

## **Research Development Fund 4.0 Final Agreement**

As the current Research Development Fund (RDF) agreement (RDF 3.0) and 1-year extension agreement expired August 31, 2024, a proposal (RDF 4.0) to continue RDF for fiscal years 2025-2029, as outlined below, is presented by the Interagency Coordination Group (ICG). The ICG includes representatives from Texas A&M University (TAMU), Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), Texas A&M AgriLife Research (AgriLife Research) and Texas A&M Health (TAMH) and constitutes the RDF Management Committee (RDF-MC).

### **Preamble**

The Research Development Fund (RDF) was initiated in April 2014 through an agreement between TAMU, TEES, AgriLife Research and TAMH that 15% of their respective IDC generated by Brazos County researchers would be used to "make strategic investments for the good of the Brazos County-based Texas A&M research enterprise" ("RDF 1.0"). It should be noted that this discussion reflects percent IDC distribution rather than specific dollar amounts as the dollar amounts will fluctuate annually. During the initial phase of RDF, the funds were used to: a) create new, needed facilities through a proposal process; b) support existing, widely used core facilities; and c) provide matching funds for external infrastructure proposals requiring them (National Science Foundation Major Research Instrumentation (NSF-MRI), etc.). The initial RDF 1.0 agreement was renewed in September 2018, with effective fiscal years 2019-2023. It was adjusted in RDF 2.0 to include recurring funds (RDF-RF) for facility support over up to 5 years, using up to 20% of the RDF funds (20% of the 15% IDC, which equates to 3% of the 15% IDC), to support existing facilities in efforts to increase their user base, or otherwise increase their revenue. This adjustment was motivated by the recognition that the creation of several new facilities using the RDF funds for instrumentation resulted in progressively more pressure to address their long-term sustainability (staff salary support, maintenance contracts, etc.). The remaining 80% (80% of the 15% IDC, which equates to 12% of the 15% IDC) of the RDF 2.0 funds were used to support new instrumentation proposed by faculty groups for one-time funds similar to that in RDF 1.0.

In response to COVID-19 the 15% IDC funding was adjusted temporarily with 7.5% of the IDC return being used as proposed in RDF 2.0 and the remaining 7.5% being used by units to cover COVID related costs.

In May 2020, the agreement for RDF 3.0 adjusted from 15% to 10% the IDC used for RDF and the difference of 5% remained with the System members to support their shared enterprise. The 10% RDF pool was used to fund three specific elements: a) new instrumentation, b) partial recurring support for existing large, shared core facilities; and c) collaborative strategic initiatives. Three percent of the available IDC be allocated to each of the programs, RDF Classic, RDF Recurring Funds, and RDF Collaborative Strategic Initiatives. The remaining 1% of the available IDC provided flexibility based on Immediate Priorities with decisions on what to support requiring agreement from two members of the RDF-MC.

The RDF 3.0 approach for new instrumentation, remained the same to that of RDF 1.0 and 2.0 with faculty driven proposals submitted as part of the normal instrumentation RFP and reviewed

by the RDF-Advisory Committee (RDF-AC) and RDF-MC. Funds could also be used as required matching funds for other significant proposal submissions. The approach for facilities also remained similar to that of RDF 2.0. Proposals for partial recurring support are submitted by facility Directors for consideration by the RDF-RF Committee who makes recommendations to the RDF-MC.

Strategic initiative support was a new element, but it fit the original vision for RDF when first created. The intent of this funding element was to increase overall competitiveness in advancing strategic priorities common to two or more units (TAMU, TEES, AgriLife Research and TAMH). Proposals for this element were submitted to the interagency Cooperation Group for review and recommendations to the Research Leadership Leads for funding approval.

#### **RDF 4.0 Proposal Development and Stakeholder Engagement**

As the current Research Development Fund (RDF) agreement (RDF 3.0) expired August 31, 2024, a proposal to continue RDF for the next 5 years (FY25-29) as outlined below, was presented by the Interagency Coordination Group (ICG) to the Texas A&M University research community for stakeholder feedback. The ICG includes representatives from Texas A&M University (TAMU), Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), AgriLife Research and Texas A&M Health (TAMH).

The ICG took a retrospective look at RDF for lessons learned and considered several potential scenarios. Overall, there is broad consensus amongst all members about the following points:

1. RDF is a valuable program that has been instrumental in growing the research enterprise of the agencies and university since its inception by promoting shared interest and complementary expertise across TAMU and the agencies, AgriLife Research, TEES, and HSC. The program has typically focused on those interdisciplinary efforts that cut across TAMU and the agencies to address grand societal challenges.
2. One of the clear strengths of the program lies in the grassroots involvement of faculty and PIs in developing proposals, as well as playing a substantial role in the review and decision-making progress for the RDF Classic and RDF-RF programs.
3. RDF has been very successful in promoting research that crosses the traditional boundaries of the university, its colleges, and the agencies.

There are also challenges in the current landscape of RDF, as well as the broader research enterprise across campus, that factored into the deliberations:

1. RDF has become an increasingly complex set of programs that may be diluting the impact of the program.
2. TAMU and the agencies are increasingly faced with fewer resources than needed to achieve their priorities.

The RDF 4.0 proposal builds on and addresses these points.

## Funding – Participation – Eligibility

Texas A&M University (TAMU), Texas A&M AgriLife Research (AgriLife Research), including the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Texas A&M Health (TAMH) will contribute 15% of their respective IDC over the next 5 years (FY25-29) to the RDF programs detailed below. Consequently, faculty members, PIs, and core facilities from these entities will be eligible to participate the RDF programs.

Initially, the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) has elected not to participate in the RDF 4.0 program in FY25 due to financial challenges but will reevaluate its participation in subsequent years. Until such time as TEES elects to participate in the RDF program:

- TEES and College of Engineering faculty and researchers will be eligible to participate in proposals as knowledge experts that enhance the outcomes of the proposed project, however TEES and College of Engineering faculty and researchers will not be eligible to participate in the RDF 4.0 programs as PIs or Co-PIs.
- No RDF monies will go to TEES and College of Engineering faculty, researchers, and core facilities, either directly or indirectly. Where core facilities are shared across entities, their primary affiliation will be determined by the administrative unit approving the facility's rate study.
- TEES and College of Engineering faculty and researchers will not be eligible to serve on any RDF committees (RDF Advisory Committee, RDF Recurring Fund Committee and RDF Management Committee). These committees can seek technical or knowledge specific input on individual proposals if recommended by the RDF committee reviewing the proposal. This has been a common practice when committee members lack the expertise to critically evaluate a proposal.
- TEES will retain its ICG seat on the RDF Management Committee and can resume participation once they opt in.
- RDF Classic and Recurring programs call for proposals will be revised by the appropriate program committees to align with the revised program descriptions, to more clearly define eligibility and to develop review criteria. These revised call for proposals will be approved by the RDF Management Committee.

## RDF 4.0 Programs

The RDF 4.0 simplifies the RDF program by continuing to use 15% of IDC to fund the RDF Classic, the RDF Recurring Fund (RDF-RF), and the TAMU/Agency Program Development Fund. The RDF 4.0 program enhances the successful RDF 3.0 Classic program by incorporating a mechanism for supporting interdisciplinary faculty research, uplifting the research infrastructure to support interdisciplinary laboratories and equipment, and developing interdisciplinary initiatives that expand the research enterprise of Brazos County.

- A. **7% IDC RDF Classic redefined to include Emergent Opportunities in Interdisciplinary Research.** This proposal refocuses this program to reflect the original vision of RDF as an opportunity to promote the research enterprise across the university

and agency partners, including the traditional RDF program that has historically provided opportunities to support technological advances (e.g., equipment). Funds can also be used as matching funds for other significant proposal submissions.

- a. Resources could be used as seed or start-up funding for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary initiatives aimed at developing new and emergent areas of emphasis as precursors to new center and institutes, or facilities.
  - b. Provide a mechanism for supporting collaboration through sharing of laboratories, and equipment critical to the maintenance of collaborative networks across the research enterprise of Brazos County.
  - c. Instrumentation proposals in the form of instrumentation acquisition or required matching funds for other significant proposal submissions, including integration of this program with large federal instrumentation grant programs.
  - d. New core facilities proposals, including traditional STEM/laboratory facilities, as well as more broadly defined core facilities, including innovation hubs, think tanks, policy focused centers, and visual and performing arts facilities, among others that expand the research enterprise. These RDF proposals should be aligned to promote increased competitiveness and opportunities in state, federal, foundation, community, and corporate funding opportunities.
  - e. Proposal will be reviewed by the RDF-AC, who make recommendation to the RDF-MC.
- B. **3% IDC Recurring Funds (RDF-RF)**, partial recurring support for existing shared core facilities to support recurring costs (e.g., service contracts, partial salary support for lab managers) associated with operating core facilities. Proposals would continue to be reviewed by the RDF Recurring Fund Committee (RDF-RF), making recommendations to RDF-Management Committee.
- C. **5% IDC TAMU/Agency RDF Program Development Fund** where the intent of this funding element is to increase overall competitiveness in advancing strategic priorities of the individual units and provide the flexibility to meet unforeseen challenges and opportunities. Decision on how each entity spends its own RDF Program Development Fund rest solely with that entity, but the RDF Management is responsible for advancing shared projects that meet collective strategic priorities.

#### **RDF 4.0 Common Principles**

- On an annual basis the RDF Management Committee will have option to shift the proportions of the 10% IDC allocated to the RDF Classic and Recurring Programs in response to proposal pressure and strategic program development needs.
- RDF Management Committee will report on an annual basis RDF 4.0 outcomes and program spending to stakeholders.
- RDF Management Committee will consist of the members of Interagency Coordination Group (ICG) contributing IDC to the program, including Texas A&M University (TAMU), AgriLife Research and Texas A&M Health (TAMH), and Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES) when they resume participation.

- RDF 4.0 Management Committee will add two representatives from the Council of Principle Investigator and two Deans (one STEM and non-STEM) from Texas A&M University colleges and schools as ex-officio non-voting members.

**Table 1:** RDF 4.0 proposal projections based on average IDC contributions (FY22-24). This proposal combines the successful RDF 3.0 Classic program with the RDF Reoccurring Fund (RDF-RF) and the TAMU/Agency Program Development Fund. The \$ amount allocated is based on average IDC contributions from FY22-24 of entity. This is intended to give a sense of the total \$ amount potentially available to each program but year over year variability is expected.

	<b>Classic/EOIE</b>	<b>RF</b>	<b>Agency/TAMU</b>	<b>Average FY22-24</b>
	<b>7.00%</b>	<b>3.00%</b>	<b>5.00%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>TAMU</b>	\$1,814,873	\$777,803	\$1,296,338	\$3,889,013
<b>TEES</b>				
<b>AgriLife Research</b>	\$1,075,424	\$460,896	\$768,160	\$2,304,481
<b>HSC</b>	\$727,765	\$311,899	\$519,832	\$1,559,497
<b>Total</b>	\$3,618,063	\$1,550,598	\$2,584,330	\$7,752,991

Table 2: RDF 4.0 proposal projection based on the average IDC contributions (FY22-24) including TEES participation. All other information is the same as in table 1.

	<b>Classic/EOIE</b>	<b>RF</b>	<b>Agency/TAMU</b>	<b>Average FY22-24</b>
	<b>7.00%</b>	<b>3.00%</b>	<b>5.00%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>TAMU</b>	\$1,814,873	\$777,803	\$1,296,338	\$3,889,013
<b>TEES</b>	\$2,223,156	\$952,781	\$1,587,968	\$4,763,905
<b>AgriLife Research</b>	\$1,075,424	\$460,896	\$768,160	\$2,304,481
<b>HSC</b>	\$727,765	\$311,899	\$519,832	\$1,559,497
<b>Total</b>	\$5,841,218	\$2,503,379	\$4,172,299	\$12,516,897