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Commissioner

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Ag Development & Resource Conservation



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Connecticut Department of Agriculture Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group Access to Education and Training
Regular Meeting Agenda
Wednesday, December 15, 2021
11:00AM-12:30PM
Held Virtually via WebEx Platform

Members Present: Kimberly Acosta, Xochitl Ahtziri, Shuresh Ghimire, Azeem Zakir Kareem, Ana Legrand, Robert Peck

Members Absent: James Dombroski, Erica Fearn, Hector Gerardo, Lauren Little, Tamika McPhail, Luis Vega

DoAg Staff: Cyrena Thibodeau, Alissa Dragan

Public Present: None

1. **Welcome and Call to Order-** Meeting was called to order by Cyrena Thibodeau at 11:11 AM.
2. **Old Business-** Cyrena let the group know that she had added notes to the draft topics Google document. She reminded members to make and changes to the draft topics and add to the organization list. Azeem led the group through a review of the areas of focus for recommendations so far. Cyrena asked group members to add anything additional or that has not yet been included to the draft topics document as Azeem reviewed it.
3. **New Business-** Cyrena discussed how other groups are tying up their work for the end of the year and planning for 2022. Groups are summarizing their conversations and identifying recommendations that they have made so far. The other groups are taking a twofold approach to making recommendations: they are recommending improvements to existing DoAG programs and proposing one or two additional programs that could be adopted by the agency. The recommendations regarding existing DoAG programs would be more immediately actionable than those proposing new programs. Ana asked if the recommendations should be grouped by timeframes – short vs long-term goals. The suggested final recommendation format does include a timeline. Cyrena will reshare the document with the group.

Ana asked if the Department has ever offered or plans to offer educational scholarships. That is not something that has been done and it might be difficult for the Department to offer scholarships. Cyrena was unsure what the mechanism to accomplish that would be and it would likely have to go through the legislative process.

Shuresh brought up a discussion from an earlier meeting regarding the accuracy of the state's data on BIPOC farmers. The data likely only includes "traditional" farmers and might not capture all farming activities, like urban agriculture and other alternative settings. Updating that data should be a recommendation. It was agreed it would be important to have complete data.

Azeem brought up the proposed educational hubs and suggested the group start with one location first as proof of concept and expand from there. Kimberly presented the alternative of targeting cities for small pilot hubs, which would expand community involvement. Important factors to consider would

be accessibility (public transportation available, centrally located, etc.), an existing community group that could potentially house it, or an agricultural, or educational facility to host a pilot hub and/or provide space and resources for future classes and workshops. The space needs resources for meetings and should be easily accessible, like Bridgeport.

What is already existing in various locations? A discussion of potential existing locations followed. Green Village Initiative's and Gather New Haven's programs and facilities were discussed also mentioned were the Kenny Park Sustainability Project, Grow Hartford, and Gather New Haven. Choosing an existing community organization keeps the people in the community from having to leave to access resources and would bring educators and resources into the communities. This would also promote local knowledge above institutional knowledge. Ana asked about the possibility of using unused facilities in Agricultural High schools, off season/off hours. Cyrena mentioned that Solid Ground uses Ag science schools to host workshops.

A virtual hub was discussed. It could include a directory of CT BIPOC farmers, peer to peer and farmer to farmer connections could be made. Information could be presented in multiple languages and videos allowing for increased access. This option eliminates transportation issues. Language & mental health resources should be part of this effort. Who would create/host it? Collective/joint management of the hub is the most likely solution. Could the CT chapter of the New Farmer's Alliance serve as the host organization? They are already a great resource, are very collaborative, and might be the appropriate place to host the virtual hub. Providing ESL resources and/or basic English terminology for non-English speakers and other language learning resources for English speakers should be included in the hub. Ana pointed out that while providing materials in multiple languages is important, learning English is also an important skill for growers to be successful. Azeem mentioned he is currently in the process of creating a virtual hub for his organization (Samad Gardens Initiative). Azeem shared the different aspects of this project with the group.

Ana asked if "Educational Access" need to be divided into general farming education and college level curriculum. The group should think about that as they draft the recommendations. Increasing access to higher education for non-traditional students is a more difficult process than providing non-degree courses/workshops. Shuresh mentioned that certificate programs (CT master gardener) are a good alternative to higher education as they do not require prerequisites. The UCONN College of Agriculture administrators are willing to join a meeting to discuss the group's ideas regarding access to higher level education.

Cyrena reminded the group that we can add items to the list & asked if anyone had any new points to add now. If not add to the doc as they come.

Kimberly proposed a short-term recommendation around Language equity. The group could recommend that DoAG create a service for translation or provide funding for translation. The recommendation should include that all DoAG materials (grant applications, newsletters, licenses, etc.) be made available in multiple languages.

Cyrena asked to group to include the connection to DoAG as part of each recommendation. What is DoAG's role as the supporting agency to recommendations? Azeem asked for examples so that the group can base recommendations off of those. Cyrena will share an example with the group.

Ana asked how the group will come to a consensus for the final recommendations. What process should we follow to ensure each member supports the recommendations. Azeem said that those not present should be referencing the Google Documents and we can remind them to review them as changes are made to provide any input. Members can provide comments in the document, or use the suggesting mode if they have changes, other ideas, or do not agree with an item. The group can also add additional meetings if necessary to discuss items as issues arise. Kimberly suggested that A

poll service could also be used to survey members regarding the recommendations.

The next core working group meeting for facilitators is coming up. All invited to attend to discuss where groups are now and what the next steps are.

4. **Public Comment-** No public comments
5. **Next Steps-** Cyrena will make some changes to the draft topics document and send out a year-end summary with the next steps for each group and the main working group before the January 25th meeting. The group will begin drafting recommendations using the template. Members should continue to update the Organization contacts list and draft topics.
6. **Adjourn-** Meeting was adjourned at 12:13 PM by Cyrena Thibodeau

Respectfully submitted by Alissa Dragan, Environmental Analyst III, November 22, 2021