

## **NIFA Response to the Plan of Work Panel Recommendations**

### **Panel's Findings and Recommendations**

#### **Issue #1: The usability of quantitative targets for Outputs and Outcomes.**

**Panel Recommendation #1:** Eliminate quantitative targets in the Plan of Work, but enable quantitative and qualitative reporting in the Annual Report. Maintain the reporting of faculty FTEs in the POW. Maintain indirect and direct contact data, patent information, and publications information as standard outputs in the Annual Report.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to eliminate quantitative targets in the Plan of Work, but will continue to enable quantitative and qualitative reporting in the Annual Report. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation for the 2013 – 2017 Plan of Work Update and 2011 Annual Report.

#### **Issue #2: Rolling 5-Year Plans versus New 5-Year Plans every five years.**

**Panel Recommendation #2:** Keep the five-year rolling Plan of Work if the recommendation for deleting the quantitative targets, discussed in Issue #1, in the POW is accepted by NIFA. Otherwise, the panel recommends a three-year rolling Plan of Work. The three-year rolling plan suggestion is to help reduce burden and to better reflect the frequent change in the planning environment.

**NIFA Response:** Since NIFA agrees to implement the recommendations made in Issue #1, NIFA agrees to keep the five-year rolling Plan of Work.

#### **Issue #3: Right now the evaluation plans and reports section is optional. Should it be a required part of the Plan and Report?**

**Panel Recommendation #3:** Evaluation is important, but the Plan should leave the details up to the state; it should not be optional. Eliminate the current check box structure in this section. NIFA should provide a text box that lets the States describe their evaluation plans for each Planned Program. The panel suggests having a “help rollover” to explain the box and to also provide examples. It also recommends reducing redundancy by adding instructions to the evaluation plan explaining that including text such as “see outcome #4” (for example) is allowable in the evaluation plan. It is also recommended that there be evaluation training for personnel; NIFA should take the lead on having large scale, targeted evaluations on a national level with rigorous evaluation designs.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to eliminate the current check box structure in the Evaluation section of the Plan of Work and Annual Report. Instead NIFA will provide only a text box that

lets the States describe their evaluation plans for each Planned Program and also provide a corresponding text box in the Annual Report to report on any results and conclusions from evaluations completed. NIFA further agrees that this section needs to be addressed by all grantee institutions and should not be optional. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation for the 2013 – 2017 Plan of Work Update and 2012 Annual Report.

**Issue #4: NIFA guidance for Knowledge Areas (KAs).**

**Panel Recommendation #4:** NIFA should share the KAs that have been designated to a Priority Area for the three areas which have been done as soon as possible. As soon as the other priorities areas have been classified with KAs, these should be communicated to the states. Expand KAs for Family and Consumer Sciences and Youth Development.

If there are additional KAs that support cross-cutting priorities and national work, a petition should be made to the NIFA classification board to consider these KAs. It is not just assisting with clarifying the relationship between priority areas and KAs, but to also add more classification definitions and increase the breadth of programs. NIFA should act on these recommendations immediately.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to share the KAs that have been designated to a NIFA Priority Area for the three areas which have been done by the end of the 2010 Calendar year. NIFA will also communicate any other alignment of KAs to other NIFA Priority Areas to the grantee institutions as soon as they are done. Furthermore, the NIFA classification board will act on any petitions it receives for expansion or changes in KAs as quickly as possible.

**Issue #5: Multistate Extension and Integration Research and Extension Reporting are not included in the online software.**

**Panel Recommendation #5:** The Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension Reporting, which currently is sent via Email to the Office of Extramural Programs, should be included in the online Plan of Work software. Until it can be implemented in the software, a link should be provided to upload the existing file in PDF format as an attachment to the Annual Report.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to include the Multistate Extension and Integrate Research and Extension reports to the online Plan of Work and Annual Report software. Until it can be implemented directly in the software, NIFA will provide a way for the states to upload the existing file in PDF format as an attachment to the Annual Report. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation after full implementation of the inclusion of Formula Grants in REEport.

**Issue #6: A conscious effort was made to gather data in the Plan of Work around a simple logic model structure (Situation, Ultimate Goal, Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes,**

**Evaluation), so that if States had a logic model drawn up for each Planned Program it would be relatively simple to complete each Planned Program. Is there a better structure for the Planned Programs, and if so, what is it?**

**Panel Recommendation #6:** Continue using the logic model as the framework for planning and reporting.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to continue to use the logic model as the framework for the Planned Programs in the Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments.

**Issue #7: Should a budget be introduced in the Plan of Work?**

**Panel Recommendation #7:** The panel recommends that budget information be excluded from Plan of Work. This overall budget data can be collected through the Grants.gov process.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to continue to exclude budget information from the Plan of Work.

**Issue #8: Formula Grants from NIFA provide value above and beyond outcomes reported through planned programs that are in the current POW and report.**

**Panel Recommendation #8:** Task a group 1) to further define and bring meaning to this concept; 2) identify measureable outcomes; and 3) propose a process for collecting data to measure this impact.

**NIFA Response:** In the September 20, 2010, Plan of Work Newsletter (Vol. 5, No. 2), NIFA included the following guidance for inclusion in the Plan of Work and Annual Report.

“Formula Grants need to have their value quantified and the quality of the outcomes continually being improved. A discussion in the Plan of Work and Annual Report on how the Formula Grant uniquely contributes to the body of research and extension work is greatly needed to remain relevant in this world of limited resources. In this discussion it is important to show how the Formula Grants uniquely contribute to the economic impact of your work. What sets it apart from other non-formula grants? What would your institution not be able to do without the Hatch or Evans-Allen research grants? What economic impact is it having in terms of dollars generated or saved? Give examples of economic impact in your overview and in your Planned Programs and include these as change in condition outcomes.”

Furthermore, national outcomes on Formula Grants will be discussed at the National Outcomes and Indicators Workshop scheduled for February 2011.

**Other recommendations:**

1. Include McIntire-Stennis and its funding in the Plan of Work and Annual Report. The panel recommends exploring the possibility of including Animal Health and Renewable Resources Extension Act to the Plan of Work also. The panel believes including these in the Plan of Work and Annual Report will help tell the whole story of Formula Grants.

**NIFA Response:** Since they are not legislated to be included in the Plan of Work, the current plan is for these programs to only be a part of the new REEport system since they are project based programs. Moreover, EFNEP is also a Formula Grant program which has its own ground roots based reporting system which will not be a part of either REEport or Plan of Work systems. The EFNEP reporting system is well supported by its users. Thus, there will always be missing elements in the Plan of Work system for Formula Grants, however, these will be brought together in the Research, Education, and Economics Information System (REEIS), and the Leadership Management Dashboard (LMD) to tell the Formula Grant story.

2. Add eXtension to the Extension Methods check boxes. This is a delivery method that should be captured. Explanation on how eXtension is used can be done in a text box.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to add eXtension to the Extension Methods check boxes on the Activity screen of the Plan of Work, and include a text box in the Annual Report on the Activity screen so an explanation can be made on how eXtension was used. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation for the 2013 – 2017 Plan of Work Update and 2011 Annual Report.

3. The panel supports an existing effort to develop national outcome indicators for the NIFA priority areas and other common national programming efforts for institutions to voluntarily adopt.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA will continue the existing effort to develop national outcome indicators for the NIFA priority areas. A national workshop to define national outcomes and indicators around the five NIFA priority areas is scheduled for February 2011. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation for the 2013 – 2017 Plan of Work Update and 2011 Annual Report.

4. Continue providing consistency in language between NIFA reporting systems. NIFA has done an excellent job making reporting consistent.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA will strive to provide consistency in language between NIFA reporting systems where possible.

5. Link the Plan of Work system to REEport and NIMSS to enable FTEs, classification data, and financial data to be uploaded automatically into the Annual Report.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA will link the Hatch and Evans-Allen projects in REEport to the Plan of Work and Annual Report so FTEs, classification data, and financial data can be

uploaded automatically into the Annual Report. Furthermore, NIMSS will link to the REEport system for Hatch Multistate providing an indirect link to the Plan of Work and Annual Report. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation after full implementation of the inclusion of Formula Grants in REEport.

6. Provide the Institutions with a model Plan of Work and Annual Report. Continue providing examples in the POW that are relevant to both Extension and research.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to provide a model Plan of Work and Annual Report. NIFA will provide by the end of the 2010 Calendar year.

7. NIFA should continue having a POW panel to provide feedback on an annual basis as to what has been done in the system and to recommend and validate new applications for the system.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA provide an opportunity each year for panel members to provide feedback on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations. Furthermore, NIFA is committed to convening a formal expert panel to assess the progress of the Plan of Work and Annual Report every five years. Thus, the next formal expert panel will convene in 2015.

8. The panel recommends that NIFA continue to provide constant feedback regarding Plans of Work and Annual Reports to institutions submitting the POW and AR.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA has a working process in place where National Program Leaders assess the Plans of Work and Annual Reports each year. National Program Leaders will continue to be trained annually on reviewing Plans of Work and Annual Reports. During this training process, NIFA will reinforce constant and consistent feedback in the Plan of Work review process. NIFA is committed to providing feedback on these assessments back to the grantee institutions within 90 days of receipt of the Plan of Work and Annual Report each year. Any concerns about feedback received from National Program Leaders should be addressed to either Bart Hewitt or Katelyn Sellers of the Planning, Accountability, and Reporting Staff.

9. Provide a way to capture the value of volunteers.

**NIFA Response:** NIFA agrees to include a table on the input screen of the Annual Report for reporting volunteer time for each Planned Program so the value of volunteers to these Planned Programs can be captured. The NIFA plan is to implement this recommendation for the 2011 Annual Report.