

**MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) PRODUCER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC)**

Location: Virtual via Zoom

Contact: Thea Rittenhouse, Farm Equity Advisor

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MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 20, 2025

Item
No.

(1) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

CDFA Farm Equity Advisor Thea Rittenhouse welcomed attendees.

(2) ROLL CALL

Present

Hung K. Doan, Arshdeep Singh, Ken Sparks, Qi Zhou

Absent

Emily Burgueno, Tania Zuniga, Minkah Taharkah, Lena Ortega

CDFA Staff in attendance

Thea Rittenhouse, Carmen Carrasco

External representatives

None

Public Attendance

None

(3) CALL TO ORDER

Thea Rittenhouse called the meeting to order at 1:09 PM

(4) DISCUSSION ITEMS

Meeting Frequency- Subcommittee members in attendance agreed to monthly, one-hour long meetings on a Thursday. Flexibility for longer meetings will be allowed when agenda items require it.

ACTION ITEM: Due to a lack of quorum, Election of a Subcommittee Chair/Co-chair was postponed until a future meeting.

CDFA block grant model overview and grant process

Thea Rittenhouse provided an overview of CDFA's Grants and processes, including pre-award and post-award grant process, grant programs at CDFA using the block-grant model, and questions about where in the process the subcommittee feels accountability is needed.

Subcommittee members inquired about the time frame for CDFA to develop a grant program from the time funding is available. Thea Rittenhouse said the timing varies depending on the type of funding and program and it can be 3-6, or up to 9 months.

Subcommittee members asked to learn more about CDFA's auditing process and the Farm Equity Office will invite audit office staff to provide more information on the process.

The discussion moved into CDFA's process for scoring grant applications. Thea clarified that CDFA programs staff does the scoring based on the Request for Proposals (RFP) criteria. Thea explained that sometimes, CDFA sets up external review panels for reviewing and scoring grant applications. Subcommittee member Arshdeep Singh asked if the same scoring process takes place for organizations that apply to the block-grant model; Thea confirmed that is the case.

Thea discussed the block-grant model used by some CDFA programs. The block grant model use for the upcoming Prop 4 funding for SWEEP and Healthy Soils has not been decided yet, but CDFA is looking at ways to improve these models.

Subcommittee members asked about the type of evaluations CDFA does on block grant organizations administering grant funds, the overhead and indirect cost allocation percentage organizations receive to administer the funding, and how CDFA evaluates performance and accountability.

Thea confirmed with subcommittee members that the areas of immediate interest are the geographic location of block-grant partners, accountability, and follow-up. Thea said that some processes might already be in existence, and identifying these areas will help bring in the correct speakers to meetings of the subcommittee to understand more.

Subcommittee suggested that accountability is needed from block-grant administrators when making individual grants to applicants and from CDFA for selecting block grant administrators. Thea mentioned that for the latter, the selection, eligibility and guidelines are in the program's RFP as an established process.

Subcommittee member Hung K Doan asked for clarification on how CDFA selects block-grant fund administrators for programs like CUSP and Healthy Soils. Thea said the Office of Environmental Farming Innovation (OEF) has an internal and external review process in place, but that understanding of these processes can help to determine how to move forward with transparency.

Subcommittee member Qi Zhou commented that standard procedures are needed to make the grant awarding process fairer. For the CUSP Program, some organizations have a first-come, first-served policy, while other organizations accept applications on a rolling basis and review all applications before making awards.

Thea said that CUSP Program staff have been working on standardizing guidelines.

Subcommittee member Arshdeep Singh commented that the focus of the subcommittee should be on policy change for grant programs and that trust with farmers cannot be lost.

Thea asked which part of the process the subcommittee would like to hear more on. Subcommittee members suggested 1) accountability or 2) the criteria of grant programs.

Thea suggested the criteria is important because the conversations around Prop 4 dollars are happening now. On accountability, Thea asked if the subcommittee is referring to CDFA to block-grant fund administrator (organization), or block-grantee to applicants (farmers).

Arshdeep Singh suggested the group start with CDFA's award process to block-grant fund organizations to learn more about how CDFA rates them in terms of their performance. Thea will ask CDFA staff to attend future subcommittee meetings to discuss the current review process and criteria, evaluation, numbers and/or reflections CDFA staff might have.

Subcommittee member Kenneth Sparks said that follow-up from organizations administering block-grant funds is important, especially when there are issues such as limited capacity to process grant applications.

(7) TOPICS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

(8) PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received

(9) CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

The public meeting was adjourned at 2:36 p.m.