



**agInnovation Business Meeting**  
**Monday, March 2, 2026 – 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm ET**

In attendance: Chandra Reddy (Chair), Vagner Benedito, Blake Brown, Desmond Mortley, Jason Hubbard, Chris Pritsos, Radiah Minor, Usman Adamu, Ami Smith, Toni DiTommaso, Arash Rashed, Beth Gugino, Bret Hess, Bridget Krieger, Chris Hamilton, Cindy Morley, Cynthia Sides, Darrin Dodds, Darrin Boss, Shawn Donkin, Erdo Memili, Frank Casey, Frank Camacho, Gary Pierzynski, Gary Thompson, Greg Goins, Holly Neiberger, Hongwei Xin, Jake Bowman, James Matthews, Jewel Bronaugh, Jenn Horton, John Blanton, Joleen Hadrich, Kang Xia, Kevin Olival, Lara Prihodko, Lee Hecker, Lesley Oliver, Leslie Edgar, Marikis Alvarez, Mary Burrows, Mike Salassi, Nathan Slaton, Paul Johnson, Rick Rhodes, Rodney Johnson, Ron Turco, Roseanne Scammahorn, Sarah Hubbard, Scott Senseman, Shibu Jose, Sreekala Bajwa, Stephanie Pearl, Steve Lommel, Troy Ott, Wendy Fink, Rose Ozbay, Tsakani Ngomane, Jorge Atilas, Gene Kelly, Alton Thompson (Executive Vice-Chair), Lisa Williamson (Assistant Executive Vice-Chair), David Leibovitz (Recorder)

Meeting administration (Chandra Reddy)

- **The [agenda for the meeting](#) was re-arranged to accommodate the schedules of the presenters and was approved unanimously.**
- **The [minutes from the agInnovation meeting of 9/18/2025](#) were approved unanimously.**

Lewis-Burke Associates Washington DC Update (Bridget Krieger)

- Congress has moved into the FY2027 appropriations season. There may not be a President's budget request in place until April 2026.
- Ag committees can draft bills prior to the release of the POTUS budget request (prior to any major proposed cuts from the Executive Branch), which is advantageous timing for LGUs.
- POTUS Budget request is likely to look like last year's –negative funding is expected in the request.
- Capacity and competitive programs are supported by both sides of congress.
- Despite rumors, NSF should be receiving all its FY2026 funding
- Farm Bill meetings are set to commence on 3/3, likely beginning with opening statements from members of congress.
- There will likely be an amendment proposed to increase RFA Funding to \$5B. While that will likely fail, it provides us a larger and more recent “high water mark” for the request.

Adaptive Roots Integrated Roadmap Update (Stephanie Pearl and Sarah Hubbard)

- [Slides from Adaptive Roots are posted on the ESCOP Website \(click to view\)](#)
- Adaptive Roots is working with agInnovation and Cooperative Extension to develop a communications strategy for long-term advocacy. Overarching goal: increased federal investment in agricultural research, education, and extension.
- Work in Q1 2026 is focused on 1) *message development* - refining the outcome goals and land-grant solutions included in the Roadmap messaging and 2) collaborating to build an implementation plan for the *communications strategy*.

- **Message Development:** agInnovation, ECOP, and ACOP each nominated two representatives to serve on each of the six Societal Benefits Teams tasked with building consensus around the outcome goals and land-grant solutions that are highlighted in each of the six Roadmap “Pillar” documents. Initial meetings were held with all six teams during January-February to begin reviewing and prioritizing the outcome goals for each topic.
  - Adaptive Roots has connected with stakeholder groups that are interested in partnering to provide message testing of the materials including the APLU BAA Marketing and Communications Committee, CARET, NCFAR, CAST, Farm Journal Foundation, and National 4-H Council. Adaptive Roots will work with APLU’s government affairs team and Lewis-Burke Associates to identify appropriate Capitol Hill and agency contacts for message testing.
  - **Next Steps:** A second round of meetings is underway with each of the six teams during February-March to continue work on the outcomes and begin prioritizing and refining the accompanying land-grant solutions. New drafts of the materials are anticipated to be ready for review at the April Governance Committee Meeting and then used for message testing with external audiences in May, with a goal of finalizing the messaging and Call to Action by June 30, 2026.
- **Communications Strategy:** In December 2025, Adaptive Roots presented a draft communications strategy that outlines four goals and supporting strategies. The document outlines a strategic approach for message refinement, coalition building, and targeted communications outreach to support the goal of increased federal investment. It includes a stakeholder map and engagement calendar, which are intended to be living documents.
  - **Next Steps:** Adaptive Roots will collaborate with the APLU BAA Communications and Marketing Committee, government affairs teams, and other LGU communicators to develop and collect feedback on an implementation plan for the communications strategy that will specify the tactics, internal and external communication channels, roles, and responsibilities for each goal, as well as plans for measurement to show progress made toward the goals and impacts.
- **Some materials will be shared with the Roadmap Governance Committee on April 9 and rolled out to agInnovation later in the spring.**

#### Capacity Investment Update (Wendy Fink)

- Phase 2 of the capacity initiative is launching – a committee has developed a 43-question survey for rollout at the end of March to gather information from multiple people at each Land-grant institution.
- The committee is seeking consistency from each institution rather than different perspectives from different units at the same university. Emails will be sent as large chains, one per institution, with many names included by CC.
- This is the beginning of what is anticipated to be a multi-year approach to capacity funding.

#### What’s new with the agInnovation Website? (PIVOT Creative and Consulting)

- All are encouraged to visit the agInnovation front-facing website ([aginnovation.info](http://aginnovation.info))
- With the support of PIVOT Creative and Consulting (Erica Mirich and Katie Williamson), the website is being revised, and content is being shared regularly.
- Press releases, news stories, blogs, and success stories are being posted on the agInnovation site regularly to promote and convey the importance of the work that we do and support increases for funding to our institutions.

- **All institutions are encouraged to submit stories for posting on the agInnovation website.**

#### [Science and Technology Committee Update \(Nathan Slaton\)](#)

- STC Awards Programs in 2026 (calls for nomination and award information are [posted on the ESCOP website](#))
  - [Excellence in Agricultural Research Innovation \(Early / Mid-career / Life-time career\)](#)
  - [Excellence in Leadership](#)
  - [Excellence in Multistate Research](#)

#### Chair's Reflections (Chandra Reddy)

- [Chandra's slides are posted on the ESCOP website \(click to view\)](#)

#### BAA Board of Directors (formerly Policy Board of Directors)

- Shibu Jose is currently agInnovation's representative on the BAA Board of Directors.
- The board will hold elections in Fall 2026; they will seek two representatives from agInnovation: one primary and one alternate.
- Elections for representatives need to be held at the section (agInnovation National) level. Service on the board is a 2-year term.
- **Regional associations will be called upon to submit nominees for service on the board. agInnovation will need to find two nominees, one as our representative and one as our alternate.**
- The Policy Board of Directors elected to change its name to the Board of Directors, to modernize and reflect business practices.
- Rick Rhodes asked if there might be consideration of the BAA changing its name from "Board on Agricultural Assembly" also for the sake of modernization. That can be brought forward to the BAA Board as a proposal at some point.

#### Multistate Research Guidelines Update (Chris Hamilton, agInnovation North Central)

- Chris, along with Bret Hess, Cindy Morley, and David Leibovitz (all regional system administrators) are in the process of revising the [national guidelines for multistate research activities](#).
- The guidelines are being revised to improve clarity and brevity, to remove archaic jargon, and to reflect our current business practices.
- The intent is to have these documents prepared for review and approval in advance of the fall agInnovation meeting in Colorado.

#### [USDA Request for Input to the Research Facilities Act Program Implementation](#) (Steve Lommel)

- BLC's 2025 Question-and-Answer document was updated to align with statutory language, incorporate additional recommendations from agInnovation members, and respond to NIFA's call for stakeholder input. BLC collaborated across agInnovation to gather feedback and submitted both written and verbal comments to NIFA in February.

#### agNGINE Update (Wendy Fink)

- agNGINE Will continue beyond agInnovation's funding commitment.
- The initiative addresses a priority as expressed by Scott Hutchins (USDA): Seeking to increase the number of domestic graduate students.

- A Graduate Summit concept has been discussed, but it needs to be led by an institution rather than an association (APLU).
- Groups like agInnovation or Academic Programs could be helpful to serve as supporters, but not as the lead, on the summit activity.
- **If there is interest from any institution in taking the lead on the Graduate Summit concept, funding support could be pursued as a conference grant from the USDA's Workforce Development program.**

*The meeting adjourned at 5:35 pm Eastern time.*

DRAFT