



National Sclerotinia Initiative

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

January 19, 2010



Article I. Goal Statement

The goal of the National Sclerotinia Initiative is to conduct a coordinated research strategy to minimize the devastating effects of *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* (white mold) on soybeans, canola, sunflowers, dry edible beans, and the pulse crop group consisting of dry peas, lentils, and chickpeas.

Article II. Structure and Roles of Committees

Section 2.01 Basic Structure

The Sclerotinia Initiative will consist of an Executive Committee (EC) and an Administrative Office (AO). The EC is considered a permanent committee to work in concert with the AO. Other special temporary committees to help with a special need can be formed as necessary. They could include an Annual Meeting Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, Site Review Committee, ad hoc committees, etc.

Section 2.02 Executive Committee

02(a) Purpose:

The purpose of the Executive Committee is to provide overall guidance and oversight to the AO for the purposes of establishment of research priorities, selection of research projects and execution of the National Sclerotinia Initiative.

02(b) Committee Composition

(i) Number of Members

The EC will consist of eight members as indicated in the table below:

Crop	Total Members	Affiliated Group	Totals	
Sunflowers	1	National Sunflower Association	1	
Dry Beans	1	U.S. Dry Bean Council	1	
Dry Peas & Lentils	1	USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council	1	
Canola	1	US Canola Association	1	
Soybeans	1	American Soybean Association	1	
USDA ARS	1	USDA-ARS Fargo - admin	1	
USDA ARS	1	USDA-ARS NPS	1	
USDA ARS	1	USDA-ARS Area Office	1	
Totals	8		8	

(ii) Length of Term

Members shall serve no specified length of term. Changes will be made at the discretion of each organization. A Committee member may select an alternative to represent the organization, including USDA-ARS, in case of member absences, etc.

(iii) Administration

The member from USDA-ARS in Fargo will serve as administrator of the National Sclerotinia Initiative. That individual will serve as fund holder/administrator of the appropriated funds.

(iv) Addition of Members

Inclusion of additional commodity organizations as part of the Initiative will be based on available funding and upon approval of the EC. Each commodity group participating in the Initiative will have one representative on the EC. A 2/3 vote of the EC will be required for addition of members.

02(c) Meeting Protocol

(i) Quorum

A quorum shall consist of more than 50% of the current members. This also pertains to voting by electronic media.

(ii) Voting

Each member of the committee will have one vote. Voting outcome shall be determined by a simple majority of votes cast.

(iii) Meetings

The EC will hold a formal meeting during the January annual research forum meeting of the Initiative. Additional meetings may be called as necessary. Teleconference meetings are acceptable.

02(d) Responsibilities

- Provide direction and guidance to the Initiative.
- Review and approve research area program descriptions and research priorities.
- Review and approve the process to request pre-plans of work (RFP).
- Review and approve the agenda and location of the annual research forum.
- Review and approve the National Sclerotinia Initiative recommended budget.
- Review and approve the structure and composition of the SC and other committees as needed.
- Approve the Procedures and Amendments to the Procedures.

Section 2.03 Administrative Office (AO)

03(a) Purpose

The purpose of the AO is to act as the administrative and communication headquarters for the National Sclerotinia Initiative under the direction of the EC. The USDA-ARS Fargo member serves as administrator. Responsibilities include:

- Organize EC meetings, conference calls, etc.
- Record and distribute minutes.
- Organize Initiative annual research forums.
- Act as liaison between Initiative and USDA-ARS.
- Manage the Initiative's website, email & address lists, newsletters, press releases, etc.
- Publish annual reports, status reports, and financial summaries.
- Develop and update Initiative Strategic Plan.
- Develop a process to conduct an assessment of research accomplishments conducted under the Initiative Strategic Plan and report the assessment to the EC and other appropriate individuals.
- Organize calls for pre-plans of work, facilitate review process and distribute funding to selected projects.

- Serve as resource management/accountability center.

Article III. Request for Plans of Work (RFP) and Review Process

The National Sclerotinia Initiative's goal is to conduct a coordinated research strategy to minimize the devastating effects of Sclerotinia on soybeans, canola, sunflowers, dry edible beans, and the pulse crop group consisting of dry peas, lentils, and chickpeas. The Initiative provides funds to United States scientists to conduct research targeted at Sclerotinia management within the above listed crops in one of the following research focus areas:

- a) Crop Germplasm Resources and Genetics
- b) Pathogen Biology and Development
- c) Pathogen and Host Genomics
- d) Pathogen Epidemiology and Disease Management (including crop production practices & biological/chemical control)

Scientists from other countries (e.g. Canada) or working on other than the above named crops may participate in the Initiative via formal collaboration with U.S. investigators as listed above.

In October of each year calls for "Plans of Work" to address needs within each research focus area are requested from interested scientists. Final Plans of Work are submitted to the Sclerotinia Initiative AO by mid-December. Plans of Work are accepted for review only if they strictly adhere to submission procedures established by the Sclerotinia Initiative AO and approved by the Sclerotinia Initiative SC. No Plan of Work will be accepted for review if it is submitted after the approved deadline or if the format for submission is not followed. Plans of Work are then reviewed by Scientific Review Panels in January/February to determine their scientific merit. Results are forwarded to the Sclerotinia Initiative AO which convenes a meeting of the Sclerotinia Initiative SC in February/March for final funding and implementation decisions.

In addition to the Scientific Review Panels, each of the five affiliated commodity groups within the SC will independently review each plan of work during the January/February time frame. These separate reviews will be used to insure that commodity and grower research priorities are recognized and properly evaluated. These panels will provide ranked results to their particular SC representative who will bring results to the February/March final funding and implementation meeting. Each affiliated commodity group is free to conduct these reviews in the manner that best suits the organization. Affiliated Group Review Panels will provide a written summary of their review results, including critique of the plans

of work, to the AO during the February/March final funding and implementation meeting.

Prior to the calls for Plans of work the Sclerotinia Initiative SC will identify priority research needs per research focus area based on action items identified from the Sclerotinia Initiative Strategic Plan. These needs will be articulated in the call for Plans of Work and will also be provided independently to the scientific and affiliated group review panels.

Calls for Plans of Work will be distributed to current and former Initiative researchers and non-funded researchers who previously submitted Plans. Notices will also be sent to the following:

- a) **National Sclerotinia Initiative list server**
- b) **Agricultural Experiment Station Directors**
- c) **Cooperative Extensions Directors**
- d) **1890 Institutions**
- e) **1994 Land Grant Institutions**
- f) **The National Sclerotinia Initiative Website**

Selection of Peer Reviewers for Scientific Review Panels:

Peer reviewers are scientists and/or technical experts possessing the knowledge to make critical decisions on the scientific merit and adequacy of the submitted Plans of Work. A panel chair will be selected by the Sclerotinia Initiative AO at that office's discretion. Potential peer reviewers will be solicited by the Sclerotinia Initiative AO in coordination with the panel chair. Review panel members will then be selected from a pool of individuals without collaborative/cooperative interests in the Sclerotinia Initiative. Peer reviewers will provide objective reviews based on the set of criteria established below. Each will sign a confidentiality agreement to protect potentially sensitive information included in Plans of Work. Review panel chairs will be disclosed, but review panel members will not be disclosed to the EC or researchers.

The panel chair and all reviewers will be reimbursed for expenses (travel, lodging, meals, etc.) related to serving on a review panel.

Scientific Review Panel Operation:

Review panels will consist of a Chair and up to four additional reviewers. A member of the Sclerotinia Initiative AO may attend to provide administrative and policy support of the process. A minimum of one review panel will meet each year to make decisions on the scientific merit and adequacy of submitted Plans

of Work. Review panels will convene to discuss and rank Plans of Work in each of the four Sclerotinia Initiative Research Focus Areas. The number of review panels to be convened will be based on total number of submitted Plans of Work. If necessary, review panels can be combined as follows: a) Pathogen Epidemiology and Disease Management & Pathogen Biology and Development; b) Crop Germplasm Resources and Genetics & Pathogen and Host Genomics. Combined review panels will include individuals identified as experts for both research areas. Three weeks (minimum) prior to review panel meetings submitted Plans of Work will be sent to each panel member. The Chair will assign individual projects to various panel members to lead discussions during the review panel meeting. Each panelist, including the Chair, will individually score all plans of work being reviewed during the meeting (the representative from the Sclerotinia Initiative AO will not score projects or participate in scientific merit related discussions if attending the reviews). Preliminary scoring should be completed prior to arrival at the review panel meeting to facilitate discussions. Final scores from each panelist will be obtained following discussions on each Plan of Work. The Chair will moderate the review panel meeting and is responsible for maintaining order during the meeting. The Chair conveys all review panel decisions to the Sclerotinia Initiative AO.

Scientific Review Criteria:

Each submitted Plan of Work will be evaluated using the three criteria listed below. Panelists are requested to provide written comments/criteria relevant to each Plan of Work being reviewed.

A) Scientific Merit, Conceptual Adequacy & Innovation - is the work well conceived? Is the planned work novel? Does it include an innovative approach to answering the objectives? Are the methods and procedures appropriate? Are hypotheses and objectives clearly delineated? Is the work feasible as defined? What is the probability that the described research will be completed within stated time frames? Does the work duplicate existing or previously conducted research?

B) Institutional Qualifications - are the researchers qualified to conduct the proposed study? Are researchers aware of current literature on the proposed area of study? Are available facilities, instrumentation, equipment, personnel, and existing funding adequate to provide proper augmentative support of the proposed study? Is the amount of requested dollars adequate, excessive, or too low to complete the study?

C) Relevance and/or Progress - does the proposed study address the prioritized needs of the Initiative based on guidance provided by the Sclerotinia Initiative SC? Does the study directly relate to action items determined from the Initiative Strategic Plan? Will the work lead to development of new knowledge or new technology to manage the disease? Is reasonable progress being made if the

Plan of Work is a continuation of a previously funded study? (Plans of Work funded for three consecutive years must show quantitative progress before additional funding will be considered. Examples of progress include: improved germplasm under selection, germplasm release, publications, patents, etc.)

D) Anticipated Progress/Outcome – What is the probable likelihood for success of the planned research over the next 12 months? Beyond 12 months?

Review panel members will score each of the four criteria under the following categories: high, medium, low. Points will be assigned to match the ratings with high = 6; medium = 4; low = 2; The four scores are added together to obtain a final panelist recommendation. Review panelist recommendations are then averaged together to obtain a final recommendation score to be provided to the Sclerotinia Initiative EC. Consensus scores among the review panel are not required.

Final Reviewer Recommendations are:

A) High - Highest priority for funding (average scores of 4.8 – 6.0)

B) Medium - Funding recommended on a case by case basis if available (average scores 3.3 – 4.7)

C) Low – No funding recommended (average scores 2 – 3.2)

Final Funding Decisions:

Scientific Review Panel scores and summaries of review critiques are forwarded to the Sclerotinia Initiative AO at the close of the review panel meetings. The Sclerotinia Initiative EC will then meet to discuss the results of the Scientific and Affiliated Group Review Panels and to finalize Plan of Work funding decisions, including allocation of available dollars. Final funding decisions are based on research priorities previously established and communicated by the EC and the total available dollars provided to the Sclerotinia Initiative within a fiscal year (October through September). There is no prescribed formula for commodity-based funding. The Sclerotinia Initiative EC will follow Scientific Review Panel recommendations as closely as possible, but retains the authority to move a project up or down on the priority list based on feedback received from Affiliated Commodity Group Review Panels. It is preferred that no Plan of Work be funded if it has received a unanimous score of low (2.0) from the Scientific Review Panel. The EC will retain the right to not fund a project regardless of the score. Once the EC approves the budget allocation, the AO shall send written notification to all researchers who submitted a Plan of Work. The AO will make every effort to explain the reasons for disapproval of the plans. Feedback will be based on written comments received from the Scientific Review Panels and the Affiliated Group Review Panels. The AO also reserves the right to veto EC

funding recommendations based on past funding experience of the applicant or other extenuating circumstances specific to an application submission. The AO cannot redirect funds to another applicant without SC approval.

Funding Mechanisms:

Currently, the USDA-ARS Sunflower Research Unit of the Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center, Fargo, ND is the fund holder for the Sclerotinia Initiative. Funds will be distributed to cooperators for 12 month periods beginning in July of each year.

Scientists who submit a Plan of Work selected by the Sclerotinia Initiative EC to participate in the Initiative will receive funds in one of two ways:

- A) USDA-ARS scientists (or scientists from a cooperating Federal agency) will receive funds via a direct fund transfer from the Sunflower Research Unit.
- B) Scientists from cooperating institutions (universities, state government agencies, private industry, foreign government research laboratories, etc.) will receive funds via the establishment of a Specific Cooperative Agreement with the Sunflower Research Unit. The Center Director of the Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center, who currently serves as the ARS administrator of the Sclerotinia Initiative, will serve as the ADODR of all agreements.

Funds received from the Sclerotinia Initiative will be used only to support research approved by the Sclerotinia Initiative EC. No funds will be provided for Principal Investigator and cooperating scientists employed as full time employees of ARS or a cooperating institution. Cooperating institutions include state agencies, research or educational institutions, and for-profit or nonprofit organizations. Postdoctoral associates, graduate students, undergraduate students, and technical support staff are not considered Principal Investigators. Specific Cooperative Agreements have limitations on what funds can be used for. In general, funds cannot be used for purchase of non-expendable equipment of greater than \$5,000 in value. Non-expendable equipment is defined as equipment that will not normally be used up or consumed in service. Sclerotinia Initiative funds will be approved for travel only to Sclerotinia related meetings and workshops, and for Sclerotinia research activities.

All funded projects will provide periodic progress reports and an annual report to the ARS Initiative administrator.

**Final approval of all decisions related to fund distribution and establishment of specific cooperative agreements is the responsibility of USDA-ARS.

Article IV. Annual Research Forum.

Section 4.01 Site Selection

Members of the EC may nominate sites and receive recommendations from the AO. The EC shall select a site by vote. Site selection should take place early enough to facilitate contracts and reservations for facility providers.

Section 4.02 Development of Agenda

The EC in conjunction with the AO shall draft the agenda. The agenda shall be approved by December 15 prior to the annual meeting. The meeting should be held in January of each year.

Section 4.03 Report of Proceedings

The AO shall publish a proceedings document including the abstracts of the presentations, status reports from current research and other pertinent information.

Article V. Strategic Plan and Program Assessment

Section 5.01 Strategic Plan Development

The AO shall lead development of a 5-year Strategic Plan that outlines the research objectives and priorities of the Initiative as outlined in Section 3. The plan will be finalized and approved by members of the EC and forwarded to the ARS National Program Staff. This plan will be reviewed and updated as appropriate. A completely new and revised Strategic Plan will be developed every 5 years. The Strategic Plan will be used to guide selection of the research funded by the Initiative. The plan will include performance measures, anticipated products and milestones, and potential benefits. Within the plan action items of critical importance will be developed by each participating commodity group. These items will be reviewed per each participating commodity annually (led by commodity organization leader on EC) and updated as appropriate.

Section 5.02 Annual Reports

An annual report addressing each element of the Strategic Plan will be developed in November and December of each year. The AO will request accomplishment statements from each funded project that directly relate their

research to the Plan. The AO and other individuals as requested will compile the reports which will be posted on the Sclerotinia Initiative website and presented during the annual meeting.

Section 5.03 Assessments

Every 5 years the AO will convene a panel of experts to review the accomplishments of the Initiative as related to the elements of the Strategic Plan. The panel will provide a written assessment of progress which will be presented to the EC. This assessment will be posted on the Sclerotinia Initiative website and presented during the Annual Meeting. Future research direction/needs of the Initiative will be modified as suggested by the assessment.

Article VI. Amendments to Procedures

Section 6.01 Format of Recommended Change

Amendments shall be submitted in electronic and written format to the AO. Any member of the SC can submit amendments to these procedures.

Section 6.02 Submission Dates

To be timely, a change should be submitted at least 30 days prior to a scheduled meeting of the SC. Untimely submissions may be reviewed but will not be acted upon by the board until the next scheduled SC meeting.

The SC can meet for the purposes of considering an amendment if a majority of the SC agrees. The meeting should still allow 30 days for purposes of dissemination and consideration of the change.

Section 6.03 Dissemination of Change

The change must be disseminated by electronic and written means to all members of the SC.

Section 6.04 Approval of Amendment

Amendments must receive a two thirds majority vote to be approved.