AREERA State Plans of Work

About the New Electronic Data Entry System

The Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) set forth the requirements for the Plan of Work. A renewed federal planning and accountability emphasis provided the environment for upgrades and improvements to the current unstructured Plan of Work system.

CSREES saw this as a opportunity to reduce States' reporting burden over a period of years, and maximize the usefulness of the information provided to us.

A Key Component of the "One Solution" Initiative

The new Plan of Work (POW) is part of the larger "One Solution" initiative. It is a web-based system for strategic planning and reporting on formula funded activities and results. The POW shares the same goals of the "One Solution" initiative.

1. Simplify reporting
2. Reduce burden
3. Improve the quality of data
4. Meet increasing performance and budget reporting expectations.

The "One Solution" itself is not a new computer application. It is an integration of reporting systems (inbound and outbound data) that includes the POW, Current Research Information System (CRIS), Research Education and Economics Information System (REEIS), and C-REEMS (an internal financial data management system).

An important aim of the "One Solution" initiative is to build a standard report, where possible, for research, education, and extension. It will make use of classification taxonomies such as Knowledge Areas (discussed in the last newsletter). It will also make use of web-based technology to offer One-Stop electronic reports, prepopulated forms, and electronic internal review workflow.

What is Covered in the POW?

AREERA requires the Plan of Work and subsequent Annual Reports to include activities that use Hatch Funds, Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c) funds, 1890 Extension funds, and Evans-Allen research funds as well as the required non-federal matching funds. It does not include the Smith-Lever 3(d) funded line items.

What is Required in the POW?

A completed and approved Plan of Work is an integral requirement for releasing funds to Land-Grant Institutions for the Fiscal Year beginning October 1 each year. The same information required by AREERA in the past POW cycle is needed, but is improved by use of a structured electronic format.

A complete POW includes the following information:

1. Overview
2. Stakeholder input documentation
3. Merit and Peer Review
4. Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension Financial Data
5. Planned Programs

The Planned Programs Section

Data entry in the Planned Programs section of the POW is structured around the elements of a simple logic model.

1. Situation Statement
2. Assumptions
3. Ultimate Goal of the Program
4. Inputs
5. Outputs
6. Outcomes
7. External Factors
8. Evaluation

Future newsletters will discuss elements of the Planned Programs section in more detail.

A Brief History of the New POW

Development of the new POW began in January 2004. Discussions were had with various groups including ECOP, Regional Research Executive Directors, NASULGC, Administrative Officers, CSREES staff, and various individuals from the Land-Grant partner universities.

Proposed Guidelines were published in the Federal Register in June 2005. After a 30 day comment period and various edits as a result, the final Guidelines were published in the Federal Register in January 2006.

The web-base software was pilot tested with eight partner institutions:

1. University of Rhode Island
2. Rutgers
3. Purdue
4. University of Florida
5. Southern University
6. New Mexico State University
7. American Samoa Community College
8. Alcorn State University (final testing)

The software was made available to all institutions on November 16, 2005, to test. The initial version of the official data entry system was released for use on January 19, 2006. Improvements will continue to be made to the system without compromising data integrity.

Training Opportunities

There is an updated set of six automated PowerPoint training modules available to help train staff. It will be available both on the CSREES AREERA Plan of Work website at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/business/reporting/planrept/plansofwork.html , or it can be sent to you on a CD by Bart Hewitt.

Also, a web training tool is being developed by Janine Gillis of the CSREES IT staff and Bart Hewitt to walk you through the Plan of Work web software. It will also be available in the training section of the POW website.

Members of the CSREES staff will also be at the Administrative Officers Conference in Rapid City, South Dakota on May 1, 2006, to discuss the future status of the Plan of Work and Annual Report and the "One Solution" initiative.

What's Next for the Software?

Future development for the software includes enabling a formatted printing function for the POW so you can more easily print the POW in a useful way, and developing the structure for the POW Update to implement the rolling 5-Year Plan of Work.

For more information on the Plan of Work, contact Bart Hewitt, 202-720-0747, or pow@csrees.usda.gov .