

NRSP RC Meeting, 05/22/2018 Warwick RI

Chair: Fred Servello (Maine)

Executive Vice-Chair: Rick Rhodes (NERA)

Recorder: David Leibovitz (NERA)

In Attendance: Mark McGuire (WAAESD, Idaho), Keith Owens (SAAESD, Oklahoma State), Don Latham (CARET, Iowa), Doug Buhler (NCRA, Michigan State), Jeff Jacobsen (NCRA), Valerie Giddings (ARD, North Carolina A&T)

Notes on terms: Don Latham (12 years), Doug Buhler (5 years)

1. **Minutes. Motion to accept 2017 NRSP RC minutes was introduced by Doug Buhler, seconded by Valerie Giddings, unanimously approved**

2. NRSP Issues Discussion

Doug Buhler provided an update on NRSP3 NADP – NADP was housed at U Illinois (Prairie Research Institute), and while affiliated w/ the university, was not embedded in the AES. The relationship of NRSP3 and the University changed. In the summer of 2017 a new host institution was sought, the University of Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene was selected, transition is underway. Wisconsin is enthusiastic about hosting NADP. Karelyn Cruz, NIFA rep, has taken strong interest in the NADP, a session is being planned for NIFA's scientific meeting in Fall 2018. NCRA was instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition from Illinois to Wisconsin.

Fred Servello introduced NRSP reflections from the AES directors from the Northeast (NERA). The NERA directors identified several areas of concern including their lack of confidence in the value of a mid-term review, the lack of a sunset on most NRSPs, the use of NRSP off-the-top funds for projects that don't fit the NRSP project definition (e.g., NIMSS) and the deployment of regional off-the-top (OTT) funds to support regional genebanks. Discussion ensued and the following questions and reflections were provided by committee members. The general areas of discussion revolved around reviews, the defining characteristics of NRSPs, and alternative strategies for deployment of off-the-top funding.

Questions/comments that revolved around reviews:

- Should there be an external/discipline area expert to conduct external mid-term reviews?
- Do review forms yield the information that ESCOP needs to make informed decisions on NRSPs?
- Perhaps the review form could include a 'summary of how the review was conducted'
- Renewal reviews need to be thorough. Midterm reviews have more room for flexibility/discussion.
- The NRSP Review Form echoes the original proposal (e.g., consistency with other NRSPs, relevance to a national issue) questions that are pre-ordained to be answered 'yes'.
- Some NRSPs have a strong extension component. Extension components are part of the review form. Should we reach out to Extension for contribution to this program?

Questions/comments that revolved around the characteristics of NRSPs:

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- Do we really know what an NRSP is and what it should look like? What do the active NRSPs even have in common?
- NRSP Guidelines state that the NRSP-RC oversees the implementation of NRSP sunset clauses. Few projects ever sunset.
- IR-4 is really not a research support project, by the NRSP definition. Because of the strong stakeholder base of IR-4 it's hard to separate from the NRSP, but why should we hang onto IR-4 if it doesn't fit the NRSP program?
- NIFA likes the OTT mechanism on the Research side – the system says 'these are priority areas where we will put skin in the game.'
- There's no guideline for the future / succession plan for an NRSP other than to not renew
- "National Research Projects" are mentioned in the NRSP guidelines – a mechanism is there, but it has never been used.

Questions/comments that revolved around the alternative strategies for deployment of off-the-top funding:

- What do we want to do with this block of "OTT money" as a National program?
- Is this a seed grant program or a research support program?
- Why not consider a national seed grant program?
 - Implementation would require ESS vote
- We ought to consider what 'buckets' we want to dedicate these funds toward, consider re-writing the guidelines to reflect what we want to be doing
- NRSP RC should consider national priority areas for dedicating NRSP funds

After much discussion a small subcommittee (Rick Rhodes, Jeff Jacobsen, and Doug Buhler) was tasked with revising the review forms to reflect the information needed by directors to make decisions about continuing to fund ongoing projects and starting to fund new projects and revised projects. **Motion to approve this subcommittee's activities was unanimously approved**

The same subcommittee will also tackle a revision of the NRSP guidelines to assist in better focusing the activities of NRSPs. **Motion to approve this subcommittee's activities was unanimously approved.**

3. NRSP 8 Renewal

The regional associations provided the following recommendations on the NRSP8 renewal request:

- NERA: Rejection
- NCRA: Revision
- WAAESD: Revision
- SAAESD: Approval

The regions also provided specific reflections on the renewal. NERA asked why continuation of OTT funds was essential for the project. NCRA noted that parts of the NRSP8 proposal read like *research*, not *research support*. Further some specificity in the budget rather than one line would be helpful. WAAESD commented that the budget request should be tied to impacts rather than expenses. WAAESD also sought details on the transition off of NRSP funding. SAAESD commented that the project strongly supported by Allen Moore (UGA).

The NRSP RC noted that reference genomes were vital for conducting the science the NRSP8 supports. Alternatively, the RC identified the following issues on the NRSP8 renewal request:

- Lack of specificity in the budget; activities bundled into one line
- What are research activities vs research infrastructure support?
- Of the listed activities in the proposal, can the NRSP8 technical committee distinguish between what's supported by the OTT funds and what's supported by external funding?
- The technical team reports \$93M in external funding, but what is resulting directly from the \$500k investment? If the returns are so great, why is the \$500k needed?
- Project has been renewed many times – should there be a sunset?
- Can an NRSP prove to be self-sustaining?
- This is meant to be broader in scope than a traditional Multistate Research Project – this is infrastructure support.
- Provide clarification on the budget, what infrastructure is supported? What is the budget plan for each species group?
- Provide explanation on the budget transition at the end of the NRSP. Is there a transition plan to get off NRSP funding?
- **NRSP RC recommendation: Provide specifics on the \$500k budget. NRSP8 team should revisit what an NRSP is – provide greater detail on what specifically will be done with the budget, define how decisions are made on the deployment of the budget, and describe clearly how this project supports infrastructure.**
 - **Motion to approve NRSP RC's recommendation was introduced by Don Latham, seconded by Valerie Giddings, unanimously approved**
 - **The NRSP RC office will draft recommendations to the NRSP8 team**

4. NRSP4 Discussion

The NRSP-RC discussed concerns with budget management. Administrative Advisers are very involved; they're serving because IR-4 is important in their states. AAs sit in on all program management committees and Jerry Baron (Rutgers) has done a good job running a complex program. The project is characterized by a very committed, very influential group of stakeholders who are champions of the NRSP. Large, populated states are involved.

Discussion ensued on the uncertainties of ARS funding to support this project. Further, the RC noted that an evaluation of the future of IR4 and NRSP 4 has been undertaken. Issues revolving around overhead continue. Doug Buhler has encouraged Jerry Baron to conduct regional visits on IR-4 at the regional association spring meetings in 2019.

Of the minor/specialty crops covered, do any participate in checkoff programs? Most do. That has been discussed as an alternative funding source. In Michigan, cherries and apples provide some funding, in Maine – blueberries.

The mid-term review suggested an 'independent assessment' of practices and an audit of the budget be undertaken. IR-4 leadership is aware of the concerns with future NRSP4 renewals.

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Motion introduced by Mark McGuire and Keith Owens to support NRSP4, and recommend the following:

- **IR-4 should communicate with regional associations and present at regional meetings**
- **NRSP4 group should consider assessment of its business and management plan**
- **Motion was approved unanimously**

5. NRSP6 Discussion

The NRSP-RC noted that this project has high relevance to a national issue, high relevance to stakeholders. However, there are ongoing concerns with management and the business plan (scored 5 out of 15.) Who should pay? Should this be OTT Hatch funded, or should contributions from industry, USDA and others be sought? When NRSP RC approved the NRSP6 renewal, there was a formal request by the midterm review to examine the diversity of funding / resources (underway). Discussion ensued and the following reflections were shared by committee members:

- In years prior, the lead AA (formerly Rick Lindroth), Doug Buhler, Jeff Jacobsen, Michigan Potato Council, and potato breeders have had multiple conversations on the topic. This included a conversation with the National Potato Council Exec, ultimately leading to conversations at their summer meeting. Simply said, the National Potato Council had no idea that the potato genebank existed.
- Jeff Jacobsen / Bill Barker met with Philipp Simon (USDA ARS RL Veg Crops Unit) to discuss what were some of the overarching issues and how they influence the future of NRSP6.
- NPGCC is meeting next week at Sturgeon Bay, WI, home of NRSP6 (May 2018) and the NRSP6 renewal is on their agenda; discussing the future of the program. Strong ARS contingent will be in attendance.
- Should there be a “user fee” or National fee implemented? Should this become some sort of a “regional off-the-top”?
- NRSP6 (lead AA, other AAs and John Bamberg) will consider the NRSP RC’s feedback and incorporate it into their next discussion. They anticipate a firm recommendation from the RC and will also have discussions/ideas evolving from the NPGCC/NRSP6 meeting as options for moving forward.

NRSP RC recommendation: Conduct a sincere effort to produce alternative business plans and funding models.

- The NRSP RC understands the importance of NRSP6’s work
- Timeframe for new models: 6 months after ESS (April 2019)
- Failure to produce alternative business plans or funding models will result in the closure of NRSP6 at the end of the project period.
 - We would not accept a renewal proposal for NRSP6.
- **Motion to approve the NRSP RC’s recommendation introduced by Doug Buhler, seconded by Mark McGuire, unanimous approval**

6. NRSP9 Discussion

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While the mid-term review of NRSP9 was positive, an AA (Rick Rhodes NE) noted that the outputs of the projects were modest. The National Animal Nutrition Program database is under construction and has – empty fields and static pages. (The website is currently a liability.) Only a handful of publications were identified by the technical team in the annual reports. Website analytics provided by the technical team indicated few visitors (90 visitors over a 6-month period.) While the structure and format of the website are in place, content is missing. NRSP9 is currently funded at \$225k/year.

- NRSP RC's recommendation
 - Seek from the technical team, more information and clarity on the outputs
 - Provide an update on budget discussion and future plans
 - **Motion introduced by Doug Buhler, seconded by Keith Owens, unanimous approval**

7. Housekeeping / Other Business

- NERA will draft location options for the 2019 NRSP RC meeting
- Regional Germplasm discussion – funding the national/regional germplasm centers. The NRSP-RC suggested working with the ESCOP chair and seek input on how the 'regional OTT' process could be reimagined? ARS should be included in the discussion. Work through NPGCC?
 - **NERA can draft a recommendation to ESCOP Chair Gary Thompson on behalf of the NRSP RC to conduct a regional germplasm review**
- NRSPs have all meetings and reports submitted to date.
- NRSP RC 2019: Renewals of NRSP3 and NRSP10, no midterm reviews.
- Timeframe for NRSP RC activities in 2018
 - NRSP Guideline changes
 - NRSP8 recommendations
 - NRSP4/NRSP6/NRSP9 midterm recommendations
 - Response by July 15
 - Input from Regional Associations by August 15
 - Craft response to ESS ~September 1
 - Set meeting date approx. same time (Doodle the NRSP RC)

The meeting adjourned at 1:37pm EDT