



# AREERA State Plans of Work

**T**his Plan of Work (POW) newsletter is a first in a series that will focus on the findings of the 2007 Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results (Annual Report) with general recommendations for improving reporting for the 2008 Annual Report. This newsletter will focus on general observations and general suggestions for overall improvement.

## **How much information do we need?**

Once the first Annual Report was submitted from most states the Office of Planning and Accountability completed some preliminary analysis. This analysis showed that while most states' POWs and Annual Reports are broad-based as intended, some states may have increased their own reporting burden by choosing to send CSREES more data than necessary. For example, one State's 2007 Annual Report contained over 600 pages of data. Much of this data were in the form an overabundant number of pages of quantitative output data in the Planned Program section. CSREES has no need of this much output data. And while it is important to recognize that outputs exist, the important emphasis should be on quantitative and qualitative outcomes. For the outputs that do exist in your POW, it is OK to not report the actual data if there is related outcome data in your report. For outcomes, it is OK to leave the qualitative section blank if the outcome has not yet come to fruition. The qualitative section is for outcomes that actually show some real impact.

The POW and Annual Report should be broad-based, but comprehensive in scope. The original guidelines suggested that between 5 and 15 Planned Programs were desirable. Most states' POWs and Annual Reports are indeed broad-based and fit into this schema. Although the POW and Annual Report should cover the breadth of what you do with the relevant formula grants, remember to pick and choose your best examples of outputs and outcomes to showcase. If CSREES received just one or two really good **quality** outcomes for each Planned Program in the POW and Annual Report we would have between 1000 and 2000 really good outcomes from which to choose when we have to do our reports for our portfolio reviews, the budget or other reports to USDA, the Office of Management and Budget, and Congress.

If you are entering more than 200 pages of data in the POW or Annual Report, you need to ask yourself if everything you input really necessary to effectively be accountable for the formula grant funds you are receiving.

## **Data needs to be tied to Formula Grants**

Preliminary analysis of output and outcome data in the POW and Annual Report seems to be revealing that not all data can be tied to one of the four formula grants which are exclusive to these Plans and Reports. For example: we are finding some patents may not have used any formula grants (Hatch, Evans-Allen, Smith-Lever, or 1890 Extension). CSREES is often asked to provide outputs and outcomes for these

formula grants in our reports to Congress or for budget requests. We need to have confidence that these data can be tied to one or more of these funding lines.

### **Quality, Relevance and Performance**

CSREES uses the criteria of Quality, Relevance, and Performance when evaluating its portfolios. We look for the same in the POWs and Annual Reports.

What defines quality? Quality in the POW and Annual Report means you have significant outcomes. There is also evidence that stakeholder input influences decision making on your Planned Programs. And the Planned Programs are aligned with current state of science and your priorities.

What defines relevance? The scope of the POW and Annual Report covers the breadth of the state's portfolio. The POW and Annual Report are focused on issues, topics, and critical needs of the state. Moreover, the POW and Annual Report identify contemporary and/or emerging issues that are consistent and relevant to the state's mission and demonstrate multidisciplinary balance in solving problems.

What defines performance? The state's POW and Annual Report show evidence of high productivity and the comprehensiveness of the state's portfolio in terms of area of work, outputs, and outcomes. Thus, there is evidence of a high level of accountability.

### **The Next Newsletter**

The next newsletter will continue to focus on the findings of the 2007 Annual Report with recommendations for improving reporting of outcomes for future Annual Reports.

### **Software Improvement Being Made**

This summer the IT staff is busy making some improvements to the Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results on-line software. Among these improvements are the following:

Add a sequence number field to each Planned Program to allow the states to number them, and thus, display them in a state-determined sequence on-line and on paper.

Add a "forgot my password" feature to the logon screen.

Add a "verbose" print version that shows all check boxes whether selected or not to allow for a pass-around copy to allow for mark-up, etc.

Add a checkbox on each Output and Outcome in the Annual Report which states: "Not reporting on this Outcome (or Output) in this Annual Report." Thus, the data for the Outcome or Output would not be seen in final.

Study ways to revise and enhance text box and paper report features.

### **AREERA Plan of Work Dates**

2010 – 2014 Plan of Work Update and 2008 Annual Report software rollover – October 2008

2008 Annual Report due by April 1, 2009

2010 - 2014 Plan of Work Update due by April 1, 2009.

**For more information on the Plan of Work, e-mail the Plan of Work staff at [pow@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:pow@csrees.usda.gov), or call Bart Hewitt, 202-720-0747.**