

NFGEL STEERING COMMITTEE
Conference Call Notes
Wednesday, February 4, 2015, 9am - noon (pacific)

Attendees: John Crockett (committee chair)
David Gwaze
Keith Woeste
Barbara Crane
Jan Schultz sitting in for Larry Stritch
Gary Man
David Pivorunas
Tom Blush
Valerie Hipkins

Agenda:

- (1) Review and discuss Matrix and process committee would like to use for NFGEL project prioritization.

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During the last Steering Committee meeting (October 27, 2014), the committee expressed interest in seeing a formalized criteria matrix developed to determine project priority. Committee members were to send matrix ideas and examples to Valerie by 11/3/14; Valerie was to develop a matrix by November 14, 2014 that she would forward to the committee for comment. A final matrix will be obtained by the end of the 2014 calendar year. On the next committee call in February, the committee would apply the matrix to a subset of NFGEL projects as a test of the process.

A formal matrix of criteria had never been used at NFGEL. Valerie took her informal process of determining project feasibility and priority and turned it into a quantifiable matrix of criteria (attached). This matrix was shared with the committee on November 11, 2014. Responses from Man, Woeste, Pivorunas, Blush, and Crane were received between 12/1/14 and 12/11/14 (attached). On 1/25/15, Valerie sent the matrix, comments, and five typical project proposals to the committee so that the committee could test the utility of the matrix.

Committee Comments

David Gwaze: felt he did not have enough information to rank value, technology, or sample availability. He also wanted more information to rank risk and leverage.

Barb Crane and Tom Blush: also felt that more information would be needed to use the full matrix for ranking.

David Pivorunas: doesn't know if the matrix will ever rank properly – it's just numbers; doesn't take into account the human element of decision making.

The committee had a lengthy discussion of the merits of a matrix such as this versus other processes. Valerie pointed out that getting all the information needed to address each criteria point within this matrix is a process that takes between several weeks to months of back-and-forth conversations between NFGEL and the manager.

Several on the committee felt that there should be weight given to the projects that come from the staffs that provide the funding to the lab (NFS-Forest Management, and S&PF-FHP in FY15). Not all members agreed with this concept.

The committee was also interested in hearing from the Regional Geneticists (RGs) and seeing if the RGs have a desire/ability to be more directly involved in project prioritization. David Gwaze will add this as an agenda item to the RG call scheduled for 2/11/15.

The committee felt there were three possible options for proceeding:

- Continue with the full matrix asking for more information from the manager and an agreed upon project plan between the manager and NFGEL Director before the proposal goes to the committee.
- Have the committee review and rank a subset of the matrix criteria (those criteria involved in the importance of the project to the Agency, not the feasibility of the work).
- Have the Director rank the projects, present rankings and justification to the committee, and have the committee offer suggestions/changes/oversight to the rankings.

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Regardless of the process used, it was decided that the committee is providing a recommendation or guidance to the lab director, not direction.

Updates.

The GS-9 Lab Manager PD is still in classification (since October 4, 2014), with the intent of on-boarding this fiscal year.

Due to current staffing limitations, we're accepting very few new projects at this time.

Next Committee call.

The next quarterly committee call should occur in May 2015.

Notes prepared by: Valerie Hipkins, February 17, 2015

NFGEL Project Prioritization Matrix

The matrix provides a means for ranking project requests to NFGEL based on seven criteria, and is useful to:

- quantify a project priority with numeric rankings,
- help facilitate agreement on priority and key issues within the Steering Committee, and
- establish a platform for conversations about what is important.

CRITERIA	WEIGHT	SCORING VALUES	Project A	Project B
			Weight * Score	Weight * Score
Strategic Alignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA/FS Strategic Goals • USDA/FS Management Initiatives • Agency Priorities 	5	0, 3, 6, 9 0: aligns with none 3: aligns with one 6: aligns with two 9: aligns with all		
Value to Customer Customer is the person(s) submitting the request for work.	5	0, 3, 6, 9 0: little value to the customer 3: some value to the customer 6: a lot of value to customer 9: essential/critical to customer		
Availability of Existing Technology Is the technology that is needed to address the proposal objectives ready to use as an applied tool and available to the lab?	4	0, 3, 6, 9 0: technology does not currently exist or is not in lab 3: major customization needed 6: little customization needed 9: no customization needed		
Availability of Sample Material Is customer able to identify, locate, collect, and ship samples needed to address the proposal objectives?	4	0, 3, 6, 9 0: samples not available 3: samples available within 9 to 12 months 6: samples available within 3 to 6 months 9: samples are ready to ship		
Importance to Risk Mitigation Would the customer be exposed to a risk or impact if the service is not offered?	3	0, 3, 6, 9 0: little risk to customer if not offered 3: some risk to customer if not offered 6: much risk to customer if not offered 9: high risk to the customer if not offered		
Leverage Potential Service can be leveraged for other customers; and/or adds value for other partners; and/or partner funds can be leveraged	3	0, 3, 6, 9 0: little leverage potential, isolated service 3: some leverage 6: much leverage 9: service could be leveraged by many		
Project Costs Includes project implementation and completion costs	2	0, 3, 6, 9 0: lots of unknown or hidden costs 3: some costs are known 6: many costs are known 9: all costs, direct & indirect, are known and tabulated		
TOTAL PROJECT SCORE			(sum)	(sum)

Total project ranking scores range from 0 to 234 points.

NFGEL Project Scheduling

Once proposals have been accepted, projects are subject to a ranking within a laboratory scheduling queue. The scheduling of a project is dependent on some or all of the following factors:

- Date of total sample receipt
- Total project sample size
- Availability of markers
- Availability of operating and appropriate laboratory equipment
- Availability of laboratory staff (professional and technician)
- Purchase and availability of materials and supplies
- Completion of a signed Contract, Agreement, or funds transfer document
- Compatibility with other projects in the lab of like species, size, laboratory protocol, and/or marker system
- Date customer requires results

Comments from committee members on matrix

Name	Response Date	Comments (VH comments in Red caps)
Keith Woeste	12/1/2014	I like the matrix. Well thought-out and I think it should prove useful. Any changes I would suggest would be minor and fussing around the edges, so if you are happy with it then I am satisfied.
Gary Man	12/1/2014	It seems like you have most of the logistics folded into the matrix (Availability of existing technology and sample material). Also, you giving any weight to who submitted the proposal (Staff – egs. FM or RM or R&D...) I HAVE NOT GIVEN WEIGHT TO THIS IN THE PAST. GOOD DISCUSSION TOPIC FOR STEERING COMMITTEE CALL.
David Pivorunas	12/1/2014	<p>The numbers yields could lead to quite artificial rankings that are meaningless, perhaps the they need to be blurred, at the end with some kind of qualifier with the actual number value not shared, and example would be</p> <p>Matrix rankings score (the number scores or amount of categories, might need tweeking)</p> <p>Very High Matrix rank 200-234</p> <p>Higher matrix rank 180- 199</p> <p>Medium matrix rank 160-179</p> <p>Lower matrix rank 100-160</p> <p>Very low matrix rank 0- 100</p> <p>Then some explanation of why they got the score would add value to the rankings.</p> <p>By giving categories and not number, there will be less illusions created that one is better than another when it really isn't.</p> <p>The data can be more meaning full and useful for the committee, if it is qualified with extra information like this:</p> <p>Project X --Medium matrix rank, project did not align strongly with Forest Service Strategic goals</p> <p>Project Y --Medium matrix rank, project sample material hard to come by</p> <p>Project Z --Low matrix rank, because many costs are unknown and technology not currently used by lab</p> <p>Maybe even more detail than above would be better than less. GOOD IDEA. GOOD DISCUSSION TOPIC FOR</p>

Comments from committee members on matrix

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Tom Blush	12/4/2014	<p>STEERING COMMITTEE CALL.</p> <p>My only comment/concern has to do with Strategic Alignment: The three bullet points are not defined, although I guess they can be found somewhere. Many of the Forest Service’s goals, initiatives, priorities have nothing to do with forest management. Somehow a proposed project needs to be evaluated based on a more narrow definition of strategic alignment as it relates to forest and vegetation management. Would a list of these forest and vegetation management related items be helpful to the scoring process?</p> <p>EXCELLENT TOPIC FOR STEERING COMMITTEE CALL. I'VE PULLED THE VARIOUS GOALS/INITIATIVES/PRIORITIES TO AID DISCUSSION.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA/FS Strategic Goals <p><u>USDA</u> Ensure our National Forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources.</p> <p><u>FOREST SERVICE</u> Sustain our nation’s forests and grasslands Provide science-based applications and tools Excel as a high performing agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA/FS Management Initiatives <p>Enhance collaboration and coordination on critical issues through cross-cutting department-wide initiatives. Leverage USDA Departmental management to increase performance, efficiency, and alignment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency Priorities <p><u>Ecological Restoration:</u> forests, grasslands, and watersheds have the capacity to maintain their health, productivity, diversity and resilience to a changing climate and unnaturally severe disturbance events and continue to deliver the benefits Americans want and need, including jobs and economic value</p> <p><u>Communities:</u> help Americans reconnect with the outdoors through education programs and by ensuring public participation in our work and our decision making processes</p>

Comments from committee members on matrix

Name	Response Date	Comments (VH comments in Red caps)
Barbara Crane	12/11/2014	<p>Strategic Alignment: "Excellent!"</p> <p>Value to Customer: "Not sure I understand -- if little value to customer, why would he/she submit in the first place? Am I missing a thought seque here?" AGREED - HOPEFULLY NO PROJECT WOULD BE SUBMITTED IF IT HAD NO VALUE. THIS GETS A BIT MORE TO A VALUE RANKING. A PROJECT THAT DIRECTLY IMPACTS A (SAY) FOREST PROCEEDING WITH A MANAGMENT DECISION MAY HAVE A HIGHER VALUE THAN WOULD A PROJECT THAT GAINS A FOREST SOME UNDERSTANDING OF ONE OF THEIR (SAY) SPECIES, BUT DOESN'T IMPACT AN IMMEDIATE MANAGEMENT DECISION. GOOD STEERING COMMITTEE CALL TOPIC.</p> <p>Availability of Existing Technology: "I would need help understanding here - how would I know? NFGEL is the best experts on this." AGREED -- MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO KNOW THIS -- BUT IS CRITICAL IN THE PRIORITIZATION OF PROPOSALS</p> <p>Availability of Sample Material: "Very critical"</p> <p>Importance to Risk Mitigation: "How are you defining service? There would be a risk if the project wasn't done, but I'm confused about the term service" SERVICE HERE IS THE PROCESSING OF A NFGEL PROJECT</p> <p>Leverage Potential: "good point"</p> <p>"I really like this system matrix, very clean and systematic way of evaluating and ranking projects."</p>
John Crockett		
David Gwaze		
Larry Stritch		