

LOCAL FOOD AND FARM COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Date:		Start Time	Location		Recorder
09/15/2023		9:05 a.m.	via Zoom Video Conferencing		Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restaurateurs:	University of the Virgin Islands (UVI)	Department of Agriculture (VIDA)	Department of Education (VIDE)	Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR)	Economic Development Authority (USVI EDA)
	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)
Voting Members/Designees Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-chair: Dr. David Hall – President (UVI) Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School Agriculture (UVI) DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife VIDA Designee: Diana Collingwood – Assistant Commissioner VIDE Designee: Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, 				
Voting Members Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner Nominee (VIDE) Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner (VIDE) Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) 				

I. Welcome, Introduction of Members and Charge

- The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. by Dr. Hall, Co-Chair of the Local Food and Farm Council.
- Dr. Hall welcomed all members and acknowledged Assistant Commissioner Diana Collingwood of VIDA and Dr. Renee Charleswell of VIDE.
- Dr. Hall conveyed that Co-Chair Dr. Louis Petersen and Director Biggs would not be in attendance.

II. Meeting Minutes: September 1, 2023

- There were no corrections or changes observed to the Minutes.
- Mr. Wickrema motioned to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented; seconded by Dr. Adamu.

III. Proposed Guidelines for Public-Private Investment Fund – revisited

- Dr. Hall introduced the topic, apologizing for the delay in circulating a document. He recapped the previous presentation by Director Biggs on loan programs at the last meeting. Dr. Hall stated that he collaborated with Director Biggs on the proposed guidelines to outline the specifics of the Public-Private Partnership Investment fund. He confirmed that the current presentation is to solicit feedback only, as Director Biggs had yet to comment on the draft. Dr. Hall introduced the concept of the Public-Private Investment Fund, which was created to stimulate business growth for farmers and fishers who might lack the resources to expand or venture into new areas. The fund could have loan and investment aspects, but the current draft suggests only investment to avoid duplicating existing loan programs. Dr. Hall outlined potential investment terms and approaches, emphasizing the importance of revenue-sharing, ownership stakes in businesses, or outright grants. He highlighted the importance of setting investment criteria based on financial viability, expertise, innovation, community impact, and sustainability. Restrictions and conditions for acquiring the funds were also discussed, emphasizing compliance with regulations and reporting requirements. David acknowledged Ms. Maynard for the research on the document. He again emphasized the need for feedback and ensuring the fund aligns with industry standards and best practices.
- Discussion Points:**
 - Mr. Wickrema inquired about the potential of encouraging private equity, specifically for people in the Virgin Islands who are between traditional investing and philanthropy. He emphasized that while individuals seek a return on investment, they are interested in sustainable investing, like green funds. **Dr. Hall clarified that the current**

development is only for funds they directly control, and they cannot determine the actions of other entities. He added that private entities can invest in their funds if they wish to have them administered based on the established regulations. Dr. Hall further stated that if the Council runs out of funds but finds a proposal appealing, they can refer it to other interested private entities. He expressed that the proposed structure was primarily designed to guide them on utilizing the funds already allocated to the Council.

- Dr. Angeli expressed gratitude for the presentation and inquired about the research regarding the public-private investment fund. She inquired if there were any existing examples of such funding partnerships in the USVI or other jurisdictions. *Dr. Hall admitted he wasn't familiar with any existing partnerships in the territory, so this may be a novel approach. He noted that while private entities might invest in agriculture, the research did not include such initiatives. He highlighted that the sources were mostly from national and global level types of investments. Dr. Hall emphasized that the process would keep evolving and encouraged Ms. Maynard to continue her research. He suggested that as the guidelines continue to develop, examples of agreements between public and private entities would be helpful for better understanding.*
- Dr. Adamu thanked Dr. Hall for the direction on developing the public-private investment fund guidelines. He emphasized the need for practical examples to clarify new concepts, especially for the Virgin Islands. He inquired about the potential challenges like risk-sharing and trust versus benefits. *Dr. Hall acknowledged the need to research more local examples and existing agreements. He mentioned continuing discussions with Director Biggs and revisiting the topic in future meetings.*
- Assistant Commissioner Collingwood commended the initiative and stressed the importance of establishing legal frameworks and clear accountability measures. She advocated for immediate intervention in case of deviations and underscored the importance of equity in service provision. AC Collingwood highlighted the need to maintain a consistent level of equity for the community's benefit in the long run.

Action Item(s):

1. Conduct further research; investigate and provide local examples of public-private partnership concepts.
2. Obtain examples of actual agreements from other entities to understand the workings of such partnerships.
3. Dr. Hall will continue discussions with Director Biggs to gather insights.
4. Dr. Hall and Director Biggs will continue to refine the guidelines and incorporate feedback and additional research. A more developed version will be presented to the Council in a future meeting.

IV. Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) proposed budget for a territory-wide Agriculture Assessment

- Dr. Hall discussed the proposed ECC budget for a territory-wide Agriculture Assessment. He stated that the budget aims to benchmark, survey, and measure success. He highlighted the flexibility in budget adjustments if they align with the set objectives. Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of having ECC involved in measuring the success of the initiatives funded, especially when accountability to the legislature is required.
- **Discussion Points:**
 - Dr. Angeli made a motion to move forward to approve the ECC budget.; seconded by Dr. Adamu.
 - Mr. Wickrema raised the possibility of ECC measuring success metrics within the pilot projects for the school. *Dr. Hall clarified that the entities should discuss their success measures with the ECC, but the Center won't impose their metrics. He stressed that each funded entity should communicate with ECC's Director, Dr. Cummings, to ensure alignment in their success measures.*

Action Item(s):

1. Ms. Maynard will inform the ECC that the Council approved the budget.
2. Entities funded through the program should engage with the ECC to determine how they'll measure success.
3. If entities do not hear from the ECC within a few weeks, they should proactively contact the ECC or Dr. Hall.

V. Proposed Survey for the Fishing Industry

- Dr. Hall thanked Dr. Angeli and Ms. Maynard for their work in creating the survey. He said they were tasked with identifying the most viable methods for distributing, collecting, and analyzing the surveys.

- Ms. Maynard shared that draft surveys have been created on paperback and electronically using Survey Monkey. The DPNR already has in place existing communication channels with the fishers, which will allow the Council to use these channels. Dr. Angeli will draft the survey campaign announcement through Mailchimp, including the survey electronic link. The printed surveys will also be distributed through the DPNR liaisons on all three islands, and the surveys can be returned via mail to the department or the DPNR drop box. The paper surveys, once returned, will be uploaded into Survey Monkey to generate the results in a single report. Ms. Maynard stated that there are 39 main questions and 11 questions related to the demographics. The suggested rollout date is Monday, September 18th, and the duration can be for one month.
- **Discussion Points:**
 - Dr. Adamu raised concerns regarding the possibility of potential low responses to the survey for the fishing industry. He asked what the protocol would be if the number of responses were below expectations. **Dr. Angeli clarified that there are approximately 350 registered fishers in the Territory. Based on past experiences, she estimated receiving 35 to 50 responses out of the 350. She emphasized that liaisons would play a pivotal role in obtaining responses and even help fishers complete surveys orally if needed. Dr. Angeli shared the Mailchimp draft template, which would serve as the survey invitation, detailing the survey's aims and various contact methods.**
 - Dr. Adamu raised another concern regarding the demographic section of the survey requesting contact information and suggested removing this question to ensure participant confidentiality and possibly improve response rates. **Ms. Maynard highlighted that collecting contact information was a way of building a database and gathering updated data.**
 - Dr. Angeli emphasized that they already have a list of fishers who opted into communications, predisposing them to participate.
 - Dr. Hall emphasized the need for clearer attribution to the Council in the survey communication. He pointed out that the Council decided to include the fishing industry under the agricultural plan, and this survey is a step towards gathering more information for future decision-making and funding. Dr. Hall suggested that the introductory paragraph of the communication must underscore the Council's intention and advocacy for the fishing and farming industries.

Action Item(s):

1. **Review and finalize the suggested rollout date for the survey.**
2. **Distribute the Survey Monkey link and print surveys as planned.**
3. **Collect and analyze survey data after the one-month distribution period; however, the Council is open to extending this date.**
4. **Refine the Mailchimp survey invitation to provide clearer attribution to the Council, emphasizing the Council's role in advocating for the fishing industry.**
5. **Ensure that all communications emphasize the Council's commitment to supporting the farming and fishing industries and its intent to use the survey data for advocacy and funding decisions.**

VI. LFFC General Operating Matters

- Dr. Hall emphasized the importance of having a distinct logo representing the Council. He said the logo should convey what the Council represents and the collaborative work with the various agencies.
- Dr. Hall mentioned the importance of the Council being represented through its logo on the upcoming survey launch, paper and electronic. He referenced prior experiences with farmers, highlighting the importance of flexibility and dynamism in timelines.
- Dr. Hall discussed the need for the Council to have an official letterhead, a web presence, and a logo. Dr. Hall referenced the Task Force's web presence on the VIDA website and perhaps for the Council to have a similar presence.
- Mr. Wickrema recommended contacting Shamori Moorehead for assistance in establishing the Council's web presence.
- Dr. Hall requested the members to review future meeting dates, which are scheduled every 2 weeks. He pointed out that for the month of November, the meeting dates conflict with Veterans Day and the day after Thanksgiving, respectively. He stated that alternative dates would be proposed. Also, the meeting dates of October (13th and 27th) and December (8th and 22nd) may possibly need to be reviewed.

→ **Next Meeting:** The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, September 29, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

VII. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 10:24 a.m.