



NERA Quarterly Teleconference

January 5, 2017 Minutes
11:00 AM-12:00 PM

This teleconference follows an Executive Committee meeting held on December 1, 2016.

Roll call:

Ted Andreadis (Connecticut)

Mark Rieger (Delaware)

Fred Servello (Maine)

Jessica Leahy (Maine)

Adel Shirmohammadi (Maryland)

Jody Jellison (Massachusetts)

Jon Wraith (New Hampshire)

Brad Hillman (New Jersey)

Jan Nyrop (New York, Cornell)

Rick Rhodes (NERA)

Dave Leibovitz (NERA)

Gary Thompson (Pennsylvania)

Debby Sheely (Rhode Island)

Tom Vogelmann (Vermont)

Agenda:

1. *Introduction of the new NERA coordinator, David Leibovitz.* David spoke to the directors and shared items that he had been working on including the website and NERA News. David looks forward to meeting the directors face-to-face in Baltimore in March.
2. *NEED-NERA Planning Grants:* The Executive Committee suggested releasing a NEED-NERA Planning Grant RFP and dedicating \$10,000 to the effort with an expectation that NEED would do the same. Further, the Exec Comm suggested a winter RFP with decisions to be made at the spring meeting. Jon noted that the spring meeting was 2 months away and we might not have enough time. Rick noted that timing would be tight. Fred reflected that this could be a 'broad call' and we could get it out quickly. Adel asked for clarification on the "\$10k amount". Rick responded \$10k would come from NERA and \$10k from NEED to support 2 projects. As a reminder, NERA supported 3 projects at \$21k in the fall (\$7k each). The idea is to put out another \$20k call; if we can support more than 2 projects we would. Gary reflected that planning grants really are integrated planning grants even when NEED isn't involved. Are some activities which are primarily extension able to roll into this pot of money? (Yes). Had

NERA Quarterly Teleconference

NEED agreed? Rick discussed this with Nancy Bull at the end of October. NEED is interested, but the details have not been worked out. Debby was asked as a NEED rep for her thoughts. Debby commented that NEED hasn't discussed this yet as a group. Brad asked about the expected review process? Rick shared that we would use the strategy that we had employed in the past: the MAC (which has NEED representation) would review. Gary reflected that given the 45 day timeframe, spring meeting on horizon, and NEED hasn't yet discussed, should this be a plan for next year? Jody remarked that a timeline to have final decision made at the summer meeting could work. Gary: makes sense. Rick agreed that Jody's suggestion to make decisions at the summer meeting is reasonable. If the group agrees, we'll run it by NEED. Adel shared that NERA needed the time—rather than rushing. NEED should discuss, and we should hold a call on this topic or this could be a discussion at the March meeting. Jon agreed that a discussion in March would be interesting; especially in light of the NERA budget. Fred noted that it makes sense at March meeting to discuss the financial commitment to Joint planning grants vs Traditional planning grants and determine a grand total amount to devote to grants. **Action item (Rick):** *Will discuss with Mike O'Neill as well as add this item to the agenda of the March Meeting.*

3. *NERA Website and NERA News updates:* Dave Leibovitz has fixed the links on the NERA website, rearranged the website and has migrated the website from URI to Wix. The NERA Office seeks reflections and suggestions on the new look and feel of the website. Likewise, what suggestions do the directors have on NERA News? How can this be improved? NERA is continuing to seek pictures from other Stations. Mark opined that there were far too many pictures from Penn State and Maine.
4. *Administrative Advisors:* NERA has received a request from a department chair at WVU to serve as the AA for a multistate project. What are the thoughts of the directors on chairs serving as AA's? Multistate committees seek the participation of the AA; what are the best ways to assist the multistates and not overwhelm the directors? Mark commented that UD interim assoc dean Jeanine Sherrier took over as an AA on a multistate project. It was a great experience; she did a great job, then she went back to being faculty and back to being chair. The effectiveness of the AA depends on enthusiasm and willingness – it comes down to the person rather than the title of the person's position. Rick noted that an AA should be willing and know where the resources are. No need to duplicate efforts. Dave Leibovitz is the NIMSS Regional System Admin and is a resource for AA's to make sure everything associated w/ a multistate project gets done. A lot of "trenchwork" isn't the domain of an AA, the AA should know where that information is. Dave volunteered that he is available for assisting AA's with the mechanics of NIMSS. Adel asked whether AA's have to be directors? Does NIFA have a requirement? Brad shared that his understanding is the



NERA Quarterly Teleconference

same as Adel – AA's should have some sort of Director title. Rick acknowledged that that's something that we've done traditionally (Directors or Assoc Directors assigned as AA's), but isn't a NIFA requirement. Fred observed that we struggle to find AA's. While we manage, there is sometimes too small a reservoir to draw from. I lean yes, but we need to examine circumstances and nature of person who takes this on. I agree w/ Mark – it's more about skill sets and organization than titles. One advantage of Directors in this role is that Directors discuss multistate projects most and have the best understanding of the spirit of multistate projects. Jody suggested an approval process for folks outside the Director's circle to become AA's. Can directors "approve the advisor"? Good people serve on the MAC and understand the demands of the AA role. Perhaps they can determine if prospective advisers are appropriate or not? Brad: Perhaps the director is the actual AA, but could have a representative to do the instrumental work, go to the meetings, report back to the NERA group. Like Mark said – this could work to train people up. Ted: Agree, the responsibility would still fall on the director but you could bring people up to speed on what's important in this process. Jan reaffirmed that the mechanics should be done by Dave. Essentially there becomes one "point-person" on multistate mechanics. I'm (Jan) an adviser on 1, maybe 2 projects. When I have to engage in mechanics vs advising (fundamentally different), I learn it all over again. One point person would develop expertise and become well versed in it. Having directors doing mechanics doesn't make sense. Perhaps a topic for spring meeting. Adel shared that the NERA guidelines for multistate projects (*Northeastern Supplement to the Guidelines for Multistate Research Activities*; item 5, page 4, 2nd paragraph), AA's must be Director, Associate Directors of institutions. Co-advisors are appointed. If we want to change our criteria, we should update our guidelines. Rick agreed that the current guidelines call for Dirs/Assoc Dirs., but the reservoir is small. Mark pointed out there are folks that have stepped in and done well, others not so well. Rick and Dave will draft language changes for the guidelines that will allow flexibility in the assignment of AA's and will provide to the NERA directors for consideration in March. **Action item (Rick, Dave):** *Draft changes to the NERA multistate guidelines highlighting the "Mechanics piece vs Advisory piece", and review the definition / prerequisites for being an Administrative Adviser. Draft changes for review at March meeting.*

5. **NERA Spring Meeting:** The meeting is scheduled for March 13-15, 2017 at the Admiral Fell Inn. NERA has the contract for the meeting. Typically, the Exec Comm meets in the late afternoon on Monday (3/13) and the full association meets on Tuesday and Wednesday. The best practices presentations include: John Kirby, *Discretionary funds to assist faculty: best practices*; Gary Thompson, *Promoting diversity in our faculty, staff and graduate students*; and Mark Rieger, *Reaching out to minority serving institutions*. What items do you want on the spring agenda? An item that has arisen and was discussed by



NERA Quarterly Teleconference

the Executive Committee included NIFA reviews of Hatch projects. Jody asked to expand the Hatch Review Process session to include issues with McIntire-Stennis reviews. Adel asked if the Hatch review session referred to site visits that NIFA was doing. Rick responded, no, this is about the reviews of Hatch projects. Adel suggested another topic of NIFA's time and effort certification. Rick asked for other items for the Spring meeting? Fred suggested having the Directors send specific issues to NERA. Fred also noted that Sonny Ramaswamy was in Maine recently and discussed the Sight lines and infrastructure initiative, perhaps a need for an update there? Adel asked if Cornerstone would attend to discuss upcoming budget. Rick answered that we anticipate them attending and holding a different kind of conversation than we've had in the past. Jan asked, different how? I've attended a few meetings w/ Cornerstone and the message doesn't seem to change much; seems straightforward with the one pager. Rick reflected that the incoming Trump administration and new Congress was a game changer. Jan countered that by March meeting, we won't know much yet. Congress will be preoccupied with some of their priority items and low hanging fruit. Jan stated that he was just trying to be protective of our time and make sure sessions are valuable and we get the relevant information from Cornerstone. Rick agreed that we don't want the spring meeting to be a series of short reports. A director reflected that the whole first half of day 1 is taken up with reports from the regional ARS director, NIFA reps, Cornerstone, and that information is typically the same every time. We tell them to keep it short and it seems to be the same every time. Rick assured the directors that we will protect our time. Jody asked if the Exec Comm group could meet from 6-9 PM versus 3-6 PM on Monday. The Exec Comm agreed. Mark brought the conversation to a close after reflecting that he had attended a recent Delmarva meeting in which they shared hiring plans for the next few years; he found that a valuable exchange. Mark noted that UMD intended to hire a 60/40 research extension agronomist at the same time that UDel was hiring an 80/20 research extension agronomist. How can we work better together? Can this be a topic for spring meeting? Summer meeting? I am required to draft 3-year strategic hiring plans. Can we take a time once a year to discuss a hiring plans? If there's one region in the USA that can do collaborative or joint hiring, it's the Northeast. Rick remarked that a strategic discussion on hiring would be valuable. **Action item:** *Work into Spring meeting agenda a session on strategic hiring and complete meeting agenda for presentation to and approval by NERA.*

6. *Top line request for BAA Priorities:* Background: the BAC passed a motion recommending a single request for NIFA to cover the BAA's six priority programs. These include: Hatch, Smith- Lever, McIntire Stennis, Evans Allen and 1890 Extension. If successful, increases would be appropriated to specific programs lines according to the respective percentages of the total for the six programs. The simplest explanation of this proposal



NERA Quarterly Teleconference

is shown on the attachment Option A (also on NERA website at <http://www.nerasaes.org/single-number-request-for-baa-prior>). The current version of the FAQs and one pager are also attached. Here are questions for your consideration:

- Is there support for this approach?
- What are the positive aspects?
- Are there criticisms?
- Are there unanswered questions?
- What should be added to the FAQs?
- What should be added to the one pager?

Rick shared that he's been asked by the other ED's for NERA's responses to this approach. It's not a new approach, this has come up in consecutive years back to 2013. Is there support for this kind of approach, any positive aspects? Tom commented that in previous years, Cornerstone advocated for a single number. He stated that he had no personal opinion and that it depended on our lobbyists and what they prioritize. Look at the Reagan years, the GOP does not typically like formula funding, they like competitive funding. Is there a 'perfect storm' here... If we have an "ask", it should be linked to jobs. Dollars spent on agricultural R&D have clear economic payoffs. Also, do not use the terms "Formula Funds", use Capacity Funds (Cornerstone uses Formula in one-pager.) Jody asked if the request goes in as a single-line request. Rick responded, yes, as a top line request then parsed out to the priority areas. Jody asked if the overall request is larger / smaller than previous? A 19% increase vs a 19% decrease? How would the difference be allocated across programs? Rick noted that either increases or decreases would be done on the same percentage basis. Capacity would not take the big hit and no effect on AFRI. Jody noted that historically, when big increases have come they have come on the AFRI side. If decreases came and if they were proportional, capacity funds would be decreased along with AFRI, but AFRI's base would be higher than 4 years previously and capacity would be the same. Historically, we're at a disadvantage. Gary shared that this initiative is for advocacy purposes. When it comes to allocation vs the authorization, congress could increase AFRI and everything else could be flat lined. Jan affirmed that he strongly believes in support for both capacity and competitive. AFRI/competitive funds and capacity funds are needed to support a system which is capable of delivering vision and innovation in food and agriculture. What we're selling is a system that is not supported by one or the other. Rick agreed, both capacity and competitive funds complementarily support a system. Debby added that everyone should be clear on the appropriation process. It is never up to NIFA how to allocate their budget. The NIFA budget comes in on 100+ lines from Congress, NIFA cannot change/move those dollars. The idea that a \$200M increase is requested, that works because it is a single message. Important to articulate the request to Congress,



Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors

NERA Quarterly Teleconference

not NIFA. NIFA does not control this. Rick, good point. Other questions? Comments on the top-line ask should be forwarded to Dave and Rick and we'll create a northeast summary of the responses. Call is coming to a close, back to Mark. **Action item:** Rick will draft a summary of the comments to be submitted to Mike Harington who is gathering information from all the regions for submission to the BAA.

7. MAC: Tim Phipps is rotating off the MAC, NERA needs a replacement. Fred noted that serving on the MAC is not a huge workload. **Action item:** Rick will contact prospective MAC candidates, he has some in mind.
8. *Any other business?* None.
9. *Adjourn :* The meeting adjourned at 12 :07 PM

DRAFT