



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Bureau of Agricultural 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, February 16, 2022

11:00AM-12:30PM

Held Virtually via WebEx Platform

Members Present: Kimberly Acosta, Xochitl Ahtziri, Erica Fearn, Hector Gerardo, Shuresh Ghimire, Azeem Zakir Kareem, Ana Legrand, Lauren Little, Tamika McPhail, Robert Peck

Members Absent: James Dombroski, 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 11:05 AM.
2. **Old Business-** Cyrena asked Lauren and Azeem to provide an update on the Main Working Group meeting held on January 25th. Azeem provided a synopsis and overview. There is a lot of overlap between the groups that all ties together and relates to the work of the Access to Education group, specifically the idea of creating an information hub. There was a brief discussion of the Google document and the timeline for proposing policies and recommendations. Any policy issues the group would like to be addressed in 2023 need to be finalized by spring of 2022 to meet legislative deadlines.
3. **New Business-** It was suggested that this meeting focus on crafting language for the recommendations. A brief discussion of the format of the recommendations followed. Lauren and Blessings discussed the overlap between the workgroups and whether this group should be working with the others and incorporate some of their items into the recommendations of this group. It was agreed that as long as doing so would not create any confusion the overlapping items should be incorporated.

The group discussed whether any of the recommendations should be focused on as potential policy for the 2023 legislative round. Cyrena indicated that the recommendations, as currently drafted, could be implemented by DoAG without legislative changes.

The group began to go through the recommendations. Lauren suggested that the group identify 3 to 5 barriers to access, such as no internet access, lack of community, etc. Can the group create alternate ways to access the information the hub will house? A discussion about assessing where people go for information, what media outlets/platforms and how to reach those without internet access followed. Local churches and community groups were suggested as a tool for outreach. Creating language equity was included in the discussion.

Hector noted that the Access to Education Group is essentially the intersection of the work of the other groups and that information on accessing land, capital and financial



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planning, resources, infrastructure, and business planning, market access and diversification could all be housed and disseminated on the information hub. The group discussed various forms of community and media outreach once the hub has been created.

Lauren proposed dividing recommendations into short-, medium-, and longer-term goals. Which was followed by a discussion of what these would be in terms of the information hub and what responsibilities would fall on DoAG so there is accountability, and the work does not overwhelm members of the community involved. The group discussed where the hub would be housed, and while there are a number of options, the CT New Farmer's Alliance makes the most sense as long as they can support the effort. These companies exist in the state and have the resources to reach a wide audience. Social media is a great tool, but algorithms can make outreach difficult. Enlisting a BIPOC firm to assist with strategic outreach once the hub is created would be ideal.

The group discussed incorporating language and accessibility equity into the hub and all of the associated outreach materials. Whether DoAG has staff to support outreach and accessibility efforts connecting with communities and existing user groups. The group discussed the possibility of the Agency funding positions, either permanent or contract, for BIPOC employees to support the creation and maintenance of the hub and associated outreach efforts. Such positions would move the agency toward institutionalizing equity.

Determining who and where the target audience is will enable the dissemination of the information contained in the hub. The group discussed creating a survey toward this end. In addition to having an online survey, there is a need for person to person survey outreach that would directly reach those without internet access or those with language and other accessibility barriers. Identifying the purpose of the survey, i.e. the specific information the group wishes to learn from the community, is necessary.

A discussion about increasing meeting frequency to draft the recommendations followed.

4. **Public Comment-** No public comments

Next Steps- Rather than increasing meeting frequency, it was decided that members will continue to add to the working Google document and potentially use an app, like Slack, to keep the momentum and communication going between meetings. It was also decided that the next meeting will be a working meeting to continue the discussion of the viability of the information hub and how to best accomplish its creation, reorganize the recommendations and suggestions, and identify any gaps.

5. **Adjourn-** Meeting was adjourned at 12:19 PM by Cyrena Thibodeau



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Respectfully submitted by Alissa Dragan, Environmental Analyst III, February 24, 2022



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