

NASA EPSCoR Caucus Executive Committee Meeting Agenda

Date: April 8, 2025

Time: 4:00 PM Eastern, 4:00 PM Puerto Rico, 3:00 PM Central, 2:00 PM Mountain, 1:00 PM Pacific, 12:00 PM Alaska, 10:00 AM Hawaii, 6:00 AM (+1) Guam

Part 1 ExCom business (ExCom and invited participants)—60 minutes

Welcome, roll, agenda C. Cole

Secretary's report (approval of minutes from last meeting) P. Oemig

Nominating Committee update—Caucus elections E. Duke

NASA announcements / updates K. Loftin

March 1, 2025 Caucus meeting—summary and next steps C. Cole & S. McBride

NASA EPSCoR Advocacy L. Gilbert / L. Katz

EPSCoR / IDeA Foundation J. Molesworth

Other business All ExCom

Part 2 Open session (All)—30 minutes

Comments and questions from the floor All

Adjourn

Meeting Attendees: Ellen Brennan, Chip Cole, Melanie Page, Shawna McBride, Ralph Milliken, Kathy Loftin, Jessica Molesworth, Toni Galvin

Meeting Notes:

Waiting for a quorum at the start of the meeting and begin with only 4 (1 short of quorum).

Any changes to the minutes? None offered, but we cannot vote to approve without the quorum. We persist nonetheless.

Talk about the upcoming Caucus elections. Ed and Nominating Committee are working on gathering nominations for the open posts. Ed, update?

Ed: Sent an email to everyone on March 21 soliciting nominations; haven't heard of any new nominations yet, but there is a deadline of April 30. We have candidates for Chair and Vice Chair confirmed, 4 candidates for the two open seats on the Ex Comm, then no candidates for Nominating Committee but have two open seats. Encouraging folks to nominate themselves for any of those, but we are particularly short in the Nominating Committee area.

Chip: Let's shake the bushes until April 30th and get some more nominees, particularly for the Nominating Committee. Maybe we can send a reminder later this month after the Space Grant OSTEM revisions are in. Any comments or questions about elections?

Melanie: Maybe if someone who has a history can talk about the size of the Ex Comm relative to how many people there are available; e.g., nearly a third of our membership are Ex Comm, so maybe if we make a smaller Ex Comm, that could move interested people to the other committees who need more bodies.

Chip: That would require changes to our bylaws, so it'd be something we have to discuss at a larger meeting.

Melanie: And maybe everyone likes it! But it is a large number compared to how many people are available, so maybe we talk about it at the next spring meeting.

Chip: We could do it sooner if folks wanted to, too. Any other thoughts on this? Should we shrink the Ex Comm? It is a little bigger right now than usual because we have one extra member and the former chair is a member, so Greg is also a member. The staggered appointments result in us having one extra member at present, so while it's 10 people right now, it's possible to be as small as 8. Any other thoughts?

None.

Chip: Thank you. This is worth having more discussion about, and we can think about an amendment to our bylaws. Kathy, you are here. Any NASA updates?

Kathy: Update on EPSCoR: Basic Research proposals for FY25, we're rounding up the online reviews and should be complete April 12. Will be consolidating for the panel reviews after that, scheduled for May 8-9. Hope to make awards soon after that. Turns out that the R3s can be done very similarly to the Basic Research due to all the delays. Those are just starting the online review process and will be making those awards about a month later. The ISS solicitation is tentative to go live on the 29th of April. For FY26, the data call internally in NASA is almost done. We're embedding them with Mission Directorates now and then will start the call internally for the Rapid Response Research efforts. One of the things that we're talking about doing is sending them out to you as soon as they're complete, but maybe in the future, putting a link directly to them so POCs change and everything can be updated real time. The areas will stay set, but at least we could update POCs. Another thing I wanted to talk about is that next year, we will start working on the new RID proposals. With all the DOGE stuff going on, they're having all programs and projects look at the portfolio and become more efficient. EPSCoR is extremely efficient right now compared to all the projects we have, but we always need to look at the portfolio of options we have and think about what's best for the jurisdictions and getting the most bang for the bucks. So we're looking at them and I officiate any comments you guys have back to give you an opportunity to help us help you. As you know, right now we are planning to do 14 Basic Research at 750k, about 14 ISSs, and the remaining for R3 and maybe an extra Basic

Research. If we have a really good Basic Research who was just below the line, we might do that, but usually we try to do as many R3s as possible. We'll have less awards because we increased the amount. Please start thinking about the portfolio we have and ensure we are reaching the early faculty like you like, look for improvements, and I am always open to suggestions. I might have a little committee that talks about what is best for the jurisdictions.

Tim: I'll get the list of the R3 proposals to you soon.

Kathy: There is of course going to be an effect on EPSCoR since I'm in the Space Grant role, but it was the only option we had. Not a lot of options here in the government right now, so I ask for your patience. EPSCoR is moving quite smoothly, so I'll be focusing more time over on Space Grant.

Chip: Thanks, any questions?

Melanie: Thank you for taking on the SG role as well, Kathy!

Kathy: One of the things we can consider is every solicitation we do is expensive, so the more awards we make, the more expensive it is. We have the option to consider doing a base award for EPSCoR as well. I would like to look at the pros and cons of that. I love the idea of the R3 options and I feel that helps out the PIs, but please think about which solicitations of ours are most helpful, which are least helpful.

Chip: Thanks! Any other questions or comments? I had one; this came up at an EPSCoR IDeA Coalition Board meeting a while ago, but the 750k Basic Research, the amount has been 750k for as long as I can remember but costs of research have gone up. Any thought on changing the max on that?

Kathy: It's always something to put on the table, but knowing we've had a flat budget for all these years, if we raise that, we'll have less of those awards. It's a give and take, but I'm open to suggestions. We raised the R3 and ISS.

Chip: Even a small-ish increase could help a lot, especially junior investigators who are establishing a career who might find the legacy of a 750k cap to be a bit restrictive. But I totally understand.

Melanie: The cost-share influence to universities, how can we get them to better support their researchers. Can we add cost-share obligations or no?

Kathy: It's a pretty divisive issue, cost-share, because it can be open in some states and completely prohibitive in other states.

Shawna: Cost-share is also up in the air right now with the potential changes to indirects, so we should stay away from that right now.

Chip: Advocacy, Leslie or Laury?

Jessica: Doesn't look like they're here. I can start with some broad strokes. 1) Jared Isaacman is going to be having his confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee. We'll track that for you and send you the recording and any first thoughts about that. We have another billionaire tech person to have his confirmation hearing... 2) As far as the budget, you all know from Leslie that FY25 CR passed so that's through Sept 30th. We're expecting a skinny budget from the president at the end of the month, and if that happens, we expect the FY26 appropriations process to begin with budget hearings and such. 3) F&A issue, we also can't lose sight of the overall agency budgets in FY26. The squeeze on nondefense discretionary spending is going to be huge, so we're going to have to be fighting hard for the overall budgets to science agencies, not just EPSCoR. 4) As far as what we need you to start to worry about, you'll be hearing from us once we see what's in that skinny budget. 5) On the Foundation side of things, I'm hearing from so many people in NIH and NSF about terminated grants, delayed grants, and the impacts that is having on people, labs, and so on. I'm collecting all of this and will make a plea for this on our biweekly calls. Send me your examples of how this is affecting you because we want to start more of a grassroots movement to get this info up to the Hill or at the very least be ready to answer questions about how it's impacting states or jurisdictions when I am asked.

Melanie: gives an example from their jurisdiction of how these cuts have impacted jobs, research, graduate students for Jessica to include

Jessica: is already engaged with that example and advocacy regarding it, so that's good! Another thing I will say, though, is that this came out of NSF but it was stop complaining to us. You're preaching to the choir. Bring this to OSTP, bring this to the White House, bring this to whoever. It's not clear that the White House has much respect for anybody in Congress, and it's not clear that anybody in Congress is willing to do their job in the checks and balances game, so we're looking at all of this. For instance, Republican governors, do we get them involved? But constituents should be weighing in. I know it's uncomfortable and can feel risky, but these grassroots movements in other arenas that are having effects are making their pleas as individual citizens. You gotta start somewhere, and silence is a message, too.

Ralph: I heard rumors about 25% cut to NASA and 50% cut to SMD. Still floating around? Different now?

Jessica: Yes, they're still floating. We're hearing those rumors, we're expecting large cuts. I'm telling everybody to be prepared for the worst.

Shawna: Do you think there will come a tipping point for the GOP where this is just too much, just destroying the states and universities and research?

Jessica: I think so. Some of this that we have seen is directed towards the Harvards and the Columbias and the Ivy Leagues and such, but it's still hurting our institutions as well. I caught Obama's remarks at Hamilton's College. He was telling universities to stand up to the

administration and use their endowment money, and it's like, not all universities have that. What are they supposed to do? But Republican lawmakers know that. And tariffs are different entirely, but seeing the movement on that is giving me hope on other things.

Ralph: EPSCoR still allows us to fund non-US Citizens. Has there been any talk about changing that in the future?

Jessica: Not for EPSCoR specifically, but I know a list of institutions in EPSCoR states that are targeting international students. So again, I don't know of anything EPSCoR program specific, but it's starting to happen at our institutions.

Kathy: No, I don't plan on making any changes, I haven't seen any guidance to make that change, and I don't want to be proactive and make changes that we aren't required to, so I'm just letting things stand.

Chip: Thank you, great discussion. Jessica, I really like the idea of grassroots activity to bring this to the forefront. There's nothing more American than that, so anything we can do, I'm on board.

Jessica: I think what that will look like is our webpages, you can find the staff you need to talk to, get some talking points about an issue, make some templates, etc.

Chip: Can we march? With signs? It'll make the news cuz nobody knows what it means! (Tells the story of the pro-science march in Burlington)

Chip: We have a few more items on the agenda, a follow-up to the Caucus meeting from March 1st. A few things, I haven't had time to finish this yet but we did extend the survey, and I'll finish that up with a report. The survey covered TIMs and our format for the excomm meetings. I'll have the report ready for a future meeting. The second item was the TIMs pausing that we agreed to at that meeting. We will revisit what to do with the idea of TIMs at a future meeting as well, as the survey didn't indicate a lot of support or enthusiasm for them. And lastly, we're going to be setting up a new website for our caucus. Current one is old and hosted at Louisiana, but if we rotate it around the Chair's institutions, it'll never be at a central stable place. So we're working with Jessica to host it at the Foundation. We'll work through that and make that website a central repository for all things having to do with the caucus, and we won't have to worry about leadership changes. We want it to be open, so anybody could look at it. We'll post agendas, meeting minutes, bylaws, and the current leadership roll for the world to see in the name of transparency. Any comments or thoughts on that?

Thumbs up are given.

We can modify the notes each month to ensure they say what they say.

Melanie: In a lot of places that publish notes, they don't identify the speaker. We could do that in the future.

Chip: Sure! That's something for the larger ExComm to consider when we have our quorum. There's no limitation there, so it should be easily done to change how we take the notes, not tracking who says what. I'm open to that, we can explore that for sure.

Melanie: Take for example the conversation Jessica just engaged with us, it was raw and honest, but perhaps we don't want the exact content of that conversation openly available. It could be taken out of context and be used against her or us or NASA. So we might want to generalize minutes as well. Just something to consider.

Chip: There are certainly risks. I've always been a real supporter of transparency. Also, depending on the state, in Vermont, we have an open meeting law so these meetings are required to be public. Anyone can ask to be present and listen in. I like the idea of meeting minutes being broad strokes, not details about what was exactly said. Just what was discussed in general and any decisions or action items that were produced. My thinking is to have them be public and easy for people to find, but be mindful about what is in them and have them be more general and broad strokes on topics and decisions.

Melanie: I would agree to that.

Toni: Do the minutes include the open discussion afterward, or just the official meeting?

Chip: The depends. The minutes cover the entire meeting, including the open discussion period.

Melanie: I think we'd have to restructure to not have the open discussion included in the minutes.

Chip: Which we could do, but lets keep it in mind for now and think about it to discuss more at our next meeting when we have a quorum.

Shawna: Could also include highlight stories on the website.

Chip: With Toni, we now have our quorum! So we can move on to approve the minutes.

Shawna: Moves to approve minutes

Melanie & Toni: Second!

Minutes get approved without discussion.

Chip: Any other ExComm business matters? No, great! Open discussion begins now.

Colleen: Question for Kathy; you're interested in pursuing the possibility of a base award, and I have no idea what that means. Is the RID like a base award or something else?

Kathy: Instead of having the Basic Research and R3s, have one big base award so jurisdictions would have more flexibility for how to use the funds.

Colleen: But you wouldn't be able to do the R3 at all.

Kathy: No, we wouldn't be able to. It's kind of a nuclear option, and idk if it's the right thing to do, but it's an option we're willing to explore based on feedback. Not saying I want to go there, I don't. But it is a nuclear option for efficiency if needed.

Shawna: For our faculty, it's a lot more prestigious to get an award from NASA than an internal seed grant like NASA EPSCoR and Space Grant. So for us, it's better to apply to NASA and get those awards from you than to get awards from us.

Colleen: Also the appropriations language for Space Grant specifies equal distribution to the jurisdictions, but EPSCoR does not and has a different mandate than Space Grant. So lots to consider.

Kathy: general agreement

Melanie: points out that the technical monitors from NASA are also really beneficial for the investigators

Colleen: When you get a good technical monitor, who's well-aligned, those in person visits are irreplaceable.

Chip: seconds that sentiment. Any other comments?

Jacob: Any update on the ISS solicitation?

Kathy: 4/29 is the date for that to go live

Chip: Meeting Adjourned!