

Communications and Marketing Committee Minutes

May 19, 2022 3:00-4:00 PM ET

In attendance: JF Meullenet, Andrea Putman, Elizabeth Gregory North, Kim Scotto, Cynda Clary, Karla Trautman, Faith Peppers, Bret Hess, Rick Rhodes, David Leibovitz

1. Approval of the agenda
 - **The agenda for this meeting was approved unanimously.**
2. Approval of CMC minutes, 4/21/2022
 - Suggested changes for the 4/21/2022 minutes:
 - Update on sponsoring the ACE meeting: Make sure to credit BAA specifically.
 - Toolkit will be released around 5/15.
 - Andrea's Powerpoint presentation should be appended to the minutes.
 - **These minutes, with these changes incorporated, were approved unanimously.**
3. Updates on CMC plan
 - CMC now has a web presence on the APLU Website:
<https://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/food-environment-and-renewable-resources/board-on-agriculture-assembly/policy-board-of-directors/communications-and-marketing-committee/>. Kim Scotto is working on refreshing all APLU BAA committee pages.
 - AgIsAmerica Website site map (attached)
 - Re-envisioning how an AgIsAmerica website should look and function.
 - Developing a tagline to succinctly describe what the LGU system does, and why. Potential candidate: "Innovating, Educating, and Connecting for our Future"
 - CMC members/Leaders may be charged with drafting "Why I am involved" statements.
 - "Voices from Labs, Classrooms, Fields, and Communities" is the stories section of the website – from institutions, labs, CARET delegates, etc.
 - Internal-facing part of the website will be password-protected for members and will include: CMC Minutes, FANR Focus, BAA documents, etc. Information from the ESCOP Website CMC page will migrate to this firewalled section. David can assist Kim and Andrea with anything from the ESCOP side.
 - Rick and JF will share the ESCOP Grand Challenges documents with Andrea. (ESCOP expanded Science roadmap: http://escop.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Updated-Science-Roadmap-Report_FINAL20181220_optimized.pdf).
 - Monthly toolkit themes, July – Dec. 2022 (attached)
 - Currently working on a pollinator-themed toolkit, should be released Monday.
 - "Building for the Future" can be moved from December to the beginning of the Academic Year. This theme might be lost in holiday messaging.
 - Since Andrea joined the BAA, the list of 140 ag communicators has grown to 160.
 - Institutions vary in their levels of participation; some post all AgIsAmerica content, some only post what resonates with their institution, some do not participate.
 - National Ag Week campaign was successful – Kim Scotto reached out directly to institutions on Twitter with suggested content.

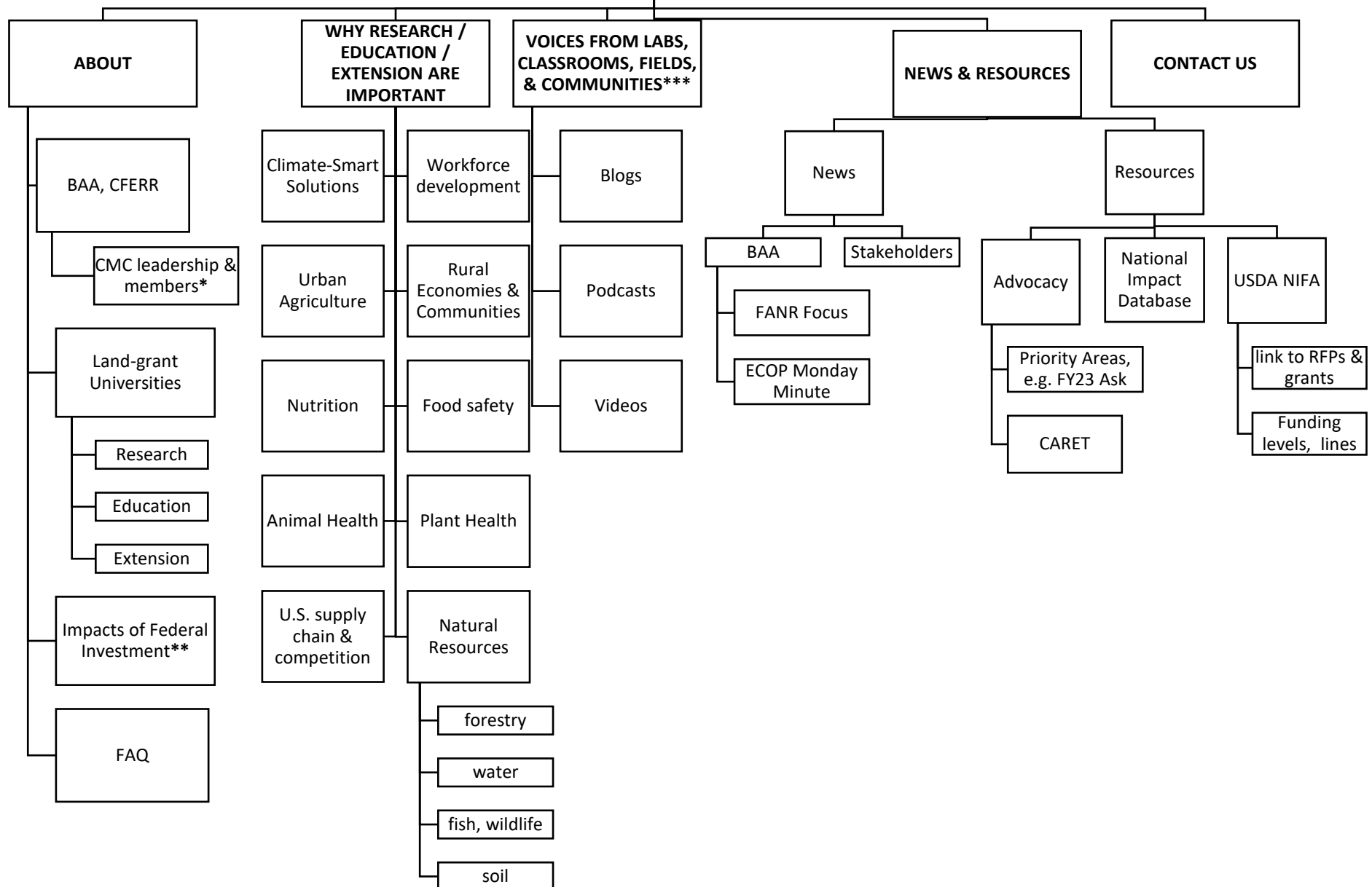
- Andrea looks forward to attending the 2022 ACE meeting and having some facetime with the communicators in our system.
- Roadmap re-visit and review the 2-year plan and priorities (both attached)
 - Dissemination of materials: focus to date has been on toolkits and FANR FOCUS newsletters, targeting research/extension specifically.
 - Still to come: Podcasts, blogs, and story banks envisioned for the new AgIsAmerica website.
 - Kim has integrated the BAA sections of the APLU Website and is refreshing the Land-grant.org website.
 - APLU BAA now has a Meltwater media monitoring account available for use
- CMC agenda items for Joint COPS meeting, July 19 – 21, 2022. Registration info will be distributed on Monday, May 16th.
 - At Joint COPS, it might be worth doing a “deep dive” into how section priorities align with the strategic roadmap.
 - While sections are together at Joint COPS, we should discuss bringing the National Impact Database under the CMC, and also a funding mechanism for the NIDB.
 - NIDB holds the information that the system can report – easily accessible, and searchable, to both NIFA and the general public.
 - NIDB will soon re-implement a peer review process for what is submitted; submissions will be reviewed by communicators.
 - Faith suggested adding a data analyst or two to the NIDB Committee, who can go in and examine trends over time or assess the collective impact in certain topic areas. This can feed powerful stories to Andrea for AgIsAmerica and helps NIFA to promote LGU activities.
 - CMC Operating Guidelines update: Andrea will provide a draft of those updates.
- 4. Informational items
 - Following a vote by the BAA Policy Board of Directors, the CMC will become a standing committee of the BAA and change its composition. 70% of PBD voting members participated in this ballot process.

The meeting adjourned at 4:07 pm ET.

AgIsAmerica

Innovating, Educating & Connecting for Our Future

Draft - May 10, 2022



MONTHLY TOOLKIT THEMES

May 12, 2022

FORBES TATE

June 2021

APPROPRIATIONS SEASON: FUNDING THE FUTURE

July 2021

AMERICA'S PRODUCERS FEED THE WORLD

August 2021

LOCAL FAIRS: A TIME TO COME TOGETHER

September 2021

BACK TO SCHOOL

FANR

October 2021

FARMERS FEEDING FAMILIES

November 2021

GIVING THANKS

December 2021

REFLECTING ON 2021 AND LOOKING FORWARD TO 2022

January 2022

WELCOME 2022 AND INNOVATING FOR THE FUTURE (emphasis on Climate Smart Ag)

February 2022

Social Media Campaign "MAKING BLACK HISTORY"

March 2022

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS! Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET)

April 2022

CELEBRATING EARTH DAY

May 2022

CELEBRATING GRADUATION AND SUPPORTING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

June 2022

Forthcoming: PROTECTING POLLINATORS (National Pollinators Month- tie to plant health and food security)

THEMES for July – December 2022

July

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS (tie to zoonotic diseases and animal health)

August

NATIONAL WELLNESS MONTH (tie to nutrition and food safety)

September

NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH (tie to food safety research, education, & extension)

October

TACKLING HUNGER MONTH (tie to nutritional security)

November

THANKSGIVING - STORIES FROM OUR COMMUNITIES (tie to thanking farmers, ranchers, scientists, educators, Extension agents)

December

BUILDING THE FUTURE (tie to science breakthroughs; highlight educators and students)

To: BAA Communications and Marketing Committee (CMC)

From: Forbes Tate Partners (FTP)

Subject: Strategic Communications Roadmap Plan Outline

Overview

The following memo provides an initial outline for APLU-BAA's new strategic communications roadmap plan. The outline, informed by what FTP learned during the Phase I assessment, is designed to provide an overview of:

- The plan's objective and strategic considerations;
- Target audiences and suggested message frames;
- Internal processes, roles, and responsibilities within BAA to support execution; and
- Suggested tactics and an illustrative messaging calendar.

The recommendations below are based in part on message, schedule, and logistical assumptions subject to revision and adjustment and is contingent upon participation by Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP), and the Administrative Heads Section (AHS) representing Cooperative Extension, research, and academic programs. However, the inclusive approach taken to soliciting feedback and shaping these recommendations is meant to help build a foundation for an effort that will ultimately serve and support the entirety of BAA and beyond to embrace existing partners like the Commission on Food, Environment, & Renewable Resources (CFERR). Please note the recommendations are meant to serve as general guidelines for the CMC and participating entities to develop the specific components of a strategic communications plan, and do not include all possible tactics and messaging examples.

We imagine this plan will encompass not only agriculture, but other topic areas including public health, nutrition, youth and community development, and natural resources.

Objective and Strategic Considerations

Objective

The CMC works in concert with other entities in the land-grant university system, including the lobbying team at Cornerstone Government Affairs, Council on Government Affairs, various committee chairs, and individual Extensions, research programs, and institutions to protect and increase levels of federally appropriated and awarded funding. Accordingly, the primary objective of the plan is to help BAA successfully secure additional federal resources to support its critical research, Extension System, and education efforts. A secondary objective is to influence and engage key stakeholders through advocacy communications.

Strategic Considerations

As it pursues this objective on behalf of BAA, the CMC encounters a set of strengths, challenges, and opportunities that can be summarized as follows:

- **Strengths:** APLU has a compelling and popular story to tell about the value of the organization's work and the work and strengths of individual institutions, students, and graduates who represent a broad network of potential messengers. Furthermore, land-grant universities enjoy broad-based support from the communities they serve and have a unique connection to every county, parish, and sovereign tribal nation throughout the country. They bring hope and opportunity, serving urban and rural populations, first generation students, veterans, and beyond – providing unique value to students through partnerships between community, research, and teaching in a way that only land-grant universities can.
- **Challenges:** BAA's messaging efforts have been hampered by internal communication and coordination issues that lead to a lack of awareness or confusion about how to tell its story, and what is defined as agriculture, ultimately inhibiting the effectiveness of potential messengers and the message itself. Differences in the ability of individual institutions to participate, or reconcile priorities, have also been identified as a challenge that an overarching communications plan should address.
- **Opportunities:** BAA has the opportunity to revitalize existing platforms and a ready-made bank of achievements that, in combination with improved internal processes, will allow it to reboot, rather than rebuild, an effective communications effort. BAA can lean in on the existing national network it has and the local support those institutions receive.

Based on this assessment, the strategy proposed will achieve the objective by positioning the land-grant system as a unique, high-value resource that not only fulfills an educational mission but also effectively collaborates with national and local stakeholders, and by communicating how investments of federal dollars have, and will continue to, allow institutions and partners to deliver advances in critical fields. The communications plan will play a critical role by maintaining ongoing awareness of BAA activities year-round (as opposed to just around specific asks), and demonstrating broad-based support for, and benefits of, BAA activities. In doing do, the plan is designed to be continuously informed by, and supportive of, members of the Council on Government Affairs and Cornerstone Government Affairs as they make direct asks of policymakers.

Audiences

Audiences

The plan is designed to speak to three distinct but related audiences. By reaching these audiences with tailored messages consistent with the overarching framework, the plan will create a self-contained echo chamber in which policymakers are being directly persuaded while also hearing from trusted, influential, and reinforcing validators. These audiences include:

Decisionmakers: The primary audience for the plan will be elected and appointed officials and staff who are responsible for making federal funding decisions including those listed below, with emphasis in any given phase determined in conjunction with key internal groups such as the Council on Government Affairs and Cornerstone Government Affairs. This initial list will be reviewed and revised as circumstances change and new opportunities present themselves.



- Congressional leadership
- House and Senate Agriculture Committee members
- House and Senate Appropriations Committee and Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee members
- Additional relevant committees and caucuses
- Secretary of Agriculture
- National Institute of Food and Agricultural (NIFA) Director, budget, and relevant staff (for purposes of persuasion and enlistment as allies in advocacy to Congress)
- USDA Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics
- Office of Management and Budget

Amplifiers: A secondary audience for the plan should be comprised of “end-users” who benefit directly from BAA’s work and other natural allies, including:

- Farmers tied to local land-grant institutions
- Farmers market operators and restaurants
- Research beneficiaries
- State, Extension, and local government officials who will support federal requests
- Agriculture and commodity association advocates
- Local primary educators and civic organizations
- Affiliated agriculture organizations (such as the Farm Journal Foundation)
- 4-H members

Messengers: In order to successfully reach these first two audiences, CMC will also need to effectively educate and equip messengers within the APLU-BAA network. Specifically, CMC will need to not only provide CARET, policy committee, Extension, experiment station, and individual institution members with the messages they are intended to convey, but the rationale for those messages.

Messaging Frame

Given the Ag Is America account’s broad base of followers and established site, the plan does not envision a full rebranding. However, we do recommend that on these platforms, and across press and advocacy materials, BAA adopt a message frame that rests on these main proof points. We have also identified additional areas that could be built out more over time, including youth wellness, community health, food, and nutrition. While intended to drive toward a unified ask for federal funding, each one of these messages can and should be supported whenever possible by human faces – students, faculty, and community members. These real-world examples will help paint a picture of how the land-grant system is keeping its diverse graduates, and by extension the nation, competitive and prepared for the future.

The following suggested messages are representative examples to be considered for adoption in the final communication plan. Additional message frames may be considered at the beginning of the year, or as events warrant. We would recommend the messages represent the full breadth of BAA activities (including areas such as broadband deployment, non-agricultural innovation, and community investment) as well as highlighting the full geographic reach of the system as a whole.

Investments in agriculture and life science research and the Extension System result in safer, higher quality food systems.

- Example: "The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of a resilient food chain supply – from farm to table. Safeguarding America's food security relies on robust, predictable federal investments in land-grant university research projects, and in the partnership between farmers and ranchers and local Extension Systems. We encourage policymakers to prioritize federal funding in agriculture and life science research and the Cooperative Extension System to continue bringing cutting-edge discoveries to those who can put them into practice."
- Example: "Even before COVID-19 negatively affected global supply chains, rapid population growth was making issues like hunger, low crop yields, inadequate food storage, and nutrition more complicated – and more important than ever before – to tackle. American land-grant universities must be equipped with the federal funding required to be at the forefront of solving these pressing global problems."

Investments in agriculture and life science research and the Extension System make communities stronger and healthier.

- Example: "Land-grant universities make significant contributions to the resiliency of communities. Federal investments in the system generate a strong return for taxpayers by reducing public health costs, offering education and opportunity to their neighbors, and improving the quality of life."
- Example: "America's land-grant universities have the knowledge, expertise, and local presence needed to help influence the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health. Land-grant research makes Americans healthier by improving the nutritional quality of food, finding solutions to make food more available, and helping individuals to make healthy food choices. These institutions also contribute to social health by helping people to avoid opioid abuse, tackle learning challenges, or promoting positive youth-development. Federal lawmakers should prioritize investments in Cooperative Extension and land-grant research that have proven to benefit youth, family, and community health outcomes."
- Example: "Cooperative Extension is engaging millions of American youths through 4-H, the nation's largest youth development organization. 4-H programming brings young people and adults together to create community change and promote civic engagement, healthy living, and scientific understanding. These positive outcomes are directly tied to continued investment in the Cooperative Extension Section found within land-grant universities."

Investments in agriculture and life science research and the Extension System address critical challenges facing agriculture and the environment.

- Example: "America's agricultural sector knows firsthand the devastating impacts brought about by climate change and natural disasters, including fire, drought, hurricanes, and more. That is why land-grant universities, along with the nation's leading ag researchers and Cooperative Extension leaders, are teaming up with key federal research agencies, farmers, ranchers, and communities across the country to address this national security threat head on. Congress can play an integral role in this effort by approving funding increases for federal research programs designed to help farmers and ranchers – through agriculture and life science research and Extension – protect our environment and our precious natural resources."
- Example: "Investing in groundbreaking work to develop better biofuels seeds America's success by making sure we can power our economy and protect our climate. Only land-grant

universities have the knowledge, research, and Extension reach to deliver these returns for the American taxpayer.”

- Example: “When unanticipated crises strike, America needs expertise and ingenuity. Federal investments in land-grant university research help to create a resilient resource that can nimbly focus knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving power to deal with new threats, safeguarding public health and our economy.”

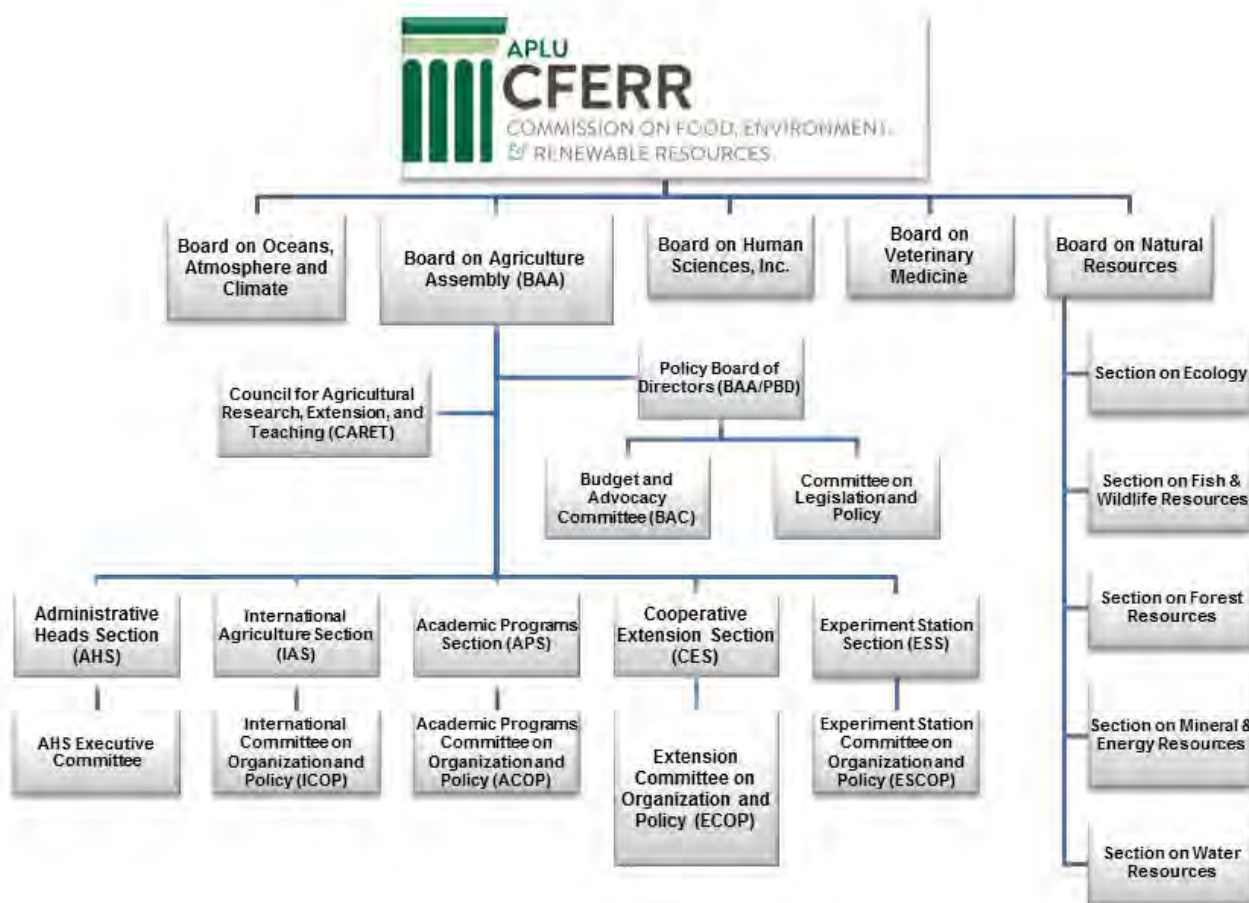
Investments in agriculture and life science research and the Extension System are vital to safeguarding America’s status as a global leader in innovation.

- Example: “Innovation has always been America’s most important competitive edge. Federal investments that enable land-grant universities to make the next generation of breakthroughs in areas like gene-editing technology, artificial intelligence, and precision agriculture are needed to ensure the US remains a global leader.”
- Example: “From undertaking life-saving antimicrobial research and tackling chronic disease through the lens of nutrition, to mapping our natural resources and preparing the next generation of the workforce, the agriculture and life science Extension departments at land-grant universities are essential to seeding America’s long-term success across a wide spectrum of issues and industries – not just agriculture. Federal investments in these programs must be robust and predictable to ensure American innovation continues at its highest potential.”

In addition to weaving these themes into topline messaging and materials, they should be used to guide the message calendar through the use of theme weeks/months that focus tactical execution around a specific land-grant contribution (e.g. food security, food affordability, energy independence, antimicrobial resistance, health and wellness, youth, family and community development, and environment stewardship). While the themes will provide a cohesive starting point for any pre-planned content, they can be coupled alongside relevant topics from the news cycle and emerging critical issues as needed in order to show the collective power of the system to rapidly address changing issues.

Internal Roles, Responsibilities, and Communications

In order to fully engage and mobilize the various entities whose participation will be required to make the communications plan a success, the plan recommends assigning each “communicator” entity within BAA’s organizational chart a specific communications responsibility to establish a regular cadence of internal communications and asks. This cadence of communications should be designed to provide members of the overall communications infrastructure, including those involved with direct advocacy and wider communications efforts (Council on Government Affairs, Cornerstone Government Affairs, APLU Communications), with a combination of standing, formal opportunities to contribute and coordinate as well as open channels to provide situational input.



CMC: CMC responsibilities will include internal coordination, overall management of the strategic plan and message calendar, execution of recurring daily and monthly communications activities (e.g. online platforms, social media content and posting, and clip compilations), and planning for “tentpole” communications activities. In order to create consistent internal engagement, CMC should send a twice monthly update report note throughout the “communicator organization” that includes items such as:

- Notification of the theme of the month, accompanied by talking points and message guidance
- Notable recent postings and clips
- Calls for internal action (e.g. submission of institution-specific coverage, accomplishments, or third-party engagement)

Policy Guides: The roles and internal reporting responsibilities for this group would include guidance on priority setting at the beginning of the year, regular (bi-weekly or monthly) updates on decisionmaker contacts and feedback, and recommendations on specific projects, priorities, or decisionmaker targets to be highlighted during thematic periods on the message calendar including food, agriculture, and environmental resources. Some participant group recommendations for consideration include:



- **Policy Board of Directors (supported by the Budget Advocacy Committee and Committee on Legislative Policy):** Set and communicate policy priorities to be highlighted within the “one ask” supported by the communications plan.
- **Council on Government Affairs:** In order to be effective, policy priority setting and communications efforts should be in sync from the outset of the process, and mutually inform adjustments to advocacy and public affairs activities throughout the year. In addition to providing direct policy input and content contributions for communications materials and engaging in regular coordinating discussions, communicators (represented by CMC) should be involved in the Council on Government Affairs’ initial priority setting discussions. In fact, it may make sense for CMC to have a seat on BAC.
- **Cornerstone Government Affairs:** Provide updates on advocacy needs and message targeting based on interactions with policymakers.
- **Land-Grant University Communicators:** Individual university communicators will play a critical role in shaping the communications strategy and leading its execution. Each institution has active, skilled communicators who will be able to provide real-time input into the plan direction as events unfold. Their expertise should be leveraged to, among other things, lead the development of locally targeted messages and responses to local concerns, while providing critical input on the national strategy and messaging and supporting the compilation and dissemination of communications materials as requested.

APLU Communications: The responsibilities of the APLU communications office will be to engage in ongoing message coordination through standing channels of communication including regularly scheduled consultation, provide ongoing technical advice in reaction to CMC updates and message planning, and assistance with planning, executing, and promoting “tentpole” communications activities.

Local Actors: Local actors, which would include CARET, the Cooperative Extension Section, experiment station section, AHS, and others, would be responsible for providing updated lists of accomplishments, profiles, and stories on a quarterly basis, as well as engaging with local media periodically at CMC’s request and in partnership with land-grant university communicators. For example:

- **CARET:** As volunteer advocates involved in making policy recommendations to the Policy Board of Directors, helping to coordinate advocacy efforts for ECOP, ESCOP, and others, and carrying messages across institutions, CARET delegates are primed to play a key role in assisting with the communications plan at the local and institutional level. In their new, evolving roles as year-round advocates, they could serve as the primary “managers” of the communications plan at their institution, and assume primary responsibility for interacting with CMC, organizing communications outreach for other groups, reporting up accomplishments, and advocating for land-grant universities. These primary CARET delegates will be identified by working with land-grant universities.
- **Extension and Experiment Stations:** Designees within the land-grant university system (Extension and Research Stations across our 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions) would have a responsibility to help generate primary content.
- **Additional Sections and Committees:** These groups would support general reporting on activities and provide other input as needed.

- **Expanded Opportunities for the Commission on Food, Environment, & Renewable Resources (CFERR):** We recommend that participation in this plan expand beyond the confines of BAA and extend participation to other APLU committees with a role to play in CMC's ultimate success.

For each entity, a communications liaison should be identified shortly after strategic plan adoption and trained during capacity development sessions in January within the guidelines of the institutions they represent. As the plan is further developed and implemented, additional participant groups may be added.

Tactics: Overview and Cadence

The tactics recommended in the strategic communications plan are envisioned to rely heavily on social media and online promotion to maintain a manageable, but consistent, daily drumbeat of communications activity, augmented by periodic earned media engagement, and punctuated by major communications pushes around "tentpole" events such as congressional visits or major report releases. Every tactical item also presents an opportunity to highlight student and faculty success stories that bring the land-grant mission to life.

Daily/Weekly

- Daily online posting of news stories featuring land-grant universities, with brief commentary on relevant topics, or promoting/engaging target audiences online
- "Land-Grant Success of the Week" post with picture or graphic highlighting the work of a specific institution, student, faculty member, or initiative
- Twitter/online poll soliciting engagement from target audiences ranging from specific policy questions (e.g. What is the most important thing agriculture can do to combat climate change?) or general questions to spark conversation (e.g. What's your favorite farm experience?)

Monthly

- Publication of online infographic highlighting BAA's past and future achievements (including any noteworthy achievements of students and faculty at member institutions) in monthly theme area
- Thematically tied essay authored by BAA member posted on Ag Is America or placed in local news outlet
- Monthly "reporter note" sent to press list of national and local reporters to keep media up to date on BAA developments and lay a foundation for future outreach (local institutions will be BCC'd on notes to reporters they have relationships with)
- Paid online promotion of social posts linking to Ag Is America web copy on issue of the month
- Paid online promotion of BAA "Champions" at the national, state, and local level who have been supportive of BAA priorities

Quarterly

Once per quarter, BAA should actively provide communications materials, promote online, and attempt to secure earned media coverage for a major "tentpole" event that involves multiple stakeholders and topics. For each of these events, CMC should engage APLU communications support in putting together promotional items that could include a press release, localized releases

or content for local communicators to use in engaging media, press availabilities with BAA leadership members, and paid promotions and online advertisements. Examples of “tentpole” events could include:

- Congressional “fly-in” meetings
- Release of a “Seeding Our Success” report building on the accomplishments in the impact database
- National 4-H Conference
- “Call on Congress” mini-campaign during the final stages of the appropriations season

Tactics: Social Media and Paid Campaigns

In order to maintain a manageable, consistent, daily drumbeat of communications activity, it is important to understand the value of posting on social media and how it can increase BAA’s communication efforts. By leveraging existing social media accounts, including the Ag Is America Facebook and Twitter accounts, BAA can increase its online presence and reputation, and promote member universities’ research efforts. It is the ideal place to tie together the work undergraduates, individual institutions, and Extension are doing, as well as the collective group, to show congressional targets the value land-grants have in their districts and nationwide.

Below are some best practices and how to implement them.

Post regularly

When content is posted consistently, it can increase BAA’s impressions, mentions, and overall online presence. Ag Is America’s social media outreach has been dormant for over a year. Varied content should be posted at least three times a week across all social media platforms to sustain and increase engagement rates.

Content can be scheduled ahead of time on the platforms themselves in order to maximize efficiency and a content calendar can be used to plan out content, whether it is around a certain event like a 4-H conference, or a national day of celebration like National Strawberry Day.

Own the content

An audit of existing resources found most social content engagement came from being tagged in member universities’ posts. To increase overall content, posting organic tweets with a variety of content (graphics, videos, appropriate and relevant hashtags, quote retweets and more) will increase overall social engagement and allow for more website and social traffic. Posting a variety of content throughout the week will enable followers to see new and engaging posts. *Ex: A tweet posted with just text should be followed by either a tweet with a graphic or video, or even a retweet.*

Additionally, staying in consistent contact with member universities’ communicators and asking them to send new research, announcements, or student successes to highlight will help with finding content to post. Communicators should also be given a heads up about any social media campaigns or hashtags you are trying to amplify so they can help extend the reach of that content to outside audiences.

Graphics or videos can be created by BAA, using free stock photos from royalty-free sites like [Unsplash](#) or [Pexels](#), from government agency databases, or member universities can share videos with BAA if permission is granted.

Be intentional with clickable items

Tools like hashtags can be useful to drive brand identity, latch onto topics that are trending online, or get noticed by your target audience. However, when incorporating items that can be clicked into your social content (i.e. hashtags, links, and tags) consider their purpose and be intentional. Every clickable item is an opportunity to drive someone away from your post. If you're driving them to something (or someone) else you want them to see and engage with, that's great, but a deluge of unnecessary hashtags can muddy the waters. Though not a hard and fast rule, we generally recommend limiting the number of clickable items to three.

Run paid campaigns

Paid promotions on Twitter and Facebook generate higher than normal bumps in impressions and engagement. Paid, cost-effective ads on Twitter and Facebook linking back to the Ag Is America website will allow users who do not follow the channels to see BAA's content and increase its online presence.

Depending on the target audience, budgets for these paid ads can run anywhere between \$25-\$200/day.

Evaluating Success

In order to establish whether the content is engaging and reaching the right audience, it is important to look at the analytics of each paid and organic post. Analytics can give unique insights into what is working by evaluating engagement rate for each post, followers gained, or likes and retweets. Although each metric of success varies across different social media accounts and organizations, there are some general baselines that should be considered.

First, consider overall engagement rate, which means how many people saw the post then chose to interact with it by either liking, sharing, or commenting on it. Looking across industries, the standard engagement rate on Facebook is about 0.1% and on Twitter it is about 0.045%. It is also important to understand how the average engagement rate for BAA's social properties will be used to set proper benchmarks. For example, Ag Is America's Twitter account has an average engagement rate of 0.1%, already higher than the industry benchmark. Setting a goal to increase the rate week over week will help create attainable goals.

Studying weekly or monthly analytics to evaluate the social content will help to determine long-term trends in engagement and website traffic. If the accounts are losing followers or dipping below the industry benchmarks, it means the content is not engaging users. To remedy this, switch up the various types of content that is being posted, change the tone of the social copy, and evaluate which previous posts got the most engagements.

How to Put A Week of Content Together

In thinking through content for the week, BAA could highlight:

- Notable calendar events
- Theme of the week or month
- News stories relevant to your priorities



- Pre-existing resources from APLU or member universities
- Individual institutions and their achievements
- Poll questions for followers (consider first what the poll results might look like)
- Evergreen content that is useful to regularly remind followers
- Trending hashtags or existing BAA hashtags
- Existing photos, graphics, or videos
- Young scientist features
- Undergraduate and graduate student features
- Faculty features
- Extension professional features
- Congressional targets

Using these categories as an outline, begin filling in draft posts. You may use the same across all of your social media accounts, but keep in mind Twitter has a 280-character limit (including links and spaces) and different platforms may attract different audiences.

Sample Social Media Content Calendar and Posts

Below are examples of a full week of social media posts, including a mix of member university highlights and events.

Monday

- This week is the National @4H Conference! Delegations of 4-H youth from all over the country are heading to Washington, DC for a week of learning and mentorship. #Opportunity4All 🍀

Tuesday

- Invasive species like bamboo 🌱 not only throw off the look of your garden or backyard, they can disrupt entire ecosystems. Learn more from @ISUEExtension on how they can be controlled 📌 Quote RT: <https://twitter.com/ISUEExtension/status/1288938693202501633>

Wednesday

- Wonder how winemakers adapt to short growing seasons? Watch @UNHAlumni's Annasamy Chandrakala @UNH_GradSchool #3MinuteThesis presentation on how nutrient-packed grapes 🍇 can do just that. Quote RT: <https://twitter.com/UNHAlumni/status/1281341615798460416>

Thursday

- Poll time! What do you think is the most important way to address climate change? 🌍
 - Reducing emissions
 - Supporting renewable energy sources
 - Implementing a carbon tax
 - Using responsible farming techniques

Friday

- Today is the last day of the National @4H Conference. From learning about civic engagement to personal development, we hope this served as an invaluable experience for all our 4-H delegates. What was your favorite part of the conference? #Opportunity4All 🍀

- Did you know September is National Childhood Obesity Month? Research made possible by universities like @SouthernU_BR help teach our nation's children how to garden and offers nutrition-related technology to local schools.



Tactics: Earned Media

Traditional earned media tactics help BAA tell its story in its own words, not just in a longer form but to a more targeted stakeholder audience, namely reporters who might write about BAA priorities and members of Congress who keep up with Beltway papers and their local media outlets. BAA should work with LGU communicators to ensure the timing and topic of any earned media tactics do not conflict with local issues or media priorities, as well as to identify local voices (students, faculty, community members) whose research and educational successes within the land-grant system help make the case for more federal funding.

Press Releases

BAA should send a formal release for every major “tentpole” event or development. Releases can also be used to make statements regarding bill signings, important votes in Congress, and funds allocated for agriculture and life sciences. In addition to a short summary of the news the release calls attention to, it typically includes a quote from the organization’s leader. After a release is sent, the person quoted, or someone well-positioned to talk to media, should be prepared to handle any resulting interview requests. If needed, the request can be handed off to the APLU communications office.

Sending a release will require a press list of reporters who cover the topic. For BAA, this should include certain national reporters covering federal funding and/or agriculture, local reporters in states of relevance, and trade reporters at the types of outlets who exclusively cover these issues. Any reporters who receive regular communications from BAA (like the reporter notes listed below) should also be included in news releases.

Reporter Notes



A monthly “reporter note” sent to this targeted list of national and local reporters would help keep this important audience up to date on BAA developments and lay a foundation for future outreach. This tactic is about developing advantageous relationships and thought leadership, so that when news does break, reporters know to go to BAA for comment or background conversations, or if there is a story BAA hopes to place, a degree of familiarity already exists between the group and the reporter.

The note should provide information about BAA’s latest work and help reporters contextualize what is happening in the world of research and Extension that proves the value of federal investment.

Feature Articles and Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

Feature articles and LTEs go in-depth or make an argument and tell a story. They are some of the best traditional tools for putting a personal touch on an otherwise policy-heavy issue and getting the attention of members of Congress. Members’ staffs monitor the news daily, so when local voices criticize, praise, or even mention a member of Congress in a local paper, it gets noticed.

These pieces could be used to highlight major achievements – and by extension the return on federal investments – or to call on Congress to get a bill across the finish line. Features go deeper than the news of the day to examine personal stories or highlight examples from member institutions to drive home a clear and consistent message: the need for more federal funding.

Another benefit of getting BAA content published is that it can be reused and amplified across existing social media channels, in alerts to BAA members and members of Congress, or passed on to the government affairs team for their use on the Hill.

LTEs are typically no longer than 200 words and respond to an article in a publication by substantiating it or refuting it. Before pitching any opinion piece, check with the intended publication to establish submission guidelines and word limits and work with land-grant university communicators to ensure timing and the topic do not conflict with local issue or media priorities.

Tactics: Member Engagement and Advocacy

Fly-Ins

Although it is difficult to know when life might return to “normal,” a fly-in, be it virtual or in-person, is still a useful tool to build and reinforce the BAA brand on Capitol Hill and make members aware of its priorities. To ensure fly-ins are as effective as possible, it is essential BAA members are briefed on the “one ask” and have talking points to support core messaging.

Fly-ins are another opportunity to highlight activities on social media, reach out to reporters – particularly Beltway reporters – and potentially place opinion content immediately before or after to reinforce the importance of federal investment in BAA activities for a public audience.

Conferences

If BAA members are already planning to attend certain conferences, like 4-H, encourage them to leverage their participation by engaging in communications outputs, such as using a consistent hashtag at the conference to make their content easier to find and share. Strengthening internal communications will give BAA a better idea of who is already planning to do what (and where and

when), so that members can be encouraged to make use of BAA messaging at these types of events as appropriate, and enable BAA to strategically amplify their content.

Reports

The “Seeding Our Success” report would build on the accomplishments outlined in the impact database, tying them together in one place to tell one consistent story about the value of federal investment in agriculture and life science research and the Extension System. The report is an important piece of original, unique content that can be deployed using all the tactics mentioned above. For example, develop a relationship with a national reporter who has shown interest or writes about issues in the BAA policy space, then pitch the story to that reporter as an exclusive. Immediately after the article becomes public, disseminate the report broadly as a press release, amplify it on social media, and urge member institutions to do the same. Finally, write and place an op-ed in an outlet targeting multiple congressional targets, such as *The Hill*, or target an individual member using a local voice in a regional newspaper. That is the beauty of any single communications deliverable – they can often be used across multiple channels to provide more longevity and reach.

Illustrative Timeline of Activities

The following illustrative timeline is largely structured to mirror the congressional budget process, in order to sync major activities to key advocacy points. Ultimately, CMC should build a calendar that corresponds with planned conferences, events, announcements, and other key dates. CMC should also stay in constant contact with BAA to determine what individual institutions already have planned, so CMC can be ready to lift up those members and the broader group. Choosing these sorts of events strategically will ensure the main message and goal of these communications activities remain at the forefront.

Q4 2020

November

- Present roadmap for final adoption
- Incorporate remaining post-adoption feedback into final roadmap
- Specify and brief stakeholders on roles and responsibilities
- Establish internal communications channels, meetings, and calendar

December

- Consult on priorities, message frames, and calendar
- Deliver best practices guide
- Deliver collateral (i.e. template press releases, graphics, one-pagers)
- Conduct first capacity building session

Q1 2021

January

- Second capacity building session
- Priority, frame, and calendar finalization

February – Introducing Message Frame in Support of "One Ask"

- Initiation of daily/weekly activities
- Public release of policy asks
- Themed monthly activities (e.g. infographic, essay/column)

March – Congressional Fly-In

- Continuation of daily/weekly activities
- Promotion of fly-in and reports from Washington to local media

Q2 2021

April – Food Security

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities

May – American Leadership

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities

June – "Seeding our Success" Report

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities
- Promotion of "Seeding our Success" Report

Q3 2021

July – Climate and Energy Independence

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities

August – Education and Innovation

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities

September – 4-H Conference

- Continuation of daily/weekly activities
- Promotion of and support for national 4-H convention

Q4 2021

October – Health and Safety

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities

November – "One Ask" Closing Push

- Continuation of daily/weekly activities
- National and local paid and earned media promotion of "one ask," targeting key decisionmaker markets

December – Year in Review

- Continuation of daily/weekly/monthly activities
- 2022 Planning

■ SCO

Updated SCO Analysis

STRENGTHS

- BAA has a good story to tell about how its work is valuable and delivers results.
- BAA has reach with institutions all over the country, making for a broad-based audience of potential champions.
- Research enjoys strong public support and BAA has leaders to elevate it and give it a face.
- LGUs have a strong base of skilled, professional communicators versed in key issues and connected to key media channels.

CHALLENGES

- Irregular internal communications limit awareness of activities and the ability to leverage members and assets.
- Priorities and messages must be clear, streamlined, and durable.
- Several internal constituencies need to be addressed and balanced.
- Accomplishments and advocacy are communicated more through individual institutions than as part of a national identity.

OPPORTUNITIES

- BAA already has a rich catalog of achievements to raise up.
- Some existing platforms already have large followings that could be revitalized.
- Land-grant universities have a unique identity as accessible public institutions that deliver elite results.
- There are a variety of outside groups and organizations to partner with to raise BAA's profile.

TWO YEAR PLAN AND PRIORITIES (August 2021 – August 2023)
Working Draft – 8.13.2021

To implement APLU's Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA) Strategic Communications Roadmap, the Assistant Vice President, Food Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) Communications and External Partnerships (Andrea Putman) will coordinate with the:

- FANR team
- Communications and Marketing Committee
- Constituent groups (e.g., AHS, ESCOP, ECOP)
- Land-grant university (LGU) ag communicators
- APLU Public Affairs
- APLU Council on Governmental Affairs

The plan will promote the value of LGUs research, education, and Extension as well as highlight the positive impacts of federal funding. Priorities include:

COMMUNICATION MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

- Strategic implementation of Forbes Tate Partners recommendations
- Develop effective, targeted content to support advocacy
- Collect, curate, organize, and spotlight LGU agriculture and life sciences stories and accomplishments
- Provide tools (e.g., monthly communications kits) to LGU communications directors
- Multi-purpose content across platforms.

Examples include:

- Podcasts
- Blogs
- Story bank (for consideration, alternative: integrate with Land-grant Impacts database)
- Social Media
 - AgIsAmerica Facebook and Twitter
 - APLU BAA Twitter
- Websites
 - Update and refresh AgIsAmerica website
 - Update BAA section of APLU website

MEDIA

- Establish and cultivate relationships with editors and reporters
- Write and edit op-eds and letters to the editor
- Develop talking points for use in media interviews
- Pitch to media outlets (e.g., Agri-Pulse, The Hill) in close coordination with APLU Public Affairs.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS / COALITION BUILDING

- Strengthen strategic partnerships with allied organizations (e.g., NIFA, FFAR, NCFAR, FACA)
- Build coalitions and collaborate with partners across external organizations (e.g., federal agencies, national agriculture and related organizations, professional communicators' organizations, funders).

REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT

- Since this is a new plan, the team will review it at six-month intervals and adjust accordingly.