

# Northeastern Supplement to the Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities<sup>1</sup>

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### **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 Northeastern Supplement to the Guidelines for Multistate Research (hereafter called the Northeastern

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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 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 (MRF) 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 MRF 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 flexible and 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 state 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 Adviser (AA)* – The Administrative Adviser is a key leader in the development and management of a multistate research or an integrated research and extension activity. Administrative Advisers have access to edit and upload materials to proposals, projects, and annual reports. AAs are also responsible for the authorization of annual meetings. All Northeastern Administrative Advisers are selected by the Multistate Activities Committee (MAC), approved by NERA, and appointed by the NERA chair. (See Section V.)

*Education/Extension and Research Activity (NEERA prefix)* – These activities serve to integrate two or more functions (i.e., education, extension, or research) on a particular topic

where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate, have expected outcomes, convey knowledge, and are peer reviewed. These activities are distinguished from formal multistate research projects in that Multistate Research Funds may be expended only for travel.

*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. The MAC is also responsible for reviewing and making recommendations to NERA on changes to the Northeastern Supplement.

*Multistate Research Coordinating Committee (NECC prefix)* – 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. These activities are distinguished from formal multistate research projects in that Multistate Research Funds may be expended only for travel.

*Multistate Research Project (NE prefix)* – 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 is an autonomous federation of State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) represented in its membership by the individual SAES directors. The Northeastern Regional Association is one of five such U.S. Regional Associations. 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, 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 Advisers, committee chairs, and committee members and should be contacted for assistance in developing and implementing multistate research activities.

*Project Editors* – Individuals from the technical team that have access to edit and upload materials to proposals, projects, and annual reports. Administrative Advisers and Regional System Administrators (RSA; NERA OED serves as the Northeast RSA) assign editors to proposals and projects.

*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 a 2-year duration from the date of initiation and may convert to a 5-year multistate research project or other multistate research activity, through normal procedures.

*Regional System Administrator* – The NERA OED serves as the RSA for the region. The RSA serves multiple functions in NIMSS and can add stations, add new NIMSS users, edit station information, create and update NIMSS user profiles, edit and submit Appendix Es, and assist in moving regional proposals through the approval process. The RSA can take any action in NIMSS on behalf of Administrative Advisers, project editors, Station Directors/designees and other NIMSS users.

*Technical Committee (or Team)* – The research scientists, and as applicable, extension specialists, and extension agents, participating in a multistate research project, plus the administrative Adviser 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 and procedures. This is done through the commissioning of external peer 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.

The MAC shall consist of six members: four of whom will be Northeast SAES directors (including Assistant and Associate Directors) and two are Northeast Cooperative Extension directors (including Assistant and Associate 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 Advisers

The Administrative Adviser is the key person in the development and management of a new or renewing multistate research activity. Their role is to encourage team effort, advise on administrative and operational procedures, and act as liaison among the technical committee, the SAES directors, other cooperating agencies and institutions, the OED, the MAC, and NIFA.

All Administrative Advisers 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 Adviser with the focus of the multistate project. For multistate research committees and multistate research coordinating committees, Administrative Advisers 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-Advisers are appointed – one SAES director (or SAES designee) and/or one Academic Program director (or Academic Programs designee) and/or Cooperative Extension director (or Cooperative Extension designee.)

## VI. Development of New Projects

A. Multistate Research Projects (A summary of the critical steps to the submission of a new project proposal and the submission of a replacement/revision of a current project is listed in Section X Appendix of this document.)

1. The ad hoc Technical Committee notifies the OED of the intent to submit a new proposal. The notification must identify to the two Northeastern stations supporting the proposal.
2. The ad hoc Technical Committee and project editors (or their SAES director or SAES designee) submits through NIMSS a [New Project Proposal](#) for either a new or revision/replacement multistate research project, coordinating committee, or education/extension and research activity. The RSA will assign a temporary project number to the proposal in NIMSS. At least two stations in the Northeast are required to be sponsors of the proposal. The project proposal must address the following:

- Issues and Justification
  - 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.
- Related, Current, Previous Work
- Objectives
- Methods
- Measurement of Progress and Results
- Outreach Plan
- Organization/Governance
- Literature Cited
- Attachments

- List of prospective participants
- Response to peer reviews

3. Once the final “Objectives” have been posted in NIMSS, the AA or the RSA may release a nation-wide call for participants and the submission of the "Form for Reporting Projected Participation" ([Appendix E](#)) in NIMSS. The Appendix E must have approval of the participant’s station director. Most frequently, the solicitation of Appendix E participants is sent after approval of the project by NERA.

4. The MAC will review the proposal for readiness for peer review and provide feedback to the ad hoc Technical Committee. The MAC will also seek the appointment of an Administrative Adviser for the project, subject to approval by NERA at the time of final proposal approval. Once revisions have been made in response to MAC feedback, or should the MAC not seek revisions by the Technical Committee, the MAC will request from the Technical Team the names of 5 peer reviewers who are not associated with the project proposal. The minimal expectation is that each project proposal receives three complete peer reviews. The OED will solicit reviews from the list of suggested peer reviewers. (An [Appendix G](#) in NIMSS is the form used by peer reviewers to comment on the proposed.)

5. Upon completion and submission of peer reviews in NIMSS, the RSA will share the reviews with the Technical Committee and provide the opportunity to revise the proposal as suggested by the reviewers. The Technical Committee will be expected to upload a narrative (added as an attachment in NIMSS) identifying changes made to the proposal and responses to suggestions made by the reviewers. The Administrative Adviser can assist the Technical Committee to ensure incorporation of suggestions of the peer reviewers into the proposal.

6. The MAC reviews the revised and complete proposal and makes a recommendation to the membership of NERA. If NERA accepts the recommendation of the MAC to approve the project proposal, the chair of NERA will confirm the permanent Administrative Adviser and the RSA will assign a formal project number. The RSA will then submit the revised and complete project proposal and the project will then be incorporated into the national portfolio of multistate projects. The region has final approval authority of the multistate research proposal. Incorporation of the project into the national portfolio will include the addition of the project into the pull-down menus of the NIFA reporting system and the assignment of a NIFA liaison.

7. It is highly recommended that all project proposals are prepared and submitted according to the timeline and review process outlined below. This chronology allows sufficient time to address concerns that may arise at any step along the approval process.

<b>Process Step</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>
Notify the OED of the intent to submit a proposal	September 30 – One year in advance of anticipated October 1 start date	Technical Committee in consultation with 2 NERA directors (2 stations supporting the submission of the proposal)
Technical committee submits complete draft proposal in NIMSS	December 1	Technical committee in consultation with AA
Proposal reviewed by MAC; MAC provides feedback to Technical Committee. Proposal revision.	January 15	MAC
Peer reviews solicited	February 15	OED
Peer reviews submitted	March 15	OED
Proposal revised in response to peer reviews; summary of revisions and response to the reviews submitted as an attachment in NIMSS	April 15	Technical Committee in consultation with AA
MAC reviews revised proposal and response to the reviews.	May 15	MAC
MAC makes recommendations to NERA (typically at the NERA summer business meeting)	June 15	MAC
NERA Directors approve MAC recommendations	June 15	NERA
Submit NERA approved proposal for incorporation into national portfolio	June 30	OED
NIFA assigns liaison and incorporates project into drop-down menus in the reporting system	July 15	NIFA
Local station project initiation	September 15	Local stations
Project start date	October 1	Technical Committee

## B. 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 integrated 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. An ad hoc Technical Committee develops a proposal using the format as shown in Appendix B of the National Guidelines and an Administrative Adviser is identified by the MAC and approved and appointed by NERA. The proposal is required to go through peer review. The NERA review and approval process is similar to that of a research project. Importantly, Coordinating Committees and Education/Extension and Research Activities do not appear in the NIFA reporting system. The development and approval timeline is similar to that presented above.

## C. Rapid Response Multistate Research Projects

When initiating a Rapid Response Multistate Research Project, 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 stations 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. This "fast-track" approach, called a Rapid Response Project, can be used to form an emergency project. One of the directors from a requesting station is designated as Administrative Adviser. The proposal is then referred to the MAC, and once the MAC approves, the proposal is considered to be approved by the region. This "fast-track" process was put in place to make sure that a quick response could be made to an urgent problem.

## **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 the multistate project, building the new research effort on the results of the previous project. In such a case, the Administrative Adviser and Technical committee would initiate a revision/replacement proposal using a similar procedure for initiating new multistate research projects (Section VI). The current Technical Committee would serve as the ad hoc Technical Committee for the development of a revision/replacement project proposal. The multistate research project number identifier will be terminated at the end of the approved period unless specifically approved by NERA. A "critical review" is required for all proposed project revisions. This critical review should provide a summary of: (1) work accomplished under the original project; (2) the degree to which the objectives have been accomplished; and (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 the chronology outlined above. It is important that the revision/replacement 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.

### **VIII. Adding New Participants to Multistate Research Activities**

Once a multistate research project, multistate research coordinating committee or education/extension and research activity has finalized objectives in place, new participants may be added to the activity. 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 proposed work to be undertaken from the procedures section of the proposal. The Appendix E must be approved by the director of the participant's home SAES or Cooperative Extension Service. Unless there are unusual circumstances or considerations, Technical Committees are asked not 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. Technical Committee Meetings**

#### **A. Meeting Authorization**

The Administrative Adviser must authorize all committee meetings using the "[Authorize Annual Meeting](#)" function in the NIMSS. This formal authorization is sent to all approved project participants and used by stations and agencies as documentation to support travel for their participants. The RSA can send a meeting authorization with the approval of the Administrative Adviser.

#### **B. Frequency of Meetings**

Committees normally meet once each year. If necessary, the Administrative Adviser 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 Adviser in consultation with the Technical 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. Virtual meetings are also acceptable especially when travel is not practical or possible. 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 Committee should define their internal voting policies. The Northeastern Supplement recognizes that a majority vote by those present at the meeting can resolve agenda questions. The Northeastern Supplement also recognizes that this process may, in some cases permit under or overrepresentation of some participant institutions or of functions. Administrative Advisers 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 one Official Representative if there are multiple participants from one Station.

#### E. Minutes

The secretary of the Technical 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 uploaded to the meeting report on the NIMSS website ([https://www.nimss.org/meetings/available\\_projects](https://www.nimss.org/meetings/available_projects).)

### **X. Reporting and Review Requirements**

#### A. Annual Report

The Administrative Adviser 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 complement 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 Adviser 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](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](https://www.nimss.org/appendix_ks/form).) An optional first or second year evaluation may be conducted by the Administrative Adviser 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 Adviser, 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 cumulative accomplishments and impacts of the research over the duration of the activity.

Responsibility for submitting the termination report rests with the Administrative Adviser. 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, many of which are archived on the [Multistate Research Fund Impacts](#) website.

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## **X. Appendix: Creating a new multistate research project proposal or renewing a multistate research project**

### **Appendix A.**

1. Notify the NERA OED of your intent to submit a multistate research proposal. In the notification include the endorsement of Directors from the two Northeast stations supporting the proposal.
2. Login into NIMSS at [www.nimss.org](http://www.nimss.org). If you haven't logged into NIMSS yet, use your email address to reset your password under Forgot Password. Going forward, use your email address as your username and new password to log in.
3. Select Project Proposals > New Project Proposal.
4. On the Basic Information page, select New. If renewing a project, select Revision/Replacement.
5. In the Form box, select Multistate Research Project (or Coordinating Committee/Rapid Response if appropriate. Do not select NRSP).
6. Type in the desired project title (for renewals, the project name can be changed to reflect new objectives) and enter the five year begin and end dates using the beginning (October 1, 2XXX) and end (September 30, 2XXX) of the federal fiscal year.
7. Enter the *Issues and Justification* in the text box then click Save and Submit. This opens access to all additional proposal form fields and alerts NERA that there is a proposal in process. Enter the remaining sections of the proposal including *Related, Current and Previous Work; Objectives; Measurement of Progress and Results; Outreach Plan; Organization/Governance; Literature Cited; and Attachments*. If the project is renewing, a critical review should be incorporated into the “Related, Current, and Previous Work” section of the new project outline. The critical review should provide a summary of: (1) work accomplished under the original project; (2) the degree to which the objectives have been accomplished; and (3) work that is incomplete, or areas in need of further investigation.
8. Once those sections are entered, the MAC will review the proposal for readiness to share with peer reviewers. If needed, the Technical Committee will have an opportunity to revise the proposal in response to comments and suggestions from the MAC.
9. The Technical Committee will also provide to the NERA OED, the names of at least 5 peer reviewers who are from outside the northeast and do not intend to participate on the multistate project. NERA will solicit the peer reviewers and, after at least three peer reviews have been completed, NERA will share the peer reviews with the Technical Committee. The Technical Committee will revise the proposal and provide written responses to reviewers concerns and a narrative of changes made to the proposal in response to the reviews. The response to the reviews and the narrative of changes to the proposal is uploaded to NIMSS as an attachment.
10. The MAC then reviews the proposal, the peer reviews, responses to the review, and changes to the proposal and formulates a recommendation to NERA. NERA directors consider the recommendations of the MAC. If approved, the project is incorporated into the national portfolio of multistate research projects.