

31 July 2025

SPaRC Outstanding Service Award
Selection Committee Members
CAMPUS

Dear SPaRC Awards Selection Committee Members:

With much enthusiasm and my strongest endorsement, I nominate **Ms. Patricia (Patti) Welander, MS, for the 2025 SPaRC Outstanding Service Award**. I have had the honor of working with Ms. Welander since January, 2019, when she was hired by University of Illinois Extension as a Grant Specialist. In this position, Ms. Welander administered federal, state, and private grants, contracts, and awards for Illinois Extension. She monitored subawards, reconciled accounts, and ensured compliance with university and funding agency guidelines. Moreover, she provided principal investigators with detailed fiscal reports and budgeting tools to facilitate their ability to oversee their funding portfolios and to prepare new proposals, respectively.

Based on Ms. Welander's exceptional performance, she was promoted to Grant Writer in April, 2020, within Illinois Extension. As Extension's leader for sponsored programs efforts during the past five years, Ms. Welander has been responsible for proposal development and training, along with other essential pre- and post-award activities. She leads the grant submission efforts for numerous Extension employees with investigator privileges, a number that is higher than for most academic departments and other campus units. She is responsible for all aspects of proposal preparation, including finding funding sources, writing and editing, budgeting, establishing deliverables and metrics, and integrating with research faculty as necessary. Ms. Welander has shepherded grants of all funding amounts and scopes, from every type of sponsor imaginable. She has developed and conducted pre- and post-award training for investigators and support staff, following the principles of the Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance (SPaRC) model and working group. Ms. Welander has provided direct support and oversight for two of the university's top 10 sponsored programs recipients of the past seven years (SNAP-Ed PI @ \$92 M; Illinois Extension PI @ \$65 M).

Ms. Welander has provided leadership by working with Illinois Extension's six program leaders / assistant deans, all of whom serve as principal investigators and—for all intents and purposes—function like department chairs, to connect campus investigators with Illinois Extension's specialists, educators, outreach associates and others who also serve as principal investigators. These efforts have led to integrated research, teaching, and outreach / public engagement programs that have built awareness across Illinois' communities regarding the university's contributions to the state and its residents. She facilitates brainstorming sessions to define project objectives and coordinates the writing and submitting of proposals. She effectively collaborates with the college of agricultural, consumer and environmental sciences research office to develop integrated projects, monitor progress, and complete reporting requirements. She provides assistance to university units and other colleges and universities (via subawards) to ensure that Illinois Extension is included in external grant projects that require

outreach / public engagement efforts. During Ms. Welander's tenure, Illinois Extension's grantsmanship has increased by approximately 15%. She has promoted pre- and post-award services that has resulted in a renaissance of seeking external funding by Extension personnel.

There are three key characteristics that Ms. Welander demonstrates that define her outstanding service as a grants administrator: 1) consistency; 2) problem solver; and 3) planner. **Consistency.** Approved investigators within Illinois Extension are quite entrepreneurial. They seek a variety of financial support to fund their programs, projects, and essential work. Often, Extension personnel propose writing and submitting grants, when donations would be the more appropriate mechanism of support. Ms. Welander has a keen eye for distinguishing between gifts and grants and then communicating this to the investigator. She has saved much time, energy, and heartache by consistently referring Extension personnel to Extension's advancement and development office when appropriate. Further, Ms. Welander has led individual and group training sessions on budget development, using standardized tools and forms, to ensure consistency in meeting RFA / RFP guidelines. She documents processes and best practices so that post-award activities are consistent, effective, and efficient across all of Extension's investigators. While this may sound rigid, Ms. Welander provides consistent outstanding service in form and format, while applying innovative thinking to seeking external funding.

Problem solver. Ms. Welander is exceptional when it comes to creatively approaching grant opportunities. She has an incredible ability to envision the lifespan of any individual grant and find the issues, concerns, or gaps that either are or will become problematic. For every problem, she develops at least one workable solution, never imposing her own viewpoint, but rather, offering solutions and supporting investigators in making productive decisions. One of my recently completed grants was substantially disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Welander anticipated where post-award problems would present and then offered solutions to resolving these problems. Her suggestions allowed for funds to be expended through an atypical but allowable mechanism. Another example is a current grant that includes a micro-grant component, directed for recipients who do not have the resources or ability to wait for reimbursement. Ms. Welander considered all of the university policies / procedures and recommended a solution that would meet the needs of award implementation. This has been very effective.

Planner. Of all the departmental- or unit-level pre- and post-award personnel that I have interacted with during my 27 year career in academia, Ms. Welander has been the most service oriented, notably due to her planning and project management skills. During the development of a \$15 M integrated research and technical services proposal, Ms. Welander broke down the RFP into manageable steps with defined deadlines so that a rather large and distributed research team could submit this one-time, very unique grant. She gave personal time during her Thanksgiving (2022) and winter holiday (2022-2023) breaks to ensure that the proposal would meet the internal submission deadline. She wrote several sections of this proposal and provided critical editorial services that improved the grant. She coordinated the overall budget, including six subawards, for the proposal. While Illinois Extension was not selected for this particular opportunity, another similar grant became available later in 2023, and with Ms. Welander's planning and service, the other grant (USDA-FSA) was awarded. She has been instrumental in monitoring this USDA-FSA grant and in providing important insights into the expenditure rate, reporting requirements, and implementation activities.

Ms. Welander is a Certified Illini Research Administrator, and she is very proud of this distinction. She attends webinars, trainings, and professional development programs to continuously learn and enhance her skills. She has provided direct training to Extension personnel regarding the grants lifespan and encourages proactive grants management by Extension investigators.

Beyond her formal position with Illinois Extension, Ms. Welander is very engaged in her community. She served as an elected official (Alderman) for the City of LeRoy, from 2021-2025. This position also required Ms. Welander's talents of consistency, problem solver, and planner to address the issues and concerns of the 3,500 residents of LeRoy. She met with constituents, attended council meetings, and voted on recommendations as presented by the city administrator. She served on the Economic Development and Public Works committee by offering her skills in developing infrastructure grant applications. This demonstrates Ms. Welander's commitment to planning and problem solving with innovation and creativity to consistently bring critical resources to research, outreach, and public engagement across communities in Illinois.

Thank you for the opportunity to nominate **Ms. Patricia (Patti) Welander, MS, for the 2025 SPaRC Outstanding Service Award**. I believe that she is very deserving of this award. If you have questions or need further information, please contact me by e-mail (nickrich@illinois.edu). Best wishes for your deliberations and a successful awards program!

Sincerely,



Shelly Nickols-Richardson, PhD, RD
Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition
Past Associate Dean and Director of University of Illinois Extension (2018-2025)