

RCN CE³SAR Steering Committee Meeting
University of Texas-Pan American
Edinburg, Texas
Jan. 12, 2012

Attending

Jude Benavides, UT Brownsville
Ping Chang, TAMU College Station
Luis Cifuentes, TAMU Corpus Christi
Hudson Deyoe, UT Pan American
Luis Hernandez, TAMU Corpus Christi (guest)
Ron George, TAMU Corpus Christi (guest)
Maggie Juarez, TAMU Corpus Christi (guest)
Gary Jeffress, TAMU Corpus Christi
Wesley Patrick, Southwest Research Institute
Rudolph Rosen, Texas State University
Rogelio Saenz, UT San Antonio
John Trant, UTPA (guest)
Ken Tobin, TAMIU (guest)
Venkatesh Uddameri, UT Kingsville
Valerian Miranda for Jorge Vanegas, TAMU College Station
Carol Waters, TAMU International
David Yoskowitz, TAMU Corpus Christi

Not able to attend

Fidel Hernandez, TAMU Kingsville
Arnie Vedlitz, TAMU College Station
Ralph Wurbs, TAMU College Station

Dean Trant welcomed the committee to the UTPA campus and remained for a portion of the meeting.

Cifuentes said that five years from now there ought to be sustainability research taking place that would not have occurred without RCN-CE3SAR. He mentioned in passing that the Southwest Research Institute already had connected with an out-of-state non-network collaborator because of something found on the network wiki. He urged the committee to read an article attached to agenda on whether sustainability science is “real science.” He observed that sustainability science is in development and that he hoped RCN CE3SAR would be part of the development of the concept and an affirmative answer to the question posed by the article. Through this kind of network, he said, though South Texas does not have a flagship institution, something that functions as a flagship can be created by this RCN. He said it is hoped that what is learned about regional research coordination will be applicable elsewhere.

Cifuentes urged committee members to review and consider submitting collaborative proposals for the NSF **“Climate Change Education Partnership” (CCEP)** program with letters-of-intent due Jan. 24 and proposals May 24. Cifuentes said he believes network collaboration on this type of program increases chances for success above a non-network proposal. Jeffress pointed out that the solicitation is for second-phase projects; however, Cifuentes said he believes it does not require first-phase funding, just that first-phase programs, as defined in the solicitation, are already in place. Later in the meeting, he suggested that the network coordinate its efforts through the In4Grants research-collaboration tool.

Cifuentes said he had recently updated the network wiki with pertinent program announcements, which included an **NIH R-21 program for assessing and modeling population vulnerability to climate change**, for which RCN CE3SAR is especially well equipped with GIS capacity. Over the years, he said, he’s hoping RCN response to solicitations will become “seamless.” “If we keep competing with each other, we don’t stand a chance of being able to mount responses possible at Texas A&M and UT,” he said. Just as important, he said, researchers at the flagship institutions also will benefit from collaboration

with the network on region-specific projects.
Juarez and Hernandez reviewed procedures for network travel reimbursement.

George introduced the **In4Grants platform** for research collaboration. Unanswered questions remained after the presentation; including (1) whether the system backed-up projects deleted by mistake; (2) whether collaborators (team members) can be removed from a project; (3) whether project “owners” can be changed; and (4) the expiration date of licenses distributed to steering committee members. George said he would send committee e-mail addresses to In4Grants for processing and that the company would be in touch with members to establish credentials.

There was considerable discussion, led by Miranda, of **the proposed charrette** to be held in San Antonio mid-to late May or early June. The purpose of the *charrette* will be to produce a 20-year vision for sustainability science in the South Texas region and a five-year plan for RCN CE3SAR to begin implementing the vision. Cifuentes said he didn’t anticipate “arriving at the charrette with a strategic plan in draft” but perhaps with components of a plan that would be the foci of various themes within which the planning process would occur. What will make the *charrette* work, he said, will be to identify the appropriate participants who will initiate crucial stakeholder buy-in. “We need to make sure we have folks at the *charrette* who will generate a strategic plan that we can’t come up with by ourselves,” Cifuentes said.

Rosen proposed that the *charrette* process should “organize this group’s thinking to produce something in advance.” Cifuentes proposed a pre-charrette “to hash out a clear explanation of RCN CE3SAR.” Miranda said that to make the best use of the larger group in May that all must be “well-primed to make the best use of their capabilities” and that “one way to do it is for a smaller group to chart an outline for the larger group.” Identify key players and where these stakeholders are from, he said; and then determine what character and complexion the *charrette* should take.

Patrick asked, “Is it a legitimate approach, and is it a way to get as much done as possible as we can?” He urged the long-range vision and moving from that to an operational or implementation plan. “If it makes sense and is helpful to go that far, that could be part of the background,” he said. “Couldn’t the questions then flow from that: ‘Here’s what we see. What do you think in reply?’”

Cifuentes said **pre-charrette planners – himself, Jeffress, Patrick, Rosen and Vanegas** – would need this preliminary material by spring break (March). Miranda added that a skeleton plan “needs to be flexible enough to accommodate input from stakeholders.” It sufficiently coherent for presentation, he said, but also subject to revision at the May meeting. Cifuentes said that as the strategic plan began to take shape, planners would need feedback to determine what may be missing from it.

Cifuentes polled the group for **ideas about stakeholder groups**. He observed that, in the beginning, the umbrella needed to be large, and that over time it will become apparent what’s important and what’s not.

Discussion generated the following list of **possible stakeholder groups**.

- Local and regional political leaders (Cifuentes)
- Non-profit organizations and community foundations from both sides of the Border (Waters)
- Water-supply authorities (Patrick)
- Hispanic organizations such as LULAC and American G.I. Forum (Cifuentes)
- State and federal regulatory agencies, such as TCEQ, the Railroad Commission and EPA (Patrick)
- The North American Development Bank (Waters)
- State and federal funding agencies, such as Parks & Wildlife (Cifuentes)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife and non-governmental organizations such as the Nature Conservancy (Deyoe)
- Energy policy-makers (Yoskowitz)

Cifuentes polled the committee for **anticipated themes**. Miranda suggested that “the smaller (planning)

group needs to take the words, 'climate, energy and environment' and take them out of academic speak and put them into people speak ... That involved defining the extent of sustainability, so (stakeholders) can see where they fit into the framework ... If you leave it a little open ended, then themes will begin to shake out on their own."

Cifuentes suggested that the *charrette* will be irrelevant if it does not address the theme of **economic development**.

Benavides raised the issue of how the *charrette* might become just another stand-off among various stakeholders over contentious environmental issues, such as climate change. He cited a Brownsville *charrette* in which he participated that "devolved into standoffs." Cifuentes said that all possible stakeholders must be included in the process because "we have promised to try to accomplish conducting the process of creating and forming public policy so as to have a greater impact on the population it's going to inform ... If we do that with just a bunch of scientists in the room, we'll lose the public from the beginning ..."

Rosen observed that "when you bring stakeholders into the process, they bring baggage ... We have to decide how to channel that and what to channel it into ... If that's not decided up front, then we'll have a debate that we've had since of old." Moreover, he said, "If anyone is left out, it creates friction with entities left out." Finally, Rosen said, "We need to figure out what do with them before we get them around the table."

Miranda: "From the beginning, when you go into charrette, you need to be clear about what you need to achieve ... It has to be stage-managed to get best input; otherwise, it takes on a life of its own ... You need to spend a lot of time planning up front."

Rosen said that stakeholders must figure in the implementation of the strategic plan. "We figure out the project then turn to the community to work it," he said.

Cifuentes observed that "the goal is not legislation but how we can create sustainability issues and inform the public in such way that it has the best potential for leading to sustainable development."

Patrick observed that "if meetings are framed properly," the *charrette* would not result in debate but "how to set up a network to get you legitimate answers to (sustainability) issues" such as fracking. "Many of those how-to-implement burning issues are not the business of this *charrette* ... but most likely, (it's) how do *you* see the process of getting information?"

Cifuentes said, "No one in this room can tell us how go about setting up a network with resources in this state to produce better science and disseminate it in better fashion to develop sustainable economic development ... What we want accomplish in this *charrette* is to get a better idea of what do to get that done ... We have particular issues about how to get this thing working effectively, not only at the academic level but out into the political and social level ... If we don't, we will come up with ineffective answers to the problems."

Miranda said, "It's inevitable that we will get noisy people into the *charrette*." Patrick replied that noisy people aren't bad. "Once they're there and feel listened to," he said, "they can become an important part of the process." *Charrette* themes, he said, are key to determining whom to invite.

Deyoe said the stakeholder "net" should be cast as wide as possible and that once the issues were presented, they would tend to "self-select." "I wouldn't immediately reduce the list from the get-go, but make it big."

Miranda said there might be as many as **20 to 25 stakeholders per theme** for the May *charrette*.

Cifuentes **another theme could be education**: "How are we going to get students involved in this?" A

key issue to discuss, he said, were the “ways we’re going to have greater student involvement (and) “how we’re going to get sustainability into the issues.” Patrick said it would be a good idea, as well, to consider parents of students as stakeholders in the science education of their children. Cifuentes suggested a network-sponsored demonstration project in public schools.

Cifuentes said **geospatial information science** would be a major theme in the strategic plan. Jeffress said, “Everything we’re talking about is going to go on a map eventually”; however, he cautioned that, in his experience, policy-makers, especially politicians, are loathe to talk about planning for sustainability. “Policymakers don’t want to know,” he said. “They want to react when it happens, but they don’t want to have things on their watch.”

Cifuentes wondered whether a CE3SAR app for mobile devices might be developed as part of the educational component of the plan. Benavides said widely available tools based on Google Earth might be a way to engage the public, especially students, with the implications of sustainability science.

Cifuentes summarized.

- Cifuentes, Jeffress, Patrick, Rosen and Vanegas would develop an outline of “what we’re trying accomplish at charrette.”
- Certain documents will explain in English the themes of the program and what we hope to accomplish.
- These documents will be shared with various stakeholders named in particular by steering committee members.
- The steering committee will meet in March to close the pre-charrette planning process by determining whom to invite and specifically how it will be run.
- A process of continued documentation and preparation will continued between that March meeting and the May charrette.
- Fifty to 75 charrette participants will arrive in San Antonio having done their homework, “and we’ll leave San Antonio with answer to Rudy’s question: ‘What the heck are we doing?’

Finally, Cifuentes said, he wants continue broadening groups of people linked with research possibilities through RCN CE3SAR. “As PI, I would like to report to NSF that the network generated research collaborations that would not have taken place otherwise. I would like to see ... the steering committee spread the network from 15 to 250 throughout the network over the next five years.”