



National Research Support Projects: An Evaluation of Processes

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Introduction

In September 2001, the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Mississippi State University was asked to conduct an evaluation of the National Research Support Projects (NRSP) on behalf of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). The overall purpose of this study was to understand the effectiveness of NRSPs used by the Agricultural Experiment Stations in their focus on priority research of national importance by interviewing current and past program administrators, and those who financially support the projects.

Our objectives in conducting this evaluation were to determine the effectiveness of, support for, and understanding of the current NRSP program among Administrative Advisors and Directors; determine the strengths and weaknesses of the NRSP program from an administrative perspective; and determine the extent to which Administrative Advisors and Directors see the possibility for future use of the NRSP program to engage the system and extant resources in addressing agency priorities.

Research Design

From September through October 2001, information on each individual NRSP was researched and studied for a more thorough understanding of each project's function. Also, during this time, past surveys were researched and studied for data and trends to be used when compiling information for the survey. Questions were brainstormed and compiled from this information and a survey draft was formed. Using input

from CSREES leadership, the final draft was completed.

In November 2001, a list was received from CSREES, which contained 50 possible interviewees. These names were broken down into three categories: Category 1 contained 22 names of former members of the now defunct C-9 committee; Category 2 contained 11 names of current Administrative Advisors for the NRSP projects; and Category 3 had 18 names that were classified as new Directors or Directors who have not been closely involved with NRSP projects.

From this original list of 50 names, a database was created of 30 potential interviewees by random selection of equal distribution from all three categories represented. This random selection did allow for input on all seven NRSP projects and also came from various categories. From November through December 2001, letters of introduction were faxed to 30 potential interviewees, and appointments were scheduled. Of the initial 30 selected and contacted, 11 were from Category 1, eight were from Category 2, and 11 were from Category 3. Once the original 30 were contacted, one person from Category 2 and two from Category 3 declined our offer to participate. These were replaced by names from an alternate list. Final totals per those participating included 11 from Category 1, eight from Category 2, and nine from Category 3 for a total of 28 interviews.

Beginning in late November, a selected few agreed to be the test group for the survey. One participant from each of the three categories was selected, and final adjustments were made on the survey(s) instruments using their input. All other interviews were successfully

completed from December 2001 to January 2002.

Interview transcriptions began in December 2001 and were successfully completed in January 2002 with all information entered into three separate databases that corresponded with the category of the interviewee. Appropriate information was also entered into SPSS during that time to incorporate quantitative data where possible.

Familiarity with NRSP Program

Figure 1: Respondents' Familiarity with NRSP Program

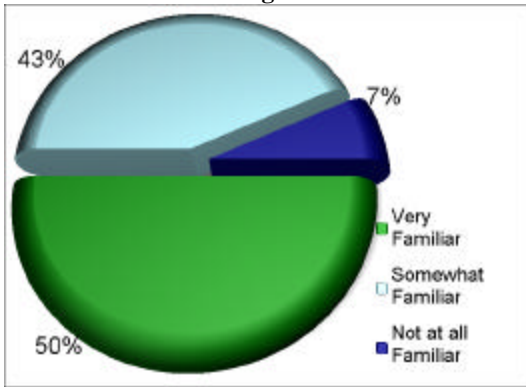
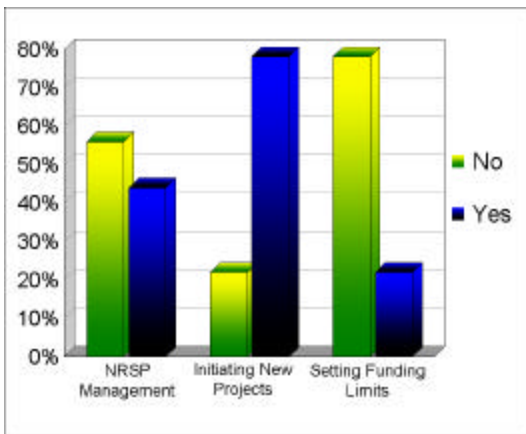
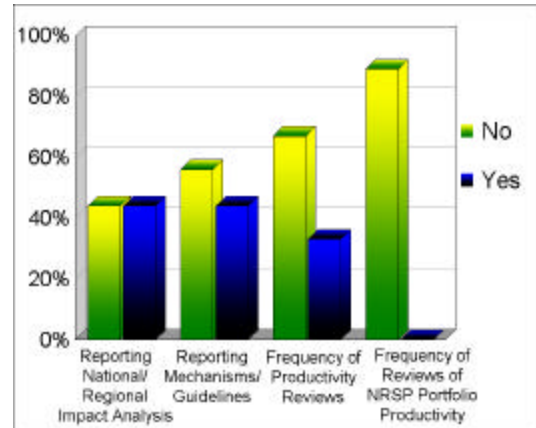


Figure 2: Familiarity With NRSP Activities/Procedures



*Asked of new Directors and Directors not closely associated with NRSPs (n=9). Numbers may not total 100% due to non response.

Figure 3: Familiarity With NRSP Activities/Procedures



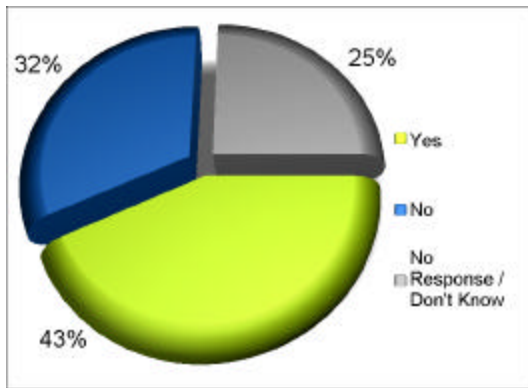
*Asked of new Directors and Directors not closely associated with NRSPs (n=9). Numbers may not total 100% due to non response.

When asked how familiar they were with the correct NRSP program, eight of the 11 from Category 1 felt that they were very familiar with only three being somewhat familiar. Category 2 was equally divided among the eight interviewees with four feeling very familiar and four being somewhat familiar. Of the nine participants in Category 3, the trend changed with the majority of five respondents feeling somewhat familiar, two felt very familiar, and two respondents were not at all familiar.

Current NRSP Portfolio

When asked if they felt the current NRSP portfolio was relevant to challenges of today, a common thread expressed across all categories was that the mission of the current NRSP portfolio is to support research across the country. Forty-three percent of the interviewees feel the current portfolio is relevant, these projects are very timely, and that “other projects are doing ongoing work that probably couldn’t be done any other way.”

Figure 4: Relevance of Current NRSP Portfolio



Some went further to explain that these projects were initially put together at a time when those issues were of critical importance and that all of the issues addressed by the NRSPs are important topics that need addressing.

Of the 32% that felt that the portfolio was not relevant, a majority felt that “many of these projects have outlived their usefulness” and are “outdated with current needs not being addressed.” Most feel that they are inadequately funded, and that no new monies are allocated to help address important current national needs and contemporary issues. Some feel that a mechanism is needed for “an objective evaluation or sunset clause” of existing projects and that new projects should be brought aboard after identifying new priority needs.

The 25% who had no response to this question includes those who expressed both yes and no opinions and two interviewees actually had no knowledge of the current portfolio.

Greatest Success of NRSP

The ability to bring together various researchers and support programs to address issues that have national importance is seen as one of the greatest

successes of the NRSP program. This effort in “bringing together the talent and achieving an agreement to move forward in a coordinated partially funded effort across this nation while trying to address critical national issues” was the majority sentiment expressed. Many also felt these support programs would not occur if not for the NRSP program.

Greatest Advantage of NRSP Portfolio and Individual NRSPs

A majority consensus across categories agreed that the NRSP portfolio brings coordination to all four regions of the United States by providing a national focus and coordination of issues that individual stations could not accomplish alone. The “ability to provide types of research support services that individual stations could not do alone” as well as “marshalling our finest and best as far as research capacity” are other shining examples to its advantage.

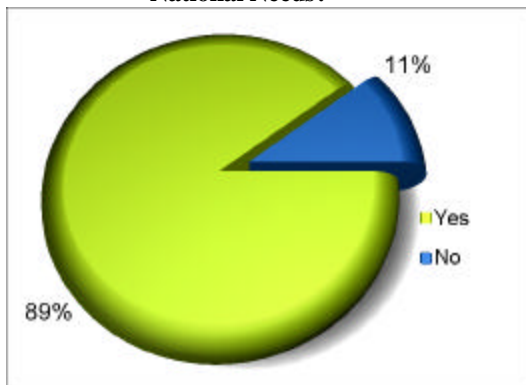
When asked about the greatest advantage of the individual NRSPs, a majority of the replies were project specific, which was not the intent or focus of our survey and report. However, when asked about the advantage of the individual programs, the thought was expressed as a “way to deal with certain issues that are cross cutting geographically and beyond the scope of any one state to be able to deal with and outside of the realm of typical competitive grants.” Still another positive example is the “ability to provide much needed research support activity that is meeting a need in research system in the United States” while “bringing together the best minds from around the country.”

Mechanisms for Addressing Important National Problems

Multi-State Research Programs, CSREES and its partnerships, and the USDA received the highest praise as mechanisms for addressing important national problems. Others that were mentioned included grant programs [from a variety of sources including National Research Institute (NRI), CSREES, and Congress] as well as commodity groups, National Science Foundation (NSF), Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and the Economic Research Service (ERS).

Addressing Only National Needs

Figure 5: Should NRSPs Address Only National Needs?



In asking all categories should all NRSPs address only national needs, 89% answered yes with 11% answering no. However, respondents in only Category 1 and 2 were asked to explain their reasoning behind their chosen answer.

Both categories expressed similar sentiment in that if the NRSPs are not addressing national needs, there should be no justification for allocation of federal monies that support these projects. “By using the word national in

the title, it should be mandatory to address national needs.”

One issue that was reoccurring in Category 1 was how do we define national issue. “These types of programs need to be and could be very much regional in nature with large regional or very much major multi-state involvement.” In answering this question in reference to agriculture, one respondent commented, “Agriculture exists in different parts of the country whereas crops are experienced locally.” Another vein of discord within this category centered on the “unclear focus on clear and comprehensive national priorities” with another feeling that “identifying national needs is the crux of the whole problem with NRSP.” One solution presented in this debate was for “ESCOP to form a committee that could perhaps be charged with identifying national needs” while bringing them to the attention of the Experiment Station section at its annual meeting.

Priority Needs Established

While all categories were asked how priority needs were established with respect to the NRSP program, most answers were very direct with either positive or negative feedback.

While over half of the interviewees from Category 1, 2, and 3 were completely unaware and had no knowledge of the process, the overall consensus of those with knowledge is that proposals for possible NRSPs are developed at the grass roots level where issues are brought to one or more of the regional Director’s organizations. These are then proposed through “a facilitative process with participant input” where they are then voted on. It was also pointed out “those national priorities are

currently feeding the budget development process.”

A concern expressed by several members of Category 1 was the lack of a mechanism to look specifically at NRSPs and their development. “Projects come up one at a time and basically have to promote themselves and convince Directors that it is a priority. There is not a national consensus to determine ahead of time what is a priority and consequently from there, developing an NRSP to support that priority.” One suggestion toward establishing a better mechanism for this would be to “charge a group to take that national priority and develop them into a proposed NRSP that can be proposed for funding.”

Each category was also asked if everyone was aware of the priority needs established and their answer was an overwhelming and resounding no, although several expressed positive feedback.

Of those respondents with knowledge, all agreed, “the folks who are most intimately involved with the programs, either the participants or the immediate beneficiaries, are very aware.” Communication is both sending and receiving information while most are “certainly informed through national e-mailings and are given where Web sites exist” for their own investigative purposes.

However, the respondents who felt that everyone was not aware of how the priority needs were established felt that communication was a major problem. Keeping a large number of people well informed can be a daunting and difficult task, but there is a “need for people to better understand the process as a whole. It may be a good process but people are unaware of it.” Another issue concerned opening the lines of communication in

that “developed mechanisms should be transparent and that is not the case now. People don’t pay close attention due to inflexibility.” Directors who are also involved in serving as Administrative Advisors may be informed, but one commented, “We have not done a good job in communicating that to the other Directors.”

Setting Realistic Priorities

When asked if the priorities of these programs and the portfolio were realistically set, Category 1 and 2 interviewees responded with a resounding no with a few expressing positive feedback or remaining neutral. Category 3 respondents were equally divided among those expressing feedback.

In Category 1 and 2, few expressed how the current NRSP program and portfolio is “probably as close to realistic” as they can be on a national level. “By and large the folks are very committed and think of the broad well-being of the citizens of the nation and the capabilities of our system...to be able to address them.” However, an overwhelming majority answered no and gave a variety of reasons for their thought process. Many felt that the process was rather slow, cumbersome, and tended to be out of date. Priorities should be reset and “once a NRSP is established, it pretty much continues even though priorities may change and consequently, as time goes on, they reflect less than national priorities.” Another pointed out the stagnant funding has caused “an inertia in the system that prevents us from realistically setting the priorities, budgeting, and focusing on new issues.” Others expressed concern in relation to funding and how it relates

to the objectives of the research. “One of the real critical issues that drives the program is the adequacy of funding, and the funding mechanisms to deal with the objectives of the research. Then, in order to be successful, the objectives need to be written very narrowly to meet the funding and talent that is there. If written too broadly, while possibly being sound objectives, the funding and talent may not be there and therefore, the priorities are not realistically set. You need very narrowly focused objectives that can be achieved in whatever the time limit that is specified along with the funding and talent available. We tend to write objectives too broadly rather than narrowly.”

Category 3 respondents, as previously stated, were equally divided on this issue. One expressed his or her confidence in the review process as a mechanism to ensure that priorities were realistically set. However, the opposing side felt that these were realistic when originally set up but need to be “revisited and readdressed.”

Changes for a More Effective System

Several trends of thinking were exposed when each interviewee was asked what changes he or she would implement for a more effective system. Overall, there were five different issues that surfaced as possible areas of change. These involved the addition of sunset clauses, formation of an advisory council, funding constraints, consistent and strenuous reviews, and improved communication. While each held similar views of changes needed to ensure success, the emphasis was different for each category.

Funding was viewed as a “limited resource that has lost purchasing power

over time due to inflation.” This constraint is viewed as a “severe resource limitation to implementing new programs and funding existing programs probably adequately.” While some felt that the current program was working reasonably well for now, still others expressed concerns that “the budgeting of the NRSPs is not well coordinated and historically based...and is an awkward system to get funding to the projects.” The idea was also expressed of creating a separate funding system for the NRSP projects that are viewed as indefinite, or that they are moved to some category other than NRSP for funding.

In regards to projects that many have labeled “indefinite,” the addition of sunset clauses to the NRSP projects was proposed as a way to “cycle projects on and off while addressing the highest priority needs and changes.” While some expressed strong opinions that sunset clauses meant that a project would terminate at the end of a designated period, others felt that certain projects deemed to an indefinite status should receive “continued support through other mechanisms once the initial funding has ended.” This, too, would open up funding throughout the portfolio for possible new NRSP projects.

The formation of an advisory committee to oversee all aspects of the NRSP portfolio was a main concern expressed within Category 1 and received some mention throughout Category 3. Many feel an advisory group of individuals should be charged with “developing a more effective system on how NRSPs operate.” This oversight group would also be in charge of taking in information from all individual NRSP programs and checking

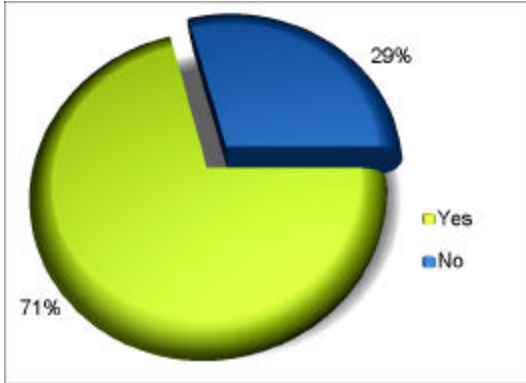
for goal achievement. This group would also report back to all individuals associated with the NRSPs and not just the Administrative Advisors (AA). (This committee would closely resemble the now defunct former C-9 committee.)

Across all categories, ensuring a consistent and strenuous review was a concern with major emphasis on this category being placed with Category 3. All respondents feel that we need some type of objective accountability system that “needs to be strengthened...beyond the regular reporting back to the meeting of the Experiment Station Directors.” Many expressed the need for a “fairly rigorous review of the relative priorities of what we have not versus what are the contemporary issues and the decision made given the amount of money we have.” To date, NRSP projects are viewed that once they are established they never go away, and many feel that a revised critical review process would help streamline the process and portfolio. This would ensure that NRSPs are “largely used to initiate new efforts, accomplish some reasonable goals, but would move them out when deemed an indefinite project.”

Communication improvement was a change brought forth from Categories 2 and 3. Some expressed concern that the lines of communication don't always work the way they are intended. Many were not sure if there was a mechanism in place “to better inform others, and if not, one needs to be.” Not only does communication cover both written and verbal but better advertising of the NRSPs as well.

Alternative NRSP Management Strategies

Figure 6: Alternative Management Strategies for NRSPs*



*Asked of former C-9 members and current NRSP AA's (n=17)

When asked if there were alternative strategies that could be used to better manage NRSPs, 29% responded no. Within this group, many felt that the management process was good because “there is an Administrative Advisor from each region that serves that project.” Another positive was that “the current system is a fairly democratic one with each one running a little differently out of necessity.” All expressed sentiment that the mechanisms were in place for good management of the NRSP.

The remaining 71% felt that there are alternative management strategies that could be used to better manage the NRSPs. The consensus is that the real problem is the “ones in place are not uniformly supported by a majority of people around the country.” Respondents felt that the current process was difficult, lengthy, detailed, and quite burdensome with “multiple steps making for difficulty in efficient management.” Many feel that “streamlining the management process” would make for more efficient management. Once again, funding was a major concern. The current mechanism “precludes

almost every new project from being funded” due to funds being “flat-lined” as their actual value is decreasing. Establishing alternative funding mechanisms and improving rigorous assessment of the current funding mechanisms were suggestions for improvement in this area.

In Categories 1 and 2, two suggestions were made with regard to positive changes within the management of the NRSPs. As previously stated, the formation of an oversight group resembling the former C-9 committee was expressed here. This review panel would be charged with evaluating the proposals as well as conducting a systematic review of the projects and portfolio. They could “look at how they are run, both individually and collectively, and make suggestions on how to improve it.” Another suggestion was to form a rotating management system for administration and advisors to these projects. This management rotation would prohibit too much ownership in one particular program and allow for more objectivity as different points of view come into play. This would also help assure adherence to projects’ relevance as well.

Category 3 was asked to respond yes or no to how familiar they are with the way NRSPs are managed. Around 45% felt that they were familiar and 55% answered no. Those answering yes were then asked to express any thoughts they have on alternative management strategies for the NRSPs. Most felt that these were national projects and should be handled on a national basis and not on the current regional process. This would also include approval for funding where most felt that the current mechanism was adequate.

Procedures for Initiating New Projects

Interviewees from Categories 1 and 2 were asked to describe the procedures for initiating new projects. Respondents from both groups agreed there are positives and negatives with this process with three major themes emerging. These themes include the procedure, where the proposals originate, and the process itself.

The procedures themselves are spelled out in a written manual that is identified by a host of terms such as the Multistate Research Document, Multistate Manual, National Handbook, and Supplemental Regional Guidelines. The “procedures are straight forward” and are viewed as “well defined within the guidelines on the specific process.”

Many of the proposals seem to originate through regional associations. This regional association can come from a “group of faculty from multiple states, or from Directors from multiple states, or both.” Others felt that this initiation comes “primarily from the Directors of the Experiment Stations working in concert with scientists, industry, and the USDA.” Draft proposals are presented to each of the regional associations and three out of four regions must approve it for the new NRSP to be implemented.

While many in Categories 1 and 2 were aware of the procedures and proposal origination, many expressed doubts about the process itself. Many feel that process is difficult and quite convoluted. One respondent commented that it tends to be “very cumbersome in how projects originate, simply based on someone’s perception of what a priority is,” and others feel they are not set up to fill a national consensus. “Political hurdles with a limited resource base

makes people reluctant to approve new projects.”

Respondents in Category 3 were asked if they were familiar with the procedures for initiating new projects. Of those responding, over 70% answered yes with over 20% answering no. Those answering yes were then asked if they felt these procedures are appropriate and effective. While describing it as “a legitimate process with good descriptive procedures,” many, however, expressed concern related to its true effectiveness overall and described the process itself as “difficult, lengthy, and detailed.”

Obstacles New NRSP Projects Would Face

Interviewees in all three categories were asked to name obstacles that new NRSP projects might face. Funding was the major concern expressed by everyone with some reference given to true national priority identification.

“Federal dollars are declining in relation to inflation,” and the federal pool of dollars is shrinking. Due to off-the-top funding constraints and limitations, many referenced the fact that it is “difficult for Directors to approve new NRSPs because every time they do that means fewer dollars into their own Experiment Station.” Another respondent commented “all resources are currently tied up in existing projects with no rotating them into new areas” of funding or without having “current projects be eliminated.” The perception is that these NRSP projects last forever and the long-term commitment is a negative. “Directors are not willing to allocate anymore off-the-top funding so if the person proposes a new NRSP, they have a real uphill battle to get it approved because there is a defined

amount of money.” Many find this unfortunate because there are some issues “that emerge on a regular basis that are worthy of consideration.”

The debate over what are true national priorities was also addressed as an obstacle facing new NRSP projects. Just the idea of getting people on board and in agreement on what is a national priority and “identifying a truly national priority that all Experiment Station Directors will support” was seen as a deterrent.

While Category 3 respondents gave answers similar to those of Categories 1 and 2, their division among answers was the most pronounced. One-third of their respondents agreed that funding was the major obstacle with another one-third questioning the identification of true national priorities. However, the remaining one-third either did not know of any obstacles or was unfamiliar with the projects and declined to comment.

Approving New NRSPs Considering the Current Portfolio Status

When asked if new NRSPs should be approved considering the current portfolio status, respondents from Categories 1 and 2 were equally divided on their opinions.

For one interviewee responding favorably toward approving new NRSPs, this would be seen as “an avenue of broadening the scope of the current portfolio.” However, even though many consented to approving new NRSPs, caution was expressed related to the current portfolio status. Respondents felt that if new ones should be approved, they must be justified back to the national priorities that are set for the system. (Assuming those are current and up to date.) Understanding that there are

“things with higher priority than currently funded NRSPs” and phasing out some of the old ones to make room for current national priorities was a big stipulation among those voting yes.

For those not in favor of new approvals, many referred to the need of evaluating the current portfolio before advancing with new NRSPs. “Not until the old ones are removed” or phased out should new projects be approved, and those are only if they are relevant and important. Some also believe that we need to fix what we have with the current portfolio system before advancing forward.

A common frustration relative to new NRSP approval between those Category 1 and 2 respondents deals with funding. Most believe that new approval is strictly a money issue and that we “must not dilute resources or inadequately fund those underway or new ones” due to the detrimental effect on the program overall. Over and over, respondents expressed sentiment on needing a changing set of NRSPs, but “if we are not phasing out old projects the current funding level won’t provide much support.” One respondent summed it up by stating that “approval means dollar commitment, and it is very hard to separate the two.”

Category 1 respondents used this forum to address the area of implementing sunset clauses into all NRSP projects and the effects it would have on the system. General consensus is that sunset clauses (time limits) may be needed because “people don’t have the fortitude to close them out.” They may be advisable “if limited to problematic issues with the understanding that other funding and managing mechanisms would take over after a certain period of time. This

should be stated up front as the purpose.” While most of those responding to the issue of sunset clauses expressed a need for them, some are “less amenable because we know that the work is going to be literally indefinite.” Another idea relative to sunset clauses is to implement them “if for no other reason than to ensure a thorough appraisal of the program for renewal purposes.”

Category 3 respondents were more general in their answers regarding new approvals. Two respondents expressed positive sentiment, and felt that approval should take place if everyone feels strongly about a certain issue and if some old ones were withdrawn. One respondent answered no because he or she felt that a thorough study of the portfolio for efficiency should be a priority above new approval. The remaining comments were general in statement with regard to the question asked. One person’s response was that “new projects should be determined by the merits of each individual proposal.” Another felt that “if a highly critical need arises, we should have the courage to step forward and respond appropriately with new NRSP project(s).” Another respondent felt that we should not look at the current portfolio as being “all-inclusive” and that preserving the ability “to form new NRSPs should be attained.” Only one respondent said that he/she did not know the portfolio well enough to comment.

Major Source of Funding

Category 1, 2, and 3 interviewees were asked varying degrees of questions within the funding section. These were decided based on levels of experience, background knowledge, and responsibilities within the NRSP structure.

To begin, Category 1 was asked if you are currently administering an NRSP, what is your major source of funding. Six of the 13 respondents from Category 1 said that they were not currently administering. Of the seven remaining, off-the-top funds, state funds, and special grants were named by two each with fees from agricultural industries named by one.

Category 2 interviewees are current NRSP Administrative Advisors (AA) and have direct involvement with the NRSP system. They were simply asked to name their major source of funding. Of 13 total respondents, off-the-top monies were named by five with CSREES named by three. Receiving one vote each were ARS, ERS, multi-state funds, competitive funds, grant monies that scientists generate, and service fees.

Category 3 was not asked any questions regarding this area.

Setting of Funding Limits

When asked how funding limits are set, Category 1 and 2 interviewees named a myriad of groups. No one response held a majority among the respondents; however, both categories had like responses and thought patterns.

Common elements between both groups named yearly budget development and appropriations for off-the-top funding as areas that set funding

limits. However, within this group, many expressed frustration in regards to off-the-top funds stating that it is usually the same funding as last year with Hatch adjustments by Congress. These funds have not increased at the rate of inflation, and causes "Directors to be fairly conservative when they are relinquishing money out of their budgets to go into a national program." This also presents a problem with "uncontrolled costs where staff salaries are increasing yet, they don't have the ability to address that other than going to other funding sources and using the NRSP funds as only partial funding for staff. Funds then have to be generated from elsewhere."

Other areas mentioned as to how funding limits for the NRSPs are set include: technical committees, regional recommendations, and being set by Experiment Station Directors approving funds for each individual project. Some also declined comment citing unfamiliarity as the reason.

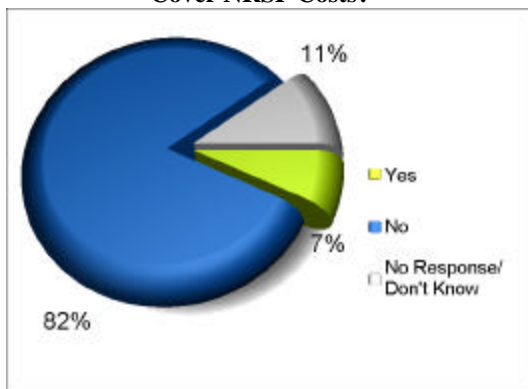
In Categories 1 and 2, Congress setting Hatch allocations and Experiment Station Directors were named as those who set the budgets while most agreed that they should be reviewed annually. Only three of the 19 respondents from both categories stated that budgets should be reviewed every five years instead of annually. This group all stated that functioning in a "multi-year cycle" would be more beneficial for all parties and would help eliminate "asking for funds on a yearly basis." Even though this group felt that the entire budgeting process should be streamlined, they agreed that many Directors would not be in favor of this system and that it would never be approved.

Category 3 interviewees were asked if they were familiar with how NRSP funding limits are set. Of the nine respondents to this group, 78% stated that they were not familiar with how funding limits were set with 22% stating that they were familiar. Of those who were familiar, they stated that Directors were responsible for setting funding limits. When asked how these funding limits are reviewed, of those responding, they were equally divided between annually and establishing a five-year approval for each project. They also went on to elaborate that “base funding should be established for the period of time that the project is approved.”

One respondent from Category 3 did express frustration on his or her lack of knowledge concerning the funding limit process. “If I am going to advise or make a judgment about whether one should be invested in or advise someone how to start one, I think it is important to know how the funding will be decided on. My guess is, in the past, it has just been shot gunned and then the Experiment Station Directors vote on it.”

Hatch Monies Associated with NRSPs

Figure 7: Are Hatch Monies Enough to Cover NRSP Costs?



Across all three Categories, 82% agree that current off-the-top Hatch monies are not enough to cover costs

associated with the NRSP projects. Reasons cited state that Hatch monies have “remained constant over the past 20 years,” and that a “serious influx of funds” is needed into the current system. One respondent did state that “no NRSP can be totally encompassed by Hatch funds,” and those funds primarily support the organization structure of the NRSP. Others feel that “many important activities are constrained by the lack of funds.”

Of the remaining respondents, 7% felt that current monies were enough to cover the costs. The main thought stated within this group was that “it is the glue that helps hold things together,” and that it usually supports a core group of people, or core efforts to manage the projects. The remaining 11% either did not know or had no response.

Approving and Reviewing Project Funding

Category 2 and 3 interviewees only were asked to comment on the process for approving and reviewing project funding. Within the same question, they were asked to project how frequently this review process should be completed.

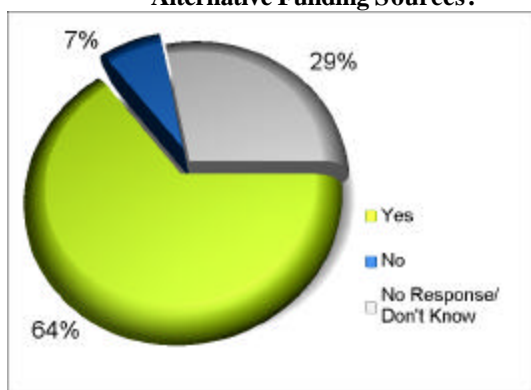
Across both categories, comments were very similar in that the current process tends to be pretty tedious, with “scientists always asking is it worth the hassle because of the bureaucratic steps of getting there and reporting.” In issues of funding, most agreed that you typically get what you had last year unless there is an increase in Hatch. One respondent commented, “We are really constrained by Congress because they don’t give any increases in Hatch, so these projects are hamstrung with no funding increases.” Both categories also agreed that accountability and

communication issues need to be implemented to ensure that projects remain on track.

In the area of frequency, nine out of 17 agreed that a five-year cycle would be best for approving and reviewing project funding. Of the remaining eight respondents, two had no idea of the process and the others offered general comments.

Alternative Funding Sources for Projects Retained Indefinitely

Figure 8: Should Projects Be Moved to Alternative Funding Sources?



Across all categories, when asked if projects should be moved to alternative funding sources once retained indefinitely, 64% responded yes, 7% responded no, and 29% gave no response or did not know.

Of those responding yes, they were then asked to explain how this might be accomplished. One of the main veins of thinking that emerged dealt with the freeing up of funds for emerging issues. Moving projects to other funding sources would “open up NRSP programs to do things current and urgent” while using “off-the-top funds for emerging issues that really deserve attention.”

The decreasing of Hatch funds over time and seeking funds from clientele beyond the Agricultural Experiment

Stations was another common element shared across categories. Some suggested that “formula funding should decline and if projects are important, then alternative funding needs to pick up the costs.” Another commented that we should “try to increase its proportion of funding from sources other than Hatch over time. Hatch monies should not completely go away, but should decrease over time.” One respondent also said, “If a project is truly significant, there should be federal monies ear marked for them,” or you could tap into industry or create endowments to offset the cost.

Highlighting successes of the NRSP programs and better communications were listed as possible ways of showcasing the efforts of many, and creating an interest base within the national scope. This interest could result in partnerships as well as lead to possible alternative funding down the road.

Alternative Funding Sources

When asked to give a list of possible alternative funding sources, Category 1 and 2 respondents gave quite a comprehensive list of agencies that may well serve in the future as possible alternative funding sources.

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), special grants, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were the groups receiving the most votes. Commodity groups and industry followed those. Others receiving mention as well included private foundations, National Aeronautical Space Administration (NASA), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Forest Service, National Park Service, Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA), and National Science
Foundation (NSF).

Mechanisms for Reporting NRSP Impact Analysis

Category 1 and 2 interviewees were asked to name mechanisms that are currently in place for reporting NRSP impact analysis both nationally and regionally. Across both categories, the veins of thinking were very distinct in describing the current mechanisms. One-third of the respondents were succinct in their explanation of the process involved in reporting impact analysis. Another one-third described the types of reports that are produced, and the final one-third expressed many frustrations with the current system.

Within the first group of interviewees, agreement was reached in how impact analysis was currently being reported and how it is shown in three different ways. The first would be “through the impact database that CSREES collects and maintains, and supposedly uses with Congress” which many refer to as the Current Research Information System (CRIS). Secondly, the annual plan of work. Third, “what is done at individual Experiment Stations when we report impacts to stakeholders and our own legislators.” Within this group, respondents feel that the mechanisms are there for doing it well including a “stable accountability and impact reporting system.”

In describing the types of reports that are produced to report impact analysis, many refer to the annual report and “impact statements on various activities that are in turn provided to Congress and to the legislative delegations.” Annual reports, usually written by the technical committees for each NRSP, are then submitted to the USDA and are available through the CRIS network. One respondent commented, “Occasionally, a

project will take the initiative to develop some form of report, possibly a brochure or maybe developing specific Web pages that talk about their productivity and impact.” Another commented, “We use every mechanism we have to communicate the success of the project – Congress at our annual Congressional Science and Educational exhibits, newspapers, annual reports to everybody involved, annual report on the Web, and reports sent to anyone involved in the process.” However, even with all the supposed reporting that is done annually, a major issue expressed within this group was “how to inform colleagues of the impacts of each individual project.”

The final group expressed frustration for the current system of reporting impact analysis. Respondents in this category felt that there was neither “a good mechanism for reporting impacts” nor any efforts to document the impacts of NRSP, and see this as a big deficiency. Many feel that the current system is informal, inconsistent, and “isn’t really a coordinated accountability process.” One person even commented, “Analysis implies a more thoughtful structured way for looking at impact. That doesn’t exist anywhere at all.” Establishing a more formal process would ensure that all projects are reporting or analyzing as completely as they should be which, according to this group, is not occurring, as it should be, on the regional and national level. Many also felt that the current system “does a poor job of extolling the benefits of the NRSPs from its initial base to a much wider audience.”

Category 3 interviewees were asked if they were familiar with the mechanisms that are in place for reporting NRSP impact analysis both nationally and regionally. Of these new

Directors and Directors not closely associated with NRSPs, 45% were familiar and 45% were not familiar (10% accounts for non-responses). Of those expressing prior knowledge of this impact reporting, all considered “the overall ability to report impact as poor,” and consider it “heterogeneous reporting” that is not well coordinated at best.

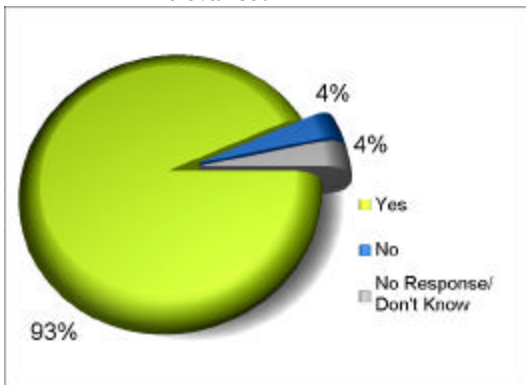
Location and Access to Information

Across all categories, a variety of locations were listed as warehouses for the impact analysis information. Topping the list was CSREES and specifically within the CRIS system. Other areas mentioned include individual stations, Executive Directors, USDA impact database, Web sites, and newsletters.

All agree that all information is readily available to anyone who requests it and can be found in a variety of places, most notably the Internet. Others with easy access include the research community, primary stakeholders, and those directly involved in the projects.

Periodic Reviews for Impact and Relevance

Figure 9: Should Projects Undergo Periodic Review for Impact & Relevance?

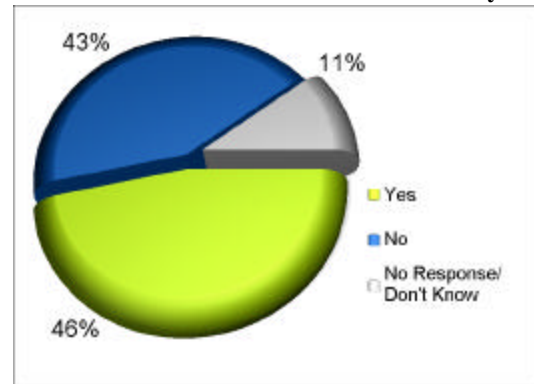


Ninety-two percent of all category respondents agree that NRSP projects should be subjected to periodic reviews to show impact as well as relevance. The remaining 8% is split equally with 4% responding no and 4% giving a non-response to the question.

Two areas were reiterated with those choosing to express comments related to this question. First, being able to show how resources are being utilized as well as impact to stakeholders, clientele, and Directors was seen as an important point. Secondly, opinions stated that a mechanism is needed to ensure consistency in the review process and in documenting impact. Five years was the majority consensus among all respondents.

Forming an NRSP Around National Accountability

Figure 10: Should NRSPs Be Organized Around National Accountability?



When asked if a NRSP should be organized around national accountability efforts and impact assessment 46% responded yes, and 43% responded no. Eleven percent choose to give a non-response or don't know answer.

Of those in favor of creating such a project, this is seen as a “very reasonable approach.” One respondent commented,

“This could possibly become a mission area of NRSP 1 as a component of the CRIS system.” Another respondent was very clear in his or her example of how beneficial this program could be by explaining, “Create a short term NRSP with very clear objectives establishing mechanisms, conducting impact analysis, and establishing criteria and mechanisms for evaluating impact. Once it does that, it goes away, and that could be used by the individuals within the system.”

Of those responding negatively, this idea “pushes getting bureaucratic and the concept of how to be accountable.” One suggestion was to set priorities on a national basis rather than “the ad hoc system that is currently done.” Another feels this would be hard to implement “around governmental functions,” and that a whole new mechanisms needs to be created.

One of the interviewees had an even different approach stating, “We should organize research around priorities for research and specific objectives. Then you find the funding and the research talents to accomplish. Then you absolutely should be held accountable for and expected to communicate the impact that the research has had.”

Mechanisms for Annual Reporting

Interviewees from Categories 1 and 2 were asked to name the mechanisms or guidelines that currently exist for annual reporting of progress and findings. Overwhelmingly, the respondents named annual reporting as the current mechanism used, and most said that it was adequate and sufficient. While most did agree that annual reporting did seem best, communicating effectively and efficiently within the system was stated repeatedly. Another respondent added, “The information is base at best, fairly skeletal, and are usually simply numbered reports that could be improved by formatting.”

While a majority named annual reporting, other types of mechanisms and guidelines were also listed. NRSP reports to their own board annually with this plan including progress and planning for the next year, past year accomplishments, and future year plans. “Having active Web pages is also critical for getting out this information as fast as possible.”

Category 3 interviewees were asked how familiar they were with the NRSP reporting mechanisms and guidelines. Fifty-five percent reported having no knowledge of these reports with 45% having some knowledge.

Improvements

When asked to comment on improvements that can be made to enhance the reporting mechanisms and guidelines, a suggestion was made from Category 1 and 2 respondents to “create a format as to how you create this annual report and the kinds of questions to be addressed.” Some were skeptical in their opinions of a written format because

“everybody doesn’t fit into the same mold and the danger is that you are basically filling out a form.” However, all agree that there needs to be guidelines about the kinds of questions that need addressing while allowing for flexibility. This formatting approach will offer consistency across all projects while allowing reports to build from year to year to “accumulate data and information over the life of the project.”

Along with sending out these reports comes a call for more feedback on the receiving end. These reports are sent to the Experiment Station Directors and “the only acknowledgement is that they were received.” Feedback in terms of whether or not they are satisfied with the report as well as points of interest, areas that should be highlighted, and areas for improvement would “serve as motivational tools for those writing the reports.” This feedback and sharing would also be an additional accountability process by which all projects would be held.

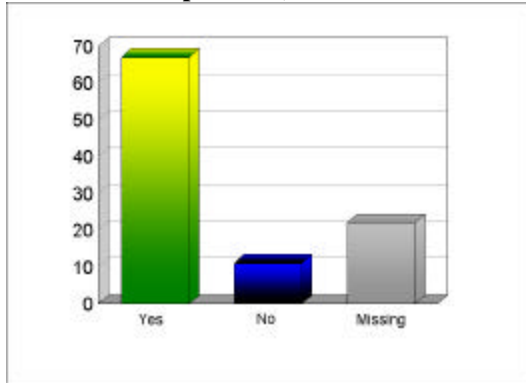
Communication is also seen as an ongoing challenge. “There needs to be a variety of ways that we do it. One way is not going to reach all audiences.” Others agree, “We are not the best at communicating,” and “tooting our own horns.” Being much more “systematic at communicating what we do to the public and obviously Congress, too, is key. Not all the voting public cares about what we do, but there are constituents that do.” It was also suggested that a communicator, a group of communicators, or perhaps someone within the CSREES level be retained as someone whose role is to publicize the results and efforts of the NRSP projects.

Category 3 answers were slightly different due to the lack of knowledge concerning these reporting mechanisms

and guidelines. Those who expressed knowledge about them believe that the scientists who write these reports ‘haven’t been trained to paint a picture of their basic work and what that might lead to.’ There are simply “not enough good statements about impact and potential end products.” This group believes that there needs to be a centralized where one may find objectives and goals for NRSPs as well as relative mission statements.

Self-assessment of the Individual NRSPs

Figure 11: Need for Self-assessment for the Individual NRSPs? (Category 2 respondents)



To begin the assessment and evaluation section of the survey, interviewees from Categories 1 and 2 were asked if there is a need for self-assessment of the individual NRSPs, and if so, to suggest a mechanism that would be most useful for this self-assessment. Category 1 interviewees agreed 100% for the need of self-assessment among the individual NRSPs. When respondents from Category 2 were asked the same question, 67% agreed with the need for self-assessment while 11% disagreed and 22% had no response. Members of Category 3 were not asked this question.

A common belief with self-assessment is that it should already be occurring within the NRSP projects as a part of the renewal process. This is seen as a way to “look internally at your goals and objectives, and did you accomplish these.” These tough questions could even be used for a more formal review process. “Before the renewal, we all should go through a rigorous self-analysis of what has been accomplished, what issues are left to do, what impacts they have had, and does it justify renewal.” This “self-study” type

approach also provides an avenue for discussing problems that were unforeseen and how they were handled.

External Reviews of a Program

When all categories of interviewees were asked to share their insights concerning the frequency of serious external reviews related to the productivity of individual NRSP programs, the lines were equally divided. Two-thirds of the respondents from all categories felt that the current system of five years was sufficient, or they had very little, if any, knowledge of individual program reviews.

There are those who feel that five-year program reviews are currently being done but “are not sure of how serious, challenging, and in depth they really are.” However, those who had little to no knowledge of this process believe that the current system “appears ad hoc,” and that some reviews may have been done, but not frequently. For some with basic knowledge, while they agree that reviews may have been done, the reports carry “varying degrees of criticism and are not external reviews, and they also don’t carry consequences.” Another respondent commented that reviews “of all of our research programs at the state level are done, but never with the NRSP programs.”

External Reviews of the Portfolio

Across the board, all interviewees were unfamiliar with any reviews of the entire NRSP portfolio. When further asked if they felt that one should be done, sentiment was both positive and negative.

Even though a review has not been done of the portfolio at this time, one

base group feels that it would be useful to do. It could possibly help in the “argument for creating a dedicated funding base for the NRSPs.” It might also be helpful for “an outside group of experts to look at how the programs are being managed, and whether or not it is successfully satisfying its objectives.” Others feel, though, that this review could be best accomplished by individual reviews because of the diversity of the portfolio. The current portfolio “may be difficult to evaluate because we are not comparing projects that have been set up with the same sort of reasons or functions.”

Who Does Them? How are the Findings Reported?

All three categories had differing views of who is doing or should be doing the external reviews of the individual NRSPs. Most comments did center on the individual projects, as opposed to the portfolio, due to a lack of knowledge with regards to an external portfolio review.

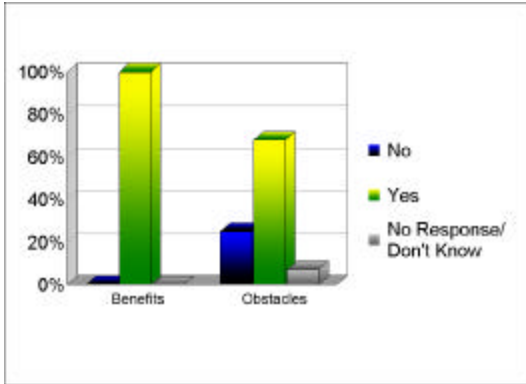
Reviews, as stated by Category 1 interviewees, which are currently being done on individual NRSPs, are stated to have been completed every year when Experiment Station Directors vote on the budgets of these programs, and at the five-year intervals for renewals. Others named as a part of the review system include representatives from regional associations, CSREES, and AAs working in conjunction with CSREES while “identifying the majority of external reviewers.” Category 2 interviewees were either not sure of who completes the review process or felt that some type of “NRSP oversight group is needed to coordinate individual as well as portfolio reviews.” This “blue ribbon

panel of people would represent Experiment Station Directors, CSREES, stakeholders, and/or other federal agencies” in the review process. Category 3 respondents felt that a committee of the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP) should be responsible for the reviews.

In reporting the findings, all groups agree the results should be published in a final report that is then forwarded to the AAs in each region, Directors, and the internal administrators of CSREES. One respondent felt that these reviews should be “brought to the attention of the Experiment Station Directors and discussed, particularly when funding is being questioned.” While some respondents referenced these reports in their answers, others were unaware of them.

Collaboration Benefits

Figure 12: Benefits/Obstacles of NRSP Collaboration With Other Government Agencies



Overwhelmingly, 100% of all respondents in all categories expressed their belief that collaboration with other governmental agencies would be of potential benefit for the NRSP programs. This collaboration, among other things, would help to “broadly distribute information that was generated,” and would “raise the level of visibility for an individual program.”

Examples of potential collaborating agencies included: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Agricultural Research Service (ARS); National Institute of Health (NIH); NRCS; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES); Natural Resource Conservation Service; National Science Foundation (NSF); National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA); and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Potential Obstacles

Approximately 68% of all three category interviewees believe that there are potential obstacles to collaborating with other agencies on the NRSP projects while approximately 25%

believe there are no obstacles and approximately 7% gave no response.

Funding mechanisms and the competition for funds was a big concern for most. “The total budget is problematic. Also, working with government entities is problematic as well because each has unique and different ways of handling funds.” Another concern was management and government bureaucracy and how to persevere through all the “red tape.” “Getting through the process of establishing memorandums, of understanding between agencies, and communication through the maze of government layers” could be challenging enough within itself. One respondent felt that “those that bring money to the table want a say in how things are handled,” and that these managers are required to interact. Another even suggested, “CSREES act as a broker between agencies as they look to leverage our resources.” Even though there are many that view the issues stated above as obstacles, others feel that the obstacles are not significant, the “potential outweighs the disadvantages,” and that the communication and relationships take time to build and will create successful partnerships down the road.

Greatest Concerns with Respect to the NRSP Program

There are four predominant veins of concern that are shared by all participants across the categories that apply to the current NRSP program. These areas include funding, leadership, stagnancy and expectations, and poor image and weak support.

As has been throughout the report, funding issues are among the top concerns with respect to the NRSP program. Funds that support the current NRSP system are finite causing constraint and inflexibility within the system. "Funding constraints and inflexibility has an impact on limiting and creating new or additional NRSPs." Even though competition for funding can be fierce, new alternative funding resources need to be located that can support these programs "without taking away from regions and states."

With respect to leadership concerns, suggestions were made to create and empower a national review committee with oversight provided from CSREES. "We don't currently have enough administrative oversight from CSREES," and the formation of this committee would have "tangible responsibilities" while providing overall oversight of the NRSP program. (This would be similar to the former Committee of 9.) Leadership of projects was another concern that was voiced. "These projects are extremely important and when someone retires or resigns and moves to another institution, the issue of continuity in leadership" becomes prevalent again. The current system is also seen as confusing to manage and "too cumbersome to make effective changes."

The current NRSP system is viewed as stagnant while having unrealistic expectations. Repeatedly, across the board, a majority feels "we don't have the mechanisms in place to ensure efficiency and relevancy," and a quality and thorough review of investments is needed to keep the main energy and focus. "There is just not a good understanding of NRSPs, what they do, what impacts they have had, and what their future really is." Suggestions included reviewing the portfolio to make sure that we are addressing issues that are contemporary, and to retire or find alternative funding sources for projects that have matured.

Poor image and weak support among the Agriculture Experiment Station Directors was mentioned as our final concern. These projects are viewed as occupying a "fairly low status" with Experiment Station Directors and are not well liked "because they are not well understood." It was expressed that "some Directors don't fully understand all the nuances and accomplishments and various funding mechanisms." One respondent expressed concern by commenting, "These Directors would opt to not support the NRSPs at all while taking the off-the-top money and disturbing it to the state. Unless something is done to renew confidence in the people who are really funding these programs" support will probably continue to dwindle.

Comments Not Addressed During the Interview

Several areas were addressed as we gave each interviewee the opportunity to respond to any area of their choice as related to the current NRSP projects. Topics of interest included sunset clauses, communication, reporting, technology, and others.

Of all the topics addressed, sunset clauses received the most attention from respondents. Comments covered a varied spectrum of emotions as well. All of the respondents addressing this topic agreed that sunset clauses should be added to NRSP projects. One interviewee felt these clauses were even implied because “of the rejustification at the end of five years, and are rational and reasonable.” However, the majority qualified their statement that while needing to add sunset clauses, one size does not fit all projects, and each program “needs to be continually justified but should not exclude the possibility of renewal,” especially if long-term needs are identified. Others pointed out that the current review process needs to be improved upon, and would possibly eliminate the need for sunset clauses. Another concern expressed was the use of sunset clauses as a management tool. “If something is no longer relevant then it should not require a sunset clause for us to have the authority to pull the plug on it. Sunset clauses give a way to let something go without making a deliberate decision, and also has the potential for killing something that is very good.”

Better communication within the NRSPs and the need for better external distribution of reports are seen as much needed areas of improvement. As it is now, “communication needs to be

streamlined” and new avenues pursued that will enhance communication within and between projects. “Most seem only concerned with internal communication and decision making within their activity program.” The reporting process is also seen as a weak link. “Reports are administrative in nature and go to the AAs. They are shared with Directors and may then be given to faculty. Guidelines for submitting annual reports and final reports are there but not sure about distribution.” Information is available through the Web to anyone who is interested, but “it is very, very abbreviated and is hard to find. Our reporting is not adequate in telling the story that some of these projects could tell.”

Using the Internet and the availability of Web pages for information is very important in today’s society. Emphasizing the public’s need to understand the NRSP projects, Web sites are useful to everyone and should be “essential part of any NRSP program.” Those addressing this topic feel that Web pages should be a requirement and “should be kept relatively current with present research, current activities, and things that impact and reflect on the stage on the project.” Others suggested even posting a “few paragraphs of their annual reports that are interesting and informative with a reference back to the homepage.” These might be helpful for those wanting more information on a related field or topic. This would also increase the exposure of the NRSP programs.

NRSP Interview Questions
Version 1 – Former C-9 Members

First, how familiar would you say you are with the current NRSP program?

Very familiar

Somewhat familiar

Not at all familiar

Current NRSP Portfolio:

1. *Do you think that the current NRSP portfolio is relevant to challenges of today?*

ý Yes ý No

Please explain.

2. *What would you consider the greatest success of NRSP to be?*

3. *What would you consider to be the greatest advantage of the NRSP portfolio?
Individual NRSPs?*

Relevance:

1. *What mechanisms are already in place to address important national problems?*

2. *Should all NRSPs address only national needs?*

ý Yes ý No

3. *How are priority needs established? Would you say that everyone is aware of those needs?*

4. *Are priorities of these programs and the portfolio realistically set? Who sets them?*

5. *What changes would you implement for a more effective system?*

Management:

1. *Are there alternative strategies that could be used to better manage NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

Please describe.

New Projects:

1. *What are the procedures for initiating new projects?*
2. *What obstacles would new NRSP projects face? Should new NRSPs be approved considering the current portfolio status?*

Funding:

1. *If you are currently administering an NRSP, what is your major source of funding?*
2. *How are funding limits set? By whom? Are these reviewed and how often?*
3. *Are current off-the-top hatch monies received enough to cover the costs associated with the NRSP project?*

ý Yes ý No

4. *If projects are to be retained indefinitely, should they be moved to alternative sources of funding?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, how might this be accomplished? (What are some examples of possible alternate funding sources?)

Impact:

1. *What mechanisms are in place for reporting impact analysis both nationally and regionally? Where are they located? Who has access to this information?*
2. *Should all NRSP projects be subjected to periodic reviews to show impact as well as relevance?*

Yes No

If yes, how frequently should this be done?

3. *Should an NRSP be formed or organized around national accountability efforts and impact assessment?*

ý Yes ý No

Reporting:

1. *What mechanisms or guidelines exist for quarterly and annual reporting of progress and findings? Are there ways these can be improved? Please explain.*

Assessment/Evaluation:

1. *Do you think there is a need for self-assessment of the individual NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, suggest a mechanism that you think is most useful for self-assessment.

2. *How often are serious external reviews of the productivity of a program done? Of the NRSP portfolio? Who does them? How are the findings reported?*

Collaboration/Partnerships:

1. *Are there potential benefits of collaboration with other governmental agencies for the NRSP programs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

2. *Are there potential obstacles to collaborating with other agencies on the NRSP's?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

Concluding Question:

1. *What are your greatest concerns with respect to the NRSP program?*

Is there anything else you would like to comment on that we have not addressed during this interview?

NRSP Interview Questions
Version 2 – Current NRSP AA's

First, how familiar would you say you are with the current NRSP program?

Very familiar

Somewhat familiar

Not at all familiar

Current NRSP Portfolio:

1. *Do you think that the current NRSP portfolio is relevant to challenges of today?*

ý Yes ý No

Please explain.

2. *What would you consider the greatest success of NRSP to be?*

3. *What would you consider to be the greatest advantage of the NRSP portfolio? Individual NRSPs?*

Relevance:

1. *What mechanisms are already in place to address important national problems?*

2. *Should all NRSPs address only national needs?*

ý Yes ý No

3. *How are priority needs established? Would you say that everyone is aware of those needs?*

4. *Are priorities of these programs and the portfolio realistically set? Who sets them?*

5. *What changes would you implement for a more effective system?*

Management:

1. *Are there alternative strategies that could be used to better manage NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

Please describe.

New Projects:

1. *What are the procedures for initiating new projects?*

2. *What obstacles would new NRSP projects face? Should new NRSPs be approved considering the current portfolio status?*

Funding:

1. *What is your major source of NRSP funding?*
2. *How are funding limits set? By whom? Are these reviewed and how often?*
3. *Are current off-the-top hatch monies received enough to cover the costs associated with your NRSP project(s)?*

ý Yes ý No

4. *Comment on the process for approving and reviewing project funding. How frequently should these be reviewed (ex: 3 year cycle? 5 year cycle?)*
5. *If projects are to be retained indefinitely, should they be moved to alternative sources of funding?*

ý Yes ý No

If **yes**, how might this be accomplished? (What are some examples of possible alternate funding sources?)

Impact:

1. *What mechanisms are in place for reporting impact analysis both nationally and regionally? Where are they located? Who has access to this information?*
2. *Should all NRSP projects be subjected to periodic reviews to show impact as well as relevance?*

ý Yes ý No

If **yes**, how frequently should this be done?

3. *Should an NRSP be formed or organized around national accountability efforts and impact assessment?*

ý Yes ý No

Reporting:

1. *What mechanisms or guidelines exist for quarterly and annual reporting of progress and findings? Are there ways these can be improved? Please explain.*

Assessment/Evaluation:

1. *Do you think there is a need for self-assessment of the individual NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, suggest a mechanism that you think is most useful for self-assessment.

2. *How often are serious external reviews of the productivity of a program done? Of the NRSP portfolio? Who does them? How are the findings reported?*

Collaboration/Partnerships:

1. *Are there potential benefits of collaboration with other governmental agencies for the NRSP programs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

2. *Are there potential obstacles to collaborating with other agencies on the NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

Concluding Question:

1. *What are your greatest concerns with respect to the NRSP program?*

Is there anything else you would like to comment on that we have not addressed during this interview?

NRSP Interview Questions
Version 3 – New Directors
(or Directors not closely involved with NRSPs)

First, how familiar would you say you are with the current NRSP program?

Very familiar

Somewhat familiar

Not at all familiar

Current NRSP Portfolio:

1. *Do you think that the current NRSP portfolio is relevant to challenges of today?*

ý Yes ý No

Please explain.

2. *What would you consider the greatest success of NRSP to be?*

3. *What would you consider to be the greatest advantage of the NRSP portfolio? Individual NRSPs?*

Relevance:

1. *What mechanisms are already in place to address important national problems?*

2. *Should all NRSPs address only national needs?*

ý Yes ý No

3. *How are priority needs established? Would you say that everyone is aware of those needs?*

4. *Are priorities of these programs and the portfolio realistically set? Who sets them?*

5. *What changes would you implement for a more effective system?*

Management:

1. *Are you familiar with the way NRSPs are managed?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, are there alternative strategies that could be used to better manage NRSPs? Please describe.

New Projects:

1. *Are you familiar with the procedures for initiating new projects?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, do you feel that these are appropriate and effective?

2. *What obstacles might new NRSP projects face? Should new NRSPs be approved considering the current portfolio status?*

Funding/Length of Project:

1. *Are you familiar with how NRSP funding limits are set?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, who sets these limits? Are these limits reviewed? If so, how often?

2. *Are current off-the-top hatch monies received enough to cover the costs associated with the NRSP project?*

ý Yes ý No

3. *Comment on the process for approving and reviewing project funding. How frequently should these be reviewed? (Ex: 3 year cycle? 5 year cycle?)*

4. *If projects are to be retained indefinitely, should they be moved to alternative sources of funding?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, how might this be accomplished? (What are some examples of possible alternate funding sources?)

Impact:

1. *Are you familiar with the mechanisms that are in place for reporting NRSP impact analysis both nationally and regionally?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, where are they located? Who has access to this information?

2. *Should all NRSP projects be subjected to periodic reviews to show impact as well as relevance?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, how frequently should this be done?

3. *Should an NRSP be formed or organized around national accountability efforts and impact assessment?*

ý Yes ý No

Reporting:

1. *Are you familiar with NRSP reporting mechanisms or guidelines?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, are there ways these can be improved? What are they?

Assessment/Evaluation:

1. *Are you familiar with how frequently serious reviews of the productivity of a program are done?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, who does them? How are the findings reported?

2. *Are you familiar with how frequently serious reviews of the productivity of the NRSP portfolio are done?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, who does them? How are the findings reported?

Collaboration/Partnerships:

1. *Are there potential benefits of collaboration with other governmental agencies for the NRSP programs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

2. *Are there potential obstacles to collaborating with other agencies on the NRSPs?*

ý Yes ý No

If yes, what might these be?

Concluding Question:

1. *What are your greatest concerns with respect to the NRSP program?*

Is there anything else you would like to comment on that we have not addressed during this interview?