

NRSP-1 Technical Committee Meeting
August 28, 2007
USDA-CSREES Waterfront Centre, Room 1410 D

Minutes

In Attendance:

Michael Vayda, Lead Advisor and Northeast Region Advisor
William Ravlin, North Central Region Advisor
Lisa Collins, Southern Region Advisor
Colin Kaltenbach, Western Region Advisor
Dennis Unglesbee, CSREES-CRIS
Carol Sowers, CSREES-CRIS
Michel Desbois, CSREES-ISTM
John Minghee, CSREES-ISTM
Greg Crosby, CSREES-One Solution
Daniel Rossi, NERA
Rubie G. Mize, NERA-NIMSS

Action Items:

1. One Solution will put together an Advisory Group with representatives from all the sections and regions. The four regional advisors of NRSP-1 will be members of this group. A suggestion was made to avoid standardizing to fit all. It is important to be sensitive to the differences inherent among extension, research and teaching.
2. CSREES staff from CRIS and One Solution will be invited to give updates at the regional associations' spring meetings.
3. In addition to the annual face-to-face meeting, the NRSP-1 Technical Committee will meet by teleconference quarterly.
4. NRSP-1 will expire on 9/2009. The proposal should be finalized by March 2008. An external review of NRSP-1 will be proposed prior to its revision.
5. An update on One Solution will be requested for inclusion in the Experiment Station Section Meeting to be held in Philadelphia on Sept. 17, 2007.

Attachments

Attachment 1.

NRSP-1 Annual Meeting with CSREES August 28, 2007

NRSP-1 was built on the foundation of collaboration. It continues to function as a support mechanism to allow CSREES to provide enhanced support for contributing partner institutions to submit their CRIS data.

Collecting data in CRIS serves many audiences including CSREES, USDA, Congress, and program leaders. At the partner institutions the information is utilized by project directors, administrators, investigators and the general public.

NRSP-1 aids CSREES in providing a means to support the partner institutions in accomplishing the submission of data that is efficient as possible for the partnership and for CSREES.

Collaboration with the University of Vermont has been a hallmark of the success of NRSP-1 and deserves to be highlighted as this partnership with Vermont approaches the 20 year mark.

The goal of having electronic CRIS forms has always been to give administrators and data managers at the partner institutions as many features and functions as possible to effectively work with the information and with those who provide it.

There have been many value added characteristics. Security is an important one. Separating the data collection process from the primary data storage is protection and security by making corruption through the contributor's gateway almost impossible.

Data quality is enhanced because the information entered is checked and verified before being submitted to CRIS. The electronic forms enforce the CRIS business rules making the input process as efficient and easy as possible and sustaining quality of data.

Administrative functions in the forms are the tools allowing site administrators to collect information locally, verify, and submit it to CRIS.

Extensive HELP and tutorials are available to assist users in the entry process.

Information entered by the partnership is in their control and accessible only by the passwords they control until submitted. Each site "owns" the information they submit to CRIS. Once entered into CRIS it becomes public information.

The CRIS site contacts at contributing institutions are critical elements in the process. Currently there are more than 140 individuals who hold an administrative password on the CRIS Forms Assistance web site.

CRIS site contacts often contribute new ideas and request features that they would like to see added, and the web forms team makes every effort to incorporate them.

Funding provided by NRSP-1 is a key element in supporting the collaboration. NRSP-1 provides 25% of the CRIS budget each fiscal year. Approximately 16% of the total CRIS budget goes back to the University of Vermont as a grant to maintain and operate the CRIS Forms web site.

Both CSREES and the partner institution have benefited greatly from the work accomplished through this collaboration.

Attachment 2

The CRIS Project Exemplifies Effective Collaboration Between CSREES and State Partners

Patricia Downer, University of Vermont

The most important role for the Current Research Information System is to not only collect, but to maintain the integrity, quality, and usefulness of the database. The clear purpose of collecting this data is to generate genuinely useful reports for the audiences that it serves, including not just CSREES, but all of USDA, Congress, researchers / administrators in the life sciences and agriculture, and the general public.

The World Wide Web provides an excellent platform for collecting data for input into the system with unprecedented ease and effectiveness, but the accessibility that makes it so effective can also pose a danger to the integrity of the data. Separating the data collection process from the primary data storage is a safeguard that makes corruption by contributors almost impossible.

It makes sense that if CRIS needs to obtain information from the CSREES state partner institutions, that it offers them a means of contributing that is not just doable, but also empowering. From the beginning, the goal of the electronic CRIS forms has been to give the managers of that data at the institutions, all of the features and functions that they would need to effectively work with the information and with those who provide it. The most important aspect of the web forms system is that the information entered is checked and verified before it can be submitted to CRIS. It is practically impossible to submit an invalid form or to submit the wrong information because the web forms are designed to enforce all the CRIS business rules correctly. This saves everyone valuable time.

The administrative functions in the web forms system is the primary tool that allows designated CRIS site contacts to collect information at their site, verify that it is correct, and submit it to CRIS when ready. An online tutorial is available and is an essential part of the training. One of the most important concepts to understand is that until the action to submit any data to CRIS is performed, the information entered is entirely in the site's own control and accessible only by the passwords which they also control. Each site "owns" the information completely until they submit it to CRIS, where it then becomes public information.

The CRIS contacts at each contributing site are central to this process and they are a unique group of currently 143 individuals who hold an administrative password on the CRIS Forms Assistance web site, allowing them to contribute data to CRIS on behalf of their institutions. Many of them meet each year at the CSREES Administrative Officers Conference where they exchange ideas about CRIS and the web forms system with each other, CRIS staff, and the web forms team. They often contribute new ideas and request features that they would like to see added, and the web forms team makes every effort to incorporate them. The system web site posts news with details about all new features. Many have expressed a high level of satisfaction with the system and support that they receive.

The members of the web forms development team are all CRIS site contacts at their own institutions. Being members of the group they serve, they know exactly what those using the system need and how best to provide it. Currently team members are at the University of Vermont and Colorado State, but during times when new development was being undertaken, the team has included members from Michigan State, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, and the University of Washington.

CRIS staff and the web forms team provide a high level of user support and are always willing to help not just administrative contacts, but individual site users whenever asked. The team is motivated by the sincere desire to provide efficient tools for the CRIS site contacts to collect, manage, and contribute data to CRIS that is complete and correct. Most site contacts feel empowered by this process and the ability to do their jobs effectively using the web forms system. For many, the CRIS web forms was the first web application they had used in their job.

A new goal for the future of the CRIS project is to add more flexibility to the web forms system so that it can handle a greater variety of funding programs and initiatives. The team will be working on consolidating the CRIS rules and CSREES funding program requirements into a viewable table that will assist CRIS staff and site contacts in understanding how documentation and reporting will need to be handled differently for various projects.

The ability to exchange data with other systems, particularly in-house systems at various institutions has always been an objective of the CRIS web forms team. Currently, processes are being developed in collaboration with Virginia Tech., Texas A&M, and Oregon State that allow their in-house systems to transfer data automatically from their own forms to the CRIS web forms. Virginia Tech. and University of California are among those that regularly use web forms data exchange processes to download and incorporate web forms data into their own in-house systems. New XML Schemas are being developed that will allow institutions to submit data to the web forms using XML-based web services.

A higher level of security and backup is being implemented in the web forms system, along with automated failover and disaster recovery to minimize downtime and potential for data loss in the event of widespread disaster. Even in the face of a catastrophic event, Cooperating institutions will be able to continue collecting and submitting data to CRIS even if the database in Washington were temporarily unable to process the information. Should the University of Vermont infrastructure become unavailable, an off-site redundant machine stands ready to take over at a secure off-campus location.

Attachment 3

NRSP-1 BUDGET

The following table provides an overview of the CRIS budget items using the general categories specified for the NRSP budget presentation. The table also shows the NIMSS allocation included in NRSP-1 funding but as a separate line item and not within the categories. The four Columns provide the actual expenditures from the previous fiscal year, the spending plan estimated at the beginning of fiscal year 2007, the actual expenditures to date for fiscal year 2007 (no further spending in fiscal year 2007 is anticipated due to the Agency cut off date), and the estimated spending plan for fiscal year 2008. The spending plan shows a planned 3% increase in the CRIS budget and a 54% increase in funding for NIMSS in fiscal year 2008.

| | Description | Actual 2006 | Planned 2007 | Actual 2007 | Planned 2008 |
|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Salaries | \$533.3 | \$625.4 | \$543.4 | \$627.4 |
| 2 | Benefits | \$146.7 | \$176.4 | \$145.7 | \$177.0 |
| 3 | Wages | \$0.0 | \$0.0 | \$0.0 | \$0.0 |
| 4 | Travel | \$3.7 | \$5.5 | \$0.0 | \$5.5 |
| 5 | Supplies | \$4.2 | \$7.5 | \$5.3 | \$6.0 |
| 6 | Maintenance | \$19.8 | \$20.0 | \$23.3 | \$25.0 |
| 7 | Equipment | \$7.2 | \$55.0 | \$2.8 | \$55.0 |
| 8 | Other | \$415.2 | \$274.8 | \$444.2 | \$304.5 |
| | TOTAL CRIS | \$1,130.1 | \$1,164.6 | \$1,164.6 | \$1,200.3 |
| 9 | TOTAL NIMSS | \$0.0 | \$32.5 | \$32.5 | \$50.0 |
| | NRSP-1 TOTAL | \$1,130.1 | \$1,197.1 | \$1,197.1 | \$1,250.3 |

CRIS FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

The following table provides the breakdown of contributions to the CRIS budget from all participating agencies and organizations. It also reflects the inclusion of the NIMSS budget included in NRSP-1 funding. The NIMSS cost is not included in the CRIS budget for determination of the amount the USDA agencies contribute to support of CRIS.

| | | FISCAL YEAR 2007 | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--|
| | Agency Contributions | % CRIS | Total for CRIS | Totals w/NIMSS | NIMSS | |
| | FS | 10.9 | \$126.9 | \$126.9 | \$0.0 | |
| | ERS | 2.9 | \$33.8 | \$33.8 | \$0.0 | |
| | RD-BCS | 0.3 | \$3.5 | \$3.5 | \$0.0 | |
| | ARS | 35.9 | \$418.1 | \$418.1 | \$0.0 | |
| | CSREES | 25.0 | \$291.2 | \$299.3 | \$8.1 | |
| NRSP-1 | SAES | 21.2 | \$246.9 | \$271.3 | \$24.4 | |
| | 1890 | 3.8 | \$44.3 | \$44.3 | \$0.0 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | \$1,164.6 | \$1,197.1 | \$32.5 | |

Total Amount Contributed by MRF through NRSP-1 = \$271.3 + \$44.3 = \$315.6

Attachment 4

CRIS Migration Update

Background

The Current Research Information System (CRIS) is part of the Information Systems and Technology Management (ISTM) unit within CSREES. CRIS is USDA's primary documentation and reporting system for ongoing and recently completed activities and projects related to agriculture, food and nutrition, and forestry. Over 40,000 projects documented in CRIS are performed or sponsored by USDA research agencies, state agricultural experiment stations, the state land-grant university system, other cooperating state institutions, and participants in CSREES administered grant programs.

CRIS is making a transition to a new environment in preparation to it being a part of the CSREES effort to meet the challenges of the **One Solution Initiative**. Improving services, increasing accessibility, and extending the scope of information are dependent on the capability to increase the flexibility and efficiency of the underlying platform for CRIS.

CRIS is currently maintained on a UNIX platform utilizing Cuadra STAR software. Due to the proprietary nature of the current software and the inherent data structure, CRIS precludes integration with other CSREES major applications. A CRIS Migration effort is well underway to convert the existing CRIS from its current database management system to a Linux-based Oracle database platform.

The CRIS Forms entry system supported at the University of Vermont will remain in place for input and data capture for CRIS. The migration will also not affect the existing public web site. By sustaining the same outward facing components of CRIS the successful completion of the migration effort should be transparent to CRIS users.

Current Status

System Development

- Relational Database Model
- JAVA application
- Data Conversion

System Testing

Objectives

The main objectives of the system test include:

- Verifying the data flow and processes are consistent with expected results
- Detecting any errors/defects/bugs in the system software
- Evaluating the features of the software interface

Special Conditions

The software product must support batch loading of data and must be maintained in synchrony with legacy databases in order to ensure the successful performance of all business functions.

Test Plan Emphasis

- Data import and export
- Application Component or Unit Testing
- Abbreviated Integration Testing
- Usability Testing

System Testing currently underway – estimated completion by mid-September

Short-Term Migration Plans

- Complete all system testing
- Correct major deficiencies
- Complete Implementation Plan
- Certification and Accreditation
- Promote system to production

Long Range Migration Plans

Continue to develop areas of functionality not included in the initial phase of development

- Advanced searching
- Financial Reporting
- Maintenance of cross-cut subject areas for financial reporting

Benefits of the New System

- Effective integration with other CSREES databases
- Improved efficiencies of many data management functions
- Automated workflow processes in lieu of current manual processes
- More conducive to electronic document management
- Improved audit and tracking functions
- Improved data validation processes

Attachment 5.

CSREES Announces Changes to CRIS

The goals of the CSREES initiative for One Solution are to decrease the formal and informal reporting burden for grantees, increase the quality of reports, improve accessibility to information, and improve accountability for information requested by OMB, Congress, and the public. As a step toward integrating CSREES reporting systems, the Agency will release changes to the traditional CRIS reporting system at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2008 (October 1, 2007). The transition will be in the direction of a more standardized report and is designed to familiarize grantees and project directors with an initial portion of an integrated, web-based, One Solution reporting system addressing problems identified by both grantees and agency staff. This approach also allows CSREES to leverage this opportunity as it works incrementally toward a full integration for the CSREES Information System (CIS).

The CRIS Transition Standard Report contains modified categories and guidance that, in addition to research, now covers Extension and Education content. The report format has evolved from the existing CRIS categories aligning the modifications with the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR) <http://grantsgov.tmp.com/grants/assets/rppr.pdf> (which is expected to be required of all federal research agencies in the near future), and the CSREES Generic Logic Model http://www.csrees.usda.gov/business/reporting/part/gen_logic_model.pdf.

The CRIS Transition Standard Report includes the Work Unit/Project Description Resume (AD-416) and Classification (AD-417) with enhanced guidance. The most substantive changes are found in the "Accomplishment Report" (formerly known as the Progress Report on the form AD-421 report). The "Accomplishment Report" categories will include: Outputs, Outcomes/Impacts, Publications, Participants, and Project Modifications. Detailed guidance is provided for each category.

As CSREES has done with the on-line Plan of Work process in the past, the CRIS site administrator at your institution will be notified when they can view the actual template and experiment with the "sandbox" of the CRIS Transition Standard Report. Finally, thanks to the partnership for contributing to the One Solution business case (2005), project plan (2006), and more recently the CRIS Transition Standard Report (2007) categories and guidance. Further information on One Solution can be found at: www.csrees.usda.gov/onesolution or contact Dr. Greg Crosby, (202) 401-6050 gcrosby@csrees.usda.gov

Attachment 6.

NIMSS Update

Rubie Mize

August 28, 2007

1. Since the last NRSP-1 Technical Committee Meeting on June 2, 2006, the NIMSS Oversight Committee and Regional System Administrators have met five and seven times respectively, by teleconference.
2. The members of the NIMSS Oversight Committee are as follows:
Eric Young, Chair, SAAESD-ED
Arlen Leholm, NCRA-ED
Daniel Rossi, NERA-ED
H. Michael Harrington, WAAESD-ED
Ralph Otto, CSREES
Marshall Martin, NCRA
Michael Vayda, NERA
Lisa Collins, SAAESD
David Morrison, SAAESD
LeRoy Daugherty, WAAESD
C. Colin Kaltenbach, WAAESD
Christina Hamilton, NCRA
Rubie Mize, NERA
Harriet Sykes, SAAESD
Donna Pearce, WAAESD
3. The NERA-OED administration had officially transferred to Rutgers University effective July 1, 2007. However, NIMSS will remain at the UMD-OIT and NERA personnel will continue to manage the system.
4. An account for the \$32,500 for NIMSS for FY2007 has now been set up in Rutgers. The proposal was approved and the funding came as a grant from CSREES. Funding for FY2008 was approved by ESCOP at \$50,000. Dr. Rossi will meet with Dr. Otto to discuss the possibility of having the NIMSS fund transferred to Rutgers as an off-the-top.
5. NIMSS Programmer, Judy Sun, left NERA on December 31, 2006. Since then, Natalie Moy is working parttime mainly for troubleshooting. The plan is to have a fulltime programmer hired by this fall.
6. Web Server Statistics for NIMSS:
Period Covered: Six weeks, from Mon-16-Jul-2007 02:02 to Mon-27-Aug-2007 02:03 (42.00 days).
Figures in parentheses refer to the 7-day period ending 27-Aug-2007 04:44.
Successful requests: 511,268 (84,657)
Average successful requests per day: 12,172 (12,093)
Failed requests: 47,791 (7,048) [due to ESCOP webpage that resides within NIMSS]
Redirected requests: 26,265 (3,614)
Distinct files requested: 40,699 (19,165)
Distinct hosts served: 22,878 (4,925)

Data transferred: 11.79 gigabytes (1.60 gigabytes)

Average data transferred per day: 287.49 megabytes (234.18 megabytes)

Number of Active Registered Users = 5,988

Total Registered to date = 9,805

7. Future Task/Activities:

- Revise Peer Review Guidelines
- Mid-term review form to include impact reporting
- Add in e-mail notification instruction to complete AD 416/417 as soon as participation to a multistate project is approved
- Add ability to download records in Excel or Access format to allow stations to manipulate data for their own reporting
- Interface of forms with CRIS allowing population of CRIS forms from NIMSS data
- Interface with POW reporting, in particular those that pertain to multistate integrated activities