

## Managing Director Conflict of Interest in MAISRC Proposal Funding

FINAL 7/12/17

This policy addresses the need for MAISRC to have its director(s) directly contribute to the research mission of the center in a manner that avoids conflicts of interest in prioritizing and selecting research projects for funding.

Background:

The position of MAISRC Director is held by a PhD scientist with nationally recognized expertise in AIS so he/she can provide the leadership needed to advance the center's mission, which is fundamentally research-based. The duties of the director are 50% administrative (i.e., leadership and organization of the center) and 50% research. For the MAISRC Director to be successful as a university faculty member in this position, he/she must have a highly productive, externally funded AIS research program. The director is unlikely to be able to work on the highest priority AIS research needs if he/she cannot rely on center funding and the center then loses critical capacity if the director cannot perform needed research.

Research funding for the Director from the Center has varied over time. Research funds for the founding director were appropriated as part of the grant set-up. For succeeding directors, research funding from the center has needed to be secured through its competitive grant process. This creates a potential conflict of interest because the Director is responsible for final decisions on project selection and funding.

For purposes of this policy, a Director Project is defined as a project in which the Director serves as PI or Co-PI.

Conflict management proposal:

### **1. Director Projects are not submitted as part of the MAISRC RFP competition**

This allows the Director to appropriately be involved in evaluating and selecting future MAISRC research, a core function of the MAISRC Director. It also removes any perceived conflict of a Director, his/her staff, or review committee favoring a Director Project and thus putting other proposals at a disadvantage for reasons other than merit.

### **2. Director Projects can be eligible for MAISRC- discretionary project funds**

A percentage of MAISRC research funds will be set aside for MAISRC- discretionary project funds. Director Projects are eligible to receive these funds within limits and according to specified procedures and oversight.

### **3. Establish funding limits for Director Projects**

A Director, as PI or co-PI, is eligible to receive up to one award per RFP that is similar in funding amount and duration to other awards being granted in that competition. A director should not designate a proposal as one of his/her projects unless he/she will be an essential and substantial contributor to the effort.

**4. Utilize the RFP pre-proposal review process to determine if Director Project should be funded.**

The pre-proposal review team is asked to anonymously score and vote on the proposed Director Project using the same process and criteria used to evaluate proposals received through the RFP. There is full transparency with the review team in advance of this process and the Director will abstain from evaluation of his or her own proposal. A majority vote from the review team, collected anonymously, will determine if the proposal should be funded subject to development of a full research proposal and being peer reviewed.

**5. Utilize anonymous peer review to evaluate scientific merit, appropriateness of budget for work proposed, DNR support for the project, etc.**

A committee of three Center Faculty Group members is asked to serve as peer review committee for the Director Project. The Associate Director coordinates the peer review process according to the same procedures and criteria used for the RFP proposals, except that the peer review committee selects appropriate reviewers, receives peer review feedback, and requests revisions from the Director as necessary. The committee members will receive credit for this work in fulfillment of their MAISRC service obligation. Upon approval by the majority of the committee, the Director will develop a workplan and budget.

**6. Use the funding entity's workplan and budget approval process to ensure external accountability**

The Director will develop a workplan and budget for his or her project and submit to LCCMR or other respective funding entity for approval along with the research addendum. Upon approval by the funding entity, a UMN account will be established and funds may be spent. Workplan updates and amendments will be handled by the funding entity according to their usual non-MAISRC practice.

**7. Additional accountability provided by the CFANS Dean**

The MAISRC Director reports to the Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS), which has oversight of MAISRC. Therefore, if there are any concerns during any part of the process described above, they may be submitted to the Dean of CFANS for mediation.