



## **RESEARCH POLICY**

### **Policy Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are to delineate key criteria guiding the research activities of the Horticultural Research Institute and Endowment Fund (HRI/EF) and to outline a grant structure and processes to fulfill its research goals. The research policy forms the basis of HRI's cooperative efforts with state/regional nursery and landscape associations, other green industry groups, and government agencies.

### **Research Characteristics**

HRI-supported projects focus on a significant problem or opportunity of the nursery and landscape industry, encourage environmentally responsible management practices, increase nurserymen's business or financial expertise, or improve and expand the market for plant material. Specifically, marketing projects open new markets, improve industry marketing practices, or introduce new or improved plant products or packaging.

HRI-supported projects have a comprehensive impact on the industry, including wholesale growers, retail garden centers, landscape professionals and horticultural distributors. Grant projects awarded in any one year create a research mix that works to solve industry problems and promotes the use of plant material. Similarly, every effort is made to ensure distribution of grant funds throughout the United States, in keeping with HRI's national research mission.

HRI's primary support goes to applied research, because applied projects answer specific needs, afford immediately applicable results, and require sums within HRI's capability to provide. However, basic research projects that add to the industry's body of knowledge do receive HRI support, particularly where HRI funds are highly leveraged and the research addresses specific industry needs, such as the field of biotechnology and plant breeding. Generally, approximately 80 percent of HRI funding goes to support applied research, 20 percent to support basic research.

### **Industry Relationships**

To further HRI's role as a clearinghouse for industry research, HRI advises state and regional nursery associations, other green industry organizations, and appropriate government agencies of HRI grant awards, and it requests similar information from those organizations. This helps to avoid duplication without impacting efforts to replicate important findings.

Certain research topics may be deemed more appropriately funded at a state or regional level. For example, the use of municipal solid waste as a growing medium, or development of a plant variety with limited hardiness, might be researched regionally. HRI refers promising projects such as these to appropriate state or regional organizations. HRI also solicits state and regional organizations for suggested topics for research. Researchers are encouraged to communicate with these organizations, and their members, to insure that potential projects meet a genuine industry need. In addition, HRI Trustees hold themselves available to help researchers target their projects most effectively.

## Proposal Review and Grant Allocation

Grant applications are solicited annually from land grant universities and other researchers in March, with a reply requested by May 15. HRI's 21-member Board of Trustees makes the initial review of *all* proposals. HRI's scientific advisory panel then reviews proposals recommended by the Trustees. Each proposal is reviewed according to specific criteria:

- Will the proposed research have significant impact on the nursery and landscape industry?
- Does it address a genuine industry problem?
- Does it have broad economic usefulness?
- Are its objectives and present status clearly stated?
- Is the proposed research feasible?
- Is the research methodology sound?
- How will results be disseminated to industry?

The industry evaluation weights the first three questions more heavily; the scientists' evaluation weights the second three. Comments are solicited from major HRI/EF contributors and are considered by the Executive Committee. The top-ranked applications are forwarded to HRI's Executive Committee for final funding decision at its November retreat. A scientist advisor is selected each year to attend the Executive Committee deliberations. A representative from USDA's Agricultural Research Service also attends, to ensure coordination between private industry and government research efforts. Fund donors and grant award winners are notified of awards in December. Funds are distributed the following January. **Grants are considered an unrestricted gift; however, no administrative deduction shall be made.**

An additional criterion scrutinized by HRI is the extent to which HRI's project funding is leveraged. Highly leveraged projects receive particularly favorable attention. For example, land grant universities provide a professor's expertise, a fully equipped laboratory, and other resources that accrue to a project at no additional cost. Similarly, HRI seeks to work with green industry organizations to fund research into common problems (e.g., the International Society of Arboriculture supported HRI-funded research on dogwood anthracnose).

Topical significance is *the key* criterion for proposal selection. This forward-looking approach not only ensures results that meet industry needs, it allows HRI to drive the research process by requesting and favoring those proposals that mesh with its priorities. A topic may be generic (integrated pest management techniques) or specific (development of a Japanese beetle-resistant cultivar of crabapple). Interdisciplinary proposals among departments and/or universities are encouraged. Such proposals require a designated team leader.

**HRI discourages the use of proprietary products or processes (e.g., the so-called gene “gun”) that might limit the usefulness or availability of results to the nursery industry.**

To enable maximum flexibility, no minimum amount is established. Proposals may run from one to three years, with an application for continued funding required each year. Satisfactory completion of one year’s grant may lead to expedited funding of a continuing proposal for the same project. Multiyear funding will be granted only to innovative research topics and approaches.

Partial funding lends HRI’s credibility and prestige to projects it does not fund totally. “Seed money” grows other funding sources for a project. With this in mind, HRI provides an abbreviated application form for proposals requesting \$5,000 or less and an expanded application form for proposals requesting greater funding. However, HRI increasingly supports larger grants. This policy also allows HRI to influence the research process, because sizeable funding attracts a greater number of better-crafted proposals from key researchers.

To ensure accountability, HRI monitors projects it supports, their results and publication. Each grant recipient is required to submit a brief annual report detailing the status of the project and the remaining funds allocated to it. Investigators neglecting this requirement will not be eligible to receive further HRI funding until a report is submitted.

**Because dissemination of research results is a primary HRI mission function, HRI will give special consideration to applications that include industry communication as part of its project objectives.**

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