

NERA Business Meeting Minutes

December 15, 2021 (virtual)

In attendance: Eric Wommack (Chair-Delaware), Matt Wilson (West Virginia), Mark Hutton (Maine), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Jan Nyrop (NY-Geneva), Margaret Smith (NY-Ithaca), Wendie Cohick (New Jersey), Bill Miller (Massachusetts), Jason White (CT-New Haven), Anton Bekkerman (New Hampshire), Jane Kolodinsky (Vermont), Calvin Keeler (Delaware), Lindsay Willey (West Virginia), Lori Gula (USDA NIFA), Bill Hoffman (USDA NIFA), Rubella Goswami (USDA NIFA), David Leibovitz (NERA), Rick Rhodes (NERA)

Call to Order/Announcements – Eric Wommack, NERA Chair

- Margaret Smith shared that a research station at University of Kentucky suffered total losses in the tornadoes of December 12, 2021. The NERA Directors are asked to consider how fellow AES Director-colleagues and other stations contribute to the UK relief effort. Rick Rhodes has been in contact with SAAESD Executive Director Gary Thompson about how the regional associations can help.
- Right now, UK does not know what their needs are. Local farmers are working together on-site and temporary buildings are being set up. Most cattle that wandered away from the station have been found. It is likely that other stations within the UK system and locally in the Southern region will be the first hands on deck to assist.
- The group went through a series of introductions.
- **The minutes of the September 28, 2021 NERA business meeting were approved unanimously.**
- **The agenda for this meeting was approved unanimously.**
- COVID update: Cornell has moved into “Red Alert” mode to cancel most on-campus activities and move final exams to an online format. All students, faculty and staff were required to be vaccinated prior to the academic year. There have been no hospitalizations, but the cases among undergraduates are increasing rapidly post-Thanksgiving and the Omicron variant is involved in the uptick in cases. Students are requested to test and quarantine prior to traveling home for the holidays. Labs and offices remain open – this is not affecting the research operation at Cornell.

Multistate Activities Committee Report – Jan Nyrop

- MAC updates were enclosed with the agenda for this meeting. No actions on the MAC report and recommendations are needed to be taken by NERA. The MAC has two new Extension representatives: Cindy Fitch (West Virginia), and another representative yet to be identified.
- NERA Planning Grant RFP suggested changes:
 - Increase award amount from \$7k to \$10k – to make the funding opportunity more attractive
 - Rather than submission of a CV from the principal investigator, the RFP requires a narrative text illustrating the capabilities of the prospective planning grant team.
 - The return on investment from NERA’s Planning Grant program has resulted in numerous multistate, multi-investigator grant awards.

- As a reminder, NERA Planning Grant funds are delivered by reducing an institution's assessment to NERA in the following Fiscal Year.
- **The revised NERA Planning Grant RFP was approved unanimously.**
- **NERA OED will prepare a brief email announcement for all Directors to use to send to colleagues along with the RFP. We need to increase awareness and hopefully increase the number of applications for the RFP.**
- Administrative Advisers are encouraged to use the NIMSS system to contact Appendix E participants regarding project activities, rather than using external listservs. Often times there are participants left off of multistate project email correspondence.

Northeast Communications Network: Assets and Needs Assessment Results –Lindsay Willey (West Virginia), NERA Communications Subcommittee

- The NERA Communications Subcommittee decided to roll out a Qualtrics survey to gauge communications resources at northeast institutions. Lindsay Willey and Lori Gula met to discuss what should be included on the survey, and Lindsay walked the NERA Directors through survey results on today's call. The survey results are enclosed with this document.
- Most of our Experiment Stations do not have dedicated resources for communication (e.g. news distribution service, media content creation service like Biteable, dedicated graphic design service).
- Experiment Stations rely on different units for their communications resources: some are in-house, some lean on university resources, some are at the college level
- Communications information across the region is delivered most frequently by news/press releases, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Several institutions who responded to the survey were interested in collaborating as part of a regional communications effort.
- A regional communications effort is not meant to promote the NERA office. NERA is here to provide a regular cadence and amplification platform to tell the stories of Northeast experiment stations.
- Recommendations from Lindsay:
 - Start small and focus on progress
 - Commit to financially supporting the NERA Communications Network (e.g. operating budget, personnel, professional design services)
 - Promote/support the connecting of regional communicators (e.g. host a communications meeting) – **hosting a meeting is a “natural next step” according to Lindsay. As the Northeast liaison, Lori Gula would be interested in joining.**
 - Discover our “WHY” and use it to: guide the formation of communications goals and objectives, define target audiences, develop key messages. Why do we want to tell a regional story?
 - The Southern AESs have seen success w/ a unifying hashtag #SouthernAgResearch. The Northeast stations may want to consider #NortheastAgResearch on all of their tweets so that everyone can amplify each others successes.
- **The survey will be re-opened and distributed to NERA Directors. Some institutions did not have an opportunity to respond prior to today's meeting.**

NERA Spring Meeting – Eric Wommack, Rick Rhodes and David Leibovitz

- First NERA face-to-face meeting in two years
- Host city: Philadelphia; dates: March 15-16, 2022 (either Hyatt at the Bellevue or Loew's Hotel in Center City, Philadelphia). A hybrid meeting option will be available.
- Agenda setting: **NERA OED will draft and distribute a SurveyMonkey to gauge feedback from Directors on what should be discussed at the 2022 Spring Meeting. Directors will also be asked to identify prospective speakers to lead these discussions.**
 - Northeast and climate change research capacities
 - Station evaluations (reviews)
 - Station efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Communications session
 - Evolving institutional response to COVID-19

Issues discussion: What's on your mind?

- Graduate student tuition
 - WVU uses the monetary value of tuition waivers, for projects with a cost share requirement in the RFA (not capacity funds)
 - At UVM, the real cost of tuition is 10% to the college
 - Rutgers must pay full tuition on all GAs and TAs (\$65k / annually)
 - At UD, the graduate tuition impact is different at each college. There was consideration of only supporting the tuition of doctoral students
- Farm staff professional development (Anton)
 - Many farm staff at LGUs are at the top of their career ladders within the university system. At a recent UNH station review, farm staff were asked: what would it take (other than a salary increase) to keep you at UNH for a long time?
 - Farm staff expressed a desire for a professional development opportunity: It would be beneficial to visit other farms/research centers in the Northeast to share information, best practices, and gain new ideas for projects at UNH
 - Other NERA Directors expressed interest in hosting some UNH farmers, particularly if there would be an exchange involved. This could be a region-wide professional development program.
 - Farm manager exchange (either one on one or as a regional summit) could give farm personnel a better sense of what activities are going on around the region
 - Matt Wilson shared a link to the Research Center Administrators Society, a professional organization promoting branch station administration in agriculture: <http://www.thercas.org/>
- Civil rights review: Bill Miller mentioned that the UMass research units just went through a USDA Civil Rights review. NERA Directors are invited to contact Bill to discuss the review process.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am ET.