

Northeastern Supplement to the Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities¹

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction**
- II. History of Multistate Research**
- III. Definitions and Descriptions**
- IV. Multistate Activities Committee**
- V. Administrative Advisors**
- VI. Development of New Projects**
 - A. Multistate Research Projects
 - B. Rapid Response Multistate Research Projects
 - C. Multistate Coordinating Committee/Education/Extension and Research Activity
- VII. Development of Revised Projects**
- VIII. Adding New Participants to Multistate Research Activities**
- IX. Committee Meetings**
 - A. Meeting Authorization
 - B. Frequency of Meetings
 - C. Location of Meetings
 - D. Decision Making
 - E. Minutes
- X. Reporting and Review Requirements**
 - A. Annual Report
 - B. Mid-term Review and Evaluation
 - C. Termination Report

I. Introduction

The four regional associations of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (Northeast, North Central, South, and West), in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture, have developed *Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities* (hereafter referred to as [National Guidelines](#)) for organizational and operational procedures that are common to all regions. The National Guidelines, however, recognize that there are regional differences in procedures and policies relative to the conduct of multistate activities, and are sufficiently important as to require the regional associations to develop supplements to the National Guidelines. The Northeast Regional Supplement to the Guidelines for Multistate Research (hereafter called the Northeast Supplement) apply to the multistate research activities that are, or will be, sponsored by the Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (NERA). These supplementary guidelines reflect the operational procedures for the Northeastern region.

II. History of Multistate Research

In 1948 President Harry S. Truman signed into law a provision to set-aside 25 percent of the

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Hatch Act formula funding for research that is provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) annually to State Agricultural Experiment Stations (hereafter referred to as SAES or Stations) for multistate research. An understanding of the history and evolution of multistate research is important to the tasks of being a contributor to a multistate research activity.

The establishment of the Multistate Research Fund created a novel mechanism for the SAESs to work across state lines in ways that were previously more difficult. To coordinate the activities the four regions formed associations of SAES directors to manage the portfolio, and to serve as the responsible body for the activities. Over time the associations have evolved to support an Office of the Executive Director (OED), which provides both staff support for Multistate Research activities and programmatic leadership for some aspects of the program. The region's Association of SAES Directors provides multistate research activity administration.

The Multistate Research Fund requires matching non-Federal funds, and is to be used to support research conducted, most simply, by two or more states. However in practice, membership on a multistate research project's technical committee is open to participation by scientists beyond institutional, organizational, regional and functional boundaries.

The Multistate Research authority was created to stimulate and facilitate interstate cooperation on research of regional and national significance. The Multistate Research program is a flexible process that allows institutions to address high priority problems, plan research activities, and coordinate scientific investigations at a level not attainable by one institution operating alone. Multistate research is a unique model that allows scientists to work freely across political boundaries, to create collaborations with institutions both public and private, and even to work with international partners when advantageous, and in ways that are not otherwise easily organized.

III. Definitions and Descriptions

Administrative Advisor (AA) – The Administrative Advisor is the key person in the development and management of a multistate research or an integrated research and extension activity. All Northeastern Administrative Advisors are selected by the Multistate Activities Committee (MAC), approved by NERA and appointed by the NERA chair.

Education/Extension and Research Activity (NEERA) – These activities serve to integrate two or more functions (i.e., education, extension and research) on a particular topic where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate; have expected outcomes; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed.

Multistate Activities Committee (MAC) – The Multistate Activities Committee is responsible for recommending to the NERA membership the proper disposition of Multistate Research Project proposals and Multistate Coordinating Committees in accordance with national and regional priorities.

Multistate Research Coordinating Committee (NECC) – Multistate Research Coordinating Committees provide a mechanism for addressing critical regional issues where multistate

coordination or information exchange is appropriate; have expected outcomes; convey knowledge; and are peer reviewed. They result in increased communication between faculty, avoidance of unnecessary duplication and gained efficiencies in the use of resources and shared ideas.

Multistate Research Project (NE) – Multistate Research Projects involve cooperative, jointly planned research employing multidisciplinary approaches in which SAES, working with the ARS, or other colleges or universities, cooperate to solve problems that concern more than one state and, usually, more than one region. There is a high level of interdependence among the cooperators.

National Information Management Support System (NIMSS) – The [National Information Management Support System](#) is an electronic project management tool that allows the Directors to perform all functions relative to the development, submission, review, and approval of multistate projects.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) – NIFA is a federal agency within the United States Department of Agriculture. The agency administers federal funding to address the agricultural issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future. It is responsible for the Federal oversight, accounting, and day-to-day record keeping for the Multistate Research Fund.

Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (NERA) – NERA was established in conformity with the constitution of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU). It represents the administrators of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) in the northeastern region (Connecticut [two stations], Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York [two stations], Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia) in collective dealings.

Office of the Executive Director (OED) – The Office of the Executive Director of NERA coordinates all aspects of the Northeastern multistate research programs. The OED is an information resource for Administrative Advisors, committee chairs, and committee members and should be contacted for assistance in developing and implementing multistate research activities.

Rapid Response Multistate Research Project – A Rapid Response Multistate Research (or series 500) Project is a special category of multistate research projects. It is a fast-track approach to form an emergency project to address an urgent problem requiring prompt action. This type of project has two years duration from the date of initiation, and may convert to a 5-year multistate research project or other multistate research activity, through normal procedures.

Technical Committee – The research scientists, and as applicable, extension specialists, and extension agents, participating in a multistate research project, plus the administrative advisor and the NIFA representative make up the project's technical committee.

IV. Multistate Activities Committee

The NERA MAC is responsible for recommending to the membership the proper disposition of

multistate research project, multistate research coordinating committee or education/extension and research activity proposals in accordance with national and regional priorities. This is done through the commissioning of external reviews, the evaluation of projects and committees, the monitoring of research progress and, as appropriate, establishing multistate priorities via broad-based issues identification and strategic planning.

MAC shall consist of six members: four of whom will be Northeast SAES directors and two are Northeast Cooperative Extension directors; all members will be appointed by the NERA Chair for a three-year term. Terms are renewable. The NERA Executive Director is an ex-officio, non-voting member of the MAC. The chair of the MAC shall be appointed by the NERA chair and serve a term of up to three years (coincident with the individual's appointment to the MAC.) The MAC meets in person or electronically prior to each NERA meeting.

V. Administrative Advisors

The Administrative Advisor is the key person in the development and management of multistate research activities. He/she encourages team effort, advises on administrative and operational procedures, and acts as liaison among the technical committee, the SAES directors, other cooperating agencies and institutions, the OED, the MAC, and NIFA.

All Administrative Advisors for Northeast multistate research activities are appointed by the NERA chair upon recommendation by the MAC and approval by NERA. The MAC and NERA will endeavor to match the expertise and interests of the Administrative Advisor with the focus of the multistate project. For multistate research committees and multistate research coordinating committees, Administrative Advisors can be SAES directors (including assistant and associate directors) of the member institutions or individuals such as senior faculty, department chairs or other administrators who are endorsed by their institutional SAES director (these individuals are hereafter called the SAES designee.) In the case of education/extension and research activities, co-advisors are appointed – one SAES director (or SAES designee) and/or one Academic Program director and/or Cooperative Extension director.

VI. Development of New Projects

A. Multistate Research Projects

1. An SAES director or SAES designee submits a “[request to write](#)” a multistate research project, coordinating committee or education/extension and research activity by submitting a new project proposal through NIMSS. The OED will coordinate the review of the request to write with the MAC. At least two stations in the Northeast are required to be sponsors of the request. The request to write using the NIMSS project proposal is limited to 20,000 characters and must address the following:
 - The need, as indicated by stakeholders
 - The importance of the work, and what the consequences are if it is not done
 - The technical feasibility of the research
 - The advantages for doing the work as a multistate effort
 - What the likely impacts will be from successfully completing the work
2. The MAC will review the request to write and if the research problem appears suitable for a multistate research project, the MAC will recommend to NERA, approval

of the request, authorization of an ad hoc technical committee and the appointment of an interim Administrative Advisor. Upon approval the NERA Chair will appoint an interim Administrative Advisor and authorize the establishment of an ad hoc technical committee.

3. The Regional System Adviser will convey the description of the proposed concept for development into a multistate research proposal to all SAES and Cooperative Extension directors, academic program directors and cooperating Federal agency directors, and invite them to identify research, teaching and extension faculty who may choose to participate in final proposal development.
4. The Administrative Advisor will:
 - Organize a meeting of the ad hoc technical committee for the purpose of developing a written multistate research proposal.
 - Follow-up with proposed participants to assure that they complete the "Form for Reporting Projected Participation" ([Appendix E](#)) in NIMSS and approval of forms by the individual stations' directors are required prior to the proposal's submission.
 - Assure that the project proposal conforms to the project outline format as shown in Appendix A of the National Guidelines.
 - Submit the proposal to the OED electronically through NIMSS. The proposal will subsequently be available through NIMSS for scientific peer review. A list of three to five potential peer reviewers is forwarded to the OED by the Administrative Adviser. An [Appendix G](#) in NIMSS is the form used by peer reviewers to comment on the proposed project outline.
 - Facilitate the incorporation of suggestions of the peer reviewers into the proposal.
 - Transmit the final draft proposal to the OED through NIMSS in advance of established deadlines (Note: These deadlines vary each year, and are typically three weeks ahead of a NERA meeting.)
5. The MAC reviews the proposal and makes a recommendation to the membership of NERA. If NERA accepts the recommendation of the MAC, the chair of NERA will appoint a permanent Administrative Advisor. Once approved a formal project number is assigned by the RSA and an official copy is transmitted to NIFA through NIMSS.
6. The proposal is reviewed at NIFA and if approved, participating Stations listed are notified and requested to submit the appropriate project initiation information to the REEport website to officially record the Station's participation. Projects are approved for a period of five years. A NIFA Liaison will be assigned to the project.
7. It is highly recommended that new projects are prepared and submitted according to the March NERA review process outlined below. This chronology allows sufficient time to address concerns that may arise from NERA directors. However, the July review process can be utilized if necessary recognizing the corresponding time limitations.

Process Step	March NERA Review Cycle	June/July NERA Review Cycle
Request to write	Submit in September - one year in advance of anticipated October 1 start date	Submit in March - prior to anticipated October 1 start date
MAC reviews request to write	September approval	March approval
Completed draft proposal	Submit September – November	Submit March – April
Peer reviews	November – December	April – May
Proposal revised in response to peer reviews; summary of revisions submitted as an attachment in NIMMS	December – January	May – June
MAC review	February	June
MAC meets to make decisions and recommendations	March	June/July
Directors approve MAC recommendations	March	June/July
Technical Committee addresses MAC review recommendations	April – June	August
Final proposal with MAC suggested revisions	July	September
NIFA notified of regional approval	March or July	September
Project start date	October 1	October 1

B. Rapid Response Multistate Research Projects

There is one important exception to the normal procedure for initiating a multistate research project. When an urgent problem requiring prompt action occurs, and the action must be taken by two or more states for a multistate activity, a formal request can be made to the chair of the NERA to accept a proposal for a Rapid Response Multistate Research Project without prior review and approval by NERA or by NIFA. This "fast-track" approach, called a Rapid Response Project, can be used to form an emergency project. A special project format (with signatures from the participating station directors) is required. One of the directors is designated as Administrative Advisor. The proposed project is then referred to the MAC, and once the MAC approves, a copy of the approved proposal is forwarded to NIFA. Although similar in many ways to the normal process for establishing a multistate research project, this "fast-track" process was put in place to make sure that a quick response could be made to an urgent problem.

C. Multistate Research Coordinating Committee or Education/Extension and Research Activity

To accommodate needed activities in the region that do not well fit into formal multistate research project the association sanctions Multistate Research Coordinating Committees and Education/Extension and Research Activities. These activities are distinguished from formal multistate research projects in that Multistate Research Funds may be expended only for travel. Reporting those travel expenditures are accounted for through the administrative project NE59. Other expenditures (e.g., operations and salaries) are not allowed by NIFA rules.

The process for developing new multistate research coordinating committees and education/extension and research activities is similar to that for multistate research projects. A request to write (using the new project proposal) is prepared and requires approval. An Administrative Advisor is assigned and extends an invitation to others to join the activity. The Administrative Advisor works with an ad hoc technical committee to develop a proposal using the format as shown in Appendix B of the National Guidelines. The proposal is required to go through peer review. The NERA review and approval process is similar to that of a research project. However, these activities do not require formal NIFA approval. The development and approval timeline is similar to that presented above.

VII. Development of Revised Projects

At the end of a multistate research project, authorized duration, the project's committee members may decide to seek a revision of a multistate project, building the new research effort on the results of the previous project. In such a case, the Administrative Advisor should follow the same procedure as defined above except that the current committee will serve as the ad hoc technical committee for the development of a revised project proposal. The multistate research project number identifier will be terminated at the end of the approved period unless specifically approved by NERA and NIFA. A "critical review" is required for all proposed project revisions, providing a summary of: (1) work accomplished under the original project; (2) the degree to which the objectives have been accomplished; (3) work that is incomplete, or areas in need of further investigation. This "critical review" should be incorporated into the "Related, Current, and Previous Work" section of the new project outline.

The timeline for development of revised projects is similar to that outlined above. It is important that the process is initiated during the fourth year of the current project to assure that the revised project is approved prior to the termination of the current project. Otherwise there may be a gap in funding.

Please refer to the process for the required Midterm Review below in Section X.B. This exercise will help gauge the health of the project if objectives will be achieved within the proposed time frame, and if a continuation of the project with a different set of objectives built on the project's accomplishments is likely.

VIII. Adding New Participants to Multistate Research Activities

Once a multistate research project, multistate research coordinating committee or education/extension and research activity has been approved by the NERA members, new participants may be added to the activity via the following mechanism. It is assumed that a

request by a scientist or Extension professional to participate in an existing multistate research activity will not alter the title or create a need to change the objectives of the original activity.

The petitioning scientist or Extension professional completes an Appendix E in NIMSS covering the work that he/she proposes to undertake from the procedures section of the proposal. The

Appendix E must be approved by the director of the employing SAES or Cooperative Extension Service.

Unless there are very unusual circumstances or considerations, the Administrative Advisor authorizes, signs off and forwards it to both the OED and NIFA. NIFA notifies the director of the originating state or agency of that action and requests submission of form in REEport for SAES participants. Specifically, committees are not asked to 'vote' on admitting new members to existing activities as membership is open to all qualified scientists and Extension professionals from Land-grants and non-Land-grant institutions.

IX. Committee Meetings

A. Meeting Authorization

The Administrative Advisor must authorize all committee meetings using the "[Authorize Annual Meeting](#)" function in the NIMSS. With this wide distribution, the announcement provides an opportunity for soliciting additional participation in the project or committee. This formal authorization is used by stations and agencies to support travel for their participants.

B. Frequency of Meetings

Committees normally meet once each year. If necessary, the Administrative Advisor may authorize more than one meeting per federal fiscal year (October 1 – September 30). The announcement should indicate that it is an additional meeting and explain why it is needed. Meeting minutes are to be recorded and are integral part of the annual report.

C. Location of Meetings

The meeting location is left to the discretion of the Administrative Advisor in consultation with the committee. The appropriateness of location and the conservation of time and travel funds should be considered in determining the location of meetings. If meetings are held in conjunction with professional society meetings, committees are encouraged to meet prior to the society meetings. Authorizations for committee meetings to be held outside the U.S. must be justified.

D. Decision Making

Decision making by technical committees and coordinating committees should be done by consensus whenever possible. While the National Guidelines indicate one vote per participating station (to be cast by the Official Representative), the Administrative Adviser in conjunction with the technical team should define their internal voting policies. The Northeast Supplement recognizes that a majority vote by those present at the meeting can resolve agenda questions. The Northeast Supplement also recognizes that this process may, in some cases permit under or overrepresentation of some participant institutions or of

functions. Administrative Advisors should monitor meeting representation to assure that fairness is predominant in all decisions. In the Appendix E participation form, it is required to assign and identify the Official Representative if there are multiple participants from one Station.

E. Minutes

The secretary of the committee records the minutes of meetings and submits them (including attendance) as part of the SAES-422 Annual Report (Appendix D in the National Guidelines) in NIMSS. An expanded or complete set of minutes are recommended for the record by the committee itself for the purpose of assisting the committee in the management of the project. The full set of minutes should be maintained on the NIMSS website (https://www.nimss.org/meetings/available_projects.)

X. **Reporting and Review Requirements**

A. Annual Report

The Administrative Advisor for each multistate research activity, with assistance of its members, submits an annual report using the "[Draft/Edit Report](#)" function in NIMSS (SAES-422 Annual Report - Appendix D in the National Guidelines). The report is due 60 calendar days following the annual meeting. This report should highlight the milestone accomplishments, collective outputs, outcomes, and actual or anticipated impacts, resulting from the activity. The annual report should also include a summary of the minutes (including attendance) of the meeting. The full, expanded version of the minutes can be uploaded in the NIMSS annual report form as an attachment.

The SAES-422 is intended to facilitate a participating station's Plan of Work accomplishments reporting, and should assist national activities that document the contributions of multistate activities. Participating institutions can use this report for identifying their contributions to the multistate activity.

B. Mid-term Review and Evaluation

During the third year of a 5-year project, the Administrative Advisor conducts a mid-term evaluation of the activities and success of the project/activity using Appendices I (for multistate research projects; https://www.nimss.org/appendix_is/form) and K (for multistate research coordinating committees or education/extension and research activities; https://www.nimss.org/appendix_ks/form.) An optional first or second year evaluation may be conducted by the Administrative Advisor if the project is scheduled for less than a 5-year term. The MAC will review these evaluations and if appropriate make recommendations for changes to NERA.

C. Termination Report

At the end of the project's approved time span, the Administrative Advisor, with assistance of the project's members, submits an annual report using the "[Draft/Edit Report](#)" function in NIMSS. This special version of the SAES-422 serves as both the annual report in the final year and the termination report for multistate activities that are being completed. The emphasis in the final annual report should be on the accumulative accomplishments and

impacts of the research over the duration of the activity.

Responsibility for submitting the termination report rests with the Administrative Advisor. Termination reports are distributed through the same process as the annual reports. They are an important source of information for anyone interested in the accomplishments and impacts of multistate activities. They are also used by the Experiment Station Section employed communications specialist as input in the development of final impact statements for multistate activities. These statements are distributed through the [*National Impacts Database*](#) and the [*Ag is America*](#) website.