



# AIANEA National Council Teleconference Minutes

Monday, June 20, 2016

11:00 pm Pacific, 12:00 pm Mountain, 1:00 pm Central, 2:00 pm Eastern

*Respect, Harmony and Beauty*

## **Council Members & Guests Attending:**

### **President**

*Athena Cholas, New Mexico*

### **1<sup>st</sup> Vice President**

*Dr. Carol Crouch, Oklahoma*

### **Secretary**

*Melissa Sturdivant, Texas*

### **Treasurer**

*Bill Parrish, Pennsylvania*

### **Midwest Regional Representative**

*Debe Walchuk, Minnesota*

### **Southeast Regional Representative**

*David Elliott, Alabama*

### **West Regional Representative**

*Susan Looper, New Mexico*

### **Past President Attending:**

*Steve Durgin, Washington, DC*

## **Guests Attending:**

*None*

## **Meeting Minutes:**

- a. The meeting was called to order at 1:05 pm (Central) by Athena Cholas.
- b. Athena took roll call of those attending the meeting.
- c. Athena asked for additional items to the agenda, and reviewed what would be addressed during this meeting, which includes:
  - USDA Keepseagle settlement*
  - Diversity and Workforce*
  - Webpage development*
  - Training Conference*
- d. Steve reported that he continues to work with NEDC to get our national training established. Steve commented that we need to work towards this, that it is a long process, but it looks to be coming together. Steve added that we are looking at developing a cadre who will deliver the training.
- e. Athena suggested that we need to act on the USDA's *Keepseagle* settlement decision. Recent decisions were made that \$38 million will be made available to AIAN initiatives. Discussions followed. Athena mentioned that a few items were mentioned and that there may be potential projects to include in the request for consideration, if we can get this submitted, we could receive an award of some of the settlement funds. She felt that funds could be used for the Elders DVD project in addition to others. Athena stated that we need to identify a dollar amount, and we need to identify someone to take care of this by Friday. Athena reported that we need to identify the programs we've done in the past that reached out to farmers and ranchers during 1981 to 2010, and we also need a budget.

Athena asked, "Should we pay someone to do this research?" Athena added that we, as AIANEA members and potential recipients of these funds, cannot do this because it would be considered a conflict of interest.

Debe commented that it might be difficult to get this done by Friday.

David commented that he does not feel that the Association qualifies to apply for those monies. He added that we (AIANEA) do not reach out to individual AIAN landowners; whereas, we might train employees who may reach out at the local level, but we do not do this directly. Discussions followed regarding the interpretation of the guidelines.

Athena suggested that the guidelines state the entity “provides advocacy services” and she felt that we do fall into that category and may be eligible. She commented that with our national trainings that have been conducted, we have provided these services. David commented that since his involvement in AIANEA, he does not believe that we do this level of work at the national conferences. He added that organizations like Intertribal Ag Council (IAC) and others provide direct services to AIAN farmers and ranchers. Susan commented that she agrees with David, and elaborated that *Keepseagle* resulted because USDA agencies failed to provide services to AIAN clientele, and she feels that we (AIANEA) do not do these level of services even indirectly at this point. Dr. Crouch added comments about how proposals are being submitted in her state and what information and materials are required as part of the proposal process. Discussions followed regarding the types and levels of activities qualify as in support of direct and indirect activities for AIAN clientele. Points of orders were brought to light before a vote occurred. No other discussions.

Motion not to submit a letter of intent to pursue monies being distributed as a result of the *Keepseagle* settlement: David Elliott  
2<sup>nd</sup> motion: Susan Looper

*All voted in favor not to submit a letter of intent related to the Keepseagle settlement, and with no votes opposed, the motion carried and is recorded.*

- f. NRCS' Workforce Diversity and Recruitment Branch. How can NRCS and USDA do a better job at recruitment and retention of AIAN employees? Drenda Williams, Acting Branch Chief (Workforce Diversity and Recruitment Branch), has reached out to employee organizations to request assistance in identifying barriers for hiring and retention of the respective population groups. Athena reported that the Branch is also making available monies for agreements to provide professional trainings. They are accepting proposals related to this, and hope to develop agreements with employee organizations to provide these trainings and outreach. Athena did not necessarily believe we were ready to submit a proposal but wanted us to think about methods to improve recruitment and to identify barriers. Athena added that if our members attend professional conferences, it is something we could potentially request funding in order to attend. Steve asked about the deadline which had already passed. Athena stated that the branch is looking to improve its reporting methods and how to capture this data and improve our recruitment and retention.

Athena suggested that we need to reach out to our SEPMS and Tribal Liaisons and gather information from them. Debe added that we need to also include our State Conservationists and garner from them what barriers they face at the state level. Melissa commented (from her work as Texas AIAN SEPM) that the problem also arises from the subjective nature of the report itself. Melissa shared recent comments made by Drenda Williams during a meeting she attended, in which Drenda stated that the branch wants to quantify the data being collected for employee retention and recruitment, and they also want to maximize the resources we have available for recruitment and outreach. Melissa elaborated that in her role as AIAN SEPM and work she does with the Texas CRAC and her STC, they have been working to identify where we (the state) need to invest our resources and efforts for recruitment and also to identify ways that we can involve our employees to improve retention. She said this is a big reason why her state supports efforts at the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) National Conference and our outreach at that event. Susan added that she has experienced the same limitations with the reporting, and the report format limits what can be captured. She shared that in some aspects, it has value, but it does have limits. Melissa will forward a copy of the SEPM report to the Council so they can see what data is currently being collected.

Athena added that when our members attend national-level meetings, we can assist the Branch by collecting some of this data and provide that to the Branch (e.g., barriers).

Carol added when we have surveyed our own members regarding barriers, and they have a hard time identifying barriers in their state, especially at their respective level versus considering an HR level of analysis.

Athena offered that the intent of the agreement is that the Branch will fund travel and conference fees for individuals to attend national conferences, and even though we may have missed the deadline this year, we should plan for next year. Carol asked for clarification regarding the type of training and conferences we are considering...are they professional development for the employee or are they recruitment events they may be attending? Athena said they could be both, Carol suggested that we need to have a consensus on the questions we ask if we do conduct official surveys to identify barriers. Debe asked if we have reached out to STCs to get their input, and asked if we have a regular dialogue with them to inform them of barriers.

*Susan left the conference call and a quorum was no longer in place to conduct business requiring a vote.*

Athena discussed the need for our regional representatives to be more involved and the possibility for them to give a presentation to STCs and the Civil Rights Advisory Committees.

Melissa asked Athena about sending a letter to each of the STCs and Regional Conservationist (RCs) to introduce the National Council and offer our services. She shared that this has been done in the past by Steve and Gina.

Melissa added that the letter could offer our services and suggest the Regional Rep attend a State-level meetings and to speak at respective state-level CRAC meetings. Steve added that a grassroots perspective might be beneficial. If we could capture some data from members to see what trainings and events they have attended and their perception of the value of those events. We could develop a brochure and disseminate it to all employees. We could develop a matrix of trainings available and what was gained from attending. Athena discussed involving our retired employees. Athena suggested that we could also involve/develop our mentoring component and offer to assist employees who want to submit a proposal for a presentation or for a poster session at a respective training. We could pair them with an experienced speaker and/or presenter to assist the attendee with their work. Athena mentioned that there are several employees she knows of in her state that are shy and would never take this on, but with a mentor, they would.

Athena will develop an email requesting some information from our members regarding trainings they have attended and what was gained, and she can work to start compiling this information that we can use later. Steve suggested that this can include all types of training and professional development. Athena discussed the value of organic farming education that is occurring, and that these are also applicable in addition to other types of training.

- g. Website development and other communications. Athena would like to set a deadline for work to be completed on the website. Athena discussed that the Communications Committee is working on some items but she does not think they have met recently to address the webpage development. Athena commented that they were possibly working to request bids. Athena would like to set a deadline and if we don't get something completed by that date, then the National Council would take action. What if we don't find a contractor who is Native?

David suggested that Athena reach out to Gina one more time and see what the committee is doing, and we should give them enough time to operate. Athena reported that Gina had asked for feedback from the Council regarding a Native owner or company to do the work. David suggested that we reach out to the committee. Debe suggested that we might also get involved on a listserv and see if we can broaden our search for contractors to assist with the webpage design. Debe offered Minnesota's AIAN listserv to see if we can find a contractor. Athena commented that she also tried to get the communications committee involved in the newsletters and the e-newsletters, but has gotten no feedback from them about this. Debe added that it seems that we have struggled to get things done because we are limited in what we can get done while on the clock. Athena added that our workloads have also increased and this is a factor, too.

- h. Elder involvement. Athena would like to involve our Elders during one of our National Council meetings, and open up the meeting for all members to attend. Athena mentioned that she reached out to Tanya and asked for the Elders to attend an upcoming meeting. They will work to identify the best date for this to happen.

Athena commented that some discussions have occurred suggesting that as our NRCS employee members retire, that we consider making them an "Honorary Elder." Athena commented that we could develop a process to recognize them. Athena believes that we should dedicate our August meeting to our Elders and have them join us for the meeting. Melissa referenced the calendar of events, and added that there is a Working Effectively with American Indians (WEWAI) session scheduled the week of our meeting but not all of the Elders would be involved with that and should be able to attend. Debe stated that she could not attend on August 15, and Athena offered the next week as an option.

Athena mentioned the mentoring program and stated that Elder Sappier had discussed an EPA training for Elders and mentoring. Athena said she is going to try and get a copy of this.

Athena will send out an email and see which date works best to have the National Council meeting and will let everyone know.

- i. Training. Athena reported that the site for the Society for American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) was decided and will be conducted in Scottsdale, AZ in 2017. She shared that Herb Webb is now serving on the Board of Directors and will assist with planning of that conference. There is a suggestion for us to partner with SAIGE to host our national training.

Carol shared that we have partnered with other employee organizations as well as SAIGE in the past. Carol discussed the expense of the SAIGE registration and if we partnered with them, then we would not have the overhead expenses as we have had in the past. Carol suggested that AIANEA could have their own tract. Carol talked at length about the potential for us to partner with SAIGE and felt that this would be a win-win situation for us and that we should consider it.

Athena asked Carol to assist with this planning, and Carol said she would do this. Steve added that we need to work with the Regional Conservationists to get a commitment that they will support this training and send enough attendees. Discussions followed regarding the pros and cons of hosting, partnering and/or participating in a national training and if we choose to do this with another organization as well.

- j. Bill stated that we need to be working on developing a budget. Athena indicated that we need the audit report, and we also need to complete the guidelines for the Harold Bryant endowment fund. Bill provided an accounting report of monies deposited and debited.
- k. Athena stated that if anyone has any information to share with the membership, please forward that to her, and she will include it in the enewsletter.
- l. Closing thoughts & comments.
  - 1) Athena extended her appreciation to everyone for attending the meeting.
  - 2) Adjourn – Being no further business, Athena adjourned the National Council meeting at 2:15 pm, Central.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Melissa Sturdivant, AIANEA National Council Secretary. Please respond to [melissa.sturdivant@tx.usda.gov](mailto:melissa.sturdivant@tx.usda.gov) with comments or corrections.