

PPM 581: Research Advisory Committees (RACs) at the Research and Extension Centers (RECs)

Responsible Officer:	Director of the REC System
Responsible Office:	Research and Extension Center System Administrative Office
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Scope:	This policy applies to the Research and Extension Centers (RECs) of the University of California’s (UC’s) Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR).

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Note: For links to referenced documents see Section VI, *Related Information*, below.

I. POLICY SUMMARY

- A.** The Research and Extension Centers (RECs) of the University of California's (UC's) Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) support field research, education and extension activities by providing suitable resources to engage in these activities including land, labor, and facilities. Each REC utilizes a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) to:
1. Provide recommendations to the REC Director on the scientific merit and appropriateness of each research activity proposed to be conducted on each REC.
 2. At the discretion of the REC Director, the RAC can be used as an advisory board to provide feedback and recommendations concerning REC direction and activities.
- B.** This section of the Policy and Procedure Manual describes the policy and process whereby academic research and extension project proposals (herein after "project proposals") are submitted for consideration, recommendation and, approval/disapproval. The collaboration of the REC Director and the RAC is central to this process, ensuring high-quality research and extension activities.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Research and Extension Centers:** The office of Research and Extension is the Administrative Office for the REC system, as well as UC ANR's statewide administrative office for coordination and acquisition approval of Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP). For additional information, contact the FEPP Coordinator (Risk and Safety Services Director) and/or see *UC ANR Policy and Procedure Manual Section 280, Federal Excess Property Program*.
- B. Research Advisory Committee (RAC):** A RAC is established at each of the nine (9) RECs. RAC members are responsible for providing guidance in recommending projects conducted at the RECs. The RAC does not have a reporting relationship to a specific UC authority or office, rather, the RAC works collaboratively with the REC Director. The RAC (in collaboration with the REC Director) is responsible for the evaluation of projects proposed for the subject REC. The RAC evaluates proposed projects principally on the basis of scientific merit and other academic interests (see *UC ANR Policy and Procedure Manual Section 581, Research Advisory Committees (RACs) at the Research and Extension Centers (RECs)*).
- C. Vice Provost of Research and Extension:** The Vice Provost of Research and Extension is responsible for oversight of the REC Directors. The Vice Provost of Research and Extension has overall responsibility for approving all REC operational policies and procedures. The Vice Provost of Research and Extension also bears overall responsibility for resource allocation, including long-term space assignment at the RECs. The Vice Provost of Research and Extension is the arbiter of all disputes that cannot be resolved at the REC level.

The Associate Director of the RECs will assume all responsibilities listed under the title of Vice Provost of Research and Extension until the position has been filled.

- D. REC Director:** Responsible for the planning and management of the subject REC to provide UC researchers and educators with managed and sustainable resources to conduct quality research and extension programs on approved projects. Provides and promotes coordination and collaboration with campus-based and county-based researchers to facilitate the successful delivery of research and educational programs at the REC. Maintains a strong REC-based local community educational outreach program. Oversees farming operations; planning, development, operation, and maintenance of the REC facilities and infrastructure; and allocation of the REC's resources.
- E. Resident Academics, Students and Staff:** Resident personnel are assigned to specific RECs by agreement between the program unit and UC ANR. In general, the REC allocates facilities and other resources based on need and availability. The facility space, basic utilities, and facility maintenance is typically provided by the REC. All other resources must be provided by the resident personnel, their program unit, or allocated by the REC Director, with RAC collaboration as appropriate for an approved research project.
- F. Non-Resident Academics, Students and Staff:** Non-resident personnel typically utilize the REC through the RAC process. All program activity on a REC, other than resident personnel in assigned space, will be directly related to a RAC approved project or will require approval from the REC Director.
- G. Project Leader:** A Project Leader is the academic responsible for a RAC-approved project. The Project Leader is responsible for the effective and timely communication to the REC of the requirements of the research project and any changes to a project that would impact REC operations. The Project Leader is responsible for all costs of resources, furnished by the REC, in excess of the resources allocated by UC ANR.

III. POLICY TEXT

An effective and equitable RAC process is critical to ensure high-quality research and clear communication between and among researchers and the REC. In some cases, Subcommittees may be formed to assist in reviews of research proposals and provide feedback and recommendations to the RAC.

A. RACS

1. Roles of the RAC

- a. Review proposals based on scientific merit including an assessment of specific objectives, feasibility of success of projects, and alignment with the REC's long-term strategic plan. When warranted, the RAC may use a Subcommittee to assist in this review.

- i. Role of the Subcommittee

The primary role of the Subcommittee is to review projects within their areas of expertise and provide feedback and recommendations to the RAC.

2. RAC Membership Qualification

- a. RAC members are selected for their academic competency and applicable expertise with the types of research and extension activities pertinent to the subject REC.
- b. RAC membership is not limited to UC academics.
 - i. RAC membership may be extended to knowledgeable industry representatives and other qualified individuals.
 - ii. RAC service by individuals not employed by UC will be on an uncompensated, volunteer basis; however, REC Directors may offer reimbursement for travel related expenses.

3. Responsibilities of RAC Membership

With acceptance of nomination, the RAC members agree to personally perform their respective service, which includes:

- a. Preparation for and participation in the annual RAC meeting. The preparation includes reviewing any and all research proposals assigned to the member by the REC Director.
 - i. If the member cannot attend the RAC meeting, they can instead submit comments on proposals to the REC Director and/or RAC Chair via email or the current online proposal review method or system.
- b. Responding to off-cycle research proposal requests as needed.
- c. Other duties as assigned at the beginning of the RAC term by the REC Director, or as negotiated during the term if the member accepts them.

RAC membership responsibilities may not be delegated to any other non-member individual (for example, a colleague, a teaching assistant, and so on).

4. Role of the REC Director vis-à-vis the RAC

- a. The REC Director serves the RAC as the RAC Chair or assigns a designee to serve as Chair to remain in an ex-officio capacity.
- b. The REC Director has the final decision on approval of a project.
- c. The REC Director is responsible for maintaining RAC meeting records.

5. Other Roles

At the discretion of the REC Director, members may be asked to become involved in more advisory functions.

B. RAC PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS

1. Academic Project Proposal Process and Requirements

An effective and equitable RAC process is critical to ensure high-quality research and clear communication between and among researchers and the REC. The review process with the RAC will look for majority agreement.

- a. The REC Director is responsible for issuing an annual request for project proposals via the REC Website, the UC ANR Report as well as other channels of communications. Outside the annual call project proposals can be accepted year-round as long as resources are available.
- b. In response, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator/Project Leader (PI/PL) to:
 - i. Submit all project proposals to the REC as requested in the call.
 - ii. Submit all project proposals on required forms and in compliance with all other administrative requirements that apply.
 - iii. Provide all information necessary to enable the RAC to evaluate the project proposal.
- c. The REC Director is responsible for communicating to the RAC their best estimates of the available land, labor and facilities for each new project.
- d. The REC Director is responsible for effectively communicating to the RAC the appropriateness of the proposed research project within the context of the REC's ability to successfully accomplish the work.
- e. In the event that a project proposal is fundamentally infeasible (e.g., requires resources not available at that REC, etc.) the REC Director may reject the project prior to and independent of RAC evaluation for scientific merit. The REC Director will advise the RAC of any such instances.
- f. If the PI/PL has previously conducted and completed a project at the REC, and is untimely (later than 3 months from due date) or delinquent in submitting a Project Completion Report (in addition to fulfilling any other administrative requirements such as recharge payment), the REC Director will send a letter to the PI/PL to the effect that new project proposal(s) submitted by the PI/PL will not be accepted until delinquent reports or recharges are submitted. In addition, the letter will also advise that the PI/PL will not be able to access UC PI/PL funding support for projects at the RECs until they have completed the Project Completion Report.
- g. When evaluating research project proposals, the RAC shall not:
 - i. Consider resources available to the PI/PL (i.e., approved grants, etc.), except to the extent that such resources may be pertinent to the PI/PL's ability to execute the proposed project.

- h. The RAC may approve a Research Project Proposal in whole or in part, or may recommend rejecting it in its entirety. The RAC may also ask the PI to make significant changes to their project and resubmit a proposal with such modifications for a second review.
- i. After review by the RAC, the REC Director is responsible to communicate to the PI/PL the result of the RAC's evaluation and the REC Director's decisions. For approved projects, the PI/PL will be informed of the estimated resources (land, labor, and facilities) required and available to the project, and of the estimated recharge costs for which they will be responsible. The PI/PL must agree to these and any other conditions specified prior to the commencement of the project.
- j. PI/PL will sign off on an acceptance contract agreeing to the specific recharge conditions for the REC. This document may include conditions of approval such as removal of orchard trials or other perennial crops by the researcher.
- k. Rejected Projects
 - i. For those projects that they recommend rejecting, the RAC will provide a brief statement of their reasoning, and the REC Director will include that information in their response to the PI/PL.
 - ii. The PI/PL should consult with the REC Director if they have questions or concerns about the rejection of a project proposal.
 - iii. In the unlikely event of a conflict that cannot be resolved locally by the PI/PL and the REC Director, and only for those projects that have been rejected on at least two (2) separate occasions, the Vice Provost of Research and Extension will exercise judgment over the matter and make a final determination as may be necessary.
 - iv. The PI/PL may resubmit a Research Project Proposal that was previously rejected by the REC Director. Such proposals may be submitted at any time and the project may be initiated on a resource-available basis.
- l. The PI/PL must request and receive approval of any proposed change to active projects that is substantive (in the judgment of the REC Director). Such requests should be forwarded from the PI/PL to the REC Director. In collaboration with the REC Director, the RAC may be consulted to recommend accepting some, none, or all of such a proposed change.

C. ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES FOR APPROVED PROJECTS

- 1. Resources That Cannot Be Provided by the REC
 - a. Prior to the start of the project, the REC Director is responsible to advise the PI/PL of any resources requested that cannot, in the judgment of the REC Director, be provided by the REC.

- b. The PI/PL is responsible to supply and bear the cost of all such necessary resources that cannot be provided by the REC.
2. Unforeseen Need for Resources
 - a. In the course of the conduct of the project, the PI/PL may request the REC Director's consideration of unforeseen but necessary resources not specifically listed in the project proposal.
 - b. The REC Director will review such requests for additional resources, and approve in whole or in part, or deny it. If approved, the REC Director will advise the PI/PL of the associated cost increase. If the REC Director disapproves of the project, they will provide written justification for denying the request. Any disagreement can be appealed to the Vice Provost of Research and Extension.
 - c. The PI/PL is responsible to bear the cost of all such approved additional resources that may be provided by the REC.

IV. COMPLIANCE / RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Compliance – Conflict of Interest

1. UC employees and RAC members shall not engage in any activity that may present a conflict of commitment and/or of interest (COC/COI), whether real or perceived. The primary safeguard against such a COC/COI is the integrity of the UC employee/RAC member themselves. Refer to Policy and Procedure Manual Section 403 *Conflict of Interest* for additional information.
2. UC employees and RAC members shall promptly report to a higher level of UC ANR administration any such potential COC/COI (real or perceived) of which they become aware.
 - a. RAC members should refer all such questions and concerns to the REC Director or the designated RAC Chair.
 - b. The designated RAC Chair and/or the REC Director should refer all such questions and concerns to the Vice Provost of Research and Extension. Issues that involve complaints against the REC Director or designated RAC Chair should be sent directly to the Vice Provost of Research and Extension.
3. The REC Director and all RAC members shall recuse themselves from the review and evaluation of any project proposal in which they have involvement, especially in a financial capacity.
4. The REC Director shall obtain the recommendation of the RAC and/or the Vice Provost of Research and Extension for any projects proposed by the REC Director.
5. Project proposals must be evaluated by the RAC and recommendations provided to the REC Director for final approval.
6. In the event that a possible COC/COI is identified subsequent to the approval

and start of a project, the Vice Provost of Research and Extension should be advised promptly.

- a. In the unlikely event of a substantive conflict between the REC Director and the RAC, it is the responsibility of the Vice Provost of Research and Extension to exercise judgment over the matter and to make a final determination as may be necessary.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. UC ANR Vice President (Vice President)

The Vice President provides administrative leadership for the University of California's programs in Agriculture and Natural Resources. As chief executive officer, they provide overall direction to Agriculture and Natural Resources in the development and articulation of shared values and visions.

2. UC ANR Associate Vice President (Associate Vice President)

The ANR Associate Vice President reports to the Vice President and is the Director of the REC system, bearing responsibility for the nine (9) RECs as a unified program. The Associate Vice President is responsible for the overall planning and management of the REC system.

3. UC ANR Vice Provost of Research and Extension

The Vice Provost of Research and Extension reports to the Associate Vice President and is responsible for oversight of the nine (9) REC Directors. The Vice Provost has overall responsibility for approving all REC system operational policies and procedures. The Vice Provost also bears overall responsibility for resource allocation. For example, the Vice Provost approves operational agreements with researchers for long term use of REC resources such as office space, greenhouses, storage, coolers, laboratory space, etc. Also, the Vice Provost is the arbiter of all disputes that cannot be resolved at the REC level.

4. REC Directors

The REC Directors report to the Vice Provost of Research and Extension and are responsible for the subject REC which they oversee. REC Directors work collaboratively with the RAC to discuss and consider issues relevant to project approval including scientific merit, operational feasibility and resource requirements, as well as alignment with long-term strategic directions. The REC Directors review all recommendations from the RACs and approve or disapprove projects based on REC resources and strategic direction of the REC. As well, the REC Directors develop operational agreements with researchers for long-term use of REC resources such as office space, greenhouses, storage, coolers, laboratory space, etc.

5. RAC Chair

The RAC Chair conducts meetings to ensure an efficient, respectful and equitable evaluation process and is responsible for correspondence from

the RAC to the REC Director.

6. Principal Investigator/Project Leader

The PI/PL has ultimate responsibility for all aspects of the proposed research project, including financial responsibility for recharges and REC-supplied or contracted services requested that are over and above the available labor hours and standard input costs. The Principal Investigator/Project Leader is responsible for compliance with all project proposal requirements, health and safety requirements related to the project and their staff, and all operational requirements of the subject REC.

V. PROCEDURES

A. RAC Member Nomination Process

1. The timing of RAC nominations may vary as appropriate to the subject REC, but generally occur on an annual basis. Member appointments are usually planned to prevent more than one-third (1/3) of the members rotating off in a single year. Once established, the schedule is applied consistently thereafter.
2. The REC Director may query current RAC members for their input on appointment recommendations and compile a nomination list.
3. The REC Director will contact the nominees to discuss roles and responsibilities of RAC membership and to verify the nominee's willingness to serve on the committee.
4. The REC Director will prepare and send the appointment letter to the approved new RAC members, providing a copy of the letter to the Vice Provost of Research and Extension.

B. General Conditions of RAC Membership

1. RAC members will agree to follow the roles and responsibilities as described in this Manual section and will commit to active participation in meetings and/or electronic request for proposal review.
2. RAC service may vary as appropriate to the subject REC.
 - a. The number of RAC members will typically be in a range of five (5) to nine (9) individuals.
 - b. Individual RAC members will generally hold a fixed-term appointment, typically for a term of three (3) years.
 - c. RAC members may serve no more than four (4) consecutive terms on a RAC.

- d. RAC members who have served four (4) consecutive terms may not be considered for membership again until one (1) year of non- participation has elapsed.

VI. RELATED INFORMATION

- [UC ANR Research and Extension Center](#)
- [UC ANR Environmental Health & Safety](#)
- [UC ANR Research Project Proposals](#)
- [UC ANR Project Completion Report](#)
- [UC ANR Policy and Procedure Manual Section 403, *Conflict of Interest*](#)

VII. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Not used.

VIII. REVISION HISTORY

November 2017:

Format updated.

May 2019:

General updates (title changes, responsible party, etc.) and to improve clarity.

September 2020:

Section updated to reflect changes to funding source allocation from annual to continual basis, necessitating that the RAC process be conducted on an on-going (not annual) basis, with reviews and recommendations happening throughout the year. Additional changes were made to improve clarity, to make use of gender-neutral language, and to update titles.

September 2021:

Updated titles and expanded *Responsibilities of RAC Membership, Role of the Director Vis-à-Vis the RAC, and RAC Process and Requirements*.

August 2022:

General updates (title changes, responsible party, format, etc.).