees within the SAES/ARD organization, and assisting CSREES in preparation of appropriate documents highlighting the impacts of the project.

V. RENEWAL OF AN NRSP

Prior to renewal, each NRSP must undergo a review according to the schedule presented in the timelines section. Each NRSP seeking renewal must meet/address all of the criteria for a new NRSP described in the previous section. In addition, renewal requests must address the following:

A. General

NRSPs should expect a finite period of significant levels of off the top funding. This allows “the system” to undertake new initiatives and address new priorities. For this reason the business plans of applications for renewals will be carefully scrutinized.

For renewals, proposals must demonstrate direct relationship in support of continuing national priority need(s). The proposal should discuss its support activities relative to other NRSPs. The renewal application builds on the previous project and provides a logical progression.

B. Relevance

Proposals must demonstrate continued need as evidenced by stakeholder use of outputs and impacts of research efforts that are supported by the activity,

C. Assessment of Outcomes

The proposal must address productivity, completion of original objectives and the relationship between projected goals and actual accomplishments.

The proposal must include an assessment of the outcomes and/or impact of the previous project period. This assessment must include an evaluation of stakeholders’ use of project outputs

D. Objectives

The proposed objectives must reflect appropriate revision, e.g. evolution or building to greater depth, and/or capacity. All project revisions must incorporate stakeholder needs.

Renewals will be judged as to the degree to which project has been on task, on time and within budget for the previous funding period.

E. Management and Business Plan

In general, NRSPs should expect a finite period of off-the-top funding. This is not a reflection of the quality of work being conducted or the

research being supported by the project. Rather, this allows the SAES system to continually assess needs and develop new projects and necessary. For this reason, the business plan of project renewals must include a transition plan and provisions for developing alternative funding or reducing off-the-top funding to a minimal level. Included would be an assessment of transition options, and alternative funding sources. However, not all projects may be shifted to other funding sources. Projects seeking to continue with significant amount of off the top funding should fully justify the request.

The renewal application should include a critical assessment of the original plan and address any shortcomings to ensure that the project will function more smoothly or effectively in the future. The proposal must indicate what additional resources have been generated or leveraged and indicate how those and any additional resources will be continued or sought.

Note. Not all projects can be transitioned to other funding sources and, if the project meets an ESCOP priority, the project may continue with off-the-top funding.

F. Integration

The business plan must indicate the diversity of partners involved in the project as well as the multiple sources of funding. The proposal should indicate any new partnerships built during the project period. The proposal should address the degree to which full team is engaged in project planning and implementation and discuss plans to complement any weaknesses that may have been identified.

G. Outreach and Communications

The proposal should assess the success of the project’s outreach and communications plan and indicate any steps to be taken to improve effectiveness. A clear description of impacts resulting from the project is required.

VI. REVIEW AND APPROVAL TIMELINES FOR NEW NRSPs OR RENEWAL OF AN EXISTING NRSP

A. New NRSP Development	
Anytime	Sponsoring Director(s) submits request to establish an NRSP writing committee to the sponsoring regional association’s Executive Director following that region’s standard process for initiating new multistate activities. Sponsoring regional association assigns lead

	<p>Administrative Advisor and solicits names of Co-advisors from other Executive Directors. Sponsoring regional association follows the normal process for approving the establishment of a writing committee and solicit additional participants.</p> <p>NRSP writing committee membership, in consultation with Administrative Advisors, prepares initial project proposal, including projected five-year budget. Administrative Advisors submit the project proposal and projected five-year budget, along with names of several qualified peer reviewers, to the NRSP National Advisory Committee. The National Advisory Committee solicits peer reviews by scientists familiar with the area and transmits review results along with Committee comments to Administrative Advisors.</p> <p>NRSP writing committee revises proposal and budget based on review.</p>
Not later than Oct 1	Administrative Advisors submit revised proposal and five-year budget, along with peer review comments, to National Advisory Committee and Executive Directors (transmission of materials to Executive Directors throughout this process implies subsequent transmission to members of corresponding regional associations).
Oct-Feb	<p>National Advisory Committee reviews proposal and budget and sends comments with initial recommendation to Executive Directors.</p> <p>Appropriate regional committees review the project proposal and projected five-year budget and report to association at their Spring meeting.</p>
Feb-Mar	Regional associations discuss project proposal and projected five-year budget, along with National Advisory Committee recommendation, at their Spring meetings and Executive Director transmits comments and/or concerns to the Administrative Advisors and National Advisory Committee.
Apr-June	NRSP Committee addresses any comments and/or concerns through further project and/or budget revisions and/or separate responses.
July 1	Final project proposal, projected five-year budget, and any additional responses are transmitted to the National Advisory Committee and the Executive Directors.
July-Aug	Regional associations discuss the final proposal and budget at their summer meetings, or the appropriate

	regional committee reviews the proposal and budget, and Executive Directors transmit comments to the National Advisory Committee.
September	The National Advisory Committee reports at the ESS Fall meeting on the final project proposal and projected budget, and its recommendation. SAES Directors vote (one vote per institution contributing off-the-top funding) on approval of the project and five-year budget. A two-thirds majority vote is required to overturn the National Advisory Committee recommendation.
October 1	Approved NRSP starts five-year cycle with five-year budget approved.
B. During Project Term (years 2-4)	
January	<p>NRSP Committee submits annual report (see below) and detailed budget for subsequent fiscal year to the National Advisory Committee and Executive Directors by January 15.</p> <p>The National Advisory Committee reviews annual report and budget and transmits any comments to Administrative Advisors and Executive Directors.</p> <p>If there is no change in total annual budget from approved five-year budget, Executive Directors transmit report and budget to regional associations for their information.</p> <p>If a change in the annual budget from the approved five-year budget is requested, a detailed justification must be submitted to the National Advisory Committee and Executive Directors, and change request is reviewed through the following process.</p>
Feb-Mar	Regional associations review budget change request during Spring meetings and transmit comments to the National Advisory Committee.
Apr- Sep	The National Advisory Committee interacts with CSREES and NRSP Administrative Advisors to determine and approve any budget changes for the next year.
C. Renewal of an Existing NRSP	
Year 4	<p>NRSP committee decides to renew project as NRSP and notifies the National Advisory Committee and CSREES.</p> <p>NRSP committee drafts initial renewal proposal and five-year budget.</p> <p>CSREES and the National Advisory Committee jointly arrange for review of NRSP that is due to terminate at the</p>

	end of year 5. Review organizer consults with the National Advisory Committee and NRSP Administrative Advisors regarding review protocol, charge, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not later than Sep 1 	Administrative Advisors submit renewal proposal and five-year budget to the National Advisory Committee and Executive Directors.
Year 5	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sep-Nov 	Review team conducts review of past four years progress and renewal proposal and transmits report to the National Advisory Committee and Administrative Advisors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct-Feb 	<p>Appropriate regional committees review report and renewal proposal with five-year budget and report to association at Spring meetings.</p> <p>The National Advisory Committee reviews proposal and budget and Sends comments with initial recommendation on renewal to Executive Directors.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb-Mar 	Regional associations discuss renewal proposal and budget along with the National Advisory Committee recommendation, at their Spring meetings and Executive Director transmits comments and/or concerns to the Administrative Advisors and the National Advisory Committee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apr-June 	NRSP Committee addresses any comments and/or concerns through renewal proposal and/or budget revisions and/or separate responses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 1 	Final renewal proposal, five-year budget, and any additional responses are transmitted to the National Advisory Committee and the Executive Directors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July-Aug 	Regional associations discuss the final renewal proposal and budget at their summer meeting, or the appropriate regional committee reviews the proposal and budget, and Executive Directors transmit comments to the National Advisory Committee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 	The National Advisory Committee reports at the ESS Fall meeting on the final project proposal and projected budget, and its recommendation. SAES Directors vote (one vote per contributing institution) on approval of the project and five-year budget. A two-thirds majority vote is required to overturn the National Advisory Committee recommendation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 1 	<p>NRSP approved for renewal starts five-year cycle with five-year budget approved.</p> <p>NRSP not approved for renewal receives one-year extension (with budget equal to 5th-year budget) to</p>

	transition off NRSP funding to other sources or downsize project.
--	---

VII. ANNUAL REPORT OF AN NRSP

Annually each NRSP will prepare a State Agricultural Experiment Station 422 Report (SAES-422) and include the following information:

1. **Stakeholders:** A description of the interaction and engagement with the stakeholders during the past year and brief description of plans for next year.
2. **Activities, Accomplishments, and Impacts:** A description of the activities (ie. meetings, etc.), accomplishments (ie. publications, information sharing, etc.), and impacts (ie. demonstration of adoption of new techniques, advancement in sharing information, change is stakeholders' techniques, knowledge, or action, etc.) for the past year and a brief description of plans for next year.
3. **Communication Plan:** A description of the implementation of the Communication Plan as stated in the proposal and a brief description of plans for next year.