

Mid Term Review(Submitted)

Status: Complete

Project ID/Title: NRSP4: Facilitating Registration of Pest Management Technology for Specialty Crops and Specialty Uses

Mission and Relevance

1. Mission:

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. Ideally, an NRSP would facilitate a broad array of research activities. The primary purpose of NRSPs shall not be solely to conduct research, as there are other available mechanisms for creating these types of projects including the multistate research projects and the National Research Project (NRP) options. Examples of NRSP activities might include collection of data that are widely used by other research groups and efforts; development of databases; or development of critical technologies."

Are the activities of this NRSP consistent with the mission of the NRSP program?

Yes ▼

2. (20 points) Relevance to National Issue:

All NRSPs must involve a national issue, relevant to and of use by most, if not all regions. These projects draw on the best minds and resources within and outside the State Agricultural Experiment Station (SAES) system to address the issues.

Does this NRSP address a national issue?

Yes ▼

Comments

NSRP4 serves a vital need for specialty, field and ornamental crop minor use crop protection product registration. Specialty crops are important to every region of the country, and all benefit from work of NRSP-4, which is for practical purposes synonymous with the IR-4 Project. The NRSP-4 project also has specific regional representation in laboratories around the country, a unique feature among NRSP projects.

Application of environmentally-sound crop protection methods for specialty commodities is indeed a national issue. IR-4 directly addresses the need for pesticide use on specialty crops when development of such methods is not economically warranted by registrants. The level of impact varies by region, but all regions are engaged and benefit to some extent. There is special emphasis on biopesticide registration support, international harmonization activities involving MRLs, pollinator protection, public health, and invasive species management products.

It should also be noted that IR-4 brings in most of its funding from industry and other government sources, greatly leveraging the NRSP funding and maintaining a strong partnership between the SAES system and major industry partners.

Total Points

20 ▼

3. (20 points) Relevance to Stakeholders:

Is there evidence of stakeholder use of project outputs?

Yes

Are there project outcomes that aid in development of or contribute to the discussion of public policy?

Yes

If so, please describe

partnerships with stakeholders across the country. The results of the program directly impact stakeholders as new uses are approved and implemented. The recently released economic impact study again documented the impacts of the program.

IR-4 leadership and the CLC engage in a range of activities that touch on public policy as it relates to pesticide regulation and use, but it is an area that could be expanded. The program staff already carry a heavy workload, but it is a topic worthy of discussion by program leadership to build on its previous work on economic impact. This might be an area of interest for public policy experts to delve into using the IR-4 history and connections.

As an example of recent activity, the ornamental and pollinator protection workshops generated important discussion among stakeholders and those involved in public policy. Deliberate stakeholder engagement and participation in IR-4 management meetings and "hill" visits conveys needs, with opportunity to impact public policy. The potential for policy impact and discussion is facilitated through integration of IR-4 information into the "information supply chain".

Total Points

18

Implementation of the NRSP

1. (15 points) Management and Business Plan:

Each NRSP must have a well-developed business plan that describes how the project will be managed and funded for a five-year period. This plan includes a management structure to adequately integrate the efforts of multiple participants. The plan should include provisions for linking multiple sources of funding and leveraging those sources with the limited off-the-top research funds. The plan should demonstrate that alternative funding sources have been sought. This plan should include efforts to bring in new agencies, organizations, industry, foundations, etc. to help address the issues and provide funding for the project. All project proposals must provide evidence of contributions from experiment stations across the nation beyond what is available through off-the-top funds.

The midterm review must reflect progress toward meeting funding expectations. Failure to meet funding goals may result in alterations to the off the top budget contribution provided by the SAES system.

Comments

The IR-4 Project currently relies to a relatively small extent on funding from NRSP-4, but NRSP-4 remains an important coordinating vehicle for the project. It is the largest of the NRSP projects from the standpoint of resource leveraging. Major additional funding comes directly from USDA-NIFA and USDA-ARS, and project funding comes from competitive grants and contracts. The project therefore requires a more thoroughly developed business plan than other NRSP projects. The administrative leadership has been examining the business plan on an ongoing basis, but especially now it is important to review and examine the business model with an eye toward maximum flexibility and continued partnership development.

Diminishing resources have led to infrastructure reorganization, and in some cases removal and redistribution of activities across each region. This was done because of careful planning and work by the Path Forward Working Group. We would have liked to see some discussion on this effort and planned activities and prospects of support moving into the next review/renewal period.

While the business plan is reasonable, the program would greatly benefit from an independent audit of both its management and

business practices. There are concerns that in an era of limited funding the resources provided to the program could be managed and used more efficiently, potentially via a new business model. For instance, concerns regarding the level of staffing and its efficient use have been raised in recent years. Such an audit could address management issues and enhance the level of confidence in the program. In an era of limited funding, availing itself of the use of electronic systems to enhance communications and reduce travel costs is one area the program could improve upon. Future administration by land-grant institutions is another area for concern, and one that has not yet been adequately addressed. Facilities and administration (F&A) costs will continue to increase, while AES resources will continue to decline. Thus, it is imperative that the program address the need to offset its F&A costs or it will be asked to relocate, as recently occurred at Cornell University.

Total Points

10

2. (15 points) Progress Toward Objectives and Projected Outcomes:

a. Objectives, milestones and deliverables should be described in sufficient detail such that progress can be measured.

b. The midterm review of the project must demonstrate productivity, progress toward original objectives and the relationship between projected goals, actual accomplishments and any impacts to date. As appropriate, this assessment must include an evaluation of stakeholders' use of project outputs to date.

Comments

This is the traditional strength of the program. The system is well established and the projects move efficiently through the system. There are occasional bumps, but leadership has been willing to critically self-evaluate and address problems as they arise. Objective description is clear and progress toward those objectives is documented in the IR-4 midterm summary. Stakeholders' use of results is well documented.

Total Points

14

3. (15 points) Integration:

a. Project proposals should indicate how efforts are integrated with extension or academic programs and how results might be of use by other potential stakeholders.

b. In the midterm review, the project must address actual collaborations and any new partnerships built during the project period. The report should address the degree to which the full team is engaged in project planning and implementation. Discuss plans to correct any weaknesses that may have been identified

Comments

The report indicates the expansion of international partnerships that facilitate data sharing and knowledge, and international trade. NRSP-4 is generally well integrated with extension, and many individual projects supported through IR-4 are with extension agents and specialists. By nature of its mission, IR-4 is less well integrated into academic programs. Partnerships within several USDA agencies and EPA are reported. This is an important aspect of IR-4 that should continue.

At the local level, the IR-4 program at UCD has been integrated with extension programs over the years but generally not academic programs. It has been hosted by the Department of Environmental Toxicology for space and administrative purposes and while generally not contributing to the department's academic mission (research and teaching), it has been a significant contributor to its outreach mission.

At MSU the program is well-connected with the faculty and other professionals involved in the fundamental mission of the program. These relationships help maintain strong connections to key stakeholder/industry groups. The vitality of the program is maintained through these individual relationships. However, the relationship with field-based Extension is not particularly strong. As key faculty retire we need to look at strengthening the ties with Extension for program execution and delivery.

Total Points

12

4. (15 points) Outreach, Communications and Assessment:

All project proposals must have a sound outreach, communications and an assessment plan that seek to communicate the program's goals, accomplishments and outcomes/impacts. The communication plan must detail how results will be transferred to researchers and other end users and contain the following elements:

a. Clear identification of the intended audience(s) of the NRSP. Since this is a Research Support Project, in most instances the primary beneficiary of the results will be other scientists. However, careful consideration should be given to other possible users of the information (such as consumers, producers, governmental agencies (local, state and federal), general public, etc.)

Yes

b. Clear description of the engagement of stakeholders in the definition and/or conduct of the research support project.

Yes

c. Thorough description of the methodology to measure the accomplishments and impacts of the National Research Support Project and effectiveness of the communication plan. Methods such as surveys, town meetings, conferences, analyses of reference data (e.g. citation index, etc.), and use of professional evaluators should be considered.

Yes

d. Specific description for development of communication pieces describing the activities, accomplishments, and impacts of the NRSP. The communication pieces will be used with SAES/ARD directors, stakeholders and their organizations, funding sources and agencies, and congressional delegations.

Yes

e. Suggested mechanisms for distribution of the results of the research support project. Examples include sharing the results at annual meetings of stakeholders, providing material to the Budget and Advocacy Committee of the APLU Board on Agriculture Assembly and other appropriate committees within the SAES/ARD organization, and assisting NIFA in preparation of appropriate documents highlighting the impacts of the project.

The midterm review must demonstrate the extent to which the NRSP is working to effectively communicate project results to those who need them and their use by target audiences

Yes

Comments

The IR-4 Project has a well-developed communications arm through its website and other vehicles including technical reports, newsletters, and social media. They engage with scientists at state experiment stations and elsewhere, and with stakeholders at all levels, including USDA partners, industry, and legislators. There is always room for improvement in areas of communication; it is especially difficult for a project such as this one to gain public recognition.

The communications operations have been strong, but are probably ready for an update. As we face the challenges of the coming decades we need to look at modernizing communication methods and exploring the uses of social and other new media. Communications materials sufficiently convey important content and activities, but care should be taken not to over saturate stakeholders and policy makers, so communications must be measured, focused and deliberate. The national IR-4 website link referred to in the report appears to be broken. Are there opportunities to link the IR-4 website to major partners?

Total Points

13