



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

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 and 2021 via the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2020 and 2021 (Report 116-123). This charter describes 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 United States Department of Agriculture/Forest Service (USDA/FS), the University of Vermont (UVM)—an instrumentality of the State of Vermont, 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/FS is the primary agency collaborator. UVM, UNH, UM and 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/FS 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 responsibilities to approve the scope and content of the annual RFP, the eligibility of applicants, and the final roster of projects for funding, with responsibilities and guidance as explained below.

TABLE 1: Membership of the NSRC management team of June 2021.

NSRC Collaborator	Unit	Executive Committee Member	Management Committee Member
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	Department of Sustainable Resources Management	René H. Germain	Mary Beth Malmsheimer
Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Anthea Lavalley	Sarah Garlick

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 approximately 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 request for proposals (RFP) for research projects and the Indigenous Forest Knowledge Fund (IFKF). If the MC deems it helpful, NSRC may request that additional external consultants also advise the EC and MC about the specific research needs for the annual RFPs.

Figure 1 shows the organizational structure of the NSRC.

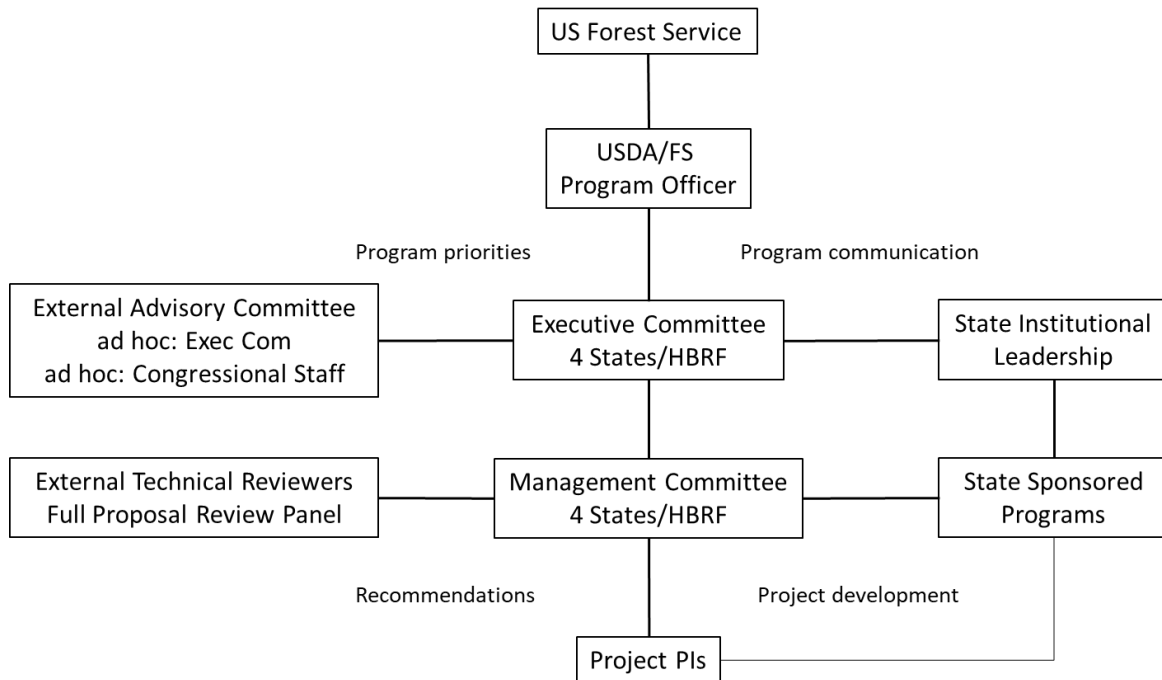


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the NSRC.

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 through competitions for research projects and the IFKF. The processes are 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 that will identify specific research themes for the annual RFP. 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 or EAC may request additional input, for example from consultants from Tribal Nations.

Research Projects Competition

- The MC will draft RFPs for EC approval and will then circulate the approved RFPs as widely as possible in the four-state region. The RFP shall enumerate a set of research priorities as identified by the EAC, for which research will be solicited that year. The RFP will specify who is eligible to apply, 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 (e.g., 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 proposals relative to the current RFP. At the 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 based on the pre-proposal evaluation 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) composed of panelists 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 may also serve as current or former 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 FPRP will abide by the NSRC’s Conflict of Interest Policy. The FPRP will use the criteria described in the RFP to evaluate each proposal. As an example, the criteria in the 2021 RFP are:
 - Proposal clearly states (a) **problem** of practice or (b) **research question** to be addressed and why it is important in the Northern Forest.
 - The problem to be addressed is well-defined, with an appropriate **approach and methods** that correlate to a high likelihood of success within the project period.
 - The project is **widely applicable** to the NSRC region (versus narrow benefit to a specific location or entity).
 - The proposal has a solid **rationale and communications plan, and outputs** will lead to wide use by practitioners, decision-makers, or other target audiences.
 - **Partners and stakeholders will be involved** throughout the design and execution of the project.
 - The project demonstrates a favorable **cost-benefit ratio**.
 - The project has high or exceptional **potential to address stakeholder priorities** in the Northern Forest.

The criteria and weight of each criterion may be modified with future experience and/or input from the EAC.

- As soon as possible after the 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. All proposals must first meet the stated criteria of direct relevance to the RFP, technical excellence, and utility to a wide range of stakeholders in the region. In selecting final proposals to recommend for awards, the EC will be guided by the statute 16 USC § 1644 Forestry and rangeland competitive research grants [\[link\]](#), as follows:
 - Highest priority for awards will be given to applicants that provide at least 50 percent non-federal matching of the federal award amount
 - Priority also will be given to proposals that include substantive collaboration with a USDA/FS researcher. In developing a final portfolio, at least 25% of the total annual federal budgets for funded NSRC research projects will include documented collaboration with USDA/FS. USDA/FS researchers may lead, participate, and benefit from NSRC-funded projects but may not draw salary or benefits from NSRC funds. This priority is additive to the priority described above, for 50 percent matching funds.
 - Proposed research is conducted as part of an existing private and public partnership that involves several interested research partners. This priority is additive to the first and second priorities for 50% matching funds and include substantive collaboration with USDA/FS researchers.
 - Additional appropriate selection criteria may be considered by the EC, including EAC-defined priorities for the RFP, the topical and geographic balance of projects, and involvement of early-career professionals.
- The final roster of projects selected for funding will be reported to the USDA/FS and to the EAC.

Indigenous Forest Knowledge Fund Competition

- IFKF proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of NSRC leaders/administrators and Tribal consultants. The committee will apply the following evaluation criteria, giving equal weight to each:
 - General fit to the program's primary goals and requirements
 - Clarity of the specific project objective and likelihood of success
 - Appropriateness of the approach and methods, including intellectual sovereignty and/or data management
 - Tribal Leader endorsement as expressed in signed letters of support
- As with the research projects, the EC will be guided by the priorities related to 16 USC § 1644 Forestry and rangeland competitive research grants [\[link\]](#) and described above.

COLLABORATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- The representative from the USDA/FS will be the primary liaison between the NSRC and the USDA/FS 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 subawards for collaborator administration and research projects, track match contributions, monitor subcontract progress, process invoices, collect project reports, and provide necessary technical and fiscal reports to the USDA/FS.
- 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. HBRF will also identify opportunities for the NSRC to disseminate the findings of NSRC research to broader audiences via publicly accessible media.
- 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.
- The MC will coordinate the communications strategy for the NSRC, which may include public-facing annual reports or a project webinar series to generate interest, share research objectives and findings, and discuss management implications of NSRC-funded activities.
- The EC will work with the MC to provide the USDA/FS with an annual business report that summarizes financial spending, project progress, and program outputs.

OTHER PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

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 16 USC § 1644 Forestry and rangeland competitive research grants ([link](#)), 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 priority is reflected in the final proposal evaluation metrics.

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.


Acknowledgement of NSRC Funding. Any product that is wholly or partially funded by the NSRC must acknowledge the NSRC and the USDA/FS as a source of funds. For example: *“Support for this project was provided by the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC), a collaboration among the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in New York, University of Maine, University of New Hampshire, the University of Vermont, and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation 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.

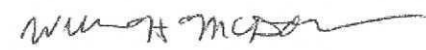
NSRC COLLABORATORS AGREEMENT

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.

Executive Committee Member	Signature and Date	Representative of Collaborating Institution	Signature and Date
William B. Bowden VT Director Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont	William B. Bowden Jan 12, 2022	Nancy Mathews Dean, Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont	Nancy E. Mathews Jan 12, 2022
Aaron Weiskittel ME Director Center for Research on Sustainable Forests, University of Maine	Aaron Weiskittel Jan 12, 2022	Christopher Boynton Director, Office of Research Administration, University of Maine	Christopher Boynton Jan 18, 2022
William H. McDowell NH Director Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of New Hampshire	William H. McDowell Jan 18, 2022	Marian G. McCord Senior Vice Provost for Research, Economic Engagement, and Outreach, University of New Hampshire	Marian G. McCord Jan 19, 2022
René H. Germain NY Director College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York	Rene' Germain Jan 19, 2022	John C. Stella VP for Research and Campus Operations Manager, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York	John C. Stella Jan 19, 2022
Anthea Lavalley NSRC Regional Collaborator Executive Director, Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Anthea Lavalley Jan 19, 2022	Brenda McCartney Director of Finance and Administration, Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Brenda McCartney Jan 19 2022

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