

## **Guidance on Changes in the Plan of Work Software FY12 Reporting Cycle**

NIFA has continuously been making changes and improvements to the POW software and reporting process as a result of recommendations made by the Panel of Experts that convened in May, 2010. The Panel convened in order to satisfy a provision in the 2008 Farm Bill which stipulated that the “Secretary shall work with university partners in extension and research to review and identify measures to streamline the submission, reporting under, and implementation of plan of work requirements.” The Panel was comprised mainly of representatives from the Land Grant University systems; NIFA National Program Leaders also participated on the panel.

For the FY12 reporting year (submission of the 2013-2017 POW and 2011 Annual Report), POW users will notice two major changes in 2013 Plans in the software:

1. Evaluation Section for Planned Programs is now mandatory.
2. Target numbers for Standard Outputs and State Defined Outputs have been removed.

### **Guidance on the Mandatory Evaluation Sections**

*Please note upfront:* NIFA’s making the Evaluation section mandatory is not meant to add a larger burden of work on the states, since this action is a result of the Panel and aimed at gathering information that NIFA can more easily use to assess the success of states’ programs and better tell the formula fund story. It was realized that although the evaluation section was previously not mandatory, most states were spending some time filling it out in some manner. However, the previous rigid check box structure was of limited use to NIFA, and the very short statements some states provided didn’t explain enough to NIFA reviewers about how evaluation of programs was really being carried out, except that they were “being done.”

#### *According to the Panel:*

“There was considerable agreement about the need for evaluation, the need for better evaluation, and the need for evaluation plans. There was less agreement on requiring an evaluation plan in the POW. All agreed that it is difficult to justify the expenditures of federal dollars if one cannot document accomplishments and the relationship between investments and results. In the end, most agreed that including an evaluation plan in the POW is a good idea. It reinforces the need for quality evaluation; encourages documentation to see if outcomes achieved are what was planned; and connects with good scholarship and research-based programming. Having an evaluation would be helpful for other university needs, as it helps to collect and analyze data. The problem may be in the way the instructions in the POW are expressed regarding the evaluation plan. Panelists made several suggestions about how to better word what would be required. For example, one suggestion was that the required evaluation plans simply include: what will be evaluated, how will it be evaluated, and to whom will these results go. It was agreed that making an optional evaluation plan in the POW, as in past guidance, is not useful. Panelists agreed that there should be an evaluation plan per

planned program. In the Plan of Work, NIFA does not need a detailed plan: submitters need to indicate that there is an evaluation plan and describe it in general. “

In order to adhere to the Panel’s recommendations of making evaluation mandatory, yet only requiring states to “describe it in general,” the software has been changed to simply include a single text box that is required to be filled in for each Planned Program in a state’s 2013 Plan (and future year Plans).

The new Evaluation section per each Planned Program appears in the software like this:

The screenshot displays a web-based software interface. At the top, there is a green navigation bar with links: Home, About POW, Contact Us, REEIS, Log Out, and Back to Portal. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links: Plan Overview, Merit Review Process, Evaluation of Multis & Joint Activities, Stakeholder Input, Planned Programs, Summary, KAs, Situation, Assumptions, Inputs, Activity, Outputs, State Defined Outputs, State Defined Outcome, Ext. Factors, and Evaluation. On the right side of the main content area, there are links for 'View programs' and 'Add new program'. The main content area shows the 'Name of the Planned Program.' as 'Climate Change: Water Quality Program'. Below this, there is a green header for 'V.(K) Planned Program (Evaluation Studies)'. The main section is titled 'Brief description of planned evaluation studies.' with a help icon. It contains a rich text editor with a toolbar featuring icons for undo, redo, bold, italic, underline, text color, background color, bulleted list, numbered list, link, unlink, and a refresh icon. The text area is currently empty. At the bottom of the text area, it says 'body div'. Below the text area, there is a red warning message: 'Entering or copying text into this text box of more than 3200 will be truncated to fit and the excess will be lost.' and a small '23' character. At the very bottom, there are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons.

- It is one free-form text box in which you have the freedom to describe the evaluations you will be performing for each planned program.
- The main goal of this text box is to convey to NIFA **how you will know if your program is successful or not.**
- NIFA does not need detailed, step by step descriptions of every formal or non-formal evaluation you perform to measure your program, but rather general descriptions of the type(s) of evaluation(s) and when in the life of the program they will be conducted and with/by whom.

- A reasonable entry in this text box could be composed of simple statements put together into a short paragraph. So, you could, for example, put together a paragraph including something similar to the progression of the following statements:
  - For this Planned Program, evaluation will be performed by distributing written surveys to all program participants.
  - The surveys will be done pre and post program.
  - The surveys will ask questions focused primarily on....
  - The surveys will help us measure the percentage of program participants who increased their knowledge on...
  - The results of the surveys will be distributed to or will be used for....(if applicable).

There is also a help box in the software to guide you through the writing process of what should be included in the text box.

The screenshot shows a software interface with a green header bar. The header bar contains the text 'V.(K) Planned Program (Evaluation Studies)'. Below the header bar, there is a text box with the label 'Brief description of planned evaluation studies.' and a question mark icon. A red arrow points to the question mark icon.

The help text is as follows:

*This text box provides you the opportunity to describe the evaluation studies you have planned for your program(s) in the manner you see fit. Evaluating a program at key times in the life of the program allows you, the NIFA Planning Accountability and Reporting staff, and your NIFA Liaison to monitor the success of the program and follow up as necessary. Both NIFA and you want to know if your program is successful, and formal evaluation undergirds the entire Logic Model and should be part of your program plan. NIFA suggests including (although, you are not limited to) the following items in the description of your planned evaluation studies: time of study (pre/post program, time series, etc.), type of study (case study, data comparisons, etc.), and type(s) of measures (percentage increases/decreases, dollar amounts, participant numbers, etc.).*

*NOTE: It is acceptable in your description to include references to other areas of your Plan. For example, if a particular evaluation method is, in fact, one of the outcomes listed for the program, you may make a statement such as: "We will evaluate percentage increases in action as stated in Outcome #4," or simply, "See Outcome #4."*

## Removal of Standard Outputs and State Defined Outputs

The change you will see in this section is that you will no longer be required to estimate target numbers for these items. Instead, you will simply be asked to check a box that affirms you will continue to collect data for both standard outputs (numbers of contacts, patents, and peer reviewed publications) and state defined outputs. NIFA does use this data and considers them a valuable measure of how your programs are doing. The manner in which you report this data in the Annual Report remains the same. The following screenshots show how these sections in the 2013 Plans now appear:

### *Standard Output Measures:*

Plan Overview Merit Review Process Evaluation of Multis & Joint Activities Stakeholder Input Planned Programs  
Summary KAs Situation Assumptions Inputs Activity **Outputs** State Defined Outputs State Defined Outcome Ext. Factors Evaluation

[View programs](#) [Add new program](#)

**Name of the Planned Program.**  
Climate Change: Water Quality Program

**V.(G) Planned Program (Standard output measures)**

NIFA no longer requires you to report target numbers for standard output measures in the Plan of Work. However, all institutions will report actual numbers for standard output measures in the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results. The standard outputs for which you must continue to collect data are:

- Number of contacts
  - Direct Adult Contacts
  - Indirect Adult Contacts
  - Direct Youth Contacts
  - Indirect Youth Contacts
- Number of patents submitted
- Number of peer reviewed publications

An asterisk (\*) indicates a required field.

\*  Clicking this box affirms you will continue to collect data on these items and report the data in the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results.

State Defined Outputs Measures:

(You still have the ability to define, edit, delete, and add measures to this section; the difference is that you no longer need to provide numbers estimates.)

Plan Overview Merit Review Process Evaluation of Multis & Joint Activities Stakeholder Input **Planned Programs**  
Summary KAs Situation Assumptions Inputs Activity Outputs **State Defined Outputs** State Defined Outcome Ext. Factors Evaluation

Add new Output Measure

**Name of the Planned Program.**  
*Climate Change: Water Quality Program*

**V.(H) State Defined Outputs** ?

Education/Classes/Training in water quality protection and VI * A * Syst Program	Edit	Delete
Workshops / Presentations about water quality protection, less toxic household products and NPS BMP's through the VI * A * Syst Program, on-site waste water treatment, cistern care, and watershed protection.	Edit	Delete
One on one consultations with residents, government employees, students	Edit	Delete
Tours of VI natural areas with students, community groups and others to raise awareness about watersheds and water quality protection.	Edit	Delete
Educational/research publications, articles, posters, newsletters, GIS maps related to non-point source pollution, on-site wastewater treatment, watersheds, VI * A * Syst, and protection of VI native plant communities.	Edit	Delete
PSAs	Edit	Delete
Fairs	Edit	Delete
TV/Media	Edit	Delete

18

An asterisk (\*) indicates a required field.

Clicking this box affirms you will continue to collect data on these items and report the data in the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results.

**Done**