

Minutes of the Middle Managers Committee Meeting

Southern Region Program Leadership Network

February 11, 2021

<https://zoom.us/j/8260348661>

DRAFT

Meeting called to order by Chair Mike Martin at 10:01.

In attendance based on sign-in:

Mike Martin (chair), Georgia

Jenny Cocanougher (vice-chair), Kentucky

Carolyn Williams, Prairie View, Texas (1890's administrative advisor)

Thomas Dobbins, Clemson (1862's administrative advisor)

Sharon Reynolds, Arkansas

Blake Lanford, Clemson

Deon Legette, Clemson

Conchita Newman, Florida A&M

Pete Vergot, Florida

Anita Neal, Florida

Tom Obreza, Florida

Bobby Smith, Georgia

Jeff Young, Kentucky

Willy Howard, Kentucky

Susan Kelly, North Carolina

Keith Walters, North Carolina

Nancy Johnson, Oklahoma

Cindy Conner, Oklahoma

Jim Steward, Tennessee

Jerry Don Lamb, Tennessee

Jeff Ripley, Texas

Lonnie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension, VT;

Janet Spencer, Virginia

Eric Simonne (secretary), Florida

Mike welcomed all members and attendees.

Review of Minutes from the October 8, 2020 meeting – No changes or comments from attendance.

Administrative Advisor updates:

Dr. Carolyn Williams, Prairie View A&M University from 1890 LGUs:

- Hopefully 2021 will be better than 2020. Let's work together!
- 1890's LGU are working on the system-wide conference for an in-person meeting the week of July 25, 2021 at the Renaissance Sea World hotel in Orlando, FL. Registration information TBA.
- Continue support of NIFA budget request -- "one ask"

Dr. Tom Dobbins, Clemson University from 1862 LGUs:

- MM are doing a great job in these difficult times
- Laura Perry Johnson is the chair of ASRED this year
- Tough budget decisions will have to be made at the federal level. Showing impact always helps!
- Unifying methods of offering Private Applicators License - Dicamba
- ASRED is discussing how to respond to 4-H programs being devastated without face-to-face activities.
- Extension increasingly involved in rural health
- Despite politicization of some measures and clients push-back, Universities and Directors are committed to not back down from university policies and protocols that follow CDC guidelines.
- Blake reminded us that Extension is committed to remain science based
- We do not want extension to be involved in super-spreader events

Mike thanked Carolyn and Tom for their support as it always helps with morale in difficult times.

Updates and overview of 2020-21 Plan of Work items:

- **Professional Development Webinars- Jenny Cocanougher:** MM webinar on Monday March 22 on statewide community assessment process (see previously shared document) presented by Alison Davis (Community and Economic Development Specialist at UK). Please pre-register at https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1zGcfV0X8MymRGm.
- **Biennial Conference- David Perrin:** As a reminder, our bi-annual MM 2021 conference is cancelled.
Since next quarterly call falls during the cancelled-conference dates, Mike asked if we could extend our normal time of 10:00-noon on April 8 to a mini-conference so the group can work on some of plan of work items? The group agreed and is making plans for a 9:00 to noon zoom meeting on April 8.
- **Measurement tools for virtual work- Sheldon Hammond.** This topic will be covered at the April 8 meeting.
- **Catalog with resources for virtual learning- Eric Simonne.** Eric (Curt Lacy and Boyd Owens) presented a table showing 7 platforms currently used by LGUs and encouraged MMs to share additional ones they use. Several agents have used Adobe Spark to edit videos and seem to find it very user friendly. We plan to post this document as a resource on the MM site (<http://srpln.msstate.edu/pln/mm.html>).
Blake will start a TEAMS page for the MM group to work on shared documents.
- **Virtual Agent Job Description- Blake Lanford.** This topic will be covered on April 8 meeting.
- **Roundtable discussion for Performance Evals- Andrea Scarrow.** This topic will be covered at the April 8 meeting.
- **NUEL Update- Tawnya Morris** – Jim shared that the Atlantic City conference is now virtual (May 17 to 20th). The Southern Region NUEL Quarterly Caucus meets on Friday May 21 at 10 am via ZOOM.

- **Work/life balance resources for Telecommuting- Cindy Conner.** In OK, they post updates and tips to help agents; we see each other more than usually, we feel we are more connected than before! Got an institutional extra vacation day to thank personnel. This helped morale.

Mike thanked all those contributing to these ambitious projects.

Update from PLC representatives Gerald Jones and Jim Stewart – Jim mentioned that the committee met in November and decided to offer the 2021 PLN conference virtual (Aug 23-26). To accommodate contracts, the plan is to meet in-person in Orlando, FL in 2023, and Fort Worth, TX in 2022. Organizers are using the feedback from the first virtual conference (2020) to plan the second one (2021)

Ideas for quarterly professional development – Mike asked for ideas and input; none propose at this time.

State Updates:

Common themes:

With restrictions on travel, un-spent funds are used in several states to catch up and invest in IT. This is a great way to support the efforts of agents and educators. All MM doing appraisals.

Transportation of youth is an across-the-board challenge; options are not allowed, one child per seat, 50% vehicle capacity, parent drop-off, or open windows for air flow.

Florida – recently created associate DED positions; inclusion, diversity, equity and access (IDEA) committees and plans developed at the unit level; vaccine database tracking the efforts of different county offices through Microsoft forms; still have portal to approve travel and meetings greater than 10 people; 4 candidates have been identified for interview in the search for a new Extension Dean.

Arkansas – 4-H agents are actively working on keeping youth and parents engaged; need administrative approval for meetings above 10 people; all university employees are in the process on getting vaccinated; strong state budget; Beth Phelps is retiring. Bob Scott is new Director as Dr. Cartwright retired last summer.

Kentucky – Completed admin transition form DEDs; now 24 extension areas with 4 to 6 counties in each and area District Extension directors with only 12 positions funded. This is to make the MM positions more county focused rather than region or district focused; filling positions that are 100% county; working with state on shared positions based on budget.

Oklahoma – Doing a pilot program for extension county councils in 20 counties; new mentor program and new on-boarding program for new employees; following CDC protocols like everyone else; no freeze on hiring; on a case-by-case basis depending on funding situation for filling positions; university president retiring; director moving and hiring a new program evaluation specialist.

Virginia – people 3 days in the office each week; slow vaccination process; with end of freeze, re-starting to hire with provost permission; residential 4-H camps are a hot topic with a lot of uncertainty; hoping to lift the restrictions of the governor so camps can proceed in 2021.

North Carolina – county offices helping with vaccination; expanded mentoring program to administrative assistants; hiring with pre-approval; budget concerns with state camps as revenue was not generated last year due to closure; seeking additional state dollars; working on state-wide annual extension report; doing CED and DED appraisals.

South Carolina – similar to VA; all programs are virtual unless “essential” and authorized; flat budget; starting to thaw the freeze on hiring; re-organized extension administration and separated the functions of (1) county operations administration and (2) HR; embarking on visioning process to reflect on the covid experience and lessons; does not plan to return to the “old” normal – extension needs to change and adapt; Extension reopening is based on covid local situations.

Texas – plan to release in March a new strategic plan looking at how we do what we do rather than changing what we do; 1 new district administrator - Lorry Coops and one vacancy; under hiring freeze; budget cuts balanced by reduction in travel expenditures; legislature started 2 weeks ago with hopes to get the 5% reduction back and re-start hiring; outlook currently positive as oil and gas revenues are rebounding and sales tax collections are high; TX is an open state; schools are open; 4-H is meeting; limited face-to-face programs – require approval; major youth livestock shows are offered in-person this year; about to hire a new employee development specialist to oversee on-boarding process.

Tennessee – open to face-to-face meetings when CDC guidelines can be followed; no large-scale regional events (limit to 50); still deciding what to do with 4-H residential camps; did a hog show virtually that was pretty successful; schools are opening up on a local basis; new Dean Ashley Stokes starts Feb. 22 coming from Colorado; Janet Fox formerly at LSU is the new FCS Dean since Feb. 1.; positive budget outlook as sales tax revenue are strong; hiring not frozen, on permission; plans for merit raises.

Georgia – Nick Place started as dean of the UGA college of agriculture and life sciences on Jan. 1; his new chief communication officer is to start soon; 11% budget cut this year; 60% of the funds cut have been restored for this year; they will help the 4-H camps; making plans for summer camp with some adjustments; planning to have groups of 8 youths max that do things together; need critical hire proposal to hire faculty; staff is quicker; making re-hiring adjustment following the freeze and vacancies; involved in the vaccination education process – especially with migrant workers and through SNAP-Ed; state meetings are virtual; opened county programs for up to 25 people; need approval for up to 50 attendees; lots of schools are open.

Other Business - None

This meeting was adjourned at 11:59.

The next quarterly call is on Thursday April 8, 2021 will be a mini-conference - plan for the whole morning.

Respectfully taken and submitted by Secretary Eric Simonne.