

NERA Business Meeting Minutes
March 09, 2021

In attendance: Matt Wilson (Chair), Jody Jellison, Mark Hutton, Jan Nyrop, Darrell Donahue, Puneet Srivastava, Kumar Venkitanarayanan, Debby Sheely, Margaret Smith, Leslie Parise, Anton Bekkerman, Wendie Cohick, Steve Loerch, Rick Roush, Calvin Keeler, Faith Peppers, David Leibovitz, Rick Rhodes

Call to Order/Meeting administration – Matt Wilson

- Agenda Modification (Additions/Deletions) and Approval
 - **The agenda was approved unanimously.**
- Approval of December 15, 2020 Minutes
 - **The minutes were approved unanimously.**

Creating a Regional Voice: Impact Reporting and NIFA – Faith Peppers, NIFA – Director of Communications, and Anton Bekkerman, UNH

- Faith suggested that we might consider changing the communications model and take advantage of missed connections. Previously, NIFA would LGUs when they had a story to tell.
 - When a scientist receives a grant, they are aware they need to develop stories about their research. LGUs are doing a good job of telling stories.
 - People are hearing stories generated by LGUs: 7,600 stories reached a 6.6B person audience in the last 6 months.
 - Top mentions in stories: 1.) *research*, 2.) *university* – impactful stories make the connection between universities and research.
- Faith shared her experiences at the UGA. She noted that UGA received little support from the university-wide communication effort regarding ag research.
 - However, 78% of UGA's total royalty income came from plant varieties in the college of agriculture. There was an established ROI, and these stories were important to tell.
 - UGA has seen a 40% increase in extramural funding over two years which can be attributed to changing the way they talk about their science, and changing their audience.
 - With help of graduate students, UGA ag communications determined the 1—2 biggest programs that investigators wanted to highlight for the college research program.
 - Some departments were not named specifically but were participating in the focus area. Try to create exposure for those types of units.
 - At UGA, the most publicized and featured programs were the programs most discussed with decision makers.
 - UGA communications focus areas now more closely align with funding and publications, and it paid off with a 40% increase in extramural funding over two years.
- NERA Directors are urged to package and push communications material and talking points to NIFA.
 - UNH is already generating great material that is being pushed to NIFA and promoted nationally.

- At NIFA, Faith personally goes into the National Land-grant Impacts Database (<http://www.landgrantimpacts.org>; now peer reviewed) seeking impact statements. These impact statements inform stories in topic areas requested by the USDA Secretary.
- Southern Region is putting together a communications consortium, Faith is helping to develop that group.
- Faith suggested to the region: determine priority areas and develop a regional story. Approach major media with a story and highlight the multi-institutional involvement. Media outlets consider their audience, e.g. businesses around the region, university alumni.
 - You can't tell a national story about *every* topic. Example: UGA didn't want to promote the use of corn for ethanol because it would drive up the cost of poultry feed – a larger industry in their state.
 - Some things are important in some regions, others are not. Example: cotton and peanuts are important to the south, not the northeast.
 - The single largest influential story in the past few years with the greatest impact came from the University of Maryland. The UMD story outweighed the reach and impact of the story on NIFA relocation.
- Make sure NIFA and media outlets know who the institutional communications experts are.
 - There are varying communications models around the country, and it is critical for the regions to develop and share an inventory of lead communicators.
 - Market the regional communicators list to any major media outlet covering ag, food, environment. Target reporters at major media outlets, pitch the list as a go-to source on science information topics. Make the list simple, a list of contacts.
 - When allowable, send communicators to visit with media outlets.
- When developing a regional voice, consider the following:
 - If not *everyone* can support a story due to conflict of interest, involve those who can.
 - Give communicators space to work on regional messaging. Deans and Directors provide different levels of freedom to communicators. Some do not have the latitude to develop large-scale visions because they are so focused on pushing out brochures and publications.
 - Develop a master communicators list and ensure communicators stay in touch. Be sure regional communicators can see what other institutions are talking about so stories can be amplified. NIFA will pick up on this and further amplify regional messages.
- Faith has a master list of communicators used by NIFA, the region is urged to keep the list up to date because it can change quickly. **Faith will share the NIFA working list with Rick.**
 - MRF Impacts used this list to populate its quarterly newsletter.
- NIFA gets a lot of calls from media but it takes a long time to get clearance. If media is on a deadline and Faith knows an institutional communicator involved in that focus area, she will forward the media to a university. LGUs are the primary voice, USDA is “supporting information.” (Example: If a Philadelphia media outlet approaches NIFA, Faith will suggest PSU or Rutgers.)
- Why regionally and not individually?
 - By working together, more voices will rally around common areas that benefit all involved institutions.

- Smaller states who have a hard time getting national exposure, can work their way into the media spotlight with a regional voice.
- Legislators confirm that regional impacts are stronger than state impacts.
- Land-grant impacts Database is a better way to reach NIFA than REEport. REEport information is forwarded to Faith by other NIFA staff; Faith directly goes into NIDB.
- How do we organize as a region going forward? What are the next steps for NERA?
 - **NERA OED and Anton can put together a survey to determine priorities for moving forward with a communications effort. What are our follow up action steps? Anton's OneDrive Doc (https://wildcatsunh-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/ab1625_unh_edu/EdQs6xU2R0lPnlC4vcKWYDABn2DJ51_49Ugj4y51Z0jj9g?e=UAYJFC) from December 2020 will be incorporated into the survey.**
 - **Rick will circulate the list of northeast communicators list to NERA. The NERA OED will work on updating that and keep the current version in NIFA/Faith's hands.**
 - **Rick will reach out to SAAESD Executive Director Gary Thompson to discuss the southern region communications group.** (Southern Region already has annual communications-focused meetings)
 - Create a space for communicators at NERA meetings, regularly. Work WITH them, don't send them off to work on their own.
 - **Directors would like to organize communications meetings in parallel to or in connection with future NERA meetings.**
 - **Faith offered to meet with institutional communicators individually.**

Multistate Activities Committee – Jan Nyrop

- MAC updates
 - NEERA1604 (regional technical committee on IPM) has submitted its renewal request to write and will be reviewed by the MAC at its next meeting.
 - NE1501 is being nominated for the Excellence in Multistate Research award. Jan Nyrop is the AA and is working with the technical team on a nomination closely tailored to the ESS Call for Nominations.
- MAC recommendations of AA's
 - NE1640 and NE_TEMP2140 Sustainable Management of Nematodes in Horticultural and Field Crop Plant Health Systems, proposed AA: Anton Bekkerman (former AA Mark Rieger)
 - **Anton Bekkerman provided a self-nomination to serve as AA for NE1640 / NE_TEMP2140. Rick Rhodes stepped down as nominee as recommended by the MAC. The nomination was seconded by Matt Wilson.**
 - NE1701 Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals, proposed AA: Matt Wilson (former AA Gary Thompson)
 - **Matt Wilson provided a self-nomination to serve as AA for NE1701. Rick Rhodes stepped down as nominee as recommended by the MAC. The nomination was seconded by Jody Jellison.**

- NE1938 Carbon Dynamics and Hydromorphology in Depressional Wetland Systems, proposed AA: Mark Stolt (URI, approved by RIAES Director, John Kirby; former AA Mark Rieger)
- NE1941 Environmental Impacts of Equine Operations, proposed AA: Puneet Srivastava (former AA Mark Rieger)
 - **Puneet Srivastava provided a self-nomination to serve as AA for NE1941. Rick Rhodes stepped down as nominee as recommended by the MAC. The nomination was seconded by Matt Wilson.**
- NE_TEMP2105 Motivations for Growing Industrial Hemp: Farmers, Producers, Processors, Manufacturers, Retailers, Consumers, Citizens, and Policymakers, 10/1/22 - 9/30/27. New, AA: Matt Wilson.
- **The slate of Administrative Adviser nominations was approved unanimously.**
- NERA recommendation for the Northeast Excellence in Leadership – Matt Wilson
 - Fred Servello (University of Maine, retired) is proposed as the award nominee.
 - Fred served as NERA Chair, longtime MAC Chair, and led the National Research Support Project Review Committee through a redraft of the NRSP guidelines in response to the Northeast’s sentiment on sunseting Off-the-top funded research support projects.
 - Fred also ensured the solvency of NERA about 8 years ago, developing the NERA funding model which is still in place today.
 - **Darrell Donahue moved to approve Fred’s nomination. The motion was seconded by Jan Nyrop and approved unanimously. Rick Rhodes will share the decision and nomination language with Fred Servello.**

Issues discussion: Infrastructure, Advocacy and the Northeast

- Agricultural Research Infrastructure Advocacy (ARIA) and NERA
 - ARIA is an APLU group led by Tom Coon, Glenda Humiston, and Moses Kairo, driving the \$11.5B request to address infrastructure at colleges of agriculture.
 - Mark Hutton and Hannah Carter (Maine) met with Caron Gala and Doug Steele (APLU) to receive “specialized coaching” on how to approach the Maine congressional delegation about supporting the infrastructure ask. Maine is also seeking approval from university upper administration to approach their delegation on behalf of the university.
 - Massachusetts congressional delegations (including ag committee member Jim McGovern) have not been approached about the infrastructure ask, a missed opportunity. It did not seem like Massachusetts was on the list of key driver states for the ARIA effort.
 - ARIA has given the impression that the requests from smaller institutions will be discussed later, after the “major ask” is secured.
 - PSU has met with the PA congressional delegation to focus on the \$100M ask for NIFA, without details on capacity or competitive funds. Delegations were supportive, but that’s only 1% of the total ask including infrastructure. It’s important to get champions lined up now from across the country and that seems to be paused.
 - Cornerstone is not approaching congressional delegations about the infrastructure ask.

- Are we just advocating for the \$11.5B? Is there a distribution model we are advocating for? What are the simple talking points for Directors to approach congressional delegations?
- Advocacy efforts often requires the permission of the university.
- The Gordian Report has not been packaged into a consistent “talking points” ask for approaching congressional delegations. We have lots of data and no consistent impactful story to tell.
- Cornell has decided among Deans and Directors that they would not be investing political capital into promoting the infrastructure ask. They are supportive of the request.
- Rick Roush plans to talk to Glenda Humiston about the effort
- NERA institutions tend to support the infrastructure ask, but aren’t willing to invest political resources into the effort.
- The impact of the infrastructure ask to rural economic development is not clearly identified.
- This should be an effort that has illustrated impact to all institutions.
- **Rick Rhodes will draft a message on behalf of NERA to the ARIA Group about concerns with spending political capital in the face of unknowns.**

Summary Comments and Adjournment – Matt Wilson

The meeting adjourned at 11:58 am ET.