

NERA Response to the NRSP RC: Renewal of NRSP3 and NRSP10

April 2, 2019

Background

The NE Multistate Activities Committee (MAC) reviewed the renewal packets of NRSP3 and NRSP10 and provided recommendations to NERA. NERA considered and discussed the comments and recommendations of the MAC during the Association's quarterly conference call on March 28, 2019. Below the Association shares comments and recommendations on the disposition of each NRSP renewal.

General comments

NERA continues to recommend that the NRSP RC engage in robust, meaningful mid-term reviews and that the NRSP RC scrutinize the business plans of new or renewing NRSPs. As the NRSP Guidelines clearly state, **off-the-top funding to an NRSP was intended to be temporary and that an NRSP should expect a finite period of funding.**

NRSP3 Renewal

NERA values the contributions of NRSP3 and supports the renewal of this project. The project has a strong history of leveraging funds in support of atmospheric deposition and climate change research. The Association recognizes that the \$50,000 in off-the-top funding serves as important venture capital for the project. In fact, contributions from the Multistate Research Fund allow the host, the University of Wisconsin, to utilize a lower F&A rate on complementary external grant funding that supports the efforts of NRSP3. (We understand that's viewed as a positive attribute by participating scientists and stations.)

NERA recommendation: Renew NRSP3 at the requested rate of funding: \$50,000 annually. This recommendation is contingent upon a satisfactory mid-term review.

NRSP10 renewal

NERA notes that the NRSP10 renewal continues to provide support for a national priority area, crop genomics. The technical team shares in the proposal that the tools are changing in crop genomics and genetics; this proposal supports the transition from older tools to newer. The letters of support included in the project proposal packet indicate the impact by the "old" NRSP10 and the need to support the project renewal.

The NRSP10 team seeks off-the-top funding to support work in a priority area at ~\$500,000 annually for the 5-year term of the project. NERA reflects that the requested annual funding is similar to the level of annual funding received by the NRSP during the previous 5-year period. While the NRSP10 renewal meets the criteria of addressing a national priority area of research support, the project proposal misses the mark on providing a management and business plan that includes a transition strategy that clearly describes alternative sources of funding and a blueprint for the significant reduction or elimination of off-the-top funds.

NERA also found that the narrative associated with the budget confusing. The project team requests \$2,449,789 over five years and the proposal states that additional support is available from WSU (\$3,035,527) and industry (\$741,889). The budget narrative also mentions

that there is “known support for the period of renewal (\$2,069,983)...” The known level of complementary support is unclear. Is it \$3,777,416 (\$3,035,527 + \$741,889) or \$2,069,983 (sources not mentioned in the budget narrative.)

NERA Recommendation: NERA recommends approval of the project proposal be deferred until the NRSP10 technical team revises the proposal and includes: a revised budget narrative that addresses the discrepancy of complementary support of the project and a clearly defined transition plan that describes the alternative sources of funding, how those sources will be sought, and how the technical team plans to reduce or eliminate off-the-top funding during the term of the project. Further, NERA recommends that during the mid-term review, that the effectiveness of the transition plan be carefully evaluated. Failure to demonstrate progress on a transition plan from off-the-top funding would result in significant reduction in MRF support to the project after the mid-term review.