

Proposal for a Professional Development Fund for Research Support Faculty within the College of Forestry

Submitted to the Dean's office by the Research Support Faculty Committee
November 18, 2015

Introduction

Oregon State University College of Forestry (CoF) is a world-class teaching and research institution with outstanding faculty and staff. Research Support Faculty (RSF) comprise at least 21% of the faculty and staff within CoF. Research Support Faculty are non-tenure-track (NTT), fixed-term faculty with job responsibilities that emphasize research. RSF include Faculty Research Assistants (FRA), Research Associates (RA), Postdoctoral Scholars and Professional Faculty in research. While RSF are on fixed-term appointments of up to 12 months, a large proportion of these RSF have been with the College for more than five years, some upwards of 20 years. Thus, many RSF are long-term professionals with significant program management duties that require independence and responsibility.

RSF serve an important role in the success of their tenure-track supervisors via data collection and analysis, manuscript preparation and submission, project management, and instruction. RSF also contribute significantly to student success through mentoring, and to outreach efforts through technology transfer and participation in stakeholder meetings. Some RSF spend their entire careers at OSU while others go on to pursue higher degrees or different job opportunities elsewhere. In all situations professional development is necessary for success.

Statement of Need

Based on our June 2015 survey of the ~100 RSF within CoF, 45% do not have any funding sources available for professional development activities (e.g., attend conferences or trainings). While this percentage is not as high as the University as a whole (62% of NTT from 2013 Faculty Senate Survey), it is still a significant percentage of the RSF within CoF. Our survey also revealed that 65% of CoF RSF need or desire more professional development activities (or funds) than what are currently available, if any. Survey respondents noted that training costs are most often in the \$500-\$1500 range, and occasionally go up to \$2000.

FRAs and RAs are not eligible for the university-wide professional development funds available for Professional Faculty and Instructors. Even when grants, agreements, and coop funds support some level of professional development activities, they generally do not cover certain types. For example, funds may not be used to learn about emerging technologies when they are outside the scope of existing grants. Additionally, funds are often limited or not available for attending trainings with transferrable skills that serve the core mission of the College (e.g., mentoring, mediation, leadership, and communication).

Realizing the vision of the CoF, including new initiatives (e.g., Institute for Working Forest Landscapes), requires a wider skillset than needed for traditional roles of Research Support Faculty. Creating a college-wide fund for professional development opportunities will enable RSF to maintain a nimble skillset to meet CoF's core mission of leading forestry research and education worldwide. This fund also provides the opportunity for the College to actively promote its core values and strategic vision of recruiting a diverse workforce. CoF's success will be enhanced with a well-trained and valued workforce that is capable of meeting new needs as they arise.

Goals

- Increase recruitment and retention of highly skilled RSF by creating a workplace that values RSF professional development.
- Support CoF's ability to be at the forefront of new forestry research by promoting the knowledge, skills, and abilities of RSF.

Goals (cont'd)

- Promote collaboration between RSF and other forestry professionals within and outside CoF.
- Improve CoF's ability to recruit talented faculty and students by having more RSF with advanced skills and abilities available for support.
- Promote equity and inclusion by increasing access to professional development opportunities for RSF.

Proposal Narrative

We propose that the College allocate \$20k annually to award grants for professional development of RSF. We propose grants of up to \$2000 each, with no requirement of matching funds. Partial awards may be considered by the Selection Committee.

The requested amount would enable a minimum of 10 individuals to attend a professional development activity per year. Applicants may receive funds once per year. This fund is meant to supplement, rather than replace RSF supervisors' responsibility to support professional development opportunities for their employees. We suggest the following selection and award process.

Application process

- Twice a year (in May and November) the RSF Committee will send an email call for applications. Funds must be spent within the fiscal year.
- Applications will be submitted via the RSF Committee website. See attached RSF Professional Development Application Form.

Selection process

- The RSF Committee will assess the completeness of each application including whether the applicant meets the following basic eligibility requirements:
 - Is the proposed budget complete?
 - If the applicant has previously received an award from this fund:
 - Has more than one year transpired since funds were last awarded?
 - Has the applicant submitted a report for the prior activity?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the application will not receive further consideration.

- All applications that meet the basic eligibility requirements will then be submitted to the Selection Committee for final selection/approval. The Selection Committee is TBD, and may include RSF and tenure-track faculty. Evaluation criteria are listed in the attached RSF Professional Development Application Evaluation form, and will be posted in a location accessible to the applicants. Criteria include the following:
 - How clear is the connection to the applicant's professional development plan?
 - How clear is the connection to the goals of the RSF professional development fund?
 - How long has the applicant been employed in the CoF?
 - When did the applicant last attend a professional development activity?
 - When did the applicant last receive an award from this fund?

Reporting process

- The RSF Committee will post an electronic record of recipients and the amount awarded, updated after each selection cycle.
- The awardee will submit a short report to the RSF Committee within 6 months following the event, describing the experience and specific benefits that resulted. This report will be added to the electronic record. See attached RSF Professional Development Recipient Report Form.