

## Maize Genetics Cooperation Board of Directors + Maize Genetics Advocacy Committee

March 1, 2024 in person at Maize Meeting (Raleigh, NC) and on Zoom

### Meeting Minutes

#### Members present:

Marna Yandea-Nelson (Chair of BoD; incoming Chair of MGAC)  
Wojtek Pawlowski (Incoming Chair, BoD)  
Erin Sparks (Treasurer, BoD)  
Andrea Eveland (At Large Member of BoD)  
Laurie Smith (Secretary, BoD)  
Jay Hollick (Outgoing Chair, BoD)  
Mike Muszynski (Communications Director, BoD)  
Jeff Ross-Ibarra (At Large Member, BoD)  
Matt Hufford (Incoming Chair, BoD)  
John Fowler (At Large Member, BoD)  
Thelma Madzima (At Large Member, BoD)  
Anne Sylvester (At Large Member, MGAC)  
Mark Lubkowitz (MGAC Chair)

#### Guests:

Bathabile Mthombeni (conference ombuds)  
Kan Wang (Professor, Iowa State University)  
Cliff Weill (NSF)  
Jack Okamuro (USDA)  
Karen Cone (NSF)  
Diane Okamuro (NSF)

#### Meeting began 12:30pm ET

- 1) Update from USDA Program Officer Jack Okamuro
  - a. ARS released a 10 year strategic plan last year to address germplasm stocks. There are >20K accessions in the collection and many are >30 years old. Approximately 25% are not available currently because of viability or need to be rejuvenated. The strategic plan lays out a process to build back the collection.
  - b. National ARS Plant Health Leader is retiring in April. This position will be open and members of this community can apply.
  - c. Thank you to MaizeGDB and the community at large for sharing data and germplasm resources.
- 2) Update from NSF Program Officers
  - a. There is a real attempt to think across agencies and to the extent that we can facilitate this, we should.
  - b. Priority areas for federal funding are, broadly: 1) Climate change, 2) food and agricultural security, 3) supply chain security, 4) human health, and 5) technology advancement (e.g. data science, AI). Note: NSF has a new initiative on safe and secure AI – maize investigators should think and address how the types of data they are generating and using can be used for AI.

- c. Bioeconomy (biotech, biomanufacturing, ag) are a focus of cross agency funding as well as use inspired work. There is a recognition that basic research and translational work are both important and there is an effort to knit these together.
- d. PGRP awards in the past required that co-PIs from different institutions function as sub-awardees. Moving forward, co-PIs can be collaborators in that each institution puts in their own proposal and receives their own award (i.e. not subawards). Linked submissions from different institutions are reviewed as one proposal. This helps investigators in EpSCOR states, at R2 and PUI institutions, new investigators, etc.
- e. TIP directorate was under applied to by plant biologists so there are opportunities for this community in this space. Regional Innovation Engines are large partnership grants and ten were awarded this year but only two for plant science (ND and WY/CO). Idea: the MGAC can schedule a meeting with a TIP PO to discuss how to increase engagement.
- f. NSF has funded the MGM through RCNs in the past but there are other opportunities for us as well. Our strong academic-industry relationships are a strength and selling point for us to make the argument that this meeting helps to grow the bioeconomy. Conference funding from NSF is getting more and more competitive. Our proposals for conference funding should consider current NSF priorities e.g. the bioeconomy, fostering collaborations with industry and the pipeline from academic labs to industry.

### 3) Conference ombuds discussion

- a. We have Roots and Shoots funded ombuds this year and moving we will have to find funds to cover this expense if we want to do it again (but note: NSF said they would not fund this through the conference grant mechanism)
- b. Important to have an external professional (as opposed to a volunteer from the community) serve in this role to address power asymmetry and because they have the training to address an incident.
- c. An ombuds can also help us examine our standards and cultural norms to create a more welcoming and inclusive conference (something recommended by the Inclusive Conference Workgroup of the Roots and Shoots initiative)
- d. Discussion on having an ombuds for several years and then determine if this step positively affects the experience of attendees.
- e. Discussion about the cost, which is between \$10-50K – balancing that against the usual priorities of keeping conference costs down and providing financial support to student participants. We are cautioned against adopting a “scarcity mindset”, and bear in mind that funds are generally found for high priority purposes

### 4) MGAC structure has changed to create largely separate groups BoD and MGAC members, allowing each group to focus on its mandate (these are different for the two bodies)

**Meeting adjourned 2pm ET**