

Plan of Work Panel of Experts *Recommendations to NIFA*

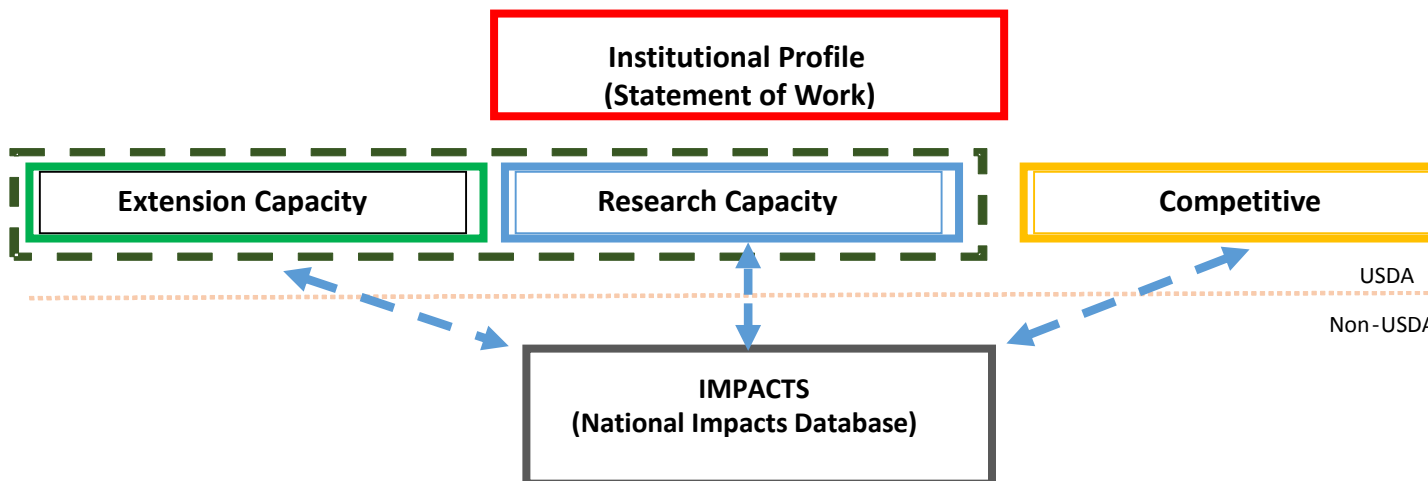
A Panel of Experts on the AREERA Plan of Work reporting process convened on June 16-18 to discuss improvements to the current reporting process. The Panel consisted of 14 members representing Research, Extension and NIFA. The Panel, with input from their respective regions and from NIFA program leaders, agreed that the current process is duplicative and burdensome. The Panel makes the following recommendations to NIFA so that the process may be streamlined in a way that reduces the reporting burden on the Land Grant Institutions as well as the review burden on NIFA National Program Leaders. The Panel also believes that this streamlining will improve data quality and result in a data collection that meets legislative requirements while also providing NIFA what it needs to continue to promote the effectiveness of the AREERA capacity funds.

The following recommendations are in draft form and will be vetted with the Panel members' regional leaders and constituencies before being presented to NIFA as final. All proposed changes will be made by the Regions to their respective representatives on the Panel. The final recommendations will be contained in a larger report that details the issues and logic that formed these recommendations. Report will be developed by the Panel over the next 60 days.

The following recommendations are classified under two categories: system-specific and general.

SYSTEM-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There should be one reporting system with a stable platform that has the elements depicted in the graphic below. The existing Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments reporting system should be eliminated concurrent with the introduction of the new system.



- a) In support of this recommendation, NIFA should invest in human capital and hardware/software to improve the current and future reporting system (or its replacement for the single system/database approach) and make plans to discontinue support of the older and less flexible POW platform. The “single system” approach should be developed in a way that allows for aggregation of all numerical data wherever possible; it should also be able to prepopulate qualitative/descriptive data wherever possible.
 - b) Concurrent with the recommendation above, technical issues currently present in REEport, including but not limited to the excessive time needed to upload and download documents, formatting issues, and the tendency for the system to crash should be addressed, especially if the REEport platform will be leveraged for the single system approach recommended here; the system needs to be a robust and high-performance platform.
 - c) The future system (whether REEport or other) should include the capability for advanced querying of all data elements and the ability to export data in desired formats.
2. The Institutional Profile module in the new system should contain those elements mandated by AREERA and other data elements deemed essential by NIFA, including:
- a) a Short Programmatic Overview of the submitting institution(s);
 - b) a Short Annual Programmatic Summary covering Research, Extension, and Integrated program and project accomplishments (the summary should highlight those programs and projects that have realized significant accomplishments and impacts in the previous year);
 - c) description of Merit and Scientific Review processes;
 - d) description of Stakeholder Input and utilization processes;
 - e) Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension components as required by AREERA;
 - f) a list of “planned programs” (or whatever they will be called in the new system).
3. The Institutional Profile module should be structured so that it may remain relatively unchanged from year to year and will repopulate annually for the institution; this results in a 5-year dynamic, rolling “plan” for all 1862 and 1890 Institutions (both Research and Extension).
- a) If an institution wishes to make changes to their profile annually, they should be able to do so (both add and subtract program elements), and a mechanism to highlight such changes for the NIFA reviewer should exist.

4. The listing of “planned programs” that is entered into the “Institutional Profile” should allow tagging to NIFA’s topic areas; this will allow entered data to be rolled up for NIFA’s use.
5. The Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules should function in a manner similar to how they are currently accounted for. The Extension Capacity reporting module should be developed to include planning and reporting related metrics needed by NIFA to assess progress and to promote the accomplishments of capacity-funded programs.
6. The Extension and Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules should be linked to the National Impacts Database (NID) so that users of the system are not required to enter impact statements that are already documented in the NID.
 - a. The potential for linking to the Excellence in Extension database should be explored as well in order to determine if there is any opportunity to further reduce duplicative reporting.
7. Participation in the National Impacts Database should be optional, not mandatory. The NID will be informed by the Extension and Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules of the single system. Language in the NID should be updated to link to NIFA’s topic areas so that NIFA may properly associate impacts to agency’s areas of focus.
8. Knowledge areas (KAs) and Subjects of Investigation (SOIs) should be expanded and/or modified to meet both Research and Extension’s needs.
9. NIFA should restore the flexibility of a state to report by institution (1862, 1890), organization (Research, Extension), or jointly.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

10. The following sub-groups should be created in order to ensure all recommendations of the Panel of Experts are carried out accurately and efficiently (note that a Panel Expert may serve on one or more sub-groups):
 - a) a sub-group to define the Extension Capacity program reporting module; the group will clearly define data fields/elements that need to be included in the new module;
 - b) a sub-group to operationalize the data elements and functionality of the “Institutional Profile;
 - c) a sub-group to identify new Knowledge Areas (KAs) and Subjects of Investigation (SOIs) for addition to NIFA’s Manual of Classification so that both Research and Extension can classify projects and programs accurately;

- d) other sub-groups as needed; for example, fiscal monitoring/tracking (the Panel of Experts will serve as a committee for determining when a new sub-group is required).
11. Reporting Deadlines: NIFA should keep all capacity reporting deadlines with the due dates that currently exist but should re-visit this issue once the new “single system concept” has been implemented (currently Feb 1 for Research REEport Financial Report; Mar 1 for Research Progress and Final Report; April 1 for all other capacity reporting).
 12. A permanent accountability and reporting track (akin to the fiscal track) for the National Extension and Research Administrative Officers' Conference (NERAOC) should be implemented. NIFA should send Representatives from the Planning, Accountability, and Reporting Staff (PARS) to the meeting annually so that feedback can be gained and improvements made to the database, by both sides, without waiting for the Panel of Experts to convene every five years.
 13. A commitment should be made by NIFA to work with Land Grant partners to ensure that the resultant system is fully searchable by (but not limited to) author, keyword, topic, programmatic classification, and location of work, and that the information within the modules will be effectively linked within the larger system.
 14. NIFA should strengthen the State Liaison Program to more effectively build and maintain relationships between program leaders and state institutions.
 - a) NIFA should clarify, standardize, and communicate the review criteria NPLs use to review programs/projects.
 - b) NIFA should clarify and communicate/educate its LGU partners how data are used to report out to various audiences and stakeholders.
 15. Non-AREERA programs, such as McIntire-Stennis, should not be included in the new reporting model proposed in these recommendations at this time, but the Panel acknowledges that the new “single system” approach, combined with NIFA’s grants modernization initiative, could eventually result in a framework that may be applied to all NIFA funding programs.