

Multistate Research Committee (MRC) Procedures

The Southern Regional Multistate Research Committee (MRC) is the quality assurance mechanism for the multistate research portfolio administered through the SAAESD. The multistate research portfolio consists of Multistate Research Fund (MRF) supported projects (S), Southern Development Committee projects (SDC), Southern Coordinating Committee projects (SCC), and Southern Extension and Research Activity projects (SERA). The MRC may be called upon to provide input for Interregional Projects (NRSP) and shall seek input from Southern Advisory Committees (SAC).

The MRC is charged to thoroughly review proposals for new multistate projects and extensions of current projects. A major objective of the MRC is to conduct effective and meaningful reviews that include evaluating the quality of science, appropriateness, regional significance of proposals, and the adequacy of the procedures and participation. The MRC is also charged to assure that the format and procedural aspects of the project proposals are done in accordance with procedures defined in the National Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities.

Composition of the MRC and length of term - The MRC shall be composed of five members who serve four-year overlapping terms to be initiated and terminated at the SAAESD Fall Meeting. Committee members are selected from the SAAESD membership (COOs or non-COOs) and approved by the Executive Committee. Members may serve successive terms. Two members of the MRC shall serve on the SERA Review Committee and will update the MRC on SERA projects. The Executive Director serves as an ex officio nonvoting member of the MRC.

Committee Leadership – Leadership for the MRC is provided by its Chair. The MRC Chair shall be appointed from the MRC membership by the SAAESD Chair at the SAAESD Fall Meeting and can serve two-year successive terms.

Meetings - The MRC shall conduct its business at four formal meetings each year to be scheduled in the winter, spring, and fall. Additional meetings can be called as needed. Meetings can be conducted virtually in a format that allows a robust discussion of the business at hand. One in-person meeting each year should be held in conjunction with the SAAESD spring meeting.

Examples of specific tasks that are linked to the meeting dates are below.

Winter meeting (January/February)

- Evaluate “Requests to Write Proposals” for Multistate Projects not evaluated at Fall Meeting
- Review SAC reports from NIMSS
- Conduct mid-term reviews for projects that are ready

Spring meeting (March/April)- In-person meeting at SAAESD Spring Meeting

- Review Excellence in Multistate Research nominations
- Review expiring project notifications for the upcoming year
- Review edits/revisions to proposals and make final decisions for proposals that are ready
- Report to directors
- Conduct mid-term reviews for projects that are ready

Summer Meeting (July)

- Review proposals (*primary meeting for proposal reviews*)
- Provide a SERA Review Committee update
- Conduct mid-term reviews for projects that are ready

Fall meeting (October)

- Evaluate “Request to Write Proposals” and project renewal intents for any proposals (*primary meeting for requests to write*)
- Conduct mid-term reviews for projects that are ready
- Review expiring project notifications for the upcoming year
- Review SAC reports from NIMSS

Minutes and Reports – Written minutes from the MRC meeting shall be posted on the SAAESD website. Reports to the SAAESD will be made at the SAAESD Spring and Fall meetings. Additional reports may be made by the MRC chair to the Executive Committee as necessary.

Summary Procedures for Multistate Projects	
Action	Responsibility
Informal request to write a new or renew existing project proposal to ED Office	Faculty group, current members, or SAAESD leadership (Top-Down Projects)
Assign an Administrative Advisor (AA)	ED Office
Request to Write a Proposal: brief statement on the issues and justification entered into NIMSS	Writing Committee Chair or AA
Approve “Request to Write a Proposal”	MRC
Prepare proposal and complete appropriate Appendix form in NIMSS	Writing Committee Chair or AA
Notify ED Office of potential peer reviewers	AA
Assign peer reviewers and conduct reviews	ED Office
Response to peer reviews sent to ED Office	Writing Committee Chair or AA
Upload final proposal into NIMSS	Writing Committee Chair or AA
Invite participation in the activity through NIMSS	ED Office
Enter participant information into Appendix E	Station Directors
Notify MRC of proposal to review via NIMSS	ED Office
MRC review and submit decision to NIMSS	MRC Chair and MRC
Notify AA of MRC recommendation	ED Office
Respond to MRC review	Writing Committee and AA
Approve final proposal	MRC
Notify AA of SAAESD approval	ED Office

Synopsis of Multistate Activities¹

Multistate Research Project (S-xxx)

Projects that involve integrated, potentially interdisciplinary, and multistate activities; have expected outcomes, including original research results; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed. APPENDIX A - Format for Multistate Research Project Proposals.

Southern Development Committee (SDC-xxx)

Committees of duration less than two years for the purpose of developing a Multistate Activity; have the expected outcome of a full proposal for a particular Multistate Activity; and are peer reviewed. APPENDIX A - Format for Multistate Research Project Proposals

Southern Coordinating Committees (SCC-xxx)

Activities that provide a mechanism for addressing critical regional issues where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate within a function (i.e. research, education or extension); have expected outcomes; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed. APPENDIX B - Format for Coordinating Committees and Education/ Extension and Research Activity Proposals.

Southern Education/Extension and Research Activity (SERA-xxx)

Activities that serve to integrate education (academic and/or extension) and research on a particular topic where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate; have expected outcomes; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed. APPENDIX B - Format for Coordinating Committees and Education/ Extension and Research Activity Proposals.

Southern Advisory Committee (SAC-xx)

Committees of department chairs/heads from a particular discipline that exchange information and serve a multistate administrative function through review of multistate activities, but are not peer reviewed.

Southern 500 Series (S-5xx)

Committees formed, for a maximum of two years, to provide a mechanism for response to acute crises, emergencies, and opportunities using the multistate research approach. Activities may range from formally organized research on targeted objectives to very informal research coordination or information exchange activity, depending on the circumstances; have expected outcomes; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed.

National Research Support Project (NRSP-xx)

Activities that focus 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; funded through off-the-top MRF Hatch appropriations; and are peer reviewed.

¹Described in National Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities

Optimal Timeline for New and Renewed Multistate Project Proposals
(All projects initiate on October 1 and terminate on September 30)

Calendar year prior to project initiation

- **September 30:** Writing Committee submits a “request to write a proposal” in NIMSS by uploading the Issues and Justifications section. An Administrative Advisor (AA) will be assigned after submitting a proposal request. Effective 2021, all S-projects will retain the same number designation upon renewal, unless otherwise requested.
- **October:** MRC meets to review “Request to Write.”
- **October 30:** Begin to upload the remaining proposal sections in NIMSS.

Calendar Year of project initiation

- **March 15:** Final Project Proposal due in NIMSS along with a list of five suggested peer reviewers. SAAESD invites participants to the project via NIMSS.
- **March 30:** SAAESD office sends the proposal for peer review.
- **May 15:** Proposals are back from peer review. The SAAESD office sends the peer reviews to the AA to be relayed to the writing committee.
- **June 15:** Writing committee responds to the peer review and edits the proposal as appropriate. A document is e-mailed to the SAAESD office that gives a point-by-point response to each of the comments made by the peer reviewers and the changes made to the project in response to these comments. This document will be shared with the MRC to aid in the review process. The revised proposal is uploaded into NIMSS.
- **July:** MRC meets to review projects up for review. Projects that are unable to be reviewed by the MRC at this meeting may not be able to be renewed for the October 1 start date.
- **August:** The Writing Committee responds to MRC review and edits the proposal as appropriate
- **September:** SAAESD reviews all revisions and makes any remaining project decisions
- **September 30:** Old projects expire.
- **October 1:** New projects begin.

Multistate Research Fund (MRF) Supported Project (S-project)

“Multistate Research Project”

The mission of the Multistate Research Program is to enable research on high-priority topics among the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES). Multistate research projects involve a team of investigators associated with several SAES working together to solve complex scientific problems of regional or national interest for which no one state could address singularly.

The Multistate Research Program allows non-SAES partners to join in these project-based collaborations. Thus, many multistate projects include members from the Cooperative Extension System (CES), Agricultural Research Service (ARS) or Forest Service research scientists. In addition, projects can have private sector and foreign participants. Moreover, the majority of multistate projects have participants from more than a single region, with many having representation from all regions, such that they are national in scope.

The MRC has responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the Multistate Research Projects portfolio, including suggesting new projects of relevance to the Southern Region. Individual Multistate Research Project proposals are evaluated using Appendix H of the National Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities.

Southern Development Committee (SDC)

Southern Development Committees (SDC) are approved for the sole purpose of developing a full proposal to establish a new or replacement Multistate Research Project (S). A new or replacement multistate project is not required to begin as an SDC. Starting as an SDC gives the project organizers two years to fully conceptualize the project, recruit participants, access to travel funds to meet, and develop the full proposal. Travel expenses for authorized SDC meetings can be paid from an individual station's multistate research funds.

The SDC proposal is uploaded to NIMSS, peer reviewed, and revised accordingly. The revised proposal, along with the reviewers comments and the written response from the SDC, is submitted to the MRC for review and evaluation. Concerns raised by the MRC are relayed to the SDC via the Administrative Advisor. Once the SDC has satisfactorily addressed concerns, the MRC Chair will send the completed proposal to Executive Director with recommendation of approval. Approved SDCs are required to meet annually. Additional meetings can be authorized by the administrative advisor. Meetings must be authorized in NIMSS and minutes uploaded in NIMSS within 60 days after the meeting.

Southern Coordinating Committees (SCC)

Southern Coordinating Committee (SCCs) provide a mechanism for groups of scientists to meet periodically to discuss and coordinate research involving related but not interdependent activities in individual states or cooperating agencies. There is also a mandate from the SAAESD for each Administrative Advisor and SCC to critically review the need for continuation of the activity.

SCCs provide a means of exchanging information and ideas on areas of common research interest in the region, identifying and avoiding areas of unnecessary duplication. They facilitate communication outside the region and with non-research agencies to identify opportunities for joint proposals for extramural funding or to identify areas for new collaborative research. Approved SCCs are required to meet annually. Additional meetings can be authorized by the administrative advisor. Meetings must be authorized in NIMSS and minutes uploaded in NIMSS within 60 days after the meeting.

Southern Extension and Research Activity (SERA)

Southern Extension and Research Activity¹ (SERA) projects bring together researchers and Extension specialists sharing a common problem, issue, or disciplinary interest. The general objective is to provide a functionally integrated forum to coordinate joint activities to address stakeholder needs. SERA committees focus on a particular topic where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate.

SERA membership is made up of two AAs (research and Extension), NIFA representative, scientists, and Extension personnel. Industry representatives are often engaged as SERA members. SERAs provide an opportunity for scientists, specialists, and others to work cooperatively to solve problems that concern more than one state, share research data, and coordinate research and other types of activities.

SERA project proposals are reviewed and approved by the SERA Review Committee. The SERA Review Committee is composed of two research directors, who also serve on the MRC, two Extension directors, and the respective Executive Directors for SAAESD and ASRED.

- Proposals for a new or renewed SERA can be made by a group of research and Extension faculty or by an Experiment Station and/or Extension Director. A new SERA proposed by a faculty group must be co-sponsored by an Experiment Station and/or Extension Director. Proposals for renewing an existing SERA can be co-sponsored by their Administrative Advisors (AA).
- SERA proposals are submitted via the National Information Management Support System (NIMSS, go to <http://www.lgu.umd.edu/login.cfm>) using Appendix B to the SAAESD Executive Director, who notifies the Executive Director of the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED).
- Proposals are reviewed by two or more peer reviewers who are identified in consultation with the AA or relevant Advisory Committee and by the SERA Review Committee, who makes a recommendation to the SAAESD and ASRED Executive Directors.
- The SERA proposal and Review Committee recommendation is considered by the SAAESD and ASRED directors separately at their Fall meetings. If approval by one of the associations (ASRED or SAAESD) is not granted, the activity may be considered for another type of activity.
- The duration of a SERA can be up to five years. An administrative advisor (AA) and NIFA representative are assigned to the SERA.
- Meetings are held annually, with provisions for interim meetings upon authorization by the administrative advisor. Meetings must be authorized in NIMSS and minutes uploaded in NIMSS within 60 days after the meeting.

¹SERA committees typically involve Extension and research activities; however, academic education and research activities can also be the focus of a SERA committee.

Optimal Timeline for all new and revised SERA Projects
(All projects begin October 1 and terminate on September 30)

Calendar year prior to the termination year

- **September 30:** Writing Committee submits a “request to write a proposal” in NIMSS by uploading the Issues and Justifications section. An Administrative Advisor (AA) will be assigned after submitting a proposal request. Effective 2021, all S-projects will retain the same number designation upon renewal, unless otherwise requested.
- **October:** Sera Review Committee meets to review “Request to Write” as needed.
- **October 30:** Begin to upload the remainder of the proposal sections in NIMSS.

Termination Year

- **January:** SERA Review Committee Meets to Review “Requests to Write” as needed.
- **March 15:** Final Project Proposal due in NIMSS along with a list of five suggested peer reviewers. SAAESD invites participants to the project via NIMSS.
- **March 30:** SAAESD will send the proposal for peer review.
- **May 15:** Proposals are back from Peer Review. The SAAESD office sends the peer reviews to the AA to be relayed to the writing committee.
- **June 15:** Writing committee responds to the peer review and edits the proposal as appropriate. A document is e-mailed to the SAAESD office that gives a point-by-point response to each of the comments made by the peer reviewers and the changes made to the project in response to these comments. This document will be shared with the SERA Review Committee to aid in the review process. The revised proposal is uploaded into NIMSS.
- **July:** SERA Review Committee meets to review projects up for review. Projects that are unable to be reviewed at this meeting may not be able to be renewed for the October 1 start date.
- **August:** The Writing Committee responds to SERA Review Committee report and edits the proposal as appropriate.
- **September:** SAAESD reviews all revisions and makes any remaining project decisions.
- **September 30:** Old projects expire.
- **October 1:** New projects begin.

Southern Advisory Committees (SAC)

Southern Advisory Committees (SACs) are dedicated to single discipline or subject matter areas. Membership consists of Department Heads/Chairs or similar administrators who are appointed by their respective Directors, usually one member per southern SAES. SACs may be established as standing committees by the SAAESD or by petition through an administrator interested in a specific topic. SACs may be abolished by action of the SAAESD. SACs have several important functions related to planning, implementation and review of research activities in the Southern Region. These include:

- **Identify new research needs and opportunities** – SACs provide the SAAESD a perspective of emerging issues and opportunities that have implications for future research in the region. They are asked to develop specific proposals for new activities, which may be submitted by the Administrative Advisor (AA) for consideration and recommendation to the SAAESD.
- **Evaluate the total Southern Multistate Research Portfolio** – SACs are asked to maintain an ongoing evaluation of the portfolio of the SAAESD activities and to review and evaluate summaries of the total research project portfolio as drawn from the NIMSS database.
- **Review requests for new and continuing activities** – SACs are asked to review and make recommendations for disposition of proposals for new and continuing activities of the SAAESD. This review should include an analysis of the disciplinary mix needed in the activity. SAC recommendations are considered by the Executive Committee and are presented for consideration and action by the SAAESD.
- **Peer Review Multistate Project Proposals** – SAC members may be contacted to assist in the peer review process for multistate project proposals. Members may conduct reviews or recommend faculty subject matter experts to serve as reviewers.
- **Perform Mid-Term Reviews of Multistate Research Projects** – Each Multistate Research Project in the Southern Region portfolio is assigned one or more SACs to monitor the progress of the activity. The designated MRF project should be reviewed at least in its third year, but could be reviewed more often if desired.
- **Interact individually with local director** – Committee members, acting as individual administrators, interact with their Director regarding the discussions and recommendations of the Committee to which they are appointed.
- **Chairs meet annually with SAAESD** – The SAC Chairs and their Administrative Advisors are invited to participate in the annual spring meeting of the SAAESD.

Appointment of Administrative Advisor – An Administrative Advisor is appointed for each SAC by the Chair of the SAAESD. He/she is one of the Southern Agricultural Experiment Station Directors and provides the linkage between the SAC and the SAAESD.

Committee Leadership – Leadership for the SAC is provided by its Chair. SACs elect a Chair and Secretary from their membership to serve for two years. For continuity, it is suggested that the Secretary become the Chair. Officers may be re-elected.

Meetings – SACs usually meet once per year, often in conjunction with other meetings attended by most of the group. The Administrative Advisor approves dates and location of meetings of the SACs and notifies all Southern Directors via the National Information Management Support System (NIMSS) at least 6-8 weeks prior to a meeting.

Reports/Minutes – Annual reports and/or minutes from the SAC to the SAAESD are made through the Administrative Advisor, who posts them in the NIMSS database, which then distributes a notice to Southern Directors and to the Executive Director's office. Additional reports may be made at any time the SAC finds a need to communicate with the SAAESD.