

# NSRC

A Cooperative of New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, New York and the USDA Forest Service for Research to Benefit Northern Forest Lands and Communities

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## **Northeastern States Research Cooperative Structure, Governance and Operating Guidelines**

The Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is a competitive research grant program specifically created for studies of the 26-million-acre Northern Forest – a forested region spanning the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Congress established the NSRC in 1998 (Public Law 105-185, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Research Act of 1978 section 1642 (d) (3) as amended in 2003). The NSRC stopped offering new research funds in 2016, to assess the past contributions of the program and to reimagine a new future. Renewed funding was appropriated in 2020 via the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2020 (Report 116-123). This charter describes new governance and operational principles for the NSRC. The NSRC will continue to support and disseminate cross-disciplinary, collaborative ecosystem, socio-economic, forest product, and conservation research that benefits the unique landscapes and communities of the Northern Forest region.

### *EXCLUSIVITY*

This charter replaces and supersedes any previously dated version.

### *STRUCTURE*

The NSRC collaborators include the Northern Research Station (NRS) of the USDA Forest Service (USDA/FS), the University of Vermont (UVM), the University of New Hampshire (UNH), the University of Maine (UM), the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in New York (ESF), and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation (HBRF). The USDA is the primary agency collaborator. UVM, UNH, UM and SUNY-ESF are the state institutional collaborators and HBRF is the regional collaborator. These partners shall collaborate to facilitate new research and knowledge synthesis for managers, policy makers, businesses, and communities in the Northern Forest Region.

### *GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION*

Each state institutional collaborator and the regional collaborator (HBRF) shall designate one Director to serve on the NSRC Executive Committee (EC), and may elect to designate a Manager. The leadership of the USDA/NRS shall designate one person to serve as an *ex officio* member on the EC. The entire six-member EC (Table 1) shall govern the NSRC collaboratively. The four state institutional directors and one regional director shall have the specific responsibility to finalize the roster of projects for

funding, as explained below.

TABLE 1: Membership of the overall NSRC management team, Executive Committee and Management Committee as of February 2020.

NSRC Collaborator	Unit	Executive Committee Member	Manager
USDA Forest Service	Northern Research Station	Chris Woodall, (ex officio, non-voting)	NA
University of Vermont	Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources	William B. Bowden	Julianna White
University of New Hampshire	Department of Natural Resources and the Environment	William H. McDowell	Michelle D. Shattuck
University of Maine	Center for Research on Sustainable Forests	Aaron Weiskittel	Margaret Fergusson
State University of New York	College of Environmental Science and Forestry	René H. Germain	Mary Beth Malmshemer
Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Anthea Lavalley	TBD

The EC shall be supported by a Management Committee (MC) and an External Advisory Committee (EAC).

The MC shall be composed of program Managers identified by the Director from each collaborator institution. The primary purpose of the MC is to ensure the smooth operation of the NSRC. The MC shall achieve this purpose by sharing the responsibilities to execute the Operational Guidelines described below. Together, the EC and MC form the NSRC management team.

The EAC shall be composed of up to 16 members selected to be representative of the communities, businesses, industries, and agencies in the Northern Forest Region that contribute to and benefit from knowledge generated by research funded via the NSRC. The members of the EAC shall collectively represent the perspectives of all four collaborator states. The primary role of the EAC will be to advise the EC and MC about the specific research needs for each annual request for proposals (RFP).

Figure 1 shows the organizational structure of the NSRC.

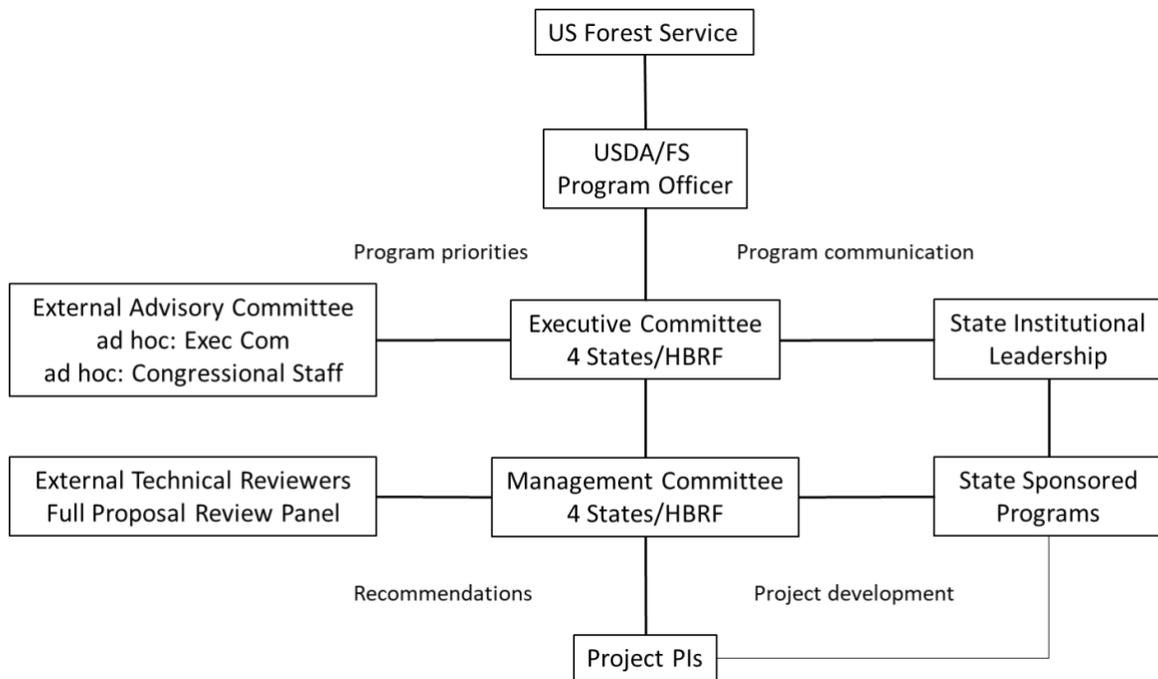


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the NSRC.

### OPERATING GUIDELINES

Members of the NSRC management team share common objectives to solicit, select, fund, and administer research projects across the Northern Forest region that will address the NSRC mission. We will achieve these objectives as follows:

- The EC and MC will collaborate to identify individuals to serve on the EAC.
- Annually, the HBRF will coordinate a meeting of the EAC to identify specific research themes that will form the basis of the RFP for that year. Members of the EAC, EC, and MC will meet in person or remotely to identify these themes well in advance of the intended start dates for selected projects (6-12 months).
- The MC will draft the annual RFP for EC approval and will then circulate the approved RFP as widely as possible in the four-state region. The RFP shall enumerate a set of specific focus questions, identified by the EAC, for which research will be solicited that year. The RFP will specify the amount of funding available and the estimated number of awards expected. More than one type of funding vehicle may be described in the RFP (i.e., larger “research” awards and smaller “travel” awards). The RFP will include pre-proposal and full proposal stages.
- The MC will receive all submitted pre-proposals and will coordinate a review of all pre-proposals with the primary intent to provide rapid feedback to the

Principal Investigators (PIs) regarding the likely competitiveness of their proposal relative to the current RFP. The MC may provide this feedback themselves or with the aid of an anonymous, ad-hoc committee formed for this purpose. At this pre-proposal stage, there will be no assessment of the intellectual or technical merit of the pre-proposal idea. PIs must submit a pre-proposal to be eligible to submit a full proposal. PIs who are discouraged from submitting a full proposal may, at their own discretion, submit a full proposal; i.e., the pre-proposal evaluation is for guidance only and not for selection.

- The MC will receive all submitted full proposals and will organize at least two (2) external, expert, technical reviews for each full proposal received. External reviewers must adhere to common standards governing Conflicts of Interest, as detailed in NSRC's Conflict of Interest Policy.
- The MC will convene an in-person or virtual, *ad hoc*, Full Proposal Review Panel (FPRP) who have reasonable technical knowledge of the areas covered by the annual RFP and the way that this knowledge could benefit stakeholders. Members of the FPRP shall not include members of the EAC. The purpose of the panel is to use the panelists' knowledge and the external reviews to rank the full proposals for consideration by the EC. Members of the RFPF will abide by the NSRC's Conflict of Interest Policy. The FPRP will use the following criteria to evaluate each proposal:
  - General fit to the primary question(s) in the RFP. (20%)
  - Degree to which environmental and social, community, economic, or workforce development concerns are integrated. (10%)
  - Clarity of the specific research question or project deliverable and likelihood of success. (15%)
  - Appropriateness of the technical approach, based on external technical reviews. (10%)
  - Wide applicability to the NSRC region (versus narrow benefit to a specific entity). (20%)
  - As per USDA/FS statute, priority will be given to proposals that offer cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested. (20%)
  - Potential leveraged funding and collaborations, including collaborations with current USDA/FS research personnel and facilities. (5%)

These criteria and the associated percentages may be modified with future experience and input from the EAC.

- As soon as possible after the annual FPRP meets, the EC will meet to consider the recommendations of the FPRP and the external technical reviews to finalize the ranked slate of specific projects for awards that year. The final roster of projects selected for funding will be reported to the USDA Forest Service and to the EAC.

## *COLLABORATOR RESPONSIBILITIES*

- The representative from the USDA/FS will be the primary liaison between the NSRC and the NRS. They will ensure that the NSRC Executive Committee and Management Committee understand all requirements of the primary award that supports the NSRC.
- UVM will serve as the primary recipient and fiscal agent of the NSRC award from the USDA/FS. UVM will establish and transmit all external subcontracts for collaborator administration and research projects, track match contributions, monitor subcontract progress, process invoices, collect project reports, and provide necessary project and fiscal reports to the USDA/FS. UVM will maintain the NSRC website.
- The MC will coordinate the pre-proposal review process, identify external technical reviewers for all full proposals, organize an annual full proposal review panel, and summarize the recommendations of the full proposal review panel for the EC.
- UM will also coordinate the communications strategy for the NSRC, including a Project Webinar series to disseminate recent findings from NSRC projects.
- Based on input provided by the NSRC management team, HBRF will coordinate an annual meeting of the EAC to develop input for an annual RFP. HBRF will summarize the recommendations of the EAC for the EC and MC and provide feedback to the EAC members to ensure that they feel that their recommendations were heard and implemented. The HBRF will also identify opportunities for the NSRC to disseminate the findings of NSRC research to broader audiences via publicly accessible media.
- The EC will work with the MC to provide the USDA Forest Service with an annual business report that summarizes financial spending, project progress, and program outputs.

## *OTHER PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS*

**Maintenance of NSRC Website.** The NSRC website will be hosted by UVM and will serve as the primary repository of NSRC-related information, including, but not limited to, this charter, the current RFP, and final reports of NSRC-sponsored research. The EC will review the structure and content of the NSRC website at least annually, and will provide feedback and guidance to the NSRC webmaster.

**Data Management.** The NSRC will develop a separate data management plan and will require as a condition of funding that all recipients of NSRC funding adhere to this data management plan. The NSRC will enter into an agreement with the Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative (FEMC) to archive NSRC data according to long-standing

protocols already developed by the FEMC.

**NSRC Program Administrative Costs.** The state institutional and regional collaborators shall limit the collective, direct costs of administration of the EC, EAC, and MC, as detailed in the Operational Guidelines above, to not more than 20% of the total NSRC award. As the lead organization, UVM will limit its indirect (facilities and administration or overhead) cost rate to 26%. Cost share is not required on the direct and indirect costs to administer the NSRC by the state and regional collaborators. Any F&A costs foregone by these administrative collaborators is indicative of their interest to share the costs to administer this important program.

**Individual Research Project Indirect Costs.** Applicants to the NSRC RFP may use the most appropriate federal negotiated indirect cost rate (F&A rate) of their institution or organization. Applicants may elect to offer a lower F&A rate. In this case, the F&A costs foregone may be used to meet a portion of the research matching requirements of the proposed project, described below. If an institution or organization does not have a federal negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA), a 10% de minimis rate can be used.

**Matching Requirements for Research Projects.** As per statute, preference will be given to research proposals that offer cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested (i.e. \$0.5 cost share for each \$1 federal award). A portion of these matching funds may derive from overhead cost foregone. This criterion is reflected in the final proposal evaluation metrics.

**Acknowledgement of NSRC Funding.** Any product that is wholly or partially funded by the NSRC must acknowledge the NSRC and the USDA Forest Service as a source of funds. For example: “*Support for this project was provided by the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC), a partnership of Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont, that is coordinated with and funded through the USDA Forest Service.*” This requirement does not preclude acknowledgement of other collaborations and/or funding sources.

**Independent Relationship.** Each signatory to this charter is independent of each other signatory. This charter does not create or intend to create a partnership, agent/principal relationship, or joint venture of the parties and no party shall hold itself out contrary to these terms by advertising or otherwise, nor shall a party be bound by or held liable for any representation, act or omission whatsoever of the others. Each party shall be solely responsible for any and all actions, suits, damages, liability or other proceedings brought against it in connection with said party’s performance pursuant to this charter or the negligence or intentional misconduct of any of its officers, agents or employees. No party is obligated to indemnify the others or to hold the others harmless from costs or expenses incurred as a result of such claims. Nothing contained herein shall be construed as a waiver of the sovereign immunity of any party and each party shall continue to enjoy all rights, claims, immunities and defenses available to it under law.

## NSRC COLLABORATORS AGREEMENT

By signing below, the collaborators of the Northeastern States Research Cooperative agree to uphold the basic structure, governance, and operating guidelines outlined in this charter.

_____ William B. Bowden, VT Director Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont	Date	_____ Nancy Mathews, Dean, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont	Date
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_____ Aaron Weiskittel, ME Director Center for Research on Sustainable Forests, University of Maine	Date	_____ Christopher Boynton, Director, Office of Research Administration, University of Maine	Date
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_____ William H. McDowell, NH Director Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of New Hampshire	Date	_____ Marian G. McCord, Senior Vice Provost for Research, Economic Engagement, and Outreach, University of New Hampshire	Date
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_____ René H. Germain, NY Director College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York	Date	_____ Christopher T. Nomura, Ph.D. VP for Research and Research Foundation for SUNY Campus Operations Manager	Date
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_____ Anthea Lavalley Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Date	_____ Brenda McCartney, Hubbard Brook Research Foundation Director of Finance and Administration	Date
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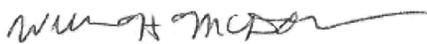
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New Hampshire

Date

 3/30/2020

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Senior Vice Provost for  
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University of New  
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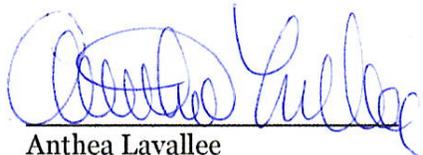
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