

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

Tuesday, November 25, 2025; 3 pm CT/4 pm ET/2 pm MT/1 pm PT

Agenda – **Joint Call with STC**

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Steve Lommel (agInnovation South)</p> <p>Past Chair: Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE)</p> <p>Incoming Chair: Derek McLean (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Members:</p> <p>Alton Thompson (ARD)</p> <p>Ulises Toledo (ARD)</p> <p>Derek McLean (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Vacant (agInnovation NE)</p> <p>Scott Senseman (agInnovation South)</p> <p>Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West)</p> <p>Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)</p> <p>BLC page with previous meeting notes</p>	<p>Liaisons:</p> <p>Lisa Townson (Extension)*</p> <p>Bob Mattive (CARET)</p> <p>Doug Steele (APLU FANR)</p> <p>Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy)</p> <p>Gary Mayo (NIFA)</p> <p>Kevin Cain (BVM)</p> <p>Laura Jolly (BHHS)</p> <p>Matt Peterson (CGA, NCSU)</p> <p>Executive Vice-Chair</p> <p>Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED)</p> <p>Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD)</p> <p>*Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson</p>
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Attendees: Sarah Hubbard, Alton Thompson, Nathan Slaton, Anton Bekkerman, Bill Hoffman, Bob Mattive, Bret Hess, Chris Smart, David Leibovitz, Derek McLean, Shawn Donkin, Elizabeth Stulberg, Gregory Goins, Jason Hubbard, Jeanette Thurston, Stephanie Pearl, Jennifer Horton, John Blanton, Ulises Toledo, Kristina Hains, Lara Prihodko, Laura Jolly, Lee Hecker, Scott Senseman, Shibu Jose, Sreekala Bajwa, Chris Hamilton (recorder and AI wrangler)

Meeting Agenda:

1. Welcome and introductions - Steve Lommel, 5 min
2. Call to Action Presentation - Sarah Hubbard, Adaptive Roots, 15 min for overview, 25 min for Q&A
3. LBA Federal Update (General and Research Facilities Act, if new info available) - Elizabeth Stulberg, 10 min
4. Other Business, as time allows

Fathom AI Notes (edited by Chris Hamilton): [VIEW RECORDING - 38 mins \(No highlights\)](#)

Action Requested: Submit written feedback on messaging documents to Adaptive Roots by December 1st. Send to spearl@adaptiverootsconsulting.com

Key Takeaways

- **FY25 AFRI Request Declined:** The BLC's request for \$700M was declined; the budget will be \$500M to protect core capacity funding.
- **Messaging Strategy Pivot:** The "Ag Innovation Roadmap" messaging will pivot from a broad, inclusive approach to a bold, specific one, directly responding to USDA Undersecretary Scott Hutchins' call to "make promises."
- **Bold Goals Reinstated:** The strategy will re-add the original roadmap's 10-year percentage goals, framing them as "moonshot" targets to drive a larger investment ask.
- **Feedback Deadline:** Written feedback on the messaging documents is due to Adaptive Roots by **December 1st**.

FY25 AFRI Budget Request Update – Steve Lommel

- The BLC's request for \$700M for AFRI was declined.
- The approved budget will be \$500M.
- **Rationale:** To protect core capacity funding, AFRI's request was deprioritized.
- The AFRI coalition's final request number is still unknown.

agInnovation Messaging Strategy/Call to Action (was formerly the Research Roadmap) – Sarah Hubbard, Adaptive Roots

- Adaptive Roots is developing a communications strategy to increase federal investment in ag research, education, and extension.
- **Goal:** Create a "drumbeat message" supporting both competitive (e.g., AFRI) and capacity funding, with a future eye on non-USDA agencies.
- **Audience:** Key stakeholders, not the general public.
- **Current Phase:** Collecting feedback on draft messaging documents.
 - **Unified Call to Action:** A streamlined document for all partners, currently without a specific financial ask.
 - **Six Societal Benefit Documents:** Customizable documents based on the roadmap's pillars, connecting problems, solutions, and benefits.

Feedback & Strategic Pivot

- **Initial Feedback:** The strategy was too broad and lacked urgency.
- **Catalyst for Pivot:** USDA Undersecretary Scott Hutchins' comments at the APLU meeting.
 - **Directive:** Focus on "discovery goals" (problems to fix) and "make promises" (set bold, specific targets).
- **Decision:** Re-add the original Roadmap's 10-year percentage goals.
 - **Rationale:** Frame them as "moonshot" goals to drive a larger investment ask.
 - **Counterpoint:** A cautionary note was raised about the SNAP-Ed program losing funding after failing to meet its promise to reduce childhood obesity.

Future Scope: Other Agencies

- [The strategy may expand beyond USDA to other federal agencies \(e.g., DOE, DOD\).](#)
- [Rationale: To leverage existing land-grant success and funding streams.](#)
- [Derek McLean offered to provide input on DOE and DOD initiatives based on experience at the University of Nebraska.](#)

LBA Report (Chris' Notes)

- Research Facilities Act (RFA) competitive grant program is expected to be released by Q2 of FFY26 (Jan-March). There is a separate earmark account also, which supports \$5 million, with different rules.
 - Several LGUs received the earmark funding.
 - There should be no matching, but discussion among meeting attendees (i.e., Anton Bekkerman, UNH) suggests perhaps otherwise, with differing cost sharing policies, etc. Elizabeth will follow up on this.
- NIFA relocation to Kansas City may be a problem for NIFA and its operations. Fewer than 50% of staff have moved and they are unlikely to, thus facing termination. Target relocation is the summer to avoid school issues for children. More to come on this as summer approaches.
- HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza) awards went out to several LGUs from APHIS. That and screw worm are hot priority topics right now.

Next Steps

- [All Participants: Submit written feedback on messaging documents to Adaptive Roots by December 1st.](#) Send to spearl@adaptiverootsconsulting.com.
- [Adaptive Roots:](#)
 - [Update messaging documents based on feedback.](#)
 - [Prepare a draft communications plan framework in December.](#)
- [Derek McLean: Provide input on DOE and DOD initiatives for potential strategy expansion.](#)

Call adjourned at 3:55 pm ET and Chair Steve Lommel wished everyone a very Happy Thanksgiving!