

**USDA
ARS**

National Program Handbook



Dedication

**This handbook is dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Allen R. Dedrick 1939 – 2009
Chief Engineer of the National Program Cycle**

National Program Handbook

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Foreword

ARS manages its research as a matrix, combining national priority setting with Area-managed excellence of research. This National Program Handbook is intended to serve as a clearinghouse for best practices across the matrix related to program and project management in ARS. This Handbook describes both what we do and why we do it. While it is not a policy and procedures document, the best practices do rely on an understanding of the accountability that various matrix parties have in managing ARS research. This Handbook resulted from interactions between the Office of National Programs (ONP) and the offices of the Area Directors and is available to everyone in ARS and will only exist in digital form on a SharePoint site. This Handbook is expected to evolve as program management changes. Its upkeep will be the responsibility of the Program Analysts in ONP and in the Area Offices. ONP will maintain the posted document.

The Handbook is the product of many minds, and I would like to thank each one for their careful and thoughtful approach to developing the Handbook. Particular thanks goes to Sharon Drumm who planned two ONP workshops that framed the document and worked with the Area Directors to coordinate the current development and editing of the Handbook. A dedicated group at ONP provided the dedicated work that made this possible: Marilyn Low, Kelly Baker, Ellen Buckley, Tracy Havermann, Rosetta Proctor, and Jill Stetka.

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Associate Administrator for National Programs
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How This Handbook Is Organized

The National Program Handbook is divided into five parts, the Introduction/Background and a section corresponding to each part of the National Program Cycle. Each is independent and allows for easy reference of the handbook as the need arises. We have included diagrams, examples of documents, and Web addresses to assist you in finding what you need to know as quickly as possible. Below is a quick look at the organization of the handbook.

- ✓ **Introduction to the National Program Management and Cycle:** The management of all ARS research programs is organized around a five-year National Program Cycle, consisting of four sequential phases (Input, Planning, Implementation, and Assessment) designed to ensure the relevance, quality, and impact of every ARS National Program. ARS uses a matrix management approach to coordinate these efforts between Headquarters and Area Offices.
- ✓ **Input:** The National Program Leaders (NPLs), working through multi-disciplinary National Program (NP) teams, define and articulate the scope of each program with input from customers, stakeholders, partners, ARS scientists, Areas, and the Administration. A prime mechanism used by the NP team to seek input is the NP workshop, conducted at the start of each program cycle. Technical and commodity-specific workshops are held for input throughout the cycle. Also, program leaders actively solicit input through professional relationships with the Administration, other government agencies, national organizations, and partners.
- ✓ **Planning:** Program and project planning, involving efforts by NPLs and field scientists, results in a series of documents defining research goals and priorities. NPLs define the ARS program and provide broad scientific direction to ARS scientists through the development of the National Program (NP) Strategic Vision and the Action Plan. The Action Plans serve as the central reference for defining the program's relevance and performance expectations, as well as the basis for NPLs to assign research objectives, personnel, and dollars to units in the field through Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memos (PDRAMs). Scientists, in turn, design their projects to meet the PDRAM's stated objectives, and the resulting Project Plans are peer reviewed by external reviewers through a rigorous process, managed by the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR).
- ✓ **Implementation:** After programs are planned, research is implemented at ARS' 100+ locations across the Nation and the world. Line managers, headed by the Area Director and followed by the Center or Laboratory Director and the Research Leader at the location, oversee the quality of science and performance. NPLs monitor and demonstrate performance at the program level through annual project and program reports, and have an ongoing coordination role.
- ✓ **Assessment:** ARS continually monitors the quality of its work to meet Federal requirements and ensure public accountability. In addition to responding to direct, specific Congressional inquiries, ARS regularly identifies accomplishments and major technology transfers in Annual Project Reports and NP Annual Reports. Also, toward the completion of every 5-year program cycle, each National Program's performance is evaluated by an external panel of customers and stakeholders against the goals and outcomes of the NP Action Plan.

Icons and Other Conventions Used in This Book

Icons

What's an icon, and why are they all over the handbook? Icons are graphics that are used to give you a quick clue about what you are about to read. Icons will help you locate a quick tip, remember something very important, or indicate a 'best practice'.



Best Practices: You will find an energy efficient light bulb icon located next to a best practice that will help you more efficiently complete your task.



Caution Sign: This icon is used to indicate possible pitfalls that could hinder the successful outcome of the subject being referenced.



Additional Information: Our information manual icon can be found next to hyperlinks for the full-text documents that are referenced in the handbook. You may require more information than what has been included.



Under Construction: The construction sign icon is used in sections of the handbook that are not quite completed, or are still awaiting feedback solicited from users.

Conventions

To help you more easily find certain types of information in this book, the following conventions are used:

- ✓ **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the keywords in bulleted lists, in headings for different sections of the handbook, and as the action part of numbered steps.
- ✓ Blue Underlined Text is used for Web addresses.

Vertical boxes on the right side of a page are used to indicate the 'take home' on a particular subject, or the main points of the preceding handbook section.

...at a Glance



Introduction to the National Program Management and Cycle

The following pages detail the history of ARS National Program development and the 5-year program cycle that resulted, as well as a description of how the program is managed by Agency leadership.

Background: Emergence of the Present National Program Organization

Senior leaders in ARS began a move to the present concept of National Programs in 1993. ARS leaders realized that to remain on the leading edge of agricultural research, the Agency approach to interdisciplinary, nationally collaborative research had to be updated. With better national coordination of ARS' considerable resources, the Agency could more effectively focus on significant problems of high national priority. In 1993, two Federal policy and regulatory requirements provided increased impetus for this development: the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), requiring all Federal institutions to be accountable to Congress and U.S. taxpayers, and an Executive Order to increase customer service standards. The Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 demanded further accountability, mandating the establishment of procedures to perform scientific peer reviews of all research projects conducted by ARS.

Over the next few years, a working group developed recommendations on the issue and held a series of "visioning" conferences to gain input from ARS customers and stakeholders. Findings produced through these activities (it was also through this process that the first ARS Strategic Plan was developed) helped ARS determine that by making substantial changes to the organization and management of its research programs, the Agency could achieve the desired accountability.

ARS revamped the way it managed its research portfolio; the 1,000-plus research projects were aligned into National Programs that encompass all the research of the Agency. There are now 21 National Programs grouped into four program areas: Animal Production and Protection, Crop Production and Protection, Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems, and Nutrition, Food Safety, and Quality. Each of the four program areas is managed by a Deputy Administrator, and each program is led by a team of National Program Leaders (NPLs). Currently, some 30 NPLs are responsible for planning and developing research strategies to address critical issues affecting American agriculture.

Increasing Communication within and outside ARS

By definition, the planning and implementation of National Program research was designed to be a participatory process requiring significant input from the broad sources of expertise and experience within and outside the Agency. Through coordinated efforts that emphasize communication with valued partners and scientists, ARS could ensure that public resources are expended in a targeted and synchronized fashion on scientifically and programmatically relevant problems.

Further, by gathering input from outside users of ARS research, the Agency could meet the ever-increasing demand for public accountability. ARS began, increasingly and more intentionally, to solicit input from the Administration, regulatory and action

Introduction to the National Program Organization and Cycle, cont.

agencies, producers and producer groups, university communities, and non-governmental organizations, often through face-to-face exchanges. By accounting for the needs and priority issues of these customers, stakeholders, and partners, ARS can, in turn, develop responsive research that emphasizes meeting short-term emergencies or requirements as well as long-term sustained research to address problems of regional, national, and international scope and importance.

National Programs Purpose at a Glance

Enhance the Agency's ability to solve problems by intensifying scientific quality and purpose.

Provide management framework that maximizes the relevance, quality, and impact of every research project in ARS.

Coordinate and leverage dollars and expertise.

Increase communication within ARS and with customers, stakeholders, and partners.

Target resources across the nation and across disciplines on problems of high National priority.

Empower scientists as part of a national research effort aimed at effectively fulfilling the ARS research mission.

As the new National Program management was implemented, ARS scientists were also encouraged to collaborate more closely with the Office of National Programs (formerly National Program Staff), gaining first-hand knowledge of priority research needs, helping develop research plans to accomplish research to meet those needs, and shaping their own research projects to contribute to the goals of those plans. Area offices/line management should encourage this communication between the scientists and ONP. ARS research projects benefit greatly from increased opportunities for coordination and communication among scientists, resulting in multi- and interdisciplinary research approaches, and Project Plans targeted to achieve the National goals.

Emphasis on communication and coordination ultimately ensures that the physical, financial, and human resources of ARS are deployed appropriately to address high-priority agricultural, food, and environmental research needs of the

Nation.

Implementation of the Five-Year National Program Cycle

The overarching objectives of the National Programs are **relevance**, **quality**, and **impact** of ARS research, all important elements of improved accountability. Research must be **relevant** to the highest priority problems, the goals and outcomes of the research should significantly **impact** the problems, and the science must meet the highest standards of **quality**. To ensure that these objectives could be achieved, ARS implemented the National Program Cycle, a cycle of phases embodying a series of recurring activities.

As shown in the diagram on page x, the 5-year program management cycle illustrates the activities by which ARS conducts its research: program planning and priority setting, peer review, project implementation, program coordination, and assessment. The cycle ties these activities together in a recurring 5-year sequence to ensure effective and efficient program and project management within ARS.

Introduction to the National Program Organization and Cycle, cont.

The three objectives, which appear around the outside—Relevance, Quality (Prospective and Retrospective), and Performance—represent what a research organization must promote to be successful. The descriptors on the inside—Program Planning and Priority Setting, Scientific Merit Peer Review, Project Implementation and Coordination, and Program Assessment—prescribe the actions that the Agency undertakes carefully, thoroughly, and with outside review to demonstrate that our research is of the highest quality.

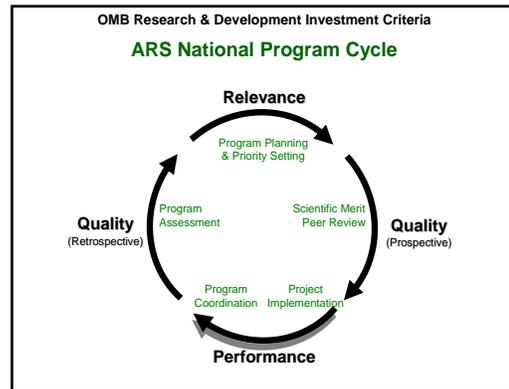


Figure 1: ARS National Program Cycle

Matrix Management: Roles and Responsibilities of ARS Leadership

To plan, implement, coordinate, and account for its research, ARS utilizes a matrix management approach. The matrix is composed of vertical (line) management organized by geographic Areas, and horizontal (staff) management organized by research programs (Office of National Programs), functions (budgeting, information technology, technology transfer, security), and business processes (administrative and financial management). The Administrator and the executive leadership team (Administrator’s Council) of ARS provide leadership to the matrix management system in accordance with the ARS Strategic Plan, National Program Actions Plans, and established operating policies.

In the matrix management system, each person in the organization needs to interact in a timely manner and at the appropriate time with several managers at different levels within the organizational hierarchy. Those designated as having lead responsibilities are expected to solicit and receive inputs from others in the matrix prior to executing their responsibilities. Conversely, those designated as having an input role are expected to participate proactively and/or in response to requests from those with lead responsibilities prior to the execution of the task. The matrix system maximizes the input received during decision-making processes, but it requires a common understanding of the lead roles and responsibilities of line and staff managers to ensure efficiency and success.

The Matrix at a Glance

Role of ONP:

- Program relevance
- Program coordination
- Program impact

Role of Line Management:

- Prospective quality assurance
- Project and resource management
- Project Impact



Further information on the management of ARS research programs can be found in the document [“Linking Priorities and Performance.”](#)

The following pages contain a series of diagrams illustrating the roles in National Program processes: input gathering, planning, implementation, and assessment activities, described in detail in the subsequent sections of this document.

Overview of National Program Processes

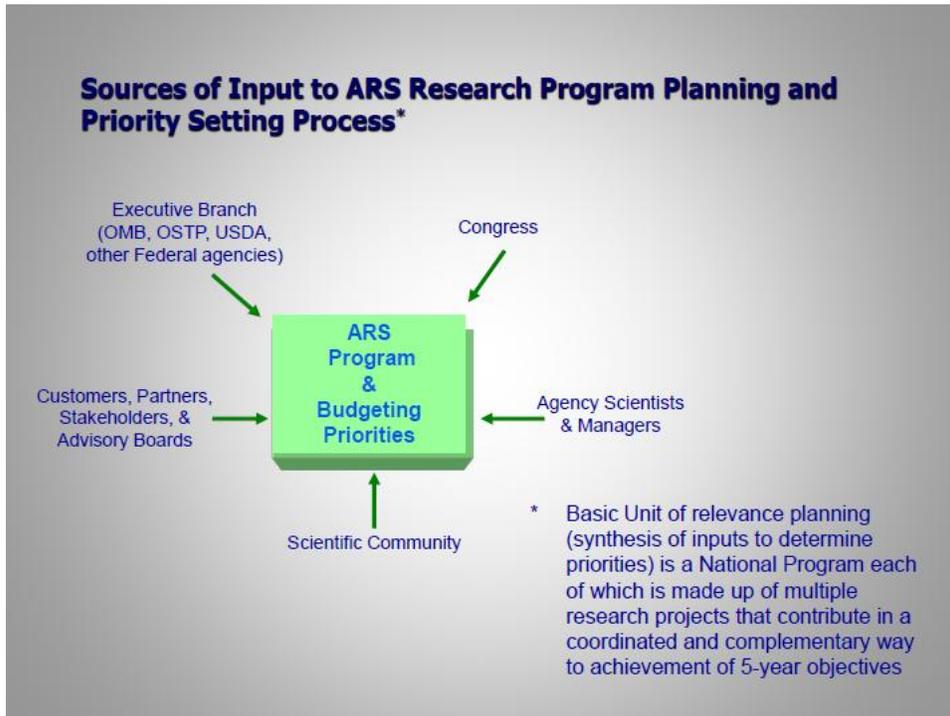


Figure 1: Gathering Input

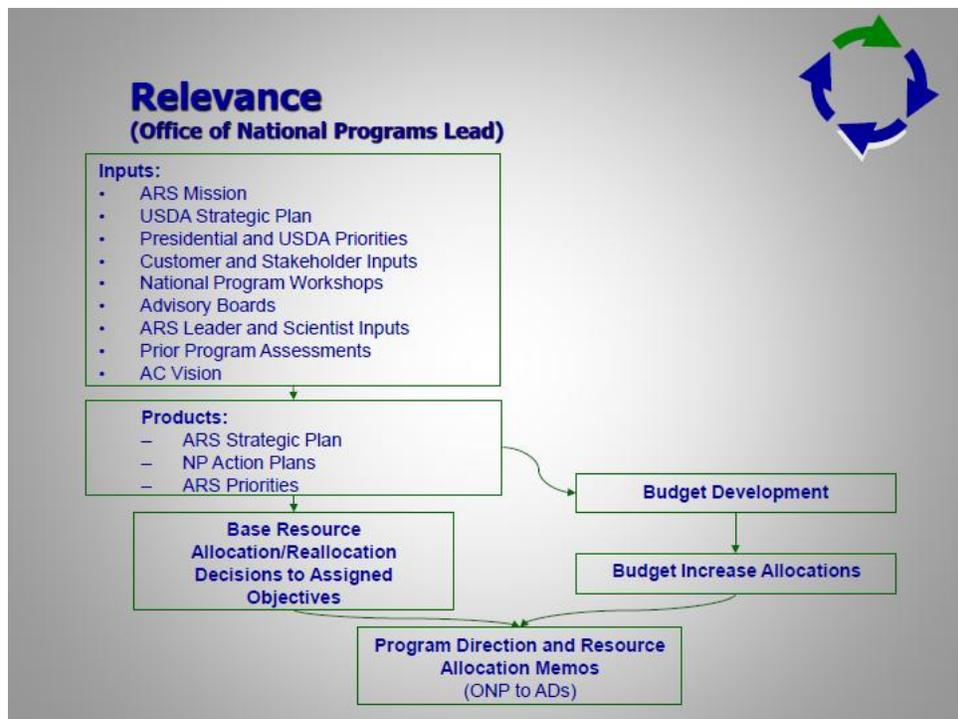


Figure 2: Planning Process to Ensure Relevance

Overview of National Program Processes, cont.



Figure 3: Implementing Quality Research

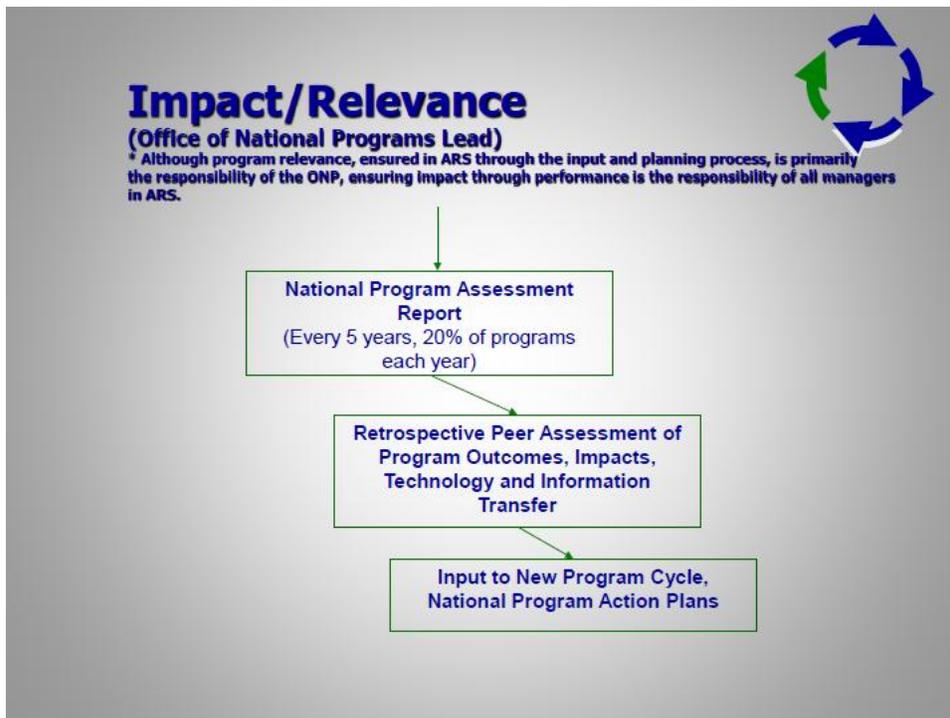


Figure 4: Assessing Impact

NATIONAL PROGRAM INPUT

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5) [NATIONAL PROGRAM INPUT RESOURCES](#)



Introduction to Input Phase of NP Cycle

Research in ARS derives part of its strength from its responsive nature. At the National Program level, senior program managers meet with customers, stakeholders, and partners; participate in Federal and Departmental working groups and initiatives; and interact with Congress to build a strong understanding of national issues in agriculture and science. At the

Relationships at a Glance

Customers: Individuals or organizations directly using ARS-developed knowledge, technologies, or services.

Stakeholders: All customers, as well as organizations or individuals with an interest in the work of ARS.

Partners (and cooperators): Organizations that ARS works with collaboratively.

Area level, senior line managers also meet with customers, stakeholders, and partners and participate in regional, state, and local working groups to build a strong understanding of regional and local issues. At the local level, line managers and scientists have strong ties to customers, stakeholders, and partners and a strong understanding of the issues facing producers and industry. One of the key responsibilities of SYs is to interact with their collaborators. These interactions often reflect the realistic feedback from outside of ARS. Therefore, SYs are encouraged to relay their discussions and findings to ONP and Area offices. Each type of input combines to produce the responsive program and project.

Although input from these constituencies is ongoing both formally and informally throughout the program cycle, the beginning of the cycle marks the consolidation of all input into the NP Action Plan by the National Program Leaders. The largest formal face-to-face input mechanism, the National Program workshop, immediately precedes the writing of that Action Plan.

ARS customers, stakeholders, and partners include:

- Producers—farmers and ranchers
- Industry and other agricultural processors
- Consumers
- The Administration
- USDA action and regulatory agencies
- Other government agencies
- Congress
- Non-Governmental groups (e.g., commodity groups and advisory groups)
- State and local governments
- National and international trade organizations
- University scientists
- Private researchers
- Government laboratories

Introduction to Input Phase, cont.

Some formal inputs to the research program and project planning processes include:

- [USDA Strategic Plan](#)
- [ARS Strategic Plan](#)
- National Program Research Area Vision Statements
- [National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics \(NAREEE\) Advisory Board](#)

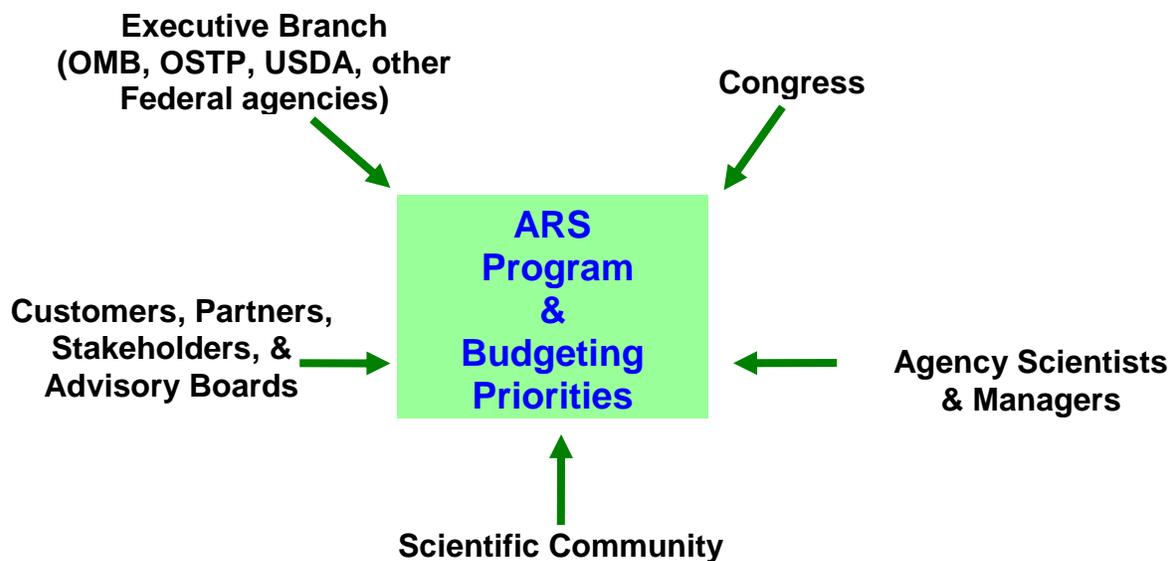


Figure 1: Sources of Input to ARS Program Planning and Priority Setting Process



Planning and Conducting a NP Workshop

The program development process begins with gathering input, which, for most National Programs, is largely accomplished through the NP workshop. Held once every 5 years, the NP workshops provide a structured format for receiving input from customers, stakeholders, and partners. They are designed to define specific researchable problems aimed at meeting high

priority needs within the agricultural community. The workshops also provide an opportunity for ARS research scientists and program managers to interact with and develop a rapport with customers, stakeholders, partners, non-ARS scientists, and representatives from other agencies. Research collaborations among Agency scientists are often developed during these times.

NP Workshops at a Glance

Purpose: Provide a formal face-to-face mechanism to obtain input from customers on priority research needs.

Originator(s): NP team.

Time Frame: Beginning of the program cycle immediately preceding the writing of the NP Action Plan.

Audience: NP customers, stakeholders, and partners.

Approval Requirements: DA, Associate Administrator, USDA Chief Financial Officer, and contracting officials, as needed.

The NP team organizes, conducts, and summarizes the workshop. Area Offices should be invited to every NP workshop, and the NP team should schedule the meeting dates to avoid conflicting with other meetings in which line management may be participating, even though it may not always be possible for someone from each Office to attend. The Area Director and Area Leadership team will decide how best to have line management and scientific personnel represented at the workshop. In order to maintain a good relationship with our customers/stakeholders, it is vital not to overwhelm them with a huge ARS presence in the breakout groups. Once the number of attending customers is known, the number of ARS attendees must not exceed that, though the SYs who are not able to attend the customer portion of the workshop should

be welcomed to attend the ARS part in order to take part in Action Plan development.

The role of the Area Director (or Area representative) is to support the planning process and show solidarity with the program side, and to interact with National Program Leaders, scientists, and customers, stakeholders, and partners. In addition, the Area Director or other senior leaders from the hosting geographic region may agree to “welcome” the participants to the workshop, and personnel from that Office are often ideal for providing logistical and facilitation support at sites away from headquarters.



National Program Leaders can take advantage of useful resources and expertise by involving the Area Offices in their workshop. Area Offices, Research Leaders, and Center Directors should be consulted for identifying key stakeholders that may have interest in attending a workshop, especially if producers and other underrepresented customers are lacking. Each Area Office maintains a database of customer and stakeholder contact information. This may be a valuable resource for identifying key people that should be invited to a workshop.

Planning and Conducting a Workshop, cont.

Lead scientists that will contribute to the next NP Action Plan should be represented at the workshop. Participation in the workshop allows the scientists to hear first-hand the challenges and issues facing customers, stakeholders and partners from across the Nation, and strengthens professional relationships across ARS locations.



ARS scientists and Research Leaders are great resources for planning the workshop. NPLs may choose a group of ARS scientists to help them develop the agenda and subsequently choose the Action Plan writing team.

After the customer interaction portion of the workshop, scientists should stay for the final session of the workshop, generally set aside for internal planning and design of the Action Plan. After the workshop, Area Directors will have an important role to play in identifying the physical resources to carry out the Action Plan.

A summary of customer discussions and meeting outcomes should be shared among Research Leaders, Area Directors, and National Program Leaders. In this way, communication can be coordinated and input leveraged on behalf of our customers, who may assume they are speaking to *all* of ARS.



A list of upcoming workshops is available on the [AD/ONP Sharepoint site](#).

the matrix bottom line: the NP team has the responsibility for planning and executing the NP Workshops. Senior line managers are a valuable source of input and should be involved in the workshops when available.



Things to Consider when Planning a National Program Workshop

- The primary purpose of the workshop is to gain customer/stakeholder/partner input and involvement, so structure the workshop with that purpose in mind. Talk *with* the participants, not *at* the participants. Engage them early in breakout sessions. Let them know how important their input is.
- In the opening session, set the stage for the workshop with clear and concise background information, providing a “big picture” look at the National Program structure. Pre-meeting distribution of information could save time during the opening session.
- Clearly define to all participants the anticipated outcome/product from the workshop and explain how it will be used to further the National Program.
- Many adults are visual learners. Material should be presented in written form—on paper, on a board, on flip charts—not read.
- Breakout groups are an ideal format for gathering participant input. Breakout groups allow for maximum input and maximum interaction among participants. Room arrangement is critical to quality interaction—small groups are optimal and it is best to avoid classroom style seating.
- In addition to general questions about what research priorities are most important to customers, it can be very helpful to ask what specific products or information they need from ARS, and what the impact of those products would be on their operation. This information can be used to develop metrics by which a program’s progress can be measured.
- Provide written instructions to breakout groups and recorders regarding how to perform their tasks to ensure that participant input is recorded as it was stated and not edited by the recorder.
- Capture participant input that relates to other National Programs and then share it with the appropriate NP team.
- Structure the workshop to ensure the participants experience some sense of accomplishment.



Workshop organizers are encouraged to create a meeting Web site to facilitate planning and communication among key workshop participants. The OCIO Web branch is a useful resource for developing such a site. A good example is available at <http://www.ars.usda.gov/meetings/Energy07/>.

Workshop Planning Timeline

All activities are performed by the NP Team, except for those identified specifically as Program Analyst functions.

9-12 Months Prior to Workshop

- Estimate the number of ARS and customer/stakeholder attendees. This information will be needed to specify meeting requirements for hotels.
- Discuss several possible workshop dates and sites. Dates are determined in part by Panel Chair availability; sites are determined by expense to ARS travelers, agency restrictions, and convenience of the customers/stakeholders. Also consider climate/season, holidays, etc.
- Check for conflicts on other upcoming meetings that may impact the NP team and key line management participants.
- Prepare a preliminary timeline of events.
- **(PA)** Prepare meeting requirements and send out Request for Proposals (RFP) to hotels in the proposed locations. (See Site Justification box).
- **(PA)** Review proposals and select hotels that meet requirements. Prepare site comparison spreadsheet for NP team to select possible locations. Analysis should include room block cost, meeting rooms, catering, audiovisuals, and local transportation for several of the destinations that meet requirements (see box).
- Prepare preliminary list of ARS attendees. This information will be needed to complete the ONP Workshop Approval Form and the Department's Justification Package.
- **(PA)** Complete ONP Workshop Approval Form for DA and AA approval. This should include meeting goals, objectives, and potential outcomes as defined by the NP Team.
- **(PA)** Complete required Federal Contracting Documentation for Contracting Specialist approval.
- Consult Research Leaders and Center Directors, Area Staff, the Office of Technology Transfer, and the Office of International Research Programs to identify key stakeholders that may have interest in attending.

Site Justification Package at a Glance (Sample Docs)

- [Request for Proposal](#)
- [ONP Workshop Approval Form](#)
- [ARS Conference or Training Event Request](#)
- [Site Cost Comparison](#)
- [Hotel Justification Memo](#)
- [Conference Planning P&P](#)
- [BEO](#)



The [AD/ONP Sharepoint site](#) contains recommendations for identifying an appropriate meeting site. Information about domestic per diem rates can be found at the [GSA's Travel Management](#) site.

Workshop Planning Timeline cont.



6-9 Months Prior to Workshop

- **(PA)** Review and finalize hotel contract. Check especially for:
 - Correct number of breakout rooms and locations
 - Dates and number of rooms in room block (should be a conservative estimate)
 - Fees/fines for not filling room block
 - Cutoff date for making room reservations
 - Special concessions
 - Payment arrangements for room reservations and for catering
- **(PA)** Send contract to Procurement official for signing.
- **(PA)** Prepare a preliminary worksheet of Meeting Cost per Research Project and send to Area Offices along with a letter explaining the charges. (Each research project in the NP will be assessed after completion of the Workshop)
- **(PA)** Prepare invitation list/database.
- **(PA)** Send a “Save the Date” memo to potential attendees to make advance travel arrangements.
- **(PA)** Contact OAA Program Analyst who maintains Web presence in order to update the workshop calendar on the AD/ONP Sharepoint site.



Management units should be encouraged not only to nominate but also to **sponsor** workshop participants whenever possible.



Customer/Stakeholder to ARS participation should be (at minimum) a 2:1 ratio. The ONP customer database (see page 10) can be used to generate a list of potential invitees.

3-6 Months Prior to Workshop

- Establish a preliminary agenda.
- **(PA)** Determine whether Federal travelers are exempt from room tax and [gather necessary information for tax-exempt status](#).
- **(PA)** Prepare invitation package (see box).
- **(PA)** Send invitations.
- **(PA)** Identify and contact facilitators, recorders, speakers, and other key participants.

Invitation Package at a Glance (Sample Docs)

- [Agenda](#)
- [Purpose and Expected Outcomes](#)
- [Customer Input Request](#)
- **Invitation Letter**
 - [Customer/Stakeholder](#)
 - [Speaker](#)
 - [ARS](#)
- **Response Forms**
 - [Customer/Stakeholder](#)
 - [ARS](#)

Workshop Planning Timeline, cont.

1-3 Months Prior to Workshop

- **(PA)** Send out follow-up note to those who have not responded yet.
- **(PA)** Send out follow-up to registrants with updated materials.
- **(PA)** Determine on-site administrative requirements: fax machines, signage, etc.
- Hold conference calls with facilitators to set final agenda.
- Prepare topics and templates for breakout sessions.
- Arrange for people driving in to bring supplies (printer, flip charts, LCDs, laptops, etc.).

2-4 Weeks Prior to Workshop

- Prepare a summary of Customer Input Request responses for distribution at workshop.
- Finalize agenda and handouts.
- **(PA)** Select banquet menus and meeting room set-ups.
- **(PA)** Determine what will be shipped and coordinate shipping arrangements (some hotels charge for storing boxes).
- Prepare breakout room assignments for participants (if not self-selecting).
- **(PA)** Assemble on-site collateral materials: registration, program, badges, etc.
- **(PA)** Prepare above materials to be shipped to meeting site.
- Prepare annotated agenda with tasks and roles for key meeting leaders and planners.
- Hold final conference call with planning team to establish roles and responsibilities.
- Finalize breakout questions/topics to ensure appropriate response.

Planning Team Package at a Glance (Sample Docs)

- [Annotated Meeting Agenda](#)
- [Breakout Session Template](#)
- **Facilitator Resources**
 - [Sample Breakout Instructions](#)
 - [Facilitator Handbook](#)
 - [Facilitators' Roles](#)



Establish a Planning Team comprised of scientists who are important to the National Program (to include facilitators, recorders, speakers, and other key participants).



Workshop Planning Timeline, cont.

1 Week Prior to Workshop

- **(PA)** Get a Banquet Event Order from meeting site and check details:
 - rooming list, VIP list, and meeting room setups
 - audio visual requirements, food and beverage requirements, billing instructions, sales tax exemption requirements, etc.
- **(PA)** Ship materials to meeting site.
- **(PA)** Confirm with local attendees what equipment they are bringing.
- **(PA)** Call hotel with final count of attendees (this should be a conservative number). Be sure to reduce the numbers for ARS-only sessions and include only a few customers.

Arrival Day

- **(PA)** Meet with hotel department heads and review last minute changes to schedule.
- Walk through program on-site/review set-up details.
- **(PA)** Check materials/supplies shipped in advance.
- **(PA)** Set up registration table and materials if possible.
- Meet with moderators, facilitators, recorders, etc., to review instructions and expectations.

After the Workshop

- **(PA)** Send thank you notes to participants and facilitators.
- **(PA)** Update participant list and post to Web site.
- **(PA)** Add presentations to meeting Web site.
- **(PA)** Add Assessment Report Executive Summary to NP home page.
- Hold a “Lessons Learned” discussion at ONP Staff Meeting.
- **(PA)** Complete fund transfers. (~one month after workshop)
- Finalize meeting product (Strategic Vision, Action Plan, etc.) and send to participants and other interested parties.

Post-Workshop Documents at a Glance (Sample Docs)

- *Thank-you Notes*
 - [ARS participants](#)
 - [Customer](#)
 - [Facilitator/Planning Team](#)
 - [Speakers](#)
 - [Hotel](#)
- [Fund Transfer worksheet](#)
- [Post-workshop Evaluation form](#)

Other Input Mechanisms

NP Workshops generally provide the primary forum for input gathering, but other mechanisms exist. These are critical to ensuring that the voices of those unable to attend workshops can be heard and that the communication lines remain open throughout the 5-year cycle.

Questionnaires for Soliciting Customer Feedback

It is important to have a mechanism for gathering written input from stakeholders, partners and customers that are not able to attend a workshop. One way is to include a questionnaire with workshop invitation materials and encourage customers to return it to ARS whether or not they plan to attend the workshop. Some sample questions follow:

- Please provide a 1-3 sentence description of your organization.
- Relative to (e.g. *bioenergy*), what are your top problems and what research products/information and technology (or what researchable questions to which you need answers) would help you solve these problems?
- What do you think ARS' top (e.g. *aquaculture*) research priorities should be (no more than five, please)?
- What might ARS do to serve its customers/stakeholders better?
- What, in particular, about ARS would lead you to recommend ARS to someone else looking for similar research products?

The input received from the questionnaire should be summarized and presented at the workshop as a handout, or as a short talk. The resulting discussion will ensure that these concerns are considered when developing the Action Plan.

Location Reviews

In addition to their participation in National Program workshops, location and Area Staff interact regularly with local, regional, and national stakeholders that have a vested interest in the research ongoing at a particular location. Location reviews can provide a key opportunity for this interaction; as the name indicates, location reviews are on-site reviews carried out by professionals in their area of expertise. While the purpose of the reviews is to focus on research performance, quality, capacity, and leadership, the resulting reports typically contain information related to program direction with specific information related to the capacity of a location to conduct relatively specific research. Reports also contain information related to local and regional research needs. Because these reviews are typically done prior to the initiation of the new project cycle, the reports should be a valuable source of information related to the Action Plan development (see *Planning Phase*).

Location or Research Unit focused workshops provide an option for engaging customers, stakeholders, and partners in helping develop a vision and mission for the unit. With the National Programs as a framework and unique capacity/expertise in mind, these workshops help identify problems and priorities that are being addressed by the location/unit. Problems that could be better addressed elsewhere in the Agency may also be identified.



Cultivating and Expanding Customer/Stakeholder Base

In order to maintain the customer/stakeholder interest in a National Program that is created at the Customer Workshop, it is important to maintain regular contact with ARS customers and stakeholders. Maintaining close relationships with these groups can provide an important, ongoing source of input. There are many ways to keep communication lines open.

Some examples of stakeholder communications include:

- Providing workshop attendees with a summary of the workshop proceedings immediately afterward. The summary can be posted on the meeting Web site and an e-mail sent to announce that workshop results are online.
- Using the Assessment Report Executive Summary and Action Plan, when it is finished, as communication tools. The NP team can send an e-mail with a link to where the documents are posted and ask for comments.
- Sending NP Annual Reports (see page 53) and newsletters to keep stakeholders informed of the latest accomplishments of the National Program. Annual Report information can be incorporated within each Problem Area of the Action Plan and sent out annually.
- Holding periodic conference calls between National Program/Research Unit liaison groups and their stakeholders to keep them informed and get input.



A simple way to produce a professional-quality newsletter is to keep a log of the [ARS Daily Feed](#) articles for each National Program and send them out periodically (quarterly, yearly, etc.) to stakeholders interested in that program.

Already-scheduled commodity, producer, or other stakeholder group meetings can provide other opportunities to interact with ARS stakeholders. It may be feasible to hold a smaller customer “listening session” in conjunction with the larger meetings, either by making room on the agenda for the ARS meeting, or by holding the smaller session after the official meeting has ended.

Cultivating and Expanding Customer/Stakeholder Base, cont.



Another opportunity for ARS to expand its customer base will soon be available through the ONP Customer/Stakeholder database, currently being created. This database will provide a central database for staff to update customer contact information only once, rather than requiring them to search and update multiple data repositories. This database will be used for a variety of purposes:

- Identify workshop invitees and potential panel members for NP assessments
- Track ONP historical information, such as customer participation on panels/workshops/symposia
- Connect more frequently with stakeholders to keep them informed of ARS activities and successes beyond the customer workshop



Contact information for ARS customers and stakeholders should be updated routinely in the ONP Customer/Stakeholder Database. After any event that involves contact with stakeholders, NPLs should bring all of the business cards and contact information they collect to the keeper of their database so that those contacts can be captured and added to mailing lists as soon as possible. The database should identify the level of the customer's interest (broad interest in the program, or specific interest in one component) where possible.

In addition to maintaining communication with existing customers, it is important to identify and sustainably engage stakeholder groups who are currently underrepresented at National Program workshops. These groups have the potential to present alternative interests and views that can help ARS to identify important new research needs and priorities. Additionally, many stakeholders will have knowledge, networks, and resources that can add significant value to the National Program.

In order to increase our stakeholder base, it is necessary to first identify all interest groups, institutions, individuals, organizations, and authorities whose input is critical. ARS scientists are a good source of stakeholder contacts. These groups include:

- Active stakeholders (scientists, Land-grant Universities, industry, etc.)
- Beneficiaries (producers, agri-business, commodity groups, distributors, etc.)
- Individuals and groups located in a region that is impacted by the National Program
- Those holding an influential position
- Consumers, trade groups, bio-security and homeland security organizations, and others affected by ARS research
- ARS Scientists



A guest book with a forum for questions about areas of interest can be set up on a National Program Web page that will give interested parties an opportunity to become customers and be invited to a workshop (see page 15). The NP team can use the requests posted to this page to assess the extent and breadth of current stakeholder interactions.



Cultivating and Expanding Customer/Stakeholder Base, cont.

The screenshot shows the USDA Agricultural Research Service website. At the top left is the USDA logo and text: "United States Department Of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service". At the top right is the ARS logo. Below the logos is a horizontal banner with several small images: a pig, strawberries, a person, a field, a landscape, a person, and sunflowers. Below the banner is a navigation bar with links: "Home", "About ARS", "Help", "Contact Us", "En Español". Below the navigation bar are two links: "Printable Version" and "E-mail this page".

Search

Enter Keywords

- Advanced Search
- Search Tips

Browse By Subject

- Research
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- People & Places
- News & Events
- Partnering
- Careers

You are here:

Generic Form: Study and Event Registration

OMB 0518-0032 (06/2009)

Name:

Email:

Address1:

Address2:

City:

State:

Event Name:

Event Date:

Study Name:

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency cannot conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0518-0032. The time required to complete this information is estimated to vary from one to five minutes with an average of three minutes per response, including time for reviewing instructions, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Department of Agriculture, Clearance Officer, OIRM, Room 404-W, Washington, DC 20250, and to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget.

Last Modified: 10/11/2006

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Figure 1: Sample Guest Registration Form

NATIONAL PROGRAM PLANNING

Contents at a Glance

- 1) **INTRODUCTION TO NATIONAL PROGRAM PLANNING:**
Strategic Visions, Action Plans, PDRAMs, and Project Plans
- 2) **NP STRATEGIC VISIONS AND ACTION PLANS**
 - Strategic Vision Guidance and Format
 - Action Plan Guidance and Format
- 3) **PDRAMs AND PROJECT PLANS:**
 - Background and Instructions
 - Peer Review PDRAM Description
 - Peer Review PDRAM Template
 - Project Plan Guidance and Format
 - Instructions for Project Plan Development
- 4) **[NATIONAL PROGRAM PLANNING RESOURCES](#)**

Introduction to National Program Planning

The planning of ARS research can be divided generally into two parts: **program planning** and **project planning**. **Program planning**, beginning with the development of the NP Strategic Vision and Action Plan and culminating in the Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memo (PDRAM), is the responsibility of the Office of National Programs (ONP), specifically the National Program Leader(s) (NPL) responsible for the National Program. Meanwhile, **project planning**, involving development of the Project Plan, is the responsibility of field scientists in consultation with line managers. Oversight of project planning and quality is the responsibility of the Area Director. Despite this division of oversight, all parties play a vital role in each aspect of program and project development, and should be consulted and have input throughout the processes.

NP Program Planning begins formally with the development of the NP Strategic Vision and Action Plan. The Strategic Vision, generally written before the NP Workshop, defines the purpose and scope of the National Program. As its name suggests, it provides a vision for what the program is expected to accomplish in the future, and establishes broad goals consistent with the NP mission within the program's capacity for implementation. The Strategic Vision also provides the basis from which progress can be measured, and can serve as a useful starting point to solicit input during NP Workshops.

Building on the Strategic Vision, the Action Plan responds to the input obtained during NP Workshops to define the actions ARS will take to achieve the mission and goals of the National Program and the locations that will be responsible for carrying out the work. It contains a list of problems to be addressed and a description, in a resource section, of where each part of the research will be implemented. Action Plans should also identify targets for the next 5-year National Program Assessment. As such, they provide a key source of information not only for project development and implementation, but also for facilitating project review and assessment of the National Programs. Scientists who contribute to the National Program are consulted during the process and may be asked to assist in the writing and formulation of the Action Plan.



NPLs can post the Action Plan at the ONP/AD SharePoint site, and invite the Area Office to begin contributing to the resource plan for the National Program. A site can also be created for field scientists to provide input on the Action Plan.



Introduction to National Program Planning (cont.)

To transfer the program mission and direction to the field and to allocate resources to the program in a coordinated fashion, the National Program team uses a *Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memo* (PDRAM). The PDRAM includes a Project Title, a statement of relevance to the Action Plan, objectives of the research, source of funds and funding level, and other information, as necessary. PDRAMs are standard in format and content across all National Programs, although flexibility exists for special circumstances. Objectives are written to an appropriate degree of specificity: enough to be achievable, yet broad enough to allow flexibility and creativity in research design. Program and line management discussions prior to the issuance of a PDRAM to Area Directors will facilitate the issuance of strong, appropriate objectives and adequate resources to meet them.

The Lead Scientist uses the approved PDRAM objectives to prepare the Project Plan. Preparing a Project Plan is a multi-step process, involving responsibilities shared among the project team (Lead Scientist and research team), Research Leader, Center/Institute/Laboratory Director, and Area Director, with input from ONP, to create a quality Project Plan. Throughout the process, ONP staff and Area Office staff operate interdependently to ensure the achievement of relevant and quality research with impact.

National Program Planning Documents at a Glance

Strategic Vision: Developed by NP team, provides scope and vision for the National Program.

Action Plan: Developed by NP team, specifies research needs within a specific National Program to fulfill the NP Strategic Plan.

Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memo (PDRAM): Developed by NPL, defines research objectives of a given project and their relevance to the NP Action Plan.

Project Plan: Developed by scientist, details the research need, objectives, hypotheses, experimental approaches, contingencies, and collaborations needed to accomplish the planned research, and the milestones and products expected to result.

NP Strategic Visions and Action Plans

National Program planning begins with the preparation of the NP Strategic Vision. Written by the NP team, the Strategic Vision provides the scope and vision of the National Program, and contains the main research goals or program priorities. In most cases, the vision is drafted before the National Program Workshop, with consideration given to the progress of the previous cycle's work, the comments of the Assessment Panel, and any future research needs. The vision can then be presented at the workshop as a starting point for discussion, and posted online on the main research page for the relevant National Program. In this way, it can provide a quick reference for customers, stakeholders, and partners interested in a fundamental understanding of the research contained in the program and the ARS vision for that particular research area. The vision should be written in language suitable for an informed customer or stakeholder, its primary audience.

After the National Program (NP) Workshop has been held and input has been gathered, the NP team will consider and compile input from the workshop and other sources (see *Input* section) for use in developing the National Program (NP) Action Plan. The Action Plan, a dynamic document written jointly by the SYs and the NP team, and routinely updated by the NP team, contains a list of problems to be addressed and defines what research will be done (and where) to address those problems and fulfill the program vision detailed in the NP Strategic Vision. The Action Plan also sets forth the goals by which the National Program will be assessed in the final phase of the program cycle.



The *ARS Strategic Plan for 2006-2011* is available at the following address:
www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/00000000/ARSStrategicPlan2006-2011.pdf.



NP Strategic Vision Guidance and Format

The NP Strategic Vision includes the following elements:

- The **Mission Statement** clearly defines the purpose of the National Program. The Mission Statement includes a reference to the goals and objectives of the USDA-ARS Strategic Plan.
- **Program Vision and Relevance Statements**
 - Program Vision succinctly describes how the world will be different when program goals are achieved, e.g., Microsoft's early vision: "a PC on every desk."
 - Relevance defines how the program derives its legitimacy and how customers and stakeholders will benefit from the products.
- **Program Priorities** for each program component identify the key research goals associated with the mission of the program.
- **Anticipated Outcomes** identify long-term measures of the program's impact.

The NP Strategic Vision will also include an interactive geographic map for access to information on projects, people, and locations assigned to the National Program.

A sample NP Strategic Vision as it appears on the ARS National Programs Web site is provided on subsequent pages in this section.

NP Strategic Visions at a Glance

Contents: Description of the main research goals or program priorities.

Purpose: Provides scope and vision for ARS research.

Originator(s): NP team.

Time Frame: Developed once every 5 years, typically before the National Program Workshop.

Audience: Customers, stakeholders, and partners, internal and external.

Approval Requirements: DA



The NP team can use its Strategic Vision as an effective tool to draw the attention of customers, stakeholders, and the public to the work of the National Program. Team leaders may consider working with the ARS Information Staff to develop a brochure or handout using content from the Vision Document for distribution at NP Workshops or events. An example can be found on the ARS Web site:

www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Program/307/BioenergyResearchStrategy.pdf.



NP Strategic Visions should be posted on the National Program Web site to encourage feedback from customers and stakeholders.

NP Strategic Vision Sample: NP 106

ARS Aquaculture National Program (106)



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- Products & Services
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- News & Events
- Partnering
- Careers

You are here: Research / **Research**

[National Programs Aquaculture](#)

Strategic Vision

NP 106 Strategic Plan ARS Aquaculture Research

Mission

- The ARS National Aquaculture Program has as its mission:
- Understanding, Improving, and Effectively Using Animal Genetic and Genomic Resources
 - Enhancing Animal Performance, Well-being, and Efficiency in Diverse Production Systems
 - Defining Nutrient Requirements and Nutrient Composition of Feedstuffs and Expanding Alternative Ingredients
 - Improving Health and Welfare of Aquatic Animals
 - Improving Production Systems, Developing New Products, and Enhancing Product Quality.

Program Vision

The vision for ARS aquaculture research and technology transfer is to support a thriving domestic industry based on improved genetic stocks and scientific information on biotechnologies and management practices to ensure a high quality, safe supply of healthful seafood and aquatic products.

Relevance

The ARS Aquaculture Program research strategy supports the following plans:

- ARS Strategic Plan for FY 2006 – 2011, specifically Performance Measures 2.1.2, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, and 4.2.5. (see <http://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/00000000/ARSStrategicPlan2006-2011.pdf>).
- The Strategic Plan of USDA's Research Education and Economics mission area. (see <http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/usdasp.htm>)
- The Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture Strategic Plan for Aquaculture Research and Technology development.

[Click here for full Strategic Plan](#)

Projects in this Program - by State



Legend:
Maroon = click to see related projects in these states.
Gray = No related research in this state.

http://ars.usda.gov/research/programs/programs.htm?NP_CODE=106 [1/28/2009 2:34:02 PM]

Program Inputs

- Workshops

Program Planning

- Action Plans
- Strategic Vision

Program Reports

- Action Plan FY10 - FY14
- Annual Reports
- NP 106 Accomplishment Report FY07

Project Information

- List of Projects in this Program
- List of Project Annual Reports in this program

Program Team

- Silverstein, Jeff (leader)
- Gay, Cyril G



Other NP Strategic Visions are available on the National Programs Home Page:
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/Research.htm>.



Action Plan Guidance and Format

Action Plans play a central role in helping ARS define what will be done to meet the needs of customers and stakeholders. Building on the NP Strategic Vision, the Action Plan should illustrate how the discrete efforts of the various ARS locations will be unified within a cohesive National Program and combine to achieve its mission and goals. Importantly, Action Plans are living, dynamic documents that should be updated regularly to reflect new and emerging issues and changing priorities (see page 41). Specific issue commodity action plans should be maintained separately to increase visibility, with items cross referenced in the Action Plan.

The elements of an NP Action Plan contain the following terminology: **Goal, Component, Problem Statement, Research Need, Anticipated Products, Potential Benefits (Outcomes), and Resources.**

Goal statements explain the reason and rationale for establishing a National Program and the scope of the National Program. In addition, the text will cite the relevance of the NP to applicable performance measures in the ARS Strategic Plan.

Component sections describe the general nature of a problem that is identified with stakeholder input. Research priorities may be emphasized by economic impact, consumer concern, regulatory issues, or other indicators of significance to U.S. agriculture.



Action Plans should be updated after PDRAMs have been issued and as necessary throughout the 5-year program cycle, preferably each year. After each update, the date of revision should be stated for future reference.

The **Problem Statement** indicates the specific nature and scope of ARS contributions toward solving the problems that will be addressed.

Research Needs define the actions that ARS will take to resolve problems or constraints that are relevant to a Problem Statement. They should demonstrate to stakeholders

and customers what actions ARS intends to take in response to their issues.



Further Action Plan guidance is available on the AD/ONP Sharepoint site: <https://arsnet.usda.gov/sites/NPS/ACCouncil/default.aspx>.

Guidance on Action Plan Format (cont.)

Anticipated Products will describe what ARS expects to accomplish or produce. These measures of performance should relate to appropriate *Actionable Strategies* in the [ARS Strategic Plan for 2006-2011](#).

Potential Benefits (Outcomes) will broadly state how anticipated research results will advance a field of science; lead to economic, environmental and/or health benefits for consumers; or enable the formulation of policies and regulations in support of U.S. agriculture by action and regulatory agencies.

Resources will assign accountability for work to locations where projects are aligned with a component of a National Program.



The NP team may wish to request concept papers from the Lead Scientists describing how their project(s) will contribute to Problem Statements and Research Needs in the Action Plan. The concept paper provides an opportunity for the research team to provide input into the objectives for their new research project. If the NP team requests concept papers for their respective National Program, then the LSs are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. A sample concept paper is available [here](#).

Action Plans at a Glance

Contents: Identifies problems to be addressed and what ARS will produce.

Purpose: Defines research goals needed within a specific National Program to fulfill the NP Strategic Vision.

Originator(s): National Program Leaders. Writing Teams comprised of ARS SYs are optional. When writing teams are used the NPL is the final editor of the Action Plan.

Time Frame: Once every 5 years.

Audience: Primarily scientists within the relevant National Program, and secondarily stakeholders.

Approval Requirements: DA



Minimize the use of tables: In general, the use of tables within the body of an Action Plan should be discouraged, as tables can make interpretation more difficult and add significantly to the total page count. When they must be used, tables should be concise.



PDRAMs and Project Plans: Background and Instructions

The Office of National Programs is responsible for program planning, and therefore Strategic Vision and Action Plan development, while line management is responsible for project planning, including the development of the Project Plan. The Project Plan must be relevant to the objectives of the Action Plan, and to link those documents, the National Program Leader uses a *Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memo* (PDRAM), identifying new project objectives and funding information, to transfer program vision and direction to the field.

About a month before the PDRAMs are due to the Areas, the NP Team will generate and review a list of projects in the NP that are due for Peer Review. ONP will then send a memo to each Area Office, requesting AD concurrence on the list of projects to be reviewed. The Area Office indicates their concurrence when they return this memo to ONP. The Area Office may alternatively indicate that a project is exempt from Peer Review, or that the AO is submitting a Request for Postponement to the Associate Administrator. This also serves as notice to the Area Office that PDRAMS are forthcoming.

After the PDRAM is developed, the NPL, through the DA, forwards the document to the AD, with a copy to the Program Analyst and the Office of Scientific Review (OSQR). The AD transmits an implementation letter to the relevant Lead Scientist, usually including the PDRAM.

With the PDRAM, the Lead Scientist uses the objectives approved by the NPL to create the Project Plan. The Project Plan details experimental approaches, procedures, contingencies, and collaborations necessary for accomplishing the proposed research. The Area Director reviews and forwards the Project Plan to ONP for validation of objectives and approach, after which it is sent back to the Area for final approval. It is then forwarded to the OSQR, which facilitates a prospective peer review of the plan.

The PDRAM and Project Plan highlight the importance of ongoing dialogue between line management (ADs, RLs, and Lead Scientists) and ONP (NPLs) during all phases of project planning and document preparation, but particularly in the early stages, during Action Plan development. In developing resource strategies for research projects, the DA and NP team discuss relevant portions of the Action Plan with each AD and Center Director, RL, and Lead Scientist, as appropriate, to identify available resources, as well as the potential contributions of each project to solve problems addressed by the Action Plan. During this process, ADs and RLs communicate any concerns with proposed research regarding available resources – monetary, facility, or staff—of which ONP should be aware in developing the PDRAM. These discussions are essential to ensuring the high quality and relevance of research as well as to preventing difficulties arising from resource availability.

This section contains the following documents: Peer Review PDRAM Description, Peer Review PDRAM Template, Project Plan Guidance & Format, and Instructions for Project Plan Development.

the matrix bottom line: The Peer Review Process is a dialogue, not a monologue.

PDRAM Description

The PDRAM outlines the project's objectives and linkages to the NP Action Plan. Those objectives should be outcome- and, where possible, impact-oriented. The PDRAM includes a Project Title, a statement of relevance to the Action Plan, objectives of the research, source of funds and funding level, and other information, as necessary. PDRAMs are standard in format and content across all National Programs, although flexibility exists for special circumstances.

(Note: The PDRAM is an essential component in the Peer Review process, providing background information to panel chairs to help determine the range of expertise needed for the panel and select proposed reviewers.)

Program and line management discussions are critical to the development of a strong and realistic PDRAM. When developing PDRAMs, the NPL should work directly with the Lead Scientist and Research Leader to ensure personnel resources and equipment are available to carry out the direction. The NPL should document conversations in a brief e-mail to the scientist, copying the RL and the appropriate Area Office, keeping the line managers informed of the direction the program will be taking. Line management, if necessary, contacts the National Program Leader with suggestions for formulating a strong PDRAM, keeping the NPL's Deputy Administrator informed of their concerns.



The AD should discuss resources with the NP team before the PDRAM is issued to the Lead Scientist to ensure objectives are realistic.



While objectives must be explicit, they should allow sufficient latitude for the creativity and insight of the scientist(s) in the development of the Project Plan.



Standard Operating Procedures for Program Analysts in developing PDRAMs (and other documents in this section) are available at:
<https://arsnet.usda.gov/sites/NPS/ACCouncil/Cycle%20Documents/Program%20Planning/PA%20SOP%20March%202010%20v4.pdf>

A template for the PDRAM is provided on subsequent pages in this section.

PDRAMs at a Glance:

Contents: Title, research objectives, source of funds and funding level, and other pertinent information to link project with the Action Plan objectives.

Purpose: Transfer program vision and direction to the field for document preparation, Project Plan development, and allocation of resources.

Originator(s): National Program Leaders responsible for the program, with input from field scientists, Research Leaders and Area Directors.

Time Frame: Developed at the beginning of project peer review process.

Audience: AD, scientists and Research Leader within the relevant National Program, OSQR panel chairs.

Approval Requirements: DA



Peer Review PDRAM Template

Date

SUBJECT: Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memo for
Project No. xxxx-xxxxx-xxx-xxD

TO: Area Director

THROUGH: Deputy Administrator

FROM: National Program Leader

The Project Peer Review for National Program XXX, (title of National Program), is scheduled for (Month, Year). Project No. xxxx-xxxxx-xxx-xxD, entitled, (project title) in (name of MU), (City, State) is due to terminate xx/xx/xxxx and the replacement project will go through this scheduled (Panel or Ad-Hoc) Peer Review. The Project Plan should focus on the research the team will perform to meet the objectives of the National Program Action Plan. Specifically, the Project Plan which is due to ONP no later than (Month, Year), should be written with relevance to the components and problem areas within the National Program Action Plan following the specific guidance given below. Please visit the OSQR website (www.ars.usda.gov/OSQR) to find the NP XXX peer review schedule.

Project Title:

Relevance to Action Plan: *(Description of problem to be solved and its relevance to components and problem areas of the National Program Action Plan.)*

Objectives of Research: *(Objectives need to be of the degree of specificity that they can be used directly in the project plan. For each objective national program, component, and problem statement must be indicated)*

Peer Review PDRAM Template, cont.

Source of Funds and Funding Level: *(State dollar amount (NTL) transferring to the new project, as well as where the funds are coming from/project number(s) -- if different from Project No. stated above.)*

National Program Information:

National Program Code:

Other Contributing National Program Code(s):

Other Information: (Optional)

cc:

Area Program Analyst

OSQR

Associate Administrator, ONP

J. Stetka, ONP

K. Jenkins, ONP



Project Plan Guidance and Format

The Project Plan is a stand-alone document that enables reviewers to evaluate the merit and feasibility of the proposed research. It should frame the research needs, objectives, hypotheses (or non-hypothesis research goals), and expected outcomes for a defined program of research. The plan details experimental approaches, procedures, contingencies, and collaborations necessary for accomplishing the proposed research. International activities and collaborations should be specifically articulated in the Project Plans (*not* Action Plans).

A clear, concise, and organized plan demonstrates to reviewers the team's ability to achieve its objectives. Thus, well-written Project Plans provide tangible evidence of the quality of science within ARS.

Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) at a Glance

The 1998 Farm Bill mandated that each ARS-proposed research project be reviewed every 5 years by a panel of scientists primarily from outside the Agency. In response, ARS formed the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) to coordinate a prospective peer review process of proposed research projects.

Although the Lead Scientist has primary responsibility for Project Plan development, the effort should be a joint one, benefiting from close collaboration with line management up to and including the Area Office, and with ONP. While the Lead Scientist and RL ensure that the Project Plan is consistent with the approved PDRAM and Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) instructions and represents the best effort of the team, the Area Office provides feedback and guidance to ensure that the final project plan is well conceived, clearly written, and soundly designed.

During this process, critical review may also be requested from additional scientists, including the NPLs. Although they have no required role in the

development of the Project Plan, they can provide valuable comments to the project team. If requested to provide feedback on draft project plans, they should copy the Area Office when sending comments to the field scientists. Once completed and approved by the Area Director, it is submitted to ONP and the NPL reviews and validates the project plan objectives and approach taken to reach the objectives.

Changes to Objectives after NP team validates Project Plan objectives and approach

- Lead Scientist should discuss changes with the NPL.
- NPL documents concurrence in e-mail to AD.
- AD concurs and forwards NPL's concurrence e-mail to Lead Scientist with cc to RL and Area and ONP PAs.
- ONP Program Analyst documents NPL approval in ARIS Peer Review Tracking System.
- Lead Scientist includes approved changes in Project Plan.

Project Plan Guidance and Format, cont.

After the Project Plan is submitted, the peer review process by an OSQR-appointed panel or *ad hoc* reviewers begins, resulting in both quantitative and qualitative evaluations. Quantitative response is in the form of Action Class Scores provided by each reviewer, while quality review is in the form of a consensus narrative detailing specific review comments and recommendations. OSQR distributes review results to the research team's AD, with copies to the National Program team. These are forwarded to the research team through the line management. Also included are instructions for revising and responding to reviewers' comments.

When the Scientific Quality Review Officer (SQRO) has determined that the review process is complete and the revisions to the Project Plan are satisfactory, the SQRO sends a certification memo on behalf of ARS to the Lead Scientist through the Area Office. This memo contains instructions to submit the AD-416/417. This marks the end of the planning phase and the initial step in the implementation phase.



If a class action score of Major Revision Required or Not Feasible is given by the panel, the AD should convene a call with the location line management, the Lead Scientist, and appropriate NPL, to discuss the approach to improving the project. The changes to objectives suggested by the panel will require approval from the NP team.

Project Plans at a Glance

Contents: Research plans detailing the work to be performed over 5 years in response to ONP issued objectives.

Purpose: Enables reviewers to evaluate the merit, feasibility, and relevance of proposed research.

Originator(s): Project team.

Time Frame: See OSQR schedule: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/OSQR>

Audience: Panel chair and panelists external to ARS.

Approval Requirements: RL, Area Office





The Office of Scientific Quality Review provides Project Plan instructions on its Web site (<http://www.ars.usda.gov/OSQR>), at scheduled online researcher briefings, and at various ARS researcher gatherings.

Instructions for Project Plan Development

OSQR provides a Project Plan Handbook providing guidance to ARS researchers in preparing a Project Plan through the entire peer review process (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1: Project Plan Handbook Table of Contents



The complete Project Plan Handbook is available at <http://www.ars.usda.gov/OSQR>

NATIONAL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Contents at a Glance

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Introduction to NP Implementation

Concepts and initiatives envisioned during the Input phase and developed during the Planning phase are taken to the next step during the Implementation Phase of the NP cycle. This phase covers a wide range of processes, all of which are to provide for the best possible research environment at all levels in the Agency. The projects, management units, locations, and programs go through a variety of review processes, and midcourse adjustments are made to fulfill the research set forward to meet the Agency's mission; SY vacancies are filled and positions abolished; funds are obligated and dispersed; and agreements with outside organizations are developed. The Management Units, Locations, Area offices and all Headquarters units work together to handle all aspects of the Implementation phase.

Research Locations: The Agency's business is research; its products are information, knowledge, and technology developed to meet customer/stakeholder needs. The Agency's mission is conducted at the Research Unit level where the RL is the fund holder and is responsible for allocating funds to meet research objectives; supervising Unit scientists; and ensuring scientists have the necessary staff, financial resources, equipment, space and other items vital to the conduct of high quality research. The quality and productivity of the research and performance of the research staff are monitored through annual performance evaluations by the RL. In addition, annual reports of scientific progress are developed to document progress towards objectives of the project plan. If locations are of sufficient size, Center/Laboratory Directors play a vital role in monitoring progress of the research, setting standards for the location, and communicating the mission and achievements of Center/Laboratory scientists.

Many research locations have organized *Customer Focus Groups* that meet annually or semi-annually with the Research Unit staff. These groups are typically comprised of customers, stakeholders and partners that are potential users of products, early implementers of technology, and local, state, or national leaders. They become part of the research process by interfacing with the research staff to identify research needs, propose innovative ideas, help ensure that the research plan is being implemented and outcomes are being achieved, and often organize or support educational activities to increase the adoption and visibility of the research regionally and nationally. Generally, the purpose of these focus groups is to ensure that ARS research continues to have a positive impact on the lives of the agricultural community.



Introduction to Implementation Phase, cont.

Area Offices: The Area Director has oversight responsibility for assuring that the Project Plan (see Planning Phase) is implemented at the location and that the science is of high quality, has impact, and meets customer and stakeholder needs. Many mechanisms are in place to ensure that the Project Plan is implemented appropriately, such as annual performance evaluations, review of annual reports, Research Performance Evaluation System (RPES), Annual Resource Management Planning Process (ARMP), Strategic Resource Management Planning Sessions (SRMP), and on-site reviews.

Headquarters Offices: Many Headquarters offices work together during the Implementation Phase to ensure all research projects and national programs are performing to fulfill the Agency's mission. The main responsibilities of ONP are to develop and ensure that project objectives are fulfilled and contribute to the goals of the NP Action Plans; to monitor progress; and/or create additional objectives as needed; and to ensure that funding is adequately balanced to meet customer needs and that projects are focused and aligned with the NP Action Plans. ONP is also responsible for program accountability and provides liaison with customers and stakeholders, as well as engaging in ongoing communication with field scientists, Area Offices, and constituent groups to communicate research findings. Additionally, ONP decides whether midcourse adjustments are necessary to avoid duplication of research and to address gaps in research that might exist due to changing priorities or emergence of new problems of high importance.

Research Locations, Area Offices, and Headquarters cooperate through close communication in all phases of the cycle. As the milestones are reviewed and modified (see Midcourse Adjustments section, page 42) and various reviews of the projects, management units, and locations are occurring (see Reviews section, page 39), locations and Area Offices should work together with and keep NPLs apprised of these changes.

the matrix bottom line: The Areas have responsibility for research project implementation at the MU and location level. ONP has responsibility for Program implementation at the National level.

Implementation of Newly Approved Projects

The first step of the Implementation Phase of the NP cycle is the implementation of the new approved Project Plan that was developed and written by the scientists. After the project is certified through the Agency's Peer Review process and the official Certification memo received, the management unit enters the new project AD-416/417 (Research Resume) into the Agricultural Research Information System (ARIS). It is then reviewed and approved by the RL, LD (if applicable), Area Office, ONP, and Budget and Program Management Staff (BPMS). It is essential that the AD 416/417 accurately reflects the approved Project Plan as well as the appropriate coding structure, because the project information entered on the AD-416/417 propagates to many public sites, such as the ARS Web site and the CSREES Current Research Information System (CRIS), as well as many subsequently generated documents. Additionally, all research accomplishments, agreements, and publications, are linked to and revolve around this project for its 5-year duration.

AD-416/417 – Research Resume at a Glance

Title: Taken directly from the PDRAM.

Objective: Approved objectives from the PDRAM or Approved Project Plan, whichever has the final approved objectives and subobjectives if applicable.

Approach: Methods used to conduct the research objectives of the project.

Investigators: List of investigators and time allocated to the research project.

Coding: Used for reporting requirements, representation of research, and grouping of research efforts.

Data from these fields on the AD-416/417 are sent to the CRIS database for public access.

Changes to the project that may take place during the 5-year cycle include funding shifts within the project, coding adjustments, or SY adjustments. These changes are further described in the Midcourse Adjustment piece of this handbook section.

Agreements: In addition to new research projects being established, new agreements are continuously being implemented to complement and fulfill the needs of the in-house research. These agreements are initiated at the management unit level and routed up through the management chain for review and approval. Final approval rests with ONP and Budget and Program Management Staff. Incoming and outgoing agreements are

implemented, adjusted through the course of the agreement, and closed out when completed.



New projects should be entered in ARIS as soon as possible after receipt of the OSQR Certification memo to ensure proper timeframe and alignment within the National Program.



Additional information on establishing new projects in ARIS and incoming and outgoing agreements can be found in the ARIS Online Manual – Chapters 4A, 4C, and 4D at <http://www.npstaff.ars.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual>.



Review Processes

The Area Director has oversight responsibility for assuring that the Project Plan is implemented at the location and for assuring that the science is of high quality, has impact, and meets customer and stakeholder needs. There are a variety of reviews and processes used to ensure each project meets these goals. The review results that are reported may then require midcourse adjustments to milestones, objectives, Project Plans, or Action Plans (see Midcourse Adjustment section).

Annual Performance Evaluations: Supervisors rate each scientist annually based on the quality and productivity of the research as measured against expectations related to the Project Plan. Although performance is managed at the location level, each Area Director contributes performance plan development by setting performance standards for all scientists within their Area. Examples of standards include: Planning and Conducting Research, Reporting Research, Technology Transfer, and other Agency-mandated elements. An Area Director may require that specific milestones from the Project Plan be included within the standards each year or that milestones remain flexible as the project moves to completion. Publication plans submitted under the Reports Research standard of the performance plan should be directed toward the completion of project plan objectives.

Research Position Evaluation System (RPES): Each Category 1 scientist is reviewed by a panel of peers every 3, 4, or 5 years depending on his/her current grade level. Area Offices carefully review the documentation (case write-up) submitted by a scientist for evaluation. Care is taken to ensure the case aligns well with the Project Plan(s) and the scientist has adequately described their science contribution and impact.

Reviews at a Glance:

Annual Performance Evaluations: Review of SY performance for the given year.

RPES: Panel review of Category 1 SY positions.

Annual Resource Management Planning Process (ARMPS): Plan for the fiscal year of each management unit's funding, personnel and other resources.

Strategic Resource Management Planning Session (SRMP): Review of the ARMPS, Area's locations and management unit, and strategic planning for the future.

On-Site Reviews: Review of management units and/or locations; used as management tool to ensure research quality.



Additional information on RPES can be found at:
<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes>

Annual Resource Management Planning Process: The Annual Resource Management Plan (ARMP) is a comprehensive reference document for administering the human, physical, and financial resources required to conduct agricultural research within ARS. ARMPs are developed at the Management Unit level, with approval by the Center Director (if applicable) and Area Office, for use as a planning and management information tool for research managers in ARS. The plan includes budgetary, research project, and personnel information for each management unit. The Area Director uses the ARMP preparation process as an opportunity to stay up to date on research and resolve research project implementation issues concerning staffing, facilities, resources, performance, or personnel.

Strategic Resource Management Planning Session (SRMP): Following the completion of ARMPs, the Area Directors and the Headquarters staff conduct an SRMP session with emphasis on strategic planning for the future. This session addresses issues of concern and provides ARS senior management with an opportunity to discuss strategic approaches for dealing with imminent resource issues. Special consideration is given to potential organizational changes that will increase the efficiency of research programs and facilities, indirect research costs, discretionary and Congressionally-mandated cooperative agreements, and retirement eligibility.

On-site Reviews:

Regularly scheduled on-site reviews - The Area Director may coordinate a system of on-site reviews as a management tool to ensure research quality. On-site reviews are often conducted by a panel of scientists from outside ARS whose research is in the same field as the Research Unit being reviewed. The AD ensures that ONP is engaged in the early planning of the on-site review via conference calls and e-mail exchanges.

Generally, a review lasts less than one week and is held on-site at the Research Unit. While on-site, the panel meets with the Unit's staff and customers, tours the facilities, and discusses research progress with the scientists. A few weeks after the review, the panel chair sends the Area Director a report with the panel's assessment and recommendations. The Area Director ensures the panel's recommendations are reviewed and appropriately implemented, so that the Unit's research performance, quality, capacity, and leadership are strengthened. Further, this information is provided to ONP for incorporation into future NP Strategic and Action Plans.



One approach is to conduct on-site reviews at a Unit every 5 years, just before the Unit develops its Project Plans for peer review. In this way, prospective assessment of individual projects is supplemented by a retrospective review of entire Units.



Reviews, cont.

Ad hoc on-site reviews – The Area Director may also schedule ad hoc on-site reviews. These reviews are similar to regularly scheduled reviews but occur as needed to resolve specific issues. Scientists on the panel may be from within ARS or outside the Agency, and the breadth of the charge may vary with the issue under review. Typically, the purpose of ad hoc reviews is to receive objective, expert advice concerning challenges involving the research structure at a location and/or personnel, resources, and performance.

As with on-site reviews, ad hoc reviews will require ONP input in early planning and preparation. The AD coordinates with appropriate NPLs in early planning via conference calls and e-mail exchanges to ensure national needs are considered and information is provided in a timely manner for NP Action Plan updates.

The reports resulting from these reviews contain information related to program direction with specific information related to the capacity of a location to conduct research, as well as information related to local, regional, and possibly national research needs. Therefore, these reports are a valuable source of information related to the development of NP Action Plans.

Given the role of on-site reviews in informing priority setting and program planning, it is imperative that NPLs be intricately involved and/or participate in the reviews and be provided the resulting reports and outcomes. In the early planning stage of the on-site reviews, the Area Director will engage the appropriate NPLs and/or DAs through conference calls and intranet communication to request input on topics for discussion during the review and potential items of concern. In addition, the NPL(s) should be invited to attend and participate in the actual review. Upon completion of the review and receipt of reports from the reviewers, NPLs and DAs should receive a copy for review and for use in Action Plan updates and other program planning and implementation purposes.

Review of Milestones: see Midcourse Adjustments section.

Midcourse Adjustments

During an ARS research project's normal 5-year cycle, many changes take place that may impact the project's progress, necessitating midcourse adjustments. Some changes that may occur include SY vacancies, funding shifts, funding being redirected or decreased, milestones not being met, or experiments having different outcomes than expected. In these cases, various aspects of the research project may need to be adjusted, such as the project milestones, project objectives, and/or the National Program designation.

Mid-Course Adjustments to Milestones: A research milestone is not a goal or accomplishment, but a measure of progress, showing how various midpoints/requirements in



Lead scientists can notify the Lead NPL of Milestone adjustments via e-mail, or Research Leaders can send one e-mail notification for all projects in their respective unit to the appropriate NPL(s).

the research are being reached/attained. These milestones are reported in gross to the Office of Management and Budget on a yearly basis. Sometimes it may be necessary to revise future milestones to more accurately capture and track research progress, such as when a project's milestones are not estimated accurately at the beginning, new science is identified, or the staff changes. Therefore, milestones are intended to be dynamic and allow for future adjustments to meet the realities of research. (Note: It would defeat the

purpose of milestone adjustments to casually change milestones to match what was actually achieved during the given year.)

Each year, milestones are reported during the Annual Report (AD-421) process. The milestones that were to be accomplished in the given year are described and the status of each is given. As the Area Directors review the Annual Reports, they should review the milestones to see if midcourse adjustments are necessary. If adjustments are required, discussions between the Area Director, Lead Scientist, and Research Leader will occur. After these discussions take place the Area Director will approve the adjustments/changes to milestones. The appropriate NPL will then be notified of the milestone changes. NPLs may contact the Area Director if they have questions regarding the approved changes. Keep in mind that changes to milestones could potentially require changes to the project objectives (see Mid-course adjustments to objectives in the next section).

Mid-Course Adjustments to Objectives: If mid-course adjustments to the project objectives are needed for any reason, the NPL will discuss the proposed changes with the AD and the research team. Also, the NPL and AD will discuss whether an *ad hoc* peer process review of the project is necessary. (Generally, a review is necessary if objectives are being added and substantial modifications made, but not if objectives are being deleted.) The type of review required will be worked out with OSQR. The NPL will then issue a new PDRAM, indicating the new/revised objectives and whether a review is necessary. Upon receipt of the new PDRAM, the lead scientist will incorporate the new objectives into the research project and modify the AD-416/417 in ARIS accordingly, and the RL should communicate the need to modify milestones as appropriate.

Mid-Course Adjustments to NP Designation: Throughout the 5-year duration of the research project, it may be determined that the National Program designation is inaccurate and should be adjusted to another National Program. In some instances, all that is required is an NP adjustment, while in others, the objectives must be adjusted as well.



Midcourse Adjustments, cont.

In the cases where only the “n” NP designation will be adjusted, discussions should take place between the NPL(s) from both National Programs, the Lead Scientist and RL, and AD. Once all are in agreement, the new Lead NPL should send an “official” email notification of the adjustment to the AD and copy the Lead Scientist, RL, CD/LD (if applicable), previous Lead NPL, and Headquarters PA, who adjusts the NP code on the AD-416/417 in ARIS accordingly. This process also applies for adjusting a project’s contributing (“c”) NP designation.

Likewise, in cases where adjustments to both the National Program and objectives are required, the new Lead NPL, the Lead Scientist and RL, and AD will need to be involved in this discussion. Upon its conclusion, the Lead NPL will send a PDRAM to the AD indicating the NP adjustment necessary, prescribed changes to objectives, and peer review information (see Midcourse Adjustments to Objectives section), with a copy sent to the Program Analyst at Headquarters and to OSQR if the project requires a peer review. The Program Analyst then adjusts the NP code designation on the AD-416/417 in ARIS accordingly.

End of Cycle Adjustments to NP Designation: During the PDRAM process for the new NP cycle, it may be determined that the NP designation is incorrect and research and resources should be focused toward a more appropriate NP and needs to be adjusted. Based on the results of discussions between the NPL(s) from both National Programs, the Lead Scientist and RL, and the AD, the PDRAM for the new cycle should indicate the new NP code designation and whether the project, under the new NP code, will go through an ad hoc review or wait for the next panel review. If a bridging project is implemented, due to the timing of the next review or duration of the existing project, it should indicate the new NP code.

Updating Action Plans: The NP Action Plan, developed by the NP team from input obtained at the NP workshop and other sources (see Input and Planning phases), defines what research will be done to fulfill the program vision detailed in the Strategic Vision, provides a key source of information for project development and implementation, and identifies targets for the next 5-year National Program Assessment (see Planning Phase). The Action Plan is a dynamic document and should be reviewed and updated by the NP team annually and as necessary to ensure the goals for the National Program are being achieved.

The first update should take place after the PDRAMs are issued for the upcoming Peer Review cycle to ensure that all components, problem statements, research needs, anticipated products, potential benefits, and resource locations are addressed by the newly proposed projects.

Timeframes for Action Plan Updates:

Timeframe: Annually, or more frequently, as needed.

Initial Update: After issuance of PDRAMs

Yearly Update: After completion of Annual Reports, completions of ARMPs, and SRMP meetings.

Midcourse Adjustments, cont.

Each year thereafter, the NP team should review and modify the Action Plan as necessary after the Annual Reports (AD-421s) are completed, using input from the various planning and review sessions occurring at this point in the yearly cycle: review of milestones, Annual Resource Management Planning, and Strategic Resource Management Planning Sessions. All of these



A Program Management Database (see Assessment Phase, page 57) can be used as a Gap Analysis tool to identify modifications that may be necessary to the Action Plans.

actions/processes provide valuable and timely input for Action Plan revision on the status of research, milestones and accomplishments from the previous year, resources available for the coming year, and potential changes required for individual projects and locations.



SY Recruitments and Abolishments

During the course of the 5-year National Program cycle, many changes occur within the research projects, as well as the National Programs as a whole, that have impact on the projects and funding levels. Scientists retire or separate from the Agency, reorganizations take place, redirections occur, or budgets are increased or reduced. Each of these events can impact the project(s), and therefore, decisions need to be made as to how to proceed with the future research to best fulfill the Agency's mission within the constraints.

SY Recruitments

When a scientist leaves a position, additional funding is received, or redirections within the program take place, **“to fill or not to fill”** is the question. If the Area Director makes the decision to fill, the AD (CD/LD if applicable) and RL should have an initial discussion, followed by a discussion with the NPL for the respective project and/or National Program concerning how to proceed if a change in discipline is necessary. This discussion should be initiated by the RL to the AD and NPL simultaneously via conference call. (Depending on the situation, different personnel may become involved later.)

When agreed by the RL, AD (CD if applicable), and NPL that a new position should be established, the first decision is what type of position or scientific expertise is needed. Once a decision is made (see Decision Tree), the RL and AD should develop the position description (PD) with input from the NPL prior to drafting the PD. (The appropriate DA should be brought into the discussion if involved parties cannot agree on the PD). After agreement has been reached, the PD along with the standard approval form (see templates) should then be routed through the approval process.

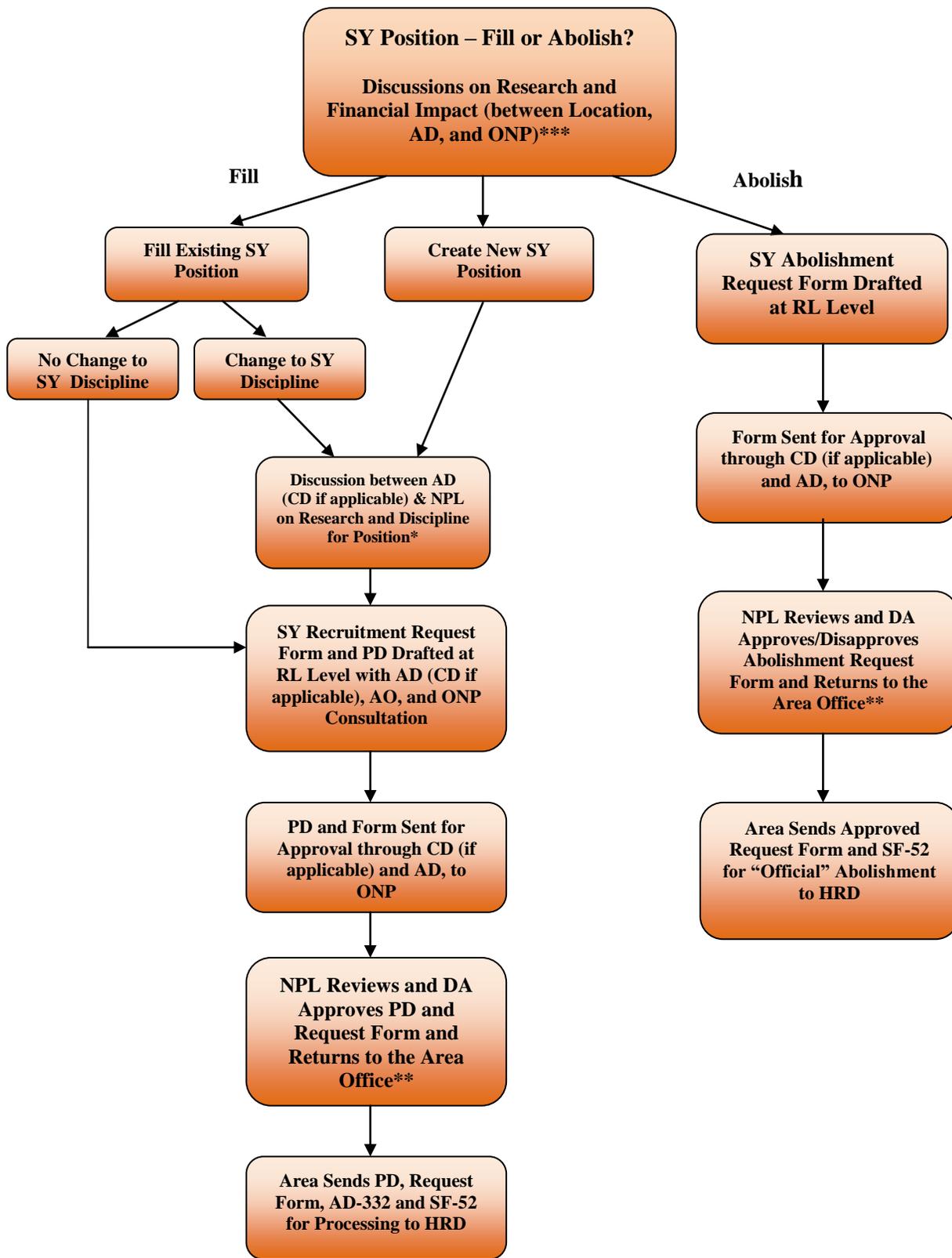
SY Abolishments

If it is decided not to fill, based on the initial discussion between the AD (CD if applicable) and RL, the next step would be to discuss the situation with the NPL and to abolish the SY position. Before the decision to abolish a position, consideration should be given to how research objectives will be met in the absence of the SY, impact of the unfulfilled objectives if not met, and financial consequences relating to funding levels and impact on location operations.

To abolish an SY position, the Research Unit should fill out an SY Abolishment form using the template and submit it through the management approval chain. The completed form should indicate the programmatic and financial impact of the abolishment, a description of what research will not be done, how the existing research will be impacted or shifted, and the financial impact, including before and after funding levels for a 2-3 year period of time (see SY Abolishment Template).



Templates are available for scientist recruitment ([link](#)) and abolishment ([link](#)).



*Deputy Administrators will become involved in decision process for the SY discipline if discipline cannot be agreed upon by Area Directors and NPLs.
 **If disapproval by DA and returned to Area, options include revision and resubmittal, or retraction of request for later consideration and/or further discussions.
 ***ADs should initiate an informal discussion with ONP prior to submitting the formal abolishment request.

Notes: All forms sent for approval should be sent electronically;
 Standard approval time for ONP approval is 5 working days
 MU level prepares all SF-52 for approval.



Cross-Location / Multi-Location Research Projects

There are several types or levels of cross-location research. At one end of the spectrum is a rather formal and highly focused response to a special customer need. At the opposite end of the spectrum is a much simpler, yet focused collaboration with common coding (i.e., NP, SOI, special codes) of ARS research projects at multiple sites contributing to the same outcomes or products identified in a given problem area of a National Program action plan. In most cases, the Office of National Programs will identify the need for these projects and will initiate the process. However, the Area Directors or lead scientists may also identify the need. ADs and other line managers will implement and report on these Cross-location research activities.

Multi-location research projects include basically three types:

- Cross-location research (CLR) where a unique project (“L” type) is established. This overarching project has its own objectives and a “Team Leader” but has no funds allocated to it. The Team Leader is the overseer of the “L” project and many locations contribute SY time and funding towards the goals of the project. Each individual project, within its own location, has its own individual objectives within its approved project plan, but also contributes towards the multi-location “L” project objectives as well (e.g., GraceNet, CEAP, REAP). (Refer to [CLR document](#) distributed 6/6/2005; revised 1/2009).
- Multi-location projects where one formal project plan is developed and approved for multiple locations (within one Area or across Areas). Locations involved in the project work towards the objectives of the project plan. Each participating location is assigned its objectives in the Project Plan and 416/417.
- Multi-location research is coordinated across locations, but each location has its own project plan, and each location works towards individual objectives that meet both locations’ research needs (informal agreement).

The first type of multi-location research project listed above is the most common type. Each level of management, from the scientist/management unit to ONP, plays a role in the development and implementation of these projects as described in the table below.

Office of National Programs	<p>Identifies the problem area; ensures relevance to ARS Strategic Plan and NP Action Plans. Identifies research objectives; outcomes and products; resources; SY contributions and roles; and Team Leader; communicates research plan with all line managers; and issues PDRAM to AD of the Team Leader.</p> <p>Integrates multi-location project accomplishments into the NP annual reports and annual performance reports as appropriate; includes any accomplishments in the NP assessment review process.</p>
Area Director/Area Office	<p>Guide Team Leader in writing the “Activity Plan” (example provided in CLR document); reviews and approves Activity Plan and distributes to all ADs having participating SYs;</p>

	reviews/approves AD-416/417 for CLR activity/project; ensures participating locations update their “D” project’s 416/417 to reflect contributions to the CLR activity; holds participating SYs accountable for meeting designated milestones in CLR Activity Plan; ensures Team Leader writes consolidated annual report for CLR activity.
CLR Team Leader	Write CLR Activity Plan based on PDRAM sent from NPL; enters AD-416/417 in ARIS for approved CLR Activity Plan; implements activity plan and hold conference calls and/or meetings as necessary; writes annual reports (AD-421s) with input from the other SYs associated with the CLR activity.

Summary of CLR Activity Process:

- If it is determined that certain aspects, outcomes, or products from the NP Action Plan require a CLR activity, then a CLR Team Leader is determined by the NPL and a CLR Activity Plan is developed based on a PDRAM sent from the NPL, through the Area to the designated CLR Team Leader. The CLR Activity Plan serves to ensure communication among SYs, RLs, CDs, ADs, and NPLs.
- The AD of the Team Leader reviews and approves the CLR Activity Plan and all ADs receive a copy. The CLR Activity Plan also includes a table of milestones and timelines for each scientist.
- An AD-416/417 is entered in ARIS as an “L” type project, with the objectives from the PDRAM and/or approved Activity Plan. In the Approach section of the 416, after the actual approach, all participating Project Numbers are listed for quick reference.
- Base funds are not transferred across locations for conducting this research. Individual locations continue to hold and spend their own funding. However, a component/objective should be added to each of the contributing “D” projects to indicate its participation in the CLR activity. Each AD continues to hold his/her supervised research project personnel accountable for conducting the planned research and using funds for the agreed upon purposes.
- Each year, an annual report is prepared by the Team Leader with input from the participating scientists and entered in the AD-421 system in ARIS. This annual report provides an accurate and complete description of accomplishments, allowing ARS to promote the capabilities, value, and uniqueness of the Agency in conducting research with a National program focus.

The second type of Cross-location research occurs when one Project Plan is written and approved through the Peer review process for two locations, either within the same Area or across Areas.

At the beginning of the new peer review cycle for the respective National Program, the decision to create one Project Plan for multiple locations is initiated by the appropriate National Program Leaders. The Lead NPL(s) and/or National Program team should also initiate conversations with the Area Director(s) to decide which locations will be responsible for which project objectives. Once those details are agreed upon, the NP team will write one PDRAM that will be addressed to the Area Director(s) of both locations involved in the multi-location research project plan.



The PDRAM should indicate the two projects that will be replaced by this one, new coordinated research project. The PDRAM should clearly indicate the objectives and which location (or if both locations) are responsible for each objective. It will also indicate the funding level for each location.

One Project Plan will be written and approved. It is the responsibility of the Lead SY from each location to work together to prepare the project plan for approval. Once the Project Plan is written, it goes through the normal approval chains for its respective Area. If the two locations are within the same Area, this process will be no different than any other review process. If the two locations are in different Areas, each Area Director should review and approve the Project Plan as they would any other Project Plan. If there are concerns or issues at the Area level, the Area Directors responsible for both locations should confer and discuss their concerns in order to come to a unified decision on how to proceed. As with any other project undergoing review, the Project Plan should not go any further until approved by both Area Directors and validated by the ONP. A separate signature page for each location will keep record of the approvals of the appropriate RL(s), Center Director(s), and Area Director(s).

Once the Project Plan is certified by the Office of Scientific Quality Review, one Certification memo will be issued and sent to the Area Director(s). Each location enters its own AD-416/417 in ARIS for the approved coordinated Project Plan. Both AD-416/417s should have the same title and the same objectives. At the end of the Objectives field, the AD-416/417 should indicate that this is a multi-location research project and is associated with (city, state) location and the associated project number (*e.g., NP216 Multi-Location projected associated with Lexington, Kentucky, Project No. 6445-12220-001-00D*). In addition, both AD-416/417s should list all investigators involved. However, the Lead investigator from one location will show on the other location's AD-416 with 0.00 SY time.

Each location is responsible for writing its own yearly Annual Report (AD-421) for the project. The reports should be coordinated as much as possible and there should be an analogous report in ARIS for both locations. Slight variations may be necessary in the Technology Transfer and International Cooperation / Collaboration questions, and approval is required by both Area Directors, if applicable.

Reminder: This is a coordinated effort and should be thought of as such in every aspect of the development and implementation.

The third type of cross-location research is an informal type of collaboration, where focused collaborative research is undertaken at multiple sites. Each site or location conducts its own research, under its own approved project plans, but contributes to an overarching problem area within the National Program action plan. These projects are simply linked by similar coding (i.e., NP, SOI, special codes) established in each of the projects. These projects may make fund transfers across areas on a temporary basis to fulfill research needs that cannot be conducted within their own sites. However, each project is self contained, reviewed separately, and maintains separate accountability with its annual reports.



NATIONAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Contents at a Glance

1) INTRODUCTION TO NATIONAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

2) AGENCY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS

- Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)
- Budget Explanatory Notes (Green Sheets)
- Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART)
- Congressional Inquiries

3) ANNUAL REPORTS

- National Program Annual Reports
- Annual Project Reports

4) NATIONAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (Retrospective Review)

- NP Assessment Process and Roles
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Introduction to National Program Assessment

Assessment is a key part of National Program Management and is conducted in different ways at several times during the cycle. Agency line managers and program leaders use different assessment tools to ensure that relevance, quality, and performance of the research are maintained at high levels. Input, planning, and implementation activities are intended to define and guide the path of the research, but assessments reveal how well programmatic goals are being met, whether any deviations from plans have been warranted and proved productive and how future research can be focused on unmet needs for innovation.

Measuring the value of science is challenging when research is focused primarily on explaining physical, chemical, and biological properties and processes. Such endeavors may lead to applications only after many years, and many factors beyond the Agency's control can affect ultimate use by producers, processors, consumers, or policy makers. Thus, ARS strives to identify ways to assess performance, impact, or value beyond simple metrics of technical inputs and outputs.

ARS uses multiple mechanisms to conduct assessments intended to meet different needs, including planning future research, reporting accomplishments to Congress, justifying budget requests, and aligning existing and future research to priorities set by the Department and the White House. Assessment documents include Annual Project Reports, NP Annual Reports, NP Assessments, and Agency Accountability Measures (Annual Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports, the Program Assessment Rating Tool, Research and Development Investment Criteria, and Evaluation of Personal Scientific Performance).



NPLs can work with the Economic Research Service (ERS) to incorporate indicators for program assessment into Action Plans, thus integrating planning documents with assessment actions.



Introduction to NP Assessment, cont.

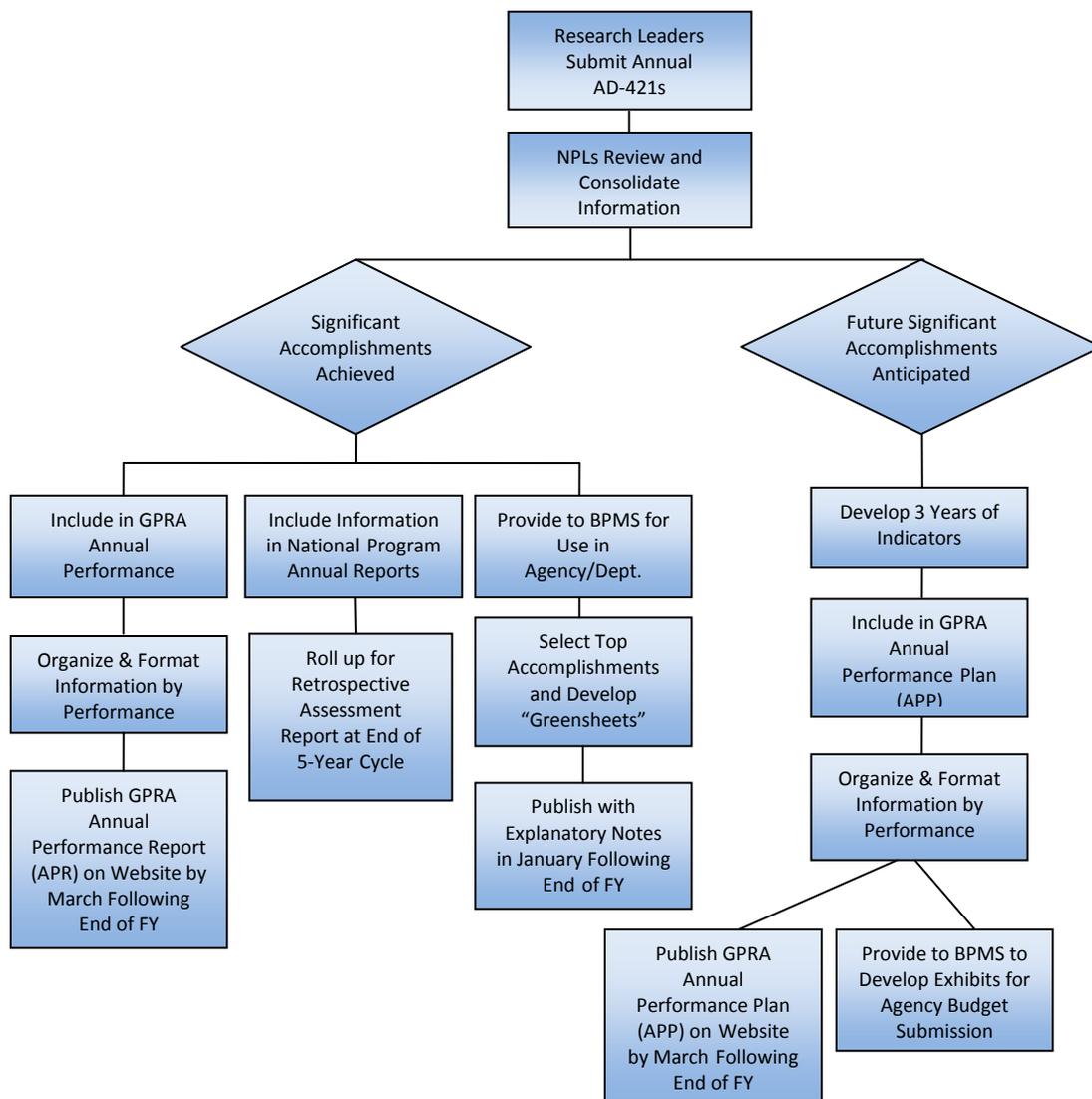


Figure 1: Annual Report Processes and Uses in ARS Assessment

External Accountability Reports

In addition to internally prescribed Agency assessments, ARS fulfills a number of external reporting requirements at set times each year and on a continual basis, in keeping with Federal policies and regulations. ONP takes primary responsibility for meeting these requirements, soliciting input from Areas as necessary. Although most of these requirements must be met on a fiscal year basis, some must be met quarterly, and others, (e.g., Congressional inquiries) may require action at any time.

GPRA Performance Annual Report and Annual Performance Plans

In 1993, the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) was passed, requiring all Federal institutions to demonstrate accountability before Congress and U.S. taxpayers. GPRA's purposes include:

- increasing the confidence of the American people in the capability of the Federal Government
- enhancing Federal program effectiveness and public accountability
- helping Federal managers improve service delivery
- facilitating congressional decision making
- improving internal management of the Federal Government

To satisfy the requirements of GPRA, ARS prepares an Annual Performance Report and Annual Performance Plan. In preparing the report, ONP identifies accomplishments from the Annual Project Report (see pages 52-53) that fulfill the performance indicators set forth in the ARS Strategic Plan and previous year's GPRA Annual Performance Plan. The report is viewed by the public, the USDA Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA), and Office of Management and Budget (OMB).



An OMB briefing paper on GPRA is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/mgmt-gpra/gplaw2m.html>. ARS' GPRA Annual Performance Reports and Plans are available at: www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/docs.htm?docid=1415.

President's Budget Explanatory Notes (Green Sheets)

Each fiscal year, ONP prepares a budget proposal for ARS that, after negotiations and approval by USDA and the White House, becomes part of the President's proposed budget and is submitted to Congress. As an addendum to the proposal, ONP prepares explanatory notes detailing the Agency's mission, initiatives, and justification for program increases. In preparing these notes, ONP identifies significant accomplishments from Annual Project Reports that demonstrate the Agency's accountability in each broad budget area. Each NP team provides input on the appropriate research to be included in the proposal. The explanatory notes are then used by USDA and Congress to make budget decisions, and are also made available to the public.



USDA's compiled Explanatory Notes are available at: http://www.obpa.usda.gov/explan_notes.html.



External Accountability Reports, cont.

Performance Assessment Rating Tool

The Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) was developed at the direction of the President by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 2004 as a means of assessing program performance and identifying ways for the Federal government to achieve better results. A PART review helps identify a program's strengths and weaknesses. It is intended to enable the Administration to make informed funding and management decisions aimed at making programs more effective and high performing.

PART reviews are conducted by broad program area on a rotating basis. In completing a PART review, ONP identifies accomplishments listed in the Annual Project Reports and uses national output measures from projects that best respond to PART measures provided by OMB. Updates are due quarterly, when applicable, and PART improvement plans are updated every December for the previous fiscal year. The resulting report is used by OMB and USDA to monitor management initiatives, used by OMB to make budget decisions, and made available to the public as an accountability tool.

External Reporting Requirements/Time Frame at a Glance

GPRA Reports: March 1

Budget Explanatory Notes:
November of each year

PART: Updated every December

Congressional Inquiries: Due ASAP, and can arrive at any time, particularly after March hearings



ARS' PART results are available under four separate goals on the www.ExpectMore.gov Web site: natural resources, economic opportunities for producers, protecting the food supply, and nutrition. Links to Assessing Program Performance briefings and further links are available at www.whitehouse.gov/omb/part.

Congressional Inquiries

ARS frequently responds to Congress on issues of programmatic, budgetary, or location-based concern. These inquiries may take the form of questions at Committee Hearings on special topics (a formal part of the Appropriations process), follow-up requests after the hearings, correspondence, or briefing requests. Questions often pertain to the status of ARS research and findings on a particular topic, plans for future action, and rationale for budgetary or programmatic decisions. Generally, requests are handled by the appropriate NPL(s) or NP team with primary responsibility for the location or program in question, with Area Offices and Research Units providing input as needed.



Hearing transcripts are part of the public record and can be accessed at www.gpoaccess.gov/chearings/index.html.

Annual Reports

Annual Project Reports

As the name indicates, the Annual Project Reports (AD-421s) describe a project's research and accomplishments for the year. They are an important source of information for activities at all management levels of the Agency as well as for informing the public about the progress and accomplishments of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Audiences of the 421s include but are not limited to: Agency management, ARS employees and field scientists; Congress, OMB, stakeholders, customers, other scientific agencies and scientists, and the general public.

The 421s consist of responses to seven questions and a list of publications summarizing the progress and accomplishments of the research project over the past year, as follows:

Objective & Approach: Objective and approach taken directly from the AD-416 for the respective project.

Milestones: Milestones that were to be accomplished during the reporting fiscal year, including a response as to whether they were met, substantially met, or not met.

Progress Report: A summary of progress during the fiscal year of the report, including the relation to the components in the National Program (NP) Action Plan.

Accomplishments: Significant accomplishments during the fiscal year.

Significant Activities that Support Special Populations: Specific activities or outreach efforts that directly benefit USDA special populations (*i.e.*, historically underserved).

Technology Transfer: Technology transfer activities in categories such as Germplasm and Variety Releases, Active CRADAs, Patents, Software, etc., and supporting information. The response should provide a description of the technology, to whom it was transferred, who the customers/users are, and the demonstrated or anticipated impact and/or outcome.

International Cooperation/Collaboration: Description of international cooperation/collaboration, informal or formal.

Publications: Peer reviewed publications, books or book chapters, and review articles related to the subject of the project.



Examples of well-written, complete Annual Project Reports are available at (to be added)

Uses of the Annual Project Reports

Annual Reports are used in a myriad of ways. The reports provide data to meet reporting requirements for Congress, the White House Office of Management and Budget, stakeholders, and many others. In addition, they provide information for external program reviews and many internal uses and management functions, such as measuring progress toward the objectives put forth in the NP Action Plan:

ARS external reporting requirements:

- ARS budget requests to Congress
- Government Performance and Results Act Requirements
- Annual Performance Reports
- OMB's Performance Assessment Rating Tool Improvement Plan Actuals and Targets
- Inquiries from Congress (*e.g.*, Q&A's) and from stakeholders, customers, and industry
- Quarterly Ethics/EEO Reports



Information for internal management functions:

- Strategic Resource Management Planning meetings (provides project and unit data)
- Review of milestone progress to determine need for project/milestone modification
- Review of the progress of projects, management units, and locations
- Identification of potential for future collaboration between projects
- Identification of potential scientists for various Agency awards
- Preparation of analyses and presentations to Management, AC, USDA, etc.
- Evaluation of research in relation to other units
- Identification of potential productivity problems within the individual project and/or the MU
- Evaluation, by ONP, of need for Action Plan revision

Other Critical Agency uses:

- Providing data for NP Annual Reports
- Providing data for NP Assessment and for upcoming NP workshop
- Supplying information for official speeches
- Supporting the review and summary of agreement progress and facilitating and reporting ADODR monitoring activities
- Supplying information for meetings with commodity groups, other stakeholders, and other Federal agencies



Additional information regarding Annual Project Reports can be found in the ARIS Online Manual, Chapter 15E, at <http://www.npstaff.ars.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual>.

NP Annual Reports

Each year, ONP prepares National Program Annual Reports (NPARs) to summarize the major accomplishments of each National Program. The NPAR is organized around the component structure of the NP Action Plan and should express the work done at multiple locations as a whole to demonstrate the program's progress and national impact. The report consists of accomplishments that briefly describe the achievement, problem statement, and impact. The audience for the NPARs includes well-informed lay persons, including customers, stakeholders, Congressional staffers, and the general public. NPARs are posted on the National Program Web site each February.



A sample NPAR is available at <https://arsnet.usda.gov/sites/NPS/Handbookteam/Shared%20Documents/Input/Linked%20Docs/NP%20307%20FY%202006%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

National Program Assessment (Retrospective Review)

The National Program assessment process plays a key role in both retrospective evaluation and prospective priority setting in ARS. During this process, the National Program's performance is evaluated by an external panel of knowledgeable customers and stakeholders. The panel

NP Assessment at a Glance

Purpose: Measure the impact/performance of the NP accomplishments against commitments described in NP Action Plan.

Originator(s): NP team.

Time Frame: Fourth year of the 5-year program cycle.

Audience: Customers, stakeholders and partners, ARS managers, ARS scientists, and OMB.

Evaluator: External Assessment Review Panel.

assesses the program's performance and impact, and its delivery of information, knowledge, and technology that meet customer expectations, as determined by actual impact or progress toward anticipated benefits to end-users, scientific communities, and/or broader society.

Using a National Program Accomplishment Report (see page 56-57) prepared by the NP team, an external panel evaluates the performance of the program against the commitments (research goals, products, and outcomes) identified in the NP Action Plan (see *Planning Phase*). The accomplishments are aligned with the Action Plan and aggregated at the National Program level *not* at the project level.



National Program Assessment, cont.

In essence, the National Program Accomplishment Report provides data as the foundation for the panel's written Assessment Report, which is a consensus on the quality of the National Program's accomplishments and outputs in the form of scientific achievements, technology transfer, and impact on the agricultural enterprise and policy makers. The panel's report provides ARS managers, customers, stakeholders, and partners with a professional judgment – not merely an accounting of numbers of publications, etc. - of the extent to which commitments made five years earlier in the Action Plan were actually met. One outcome of the panel's Assessment Report is that the National Program Team has tangible, independent judgment and commentary on which to base an updated vision, direction, focus, and rationale of the research agenda to be supported by the resources that enabled a specific National Program during the previous five years.

NP Assessment Roles and Responsibilities at a Glance

NP Assessment Coordinator: Plan and facilitate NP Assessments.

National Program Leaders: Prepare the NP Accomplishment Report and provide an overview of the Program to the external panel.

Area Directors/Center/Lab Directors/Research Leaders: Coordinate response to data call and provide feedback to their units on panel results and recommendations.

Scientists: Provide significant research and/or technology transfer accomplishments for incorporation into the NP Accomplishment Report.

Frequent Panel Comments and Recommendations

ARS should:

- Take better advantage of interdisciplinary capabilities to address problems on a national level.
- Build stronger international collaborator network and establish new linkages.
- Develop a more vigorous technology transfer and extension effort.
- Communicate findings to regulatory agencies; impact to end users is not always discernible.
- Strengthen linkages with other federal agencies.
- Minimize research activities that do not address high-priority national goals.
- Assess the economic value of research results, an important measure of impact.
- Allow problem areas to drive objectives rather than adapting them to the objectives.

Assessment Planning Steps

The NP assessment process begins 6 months before the scheduled panel and generally concludes a few weeks after the panel meeting.



Program Management Database

Before the assessment process begins, the Program Analyst collates information from various sources throughout the 5-year cycle (PDRAMs, Annual Reports, and other documents with relevance to expected and demonstrated program accomplishments) into the Program Management database, a database that is currently being created to provide ready accessibility to documentation necessary for program management. It is essential that all the information be collated in such a way that the program managers can retrieve, interpret, and disseminate it easily.

Data Call

Well before the panel is scheduled to convene, the NP team should begin preparations on an Accomplishment Report, which the panel will use in assessing the quality and impact of the National Program. About six months prior to the meeting, the team sends a request to update significant NP accomplishments through the AD, Center Director, and Research Leader to the scientists who conduct research related to the National Program being reviewed. This should include projects “C” contributing to the National Program. Within 4 weeks of the request, the scientists should respond with data on their significant research results, scientific publications, public germplasm releases, CRADAs, patents, and licensing with industry and other partners.



The NP team should use accomplishments and technology transfer information from the AD-421s to draft the accomplishment report. The field reviews/verifies the report and provides additional information to NP team to fill in gaps. The NP team revises the Accomplishment report based on the input from the field.

The team could use a web conference with field scientists to present the draft Accomplishment Report and give direction for feedback on and input to the draft.



Assessment Planning Steps, cont.

Panel Chair Selection

Approximately 6 months before the panel convenes, the NP team initiates the panel selection process. With prior approval by the appropriate DA and AA, the NP team selects a Panel Chair capable of guiding the assessment process. The Panel Chair should have sufficient breadth of knowledge and experience with the various aspects of the National Program and with the goals and objectives in the Action Plan.

After the selection is made, the NP Assessment Coordinator and NP team host a conference call to brief the Panel Chair on the assessment process, the NP cycle and National Program being assessed, and panel member selection.

Panel Selection

The Panel Chair works with the NP team and Assessment Coordinator to select the panel members with the aim of composing a balanced team of non-ARS experts from groups that collaborate with or use ARS research and technology. The Assessment Coordinator approves the final selection. *All panelists, including the Panel Chair, must be screened for Conflicts of Interest (see requirements below).*

Panel Chair Role at a Glance

Guides process and serves as a panel member.

Selects panelists.

Debriefs NP team before leaving Beltsville.

Prepares a written assessment of the National Program.

Presents the panel's evaluation at the stakeholder workshop.

Conflict of Interest Considerations for Prospective Panelists

- Does the reviewer receive current financial support (*e.g.*, research agreements, procurement contracts, consulting contracts, other grant support) from the program being evaluated that could be directly affected by the panel's report (*e.g.*, possible termination of current arrangements or loss of reasonably anticipated future funding)?
- Does the reviewer receive substantial current non-financial support (*e.g.*, equipment, facilities, industry partnerships, research assistants, other research personnel) from the program being evaluated that could be directly affected by the panel's report?
- Does the reviewer have any other current financial interest (*e.g.*, patent rights, interests in partnerships and commercial ventures) obtained from or through the program being evaluated that could be directly affected by the panel's report?

At this stage, the NP Assessment Coordinator and NP team hosts a conference call to brief the panel on the assessment process, the National Program and other relevant background, and travel logistics. The NP Assessment Coordinator establishes travel authorizations, confirms lodging, determines on-site administrative requirements, and communicates this information to the panel members.

Accomplishment Report

About four months before the panel begins, the NP team prepares the Accomplishment Report (not to exceed 75 pages) and any other evidentiary materials for the panel. The report highlights the most significant accomplishments of the National Program and focuses on the performance/impact of the National Program rather than individual project accomplishments. The NP Team completes the accomplishment report and then it is distributed to the panel by the Assessment Coordinator 6 weeks before the panel meeting. At that time, the Assessment Coordinator schedules a conference call with the full panel and NP team to discuss the report and any additional materials that may be needed.



Accomplishment reports are available on the National Program Web page at <http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/programs.htm>



The NP Team should discuss the specific assessment criteria to clarify the term 'impact' before preparing the Accomplishment Report.

Panel Meeting

Before the start of the panel meeting (typically at the George Washington Carver Center or hotel in Beltsville, Maryland), the NP provides an overview of the National Program to the panel followed by a Q&A session.

Evaluation Definitions

High Impact: Research is of high quality and could be considered leading edge research. It has had or is expected to have a substantial impact.

Medium Impact: Further progress may be needed for this research to have realized, rather than potential, impact. Alternatively, research with this rating may be on a relevant topic but not producing particularly pertinent information.

Low Impact: Research with this rating may be good, but the topic is not relevant or the research is neither of high quality nor on a relevant topic.

The panel then evaluates the National Program, determining whether the selected accomplishments in the report significantly advanced the ARS mission and addressed projected outcomes/impacts of the planned research activities described in the Action Plan. The panel evaluates the program according to the degree of impact (see definitions in box) and provide written commentary on salient discussion points. At the conclusion, the panel presents a verbal report of their findings to the NP team.



The panel is instructed to take a 'National Program' focus, not 'research project' focus. The panel does not evaluate the scientific excellence of individual research projects; this evaluation takes place as part of the peer review process coordinated by the Office of Scientific Quality Review (see Planning section).



Assessment Planning Steps, cont.

Assessment Report

The Panel Chair leads the panel in the preparation of a written assessment report on the performance of each component/problem area of the National Program; recommendations for the next 5-year cycle are provided in a separate document. The Chair will attend the next Customer/Stakeholder workshop to present the panel results and recommendations.

The NP team will post the Assessment Report on the ONP Sharepoint site and the NP home page.

Core Assessment Criteria

As a direct result of the activities of the last 5 years, which of the following outcomes have occurred?

- Major agricultural problems ameliorated, mitigated, or solved.
- New or improved scientific methods, tools, or technologies developed by ARS and adopted by others (customers, stakeholders, consumers and/or other scientists).
- Research resulted in or is likely to yield economic or environmental advantages for producers.
- Research yielded health, social, economic, or environmental benefits for consumers/society.
- Research contributed to the development and/or implementation of government or industry policy or regulations (contributed to reports forming the basis for policy).
- Research created new knowledge and/or technologies that were broadly disseminated.



A list of upcoming NP Assessments is available on the AD/NPS SharePoint site at <https://arsnet.usda.gov/sites/nps/accouncil/default.aspx>:

The internal and external processes described in the previous pages highlight the ways in which ARS ensures the quality, relevance, and impact of research. In responding to information requests and subjecting itself to further scrutiny by experts in these ways, ARS demonstrates its commitment to excellence in its research and public accountability.

NATIONAL PROGRAM CYCLE REFERENCES

Office of Scientific Quality Review Project Plan Handbook
[OSQR Handbook](#)

Peer Review Standard Operating Procedures:
Procedures for NP and Area Program Analysts
www.ars.usda.gov/.....

Annual Reports:
Link to Complete Description of AD-421s/Annual Reports

