

NERA Spring Teleconference Notes

December 06, 2019, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Roll call: Fred Servello (Maine), Adel Shirmohammadi (Maryland), Ted Andreadis (CT-New Haven), Gary Thompson (Penn State), Matt Wilson (West Virginia), Kumar Venkitanarayanan (CT-Storrs), Jon Wraith (New Hampshire), Jan Nyrop (Cornell), Carol Thornber (Rhode Island), Pat Vittum (UMass), Brad Hillman (Rutgers), Dan Rossi (Rutgers / ex-officio), Rick Rhodes (NERA / ex-officio), David Leibovitz (NERA / ex-officio)

Agenda

1. Approval of agenda, December 6, 2019 (Ted)
 - **The agenda was approved unanimously with no additions or changes.**
2. Approval of minutes of September 25, 2019 (Ted)
 - **The minutes were approved unanimously with no additions or changes.**
3. IR-4 update (Dan Rossi)
 - Established 56 years ago, IR-4 National and NE headquarters currently located at Rutgers
 - Other regional centers: MSU (NCRA), Florida (SAAESD), UC Davis (WAAESD)
 - USDA ARS “fifth region”
 - IR-4 Funding Sources
 - \$11M NIFA Grant
 - Hatch Multistate Funds (NRSP4; \$481,182)
 - \$3.1M appropriations from ARS
 - Formerly located at Cornell, relocated to Rutgers in 2014
 - Dan Rossi moved into NE Director role
 - Rutgers adopted Responsibility Centered Management
 - College billed \$1.3M/year for hosting IR-4
 - IR-4 had to consider relocating its HQ to another institution
 - NC State has stepped up with a 10-year commitment to hosting national IR-4
 - Relocation has been approved
 - 3-year window to complete relocation
 - Timing aligns with the NIFA grant cycle
 - Relocation complete by September 2021
 - Given the relocation of IR-4 to NC State, the NE region needs a new host institution to take over from Rutgers
 - Rutgers reached out to Univ of Maryland, who hosts the NE Regional Field Coordinator (sub-award from Rutgers), but Maryland could not consider hosting
 - NERA institutions asked to consider hosting
 - IR-4 NE Regional Field Coordinator is preferred to stay in Maryland
 - Host institution provides administrative leadership and budget management

- Regional Director required to oversee the program, control of rewriting IR-4 proposals
 - Ideally the NRSP Administrative Adviser would be at the host institution
 - Transfer of the regional office won't require the relocation of any people
 - Annual IR-4 budget for NE region is ~\$880k, including:
 - Sub-award for the Maryland Regional Field Coordinator - \$185k / year
 - Sub-award for field trials - \$470k / year
 - Sub-award for consultant field trials - \$23k / year
 - Regional travel - \$24k / year
 - Mailing expenses for samples - \$19k / year
 - Rutgers will maintain the NE center for now until a new host is determined
 - “Out-of-pocket” cost to the host institution depends on the budget model
 - Particularly expensive at Cornell because of 18% charge on the annual \$880k budget (\$100k+ cost to the institution)
 - Expensive at Rutgers under RCM; they were willing to take it on before RCM was implemented.
 - Grant accounting support would be necessary
 - National HQ will stay at Rutgers through September 2021
 - IR-4 Executive Director Jerry Baron will relocate to NC State in January 2020
 - IR-4 would like to determine a willing new host as soon as possible
 - Ideally a new host would be determined in early spring 2019
 - Deeper discussion can take place at the 2020 NERA Spring Meeting in Philadelphia
4. MAC report (Request to write update, multistate research award nominee, NERA Planning Grant update/discussion) (Brad)
- NERA approved NECC_TEMP1901 as NECC1901 (*Integrating Genomics and Breeding for Improved Aquaculture Production of Molluscan Shellfish*), Eric Wommack (DE) assigned as Administrative Adviser
 - Suggestion for the coordinating committee to evolve into a multistate research project in the future
 - Bill Miller (UMass) was approved as Northeast AA for NRSP1 (*NIMSS / Impact Reporting*)
 - Matt Wilson (WVU) was approved as AA for NE1544 (*Dairy Production systems: C,N, and P management for production, profitability and the environment*), NE1962 (*Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Other Green Environments: Understanding Human and Community Benefits and Mechanisms*)
 - Mark Hutton (Maine) was approved as AA for NE1731 (*Collaborative Potato Breeding and Variety Development Activities to Enhance Farm Sustainability in the Eastern US*)
 - NERA Planning Grant (Govoni, UConn) was funded (\$7,000)

- NERA RFP Discussion
 - Traditionally, NERA cuts a check for the full award amount to the host institution and the host institution is responsible for management of the funds.
 - Some investigators cannot apply for NERA RFPs because of indirect cost requirements at their host institution.
 - A new RFP was reviewed by the MAC which adds a second pathway for submission: investigator submits proposal to their AES Director, the Director shares the proposal with the MAC, and if approved, the proposal would be funded internally. NERA would reduce its assessment to the host institution in the following year by the amount of the funded NERA proposal, with an itemized invoice as backup.
 - The MAC recommends approval of the new RFP, which includes both pathways for submission; it is up to the investigator to decide which pathway to use.
 - In the end, all proposals will require endorsement from the PI's station Director.
 - NERA Directors like the idea of reducing the following year's assessment to fund Planning Grants
 - **A motion was introduced to approve the following NERA RFP process: funding requests would be submitted to a station director. The station director to whom the request was submitted would then solicit input from the MAC as a means to assess merit. The MAC would make a recommendation to the director to fund the proposal locally. A like sum to the local funding would be reduced from the following year's assessment**
 - **The motion was approved unanimously. The RFP will be revised, re-posted, and distributed to NERA.**

5. Discussion items

- NIFA Relocation / Reimagining NIFA
 - NERA has an opportunity to provide suggestions to NIFA Director Scott Angle directly.
 - NIFA workforce has been reduced by 78% as a result of relocation to Kansas City, MO in 2019.
 - Short-term: NIFA must respond to its stakeholders, vacancies prevent them from answering calls.
 - Long-term: What should NIFA aspire to be/do?
 - Suggestion to merge NIFA and ARS, inspired by NIH model
 - Increasing the NIFA budget, level the playing field with NSF
 - Problems?
 - Immediate need: Projects are not being approved on time and are not being backdated upon approval.

- There's no higher vision coming from NIFA leadership.
 - At NSF, program directors have a lot of autonomy than they traditionally have at NIFA
 - Crop improvement – some NIFA genomics research has been given away to NSF
 - Need for a higher level of vision for nutritional security, not just food security (high carbohydrates issue)
 - NIFA needs its budget and accounting groups integrated more closely with their award and evaluation groups – they behave differently, they send different messages
 - What makes the LGU relationship with NIFA a “partnership”?
 - **NERA Directors were asked to send feedback on NIFA issues and reimagining NIFA to the OED. Rick Rhodes will collect more feedback from Directors and submit a regional package to Scott Angle on the long-term vision for NIFA, in parallel with the other AES regional associations.**
 - U.S. Domestic Hemp Program
 - A request for questions was circulated to NERA, 9 questions were submitted
 - Three dispositions for those questions:
 1. NIFA's answer on utilizing NIFA funds for hemp research
 2. Advice from the Agricultural Marketing Service (overseeing Hemp Production program)
 3. Submit comments during the USDA's open comment period on industrial hemp
 - Three institutions are moving forward with hemp research programs (Penn State, Cornell, Maryland) – local leaders and sources of information on hemp research
 - Spring meeting agenda
 - **Rick Rhodes will forward draft suggestions on the spring meeting agenda to NERA for their consideration.**
6. Updates
- Jon Wraith has announced he will step down as New Hampshire AES Director at the end of FY2020. NERA congratulates Jon Wraith on his contributions to UNH and to NERA.
7. The call adjourned at 12:02pm.