

**NERA Summer Business Meeting Minutes**  
**June 7, 2022, 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM ET**  
**Portland, ME**

In attendance: Eric Wommack (Chair / Delaware), Puneet Srivastava (Vice Chair / Maryland), Anton Bekkerman (Officer-at-large / New Hampshire), Wendie Cohick (New Jersey), Rick Roush (Pennsylvania), Jan Nyrop (NY-Geneva), Anna Katharine Mansfield (NY-Geneva), Indrajeet Chaubey (CT-Storrs), Diane Rowland (Maine), John Kirby (Rhode Island), Tim Schartner (Rhode Island Grows), Kevin Kephart (USDA-NIFA), Margaret Smith (NY-Ithaca), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Rick Harper (Massachusetts), Lori Gula (USDA-NIFA), Caron Gala (CARET Executive Director), Jim Shirk (Northeast CARET), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA)

Meeting Administration (Eric Wommack, NERA Chair)

- The meeting was called to order and the group went through a series of introductions.
- **The agenda for this meeting, and minutes from March 15, 2022, were both approved unanimously.**

Multistate Activities Committee Report and Recommendations (Jan Nyrop, MAC Chair)

- The MAC's role is to take actions and make recommendations to NERA on multistate activities. Discussion ensued.
- Budget request recommendation for NE59: Support for the Northeastern Regional Center for Rural Development (\$40,788 request)
  - The NERC RD is located at Penn State University under the direction of Stephan Goetz.
  - This is an off-the-top funding request, which was previously (and historically) determined to be the best mechanism for funding the regional Germplasm centers and Rural Development centers.
  - NERA is asked to consider: Are there opportunities for other groups to request off-the-top funding?
  - **The NE59 FFY23 budget request was approved unanimously.**
- Request to Write: NE18862 Legal Issues in Agriculture and Natural Resources
  - The MAC recommended this group consider writing as a multistate project instead of a coordinating committee.
  - **The request to write for Legal Issues in Agriculture was approved by the MAC unanimously, with the recommendation to re-work the proposal into a multistate research project.**
- Request to approve Peer-reviewed Multistate Activities: The MAC recommends to NERA the approval of the multistate activities below for a project cycle of 10/1/2022 – 9/30/2027:
  - NECC\_TEMP2202 (Formal Structure for the Minor Use Animal Drug Program, AA: Margaret Smith, NY-Ithaca)
  - NE\_TEMP2202 (The Equine Microbiome, AA: Eric Wommack, Delaware)
  - NE\_TEMP2210 (Improving Forage and Bioenergy Crops for Better Adaptation, Resilience, and Nutritive Value, AA: Eric Bishop-von Wettberg, Vermont)
  - NE\_TEMP2220 (Multi-state Coordinated Evaluation of Grape Cultivars and Clones, AA: Margaret Smith, NY-Ithaca)

- NE\_TEMP2227 (Contribution of Ovarian Function, Uterine Receptivity, and Embryo Quality to Pregnancy Success in Ruminants, AA: Dave Townson, Rhode Island)
- NE\_TEMP2248 (Mastitis Resistance to Enhance Dairy Food Safety, Milk Quality, and Animal Welfare, AA: Kumar Venkitanarayanan, CT-Storrs)
- **The full slate of multistate activities above was approved by the NERA Directors unanimously. As a reminder, NERA has final approval authority on multistate research projects. The MAC Chair will follow up with the Administrative Advisers and technical teams, and the NERA OED will approve all of these projects in NIMSS.**
- Request to Write requirements discussion
  - Currently, the “request to write” calls for teams to identify the issues and justification for pursuing an issue as the basis of a multistate project.
  - The MAC chair posed the question: Should NERA either provide the option or require teams to draft full project proposals at the request to write stage, instead of only submitting the “issues and justification”?
    - From draft to final approval, the multistate project review and approval process has many steps and takes a long time to complete.
    - If a technical team submits a full project proposal draft for an initial MAC review, it could either be sent back to the technical team or move on to external review immediately, eliminating a step that comes with our current “request to write” process.
    - Calling for full project proposals upfront could remove a waiting for technical teams.
    - Should we change the expectations for what is stated in a project’s outreach plan? What should that plan consist of?
    - **Jan Nyrop proposed that the MAC drafts a new set of guidelines for preparing and submitting multistate projects with the following major changes:**
      - 1.) Eliminate the “request to write” requirement and solicit full proposal drafts. The full draft must include the support of two NERA AES Directors and a list of prospective participants.
      - 2.) Clearly identify the goals of the Extension/outreach plan.
      - 3.) Make the document more succinct and approachable
      - **The MAC and NERA OED will develop a revised set of guidelines for presentation at the Fall 2022 NERA Business Meeting.**

#### NERA Budget Discussion and OED Evaluation

- The NERA budget was presented by the ED. The immediate takehomes: NERA is in good financial shape. NERA expects to close out the FY22 budget with a larger carryover than approved. That’s a reflection of not spending down the full \$31K in planning grants and we did not receive any requests from the region in FY22. While we did not have any FY22 planning grant expenditures, the planning grant effort has been very successful in the past. Recently, a WVU rural tourism group received a planning grant which resulted in both submission of a competitive grant proposal to NIFA (the proposal was funded) and a approval of a multistate research project.

- Discussion of the planning grants line ensued. The FY23 budget retains the \$31k planning grant line. There is a rolling RFP posted on the NERA website. Planning Grants are offered with a cap of \$10k. The OED will continue to solicit the planning opportunity to NERA members.
- Rick Rhodes and David Leibovitz exited the meeting room and the NERA Directors went into closed session.
- **The FY23 NERA Planning Grants RFP will be posted and distributed to NERA Directors on July 1 for advertising to investigators.**
- **Following a closed discussion, the NERA Directors approved the renewal of the NERA OED contract and the NERA Budget proposal unanimously.**

Station Research Profile: Viral Ecology and Our Natural Ecosystems (Eric Wommack, Delaware)

- Eric profiled the work in which he is engaged.
- The vast abundance of viruses within natural ecosystems is paralleled by their extraordinary diversity. It is likely that dsDNA viruses also comprise Earth's largest pool of unknown and novel genetic diversity.
- Understanding the influence and importance of viral processes within natural ecosystems is the central research focus of his laboratory.
- The encompassing nature of ecological research means that the work of my laboratory is highly varied and includes field measurements of microbiological processes; quantitative microscopy of viruses within field samples; molecular genetic analysis of viral assemblages; and assessment of viral diversity through high-throughput DNA sequence analysis (viral metagenomics).
- The computationally-intensive analyses associated with viral metagenomics also means that the work of the lab is highly interdisciplinary requiring close interaction of computer scientists and environmental microbiologists.
- Eric's on-going viral ecology research programs span the biosphere and include investigations of agricultural soils, coastal marine environments, deep-sea hydrothermal vents, poultry production houses, and the microbial communities associated with the human body.

Best Practices Discussion: Attracting and Retaining New Faculty (John Kirby, Rhode Island)

- The URI College of the Environment and Life Sciences (CELS) has turned over ~80% of the faculty under John Kirby's leadership since 2010.
- Since 2010, the URI CELS faculty has gone from ~85% male to ~50% female.
- URI CELS looks beyond the college level to improve unique capacities at the institution.
  - Example: URI has become a leader in studying inclusive science communication, a collaboration between CELS and the College of Arts and Sciences.
  - Journalists are provided with training on how to use science appropriately in communication. 3,000 journalists globally have been trained by URI's Metcalf Institute based in CELS.
- Developing a strategic vision for the organization has allowed CELS to tailor faculty hires to strategic areas.
- URI CELS uses a significant amount of Hatch funding as startup for new faculty; CELS does not use Hatch funds to pay salaries.
- URI CELS hired 12 new faculty during the pandemic.

- It's critical for search committees to closely align with the college's intent for newly hired positions. Hire people who will operate under the college's expectations.
- All tenured faculty receive an annual review from the Dean's Office and the Dean meets with each member one-on-one for an hour annually. Faculty are considered the most important investment for the organization.
- The one-on-one Faculty/Dean meetings ensure people are adequately engaged, evaluated, and that they feel like they belong.
- Hiring a coordinator for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has provided meaningful mentoring to new faculty and students in marginalized populations.
- Mentoring is a key activity, which continues to be a challenge of many institutions.

#### State Departments of Agriculture (Rick Roush, Pennsylvania)

- Pennsylvania state government under Republican majority has had a budget shortfall.
- \$280M-\$300M commitment required to reverse PA Agricultural impact on Chesapeake Bay
- Rick Roush, Diane Rowland, Indrajeet Chaubey, Eric Wommack expressed initial interest in interfacing with state directors of agriculture.
- NERA will compile a list of each state's director/secretary of agriculture and institutional administrators for distribution to the region.

#### Meeting with CARET (Jim Shirk-NE CARET chair and Caron Gala, Executive Director, CARET)

- Caron and Jim shared that the mission of CARET is to educate and advocate on behalf of the Land-grant system in an effort to secure the necessary funding for research, Extension and teaching.
- They shared that the strategic plan of CARET is to engage in four initiatives over the next four years:
  - Coalition building: build relationships and understanding of the LGU system
  - Communications: Improve communications and coordination.
  - Develop, train, and support the general membership of CARET
  - Accountability: Ensure that CARET is engaged and accountable
- CARET wants to ensure that the regions are heard and that they complement our activities.
- CARET is particularly interested in the Facilities Act.

*The meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm ET.*