

NRSP RC Meeting Notes

May 29, 2019, Warwick, RI

In attendance: Fred Servello (NERA-Chair), Rick Rhodes (NERA-Executive Vice-Chair), Jeff Jacobsen (NCRA-Incoming Executive Vice-Chair), Keith Owens (SAAESD), Bret Hess (WAAESD), Doug Buhler (NCRA-Incoming Chair), Ali Mitchell (ECOP representative-NEED), Don Latham (Stakeholder member), David Leibovitz (NERA-Coordinator, Ex-officio)

All committee action items are in bold.

Meeting called to order at 8:00 AM.

Agenda

- Under NRSP Issues Discussion, request to add NRSP4 / IR-4 topic.
- **The agenda was approved by acclamation.**

Minutes from September 4, 2018

- Call was held to frame recommendations to ESS.
- Included renewal of NRSP8, mid-term review of NRSP4/6/9.
- NRSP funding comes off the top from the Multistate Research Fund, 1% of all Hatch (~\$2M). All stations have a stake in the NRSP Portfolio.
- **The minutes were approved by acclamation.**

NRSP Issues Discussion

- Rotations – occur each year following the ESS Fall Meeting
 - Set to rotate off in Sep-2019: Fred Servello (NERA-Chair), Rick Rhodes (NERA-Executive Vice-Chair), David Leibovitz (NERA-Coordinator, Ex-officio).
 - **NERA will identify its next Northeast representative by the ESS Fall Meeting.**
- Topics from 2018: “what is an NRSP?”, National OTT funding sunset and business plan, “research” vs “research support”, National Research Projects, major changes to NRSP guidelines.
- NRSP1 (NIMSS and MRF Impacts)
 - \$13k annual Support for Project Director embedded in NRSP1, held as part of Colorado State University NRSP1 allocation.
 - Project Director position vacant as of late 2018.
 - Impact writer Sara Delheimer is still on board, with a student working on MRF Impacts social media presence.
 - MRF Impacts is separate from the National Impacts Database.
 - MRF Impact statements go to NIFA; former Director Sonny Ramaswamy consistently read and recognized MRF Impact statements.
 - **This issue was tabled to allow the NRSP-1 Management Committee to frame a recommendation to the NRSP RC.**
- NIMSS and NRSP Participants
 - Objectives are required for participants to sign on to NRSPs.

- With the NRSP voting in September it does not allow business officers enough turnaround time to set up participants in NIMSS and REEport for 10/1 startdate.
- **A request to draft clear objectives will be embedded in the recommendations to the technical teams of the renewals of NRSP3 and NRSP10.**
- NRSP6 Response to NRSP RC Mid-term review
 - Background NRSP6 correspondence and potato data were circulated to the committee.
 - The NRSP RC sought a transition plan to move away from National OTT funding toward alternative sources, and has offered recommendations on how to do so.
 - NRSP6 is asking for a hard number on how the budget should be reduced, the RC seeks alternative sources of funding.
 - In 2011, NRSP RC deferred the NRSP6 Budget Recommendation on the condition that the technical committee develop a plan for alternative funding sources.
 - 2018 mid-term review: NRSP RC asked for a plan within 6 months.
 - 2019: still no transition plan for NRSP6.
 - The NRSP program will become more attractive if it's evident that the funding will go away. If NRSPs continue to be extended based on their original application merits, are they serving/responding to the needs of our communities in perpetuity, with every renewal?
 - NRSP6 issues are not with the technical operations of the seedbank, it's with the finances and management of the seedbank.
 - Every region has Directors on the NRSP and John Bamberg hasn't been working with them. Bill Barker (lead AA-Wisconsin) is in the same state...
 - Growers and industry see value in the seedbank.
 - NRSP6 is the only germplasm center that isn't part of the Regional OTT portfolio.
 - NPGCC/ARS is comprehensively reviewing the germplasm centers.
 - NRSP RC is not seeking a cut, but rather a transition plan away from National OTT funding.
 - What if ESCOP told ARS they'd pull the plug on NRSP6 / National OTT support? This is ARS's problem...
 - Who is the appropriate audience at ARS to have a serious discussion on withdrawing support for NRSP6?
 - Why isn't potato handled like the national germplasm system (Regional OTT rather than NRSP)?
 - NRSP6 issues discussion is on the agenda for the NPGCC 2019 meeting.
 - Discussions along three lines for NRSP6:
 - Seedbank discussions
 - ARS discussions
 - Data suggesting other possible funding models
 - **NRSP RC response to NRSP6 (regional AAs):**
 - **NRSP RC's expectations for an alternative funding plan were not met; the submission was not sufficient.**
 - **We acknowledge the budget reduction plan and ask that you proceed accordingly.**

- **For the next renewal, NRSP6 technical team and AAs must develop an alternative funding plan in order to be accepted.**
- **A subcommittee of the NRSP RC will be investigating other options as a means to assist NRSP6 with the transfer away from National OTT funding.**
- **Doug Buhler, Jeff Jacobsen, and Rick Rhodes will lead a discussion with USDA-ARS about the withdrawal of ESS support for NRSP6.**
 - **If these discussions move forward, keep Bret Hess involved as there are WAAESD Directors willing to engage state ARS leaders.**

Renewal of NRSP3: *The National Atmospheric Deposition Program*

- Team is known for being nimble and adapting with national issues.
- NADP was shifted from Illinois to Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene, which has been successful.
 - Wisconsin leadership provides strong outreach effort.
- NADP focusing heavily on climate change.
- An environmental project with an ag relationship: NRSP3 addresses some Grand Challenges in Food and Agriculture.
 - Wisconsin leadership is promoting more links between NADP and agriculture, a major goal of the renewal.
- NRSP3 participation in the West
 - Not a strategic issue, a funding issue: it is on their radar.
- Regional responses: approve renewal, across the board.
- Technical reviews: positive across the board.
- \$50k investment gets the Experiment Stations to the table on climate change discussions.
- This could be an example of how things that may not have traditionally been ag related, actually support agriculture.
- Review 2 called for strengthened ties to the Extension system.
- NRSP RC will mention the priority of strengthening NADP ties to Extension
- NADP would appreciate a stronger Extension connection to promote their work.
- **A motion was introduced for the NRSP RC to make recommendations to NRSP3:**
 - **NRSP RC will recommend approval of the renewal of NRSP3 to ESS.**
 - **The technical team is encouraged to**
 - **Strengthen link with Extension.**
 - **Continue effort to connect with agriculture and natural resources researchers**
 - **Explore strategies to expand sampling sites in the west.**
 - **Draft a set of objectives in NIMSS to allow business officers to recruit and appoint participants to the project.**
 - **The motion was approved unanimously.**

Renewal of NRSP10: *Database Resources for Crop Genomics, Genetics, and Breeding Research*

- This is the first renewal of NRSP10.
- Started with legacy databases, has transitioned into newer platforms, and is evolving rapidly.
- Regional reactions:
 - SAAESD: renew, but what is the long-term plan?

- NCRA: renew, discussion on business plan and how it plays out in this next cycle, need detailed update in their midterm review with alternative business plan models/processes.
- NERA: defer approval; seeking an alternative business plan to move away from OTT funding.
- WAAESD: support from commodities was lower than expected.
- Technical reactions
 - Mostly positive across the board, one mention of seeking an alternative business plan.
 - The proposal is expanding to create user-friendly informatics platforms for plant breeding and genomics work.
 - Extending bioinformatics to other discipline area experts.
- Budget
 - Structured as it was in its first iteration.
 - Project proposal states that support is anticipated: WSU \$3M, Industry \$741k.
 - Known level of support: \$2.6M, but the sources are unclear.
 - The budget should show the declining support coming from NRSP over the 5 years.
- Participation
 - Participation on the renewal is currently low.
 - To increase participation, the technical team should draft a set of objectives for inclusion in NIMSS.
 - Current NRSP10: 47 participants (representation: 11 AES, 7 USDA offices, 5 other.)
- Approval of NRSP10 should come with a request for a funding transition plan at mid-term review – consistent with the NRSP RC's philosophy on other projects.
- **Motion was introduced for the NRSP RC to make recommendations to NRSP10:**
 - **NRSP RC requests that the technical team revise the proposal prior to any recommendations to ESS, addressing the following points:**
 - **Draft a set of objectives in NIMSS to allow business officers to recruit and appoint project participants.**
 - **The technical team should provide data on users of the database: what stations use the database? How frequently?**
 - **The proposal identifies a 'sustainability plan' that is not clearly defined. Please define the 'sustainability plan' and clearly identify alternative sources of funding.**
 - **A transition plan away from OTT funding should be drafted.**
 - **At mid-term review, the NRSP RC seeks the entire transition plan, not a preliminary plan, so the NRSP RC clearly understands the feasibility and practicality of transitioning away from OTT funding.**
 - **The motion was unanimously approved**

Review of NRSP RC Guidelines Suggestions

- The NRSP RC reviews the guidelines, prepares recommendations for review and approval by ESCOP, and subsequently brings the proposed guidelines revisions to ESS for final approval.
- This revision attempts to bring some clarity to the operations of the NRSP Review Committee and the review process for NRSPs.

- Recent years' review forms were not providing the appropriate information from the reviewers for the NRSP RC.
 - Scoring system is not meaningful in the absence of a rubric.
 - Mid-term reviews by Administrative Advisers should be reimagined.
 - *Bottom line: Should the project continue to be funded at the proposed level? Yes/No? If no, please explain why.*
 - NRSPs are reviewed through a 'research' lens but should be reviewed through a 'support' lens.
- The NRSP RC Chair suggests we summarize the changes to the guidelines in a concise cover letter to ESS for ease of understanding prior to a vote.
- Multiple references to "a finite period of funding" throughout the current guidelines
 - Inconsistency between "start up support" and "renewals going forward".
- Regional Association NRSP reviews have been conducted appropriately.
- A discussion should be held on National Research Projects (NRPs) – what are they? Keep as a placeholder until we see the refinements proposed based upon prior edits and NRSP RC discussion.
- NRSP program constitutes 1% of Hatch funding, ~\$2.5M. What does ESS want to do with those funds?
- Is there an opportunity to expand the relationship between NRSPs and Extension? A parallel program on the Extension side?
- Why do we view multistate projects regionally, when they're often national in scope? How would a National Research Project (NRP) differ?
- The NRSP RC seeks to remove all opportunities for "creative reading" and "creative writing" of the guidelines.
- Leave placeholder language for NRPs in the guidelines and further define in future years.
- ESS Rules of Operation - changes are being made by an NRSP RC subcommittee for delivery in Sep 2019.
 - Three categories of proposed changes: general, housekeeping (formatting/typos), substantive (with short rationale as to why.)
- "Minimal Level of Funding" was eliminated throughout the document, replaced one time by:
 - *Occasionally, an NRSP might require a continuing level of minimal funding. Long-term, minimal-level support would be considered by the NRSP RC if the NRSP shared a compelling rationale. Even in this circumstance, the NRSP RC will recommend that a project team identify strategies to eliminate OTT funding.*
 - No wiggle room beyond the above will be granted.
- On the initial NRSP submission, a transition plan/sustainable funding plan should be provided
 - **Include an up-front request for a transition plan, to address "How does the technical team envision transitioning from OTT to other sources of funding?"**
- What happens if an NRSP is not approved for renewal?
 - Project receives a one-year project approval, with a budget equal to the previous year's budget, to transition off NRSP funding to other sources or downsize the project
 - **Suggestion: "Project may receive one-year project approval..."**
 - **Suggestion: "Termination plan may be negotiated"**
- **Change to NRSP review process:**

- Remove the NIFA representative from the process (no need for NIFA to convene reviewers.)
- Rick Rhodes will revise the review form to eliminate scoring and include boxes for qualitative written review.
- Remove the APPENDIX F Regional Association Review Form (hasn't been used in over 10 years, if at all.)
- Remove the dollar amount behind the "1% of Total Hatch"
 - Allows flexibility to keep current projects, and entertain new project proposals.
- Under "Mission of NRSPs", a suggestion to change "but not primarily research" to "not in and of itself research."
- Change language on voting to "simple majority of a quorum (those AES Directors present) at the SAES/ESS meeting."
- Jeff Jacobsen and Rick Rhodes will review each other's revisions to the guidelines before presenting a new copy to the NRSP RC.
- Suggestion to draft a one-pager / quick guide with suggestions for prospective NRSP Advisers
 - Reference language and page numbers throughout.

Other Business

- NERA will schedule an NRSP RC Zoom meeting for late August / early September to formally frame the recommendations to ESS.
- Regional associations are encouraged to share NRSP RC activities and proposed changes to the NRSP Guidelines at summer meetings, to prepare for approval at ESS Fall Meeting.
- The NRSP RC plans to meet on May 26-27, 2020 (Madison, WI tentative location.)

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 PM.