

National Institute of Food and Agriculture
1U.S. Department of Agriculture
OMB# 0524-0036
Supporting Statement for Extending Reporting Requirements for
Agricultural Research and Extension Formula Funds

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. CIRCUMSTANCES MAKING COLLECTION OF INFORMATION NECESSARY

The purpose of this information collection is to continue implementing the reporting requirements for capacity grants, previously referred to as formula funds, for research and extension programs managed by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As required by the Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2002 (FCEA) (P.L. 110-246, Sec. 7505) NIFA is working with its partners and stakeholders in extension and research to review and identify measures to streamline the submission, reporting under, and implementation of Plan of Work requirements. The effort to streamline reporting extends to other capacity programs as part of an ongoing effort to build a new reporting system, the NIFA Reporting System (NRS).

NIFA administers several capacity-funded research and extension programs at 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions, schools of forestry, and schools of veterinary medicine. Capacity research funds are provided to 1862 land-grant institutions and agricultural experiment stations under the Hatch Act of 1887. Research funds are provided to forestry schools associated with 1862, 1890, and some 1994 institutions under the McIntire-Stennis Act of 1962. Animal health and disease research capacity funds are provided to veterinary schools and agricultural experiment stations at the 1862 and 1890 institutions under section 1433 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA).

Extension funds are authorized for 1862 land-grant institutions under sections 3(b) and 3(c) of the Smith-Lever Act and section 208(c) of the District of Columbia Postsecondary Education Reorganization Act. Extension funds are provided to 1890 land-grant institutions under sections 1444 and 1445 of NARETPA. Extension funds are also provided to 1862 and 1890 institutions under the Renewable Resources Extension Act.

Specific reporting requirements differ depending on funding type and institution and are described below.

Plan of Work (POW). Sections 202 and 225 of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) require that a Plan of Work must be submitted by each institution and approved by NIFA before formula funds may be provided to the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions.

Each Plan of Work must address the critical food and agricultural issues in the State and describe the programs and projects targeted to address these issues using the funds. Each Plan of Work must also briefly describe the institution's multistate activities, their integrated research and extension activities, and must include a description of the processes for obtaining stakeholder input and for conducting peer and merit reviews.

Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results. The capacity funds that require an Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results are authorized under the Hatch Act for agricultural research activities at the 1862 land-grant institutions, under the Smith-Lever Act for extension activities at the 1862 land-grant institutions, and under sections 1444 and 1445 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 for research and extension activities at the 1890 land-grant institutions. The Annual Report of Accomplishments provides information on the previous fiscal year's accomplishments supported by capacity funding. The Executive Summary provides an opportunity to give an overview by critical issue of any significant achievements or challenges. Only significant updates from the Plan of Work are provided for Stakeholder Input and Merit and Scientific Peer Review. Additionally, grantees highlight significant results for research projects or extension programs achieved in the previous fiscal year.

Stakeholder Input (included in Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments). Section 102(c) of AREERA requires that 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant institutions receiving agricultural research, education, and extension formula funds from NIFA establish and implement processes for obtaining input from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, extension, or education concerning the use of such funds. Section 102(c) further requires that the Secretary of Agriculture promulgate regulations that prescribe what the institutions must do to meet this requirement and the consequences of not complying with this requirement per the final rule (7 CFR 3418) on Stakeholder Input Requirements for Recipients of Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension Formula Funds which was published in the *Federal Register* on February 8, 2000 (73 FR 80361).

In order to ensure compliance with these legislative and regulatory requirements, NIFA requires institutions to submit an annual Stakeholder Input report describing institutions to report each year to: 1) the actions taken to seek stakeholder input to encourage their participation; 2) a brief statement of the process used by the recipient institution to identify individuals and groups who are stakeholders and to collect input from them; and 3) a statement of how collected input was considered.

Merit and Scientific Peer Review (included in Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments). Section 103(e) of AREERA requires that the 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant institutions establish a merit review process to obtain agricultural research and extension funds. Section 104(h) of AREERA also stipulates that a scientific peer review process be established for research programs funded under section 3(c)(3) of the Hatch Act (commonly referred to as Hatch Multistate Research Funds). These guidelines

require that a description of the merit review process and, if applicable, a description of the scientific peer review process be included in the Plan of Work.

2. HOW, BY WHOM, AND THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE INFORMATION IS TO BE USED

This collection of information will be received by NIFA via the NIFA Reporting System at <https://nrs.nifa.usda.gov>, or via email, in limited cases when an alternate collection method is necessary in order to meet key reporting deadlines. NIFA program and scientific experts review the State Plans of Work for the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions and the Annual Reports of Accomplishments and Results. They may also review and provide feedback on individual project results. Upon confirmation that all reporting requirements have been met, the Office of Grants and Financial Management releases funds to the recipient institutions.

3. USE OF IMPROVED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

The recipients of agricultural research, education, and extension formula funds provide information to NIFA via the new NIFA Reporting System at <https://nrs.nifa.usda.gov>, which replaces the previous REEport Reporting System. The decision to build on new technology has contributed to a significant reduction of the time to collect, input, and review information. Built on modular technology and microservices, the NRS' capacity to import or export information from other applications minimizes the need for recipient institutions to input information into multiple applications. The NRS will eventually import information of patents and licenses from iEdison instead of requiring institutions to also enter this information into NRS. NIFA will collect a persistent digital identifier, such as ORCID, to ensure the collection of data on NIFA funded scholarly publications and digital scientific research data.

The ability of the NRS to link and organize information in multiple ways makes it possible to eliminate the need to report research funded under the Hatch Act at 1862 institutions and research funded under Section 1444 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 at 1890 institutions. To comply with the RPPR and with the Plan of Work, institutions reported research results in two different applications. Not only does the NRS integrate research and extension under one application, the NRS contains a report builder that compiles the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results for each state and institution using the project- and program-level results. The builder organizes the annual reports by institution, critical issue, funding type, and other reporting requirements.

The NRS also meets USDA OCIO's security standards and supports the OCIO's strategic objectives. Users of the system must register in eAuthentication and verify their identities online or at an authorized USDA office.

The NRS, and the information therein, is currently available only to those institutions' directors and their representatives who have been granted access. NIFA will export the

information to its public-facing data, the Data Gateway, upon completion of the modules related to capacity funding.

4. EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY DUPLICATION

This collection of information is not available to NIFA through any other source or means. Detailed descriptions of the critical issues, the research and extension efforts undertaken to address those issues, and the results and accomplishments achieved using capacity funds are available only through the NRS. In designing the NRS, NIFA has scrutinized past requests for information. Fields were included in the NRS only if they were required by law or regulation or fulfilled a substantial informational need by NIFA or its partners. Fields that did not meet the criteria, or were collected through other means by NIFA, were not included in the NRS.

Since the 1862 land-grant institutions and the 1890 land-grant institutions report the stakeholder input process as part of their Plan of Work, and annually as part of their Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results, they are not required to report separately on the stakeholder input process. The Plan of Work reporting requirements will satisfy the stakeholder input requirements under 7 CFR 3418 which implements the stakeholder input requirements of section 102(c) of AREERA. In addition, those recipients of forestry and animal health research funds that are also land-grant institutions will be exempt from any additional reporting requirements if the stakeholder input process for these funds has already been addressed through the Plan of Work process.

5. METHODS TO MINIMIZE BUDGET OF SMALL BUSINESSES OR ENTITIES

This information collection will have no impact on small businesses or small entities as the respondents do not include any small businesses or entities.

6. CONSEQUENCE IF INFORMATION COLLECTION WERE LESS FREQUENT

The streamlined reporting format for NIFA's capacity-funded research and extension programs provide maximum flexibility for the land-grant institutions while providing adequate accountability for agricultural research and extension formula funds. Annual updates to the Plan of Work and the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results are needed to ensure that agricultural research and extension formula funds are being expended on critical agricultural issues in the States; that the stakeholder input and program review processes are implemented; and that those institutions are directing a portion of their formula funds, as specified by law, to multistate and integrated research and extension activities.

AREERA legislation requires that NIFA know if these requirements are being met prior to the release of formula funds to these land-grant institutions each fiscal year. Sections 202 and 225 of AREERA dictate that a Plan of Work must be submitted by each institution and approved by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) before formula funds may be provided to the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions. Section

102(c) of AREERA for the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions requires that NIFA establish and implement processes for obtaining input from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, extension, or education concerning the use of such funds. If this information is not collected, NIFA would be in violation of the above mandates as required by AREERA.

7. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION

There are no special circumstances for this information collection.

8. FEDERAL REGISTER NOTICE, SUMMARIZATION OF COMMENTS AND CONSULTATION WITH PERSONS OUTSIDE THE AGENCY

Notice of intent to renew and revise this information collection was published in the *Federal Register* on Monday November 29, 2021, Vol. 86, No. 226 (86 FR 67680). No comments were received from this announcement.

The names and contact information for three people surveyed for the burden estimates are below. Respondents commented that the most time needed to complete information collection is spent coordinating with all parties at their institution involved in providing or reviewing information provided in these reports. In some instances, this is a result of faculty getting acclimated to the functionality of NRS. In response to these concerns, NIFA holds regular informational webinars to provide users updates and demonstrations of system functionality. Additionally, NIFA has resources on our external webpages as well as a dedicated help desk email for any system questions or issues.

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9. DECISION TO PROVIDE ANY PAYMENT OR GIFT TO RESPONDENTS, OTHER THAN REMUNERATION OF CONTRACTORS OR GRANTEEES

The agency does not provide payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

10. CONFIDENTIALITY PROVIDED TO RESPONDENTS

No privacy and/or confidentiality issues are anticipated with this information collection.

11. QUESTIONS OF A SENSITIVE NATURE

No information of a sensitive nature will be requested.

12. ESTIMATE OF BURDEN

There are two transactions involved with this collection of information: the Annual Update to the Plan of Work and submission of the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results.

I. Plan of Work

Estimate of the Burden: the total reporting and record keeping requirements for the submission of the "Plan of Work" is estimated to average 64 hours per response. There are four components of this "Plan of Work:" "Merit and Scientific Peer Review Processes," "Stakeholder Input," "Manage Critical Issues," and "Executive Summary."

Estimated Number of Respondents: 75

Estimated Number of Responses: 75

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 4,800 hours

Frequency of Responses: annually

II. Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results

Estimate of the Burden: the total annual reporting and record keeping requirements of the "Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results" is estimated to average 260 hours per response. There are three components of the "Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results:" "Merit and Scientific Peer Review Processes," "Stakeholder Input," and "Project/Program Results."

Estimated Number of Respondents: 75

Estimated Number of Responses: 75

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 19,500 hours.

Frequency of Responses: annually

The total annual burden of this collection is 24,300 hours.

Estimated Costs to respondents:

I. Annual Update to the Plan of Work

Total Costs:

	Hours	Rate	Total
Professional Burden Hours	61	\$45.69	\$2,787.09

Clerical Burden Hours	3	\$21.90	\$65.70
Total Costs per Response			\$2,852.79
Total Costs: (\$2,852.79 x 75 responses) = <u>\$213,959.25</u>			

II. Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results

Total Costs:

	Hours	Rate	Total
Professional Burden Hours	235	\$45.69	\$10,737.15
Clerical Burden Hours	25	\$21.90	\$547.50
Total Costs per Response:			\$11,284.65
Total Costs: (\$11,284.65 x 75 responses) = <u>\$846,348.75</u>			

The total annual cost to respondents of this collection is \$1,060,308.00

13. CAPITAL/STARTUP COSTS

There are no capital, startup, or ongoing operation/maintenance costs associated with this information collection.

14. ANNUALIZED COST TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

It is difficult to estimate the annualized cost to the Federal Government in terms of number of hours expended, salaries, equipment involved, etc., because project initiations are received throughout the year and the number of new projects and programs varies from year to year. The personnel responsible for processing applications are full-time employees at the GS-14 grade level. NIFA estimates the total cost in personnel time to be **\$145,965.40**.

Estimated Total Costs to NIFA				
Job Title	Action	Hourly Pay	Hours per Year	Estimated Costs
Program Manager, GS-14	Reviews updates to state Plans of Work. Approves based on completeness and alignment with NIFA's mission.	\$61.33	1,190	\$72,982.70
Program Manager, GS-14	Review Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results.	\$61.33	1,190	\$72,982.70
TOTAL				\$145,965.40

Dollar amounts derived from the 2022 Federal Pay Tables for Kansas City-Overland Park-Kansas City, MO-KS assuming a GS-14 step five hourly rate.

15. REASONS FOR CHANGE IN BURDEN

The burden estimate for this collection has decreased by approximately 25,000 hours (from 49,248 hours to 24,300 hours). This decrease is primarily related to the fact that in the previous collection requests, estimates were based on having each respondent submit the “Plan of Work” and the “Annual Report of Accomplishments” twice per year. The estimate has been updated to reflect that NIFA asks respondents to submit each report only once per year.

16. TABULATION, ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION PLANS

Not applicable.

17. SEEKING APPROVAL TO NOT DISPLAY THE EXPIRATION DATE FOR OMB APPROVAL OF THE INFORMATION COLLECTION ON FORMS

Not applicable.

18. EXCEPTION(S) TO THE CERTIFICATION STATEMENT (19) ON OMB 83-1

None.