



Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI)

Update to 2016 Evaluation Report

February 2018

Problems Identified

- **AURI Did Not Prioritize Projects Based on Potential Impact.** AURI assists clients with projects and conducts research on its own initiative. AURI prioritized client work over projects it initiated, even though its research could be used by a wider audience. Also, AURI required only clients who asked for financial help to justify their request, which limited information available to prioritize use of staff resources.
- **The Institute Did Not Sufficiently Measure Its Performance.** AURI's measurement focused on client projects, but survey response rates were low. AURI's form to collect staff assessments of all projects did not reflect the range of the institute's work, limiting its usefulness. Finally, AURI's annual legislative reports fell short of requirements in state law.
- **AURI's Approach to Charging Fees for Services Was Inconsistent.** AURI collected little fee revenue for its services, and fees varied without explanation. For example, rates charged for staff time ranged from a "discounted rate" of \$45 per hour to \$150 per hour.
- **Some Aspects of AURI's Board of Directors Needed Improvement.** Best practices for nonprofit boards recommend selecting members that have needed skills or perspectives. But all AURI board members were specified in state law or nominated by organizations named in law. Also, the board did not always comply with the state's Open Meeting Law.

Changes Implemented

- **AURI Changed Its Project Approval Process.** The institute updated its project approval process in ways that were responsive to OLA's evaluation. For example, AURI now scores projects based on potential impact and success, which can inform priority setting. AURI also requires more information about projects that are expected to consume significant staff time.
- **AURI Expanded Performance Measurement.** AURI has started collecting project impact information from clients at a project's conclusion and surveys participants in its networking events. It also made changes to its annual report to the Legislature.
- **AURI Implemented a Consistent Approach to Charging Fees.** AURI created a method to calculate the value of its services, and the board approved a new fee-for-service framework. The institute implemented the framework, which uses a tiered approach to fees based on a client's gross revenues, in January 2018.
- **The 2017 Legislature Expanded AURI's Board.** The Legislature added positions for two at-large members to AURI's board. In addition, the Legislature clarified that AURI's board is a "state board" for the section in the state's Open Meeting Law that covers meetings held electronically (*Minnesota Statutes* 2017, 13D.015).