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Fayetteville, Arkansas

CRIS FOR EVERYONE

Project Accounting is the procedure used by the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES) to maintain an auditable trail of accountability for funds expended. This includes all funds (hard and soft). To this end, nearly all administrative support staff are involved, to some degree, with the processing and reporting of, or monitoring the expenditures for, CRIS projects. Understanding one's own role regarding CRIS projects, in addition to the role of one's co-workers, -- how each "fits" into the total CRIS spectrum -- should enable departmental staff to better assist each other in complying with Station policy as relates to CRIS and in managing these expenditures.

What is CRIS? What is a CRIS Project?

The **C**urrent **R**esearch **I**nformation **S**ystem (**CRIS**) is a unit of the **C**ooperative **S**tate **R**esearch, **E**ducation, and **E**xtension **S**ervice (**CSREES**), an agency under the US Department of Agriculture.

All research sponsored or conducted by the USDA is required to be documented in the CRIS web-based system. The projects documented under this process are referred to as CRIS projects. The CRIS database currently includes information covering over 95% of all publicly supported agricultural and forestry research. CRIS Projects processed through the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station are assigned a 4-digit number following the suffix ARK0. (CRIS projects are processed using CRIS Forms AD-416, AD-417 and 2008). Projects are not “official” until documentation is reviewed and approved by USDA. AES “station” projects are established initially for a 5-year period, and may run up to a maximum of 12 years. CRIS projects *established for a specific grant will start and end with the effective dates of the grant.* Annual reports (progress or termination) must be submitted for all CRIS projects (AD-421).

How are CRIS Projects used by the UA AES? What is “Project Accounting”?

The UA AES Business Office must account for all federal research dollars received. In addition, a variety of reports to the federal government are due annually, which include data on all our sources of funding. CRIS projects assist in tracking the *number* as well as the *sources* of dollars spent on the research conducted by the Experiment Station. CRIS data is used to compile the reports to the federal government by which is calculated federal support dollars to be distributed to the Station (“federal formula funds”).

Is a fixed funding amount associated with a particular CRIS project?

A CRIS project is not associated with a specific amount. It is the documentation that describes the research (including the objectives, approaches, findings) conducted by a Project Leader, and the number by which we track expenditures for that particular research. An dollar amount may be reflected in the CRIS project data for a specific grant it is associated with, but it is not the grant’s CRIS project that generates the funding.

Is a CRIS Project the same as a grant?

NO. A USDA agency may require that a CRIS project be established to document the research conducted under a specific grant, but the CRIS project is not the grant award.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

<http://cwf.uvm.edu/cris/> (CRIS FORMS Assistance)

<http://cris.csrees.usda.gov/menu.html> (CRIS Search Menu)

PROJECT (CRIS Project)

VS

PROJECT (Grant; Award; Study)

Very often, the term “project” is used interchangeably for both a CRIS project and a grant. When in doubt, clarify with your PI which is being referenced.

Under what circumstances does a PI acquire a CRIS Project?

1. Newly-hired, research-appointed faculty.
2. Change in research appointment for current faculty.
3. To replace a terminating AES Station CRIS project.
4. To document the UA PI participation on a Multistate Project
5. To document the research conducted under certain USDA grants.

1.,2.,3.

Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station policy requires that all faculty (principal investigators -- "PI's") with research appointments must obtain a Current Research Information System (CRIS) project. This must be done within six months of the faculty member's date of hire (or appointment on research funds). If the faculty/PI has a 50% or greater research appointment, he/she must maintain a CRIS project on which he/she is the LEAD PI. If the faculty/PI has a 50% or lesser research appointment, he/she must be a CO-PI on a CRIS project.

4.

The multistate research program enables research on high-priority topics among the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) in partnership with USDA CSREES, other research institutions, and the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). The regional association of SAES directors serve as the coordinating entities for multistate research activities. The regional associations are:

North Central <http://www.wisc.edu/ncra/>
Northeastern <http://www.agnr.umd.edu/users/NERA/>
Southern <http://www.msstate.edu/org/saaesd/>
Western <http://www.colostate.edu/Orgs/WAAESD/>

The National Information Management and Support System (**NIMSS**) is a web-based application that allows participants of Multistate Research Projects and Activities to submit proposals and reports online. <http://www.nimss.umd.edu/>

Interested parties, stakeholders and cooperators can also query the System for relevant and timely information. Multistate research participation which require CRIS documentation falls under those projects beginning **NC, NE, S, W** (and possibly **NRP** National Research Project and **NRSP** National Research Support Project) where project has been officially approved (and UA PI is formal participant in project). Travel support to these regional meetings may be available from the Station. (Note: Faculty budgeted to regional dollars (0323) must reflect a valid regional CRIS project in the PSB distribution.)

5. Terms and conditions of most USDA grants require that the PI document in the CRIS the research conducted under the award.

Under what circumstances does a CRIS Project terminate?

1. Station project reaches the maximum life allowed by CRIS (≤ 12 years).
2. Change in research appointment for current faculty.
3. PI retires or resigns from the University.
4. PI ceases participation a Multistate Project (or the MRF project ends)
5. The grant associated with a CRIS project reaches its end date

1.

When a Station project reaches its maximum life allowed by CRIS, the PI must submit a request for a replacement (new) project, (according to Station policy criteria).

2.

This would be a rare circumstance, but possible where a PI's research appointment would drop below 50%.

3.

When a PI retires or resigns from the University, a determination must be made as to the status of the CRIS project(s) under that PI. If the CRIS project(s) are not to be reassigned to other PI(s) within the department, the CRIS project must be terminated and termination report(s) should be processed immediately.

4.

A CRIS project associated with a multistate research project will terminate effective with the end date of the MRF (regional) project, or effective when the Arkansas PI withdraws from the project (if no other Arkansas PI is assigned to the project). If Arkansas does withdraw from the project prior to its end date, the UA/AES PI should terminate the Station's CRIS project and process a terminating report.

5.

A CRIS project associated with a grant terminates effective the end date of the grant. (When a grant is extended, the CRIS project is likewise extended.)

REMEMBER: When a CRIS project terminates, all cost centers with that CRIS project must likewise terminate.

TERMINATING PROJECTS: **PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH**

DEPARTMENTS

Upon notice that a project is terminating, key personnel in departments should address a variety of issues:

CRIS Reps should work with PI's to process replacing CRIS projects, where applicable, so that new CRIS projects are in place prior to the expiration date of the outgoing CRIS project. Also, remind PI's that termination reports (AD421) should be submitted (CRIS policy deadline is 90 days after termination of CRIS project).

As soon as an announcement is made that a PI is to terminate his/her employment with the University, departmental staff should check with the Department Head as to the disposition of that PI's CRIS projects.

Personnel involved with any aspect of project accounting should be made aware that a CRIS project is terminating so that they may process the necessary transactions to avoid using the terminating CRIS project beyond its termination date. PSB Distributions, Wage Rates, PAPC's, Blanket TA's and PO's, one-time PO's expected to be processed beyond the CRIS termination date, on cost centers with expiring CRIS projects, etc., should all be updated to reflect valid CRIS projects upon termination of the expiring CRIS project. **(TIP: Communicate.)**

AES BUSINESS OFFICE

CRIS Administrator will notify CRIS reps of projects slated for termination, with status options, providing sufficient time for new, revised, or rewritten projects to be processed prior to existing CRIS project expirations.

Cost centers with expiring CRIS projects will be re-set to reflect the inactive date of the CRIS project upon determination that the CRIS is to terminate.

NEW PROJECTS: **PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH**

DEPARTMENTS

Provide New Faculty with Guidelines for Processing a CRIS Project along with instructions for completing CRIS forms upon arrival **(Tip: Make this a part of your “new employee-Faculty” packet. Follow-up as 6-month deadline approaches).**

Assess PI distributions on occasion for compliance with Station policy regarding CRIS projects. **(Tip: Has a PI’s research appointment changed? Do all CRIS projects where PI serves as the lead PI reflect in the distribution at least 10%?)**

Work with PI’s and department heads to submit CRIS documentation by requested deadlines, particularly where new and replacement projects are due.

Communicate regarding new projects. For Station projects, the departmental CRIS rep is generally the person who receives documentation of a new project. Since CRIS projects are key to AGRI accounting, support staff involved with labor, payroll, travel, purchasing, departmental accounts, etc., also need this information. On the flip side, often the accountant may be the first person to be notified of a new CRIS project associated with a grant. **(Tip: Better to get the message more than once than not at all.)**

Personnel involved with any aspect of project accounting should be made aware if a new CRIS project is replacing a terminating CRIS so that they may process the necessary transactions to avoid using the terminating CRIS project beyond its termination date. PSB Distributions, Wage Rates, Blanket TA’s and PO’s, PO’s expected to be processed beyond the CRIS termination date, on cost centers with an expiring CRIS project, should all be updated to reflect the new CRIS project upon termination of the expiring CRIS project. **(Tip: Focus more on the research to be represented by the CRIS project rather than the “four-digit number”.)**

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When CRIS administrator receives notice of arrival of new faculty, will make contact with Department. **(Note: New faculty are often on board for some time when CA is notified.)**

As new projects are acquired, general policy is to add the project to the departmental maintenance, faculty, and GA accounts, and Hatch (0313) and/or regional (0323) accounts, as applicable. Will generally notify the accountant, with request for any other cost centers to which the new CRIS project needs to be added. **(Note: Accountants, please notify key personnel of new cost centers and effective dates.)**

TERMINATING CRIS PROJECTS – MANAGING EXPENDITURES

1. Determine active cost centers in your BU on the terminating project.
(Query: Active CC's for a CRIS Project)
2. Determine PSB distributions on those cost centers.
(AES Business Office can assist here – early August). HINT: Use the AGRI Clearing cost center if no replacing cost center is yet available at the time of updating PSB distributions.
3. Determine TA's, PO's, and PAPC's on those cost centers.
(Query: PO's for a CRIS Project Spreadsheet). HINT: If replacing a blanket PO altogether with a new PO, use old PO for September activity (until month-end closing) and new PO for October activity when "receiving". If retaining an existing PO and merely replacing the expiring cost center CRIS project with the new CRIS, wait until the day after the month-end closing to update the PO to the new cost center. Timely "receiving" is key.
4. Determine Wage Rates on cost centers. (No quick query, but hourly payroll personnel should be able to keep these updated since payroll is processed twice a month. HINT: Where possible, process hourly time through the last day of the expiring project. Example: If a project terminates at 9/30/01, for the payroll to be paid on 10/10/01, process through 9/30 (as opposed through 9/25). This allows all wages paid on 10/10 to relate to the old project and all wages paid at 10/25 to relate to the new project – i.e. no "split" distributions (and may avoid unnecessary snags due to new payroll date validation.)

Even with the utmost attention to following the above recommendations, it is inevitable that some invalid postings will occur. Implementation of new Payroll "Date Validation" will virtually eliminate invalid payroll postings; however, all other transactions (UPS, GJIM) must be manually monitored for appropriate expensing. Timely reconciliations of DART transactions (or running the AG DBR's on terminating cost centers in late October) will help "flag" these. (Also, look for transactions posting with an "S" code.)

"PROJECT ACCOUNTING CLEAN-UP" after the fact can be quite *Labor Intensive*. The more we can all do ahead of time to avoid invalid postings, the more time we all have to concentrate on all our other responsibilities, allowing us to become more productive and efficient at all we must accomplish in a limited amount of time.