



Local Food and Farm Council

Meeting Minutes

April 4, 2025

Location		No. of Attendees	No. of Presenter(s)	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing		11	1	10:35 a.m.	10:08 a.m.	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)
Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDE)Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI)Member: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI)DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and WildlifeVIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green LivingHonorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz FarmHonorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston LedeeDirector, Agriculture Business Center: Ms. Shanta Roberts (AgBC)State Sustainability Director: Cydney Meadows (VIDE)					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI)Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA)Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR)Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – CommissionerVIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and InstructionDPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, FisheriesHonorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef FarmHonorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed FarmHonorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel MaldonadoLocal Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition					
Guest Presenter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mr. Michael Morsberger, Vice President of Institutional Advancement – University of the Virgin Islands					

I. Call to Order, Opening Remarks, Attendance, and Agenda Overview

- Dr. Petersen called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m.
- Due to technical difficulties, the Zoom meeting experienced intermittent connectivity issues, requiring members to reconnect multiple times. A roll call was completed as the members rejoined.

II. Guest Presentation – Fundraising for Food Security presented by Mr. Michael Morsberger

Mr. Morsberger presented strategic insights on leveraging philanthropy to support food security and institutional growth. He noted that while national philanthropic trends show individual donors as the primary source of contributions, UVI currently receives most of its funding, approximately 90%, from local industry partners, including RT Park, the Economic Development Commission (EDC), and related entities. Contributions from alumni and trustees remain disproportionately low.

Mr. Morsberger encouraged the Council to develop an “inventory of opportunity,” a curated list of fundable projects ranging from \$25,000 to \$10 million, which can be shared with prospective donors. This list should reflect high-impact, mission-aligned initiatives that demonstrate clear outcomes. He stressed that this approach would be more effective than relying on traditional fundraising events, which often yield minimal net revenue.

Agriculture and food systems were identified as strategic priorities for philanthropic engagement. Mr. Morsberger affirms the university's commitment to advancing agricultural initiatives in alignment with the territorial agenda. He also recommends partnerships with other academic institutions and nonprofit organizations to expand funding opportunities and strengthen collaborative efforts.

During the Q&A session, members discussed potential partnerships with institutions such as Penn State and explored how the university's fundraising efforts could complement the goals of the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan.

III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes of February 7, 2025

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Ms. Roberts moved to approve the meeting minutes as presented, with Dr. Olive seconding the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no objections or abstentions.

Meeting Minutes of February 21, 2025

- The minutes were reviewed, and no corrections or modifications were observed.
- Dr. Olive moved to approve the meeting minutes as presented, with Ms. Roberts seconding the motion.
- The minutes were unanimously approved with no objections or abstentions.

IV. Report – Consolidated Feedback on Grant Reviewer Selection Process

Dr. Petersen presented the consolidated report summarizing responses from Council members (Shant Roberts, Winston Ledee, and Dr. Rick Nader) regarding the proposed selection process for grant reviewers in the 2025 Public-Private Partnership Investment Fund (PPPIF) cycle. The feedback was organized into five key areas:

1. Number of Reviewers

- Ms. Roberts recommended 5 or 7 reviewers, ensuring representation from all three islands.
- Mr. Ledee proposed 4 to 6 reviewers on the panel, including Dr. Angeli and Commissioner Petersen.
- Dr. Nader emphasized having 3 reviewers per applicant, with a minimum of 2 and a maximum caseload of 10 applications per reviewer.

Consensus: The Council agreed to appoint 5 to 7 external reviewers, independent of the Council, ensuring a mix of geographic representation and subject-matter expertise. Additionally, it was agreed that reviewers do not have to reside in the territory.

2. Qualifications

- Ms. Roberts highlighted the need for agricultural or business experience, financial knowledge, and 10+ years in the field.
- Mr. Ledee emphasized that reviewers should be actively affiliated with farming and fishing.
- Dr. Nader suggested a balance of academic and business experience in agriculture and fisheries, and proposed engaging Thorn Run Partners if needed.

Consensus: Reviewers should have at least 10 years of experience in agriculture, fisheries, or grant-related work, a strong understanding of local food systems, and a clear understanding of the potential impact of proposed projects.

3. Responsibilities

- Ms. Roberts proposed that reviewers provide feedback, ensure compliance, and conduct project checks for one to two months after funds are disbursed.
- Mr. Ledee emphasized that applicants should be full-time farmers or fishermen with established businesses.
- Dr. Nader recommended independent reviews and scoring based on clear criteria and participation in a review panel if top applications require further discussion.

Consensus: Reviewers will independently evaluate and score applications and may provide insights for compliance follow-up. However, post-award monitoring and site visits will remain the responsibility of the Council and program coordinators.

4. Compensation

- Ms. Roberts proposed an hourly rate (\$30 - \$33) or a stipend (\$500 - \$1,000).
- Mr. Ledee deferred on the issue.
- Dr. Nader suggested \$100 per application, plus a \$300 flat fee for participating in review panel meetings.

Consensus: A flat stipend of \$500 to \$1,000 was preferred, with the final amount to be determined based on the number of applications and the scope of work.

5. Fairness and Transparency

- Ms. Roberts recommended that all applications be anonymized (numbered, not named) and sorted by applicant type (farmer or fisher), with an established scoring system (holistic or analytic).
- Mr. Ledee advocated for ensuring funds go to applicants who demonstrate food security contributions, not to hobbyists (e.g., sports fishermen or floral vendors).
- Dr. Nader advised that the Council consider involving Thorn Run Partners to support impartiality and process integrity.

Consensus: The Council reaffirmed its commitment to transparency by maintaining anonymous applications, standardized scoring tools, and objective reviewer selection. The structure used in the previous grant cycle was deemed adequate and will largely remain in place.

V. Open Discussion

Dr. Petersen noted that the next scheduled meeting date (April 18, 2025) falls on Good Friday. A proposal was made, and it was agreed to reschedule the meeting to April 25, 2025, at the same time.

VI. New Business

1. Delayed Disbursement of Funds from OMB

Dr. Petersen raised concerns regarding delays in releasing funds from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). He noted that the Council had submitted requests tied to three different funding streams authorized by law, none of which had been released at the time of the meeting. The delay appears to be related to broader cash flow issues.

Dr. Petersen emphasized the importance of addressing this in future meetings, as it is beginning to affect vendor payments and the Council's operational planning.

2. Acquisition of Lettuce Farm by the Department of Education

Dr. Olive shared an initiative by the Department of Education that he discovered: a recent acquisition of a lettuce farm. He referenced a news report and expressed the need to understand how this initiative aligns with the Virgin Islands Agricultural Plan. Dr. Olive underscored the need for clarity and coordination, noting that such initiatives could affect broader food system strategies.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was officially adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

VIII. Next Meeting

- The next virtual LFFC meeting will be held on Friday, April 25, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.