

Summary of The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine document:

ENHANCING COORDINATION BETWEEN LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES – Preliminary Observations

For discussion at Southern Administrative Heads meeting, May 17, 2022, Texas A&M University. Complete document may be seen at <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/land-grant-collaboration/form/land-grant-use-preliminary-observations.pdf>

Introduction

Acting on a Congressional directive, USDA/NIFA asked the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to establish a Blue Ribbon Panel to consider how to maximize coordination among universities and colleges of the land-grant system to improve and sustain food security in the U.S. and beyond and suggest ways to increase and communicate their collective impacts.

This document contains the Panel's preliminary observations about the nature of collaborative activity across the land grant system and the potential to enhance its impacts.

Section 1: Collaboration in the Land-Grant System

Preliminary Observation #1: There is a significant amount of active and successful inter-institutional collaboration and cooperation taking place in the land-grant system today.

Preliminary Observation #2. Currently, inter-institutional collaborations do not routinely engage faculty from the full range of institutions across the land-grant system.

Section 2: The Rationale for Collaboration

Preliminary Observation #3: The nature of key questions for food and agricultural science are evolving, and the scientific approaches to address them are increasingly at the convergence of multiple disciplines, use information collected dynamically across multiple scales or geographies, and require advanced data science capability.

Preliminary Observation #5: Inter-institutional collaboration can allow human, fiscal, and physical resources to go further and have a broader impact.

Section 3: Barriers to Collaboration and Ideas for Overcoming Them

Preliminary observation #6: Institutions use different approaches for approving funds to support faculty involvement in collaborations that may create varying expectations on the nature of collaborations and the role of participants.

Preliminary observation #7: Historical inequities have handicapped the ability of many 1890 and 1994 institutions to be full partners in collaborations with the 1862s.

Preliminary observation #8: Faculty members may already be fully committed to other grants and teaching assignments, leaving insufficient or inadequate time and resources to support new collaborative projects.

Preliminary observation #9: Land-grant system institutions have traditions emphasizing and rewarding competitive, rather than collaborative, research projects.

Preliminary observation #10: A lack of information about the distribution of expertise at institutions across the land-grant system or of other available assets may hinder the ability to identify suitable partners for collaboration.

Preliminary Observation #11: The time available for planning collaborations properly is sometimes inadequate.

Preliminary observation #12: Leading collaborations requires team building, emotional intelligence, and project-management capabilities, for which many faculty are unprepared and untrained while administrative supports may not be available to assist.

Preliminary observation #13: Institutions have different administrative procedures and policies for proposals, agreements, intellectual property, reporting, and mechanisms for handling funds that may create time lags, paperwork burdens, and opportunity costs that discourage collaboration.

Section 4: Amplifying and Communicating the Impacts and Outcomes of Collaboration

Preliminary observation #14: The size and complexity of a collaboration should be expected to change over time and take on new goals and partners.

Preliminary observation #15: Some key issues and questions in agriculture may require large, multi-disciplinary collaborations and sustained research over time in multiple locations.

Preliminary observation #16: Collaborations lead to a diversity of outcomes, including some for which impacts are not easily recognizable or require more time to achieve.

Preliminary observation # 17: Stakeholders, including producers, policymakers, and the public, are more likely to recognize the impacts and benefits of collaborative activities among land-grant institutions if communication strategies are tailored to them.