

agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC): <http://escop.info/committee/blc/>

Tuesday, June 24, 2025; 3 pm CT/4 pm ET/2 pm MT/1 pm PT

Call Notes – MEMBERS only for this call

Attendees: Steve Lommel, Jeanette Thurston, Matt Peterson-invited guest, Derek McLean, Wendie Cohick, Anton Bekkerman, Elizabeth Stulberg, Scott Senseman, Jose Toledo, Kevin Cain, Gary Pierzynski, Cindy Morley-notes

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) Past Chair: Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) Incoming Chair: Gary Pierzynski (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Members: Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Derek McLean (agInnovation NC) Wendie Cohick (agInnovation NE) Scott Senseman (agInnovation South) Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West) Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)</p> <p>BLC page with previous meeting notes</p>	<p>Liaisons: Lisa Townson (Extension)* Bob Mattive (CARET) Doug Steele (APLU FANR) Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Gary Mayo (NIFA) Kevin Cain (BVM) Laura Jolly (BHHS)</p> <p>Executive Vice-Chair Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED) Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD)</p> <p>*Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson</p>
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Meeting Agenda/Notes:

1. Welcome and Introductions (10 min) – Steve Lommel
2. Chair Updates (10 minutes) – Steve Lommel
 - Capacity Talking Points
 - They have been updated and attached to the meeting invitation. There were a few updates made in response to last month’s BLC discussion and in response to the USDA NIFA Explanatory notes.
 - They were shared with regional associations and CARET. Feel free to use these with your delegations.
 - BLC–LBA Update
 - June 30 will be the next “Elizabeth Unplugged” zoom 3-4:30pm ET. Topics for Elizabeth to cover:
 1. Steve-Landscape on F&A is firming up at 15%. An update on this would be good.
 2. Anton-COGR is developing two model plans to argue on behalf of universities.
 3. Matt-Effort by Kevin Droegemeier to put some sanity back in the F&A conversation. 15% is an arbitrary number and there isn’t a lot of reasoning behind it beyond that is what other agencies have charged. This is an important conversation.
 4. Send additional topics you recommend Elizabeth touch upon to Steve prior to Monday June 30.

5. Regional associations please resend the zoom links so it can be on calendars.
- Inclusion of APLU's Council on Government Affairs (CGA) member on future BLC-Should we include the current CGA chair for ag Appropriations as the representative?
 - Different perspectives are good, maybe have the CGA member rotate amongst the regions?
 - Steve will consider options and decide on a CGA rep on BLC.
 - Matt will attend the June 30th meeting and give CGA perspective.
- New Administration Impacts Document- created by NC region.
 - Shared with Marcus Glassman, Matt Peterson and Doug Steele.
 - Doug to let us know how this will be used across CGA.
 - Matt-This administration needs to hear from us and our constituents. There is a lot of education that needs to happen, especially regarding capacity grant programs.
3. CGA Member Introduction and Q&A (20 minutes) Matt Peterson
 - Serves as NC State Federal Affairs Director and as the APLU CGA Chair for Ag Appropriations.
 - Working to advocate for Capacity funding, especially with USDA.
 - Since USDA doesn't have a say in how it is spent, they see capacity as a D list priority.
 - Every institution uses it differently, depending on their stakeholders, making it hard to have a consistent message. This makes it harder to tell the story well at a national level.
 - Due to his work on the CGA- he knows counterparts at most of the institutions. It is important for CGA to collaborate across institutions.
 - Federal affairs colleagues are currently feeling pressure on every front. Every research agency and every Dean is facing similar issues. It is still important to have forward thinking approaches such as messaging Capacity grant programs in a 21st century way...
 - For member directed requests, does CGA share best practices, or do they keep things separate at the state level?
 - CGA shares at the macro level. There are multiple meetings each year and there is a lot of professional development and member-developed requests addressed.
 - The secret sauce to being influential on the Hill is having an appropriator that cares.
 - Each LGU has a lot of expertise in all this
 - How does CGA talk about bridging the gap with each state doing things differently?
 - We look at the results. Since capacity funding has been flat for a decade, we are clearly not doing a great job.
 - The President's budget matters (no matter who the president is). We have not been able to get the President's budget to increase capacity funding in 2 decades (beyond inflationary increase). The reason isn't that we don't have a good story, and USDA doesn't prioritize capacity since they don't control how the funding is spent.
 - From your perspective, what resonates most with staff members and elected officials?
 - Several challenges, at the staff level you are lucky if you get a staffer who spent 2 years on Ag. Constant staff change, resulting in an education issue. Ag portfolio is way too complicated. There are 20 lines that we care about.
 - We don't trust USDA to do right by us. For NSF and NIH, the advocacy message, up until this point, was to "increase and we trust them to do the right thing". Ag has a lot of distrust that if we give them a giant chunk of money that they will spend it by how APLU ag institutions will find acceptable. Each institution cares about each line slightly differently.
 - An important role is for the BLC to help homogenize that capacity story. Need a coherent and cohesive message. We don't have a great message for why capacity is important.

- It would be easier to say double the NIFA budget, but that hasn't been the experience of our institutions.
 - It is time for our system to do things a little differently. Is there a way to preempt future administrations instead of reacting all the time. We must be proactive to coin the message in advance.
 - That is what BLC is designed to do. If we can get more members of congress to understand the vital work that capacity does, that will help.
 - If we don't have a foundation of capacity, we can't be more competitive. We must grow our foundation.
 - The term Capacity confuses folks. Our roadmap and story need to include "increase our funding". If we got what we need, it doesn't matter where it comes from. The roadmap provides a way forward without calling it anything specific. The roadmap shows what we want to do and why we want to do it. We seem to always just make-do. We can't do that anymore.
 - The debt and deficit work against us. We are going to pay more interest on the national debt. This will make it harder to get more money for any program.
 - If we could rename Evans Allen, Smith-Lever, Mac Stennis etc. into something that made sense it would be a win! There would be more understanding on the Hill. Branding matters. We have named our programs for people who founded them rather than their purposes. We could be more successful by naming them for what they do.
 - How do we change those? Would take an act of congress to "formally" change the names of these?
 - The names are in the Farm Bill or other legislative vehicle. Sounds like a stupid problem, but it is a problem.
 - What we call these programs is a barrier. Not the primary barrier, but it is a barrier to explaining them. Capital hill staffers and congress, the more straight forward, the better they remember.
 - Higher Ed is under attack right now. Not just Harvard, but everyone across the board. It is our business model that they don't like. It will be very tough to get any additional dollars for higher ed out of a R congress.
4. LBA Update (10 min) - Elizabeth Stulberg
- Agrees with Matt's comments.
 - You don't necessarily need to rename the USDA funding lines if you all grouped them under something like "ag Research" or "doubling NIFA" or something. Trust is an issue.
 - NSF has the national Science Board that is very well respected. There are advisory boards for NIH that are well trusted. The [NAREEE board](#) is just NOT. The make-up of the committee is a problem. They don't have the expertise to weigh in on most of the questions. Consumer and business advocates can't answer the questions... needs a stronger scientific expertise on the board (or an entire new board). Separate allocations because USDA didn't respond well. They weren't empowered to make decision about what they want Ag to be.
 - A strong scientific advisory board is a feature at NSF and NIH but not at USDA. Ag is at best and afterthought. OSTP (presidents science advisors), not a single person had a background in ag.
 - There was a subcommittee on Food and Ag in the Obama admin but was axed in Trump 1.0
 - OSTP was very tech-bro in previous administrations.
 - The reality is that USDA doesn't have funding for a lot of the things that they need to do.
 - General update on Congress and Big Beautiful Bill and our areas of interest-
 - Reconciliation-Good news and bad news- Senate Ag Bill for reconciliation. Has to go through Byrd Rule regardless of if it is eligible for reconciliation process or not. The

original Senate version was not exactly like the house and SNAP Ed was not there. They ultimately did it in a way that was friendlier to states- Percentage based on error rates. Incentivize states to lower their error rates. In the end they worked out a different model that they were satisfied with- a SNAP error rate cost share program.

- RFA and many other things are in the bill. A lot of the costs of SNAP are moved to states making it an unfunded mandate.
 - Plenty of R Senators don't like the direction of SNAP cuts and Medicaid cuts. This would take the money away from hospitals. There will be a higher burden on rural hospitals that cater to Medicaid patients.
 - Appropriations- House Ag passed its bill last night. Overall, 4% cut to USDA. Most of our programs did OK. House wants to match top lines from President's Budget Request. NSF probably will take a significant reduction in funding but there will likely to be a CR so program funding would remain flat.
 - NIFA and Peer Review- Elizabeth started hearing that NIFA is sending out proposals from last fall. Have heard from 2 people that those have come back. One got an "outstanding" but they may not be funded. This is concerning. NIFA hasn't spent any money so why will they say they don't have funding or an "outstanding" proposal? Seems to be a disconnect with spending. Is OMB holding them up? Will they send money back if the money isn't spent? We have been assured that things are moving. If everything is moving except the money, then there is a problem.
 - Those institutions receiving emails from NIFA include "Pending further administrative review"; there is concern on what this means and who is making decisions? DOGE or others who are making science merit decisions who do not have appropriate education/experience?
 - Who has received Gain of Function Research emails from funding agencies (e.g., USDA, NSF)?
 - When the EO for Gain of Function came out, they (LBA) conducted an internal review to see which programs fall under this. Lots of things fall under this. If you haven't done an internal review, you should start and share the letter with your General Counsel's office.
 - Gain of Function is a sliding scale. This is very disturbing. There is no panel of Scientists that reviewed these policies.
 - The Office for Nutrition Research- released a strategic plan yesterday. Because we have all this talk from MAHA this could get more traction than in the past.
 - <https://dpcpsi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/ONR-Strategic-Plan-Internal-508.pdf>
 - USDA Relocation? No one knows...
5. Other Business, as needed and as time allows – None.