

LGU2U – Session I Partnerships Across LGUs and NIFA (June 16, 2021)

Building relationships across two unique partners such as NIFA and LGUs can be enhanced by actively engaging in small group discussions following various presentations. This ‘wisdom in the room’ captures the essence of the initial dialogue through the discussions across several key topical frames. Similar responses and descriptions have been grouped and slightly edited for clarity. These present reflections (and revisiting over time) provide one mechanism to rebuild and improve the partnership with unique opportunities to jointly grow, continuously improve our processes and achieve shared success.

BREAKOUT #1:

What are the Key Facets of a Partnership?

- Listening with the intent to understand.
- Shared language.
- Regular, frequent, open, two-way communication.
- Timely feedback, responsiveness and reliability.
- Focus on relationship-building.
- Trust.
- Respect.
- Transparency.
- Approachability and openness.
- Clear expectations.
- Understanding one-another’s role(s).
- Acceptance of our differences.
- Desire to network, collaborate.
- Empathy.
- Equity.
- Understanding there are boundaries for collaboration/partnerships.
- Working toward a common goal, similar interests, joint work products/efforts.
- Breaking down “mine versus yours” mindset.
- Willingness to be entrepreneurial.
- Partners do not have to own resources in order to use, leverage or take advantage of them.
- Identifying mutual benefit.
- Accountability, shared need for evaluation and understanding impacts.
- Understanding for how to solve disagreements, and how to change course.
- Connections, continual learning about the people involved, and friendship beyond partnerships.

Who are the Stakeholders?

- Taxpayers.
- General public.
- Farmers and ranchers.
- Urban residents.
- Business owners.
- Schools/students.
- Anyone interested in our programs.
- 1890s and 1994 – specific communities, often who are not reached.
- Congress (federal).
- Faculty members and program manager who implement the efforts supported by USDA funding.
- Private Sector interest/stakeholders/constituencies.
- Foundations.
- Finance offices at universities (accounting departments/divisions).
- Non-LGUs (access by other types of institutions and a level playing field required by NIFA).
- The recipients of the research, education and outreach.
- State legislatures.
- County and locally elected officials.
- Other units with NIFA, such as Programs and Policy Oversight.
- Structures are changing at NIFA and there is a need for LGUs to understand those changes.

BREAKOUT #2:

How does Organizational Structure Influence Programs?

- Programs depend upon staff and resources, so structure and understanding that structure is very important.
- To manage a grant it is helpful to understand who we interact with, why we interact with certain positions, and how LGUs have different structures among them.
- Where one sits in the organizational structure influences your own sense of priorities. Also, by being a group it means as a group you have influence.
- Sometimes with large structures it means there are many people involved (e.g., too many cooks in the kitchen) with their own agendas.
- For some with administrative roles, the way they must do their job can be a hindrance to getting things done (research and programs implemented).
- Structure and size of the institution may present challenges with how quickly an LGU can make decision and even how fast it can respond.
- Local communities and county organizations/councils/committees/boards have common challenges among them, but they address those challenges individually.

How does LGU Type (1862, 1890 and 1994) Influence Decision-making?

- Each may have different priorities related to their primary audiences.
- Each have vastly different resources (and we tend to focus on creating partnership with others in order to have resources). Faculty and research facilities vary greatly among different LGUs.
- Each may have strategic plans, their own needs assessments, and local stakeholders.
- LGUs may have direct relationships between University Presidents and Governors.
- For smaller institutions, there is difference between forced versus voluntary collaboration.
- Larger institutions, such as the 1862s, may be more competitive for research funding. 1890s and 1994 have strength in their primary focus on instruction/classroom activities.

What Kinds of Partnerships are Possible with LGUs?

- Advocacy. (Additional comment: A 424 Grant Application to NIFA requires applicant to identify if they are participating in lobbying.)
- Work on congressional language and authorizations/appropriations.
- Multi-state efforts and responses.

OTHER COMMENTS:

- NERAOC: what is its role, how can it be more about dialog?
- NIFA Staff were grouped based on their financial background, but not necessarily with the knowledge and understanding of partnerships (current and future opportunities).
- NIFA Staff are just trying to get the work done.
- Could there be a follow up discussion or part of the capstone experience that address equity issues?