

ARS □ NIFA □ ERS □ NASS

Policies and Procedures

Title: Research Support Agreements

Number: 704.0.v.2

Date: March 21, 2014

Originating Office: Financial Management and Agreements Division
Grants and Agreements Management Branch

This Replaces: This replaces P&P 704.0 dated November 17, 2009

Distribution: ARS Headquarters, Business Service Centers, Areas,
and Locations

This revision incorporates new terminology reflecting the AFM reorganization into Business Service Centers. RSA policy remains unchanged.

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the responsibilities, policies, and procedures for establishing Research Service Agreements (RSAs) with State Cooperative Institutions and other colleges or universities for the acquisition of goods and services, without regard to competition and other Federal acquisition regulations.

2. Background

The authority for the RSA was established to adequately recognize the cooperative relationship between ARS and the State Cooperative Institutions and other colleges and universities. Because of the close geographical proximity of ARS laboratories to universities and other colleges, the acquisition of goods and services from the State Cooperative Institutions and other colleges and universities without regard to competition was needed. This special authority allows ARS to utilize the general support and personal services of the University to carry out the agricultural research, extension, or teaching activities of mutual interest.

In 2007, the Extramural Agreements Division established a national workgroup to study the award process taken by Agency personnel when awarding the RSA. The workgroup determined that the award process would be significantly streamlined by consolidating the RSA and Task Order requirements into a single instrument. The “new” RSA instrument eliminated the need to establish a 5-year umbrella agreement, and the use of Optional Forms 347 and 348 (Order for Supplies or Services and Continuation Sheet). Today, the RSA is awarded through ARIS/AIMS and does not require the AD-700 or Task Order forms.

3. Policy

A. General

- ARS may acquire goods and/or services, including limited personal services from the Cooperator, to carry out research of mutual interest.
- RSAs, including all amendments, must be initiated and approved in ARIS/AIMS prior to execution.
- The RSA Budget/Statement of Work must, at a minimum, include:
 - A description and amount of the supplies, materials, and/or services to be received.
 - Listing of occupational categories with duties.
 - Dates or timeframe for the delivery of goods or performance of services.

- RSAs may be awarded in one fiscal year with performance ending in another fiscal year, provided that all of the following conditions are met ([7 U.S.C. 2209c](#)).
 - The requested services must be severable.
 - The requirements are to meet a bona-fide need established in the current fiscal year.
 - Performance commences in the current fiscal year.
 - The requirements do not exceed **12 months** in duration.
 - The REE Ethics Office will ensure that all conflict of interest and impartiality concerns are addressed upon review of the ARS PI's Financial Disclosure Report and Conflict of Interest Certification Form REE-102.
- Full and part-time temporary requirements for personal services shall be limited to 4 years in duration. General support costs are **exempt** from the 4-year limitation requirement. (See B. Authorized Uses, General Support Costs)
- ARS employees may provide work assignments, technical instruction, or scientific direction to Cooperator's employees, however, employee relations, benefits, and other administrative issues must remain the sole responsibility of the Cooperator.
- ARS employees **shall not** intervene in personnel matters between the Cooperator and their employees including, but not limited to, issues regarding the following:
 - Leave (sick/annual)
 - Holiday pay/vacation benefits
 - Inclement weather dismissals
 - Salary increases/fringe benefits
- The authority to obtain personal services under the RSA **shall not** be used to:
 - Give a particular person a temporary or intermittent appointment in anticipation of a Federal appointment.
 - To avoid competitive Federal employment procedures.
- The RSA shall not be used to avoid or subvert established Federal procurement and property procedures.

- Reimbursement of tuition costs may be negotiated and, as such, shall be considered an allowable cost under the RSA (7 U.S.C. 3319a).
- The Cooperator's negotiated ICR, not to exceed 10 percent of total direct cost, is allowable under the RSA (7 U.S.C. 3319a).
- The Area Office shall determine who is responsible for negotiating the ICR payable on the RSA, and notify their locations by policy memorandum or e-mail.

NOTE: The negotiated ICR agreement may cover an indefinite number of years.

- The ADO may enter into a RSA with State Cooperative Institutions or other colleges and universities outside of their location when services are required to support the location's research project at a remote worksite.
- The ADO must have a Level 1 (or higher) delegation of authority to commit Agency resources on the RSA. (See [P&P 700.0.v.2, Delegation of Authority for Authorized Departmental Officers](#))
- The ARS PI must have a delegation of authority to act as the technical representative on the RSA. (See [P&P 701.0, Selection, Appointment, and Responsibilities of the Authorized Departmental Officer's Designated Representative \(ADODR\)](#)) Typically, the ARS PI is the scientist (fundholder) requesting the goods and/or service from the University. In the event that more than one scientist is using a single RSA, the Research Leader may serve as the ARS PI.
- The ARS PI shall obtain approval through the ARMPS to use the RSA.

B. Authorized Uses

ARS is authorized to use the RSA to acquire goods and/or services, including personal services from State Cooperative Institutions, colleges, and universities to support research projects of mutual interest.

The following list includes examples of types of services that may be acquired using the RSA:

- **Personal services:**
 - Laboratory technicians and aides.
 - Wage-grade support help.
 - Support professionals who do not perform original research.

- Graduate and undergraduate students paid an hourly wage. Fringe benefits may also be included for reimbursement.
 - Short-term SYs (limited to 90 days or less in duration).
 - Data entry and clerk-typists required for specific research projects. Cooperator's employees cannot be used to perform general office functions or duties.
 - Seasonal and intermittent workers.
 - Full-time and part-time temporary requirements (limited to 4 years in duration). This is limited based on the need of the position and not the person. If the requirement and duties of the job are expected to be longer than 4 years in duration, another mechanism should be used.
- **General support costs:**
- Facility maintenance services, including janitorial and landscaping.
 - Security services.
 - Telephone services.
 - Utility usage (this does not include entering into utility contracts under Federal Acquisition Regulation Part 41, Acquisition of Utility Services).
 - Computer time/statistical reporting/user fees.
 - Reimbursement of manuscript processing (page charges).
 - Reimbursement of work-related training and travel (including foreign travel) for the Cooperator's employees.
 - Reimbursement for work-related seminars and colloquium expenses.
 - Reimbursement of liability insurance purchases to cover employees working under a RSA.
 - Internet access (a waiver must be obtained from the Department authorizing the location to access the internet through the Cooperator's server).

C. Unauthorized Uses

Use of the RSA to acquire the following positions and services is **prohibited**:

- SY categories: 1 - Research Scientist, 2 - Non-permanent Research/Service Scientists, and 4 - Service Scientists lasting longer than 90 days in a fiscal year.
- Postdoctoral Scientists or Research Associates in direct support of Agency scientists.
- Direct clerical, secretarial, or receptionist support for Agency personnel.
- Administrative officers/technicians in direct support of Agency personnel.
- Purchasing, property, and fiscal personnel in support of Federal operations.
- Visiting and/or foreign SYs.
- Acquisition, use, or disposing of real property.
- Construction modifications, alterations, or capital improvements of either Federal or Cooperator facilities.
- Architectural and engineering services.
- Equipment purchases.
- Printing and binding.
- Real property services (appraisals, boundary surveys, master plans, etc.).

4. Responsibilities

Area Director (AD)

- Approves plans for obtaining goods and/or services through the agreement process.

AFM GMS

- Provides advice and guidance to location personnel on RSA policy and procedures.
- Conducts ICR negotiations with the Cooperator as determined by Area policy.

NOTE: The negotiated ICR agreement may cover an indefinite number of years.

ADO (responsible for signing the RSA)

- Must be fully cognizant of RSA policy and procedures.
- Negotiates awards, administers, suspends, closes out, and/or terminates the RSA.
- Conducts ICR negotiations with the Cooperator as determined by Area policy.
- Determines the method of payment for the RSA.
- Determines the frequency of reporting requirements.
- Ensures the ARS PI has a delegation of authority.
- Ensures the RSA is initiated and approved in ARIS/AIMS.
(See [ARIS/AIMS Manual, Chapter 4D, Extramural/Outgoing Agreements](#))
- Provides a copy of obligating documents and invoices to ARS Operations Section or the BFO for certification and processing.
- The ADO must also perform the following:

Pre-Award

- a. Verify the eligibility of the proposed Cooperator, including review of the Debarred and Suspended Database and ensuring the Cooperator has a DUNS number, and is registered in SAM.gov.
- b. Verify the presence of mutuality of interest between ARS and the Cooperator.
- c. Verify the ICR.
- d. Obtain the Cooperator's banking information and the vendor code for the accounting system.
- e. Obtain and evaluate the Cooperator's pricing information to ensure costs are allowable, allocable, and reasonable.
- f. Verify the requested goods and/or services are allowable, allocable, and reasonable in accordance with the "Authorized Use" section of this P&P and the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-21, *Cost Principles for Educational Institutions*.
- g. Review all data fields in ARIS/AIMS for accuracy and completeness of the RSA information.

- The RSA Budget/SOW must, at a minimum, include:
 - A description and amount of the supplies, materials, and/or services to be received.
 - Listing of occupational categories with duties.
 - Dates or timeframe for the delivery of goods or performance of services.
- h. Approve and submit the RSA to the Cooperator for signature.

Post-Award

- a. Maintain the “official” RSA file in the E-green module in ARIS/AIMS.
- b. Monitor the Cooperator’s performance, and ensure that financial and performance reporting requirements are met as prescribed in the terms and conditions of the agreement.
- c. Adjust the RSA obligation based on expenditures and changing program needs as required.
- d. Ensure the ARS PI reviews and approves MRs.
- e. Initiate closeout of the RSA within 90 days of the expiration date.

For EFT/VEXP method of payment:

- a. Verify the invoice based upon documentation (i.e., packing slips, payroll detail listing, delivery tickets, memoranda, etc.), and approve for payment.
- b. Submit copies of the approved invoices or other approved documentation to the National Finance Center, ARS Operations Section,.

For payment management systems (PMS) methods of payment:

- a. Verify the MR based upon documentation (i.e., packing slips, payroll detail listing, delivery tickets, memoranda, etc.), and approve the report.
- b. Compare the MR against the disbursement activity.

ARS PI

- Must be fully cognizant of RSA policies and procedures.
- Must have a current delegation of authority to serve as the ARS PI.
- Establishes the intent to use the RSA during the ARMPS cycle by completing the ARMPS Extramural Plan.
- Consults with the ADO for guidance on what can and cannot be accomplished using a RSA.
- Identifies the RSA requirements.
- Ensures data entry of ARIS/AIMS requirements for the RSA, and approves the agreement for submission to the ADO level for processing.
- Receives and verifies the quantity, quality, timeliness, and other pertinent aspects of the goods and/or services received, by reviewing and signing the MR and/or invoices against the RSA requirements to ensure that expenditures are proper.
- The ARS PI must also perform the following:

Pre-Award

- a. Consolidate the unit's requirements.
- b. Ensure RSA is initiated and approved in ARIS/AIMS.

NOTE: The RSA Budget/SOW must, at a minimum, include:

- A description and amount of the supplies, materials, and/or services to be received.
 - Listing of occupational categories with duties.
 - Dates or timeframe for the delivery of goods or performance of services.
- c. Approve the RSA in the ARIS/AIMS database (approval submits the RSA to the ADO level for execution).

Post-Award

- a. Manage and reallocate funds.
- b. Monitor the receipt of goods and/or services through certification of MRs.

NOTE: The MR must be signed by the ARS PI.

- c. Assist the ADO with closeout requirements.

5. Authority

The RSA is awarded under the authority of [7 U.S.C. 3319a](#).

6. Forms

The following forms are available on the Administrative and Financial Management website:

- REE - 452R, General Provisions for the Research Support Agreement
<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/provisions.htm>
- ARS - 157, RSA Management Report Template
<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/forms.htm>

7. Eligibility

ARS may enter into RSAs with State Cooperative Institutions or other colleges and universities in accordance with 7 U.S.C. 3319a.

8. Amendments

The modification of the RSA requires the execution of an amendment. Amendments are subject to the same approvals, policies, and procedures as the initial agreement. Amendments can be used to, but are not limited to:

- Extend the period of performance not to exceed 12 months.
- Add or delete services.
- Increase or decrease funds.
- Change the Principal Investigator.

9. Closeout

The ADO is required to promptly close all expired RSAs as prescribed in [P&P 703.0, *Closeout of Extramural Agreements*](#), and while doing so, verify that the Cooperator has satisfied all requirements to provide goods and/or services to the Agency.

10. Definitions

A comprehensive listing of grants and agreements terminology is available on the ARS-AFM website. Click here to view: [Grants and Agreements Glossary](#).

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