

NERA Business Meeting  
Bethany Beach Ocean Suites Residence Inn, Bethany Beach, DE  
June 06, 2018

In attendance: Carol Thornber, Jody Jellison, Brad Hillman, Jason Hubbard, Adel Shirmohammadi, Gary Thompson, Eric Wommack, Jan Nyrop, Ted Andreadis, Rick Rhodes, David Leibovitz

1. Minutes from the March 6, 2018 NERA meeting were approved unanimously.
2. Chair's remarks and discussion (Jan Nyrop)
  - Holding the NERA meeting during CARET/AHS didn't work; we marshalled our way through it rather than allowing time for expanded discussion and reflection
  - NERA will not hold future spring business meeting during CARET/AHS
  - A concern was expressed about moving the spring meeting and losing the expanded discussions – best practices, common issues in research, etc.
  - NERA's "spring meeting" equivalent may be held at the Summer meeting
    - Eliminates weather-driven travel complications in early March
    - Need to ensure retaining the spirit of the spring meeting – provide opportunity to ruminate over the discussions
    - Shifting the NERA meeting to the end of the summer meeting is not "quality time" – folks have one foot out the door
    - NERA sessions could be held at the beginning of the Summer meeting, perhaps in lieu of a tour
  - **NERA decided to hold its 2019 face-to-face meeting at the NE Joint Summer meeting, either before / after / in between sessions (preferably before). This would require an additional day's commitment (Thursday) for NERA.**
  - Some activities (e.g., MAC discussion, NRSP responses, Award nominations, etc.) require NERA to meet in the spring
    - **NERA OED will revise the NE guidelines for multistate activities; eliminate the "review cycles" and include hard deadlines for stages of multistate proposal routing**
    - **Transactional business needs in March will be handled electronically**
3. MAC report (Fred Servello)
  - Request to write
    - NE18515 (Broccoli) – MAC asks the group to expand the objectives and clearly define the science questions. Rick will provide input to the technical team.
    - Proposed AA assignment: Jan Nyrop, Cornell
  - Approval of peer reviewed proposals
    - NE\_TEMP1834 (Avian Diseases) – positively received by the MAC, recommend approval
    - NE\_TEMP1835 (Controlled environment ag) – no major issues in peer review, recommend approval
    - NE\_TEMP1838 (Weed emergence model) – The reviewers were split; some said scientific merit was unacceptable, some said it was excellent, all provided comments. MAC returned the proposal to the technical team to respond to peer reviewers.

- AA assignment
  - NE1602 (Informational): UMass is determining their replacement for Pat Vittum (turf professional background), who will serve as AA for NE1602
- **A motion to approve the MAC's recommendations (assignment of Jan Nyrop as AA for NE18515, approval of NE\_TEMP 1834, and NE\_TEMP1835) was introduced by Gary Thompson, seconded by Jody Jellison, and approved unanimously.**

#### 4. Discussion on NIFA response times

- NIFA's response times have been inconsistent across institutions; some are received very quick, others seemingly ignored.
- NIFA is making a point that Mc-Stennis money is not being spent down by institutions, they are toughening restrictions on those funds.
- **Rick Rhodes will communicate NERA's issues to NIFA (on response times, rejections by the Mc-Stennis NPL)**

#### 5. NRSP Review Committee (Fred Servello)

- The NRSP-RC was thorough and extensive in their responses to the midterm reviews of NRSPs 4, 6, and 9 and renewal proposal of NRSP8.
- NRSPs keep surfacing in conversation because they typically don't end after one or more grant terms.
- NERA was the only region who recommended rejection for the renewal of NRSP8.
- Doug Buhler (Michigan State) agreed with many of NERA's comments on NRSP8; Jeff Jacobsen agreed with continuing the discussion to challenge NRSP8.
- What are the principles that will guide NRSPs going forward?
  - Sunset clause – they "never" end
  - Midterm review – should it be conducted by experts?
  - Is OTT / NRSP1 the best vehicle for NIMSS? Or for IR-4?
  - Should OTT funding support regional gene resources?
- NRSP RC typically moves through their agenda only affirming midterms and renewals; this year's meeting challenged the guiding principles of NRSPs.
- NRSP RC argued that the midterm review was not much more than a rubber stamp; recommended that midterm reviews be conducted by disciplinary experts.
- Eric Young (SAAESD) stated that a \$50k "maintenance level" of funding is a strategy to support an NRSP effort (some skin in the game) without breaking the bank.
  - This was not favored by NERA Directors; sounds like an NRSP wouldn't ever go away
- NERA Directors were interested in moving toward sustainable business plans – what is the plan to get NRSPs off of OTT Funding?
  - Most NRSPs fall under this category; does IR-4?
    - IR-4 is housed at Rutgers, holds international programs – at Rutgers, RCM is costing the college a lot (\$1.4m)
    - If Rutgers could not afford to pay for Jerry Baron, where would he go?
- There are NRSPs that don't fit in with the guidelines as they're written, they're actual research activities rather than research *support*.
  - How does the current NRSP portfolio fit with the intent of the NRSPs?
  - What is required to change the rules/guidelines?

- A subgroup of the NRSP RC (Rick Rhodes, Jeff Jacobsen, Doug Buhler) will examine the review process to make midterm review more useful.
  - This subgroup will propose changes to the NRSP guidelines to change review practices, the mechanics of NRSPs, and the NRSP system as a whole.
  - Guidelines state that the NRSP RC should oversee the sunset of an NRSP, but there is no guidance on “sunsetting”.
  - **Proposals from the subcommittee and NRSP RC will be clear and final for presentation at ESS in October 2018 – the subgroup will try to get the changes in front of each region and gather feedback over the summer.**
- If objectives are achieved, an NRSP should sunset.
- If multistate proposals had no clear hypotheses/objectives/timelines, they’d typically be rejected up front.
- Merely tweaking the review process does not solve the problem
  - It’s difficult for NRSP groups to let go of what they already have
  - NRSPs should just end after 5 years. Rather than renewing, teams would have to submit a new proposal.
- We don’t want to blindside ESS with these changes. The NRSP RC should engage other thought leaders to build consensus for a real discussion on changing the NRSP system.
  - Input from the regions (summer meetings) is where the consensus is built
- Who is benefitting from NRSPs? South and West have been most reluctant to change the system or resist NRSPs.
- We ought to examine whether or not NRSPs could be funded from other mechanisms.
- NRSP feedback from the RC
  - NRSP8 renewal: NE was only region with strong concerns and rejection recommendation. W/NC/S approved. This looked like a research project rather than research support.
  - NRSP4 (IR-4) midterm:
    - Doug Buhler mentioned the team was in active discussions about their budget.
    - Rutgers can’t afford to continue to support IR-4
    - **Leadership of IR-4 should attend and report at regional associations’ meetings**
    - **The NRSP RC recommended to continue NRSP4.**
  - NRSP6 (Potato):
    - The group failed to adequately address its business plan.
    - What ought the LGU system do with Gene Research Support?
    - The NRSP RC recommended sunsetting NRSP6 if they did not develop and alternative business plan.
    - What are other funding options for NRSP6: industry support (industry didn’t know they existed), the group claims industry won’t support. User fees / transfer agreement? NRSP6 deems user fees as unfeasible.
    - **NRSP RC’s recommendation: NRSP6 should draft a sustainable plan to move away from NRSP funding, or it shouldn’t be allowed to renew.**
  - NRSP9 (National Animal Nutrition Program):
    - Rick Rhodes serves as the Northeast AA

- During midterm review, outputs of the group were examined:
      - Few publications
      - Weak, largely empty website (empty tables on many pages, broken links)
      - Little website usage (less than 100 users in a 6-month period)
      - The website is a liability it should be taken down or fixed.
    - **The NRSP RC asked for additional information on NRSP9's outputs.**
  - Should ESCOP have an expanded discussion on regional Germplasm centers / genetic resource management?
    - Is OTT funding the proper way to fund these?
    - Should the regional resources should be turned over to the ARS/USDA

## 6. ESCOP Reports (Gary Thompson)

- Gary and Rick have spent time at meetings in DC, visiting with agencies and attending the May 2018 NC-FAR summit (Crafting A Strategic Vision for an Advanced Future in Ag Research and Delivery)
  - The summit was composed of many non-university advocacy groups
  - Robust APLU representation at the summit
  - Conclusion from the summit: LGU's / Capacity Funds are either *at* the table, or *on* the table.
  - Many industry constituents (e.g. corn growers) have a skewed view of capacity fund and LGUs.
  - Rick and Gary were able to push back and derail some of the conversations that questioned the LGUs.
  - People within some organizations see this as a zero sum game – increasing competitive funding means money needs to come from somewhere. Capacity funds are 'in the bullseye' for use in other areas.
- Conclusions from the Chair
  - The Experiment Stations need to be at the table with national agencies and organizations.
  - LGUs need to stop talking about woes and start talking about value.
  - Big Initiatives – we need to think about being strategic in our asks; if we ask for increased capacity funding, what would we do with the money?
  - Communicate the value of the work first, talk about the money second.
  - Relationships are established – these agencies know who we are, and we need to continue visiting with them.

## 7. Communications and Marketing Discussion

- CMC is a committee of ECOP/ESCOP/AHS
- The committee operates as an overseer of kglobal, the APLU-hired marketing consultant
- CMC was proposed to become the third standing committee of the Policy Board of Directors.
  - Two current standing committees: CLP, BAC
  - In order for CMC to become a standing committee, it needs to be voted in by the section. Few people typically vote, we can't rely on a vote.
  - Without vote, CMC could become an ad hoc committee rather than a standing committee.

- What if the CMC were elevated? The PBD thought the CMC should be reimagined.
  - A meeting was held at APLU on the Communications and Marketing Committee attended by Craig Beyrouthy, Alan Grant, Chuck Hibberd, Ed Jones, Ian Maw, Rick Rhodes, Hunt Shipman, Gary Thompson. Notes were distributed to NERA.
    - The regional associations were to discuss the concepts captured in the notes.
    - CMC found that “the system” is not successful at engaging congressional delegations in response to CTAs.
    - **NERA will gather the responses to these CMC notes after the meeting**
  - The most recent CTA had a tepid response from “the system”, but was more successful than any previous campaign. It did not yield an increase in funding, but did activate our network to engage congress.
  - Should we focus on CTAs and engagement of congress? Or more general, value-building projects?
  - PBD wants to divorce the conversation from the working relationship with CMC and kglobal. The specific consultant could go away; this is about the CMC.
  - Two points from the Chair:
    - “We” view APLU as a large organization, but it’s small (3 in-house people for the BAA). Advocacy is “handed off” to Cornerstone.
    - The CMC has no representation at the national level (level of the PBD and BAC).
    - CMC’s budget could pay for an FTE or two within APLU; dedicated Communications and Marketing person in-house.
    - What should the vision be? Advocacy? Marketing? Sales?
  - We’re not engaging our communicators at the university level to speak for “the system.”
  - IS there an opportunity for us to speak as “a system”?
  - APLU issues CTAs that are inconsistent with what we’re hearing from other organizations
  - **For NERA’s consideration: As a national level committee, what would be your vision for the CMC?**
8. ESCOP Awards Update
- The Science and Technology committee is selecting the winners for the Excellence in Multistate Leadership award (NE recipient: NE1335, *Resource Optimization in Commercial Greenhouse Production*)
  - The Diversity Catalyst committee is selecting an award winner for its inaugural excellence award
9. NERA Budget (budget sheet enclosed)
- FY19: 3% salary increase is built in, travel will decrease as ESCOP chair rotates to NCRA
  - **The budget (FY18 actuals and FY19 projections) was unanimously approved by NERA**
10. Final remarks and adjournment
- NERA thanks Gary Thompson for his leadership as ESCOP Chair and Rick Rhodes for service as ESCOP Executive Vice-Chair
  - NERA will hold its expanded meeting next year at the joint summer session
  - The Northeast region has a unique opportunity to show up and participate at national activities because of proximity to DC

- NERA Directors can target and engage in specific, high-priority events for the region given the proper lead time
- Please consider: Tom van Arsdall asked, how can NCFAR advocate for the ESS?
- A resolution to the University of Delaware and Delaware State University was delivered by Brad Hillman (enclosed)
- The meeting adjourned at 3:30pm