

Diversity Catalyst Committee Meeting Notes

March 16, 2021, 4:00 pm ET

In attendance: Henry Fadamiro (Auburn, chair), Bill Barker (Wisconsin), Bret Hess (WAAESD), Brian Raison (Ohio State), Chris Hamilton (NCRA), John Dieffenbacher-Krall (Maine), Tracy Dougher (Montana State), Wes Burger (Mississippi State), Majed El-Dweik (Lincoln), Nina Lyon Bennett (UAPB), Drenda Williams (USDA-NIFA), Gary Thompson (SAAESD), Rick Rhodes (NERA)

1. Introductions and opening remarks
 - Chair Henry Fadamiro opened the meeting with a thanks to DCC members and a reflection of appreciation to John Dieffenbacher-Krall, who had shared a D&I best practice during the DCC's February 16, 2021 meeting. Henry then asked several rhetorical questions including: How can the DCC move the needle on D&I? How might we compel station directors to take and share D&I actions? What best practices serve as catalysts for change? Two new members of the DCC introduced themselves: Majed El-Dweik (pronounced L-Dwick) and Tracy Dougher (pronounced Dew-er.)
2. Approval of the agenda
 - The chair sought a motion to approve the agenda. John asked the DCC what actions could the committee take in response to the discriminatory actions of the USDA and the lack of access that farmers of color have historically had to USDA programs. Drenda noted that she is working on cross-agency civil rights issues that include building racial equity, lowering barriers and evening the playing field. Henry suggested that the DCC should engage in focused discussions and the development of action steps. John and Drenda will frame a discussion and action steps on USDA programmatic access for the next DCC meeting.
 - **Bill Barker moved to approve the agenda, the motion was seconded by Rick Rhodes and the agenda was approved unanimously.**
3. Approval of minutes, 2/16/2021
 - **Chris Hamilton moved to approve the amended minutes of 2/16/21, the motion was seconded by Brian Raison and the agenda was approved unanimously.**
4. DCC Plan of Work
 - The committee reviewed the draft of the plan of work. Rick noted that the DCC made progress on the plan: the DCC initiated more frequent meetings (now meeting monthly), a call for nominations for the National Experiment Station Section Diversity and Inclusion Award had been issued, and a "call to action" had been drafted. Henry asked the DCC what are the best ways to involve directors and drive organization change with the experiment station section? Brian noted the leadership framework of [Kouzes and Posner](#) might assist the committee and shared that leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process enable others to act and encourage change of heart.

Discussion ensued. Henry asked: What is do-able and how do we connect with our directors. Bill noted that at Wisconsin students have challenged leaders and have sought and acknowledged statements and robust D&I efforts with that have clear, actionable solutions. The conversation led to a discussion of a “call to action.”

5. DCC Call to Action

- An engaged discussion unfolded on what should be incorporated in a call to action. A draft of a call to action had been circulated to the DCC. In that call to action, directors were expected to reflect on the D&I challenge areas identified during the opening session of the annual ESS meeting and share actionable steps to address the challenge area. A number of alternative “asks” were discussed. Gary suggested that the DCC ask the directors for a description of obstacles and roadblocks to advancing D&I, positing that progress was slow. Chris noted that Kate VandenBosch had shared an inspiration message on D&I at Wisconsin. Nina reflected that advancing D&I was not just about “being invited to the dance, it also required being asked to dance.” How do we overcome hidden racism? Nina suggested that we solicit the directors for their definitions of diversity and inclusion and ask what does diversity and inclusion look like on your campus? The conversation continued on changing the culture, engaging in meaningful dialogue and recognizing the intensity and criticality of D&I issues was increasing. Wes proposed that all D&I efforts must have clear intentionality and went on to review progress on increasing diversity in natural resource programs at Mississippi State. Wes described the operationalization of a D&I effort noting that change must occur along a continuum that includes K through 16. Bret suggested that the DCC should make a recommendation to the National Impact Database NIDB Committee that an additional area be added to NIDB that would allow submission of impact statements dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusion.
- **Action steps: Rick will draft a memo on behalf of the DCC, seeking a “diversity and inclusion” focus area in the NIDB. Rick will also make changes in the “Call to Action” as a means to advance the work of the DCC to drive change in the ESS.**

6. The next meeting of the DCC is scheduled for April 20, 2021 at 4:00 PM ET.

The meeting adjourned at 5:17 pm.