

SRCC Update for Spring 2024 SAAESD Meeting

- SRCC Meets Monthly-
 - Format-
 - One communicator gives an overview or update about their office. Discusses their structure (do they serve all three LGU missions, do they also do other jobs etc.
 - Best Practices discussions- can be software, media relations etc.
 - NIFA Communications Update
 - Multistate proposal/project update by Chair of S1095
 - Update on collaborative stories.
 - Attendance is usually between 17-20 each month.
 - With the exception of Puerto Rico, most other stations are engaged and regularly send at least one communicator to our meetings.
 - We also have engagement with some 1890 communicators as well.
- SRCC is currently led by a steering committee which also meets monthly and is made up of:
 - 5 Communicators from our institutions
 - Currently from LSU, AR, OK, FL and VA
 - 1890 Communicator- Latasha Ford from FVS
 - NIFA Communicator- Andy Thigpen, NIFA rep for the southern region
 - SAAESD Program Coordinator- Cindy Morley
- SRCC generated 3 large Collaborative stories in 2023 related to:
 - Feral Hogs (March 2023)
 - Plant Breeding (April 2023)
 - Turfgrass (September 2023)
- SRCC had multiple additional collaborative stories between 2-3 institutions.
- SRCC Strategic Roadmap- approved in 2023.
 - 3 Goals were identified for 2023 based on priorities identified by the Directors-
 - Collaborate to amplify the southern region research message and develop metrics to track.
 - Engage with our key audiences — funding agencies and major stakeholders.
 - Train researchers to communicate with the media.
 - Progress on those three goals-
 - A Standard Operating Procedures document was created and approved by the membership in January 2024. This will outline how we collaborate going forward and enable a more streamlined process.
 - Based on a survey conducted by the SAAESD office of the communication stories, we have created an editorial calendar to better plan our story development.
 - Seasoned communications take the “lead” on a story and can mentor newer communicators on how to effectively collaborate on stories across states/institutions.
 - We are currently developing two different methods to track our metrics-

- Andy Thigpen- NIFA Analytics using “siteimprove.com”
- Nick Kordsmeier- Developed a form and database and will use “Meltwater” to pull analytics.
- Both of these are new, and we don’t have any metrics to share yet.
 - The SAAESD office polled communicators in December/January on media training and the SRCC Steering committee is reviewing that data to see what needs to be done regarding media training for our researchers.
- SRCC members assisted SAAESD Implementation team with editing an “Honorifics Best Practices” Quick Guide (Print-out for distribution).
- The year ahead-
 - We have two collaborative stories in the pipeline for early spring.
 - Precision Breeding and Food Sustainability
 - Continue developing analytics tools with the goal to have some data to share at the Fall agInnovation meeting.
 - Use the data gained from the survey to develop media training.

Regional Strategic Research Communications Roadmap

Mission

Strengthen the reputation of southern ag land-grant researchers and institutions by showing the impact of their research innovations.

Vision

- Southern ag researchers are the first choice for competitive grants.
- Southern ag researchers are seen as the foremost experts in their fields.
- Southern ag researchers look to other southern ag researchers for opportunities to collaborate.
- The SRCC's network of communicators collaborates frequently to share the southern region story.
- The SRCC leads the nation in showing how to collaborate.

About Southern Land Grant Research (Intended to be modified as needed)

Southern land-grant institutions, including [Your University/Organization Name(s)], are at the forefront of advancing knowledge and delivering innovative solutions to support sustainable food and fiber production for a growing population.

We are part of a network of 15 southern agricultural research institutions established under the first Morrill Act of 1862. This network collaborates with the 19 historically Black universities established under the second Morrill Act of 1890. Together, we tackle vital challenges affecting agricultural production, resource conservation and human health.

Three Major Goals

1. Collaborate to amplify the southern region research message.
2. Engage with our key audiences — funding agencies and major stakeholders.
3. Train researchers to communicate with the media.

Goal #1 — Collaborate to amplify the southern region research message.

- Adopt a standard operating procedure for collaboration among the southern region and 1890 universities. This document should help guide collaboration for organic stories and make recommendations for proactively partnering on communications products.
- Encourage every member institution of the SRCC to collaborate with at least one other SRCC member on a research story each year.

A collaborative research story should:

- Typically involve two to five southern region institutions.
- Focus on the impacts of southern ag research on the region or nation.

- Include one-on-one collaboration between communications offices.

Research stories can either cover collaborative research (e.g., faculty from two universities work together on a single project) or individual research-related problems (e.g., faculty from two universities separately work on research that relates to a single theme).

Communicators from each institution participating in a collaborative research story should collect relevant metrics that demonstrate the success of the story.

- Encourage engagement among SRCC communicators. Engaged SRCC communicators are encouraged to reach out to institutions that are not participating to encourage attendance at monthly meetings. Reasons for participating in SRCC include:
 - The more we collaborate on stories, those stories can be distributed to more markets, boosting the reputation of your researchers, university and region.
 - Tell a more compelling story by connecting all the pieces of each research project.
 - The more connections we make with each other, the more information we can share amongst ourselves to better tell our universities' stories at local, national and international levels.
 - Professional development — Southern Region communicators have a great deal of experience. Sharing and gaining from that collective experience is extremely valuable.

Measuring Success

- **# of collaborative research stories** — Count the number of collaborative stories through a self-reporting form for SRCC members to share collaborative stories.
- **# of media pickups** — Count the number of media pickups from collaborative stories. This data can be gathered through self-reporting and through the use of media monitoring tools.
- **Total potential reach** — Evaluate the quality of media pickups through easily available reach numbers obtained through media monitoring tools.
- **SRCC Meeting Attendance** — Use meeting attendance numbers to assess the engagement of SRCC member institutions and their representatives.

Goal #2 — Make southern region research impacts highly visible to funding agencies and major stakeholders.

- Develop a shared list of key audiences and relevant contacts. Target audiences defined by the directors include:
 - USDA, NSF and other national funding agencies.

- State and federal legislators
- Large stakeholder groups, like Farm Bureau
- Develop a list of recommendations for communicating with key contacts. These recommendations should address:
 - What message does each audience need to hear?
 - How can we individually contact these audiences to help share the regional message?
 - Who is responsible for directly communicating with these target audiences on behalf of the southern region?
- Develop regional communications products to show the impact of southern region research. Assign responsibilities and set deadlines to improve accountability. Options include:
 - Collaborative news stories (see Goal #1)
 - A southernagresearch.org website
 - A southern ag research newsletter
 - Research news digests for media
 - Materials to help lobbyists
 - Blog posts
 - Podcasts
 - Timely op-eds
 - Media Advisories

Measuring Success

- **# story pickups from APLU-affiliated entities** — Count the number of times that APLU affiliated entities publish SRCC member stories
- **# story pickups from funding agencies** — Count the number of times that major funding agencies publish SRCC member stories

Goal #3 — Make southern region scientists go-to expert sources for the media.

- Share training materials to help prepare researchers for media interviews. For example, Chris Vivian's [ACE webinar on effective media training](#).
- Identify key message areas particularly suited to the southern region.
 - Data-driven science (precision agriculture, AI, digital ag, remote sensing)
 - Health systems (One health, microbiome, vector-borne diseases, precision nutrition, food safety, biosecurity)
 - Water issues (water quality, water quantity, precision irrigation, wetland conservation, coastal ecology)

- Sustainability (climate change, natural resource conservation, regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration, advanced energy systems)
 - Plant and animal improvement (genomics, precision breeding, informatics, specialty crops, row crops, livestock)
 - Consumer issues (urban agriculture and forestry, food security, food supply chain)
 - Emerging and growing enterprises and issues (controlled environment agriculture, rural broadband, plants as sensors, low input agriculture)
- Develop an editorial calendar to aid in pitching southern ag researchers to the media. Aim to provide quarterly recommendations to southern ag research communicators.

Measuring Success

- **Survey SRCC members** — Survey SRCC members about their faculty media training efforts to develop a baseline of how member institutions train their faculty.

Strategic Plan - Measuring Success as a Whole

Perception of the Directors

Develop a simple survey to assess how the SAAESD member directors feel about the SRCC's efforts. This simple survey should be administered by the SAAESD executive director and program coordinator during the in-person SAAESD spring and/or fall meetings. The survey should be administered at least annually to measure perception over time.

Standard Operating Procedures — Regional Communications Collaboration

In line with the SRCC's Regional Strategic Research Communications Plan, all member institutions of the SRCC are encouraged to write at least one collaborative piece per year. These guidelines discuss different types of news releases and how to go about the collaboration.

Organic News Releases

When beginning a research story, always ask the question: ***are there any collaborations with other southern region or 1890 universities?***

- Ask your researcher how the partner institution(s) are involved?
- Contact communicators at partner institutions to give them a heads up and/or request assistance.
- Depending on level of research collaboration:
 - Minor: reference the partner institution(s) with general description of roles.
 - Moderate: consider seeking a quote from the partner institution(s)' researcher through their communications department.
 - Major: consider conducting an interview with the major collaborator to tell a more compelling story.
- Share final news release with partner institution(s) with the understanding that the partner institution(s) may localize the story while still retaining the regional quality of the story. OR coordinate with partner institution(s) to post the news release at the same time.

Issue-based News Releases

- Using the southern region research priorities developed by SAAESD directors, select a research issue that other southern region institutions are engaged in.
- Pitch story idea to SRCC members during monthly meetings and ask who would like to participate. Another option is to reach out directly to the communicators of the institutions you would like to collaborate with on the topic and gauge their interest then present the idea and its collaborators in the monthly meeting.
- The institution that originates the story will write the story, but at least two editors from the selected group should be identified to review the story.
- Set a deadline for completing the story within a reasonable time frame.

News Release Distribution

- Share the final collaborative story with the SAAESD program coordinator to share on SAAESD social media, the SRCC email list, and eventually the southernagresearch.org website.
- If relevant, share directly with funding agencies connected to the story (e.g., NIFA).
- Collaborating institution(s) may post to their websites and on social media. Please use the #SouthernAgResearch hashtag on social media.
- Collaborating institution(s) may distribute to their media lists.
- Collaborating institution(s) should share directly with their research directors.
- Collaborating institution(s) may wish to coordinate on targeted regional media pitches.
- As part of tracking the success of the stories, partner institution(s) and the SAAESD program coordinator should work together to develop a list of media pickups.

Southern Region Communications Consortium Editorial Standard Operating Procedures

Drafted 11-7-23 A. Gore/OSU

APPROVED 1/30/24

Purpose

This document outlines the process for collaborative Southern Region research content creation among the Southern Region Communications Consortium (SRCC), as well as content created and distributed by a single university in collaboration with another Southern Region institution.

Procedure for Regional Collaborative Content

1. Once a story idea has been formulated/obtained, present the following information to SRCC members in the monthly meeting:
 - a. Type of research
 - b. Subject matter related to the research
 - c. Story angle – food security, environmental conservation, economy, etc.
 - d. Which universities are participating in the story?
 - i. Contact the communications professional with each of these universities ahead of time to make sure they are willing to participate.
 - ii. Choose no more than four other universities to participate.
2. Designate the lead author of the story.
 - a. This should be the person who pitched the story unless they feel they do not have enough background in editorial to do so.
 - b. This person then creates a sharable Google Doc (or similar) that contains all pertinent details on the story planning, sources, assignments, reviewers, deadlines, etc. The story will be drafted in this document for efficient review/editing and the ability to track changes.
3. Designate two editors from participating universities to proof the story and designate a steering committee member who will facilitate review with the steering committee and give final review/approval (and provide leadership on distribution strategy).
4. Compile information and/or contacts related to the story from each university communication professional.
5. Conduct interviews and/or gather information.
 - a. The author can conduct all the interviews or they can have the communication person from each university conduct the interviews and pass on notes or written text to them.
6. Have a communications professional within your own department/organization proof the piece.
7. Include relevant hyperlinks that would help the reader learn more about the topic, provide historical context, etc.
8. Select a photo and write a caption to go with the written piece.
9. Send to first SRCC editor for review.
10. Send to second SRCC editor for review.

11. Once the piece is finalized, send the story to one steering committee member to give final approval.
 - a. This member can be designated or volunteer at the time of the story pitch.
 - b. This member can circulate the final proof to the steering committee for any last-minute feedback or changes.
12. Once approved by the steering committee, the author sends the finalized piece to Cindy Morley to post on the SRCC website and send it to the SRCC member distribution list.
 - a. Participating universities can distribute the article to their local distribution lists if they wish to do so. In addition to the university's website, the story should be linked to the SAAESD news website.
 - b. All SRCC members should contribute to the compilation of the SRCC distribution list.
 - i. National distribution list
 - ii. Regional distribution list
 - iii. Local distribution list

Style Guidelines for Group Content

- Written in AP style and aligned with Associated Press guidelines.
- Stories are to be no more than 1000-1200 words.
- No more than half a page of content per university (no more than five universities to a story).
- Use the SRCC identity statement as a boilerplate at the bottom of the story before the -END- mark.
- Use either the SAAESD letterhead at the top of the story or the SAAESD logo at the bottom with the identity statement.
- If the story is posted on social media, tag SRCC -- #SouthernAgResearch – as well as the participating institutions.

Process for Localized Collaborative Content

When a communications professional from a Southern Region institution learns of a joint research effort between their university and another Southern Region university, they should:

- Contact the communications professional from the fellow university to see if they are aware of the project.
- Offer to collaborate on the piece.
- Make the SRCC steering committee aware of the collaboration via email. The chair of the steering committee can then add it to the agenda for the next steering committee or larger group meeting.
- Once the steering committee approves the topic and angle, write the story.
- Obtain a photo and write a caption for the story.
- Send the story to the communications professional with the collaborating university for review.
- Send through your department/institution's editorial review process and follow the steps outlined above for final approval from the steering committee.

- Provide the story to the contributing institution for them to localize and distribute.
- Provide the story to Cindy Morley to include on the SAAESD news website.

Guidelines for Localized Content

- Write in AP style and align with Associated Press guidelines.
- Stories should not be more than 850-1000 words.
- Use the fellow institution's identity statement at the bottom of the story following your own institution's statement before the -END- mark.
- If the story is posted on social media, tag SRCC -- #SouthernAgResearch – and the fellow institution.

VIDEOS and DIGITAL CONTENT

- Videos, social media content, web content, infographics, etc., created on behalf of the SRCC should follow a similar standard operating process. Designate a lead person, review process, approvals, distribution strategy, etc.

GOALS AND FOLLOW-UP

- Establish goals and tactics when starting the project.
- Include distribution details.
- Once the piece is distributed, provide analytics on readership, reach, and advertisement value equivalent (AVE) at the appropriate time. Provide that information to the steering committee and the experiment station director at your institution.
- This is to help ensure communications/marketing initiatives align with the expectations of Southern Region directors

OTHER (work in progress)

- Sample boiler plate to use at end of SRCC press releases:
[Clemson University, North Carolina State University, Oklahoma State University, University of Tennessee and University of Georgia (insert your institution)] are part of a system of 15 agricultural research centers at land-grant universities in the southern U.S. where scientists collaborate to conduct research and outreach focused on conserving the region's natural resources and sustainably feeding a growing global population.
- Photo captions should include the photographer's name and institution. If possible, use the scientists involved in the research or "real people" who benefit from the research outcomes.
- Editorial: Use quotes from "real people" impacted by the research to make the story more relatable to wider audiences.

State	City	University	Communication Liason	Email	Additional Communicators	Email	Cindy's Notes
Alabama	Auburn	Auburn University	Josh Woods	jlw0067@auburn.edu	Kristen Bowman Paul Hollis, Adam Cletzer	kmo0005@auburn.edu hollipl@auburn.edu dac0098@auburn.edu	Adam Cletzer is new Ag Research Communicator 7/1/23
Arkansas	Fayetteville	University of Arkansas	Nick Kordsmeier	nkordsme@uark.edu	John Lovett Mary Hightower	jlovett@uada.edu mhightower@uada.edu	Nick is on SRCC Steering Committee
Florida	Gainesville	University of Florida	Chris Vivian	cvivian@ufl.edu	Ruth Borger, Hope Miller, Kirsten Rabin	rborger@ufl.edu miller.hmarie@ufl.edu kromaguera@ufl.edu	Hope Miller is communicator for UF/IFAS Research Dean Office
Georgia	Athens	University of Georgia	Cassie Ann Kiggen	cakiggen@uga.edu			
Kentucky	Lexington	University of Kentucky	Derrick Meads	djmead3@email.uky.edu	Chris Carney	christopher.carney@uky.edu	New 2023
Louisiana	Baton Rouge	Louisiana State University	Tobie Blanchard	TBlanchard@agcenter.lsu.edu	Frances (Frankie) Gould, Annabelle Lang	Fgould@agcenter.lsu.edu alang@agcenter.lsu.edu	Frankie is Chair of SRCC Steering Committee
Mississippi	Mississippi State	Mississippi State University	Karen Brasher	karen.brasher@msstate.edu			
North Carolina	Raleigh	North Carolina State University	Sam Jones	sjones28@ncsu.edu			Sam is the Research Communicator
Oklahoma	Stillwater	Oklahoma State University	Lyndall Stout	Lyndall.stout@okstate.edu	Alisa Boswell-Gore	alisa.gore@okstate.edu	Lyndall Stout is on SRCC Steering Committee. Alisa is a dedicated "Research" communicator
Puerto Rico	Mayaguez	University of Puerto Rico- Mayaguez	Yolanda Toro Adorno	yolanda.toro2@upr.edu			
South Carolina	Clemson	Clemson Univeristy	Tricia Petty	triciap@clemson.edu	Denise Attaway, Jonathan Veit	avaa@clemson.edu veit@clemson.edu	
Tennessee	Knoxville	The University of Tennessee	Patty McDaniels	pmcdaniels@tennessee.edu	Lisa Stearns (Vice Chancellor). Says to list Patty as Primary.	lstearns@tennessee.edu	
Texas	College Station	Texas A&M	Gabe Saldana	Gabe.Saldana@ag.tamu.edu	Holly Shive, Shelby Dittman	holly.shive@ag.tamu.edu shelby.dittman@ag.tamu.edu	
Virginia	Blacksburg	Virginia Tech	Max Esterhuizen	scuffv12@vt.edu	Lori Greiner	lgreiner@vt.edu	Max is on the Steering Committee 2024
Virgin Islands	St. Croix	University of Virgin Islands	Marthious Clavier	mclavie@uvi.edu			
Additional Communicator contacts:							
Region	State	Name	LGU	Title	Phone	Email	Notes
1890s	Georgia	Latasha Ford	Fort Valley State University	Research Communications Specialist	478-825-4307	fordl@fvsu.edu	1980 Rep to SRCC Steering Committee
1890s	Virginia	Michelle Olgers	Virginia State University	Director of Marketing and Communications	804-524-6964	molgers@vsu.edu	Met at 2022 SAAS
NERA	Connecticut	Stacy Stearns	University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension	Agricultural Communications Specialist	860-486-9228	stacey.stearns@uconn.edu	Met at 2022 SAAS, wants to be part of SRCC mailing list
NCRA	Iowa	Shuyang Qu	Iowa State University	Assistant Professor- Ag Comm.	515-294-8343	squ@iastate.edu	Ag Com Faculty met at 2022 SAAS. Wants to be added to our Consortium Mailing list
South USDA	Arkansas	Jeff Miller	University of Arkansas	Professor- Ag Com and Ag Ed		jdmliller@uark.edu	Ag Com Faculty met at the 2022 SAAS. Interested in a Multistate Project.
		Andy Thigpen				Phillip.Thigpen@usda.gov	NIFA Rep on the SRCC Steering Committee
South	Texas	Blair Fannin	Texas A&M AgriLife Extension	Communication Specialist		b-fannin@tamu.edu	Met at 2022 SAAS. Part of the Impact Writing Team.
		Sara Delheimer		MRF Impact Writer		Sara.Delheimer@colostate.edu	
South	Florida	Jamie Burrow	IFAS Extension			jd Yates@ufl.edu	Met at 2023 ACE
South	Florida	Ricky Telg	IFAS Faculty	Professor		rwtelg@ufl.edu	Met at 2023 ACE
South	North Carolina	Katie Sanders	NC State University	Assistant Professor- Food systems Communication		catherine_sanders@ncsu.edu	Met at 2023 ACE