

Strategic Realignment FAQs
July 3, 2018
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Q: How/where did this effort originate?

A: There are currently 45 different lines in the NIFA budget. Each one funds critical and important work and thus requires varying degrees of attention from our advocacy teams. Twenty-seven of those lines support programs receive \$5 million or less.

Then Chair of the BAA Budget and Advocacy Committee, Orlando McMeans, charged the ESCOP and ECOP Budget and Legislative Committee with developing recommendations on how the several lines might be strategically realigned to simplify the NIFA budget. This was to have been done by mid-January; however, this time frame was too short.

Subsequently, Policy Board Chair Mark Hussey appointed a special committee to undertake this effort with these caveats:

- Protect/maintain program funding including local capacity as well as competitive support for important programs and projects;
- Consolidate budget lines where it makes sense, doing no harm;
- Maintain intent (functionally equivalent) of programs, e.g., research, education, Extension, and integrated activities regardless of where the budget lines reside within the USDA/NIFA Budget;
- Expand our ability to integrate research, education and Extension functions of the nation's Land- Grant Universities in local and multistate problem solving;
- Acceptable to those directly affected and supported by the COPs, BAC and PBD; and
- Acceptable to appropriators.

Q: Why take these steps now?

A: Congressional staff has been requesting simplification of the NIFA budget for decades including a specific in the draft House version of the Farm Bill for NIFA to make such recommendations. The BAA and it BAC has endeavored to support the NIFA budget by simplifying “the ask” to six lines then to the One Ask concept

By consolidating budget lines, our advocacy efforts will be more effective in helping to secure needed resources, maintaining program funding and functional integrity allowing our institutions to continue critically important work. With fewer budget lines, we can more effectively advocate for budget increases because we can garner widespread stakeholder support.

Q: How will program integrity be maintained?

A: Faculty and those who care about specific lines will make the need for the programs know through the current stakeholder input processes that NIFA employs.

Q: Why were all of the academic programs moved under AFRI?

A: All of these program were located under the Research and Education section of the NIFA budget. Some of these program have specific limitations of eligibility but all distribute funding by competitive processes.

Q: How capacity be defined?

A: Capacity is defined as both the intellectual and staff capability and fiscal facilities of the system to address pressing problems, provide solutions, and education to stakeholders

Q: What is the status of the capacity funded programs in the proposal?

A: These programs are maintained as separate lines and will be distributed as they currently are.

Q: How will competitive programs be defined?

A: Competitive programs are solicited through an open RFA process and reviewed by panels that select the best proposals.

Q: How will AFRI programs be administered?

A: The AFRI program would be open to any institution and not limited to Land Grant Universities. This is to say the NIFA program would accept applications from a broad array of universities and other institutions similar to the NRI, NSF or NIH programs. It is anticipated that those institution that have been receiving funding from programs moved into AFRI would continue to compete effectively.

Q: How the new alignment be more efficient administratively? Will it lead to a reduction of bureaucracy?

A: Consolidation will, in and of itself, lead to more effective advocacy, increased funding, better stakeholder service and better organization.

Q: How will the internal functions/roles of NIFA that support the land-grant programs change?

A: It is anticipated that there will be more regular stakeholder input sessions that will drive the program portfolio. It is expected that National Program Leaders for specific areas would be heavily involved.

Q: What is the status of “Hill” discussions? Is there support for this concept?

A: There have been very preliminary discussions with key staffers and members but no details have been discussed. The House version of the Farm Bill requires NIFA to make such recommendations.

Q: How do we reconcile the maintenance of capacity funds in the proposal with recent attempts to move these funds to a competitive model?

A: Capacity funds are a high priority for most if not all universities as they provide critical basal support. The System has made this abundantly clear in recent years. The attempts to remove capacity funds by the administration have been soundly rejected by the Congress. Capacity funds would be specifically mentioned in legislation reaffirming their importance.

Q: What legislative authority or changes are needed to implement the proposal?

A: The legislative consultants have reviewed all of the associated legislation and have determined that no changes in the underlying legislative authorities are required. Rather, the effort can be achieved via the annual appropriations process and in working with NIFA on continuation of programmatic integrity.

Q: Would a system wide vote be required? Do we need a vote or can sections approve?

A: No, the Policy Board of Directors charged the Committee with developing recommendations on line consolidation. The proposed consolidation must be acceptable to those directly affected and supported by the COPs, BAC, CLP, and PBD and acceptable to appropriators. PBD would forward the final recommendations to USDA, NIFA and Congress.

Q: Where are commodity groups?

A: Those groups who might be affected by these changes will be contacted to address concerns and provide assurance that “*their*” programs will be maintained; however, they will need to make sure that their needs are heard during NIFA listening sessions.

Q: Where are faculty who have been funded by these lines?

A: The committee has the funding history for each line in the NIFA budget. These data provide information of who might be affected by these changes, how the program was

administered, any IDC costs, etc. Those who might be affected by these changes will be contacted to address concerns and provide assurance that “*their*” programs will be maintained; however, they will need to make sure that their needs are heard during NIFA listening sessions.

Q: What is the compelling and overarching reason to undertake this budget realignment effort?

A: The need to simplify the budget is compelling and should, in fact, drive the realignment allowing more effective advocacy for our programs.