

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

March 2024 Agenda- Members & Liaisons

Reschedule to: Tuesday, April 2, 2024 3pm (CT)/4pm (ET)

Attendees: Vernon Jones, Steve Lommel, Rick Rhodes, Gary Pierzynski, Alton Thompson, Paula Geiger, Bridget Krieger, Flannery Bethel, Sreekala Bajwa, Derek McLean, Elizabeth Stulberg

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Anton Bekkerman (NERA) Past Chair: Glenda Humiston (WAAESD) Incoming Chair: Steve Lommel (SAAESD)</p> <p>Members: Alton Thompson (ARD) Vernon Jones (ARD) Gary Pierzynski (NCRA) Derek McLean (NCRA) Wendie Cohick (NERA) Steve Lommel (SAAESD) Scott Senseman (SAAESD) Sreekala Bajwa (WAAESD) Shawn Donkin (WAAESD)</p>	<p>Liaisons: Jason Henderson (ECOP) Katie Frazier (CARET) Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Paula Geiger (NIFA) Laura Jolly (BHHS)</p> <p>Executive Vice-Chair Gary Thompson (SAAESD ED) Cindy Morley (SAAESD)</p>
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Meeting Agenda:

Welcome – Anton

- Quorum was not achieved: no votes were taken.

Approval of the January meeting notes - Anton

Approval of today's agenda - Anton

DC update – Bridget

- FY 24 final numbers:
 - Weathered the FY24 storm. Critical programs such as capacity were kept whole. \$1M in RFA is a good thing. AFRI and several other lines were cut. Better than the 14% cut that was proposed in the House.
 - NSF and NIH were cut significantly in FY24. NSF is actively considering how that cut will be applied, possibly reducing the scope of existing grants.
 - Unobligated funding in USDA - why was that number relayed? Possibly some miscommunication.
 - \$300M in recissions across NIFA. Recommend that Doug talk to Dr. Misra to discuss where that money is taken.
 - What are the optics of the unobligated funds?

- Less concerned about appropriators since they understand how these things work and how some things get held up. Don't want to talk about this with the regular rank and file members of Congress. We need a message on this to protect NIFA. Don't want implications that NIFA can't spend its money efficiently.
- Senate should have confirmed with USDA in advance and raised a red flag.
- The purpose of multi-year funding is to allow funding across fiscal years. Need the ability to spread the workload into the next fiscal year. It is all about timing. Unobligated balance is constantly changing. They used an old number.
- Will USDA be likely to receive cuts in FY25 since it was spared in FY24?
 - Unlikely. It comes to subcommittee allocations. What helped us was the desire to fix the WIC shortfall. Ag allocations in the minibus did very well, a little higher than FY23. That's why you see flat level funding. WIC issue not going away so will likely continue to be addressed in FY25. The subcommittee knows realistically that our programs are not the programs that grew exponentially in the last few years and are not the programs that should be cut.
- FY 25 President's Budget Request
 - Do not panic about budget requests, which are just suggestions at this point. These numbers are based on the debt ceiling deal reached last summer. Some programs that can be supported via AFRI were cut.
 - The cut to McIntire-Stennis was surprising. Asking for feedback from the forestry group. Suspicion is that it isn't a very popular program or that the Senate plussed up in previous years. Forest fires are a big priority in this request with a lot of money specifically directed to that issue, which may have reduced Mac-Stennis.
 - Appropriations committees want to move quickly. House Chairperson stepped down and Tom Cole from Oklahoma will take that assignment. House is rethinking earmark criteria, which could cause delays in subcommittees submitting requests. The RFA "Dear Colleague" letter came out last week.
 - Doubtful that we will see final bills before the election.

Reflections on the CARET-BAA Meeting – Flannery Bethel

- Over 300 registrants. Positive feedback and already planning next year's meeting.
 - Intel from the hill and survey feedback comments like last year. Staff are supportive just looking at where the money will come from.
 - Positive interaction with Hill staff at the reception.
- Caron's last day was yesterday.
 - Doug to serve as Interim Executive Director for CARET. Flannery to stay on and assist. Position is listed and will keep open until it is filled. Goal to have filled by September 1.
- CARET will be meeting with other groups at Joint BAA Leadership Meeting in July.
- BLC Member Feedback
 - Meeting was better organized this year than in the past and the sessions were useful.
 - Felt frustration from staffers by lack of movement of bills.
 - 1890 community thought the meeting was good.
- Doug is working with Bridget to pick the most opportune time to hold the next meeting.

How to formulate and justify the “ask” for FY25 – Bridget Krieger, LBA

- In the past we have used 14% as a guidepost and how that compares to China.
 - Tried an approach of having tiers and showing how ag research compares with the different tiers (stagnant funding vs more funding, etc.).
- Mike Boehm wants to do this early, however political scenarios dictate how aggressive we can be.
 - Republican sweep will be more conservative.
 - Split environment could be like the current situation depending on who has the majority and how big of a majority.
 - In theory, FY26 won't be held to the same budget caps of FY24 and FY25. Given how volatile the environment can be, we don't want to do something in July that is way off target come November.
- One Scenario is to ask the sections to agree to a couple different numbers depending on the political situation. What is your aspirational budget (14%), prepare what that would look like.
 - Prepare an option that shows flat funding. Prepare a budget showing flat plus 4% inflation etc. LBA will give us this guidance but wants to wait for guidance from appropriations staff.
 - Hope to have some information in April, but likely will have to prepare various options. Option A, B, or C pending political outcome.
- Another scenario is a new congress and the opportunity to educate new staffers.
 - Fresh information that can provide talking points, send it their way so they can hit the ground running.
- Infrastructure: it is important to have a list of facilities that are in need? Should we show them facilities that need work? How to include? This is how much it costs to fix this, etc.?
 - Love firsthand data points. Lands well with the delegations and makes it real for them. It is hard when talking about some of these capacity programs for the office to conceptualize where that \$245M going in MY state.
 - Show the ROI. Show them the consequences of NOT investing. Staff hate seeing the ugly but it is necessary. Harder to do at the Section level.
 - Have your own 1 pager about what that means for your own institution. Commonalities on infrastructure across all institutions could be a talking point (updated greenhouses etc.). Are you losing industry, students, or faculty.... Show real numbers and experiences. Talking jobs in an election year resonates.
- We have reduced the number of lines that we ask for. Our approach has been different strategies for each line: capacity, infrastructure and competitive. Should we simplify and with a consistent approach across each line?
 - Feedback was we really like you thought about this for each line. The one size fits all does not resonate on the hill. They like seeing that we are okay with giving some programs a smaller increase while staying level with another. The guess is they will still want to be strategic. Different percentages show that real thought went into it.
- NIH community approach

- Historically, every center and institute individually advocated. Doubling of NIH was the result of bringing the entire community together.
- What is hurting us is for so long we have been nickel and dimed to death with our programs. No one wants to lose what we already have.
 - If there is an appetite to really plus up NIFA, would that be enough to bring the entire community together? In this environment that isn't a conversation we can realistically have... but in the future it could be a potential opportunity.
- We are waiting on LBA to give us guidance in the next few weeks about next steps.
 - Likely into May before we have that information. What is a conservative approach. Is that 14% number still a benchmark?
- USDA is analyzing the FY24 budget cuts and the rescission. Answering questions about FY25 while already working on FY26. The process continues to move forward and looking at funding levels and priorities.
- What is the status of the \$1M RFA funding.
 - May 13, 2024 is the new deadline.