

APPENDIX E - NRSP PROPOSAL PEER REVIEW FORM

The following statement defines the mission of the National Research Support Projects (NRSP's): "The activity of an NRSP focuses on the development of enabling technologies, support activities (such as to collect, assemble, store, and distribute materials, resources and information), or the sharing of facilities needed to accomplish high priority research, but which is not of itself primarily research."

Based on this mission statement, please rate the proposed NRSP using the following criteria.

| | Excellent | Good | Fair | Unacceptable | Not applicable |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|------|--------------|----------------|
| Mission: | | | | | |
| Consistency with the mission of an NRSP | xxxxxxx | | | | |
| Relevance: | | | | | |
| Addresses and supports a high priority national issue | xxxxx | x | | | x |
| Demonstrates clear/tangible benefit to the scientific community as a whole | xxxxxxx | x | | | |
| Clearly identified sponsoring "stakeholders" or beneficiaries | xxxxx | xx | | | |
| "Stakeholder" involvement in project development, project activities, review and/or management plans | xxxxx | xx | | | |
| Technical Merit: | | | | | |
| Overall technical merit (sound scientific approach, achievable objectives, appropriate scope of activity) | xxx | xxxx | | | |
| Potential for significant outputs (products) and outcomes and/or impacts | xxxxxxx | x | | | |
| Implementation Plan: | | | | | |
| Benchmarks for success clearly identified | x | xxx | xxx | | |
| Management structure that adequately coordinates efforts of multiple participants | xxxxxxx | | | | |
| Well-developed business plan that links multiple sources of funding and leverages limited off-the-top research funds | | xx | | | xxxxx |
| Funding plan that develops of alternative funding sources to reduce off-the-top funding in future years | | x | | | xxxxxxx |
| Efforts integrated with extension and/or academic programs | xxx | x | | | xxx |
| Outreach, communications and assessment plan that communicates the programs goals, accomplishments and outcomes/impacts | xxxxx | | | | xx |

Recommendation: Approve Approve with revision Disapprove

General Comments (Please add general and specific comments on strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, including specific revisions that would improve the proposal. Use as much space as needed for your comments.):

NOTE: All reviewers marked 'Approve' for their final recommendation. All comments are provided below. Reviewer #7 rated two aspects of the Implementation Plan dealing with 'funding' as excellent. In the reviewer instructions an option was provided to include a rating of 'Not applicable' and this is the tally recorded in the above Summary Table.

Reviewer Comments:

Reviewer 1 – The strength of this proposal is its focus on impact writing workshops. These are certainly in demand and deemed useful. However, I think more of the budget could be put towards these workshops to really help connect LGUs with stakeholders and stakeholders to research, Extension and teaching. One other strength of the proposal is the second objective which discusses how/why it is important to leverage a variety of platforms to share NIMSS data and impact statements. Challenges we continue to encounter could be better addressed are the NIMSS, the Land-grant database (and website) and multistate research impacts site too redundant?

Response – The proposed budget supports 4-6 impact reporting workshops per year (depending on travel costs). These workshops would target multistate projects. We anticipate that workshops would be delivered in person at annual meetings. Given the expanded scope of this initiative (i.e., social media, infographics and expanded products, press releases), we strongly believe that at current staffing levels we can offer 4-6 high quality workshops that are customized to the needs of each multistate committee, while continuing to produce high quality impact statements, press releases and more. More explanation has been inserted to delineate the purpose of NIMSS, Land-grant database and the Multistate Research Impacts site which describe the different users and their needs.

Reviewer 2 - NRSP1 is a unique NRSP in that it does not necessarily meet all of the NRSP criteria, however it supports a very important need of all State Agriculture Experiment Stations. In that respect it provides support for an enabling technology needed to allow State Experiment Stations to manage their research activities, provide documentation of activities and disseminate research findings to the USDA and other stakeholders. The proposal appears quite sound. Due to the nature of the activities, benchmarks for success are sometimes vague however that may be expected for this type of activity. One very minor issue I see with the proposal is the plan to have multistate units competes for in person workshops on impact writing. Not sure we need to do this. I would prefer seeing regional workshops at meeting to go over this, but not a big deal. Overall, I think that this is an excellent program and needs continuing support.

Response – The proposed budget supports 4-6 impact reporting workshops per year (depending on travel costs). These workshops would target multistate projects and we anticipate that workshops would be delivered in person at annual meetings. It has been our experience that multistate project participants only have funding to attend their project’s annual meeting, and thus would not necessarily have support for another separate meeting. In addition, we want to ensure that NRSP1 funds are spent specifically on multistate project participants (versus being offered to colleges/departments). We agree with the overall assessment and have modified the goal of providing workshops to be more inclusive across the regions.

Reviewer 3 - The proposal was well articulated and to the point. I viewed the information on NIMSS and impact reporting separately and that is reflected in the comments below. I also asked for input from the system users and am including their views in the comments. I am not requesting to see the proposal again.

NIMSS:

- A good partnership with users has been demonstrated.
- A committee that includes the RSA’s is a positive.
- Questions on the NIMSS conversion have been responded to or handled quickly and efficiently.
- The NC RSA (Chris) has been very helpful and the system is quite intuitive for users.

Impact communications:

- The training was helpful to those attended, but could be built upon in the coming years. Overall, the audience seemed somewhat confused about how they could get the level of detail needed to build a "great" impact statement.
- It could be beneficial to add workshops for research faculty and extension educators on what you are looking for in order to make a great impact statement (and how they and their institution would benefit). Something we could share on-line that could be viewed when we approached a faculty member could be very useful.
- Bringing in a part-time student to focus on social media is an excellent idea.

Response – Agreed with these comments and observations. It is the goal of every impact reporting workshop to have participants leave knowing how to develop or recognize a “great” impact statement. We solicit feedback from participants each time this workshop is given to continue to make improvements. Further, having given this workshop in person and via webinar, we can confidently say that it is really only effective in person (we do not plan to offer webinars going forward). We want to ensure that NRSP1 funds are spent specifically on multistate project participants (versus being offered to colleges/departments) and can gladly suggest other options for departments/units/colleges who want additional professional development on this subject.

Reviewer 4 - This is a very solid proposal with tremendous impact potential. A few observations to consider: I’m not sure the introduction does justice to the importance of this project. This is vital to the success of multi-state projects as a whole, and the introduction should strongly state that.

I would also offer that you might consider increasing the outreach to organizations to include the joint meeting every four years of the International

Federation of Agricultural Journalists and the US Ag Media Summit. This is a prime opportunity to expand the reach of the impact reports to the widest possible audience of interested journalists and introduces an international component to the project.

I noticed that either the guidelines or the proposal itself specifically mentioned engaging professional evaluators to help with impact reports; but, although it is a requirement that the proposal include a communication plan, it does not suggest that they include a professional communicator in their project plan, nor a communication budget. I think often there are fantastic projects in the NIMSS system that does not get publicity because they didn't plan for communication costs in the budget. I don't know if that flaw can be addressed in this project proposal, but it should be at some point. I only became familiar with multi-state projects after being asked to be a part of one 15 years into my career. If communication professionals within our APLU institutions don't know much about the projects, they probably are not giving you as much free coverage as they could. The project specialists have been very visible in communication and impact circles for the past few years and it has brought tremendous awareness of the multi-state projects and the impact reports that come from them. We can and will do more if asked.

If one of the goals of this project is to get better quality impact data submitted from the projects, I'd suggest adding the new National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals (<http://naepsdp.org>) to your training agenda since that's where many of the evaluation people are housed these days.

If your budget is correct and current, you are underpaying your communications specialists. I'd recommend a look at the national average, or even the regional average before you submit this budget.

Response - We have revised the proposal. Opportunities for professional development for the Communications Specialist may include (but would not be limited to) the annual Association for Communications Excellence meeting, the National Association of Science Writers annual meeting, the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists, and the U.S. Ag Media Summit. In FY18, the budget would support attendance at the 10th World Conference of Science Journalists in San Francisco, CA.

Reviewer 5 – While the mission of NRSP1 is unique, I believe that it is consistent with the purpose of NRSP projects. It facilitates development and management of research activities. I support and recommend approval of this proposed project, but have several specific comments: 1) kglobal is mentioned, but there is no specific explanation of what it is (page 2). For many in the “system” that is not necessary, for those outside might not be aware of it and its role; 2) reference to 35,500 individuals being reached, but no explanation if they are the “right” ones; 3) “RSA” should be spelled out; 4) production of 10-15 impact statements per year, I believe that approximately 40-50 terminate each year, Is there insufficient information on that many? (page 3); and While there may be a special case, I do not see value in producing a hard copy of ‘full color Impact Statement compilation books.’ (page 7)

Response – Proposal was revised to include explanation of what/who kglobal is. Further, proposal revised to include clarification of social media reach to trade associations, industry, elected officials, regulatory organizations, college leadership, journalists and others. RSA was spelled out on first instance of use. The Program Director and Communications Specialist work together to select approximately 10-15 projects that relate to national issues/topics of interest (i.e., Healthy Foods, People; Water and other ESCOP/ECOP initiatives), match well with the kglobal media calendar, will be receiving awards, and round out the portfolio of impact statements. Our goal is to select projects that best represent the Multistate Research Fund program and are best suited to highlight the great work LGU scientists, faculty and extension specialists are doing, system-wide. We consider not only the quality of material provided by committees in annual reports, but the potential for traditional and social media engagement around that particular topic/story. Given the time needed to produce each impact statement, and its supporting materials (press

releases, etc.), 10-15 impact statements per year has been a reasonable target for production of high quality products and companion media materials. We added additional narrative to reflect the role of kglobal and how it interfaces with and is connected to these multimedia and multiple platforms. The firm commitment to publish a hard copy has been scaled back to convey only in special circumstances would print copies be available.

Reviewer 6 - Justification: The justification for the impact communications piece would be strengthened by additional explanation about what these impact statements try to convey that is not already available or poorly captured in the other existing reports like NIMSS and the national impact database. Objective 2: You may reach a more relevant audience by spending more travel funds doing impact writing workshops where multistate project participants are going to be located rather than at venues like NERAOC where mostly administrators attend. How will the social media component of the impact communications add value to what the Ag is America site already does?

Response - NIMSS only serves as an archive of the TEXT ONLY version of an impact statement; the system is designed as an internal interface for multistate project participants and the AES/CES offices that support them—it is not designed for broad accessibility by the general public or media. Further, the annual reports submitted to NIMSS are often dense and lengthy and complex; our impact statements are essential for paring that information down and presenting it in a highly accessible format. Impact statements are rapidly evolving into infographics, videos, postcard leave-behinds, and other products that are designed to increase our exposure with multiple audiences. Similarly, the Impact Database is a convenient archive for final PDFs of impact statements. Impacts submitted in an annual multistate project report are not always uploaded to the National Impact Database or shared in other formats. Our strategic, dynamic effort has the ability to respond to requests for information and proactively get out in front of trending topics, while both NIMSS and the National Impact Database have no outreach component and rely entirely on interested parties conducting searches for information/impacts. The proposal has been revised regarding workshops. The Communications Specialist will no longer deliver the workshop at NERAOC. Instead, the Program Director will give any NERAOC presentations because she (Sarah Lupis) regularly attends that meeting. Instead, the Communications Specialist will focus on delivering this workshop to multistate project committees. Ag is America's purpose is to promote Extension and research activities of the entire LGU system. Our social media efforts are specific to multistate projects and thus are more focused on this particular impact of LGU scientists, specialists, and educators.

Reviewer 7 - Overall, this is a very strong proposal that I recommend for approval. However, there are a few things I think could be added to the proposal to make it even stronger (if these things are not added, I still recommend for approval and do not hinge my approval on the following suggestions):

1. I rated "stakeholder involvement in project development" as only "good" because I didn't see a very clear statement about exactly how stakeholders would be involved. For example, the end user experience in NIMSS is very important to collect information on (collect "needs statements" from users, identify trends in user issues, etc.) in order to inform the continual development of the UI and improve efficiency of the system. I know both Chris and Sarah do an excellent job reaching out to and working with users, but that is not actually described in the proposal (other than the short statement of "...answer queries from users"). It would be helpful to see a 2-3 sentence description on the tactics they will use to collect information about the system and how they will disseminate information about changes (even it's as simple as "The lead RSAs will provide quarterly updates during NRSP1 meetings on NIMSS development and will collect feedback through the AAs and from NIFA on user comments/experiences as available. The lead RSAs may also send out short surveys to the user community and/or conduct ad-hoc interviews during conferences such as NERAOC in order to gain improved understanding of user needs."

2. I rated the “benchmarks for success” as only “fair” due to the fact that I saw no clear indicators or measures for demonstrating what “success” in NIMSS and Impact writing looks like. Not every single aspect of the two objectives needs to be measured, but it would be helpful to have a couple basic indicators. For example, the proposal already includes a statement that “the collective social media reach of any given impact statement is 35,500 individuals. “ It would be very easy to insert a statement into the proposal such as: “*One indicator of success for Objective 2 will be that the collective social media reach of a single impact statement is maintained or increased each year of the project (baseline is 35,000).*” This would also be a good measure given the fact that you propose to hire a part-time student to manage the presence on Twitter and other social media. If there is more effort being put into social media advertising, then you should see an increase in collective reach.

One other administrative note: For the two points under “implementation plan” having to do with funding (reducing off-the-top funding and looking for other sources), I chose “excellent” only in order to indicate that I saw nothing wrong there, but really, they should be “not applicable” as the nature of NRSP projects is that they use off-the-top funding.

Editorial note: In the first paragraph, please change NIFA’s title to National Institute **OF** Food and Agriculture (instead of “for”).

Response – Narrative has been added to reflect additional activities by the RSAs, NRSP1 Management Committee and users, to solicit over time and in various venues, feedback to enhance NRSP1. From page 5 in the proposal: “We will establish benchmarks to measure the success of social media efforts during the first year with the student employee. While we are currently proposing social media engagement via the Twitter platform, we acknowledge that social media is an evolving outlet. Expansion or shifting to emerging platforms will be evaluated regularly.” NIFA language has been updated.