

## **The NH-INBRE Equipment Exchange Program**

We have found at NH-INBRE that much of the equipment and supplies no longer being used at Dartmouth are of value to researchers at our NH-INBRE Partners. Therefore, we have established an inter-institutional “loan”/exchange program that provides used and surplus laboratory equipment and supplies to our Partners free of charge. This Equipment Exchange Program not only provides cost savings to our Partners, but is also consistent with “green” initiatives at Dartmouth in reducing scientific waste and costly disposal fees. This NAIP “best practices” submission describes our program and provides details for establishing an equipment exchange.

### **How do we find the items for the Exchange Program?**

We have made campus-wide efforts to contact Department Administrators and Chairs, Facilities Operation and Management personnel, Environmental Health and Safety staff members, and campus researchers to let them know about our program. As word has spread, individual labs have notified us of items they are no longer using. In addition, the Facilities Staff and the Environmental Safety personnel have also let us know when labs are moving within the institution, closing down, or leaving the institution. To help maintain a good relationship with the departments and researchers at our institution, we make sure that departmental colleagues, and then any other institutional colleagues, have first choice of any available items. Only then do we include the remaining items in the Equipment Exchange Program.

### **How do we decide what items are appropriate for the Equipment Exchange?**

We have established a number of criteria when selecting items to include in the Exchange. Consumable/disposable supplies are straightforward, and need minimal evaluation other than considering whether they might be useful to our Partners. For equipment:

- . Equipment must be in overall good working condition and appear as though it could be used a long period of time.
- If the item needs minor repair (ie. new power cord, new gasket), we limit the cost to no more than 10% of the original purchase price.
- Should the equipment repair cost exceed this 10% (as mentioned above) it may still have value in that it could be used as a trade-in toward purchase of a new item (ie. Eppendorf centrifuges).
- The equipment should be either standard lab equipment (ie. balances, centrifuges) or earmarked for a particular investigator’s research, not an item so specialized that it would be hard to find a user within a reasonable time frame.

The amount of equipment and supplies we’ve been able to distribute through the Exchange Program has been surprising, and represents tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars worth of resources. We often obtain -20 freezers, CO<sub>2</sub> and other types of incubators, centrifuges, stir plates, water baths, and have distributed large quantities of glassware and disposable plastic products, including micropipette tips, Eppendorf tubes and tissue culture dishes and pipettes. In addition, we have often supplied lab and office furniture.

### **How are items stored and transported?**

Items are stored at the Lead institution (Dartmouth) in a room made available to us through the efforts of the Facilities and Operation Management Office. This is another instance of institutional support for NH-INBRE. Despite this space, the large volume of equipment and supplies makes storage an issue, and drives our efforts to keep storage at a minimum by selecting appropriate items that our Partners will be quick to use. Transporting the items is an additional challenge. NH-INBRE personnel, with assistance from Facilities personnel, typically acquire the items. To date our Partners have been eager enough to obtain the items that they have often come to Dartmouth to pick up their items as soon as possible. We have also been very successful in coordinating pick-ups and deliveries with other NH-INBRE activities and travel, including when Partners come to Dartmouth for meetings, symposia, and collaborative research activities, and when NH-INBRE administrative team members visit Partner institutions.

### **Are there health and safety issues involved?**

There are potential health and safety issues with used biomedical research equipment. Our Environmental Health and Safety Office has agreed to expand their routine evaluation of abandoned and discarded lab equipment and the de-commissioning of labs to include checking equipment we have identified, and determining whether it is safe to transport and use at another institution. This is another valuable component of the institutional support we have for this program.

### **How are the available equipment and supplies advertised to partners?**

We have developed an online catalog that includes photos and brief descriptions of the available items, and have made it available on our website ([NHINBRE.org](http://NHINBRE.org), click on “Equipment Exchange” in the navigation bar to view the current issue of the catalog). We aim for a quarterly release of an updated catalog, but that depends, in part, on the acquisition of new items. We therefore notify our NH-INBRE participants when an updated version of the catalog has been put up on the website.

### **What is our system for request, justification and allocation?**

When a new edition of the catalog has been released and we have notified our NH-INBRE Partners, we then typically wait a few weeks before we begin evaluating requests, so that everyone has had a chance to respond. Other than the typical “rush” in response to a new catalog, requests can be made at any time. The Partners send us a list of the items they are interested in, listed by item # and short description. We also request a brief (few sentences to a paragraph) justification for their request, to help us make sure the equipment and supplies will be used in a manner consistent with the goals of the NH-INBRE, and to help us consider priorities for distributing the resources when there are multiple and overlapping requests for the same items. Priority is typically given to those with NH-INBRE research grants, to new faculty researchers, and /or requests indicating that multiple faculty and student researchers will benefit. If we receive multiple requests for materials we often attempt to divide the items among Partners when feasible. Overall, we try to distribute support across the network and be generally equitable in distribution of the most sought-after items.

### **Are there institutional issues about distributing equipment that may have been purchased by grant funding?**

When establishing the Exchange Program we had discussions with the Dartmouth Procurement Office and Office of Sponsored Projects. They advised us to contact them if any of the large equipment had institutional “tags”, so they could determine whether the grant was no longer active or whether the equipment was old enough that it had depreciated sufficiently and was no longer of sufficient value that it warranted institutional oversight. The overall recommendation was that if we provided the equipment as “long term loans”, and were able to track the location of the items via record keeping and labels, it would be less of an administrative burden and issue.

### **Are the items tracked by the equipment exchange?**

For tracking purposes (see above), all items in the Exchange Program have a specific catalog number, “loan” date, and institutional location. Before distribution we place a visible sticker on all equipment so that it is clear that the source was the NH-INBRE Exchange Program. This sticker also has a reminder to researchers that if the stickered item contributes to a publication or presentation, that the users cite the NH-INBRE.

### **Is there paperwork involved?**

We have developed an Exchange Program agreement form (which is attached to this “best practices” description). Prior to receiving any requested equipment, the recipient signs and dates a release indicating that they waive and release any and all claims whatsoever that they, or their legal representative, might have against the NH-INBRE Exchange Program, and that they assume responsibility for the proper care and disposal of the equipment. This form is filled out each time they receive anything from the Exchange Program.

### **Any other “best practices” experience to pass along?**

- 1) Know your audience! Don’t take in items that are unlikely to be of use to your Partners
- 2) Realize that while a program like this is of high impact and worth the investment of resources, it does require ongoing effort from INBRE personnel.
- 3) It takes significant and ongoing effort to keep the institution aware that unwanted research items should be brought to our attention.

### **How can we find out more about the NH-INBRE Equipment Exchange Program?**

The daily operation of the Equipment Exchange Program is coordinated by Ms. Donna Porter, and questions should be addressed to her at: [Donna.M.Porter@Dartmouth.edu](mailto:Donna.M.Porter@Dartmouth.edu). We look forward to hearing from other INBREs that establish equipment exchanges, so we can compare notes and update the NAIPI best practice notes on this topic.

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