

NERA Business Meeting Minutes
December 7, 2023
8:00 AM – 9:30 AM ET via Zoom

In attendance: Anton Bekkerman (Chair-New Hampshire), Puneet Srivastava (Past Chair-Maryland), Margaret Smith (New York-Ithaca), Leslie Parise (Vermont), Lynne McLandsborough (Massachusetts), George Criner (Maine), Lisa Townson (Rhode Island), Chris Smart (New York-Geneva), Anna Katharine Mansfield (New York-Geneva), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Beth Gugino (Pennsylvania), Jason Hubbard (West Virginia), Darrell Donahue (West Virginia), Matt Wilson (West Virginia), Calvin Keeler (Delaware), Kevin Kephart (USDA-NIFA), Susan Moser (USDA-NIFA), Rick Rhodes (NERA Executive Director), David Leibovitz (NERA Coordinator)

Meeting Administration (Anton Bekkerman, NERA Chair)

- Anton called the meeting to order, and the group went through a series of introductions.
- Updates:
 - Kevin Kephart mentioned that at the November APLU meeting, the Climate Change Roadmap was formally rolled out. This initiative was led by Gene Kelly and Jan Leach at Colorado State University and had broad input from agInnovation stations in all regions.
 - Civil Rights reviews updates:
 - NY-Ithaca just finished submitting documentation for its Civil Rights Compliance Review and will share lessons learned with the group.
 - Rhode Island Extension just completed its Civil Rights Compliance Review, and it resulted in positive conversations.
 - West Virginia Extension just finished its review, and AES will be coming in the next year.
 - Delaware finished its civil rights review 6 months ago and has not received its report back from USDA.
 - **NERA will continue to share Civil Rights Review resources on its website: <https://www.nerasaes.org/civil-rights-review-materials>.**
- **The agenda for this meeting was approved by acclamation.**
- **The minutes of the September 25-26 NERA meeting were approved by acclamation.**
- Approval of committee nominees
 - agInnovation Science and Technology Committee (STC) seeks a Northeast representative to replace Indrajeet Chaubey, who rotated off. George Criner also represents NERA on the STC. **Jason Hubbard volunteered to serve as the new Northeast representative on the STC. Jason's appointment was approved unanimously.**
- Approval of March face-to-face meeting (March 11-13, 2024, at APLU in Washington, DC)
 - This meeting is not being held in conjunction with CARET/BAA which runs from February 25-28. This meeting will be held at the same time as an ECOP meeting in Oklahoma.
 - **Chris Smart moved to approve holding the NERA meeting on March 11-13 in Washington, DC at APLU. The motion was seconded by Anna Katharine Mansfield and approved unanimously.**
- NERA Officer-at-large Appointment
 - **Blair Siegfried was nominated to serve as the NERA Officer-at-large, joining the Executive Committee beginning in 2023-24. Blair's nomination was approved unanimously.**

Multistate Activities Committee (MAC) Report and Recommendations (Matt Wilson, MAC Chair)

- Administrative Advisers – NERA seeks volunteers to serve as AA on the following activities:
 - NE2101: Eastern White Pine Health and Responses to Environmental Changes
 - **George Criner volunteered to serve as the NE2101 AA. George’s nomination was approved unanimously.**
 - NRSP 11: Building Collaborative Research Networks to Advance the Science of Soil Fertility: Fertilizer Recommendation Support Tool (FRST), 10/2023 – 09/2028 [New project, Nathan Slaton, University of Arkansas, Lead AA]
 - NRSPs have AAs from all regions; currently seeking a Northeast AA
 - **Rick Rhodes will work on finding a northeast NRSP11 AA following this meeting.**
- MAC membership rotation:
 - **Matt Wilson is rotating off the MAC.**
 - **Puneet Srivastava begins a renewed MAC term and will serve as Chair, 2023-26.**
 - **Chris Smart will serve as a new MAC member, 2023-26.**
- The remainder of the Multistate Activities Report was informational and is [posted on the NERA website](#).

NERA Value Proposition and the Implementation of the Northeast Agenda (Anton Bekkerman and Rick Rhodes)

- [A document on the NERA Value Proposition was shared and is posted on the NERA website](#). The value proposition is also captured on the NERA website home page (www.nerasaes.org).
- There has been great turnover in NERA in recent years. It was important to revisit the value proposition of NERA, hopefully exposing some areas where the association can improve and help all members work better together.
 - NERA’s value can be described in four major categories: Administration, Information Commons, Collaboration, and Representation.
 - **There was a suggestion to add a bullet about NERA serving as important advisers to USDA/NIFA.**
 - What’s missing? What should be prioritized?
- **Jason Hubbart suggested NERA designs a survey to collect feedback on the value proposition, prior to the Spring meeting. The survey could also gather information on how familiar the Directors are with the roles, responsibilities, and products of NERA. This could set up a session at the spring meeting in Washington.**
- Lisa Townson suggested that NERA could collectively work in pursuit of large grants, leveraging our strength in the name of increased resources.
- Margaret Smith appreciates the conversations NERA has about outside the box thinking; thinking beyond the walls of our college, beyond budgets, beyond agriculture. NERA should continue to challenge the Directors to think differently.
- Kevin Kephart (former AES Director) described his past working relationship with the North Central Regional Association as a “professional family.” NERA appears to work the same way – an important forum to convene, share ideas, and hold candid conversations. From NIFA’s perspective, as issues come up (e.g., environmental justice, climate change), the NERA Directors are needed to provide input and drive strategy.

- Blair Siegfried appreciates the opportunity to bring up issues that are affecting each institution and gather advice from the Directors. The complexity of Experiment Station issues / funding / compliance is daunting. NERA has been helpful in negotiating through some of those issues.
- Important elements for organizations to identify:
 - Have a strong vision. NERA has a strong vision, albeit complex.
 - Have leadership on board with the vision – what is the vision, from the Directors’ perspective?
 - If NERA can articulate its vision, that can give way to development of a mission and allow members to stump for that mission.
- Questions to consider, perhaps for the upcoming survey:
 - What topics do Directors want to discuss at NERA meetings?
 - What should we prioritize?
 - Is the top priority for us to communicate what we do?
 - Should we be promoting leadership engagement within APLU/BAA?
 - Should we create programs to incentivize the pursuit of large grants?
- Margaret suggested that NERA look closely at the Climate Change Roadmap and come up with a northeast research action plan for engagement around those issues.
- Regional story telling efforts can help the Experiment Stations communicate internally to university leadership about the value of what they do beyond their reputation of “cows, plows, and sows.”
 - Cornell CALS Dean attended a food system meeting in NYC a few years ago, and was asked why she was there, since the meeting was about food.
- Kevin shared a video of an inspirational keynote address from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack delivered at the APLU meeting: <https://youtu.be/y4XGIgeiveY>

Summary Comments and Adjournment

- All are encouraged to attend the agInnovation Full Business Meeting next week Tuesday, December 12 at 4:00 pm ET.
- **A questionnaire on the value of NERA will be circulated to the group in anticipation of discussing results and pivoting to action at the spring meeting.**
- The APLU CARET/BAA meeting will be held February 25-28, 2024, in Washington, DC.
- The NERA Spring Meeting is confirmed to be held March 11-13, 2024, in Washington, DC at APLU.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 am Eastern Time.