

**National Research Support Projects (NRSPs) Program Input:
Questionnaire Results Summary from NRSP-RC (3/18/2020)**

Q1: The purpose of NRSPs remains worthy of the continued investment of 1% (currently up to \$2.59M) by ESS.

Responses: All yes.

Q2: Regardless of your response to the previous question, we'd like your thoughts on whether the NRSP program needs improvement. Please select the answer below that best aligns with your thoughts on the program. You'll have the opportunity to describe any desired changes in the next question.

- 4 for: Phase in MAJOR changes. You'll have a chance to describe these major changes later.
- 2 for: Phase in slight changes. You'll have a chance to describe these slight changes later.

Q3: If you chose "Phase in MAJOR, slight changes, or have ideas for a brand-new program in the previous question, we'd like to hear your ideas. Please provide details here.

- The discussion during our conference call got me thinking. In the past, NRSPs were created by teams of scientists who identified a need. If the AES Directors identify strategic needs that can be addressed through the NRSP process, then a call for proposals could be issued. Let teams of scientists come together around the call and have a competition for which team gets funded. Example: data management plans. Engage libraries to develop data management templates and provide access to data developed by AES scientists.
- Set term limits for funding a project (i.e. max two renewals, assuming the plan is realistic and deem essential); require a percentage of collaborative/external match or external support from industry/stakeholders/collaborators or other grant sources to leverage a renewal project; work with ESS to identify critical national need areas and use as the focus for future project applications; and require a needs assessment for proposed project
- To ensure that projects graduate into self-funding, I recommend only 1 5-yr term during which the project must establish funding for viability. This would treat the NRSP projects as seed money for the team. I would consider a second 5-yr renewal at a maximum of 50% of the first term if others desire a longer option. A stair-step approach to the decrease is another option. Renewal year 1 - 100%, year 2 - 80%, year 3 - 60%, year 4 - 40% and year 5 - 20%.
- Hard requirements for sunset clauses and transition plans. Create a mechanism to auto-reject NRSPs at the committee level without the need for ESS voting if transition plans are not provided and/or adhered to.
- I'd for us to consider having two categories. One would be close to the current program focused on getting new ideas up and running with a sunset plan. The other category would be for support of long-term high priority programs with national impact. NRSP's 3, 4 and 6

might be programs supported. I think we need to be less concerned about a set of rules and more focused on how we can use these funds to support impactful programs that leverage other partners.

Q4: Assuming we do keep the NRSP program, please consider just the NRSP Guidelines themselves. Should they be simplified and changed as necessary?

Reponses: 5 yes, 1 no

Q5: Provide additional observations on the DESIRABLE characteristics and goals of NRSPs: (1) Flexible method to fund projects, (2) Stimulate/catalyze research and collaborations, (3) Few long-term projects (or projects with minimal cost), (4) Several existing projects are highly leveraged, (5) Stimulate innovation and risk taking, (6) Flexible duration depending upon the nature of the project, (7) If ESS could identify a few strategic areas of need, then new proposals could be created/funded, (8) Ground up ideas from LGU faculty, (9) Meet a critical national need not readily funded by other sources.

- Nothing to add, these are good.
- The list hits the main desirable characteristics. Proposals are subjected to extensive review and SAES directors decide through a collective vote on whether or not to fund a project for 5 years. The overall return on investment is tremendous when considering the investment is spread across more than 50 states.
- I agree that 1, 2, 4 and 9 represent the value of the NRSP. I don't think that 3, 5, 6, and 8 are true given the "permanency" of some projects. I also feel that innovation and risk taking is not supported, and maybe that is the right thing to do. Don't take risks with this money. Support projects critical to many.
- A more open, transparent process.

Q6: Provide additional observations on the UNDESIRABLE characteristics and goals of NRSPs: (1) Distinction between research and support becomes difficult to identify (need to discuss), (2) Long-term perpetuity of some projects with higher budgets minimizes change (desirable too), (3) NRSP Guidelines complexity/redundancy do not reflect the nature of all projects, (4) SAES has a hard time of saying no or terminating projects, (5) SAES takes what comes and does not ask for strategic areas of interest or needs assessment.

- These observations are right on and the practice should be discontinued as we develop new guidelines for the program.
- Aspects of the undesirable characteristics are certainly true, yet other aspects could be considered desirable. Number 1 is a must. Number 2 is only desirable if the project remains relevant and is worthy of continuous support. Might there be a way to set aside a portion of funds for new and emerging topics? Number 3 can be corrected with changes to the guidelines. Is it possible that there are different types of programs, not all of which can be

addressed in a single set of guidelines? Number 4 is only partially correct. There seems to be a more concerted effort to terminate projects in recent times (e.g., NRSP7). Number 5 should be split into two separate characteristics because it is not necessarily accurate as one statement. The two most recent NRSPs were heavily scrutinized. One could argue that all NRSPs are strategic investments. NRSP8 and 10 are good examples of strategic investments to address timely topics.

- I agree that there are concerns associated with each of these points. The key is determining how strategic the investment is to aid in the broadest aspects of science. We should be receiving requests that fit the bill but it appears that it is easier to just be renewed.
- Concur

Q7: If you have any additional comments that were not addressed in the questions above, please add them here.

- None
- I believe concerns with the NRSP program can be addressed with modifications to the guidelines. The issue of projects existing in perpetuity is a tough subject to grapple with when NRSP1 and 3 are considered in the mix.