

POW Panel of Experts: NERA/NEED Summary

June 16-18, 2015

L Townson (NEED; UNH)

C Faustman (NERA; UConn)

Panel Membership

Name	Representing	Home Institution
Debbie Carter	Western Region Extension	U. Alaska
Scott Cummings	Southern Region Extension	TAMU
Cameron Faustman	Northeast Region Research	U. Connecticut
Benjamin Forbes	1890s Research	North Carolina A&T
David Jackson	North Central Region Research	U. Nebraska
Debra Lewis	North Central Region Extension	Ohio State University
Steve Loring	Western Region Research	New Mexico State U
Maifan Silitonga	1890s Extension	Kentucky State U
Lisa Townson	Northeast Region Extension	U. New Hampshire
Marty Draper	NPL	USDA NIFA
Ray Knighton	NPL	USDA NIFA
Edwin Lewis	NPL	USDA NIFA
Jeanette Thurston	NPL	USDA NIFA
Bruce Haas	Facilitator	Michigan State U
Karl Maxwell	Facilitator	USDA NIFA
Katelyn Sellers	Facilitator	USDA NIFA

Notes:

1. The letters sent by NERA and NEED were referred to in the opening comments of the facilitators. Other regions used the letters to catalyze their own discussions that added to the stated concerns. Regional representatives were united in their concerns about the current system.
2. Concerns from the regional representatives included:
 - a. What does USDA need and how is it used?
 - b. Redundancy of some inputs for POW reporting and REEport; have a single database
 - c. Poor software functionality in the POW software; neither NIFA or states are able to pull useful data (some felt the data were going into a black hole)
 - d. Current system requires too much time for data input
 - e. McIntire-Stennis not currently accounted for (in a separate system)

- f. Noted that the current reporting system has become cumbersome and complex akin to the tax code
3. Concerns from the NPLs
- a. Want to make review of the reports easier
 - b. Would like to see more connection of research to extension
 - c. NIFA has done a poor job of implementing AREERA; acknowledge they are not asking the right questions - products returned from the states are what USDA has asked for but they aren't useful. (POWs/ROAs represent about ½ of NIFA \$\$) and impacts in REEPort from Expt Stations are not very good.
 - d. NPLs cannot say "no" to (or disapprove) the reports and so feel their hands are tied.
 - e. Small states and 1890s institutions don't have as many reporting staff and struggle with burden
 - f. More granular Extension reporting needed (akin to research reporting)
 - g. Outcome of this panel needs to be legal, simple, and workable. An unnecessary complexity has developed over the years.

We agreed to focus on only what is required (by law) and what is needed for NIFA to do their job – but exclude data that is only NICE to know.

4. Bart Hewitt presentation (*see attached PPT*)

Still Required by AREERA:

- Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension
 - Sec 105 and 204 of AREERA
 - 25% of Hatch and 25% of SL, or 2x the 1997 baseline for Integrated Research and Extension
 - 25% of Hatch and 25% of SL, or 2x the 1997 baseline for Multistate Research and Extension
- Stakeholder Input – Section 102 of AREERA
- Merit Review – Sec 103(e) and 104(a)
 - Research needs to certify and describe Scientific Review Process
 - Extension needs to certify and describe Merit Review Process

Discretionary as to how it's collected (info is needed but categories/approach used could be changed):

- Executive Summary
- Planned Programs (USDA needs to know what we're doing)
 - Hatch and Evans-Allen do REEPort

Hewitt Proposal:

- Scrap the planned program section from POW and ROA (but keep the other tabs)
- Require Extension to enter SL and 1890 Extension “projects/programs” into REEPort
- Standardize Planned Programs (9 as per NIFA Portfolios)

5. Sonny Ramiswamy comments:

- Stated clearly this was an opportunity to start from scratch (re-do) if the panel wanted to recommend that – but he did cite the REEport system has useful in getting the research reporting he needed.
- He has heard the message about “burden” and “redundancies” in reporting from us, although he clearly didn’t understand (or believe) the current system was truly burdensome.
- Congress and OMB needs updates on progress of USDA NIFA and so the reports are important. He gave the example of a request from congress; “What financial resources is NIFA expending on water?” While his staff could determine dollar figures (much from REEport) for AES and competitive programs on water, they were not able to do so with the Extension reports.
- “We have to capture everything that is going on”
- When asked what one thing he would change over the existing reporting system, S Ramiswamy said he would implement a system for Extension reporting in a manner that allows USDA to capture the information needed for reporting/bragging to Congress/OMB and others.
- He also mentioned the need to allow public data to be available – so people can filter data for reports - <http://nifa.usda.gov/data>

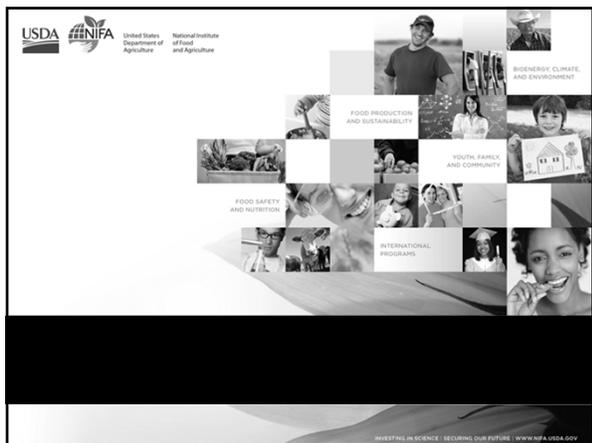
6. Concerns/issues following Day 1:

- a. Some language used hinted at moving Capacity funds processes to resemble more of a Competitive model and that was a concern for regional reps.
- b. Although not stated outright, there was some criticism of the “peanut butter approach” to distributing capacity funds (spreading dollars over many people within the institution as opposed to spending these dollars more focused, e.g. through a competitive process).
- c. Extension is different vs Research and has to report through an appropriate template/structure. Extension is more programmatic in nature while Research is more project-based (quite a bit of discussion about this difference).
- d. Challenge is how to get the granularity needed without making the data input steps overly burdensome/inefficient. Extension expressed concern about challenges of having frontline county-based folks entering data on all of the

different projects that they are involved with (often these projects contribute to different programs).

- e. Extension folks, in particular, were strong against the idea that institutions be required to propose how the money will be spent w/in a POW doc. Capacity funds are not competitive funds in that manner. NPLs noted that USDA treats Capacity funds as a grant even if LGUs do not view them in that manner. We agreed to disagree and suggested that this was a topic for director-level discussion.
- f. Concern about the level of reporting required for what is often a small percentage of our funding. If a state only gets 8% of their funding from NIFA; but the reporting burden is 75% of their reporting effort; this seems out-of-line. Reminded them of other reporting requirements Extension has – to state, county, commodity groups, etc.

Bart Hewitt Presentation
POW Panel of Experts Meeting



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Streamlined POW Approach

What would a Plan of Work process as required under AREERA look like if we start from ground zero?

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OIG Approved

- The current Plan of Work and Annual Report has passed the scrutiny of the Office of Inspector General.
- Any new approach is subject to OIG scrutiny.

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Still Required by AREERA

- Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension
 - Sections 105 and 204 of AREERA
 - 25% of Hatch and 25% of Smith Lever, or 2 times the 1997 baseline for Integrated Research and Extension
 - 25% of Smith-Lever 3b&c or 2 times the 1997 baseline for Multistate Extension

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Still Required by AREERA

- Stakeholder Input - Section 102 of AREERA
 - Actions taken to seek stakeholder input that encourages their participation
 - A brief statement of the process used to identify individuals and groups who are stakeholders and to collect input from them
 - A statement of how collected input was considered

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Still Required by AREERA

- Merit Review – Section 103(e) & 104(a)
 - Research needs to certify and describe Scientific Peer Review processes
 - Extension needs to certify and describe Merit Review processes

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Executive Summary

- Very Useful
- Needed to show integration statewide for research and extension
- Needed to show efforts made to identify and collaborate with other colleges and universities within the State, and other States
- Needed to show the manner in which research and extension activities funded other than from formula funds will cooperate to address the critical issues in the state

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Planned Programs

- Planned Programs – What you plan to do (science, research, extension, etc.)
 - Hatch and Evans-Allen already plan individual projects in REEport
 - Let's eliminate the perceived double reporting

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How??

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Planned Programs Proposal

- Scrap the Planned Program Section from the Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments in its current format
- Require Extension to enter Smith-Lever and 1890 Extension “projects/programs” into REEport
- The AREERA Planned Programs then become a listing of projects and programs already approved by Subject Matter NPLs
 - With Impact Stories generated from REEport

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Planned Programs Proposal

- Planned Programs could become standard as classified in REEport by NIFA Portfolios
- Nine Portfolios?
 - Sustainable Agricultural Systems
 - Bio-economy, Bio-energy, Bio-Products
 - Climate Change
 - Food Safety
 - Human Nutrition
 - Youth Development
 - Family and Consumer Sciences
 - Education/Multicultural Alliances
 - Environmental Systems

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Advantages to Using REEport

- All Data is reported the same way for all grants
- Follows the US Government Standard
- Projects/Programs reviewed by subject matter NPLs
- Allows NIFA to answer questions for Extension we could only answer for research before
 - Example: How much is extension spending on wheat, almonds, etc.?

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REReport

- Will require some tweaking to REReport
 - Addition of Extension Participant output data
 - Standard Planned Program Titles
 - NIFA Portfolio Titles?
 - Addition for Impact Stories like currently in POW
 - Allow for integrated projects?
 - What else is needed?

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Why REReport for All Grant Projects and Programs?

- Hatch and Evans-Allen are already using it for projects
- Granularity of Classification Data
 - Water Example
 - When asked by the Secretary how much was spent on water, we had no definitive answer for Extension; only Research.

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What's Missing?

Table 1. NIFA INVESTMENTS IN WATER RESEARCH, EDUCATION, and EXTENSION
FISCAL YEAR 2009-2013 FUNDS (IN THOUSANDS) BY FUNDING AUTHORITY and FTEs
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

FY	NO. PROJ	HATCH	MC-57N	EVANS-ALLEN	ANIMAL HEALTH	SPECIAL GRANTS	AFRI/NEI GRANTS	SBR GRANTS	Smith-Lever 1616 and 1890 Extension			OTHER NIFA	SARE*	TOTAL NIFA
									NA*	\$18,415	\$100			
2009	3108	\$14,853	\$3,023	\$3,006	\$76	\$5,931	\$4,858	\$588.00	NA*	\$18,415	\$100	\$104,790		
2010	2538	\$14,313	\$2,689	\$4,357	\$56	\$5,991	\$6,818	\$779.00	NA	\$23,300	n/a	\$114,560		
2011	2586	\$16,310	\$2,902	\$4,090	\$26	\$851	\$28,748	\$1,376.00	NA	\$12,095	\$210	\$127,550		
2012	2658	\$17,074	\$3,067	\$1,883	\$42	\$766	\$17,303	\$1,134.00	NA	\$11,897	\$307	\$118,347		
2013	2442	\$16,238	\$3,172	\$3,913	\$34	\$738	\$20,039	\$1,748.00	NA	\$10,384	\$57	\$116,438		
Total	13332	\$78,788	\$14,853	\$19,187	\$234	\$14,275	\$77,759	\$5,425.00	NA	\$76,131	\$674	\$583,863		

* NA - Not Available; the Plans of Work and POW Annual Reports do not allow quantifying the amount of funding invested for water related efforts under Smith-Lever 1616 and 1890 Extension authorities.

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Why REEport for All Grant Projects and Programs?

- Granularity of Classification Data
 - Many more examples like this.
 - We need to follow the money better for Extension at a more granular level.

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What is in REEport?

Research, **E**ducation, and **E**xtension
project **o**nline **r**eporting **t**ool

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REEport Basic Structure

- Project Initiation
 - Cover Page
 - Inputs (Staff Contacts and Staff Time)
 - Goals (Text Box)
 - Products (Planned)
 - Outcomes (Expected)
 - Target Audience
 - Methods
 - Non-Technical Summary
 - Keywords
 - Classification

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REReport Basic Structure

- Progress Report
 - Cover Page (from Project Initiation)
 - Inputs (Staff and Staff Time)
 - Target Audience
 - Outputs (Products and Other Products)
 - Accomplishments
 - Impact Stories
 - Changes/Problems

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What Else to Think About

- How to tie the RFA and the Application for the funds to the Plan of Work
 - Application for Five Years on a renewal basis
 - Each subsequent year provides a renewal-like POW Update with changes and goals for the coming year.
 - Annual Progress Reports due 90 to 120 days after Anniversary date.
 - Anniversary date on October 1 for Capacity Grants

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What Else to Think About

- Progress Reports through REReport for individual projects/programs.
- Planned Programs
 - By NIFA Portfolio Titles?
 - Containing List of REReport Projects/Programs
 - With Impact Stories generated from REReport projects/programs

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What Else to Think About

- Level of Project/Program for Extension in REEport?
 - Program Level or Individual Projects like Hatch?
 - Program Level – More Broad
 - 4-H
 - Nutrition
 - Food Safety
 - Etc.
 - Project Level – More Granular

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How Submitted

- By Institution instead of by State?
 - REEport follows the money
 - Applications for Capacity Grant Funds are by grant line item
- Integrated Research and Extension
- How about integrated Hatch and Smith-Lever projects or Integrated Evans-Allen and 1890 Extension projects in REEport?

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When is POW Submitted?

- POW Tied to the Application for funds from Capacity RFA
- Due as part of the Application proposal submission in Grants.gov each year for funds
- Release of funds each year tied to approval

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When is Annual Progress Report Submitted?

- Terms and Conditions on Grants state Progress Reports due within 90 days of Anniversary date
 - Anniversary date on Capacity Grants is always October 1
- Move to February 1?

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Land-Grant Impact Database

Analysis by Ray Knighton

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Questions?

**POW Panel of Experts
Draft Recommendations**

Plan of Work Panel of Experts *Recommendations to NIFA*

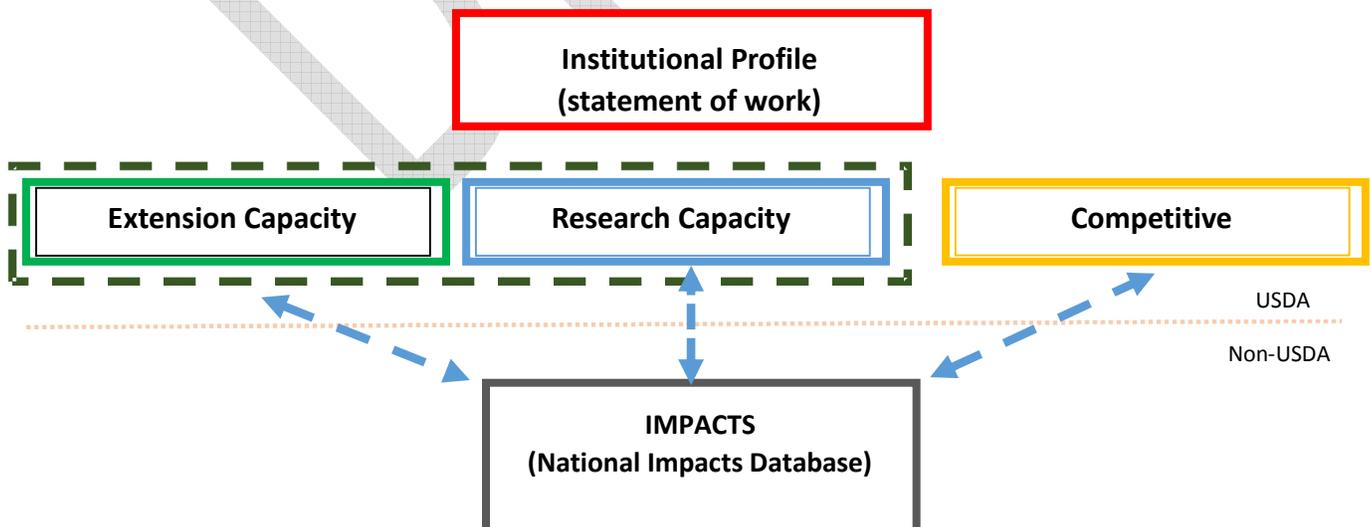
A Panel of Experts on the AREERA Plan of Work reporting process convened on June 16-18 to discuss improvements to the current reporting process. The Panel consisted of 14 members representing Research, Extension and NIFA. The Panel, with input from their respective regions and from NIFA program leaders, agreed that the current process is duplicative and burdensome. The Panel makes the following recommendations to NIFA so that the process may be streamlined in a way that reduces the reporting burden on the Land Grant Institutions as well as the review burden on NIFA National Program Leaders. The Panel also believes that this streamlining will improve data quality and result in a data collection that meets legislative requirements while also providing NIFA what it needs to continue to promote the effectiveness of the AREERA capacity funds.

The following recommendations are in draft form and will be vetted with the Panel members' regional leaders and constituencies before being presented to NIFA as final. All proposed changes will be made by the Regions to their respective representatives on the Panel. The final recommendations will be contained in a larger report that details the issues and logic that formed these recommendations. Report will be developed by the Panel over the next 60 days.

The following recommendations are classified under two categories: system-specific and general.

SYSTEM-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There should be one reporting system with a stable platform that has the elements depicted in the graphic below. The existing Plan of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments reporting system should be eliminated concurrent with the introduction of the new system.



- a) In support of this recommendation, NIFA should invest in human capital and hardware/software to improve the current and future reporting system (or its replacement for the single system/database approach) and make plans to discontinue support of the older and less flexible POW platform. The “single system” approach should be developed in a way that allows for aggregation of all numerical data wherever possible; it should also be able to prepopulate qualitative/descriptive data wherever possible.
 - b) Concurrent with the recommendation above, technical issues currently present in REEport, including but not limited to the excessive time needed to upload and download documents, formatting issues, and the tendency for the system to crash should be addressed, especially if the REEport platform will be leveraged for the single system approach recommended here; the system needs to be a robust and high-performance platform.
2. The Institutional Profile module in the new system should contain those elements mandated by AREERA and other data elements deemed essential by NIFA, including:
 - a) a Short Programmatic Overview of the submitting institution(s);
 - b) a Short Annual Programmatic Summary covering Research, Extension, and Integrated program and project accomplishments (the summary should highlight those programs and projects that have realized significant accomplishments and impacts in the previous year);
 - c) description of Merit and Scientific Review processes;
 - d) description of Stakeholder Input and utilization processes;
 - e) Multistate Extension and Integrated Research and Extension components as required by AREERA;
 - f) a list of “planned programs” (or whatever they will be called in the new system).
3. The Institutional Profile module should be structured so that it may remain relatively unchanged from year to year and will repopulate annually for the institution; this results in a 5-year dynamic, rolling “plan” for all 1862 and 1890 Institutions (both Research and Extension).
 - a) If an institution wishes to make changes to their profile annually, they should be able to do so (both add and subtract program elements), and a mechanism to highlight such changes for the NIFA reviewer should exist.
4. The listing of “planned programs” that is entered into the “Institutional Profile” should allow tagging to NIFA’s topic areas; this will allow entered data to be rolled up for NIFA’s use.

5. The Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules should function in a manner similar to how they are currently accounted for. The Extension Capacity reporting module should be developed to include planning and reporting related metrics needed by NIFA to assess progress and to promote the accomplishments of capacity-funded programs.
6. The Extension and Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules should be linked to the National Impacts Database (NID) so that users of the system are not required to enter impact statements that are already documented in the NID.
7. Participation in the National Impacts Database should be optional, not mandatory. The NID will be informed by the Extension and Research Capacity and Competitive reporting modules of the single system. Language in the NID should be updated to link to NIFA's topic areas so that NIFA may properly associate impacts to agency's areas of focus.
8. Knowledge areas (KAs) and Subjects of Investigation (SOIs) should be expanded and/or modified to meet both Research and Extension's needs.
9. NIFA should restore the flexibility of a state to report by institution (1862, 1890), organization (Research, Extension), or jointly.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

10. The following sub-groups should be created in order to ensure all recommendations of the Panel of Experts are carried out accurately and efficiently (note that a Panel Expert may serve on one or more sub-groups):
 - a) a sub-group to define the Extension Capacity program reporting module; the group will clearly define data fields/elements that need to be included in the new module;
 - b) a sub-group to operationalize the data elements and functionality of the "Institutional Profile;
 - c) a sub-group to identify new Knowledge Areas (KAs) and Subjects of Investigation (SOIs) for addition to NIFA's Manual of Classification so that both Research and Extension can classify projects and programs accurately;
 - d) other sub-groups as needed; for example, fiscal monitoring/tracking (the Panel of Experts will serve as a committee for determining when a new sub-group is required).
11. Reporting Deadlines: NIFA should keep all capacity reporting deadlines with the due dates that currently exist but should re-visit this issue once the new "single system concept" has been implemented (currently Feb 1 for Research REEport Financial Report; Mar 1 for Research Progress and Final Report; April 1 for all other capacity reporting).

12. A permanent accountability and reporting track (akin to the fiscal track) for the National Extension and Research Administrative Officers' Conference (NERAOC) should be implemented. NIFA should send Representatives from the Planning, Accountability, and Reporting Staff (PARS) to the meeting annually so that feedback can be gained and improvements made to the database, by both sides, without waiting for the Panel of Experts to convene every five years.
13. A commitment should be made by NIFA to work with Land Grant partners to ensure that the resultant system is fully searchable by (but not limited to) author, keyword, topic, programmatic classification, and location of work, and that the information within the modules will be effectively linked within the larger system.
14. NIFA should strengthen the State Liaison Program to more effectively build and maintain relationships between program leaders and state institutions.
 - a) NIFA should clarify, standardize, and communicate the review criteria NPLs use to review programs/projects.
 - b) NIFA should clarify and communicate/educate its LGU partners how data are used to report out to various audiences and stakeholders.
15. Non-AREERA programs, such as McIntire-Stennis, should not be included in the new reporting model proposed in these recommendations at this time, but the Panel acknowledges that the new "single system" approach, combined with NIFA's grants modernization initiative, could eventually result in a framework that may be applied to all NIFA funding programs.

To provide feedback to these recommendations, please contact your regional representative who is compiling all suggested changes to these recommendations and will be discussing with the Panel of Experts during July and August virtual meetings.