

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board

Office of the Executive Director
Whitten Building, Room 332A
REE Advisory Board Office
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250-2255

Mailing Address:
STOP 0321
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250-2255
Telephone: 202-720-3684
Fax: 202-720-6199

MINUTES Executive Committee Conference Call Friday, November 14, 2014, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST.

Executive Committee Members Present: Dr. Milo Shult (Chair), Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen (Vice Chair), Dr. Charles Boyer, Dr. Patsy Brannon, Dr. Carrie Castille, Leo Holt, Dr. Mark McLellan, and Dr. Robert Taylor

Executive Committee Members Absent: Julia Sabin

NAREEE Board Staff: Michele Esch, Executive Director; Shirley Morgan-Jordan, Program Support Coordinator

Others Present: Dr. Catherine Woteki, REE, Under Secretary; Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, NIFA, Administrator; Dr. Ann Marie Thro, Senior Advisor, USDA Office of the Chief Scientist

I. **Roll Call of the Executive Committee Members and Meeting Attendees**

Michele Esch conducted a roll call of the Executive Committee once members signed on to the conference call.

II. **Welcome from the Co-Chair**

Dr. Milo Shult welcomed everyone on the call. He gave his sincere thanks and compliments to the committee members for their work and the products they were releasing. He then turned the meeting over to Dr. Woteki.

III. **Comments from the REE Office of the Under Secretary**

Dr. Woteki welcomed everyone on the call.

- Dr. Woteki informed the committee that Congress was back in “lame duck” session post elections. She stated that we are watching the appropriations process for the remainder of the fiscal year; we currently are authorized through December 11. She stated that there may be a longer term funding authorization until the end of the year or a short continuing resolution until the newly elected leadership is in place.

- Dr. Woteki stated that the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR) held their first face-to-face meeting on November 6-7, 2014, in Washington, DC. The committee focused on procedural issues and has a lot of decisions to make. The committee is very engaged and excited about the how the funding will be allocated.

Dr. Shult asked Dr. Woteki if the committee was looking at staffing for the FFAR. Dr. Woteki stated they are trying to decide what kind of staff to hire; they may choose to initially use a firm to manage the legal aspect and audit functions or opt to choose to hire an Executive Director but it is too early to know.

IV. Recommendations from the Specialty Crop Committee

Dr. Charles Boyer reviewed the report and recommendations developed from the Specialty Crop Committee meeting held in October. This included consultation with NIFA Program leaders and leadership.

Dr. Boyer emphasized that the main recommendation from the Committee was to ensure that the Relevancy Review is equally weighted to the Scientific Merit review. The SCC felt that communication was very important to the relevancy review process and that this year was rushed. The committee recommends several items to address communications. The committee recognizes that a number of the recommendations to the relevancy review process may not be doable but still wanted to state a number of things to improve the process.

Dr. Boyer stated that in order to make the Relevancy Review stronger, there needs to be a conference call or face-to-face interaction. The panel needs to be able to bring their thoughts together in a collective way. The program managers need to recognize what has happened last year and that NIFA should work with the SCC to help identify the best way to fund the proposals.

In addition, Dr. Ramaswamy thanked the committee for their hard work. He stated that Bill Hoffman (NIFA, Chief of Staff) and others are also very interested in the committee's work. Dr. Ramaswamy also provided an update on: the current matching requirement (currently available on the NIFA website); the creation of the Centers for Excellence (currently under review by the Office of General Counsel); and the Promotion Board program (currently under development).

Dr. Ramaswamy stated that NIFA is trying to make sure the Request for Applications (RFA) come out in a timely fashion. They are waiting for the committee to tell them that is ok and he believes they are on the track with getting the RFA's out.

Dr. Woteki stated that she was very interested in knowing why the SCC believes that the relevancy review process does not equal the scientific merit review. In order for a proposal to be reviewed for scientific merit, it must pass the relevancy review. Dr. Boyer explained that there is a perception that the two reviews are not connected and that the results are not communicated appropriately to the scientific

merit panels. Some panels didn't know how to use the ranking, so communication plays an important role. He also stated that the only proposals deemed to be relevant go to the next level.

Dr. Ramaswamy stated that for the upcoming granting cycle, the Scientific Merit Review panels will be clearly informed that the proposals they are reviewing were reviewed for relevancy. The panels will also be provided the rankings and comments from the relevancy reviewers.

Dr. Woteki also added that the report did not provide evidence or background on why the SCC was submitting the recommendations. She suggested that there needs to be explanatory text and comments for each recommendation.

Dr. Mark McLellan stated that impact must be taken into consideration. If not carefully managed, larger programs could stomp all over the smaller ones. He also stated that he was disappointed to hear the recommendation on where the research funding should go. He provided the example of food safety and indicated that there is a massive amount of work to be done in food safety for specialty crops. It has the appearance that the specialty crop industry is over-reaching.

Dr. Shult asked the committee if this could be accepted as a working document. Michele Esch stated that the committee can go back to the report and add some additional language and explanation from the comments received. Dr. McLellan stated that he didn't want to hold the report and wanted to keep it moving forward.

Dr. Shult stated that we would accept the report as a working document and keep it on the docket for discussion.

V. Specialty Crop Committee Membership

Dr. Boyer reminded the Executive Committee of the members who volunteered at the October 2014 NAREEE Advisory Board meeting to serve on the Specialty Crop Committee: Robert Taylor, Chalmers Carr, Julia Sabin, and Twilya L'Ecuyer.

Dr. Shult motioned to approve these NAREEE Board members as members of the Specialty Crop Committee. Dr. Mark McLellan motioned. Dr. Patsy Brannon seconded.

VI. Recommendations from the Data Management Working Group

This topic was postponed to the December teleconference.

VII. Final Recommendations from the Agricultural Experiment Station Working Group

Dr. Brannon stated that there were some changes made to the report based on the conversation at the NAREEE Board meeting. These changes were: additional narrative moved to the beginning of the report; added additional actionable items to the recommendations; and added recommendation 3b, including the issue of diversity in the first section.

Dr. Brannon stated that once the Executive Committee approved the report then it would be ready to go to the full Board. A motion was moved by Dr. Mark McLellan; Dr. Robert Taylor seconded the motion. The report will be submitted to the full Board for approval.

VIII. FY2015 Relevancy and Adequacy Report Update

Dr. Castille thanked Dr. Woteki for attending the meeting and discussing the Relevancy and Adequacy Report. She stated that the group will be meeting in the near future to discuss the process and establish a plan for going forward.

Other Business

Dr. Woteki thanked the Executive Committee for having a better relationship. She stated that some reports can stand alone and others need help. When you pick up the report to read, you should be able to understand it. As we move forward, we will be including a letter from REE on the actions that will be taken in response to the recommendations. This will be included in the package that is sent to the Secretary and Congress.

There being no additional business, the meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

The next Executive Committee teleconference is scheduled for Friday, December 5, 2014 at 11:00 am EST.

Dr. Milo Shult
Chair

Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen
Vice Chair

Michele Esch
Executive Director

APPROVAL BY ADVISORY BOARD:

Date

Initials following Advisory Board Approval