

NERA thoughts on NIFA relocation (June 17, 2019)

The Office of the Executive Director posed the following questions to the NERA listserv on June 12, 2109:

Doug Steele (APLU) and Scott Angle (NIFA) are seeking your recommendations and advice on the NIFA relocation. (Ali has shared the same solicitation with the NEED directors.) The two specific items of interest include:

1. **Which NIFA positions need to remain in DC (you can go to NIFA website and review the [organizational chart](#))?**
2. **Which members of the LGU community can/should serve as an informal advisory committee during the transition? (While the role of this committee has not been defined, we believe it will focus on communications, priorities, and other transition issues).**

Here are the responses:

Jody Jellison (to Ali Mitchell who shared the same ask above with NEED) –

My suggestion for the committee is that it be comprised of the 4 regional ED's for Extension and the 4 regional ED's for research as that will ensure effective communication with the totality of the state directors. So for example, you and Rick would function as the NE representatives on the committee. On the question of essential positions to remain in DC, that is harder as in my opinion it would be far more than the limited number they are envisioning. Individuals that I personally interact with and would hope would continue to be centrally located include Bill Hoffman, Luis Tupas, Muquarrab Qureshi, and Michael Fitzner. I would also anticipate interacting with Bob Green in the future.

Jan Nyrop –

I want NIFA to be successful but I also think we are being dragged into a move that is not needed and will badly damage agricultural research. We will now be complicit in this idiotic and politically motivated action. OK, I got that off my chest. Now to answer your questions:

I think the entire operations group can move (under Robert Holland) and the Planning, Accountability and Reporting Staff. I would keep all the Deputy and Division Directors in DC because they are the ones who need to meet with LGU folks and counterparts in other agencies.

I honestly don't know who should serve on an advisory committee during transition but it needs to be someone with high tolerance for administrative work and understands the importance of keeping awards and grants programs moving.

Jon Wraith –

I wholeheartedly agree with Jan. I thought 'we' were making progress in preventing the move, through legislative and other activities. I think a move of the Divisions – perhaps also true with a move of only the Operations and PAR group – would/will end up crippling the agency for years, which will cripple our own abilities to function as well. Very slow response times (not that they're particularly good now, with all the departures, vacancies and personnel changes), ill-targeted/incompetent software and lack of assistance or responses to remedy these, etc. They have already decimated the personnel that we interact with and rely on.

Should they move in spite of this, Jan's take on which groups must stay in DC is correct in my view. In that case I'll be happy that I'll be retired before too much longer, so won't have to deal with the long term damage they will have inflicted.

Tim Phipps -

If this can be delayed another 18 months it won't happen and will end up saving the government millions. Unfortunately, as Jan and Jon note, they have already lost a lot of key personnel, which I think is the main goal of this nonsense. Keep the scientists as far away from Washington and policy circles as possible, makes it easier to ignore them.

Adel Shirmohammadi –

I agree with Jan and Jon in their assessments. I agree that they are dragging us to be partners in solidifying this move. I personally believe that us in the Land Grant system sent mixed signals by first unanimously opposing the move and then submitting letters of interest to host NIFA in very early stages of this whole episode. I am wondering if we are doing the same thing here in terms of being part of the decision, thus solidifying this politically driven decision. I should also say that I wish all the success for NIFA because their success is connected to ours as well. This move has already demoralized many of NIFA employees at all levels and that alone will have huge negative impact on all of us Land Grants in terms of timely and efficient delivery of services.

If the move is going to happen, I agree that Institute and Division Directors should remain in DC and the Operations unit excluding "communications Staff" can move. Having Communications unit to stay in DC can help NIFA's interaction with other National Agencies, Congressional representatives, and other relevant entities in DC and throughout the country.

Ted Andreadis –

I am in agreement with all previous comments from Adel, Jan, Jon and Tim. However, I am not enthusiastic about serving on some politically motivated "advisory committee" having been opposed to this move in the first place. It's self-serving for NIFA and as Jan pointed out, makes us complicit in this move.