

**agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC):** <http://escop.info/committee/blc/>  
Tuesday, May 26, 2026, at 4 pm ET  
Call NOTES

**Committee Members:**

<p><b>Chair:</b> Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) <b>Past Chair:</b> Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) <b>Incoming Chair:</b> Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC)</p> <p><b>Members:</b> Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Rod Johnson (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 Hammons (CGA, UNL)</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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**Call Attendees:** Steve Lommel, Alton Thompson, Bret Hess, Rod Johnson, Ulises Toledo, Shawn Donkin, Scott Senseman, Elizabeth Stulberg, Kate Owens, Sreekala Bajwa, Matt Hammons, Derek McLean, Shibu Jose, Chris Hamilton

**Meeting Agenda ([call notes/recording links below](#)):**

1. Welcome and Call to Order - Steve Lommel
2. BLC Member and Liaison Updates – Steve
  - Introduce new CGA liaison, Matt Hammons, CGA Agriculture Appropriations Issue Team Leader and UNL Assistant Vice President for External Relations and Director of Federal Relations
  - New agNC BLC member, Rod Johnson, University of Illinois
  - Shibu Jose taking over Incoming Chair role from Derek McLean
3. DRAFT BLC Work Plan—BLC team discussion and input
4. New Role for BLC?—stakeholder engagement and coordination
5. DC update—Elizabeth Stulberg and Matt Hammons
6. Other Business, as needed

[Draft BLC Plan of Work, May-September 2026](#)

**Call Notes (Fathom AI):** <https://fathom.video/calls/687986073>

**Links from chat:**

- BLC information: <https://escop.info/committee/blc/>
- FSIS and re-org: <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2026/04/23/usda-announces-food-safety-and-inspection-service-reorganization-establishes-national-food-safety>

### Key Takeaways

- FY28 Strategy: The BLC will request \$500M for AFRI, a realistic target given the current funding environment. The primary advocacy focus will be on increasing capacity funds, using a "stair-step" plan to build momentum over several years.
- Justification: The request will be justified by linking funding to specific state impacts, citing the "arms race" with China in ag research, and highlighting the critical role of land-grants as USDA ARS capacity shrinks.
- BLC Scope: The BLC will explore expanding its role to lead and coordinate formal stakeholder engagement, moving beyond its traditional focus on appropriations and the Farm Bill.
- DC Environment: The House passed a bill with flat funding for AFRI and capacity, a positive outcome given proposed cuts. However, a major USDA reorganization is causing significant staff attrition and operational chaos, creating a critical gap for land-grants to fill.

### FY28 Appropriations Strategy

- Context: The BLC must submit a draft FY28 request to the BAC by July. The strategy must balance the BLC's need for competitive funding (AFRI) with APLU's focus on capacity funds.
- AFRI Request:
  - Decision: Request \$500M.
  - Rationale: This is a realistic target. A higher ask (e.g., \$700M) is unlikely to succeed and could send the wrong signal in a tight budget year.
- Capacity Funds Strategy:
  - Goal: Make a strong case for increased capacity funds.
  - Justification Pillars:
    - State Impact: Connect funding to specific, tangible benefits for constituents in each state (e.g., AI in Illinois, digital ag in Nebraska).
    - Productivity Metrics: Link funding to agricultural productivity data to show a clear return on investment.
    - Strategic Imperatives: Frame the request around national priorities (biosecurity, AI) and the "arms race" with China, where the US is falling behind in ag research investment.
    - USDA Capacity Gap: Position land-grants as the critical research partner as USDA ARS capacity shrinks due to reorganization.
- Process: The BLC will invite key stakeholders to its June meeting to inform the request.
  - Invitees: Julie McClure (AFRI Coalition), Keith Coble (BAC Chair), Matt Hammons (UNL), and Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke).

### Expanding BLC Scope to Stakeholder Engagement

- [Proposal: Expand the BLC's role to lead and coordinate formal stakeholder engagement.](#)
- [Rationale:](#)
  - [Strategic Alignment: Provides a formal structure for an activity directors already perform, ensuring a unified message.](#)
  - [Improved Advocacy: Aligns land-grant priorities with national commodity groups \(e.g., Farm Bureau\) for more effective advocacy on the Hill.](#)
- [Process: This would be a new charge, requiring approval from Chandra. The BLC will review its current charge document to formalize its scope.](#)

#### **DC Update: Appropriations, Farm Bill, & USDA Reorg**

- [FY27 Appropriations:](#)
  - [The House passed a bill with flat funding for AFRI and capacity, a positive outcome given the president's proposed cuts.](#)
  - [The Senate Appropriations Committee begins markups next week; a more generous bill is expected.](#)
- [Farm Bill:](#)
  - [Outlook: Unlikely to pass this year due to limited legislative time before the election.](#)
  - [Advocacy: Lewis-Burke is pushing to include the retirement fix in any Senate bill, as it cannot be added later in reconciliation.](#)
- [USDA Reorganization:](#)
  - [NIFA: Staff attrition is expected to reach ~50% due to the Kansas City relocation mandate.](#)
  - [ARS \(BARC\): 400 researchers at the Beltsville station were given until September to relocate, creating chaos as they must move their own research with no support.](#)
  - [APHIS \(Biotech RFI\): A proposal to merge Biotechnology Regulatory Services into Plant Protection and Quarantine would eliminate the risk-based exemption process for biotech plants, requiring a permit for all. This could halt plant biotech and create a regulatory gap for industrial biotech crops.](#)

#### **Next Steps**

- [Jeanette: Draft an initial capacity fund request number for discussion at the June meeting.](#)
- [Steve & Alton: Discuss the BLC scope expansion proposal with Chandra.](#)
- [Steve: Invite Julie McClure, Keith Coble, and Matt Hammons to the June meeting.](#)
- [All: Prepare to discuss the FY28 appropriations strategy and the capacity fund request at the June meeting.](#)

*Call adjourned at 3:59 pm CT*

## **Draft BLC Work Plan | May–September 2026**

### **Background**

The Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC) would like to develop a collaborative work plan and coordinated approach for the upcoming summer and early fall. A primary responsibility of the committee is development of the annual appropriations request, including strategy development and justification for the FY2028 agricultural research funding request.

In addition, BLC is exploring a broader leadership role within agInnovation related to stakeholder engagement and coordination. This emerging effort would focus on strengthening relationships with key external partners, improving communication consistency, and helping elevate the value and priorities of agricultural research. Input from the agInnovation Chair will be important as this role is discussed and refined.

***Please review the draft discussion topics and proposed outcomes below and share your thoughts either in writing or during the BLC members-only discussion at the May 26 meeting.***

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### **Draft Discussion Topics, Activities, and Desired Outcomes**

#### **May–September 2026**

#### **1. Potential New Stakeholder Engagement Role for BLC**

##### **Overall Goal:**

Provide leadership and recommendations to the agInnovation Chair regarding priority stakeholder organizations and strategic engagement opportunities to strengthen relationships, broaden outreach, and improve coordinated communication about the value and priorities of agricultural research.

##### **Proposed Discussion Topics and Activities**

- Invite agInnovation chair, Chandra Reddy, to provide input during the May or June BLC meeting regarding the potential role of BLC in stakeholder engagement coordination.
- Explore development of a coordinated stakeholder engagement strategy, potentially in collaboration with the Science and Technology Committee (STC).
- Consider how BLC can help inform or coordinate shared messaging resources such as talking points, stakeholder “leave-behind” materials, impact summaries, and other communication tools used in meetings with stakeholders, policymakers, commodity groups, coalitions, and partners.
- Discuss a distributed leadership approach in which agInnovation directors and Executive Directors volunteers engage with stakeholder organizations aligned with their expertise, interests, or regional priorities.
- Consider whether agInnovation should provide travel support for directors or Executive Directors who are willing and able to participate in strategic stakeholder engagement activities.

##### **Desired Outcomes**

- Clarify whether stakeholder engagement coordination should become a formal BLC responsibility.
  - Identify potential partner organizations, priority audiences, and coordination needs.
  - Develop initial recommendations for an agInnovation stakeholder engagement framework and support structure.
  - If acceptable, implement stakeholder engagement plan by Fall 2026.
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## **2. Development of the FY2028 Appropriations Request**

### **Timeline:**

Begin discussions in June and no later than July 2026.

### **Proposed Discussion Topics and Activities**

- Invite:
  - Julie McClure (VP, Torrey Advisory Group; AFRI Coalition; Friends of ARS),
  - Keith Coble (Chair, Board on Agriculture Assembly Budget and Advocacy Committee),
  - Matt Hammons (BLC CGA representative, CGA Agriculture Appropriations, Issue Team Leader, UNL Asst. VP for External Relations and Director of Federal Relations),
  - and Elizabeth Stulberg (Principal, LBA)

to help initiate discussions regarding FY2028 strategy development for both competitive and capacity funding requests.

- Discuss the broader federal funding landscape, including anticipated pressure on discretionary spending and potential reductions across federal research agencies.
- Identify strategic messaging, data points, and justification themes that will strengthen the FY2028 request and broader advocacy efforts.
- Coordinate timing and messaging with agInnovation, APLU, BAA, CGA, and partner organizations where appropriate.

### **Desired Outcomes**

- Develop a framework and strategy for the FY2028 appropriations request by late Fall 2026 reflective of agInnovation needs and priorities.

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## **3. Continued Engagement in the LGU Call to Action (formerly the Roadmap)**

### **Proposed Discussion Topics and Activities**

- Continue monitoring and engaging in discussions related to the Land-grant University Call to Action.
  - Provide feedback and recommendations where appropriate.

### **Desired Outcomes**

- Ensure BLC perspectives and priorities are represented in ongoing discussions.

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## **4. Continued Federal and DC Policy Updates**

### **Proposed Discussion Topics and Activities**

- Continue regular federal policy and appropriations updates during monthly BLC meetings.
- Continue the broader agInnovation DC Update meetings that include participation from all agInnovation directors and leadership.
- Monitor and discuss emerging federal issues, appropriations developments, USDA policies, Farm Bill discussions, and agency updates relevant to LGUs and agricultural research.

**Desired Outcomes**

- Maintain timely awareness of federal developments impacting agricultural research to better inform FY2028 and future funding requests and other initiatives.
- Support coordinated communication and informed advocacy efforts across agInnovation leadership and member institutions.