

**agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC):** <http://escop.info/committee/blc/>  
**Thursday, December 18, 2025, 2 pm ET (Rescheduled from 12/23/2025)**  
**Agenda – MEMBERS ONLY**

**Committee Members:**

<p><b>Chair:</b> Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) <b>Past Chair:</b> Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) <b>Incoming Chair:</b> Derek McLean (agInnovation NC)</p> <p><b>Members:</b> Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Derek McLean (agInnovation NC) Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC) Chris Smart (agInnovation NE) Scott Senseman (agInnovation South) Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West) Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)</p> <p><a href="#">BLC page with previous meeting notes</a></p>	<p><b>Liaisons:</b> Lisa Townson (Extension)* Bob Mattive (CARET) Doug Steele (APLU FANR) Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Gary Mayo (NIFA) Kevin Cain (BVM) Laura Jolly (BHHS) Matt Peterson (CGA, NCSU)</p> <p><b>Executive Vice-Chair</b> 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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**Attendees:** Steve Lommel, Scott Senseman, Elizabeth Stulberg, Alton Thompson, Anton Bekkerman, Ulises Toledo, Derek McLean, Chris Smart, Bret Hess, Jenn Horton, Sreekala Bajwa, Jeanette Thurston, Chris Hamilton

**Meeting Agenda:**

1. Welcome and Call to Order - Steve Lommel, 5 min
2. Call to Action Open Discussion (Current [Documents are here](#))
3. Updates from Washington, Elizabeth Stulberg (LBA) ~~and Matt Peterson (CGA)~~
  - Matt was unable to join the call.
4. FFY28 Budget Strategy (with input from Elizabeth ~~and Matt~~)
5. Exploring Opportunities Beyond USDA (with input from Elizabeth ~~and Matt~~)
6. Other Business, as time allows
  - None identified today

**Fathom AI Meeting Notes, edited by Chris:** [VIEW RECORDING - 60 mins \(No highlights\)](#)

**"Call to Action" Open Discussion**

- [The draft from Adaptive Roots is too general and lacks the "boldness" needed to secure a transformative investment.](#)
- [Problem: The document focuses on incremental, applied research, not the aspirational, moonshot initiatives required to justify a major funding increase.](#)

- **Solution:** Reincorporate specific, scientist-backed outcome metrics from the original agInnovation Roadmap.
  - **Example:** Replace "improve water quality" with the concrete goal: "reduce water quality impairments by 40% within agricultural watersheds."
- **Rationale:** These metrics provide a clear, measurable vision of what a "bold" investment can achieve, moving beyond vague promises.
- **Process:** Adaptive Roots will restructure its contract to focus on this revision and will reconvene the original working groups (composed of administrators, not just scientists) to ensure the metrics are accurately represented.

## **Congressional & USDA Updates**

- **Congressional Gridlock:**
  - The House is stalled by a discharge petition on healthcare subsidies, blocking all other legislation.
  - A full-year Continuing Resolution (CR) is a likely outcome, which would freeze USDA budgets at current levels.
- **Farm Bill Status:**
  - House Ag Committee staff (G.T. Thompson) are drafting a bill for a likely February release.
  - The draft currently includes a nutrition title (SNAP), but its fate is uncertain due to political friction.
- **USDA Leadership Changes:**
  - **Office of the Chief Scientist:** Deirdre Chester was reassigned to NIFA; Catherine Sixt (from DOD) is the new political appointee.
  - **ARS:** May pivot from 5-year plans to short-term, commodity-driven research.
  - **NIFA:** Senior program leaders are considering a Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) due to agency uncertainty.

## **Future Budget & Advocacy Strategy**

- **FY27 Budget Request:**
  - **Evans-Allen:** The ARD community will request an increase over the FY26 *requested* amount, not the flat \$89M received for the last four years.
  - **Hatch/AFRI:** Strategy is pending. APLU's January capacity survey discussion may signal their willingness to make a bold ask. It was noted that the AFRI coalition will request \$500M again for FFY2027.
- **Advocacy Beyond USDA:**
  - **Proposal:** Formally advocate to agencies like NSF and DOD for agricultural research funding.
  - **Risk:** This could conflict with APLU's broader university-wide priorities (e.g., medical school funding, indirect costs), potentially undermining institutional unity.

*Call adjourned at 2:04 pm CT.*

**Call to Action Documents from Adaptive Roots** (click on one to select, then double click to open)



Water  
Resiliency.docx



Sustainable Food  
Systems Messaging



Resilient Lands  
Messaging.docx



Positive Youth  
Development.docx



Nutrition and  
Health.docx



Draft call to action  
ver 3 - november 202



Community  
Economic Developm