



NERA News & Notes

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From the Executive Director, Tom Fretz

NERA Moves to USDA–Beltsville Area Research Center (BARC)

I am pleased to report that the move to our new offices at the USDA – Beltsville Area Research Center went off without a hitch. Just a few sore and aching backs! In fact, the staff and administration of Beltsville have done everything possible to make our move as effortless as possible, and to see that our downside time was limited. In the event you did not get our new snail mail address and phone numbers, see below. Email addresses for NERA will remain the same and we will continue to administratively function through the University of Maryland.

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Essay on Interdependence

Over the past several months I have been thinking about the issue of interdependence in our regional multistate portfolio. In part, I am concerned that our definition and understanding of interdependence, and to a greater degree, are we as Administrative Advisors and Executive Directors encouraging our multistate activities to demonstrate that the project objectives are interdependent. As such I have written the attached essay for your review. I would appreciate any and all comment, as it is my intention to keep this on the NERA website for future reference.

Interdependence is defined by Webster as multiple dependencies, while being dependent is defined as being contingent on something or someone else for support or relying on the aid of another.

A goal of regional multistate research is to strengthen the collaborative nature of research between scientists, and disciplines in the state experiment station system (SAES). This was clearly the intent of Congress when regional research allocations were mandated at the level of 25% of the Hatch allocation. Furthermore, the specificity of the integrated accounts further encourages multistate, multidiscipline, multi–institutional research activity.

Specifically, the multistate research portfolio is designed to encourage and increase multistate collaborations on critical issues which have a national or regional priority, and in working collaboratively we can reduce duplication and further the areas of science while resolving issues and providing answers to important stakeholder driven questions in the regional or national interest. Given the current fiscal climate, increasing integrated multistate efforts to meet local, regional and national research goals is critical and will likely increase. Individual states can not continue to do all things, meet all needs, and are increasingly dependent on multistate, multidisciplinary approaches to research and outreach activity. Indeed many of the problems that today’s scientists face require this multistate, multidisciplinary approach. Within the framework of the above, it is clear that many regional research projects are not as interdependent as one would expect or anticipate.

It is clear that greater demonstration of the level of interdependence in impact and annual reports of project activities is required. Many regional research projects objectives are singularly acted upon by individual investigators and do not demonstrate the level of interdependence that is desired or anticipated at the time of the conception of the regional, multistate research project, nor do multistate research activities report a level of interdependence that would suggest that the activity could not be completed unless there is collaborative activity. While the sharing of research information and research protocols around single topical areas of research within the multistate research project activity is laudable, this in and of itself does not constitute interdependence. In many cases, the objectives and level of

activity appear to be well-designed individual experiments conducted by individual investigators, but often without any interdependency or relationship with others investigators working on the project objective.

Regional multistate research should strive to achieve a level of interdependence within the orientation of the project activity. All projects should attempt to demonstrate this interdependence within each objective at the time of preparation of their annual report and when projects seek renew and revision. Without some level of prescribed interdependence, one has to question the continuing commitment of multistate research funding to the proscribed activity.

<http://www.agnr.umd.edu/users/NERA/InterdependenceJune2004.pdf>



Checklist for Multistate Project Administrative Advisors

As I have been reviewing my role as AA to a number of multistate activities, I pulled together the attached list to assist me in providing advice to these committees, and to see that project activities proceed on time and in the appropriate fashion. I would appreciate any thoughts and comments.

___ Have I as Administrative Advisor (AA) authorized the planned project meeting using the NIMSS paperless environment, 90 days prior to the planned meeting or activity?

___ Have I familiarized myself with the nature and the purpose of the regional activity? Have I reviewed the history of the research project activity including consultations with the previous administrative advisor(s) and the CSREES representative?

___ Have I encouraged the USDA/CSREES representative to attend the annual meeting? In the event that the USDA/CSREES representative can not participate, have I discussed issues which need to be brought to the attention of the committee members?

___ Are the overall project objectives congruent with regional and national research priorities and program plans? Does the proposed activity fit within the CSREES strategic plan? Do the regional committee activities support the project objectives?

___ Does the project activity demonstrate a level of

interdependence in its approach? Is there evidence that the investigators are working together on each objective, or is the work simply a collection of individual investigators conducting research without some demonstrated level of dependence? As AA have I discussed and reinforced the need for demonstrating interdependence in the preparation of annual reports and the SAES 422.

___ Has the multistate project sought to broaden its participation with other scientists working in similar areas? Is there a strong commitment to the multistate activity as evidenced by annual meeting attendance?

___ Are all scientists assigned to the research project activity contributing?

___ Have the scientists engaged in the multistate activity shown any interest or success in seeking and finding supplemental funding to enhance selective objectives of the project?

___ Are the scientists involved with the research endeavor communicating the impacts and results of their work to the general public and/or to relevant audiences?

___ As AA, am I acting as an advocate in communicating the findings of the multistate activity? Is there someone that I, as AA should be communicating with to make USDA, etc. aware of the research and its implications to regional and national needs?

___ Have I checked to see that an annual report has been completed for the past year's activities, and properly conveyed?

___ Has an agenda been developed and posted to all participants prior to the regional meeting?

___ Has the committee developed a systematic approach for assuring timely submission of reports, authorizations for meetings and project revisions? Has the issue of timely submission of the minutes and annual report from the past annual meeting been discussed with the committee?

___ When and where appropriate have I encouraged linking and meeting with similar multistate activities to expand collaboration?

___ Are there other investigators from other disciplines that if brought into this project activity would increase the multidisciplinary nature of the activity, including extension faculty?

___ In reviewing the outcomes of the proposed activity, are they achievable? Has achievability been discussed with the committee?

___ How can I assist the regional committee leadership with

the preparation of the meeting agenda? Is the agenda built around the project's objectives?

___ When new members join the regional project activity, have I spend time acquainting them with the project activity.

___ As AA have I reviewed the multistate research portfolio for potential duplication of research project activities.

___ As AA have I encouraged the project leadership to complete the annual report (SAES-422) in a timely fashion and to forward to the CSREES Partnership office in a timely fashion. This is easily handled with the NIMSS paperless process.

___ As AA have I encouraged the project leadership to set deadlines for necessary committee / project activities, especially the completion and submission of the SAES 422.

___ When and where possible, have I assisted in dissemination of the result of the multistate research activity into the hands of users.

<http://www.agnr.umd.edu/users/NERA/ChecklistAdvisorsJune2004.pdf>



Looking forward to seeing you in Mystic! Have a great July 4th!