

Project FY22-EC-002: USWBSI Networking and Facilitation Office

1. What are the major goals and objectives of the research project?

The objectives of the Networking and Facilitation Office (NFO) are to:

- 1) Maintain and enhance the management and accountability of USWBSI's resources
- 2) Facilitate and enhance communication within the Initiative and with its stakeholders
- 3) Administer the process of developing the Initiative's annual research plan and budget
- 4) Manage and implement all meetings and conferences

2. What was accomplished under these goals or objectives? (For each major goal/objective, address these three items below.)

What were the major activities?

Objective 1 – Management and accountability of USWBSI resources

- Facilitated Executive Committee (EC) and Steering Committee (SC) funding and strategy meetings and coordinated all onsite meeting logistics in December 2023, April 2024, and all virtual meetings throughout the year. (Table 1)
- Facilitated the USWBSI Action Plan implementation, posted for community project development.
- Coordinated FY24 Working Cap establishment for review panel process.
- Reviewed processes and facilitated grant and database management protocols to ensure efficient and effective approach in alignment with USDA-ARS requirements.
- Held RA/CP Chair Funding Cycle Overview Zoom sessions to offer guidance and discuss processes as well as answer questions for chairs in preparation of review panel discussions.
- Developed new mycotoxin (deoxynivalenol or DON) Lab Annual Report tracking for consistent and comprehensive reporting of DON sample transactions.
- Managed USWBSI leadership online nomination and election process.
- Updated onboarding slide deck for all new EC/SC members to offer high level overview of USWBSI and operational components.
- Facilitated the USWBSI Policies & Procedures updates and operational recommendations including addition of new USWBSI Code of Conduct, updates were ratified and posted.
- Updated user login system with better feedback for users when encountering errors, users were also given the ability to edit their accounts.
- Conducted financial tracking for NFO budget, monitoring expenses and assessing utilization for budget requests.

Objective 2 – Enhance communications

- Coordinated implementation of overall communications plan focused on extension, crop consultants and grower groups. New Communication Plan Advisory Team guidance incorporated. Efforts included:
 - Publishing periodic FHB Tool Talk emails to amplify key messages to influencers.
 - Establishing online Communications Toolbox with readily available resources.
 - Developing Fungicide Timing postcard series, with easy-to-use visuals depicting optimum application timings.
 - Pitching and facilitating key FHB experts as guests on multiple podcast channels.
 - Conducting user survey to assess first year offerings and determine enhancements/adjustments.
- Worked with advocacy volunteers on materials and data points to enhance education of key stakeholders.
- Published *FHB Disease Impact Update* in November 2023.
- Published *Fusarium Focus* Newsletters - distributed three times/year.
- Published updated USWBSI Impacts - one-pager for key stakeholders.
- Updated USWBSI infographics on critical data points for stakeholders.

- Published monthly feature articles on researchers and advocates highlighting contributions.
- Coordinated live Scabinar (USWBSI webinar) for growers, crop consultants and extension personnel on current FHB management techniques, offered continuing education credits (CEU), 161 attendees participated; recording posted for ongoing access.
- Offered a series of Graduate Student/Post-Doc/Early Career webinars and activities to provide educational, career and social opportunities for new FHB scientists.
- Maintained ScabSource, a database for tracking relevant FHB research publications.
- Facilitated the opening of FHB Risk Tool for the 2024 season, incorporating enhancements.
- Updated the USWBSI's YouTube channel, with available recordings/content.
- Regularly enhanced the scabusa.org website to better present and store key content. Reestablished access of USWBSI google account and implemented Google Analytics tracking of website for more accurate and useful usage data. Scripts and web pages were updated with new security features, better error reporting, and interface improvements.
- Redesigned the USWBSI email system, cloud hosting service was reconfigured to improve email security and deliverability rates. A new email campaign software package, Mautic, was installed and configured on the USWBSI email server to improve email tracking and delivery rates. Custom mailing lists and email templates were created in Mautic.
- Implemented backup/email server configuration changes and repairs. The system was moved to a new firewall setup at Cornell University. Failed RAM card was replaced in the machine. The system was reconfigured to run multiple versions of Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP) programming language.

Objective 3 – Administer Research Plan & Budget

- Developed the USWBSI's FY24 Research Plan & Budget in December 2023, a \$1 Million reduction notification in April 2024 required a revised Research Plan & Budget that was modified by the Executive Committee and vetted by the Steering Committee. The revised FY24 budget was approved by USDA-ARS in May 2024. The final research plan includes 123 research projects across multiple research areas including: FHB Management; Food Safety & Toxicology; Gene Discovery & Engineering Resistance; Pathogen, Biology & Genetics; Variety Development & Host Resistance (that includes 3 sub-groups Spring Wheat, Northern and Southern Winter Wheat Coordinated Projects)), three commodity-based coordinated projects (Barley, Durum, and Hard Winter Wheat), and the USWBSI Headquarters (NFO/Website). The recommended funding amount totaled \$7,655,897 (previously \$8.6M).
- Developed materials and communications for two-path submission process for FY24 RFP and YR3 continuation submissions. Clearly delineated steps for submitting researchers.
- Built out the FY24 Request for Pre-Proposals (RFP) documentation, worked with USDA-ARS on review of content and incorporation of all requirements, fine-tuned Transformational Science components to increase submission quality; published and promoted the RFP.
- Redesigned the Submission Portal to merge the submission process for new pre-proposals and continuation requests. This created a unified interface for users. New features improved the user experience, administration, and created a tighter integration with the Funding databases. Integrated review system for seamless viewing by review panels.
- Managed Performance Progress Report and Federal Financial Report solicitation and submissions.
- Monitored PI agreement spending status, built in series of notifications to bring awareness to PIs on remaining funds compared to agreement end date. Established communications to identify needed No Cost Extension on agreements to ensure objectives were met and full spend out of awards was attained. Worked with PIs on needed budget reallocations as needed.
- Established communication with university financial contacts to ensure prompt completion of the financial reports required for closeout of agreements.

Objective 4 – Manage meetings and conferences

- Managed 2023 National Fusarium Head Blight (NFHB) Forum onsite planning and logistics in Cincinnati, OH. Nearly 200 attendees from three countries participated. Two opening presentations, one of which was a grower perspective, and 17 invited presentations provided valuable updates. In addition, two

poster sessions facilitated 55 scientific poster presentations allowing for both onsite interactions and offsite access through a virtual poster room.

Other key elements accomplished:

- Worked with the Forum Organizing Committee to develop onsite program model.
- Built out registration payment system via a University of Minnesota (UMN) tool incorporating added and required features for onsite meeting.
- Solicited and managed all elements for financial sponsors and in-kind donations to support event; confirmed two new sponsors Syngenta and Ohio Corn & Wheat for added revenue.
- Held an Early Career Networking Social facilitating Graduate Students and Post-docs to build connections.
- Updated approach for poster judging competition, with in-person assessments conducted as part of the “Flash-and-Dash” presentation structure.
- Created a new Abstract submission system with a multi-step process and time saving features.
- Outlined all logistics of onsite meeting planning, from room setup/utilization, AV, food/beverage, service, third-party vendor selection, report tracking, staffing needs; provided guidance/tracking for smooth onsite implementation, responded to unexpected issues.
- Conducted survey of attendees to track interests/adjustments for future planning.
- Finalized negotiations and contracting for 2024 National FHB Forum venue in Austin, TX.
- Solicited and investigated venue options for 2025 NFHB Forum; visited top contenders and began negotiations for 2025 NFHB Forum site selection in Denver, CO.
- Supported virtual update and planning meetings for the GDER/PBG Community and the Hard Winter Wheat Community. Supported VDHR-NWW in-person planning meeting.
- Initiated planning for High throughput Phenotyping Workshop to bring together key PIs and outside expertise in the establishment of an overall plan for USWBSI.

What were the significant results?

- The FY24 Research Plan & Budget was finalized with a reduced total amount of \$7.6M, materials were updated promptly and submitted to USDA-ARS to expedite the annual awards process.
- The funding submission and review system is now much easier to navigate and use. This aids both the administrators and users. Fewer errors are introduced into data due to more automation and the linking of the Funding and Submissions databases. Also, many of the requirements, such as file uploading, are now faster and more reliable.
- A new USWBSI Code of Conduct was ratified and promoted to the FHB Community.
- The National FHB Forum was held successfully with attendees providing high ratings on content value and networking to increase USWBSI efforts.
- Visibility of top FHB graduate students/post-docs was increased with the incorporation of streamlined judging of finalist poster presentations into program; winners were featured during last poster session.
- The 2024 Scabinar enhanced the understanding by more than 160 ag professionals of the most recent management approaches for FHB, recording continues to offer access to content year-round.
- Results of the USWBSI Communications efforts, via user survey input, were analyzed and incorporated into plans for 2024.
- The new email system provides the ability to track and report on user's interactions with emails. The template used to create emails also makes writing nicely formatted emails easier. Mautic is hosted on the USWBSI mail server, increasing email deliverability. The backup/email server changes made the system more reliable, more secure, and allows multiple apps to run outside of the cloud server.
- The website and associated scripts are more secure, faster, and easier to use due to ongoing improvements. Error reporting is informative to the users and admins, allowing for quicker issue fixes.

List key outcomes or other achievements.

A summary of committee meetings, conference calls, research-based workshops and committee nominations, appointments and elections that were organized, facilitated and/or supported by the NFO are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Summary of Administrative Meetings and Research-based Workshops/Planning meetings facilitated or supported by the Networking & Facilitation Office (NFO).[‡]

Committee/Group	# of Meetings	Description/Purpose of Meeting
Steering Committee (SC)	3 Meetings	12-05-23: SC Meeting – Review and approval of EC’s recommended FY24 Research Plan and Budget 05-14-23: SC Open Forum for Revised FY24 Budget Discussion 05-15-23: SC Open Forum for Revised FY24 Budget Discussion
Executive Committee (EC)	17+ Meetings	05-04-23: EC Working Cap Recommendation Meeting 07-14-23: EC TSCI LOI Review/2024 Forum Venue Options 11-27-23: EC Meeting with BAR-CP Committee Chair EC Meeting with DUR-CP Committee Chair EC Meeting with HWW-CP Committee Chair EC Meeting with VDHR-SPR Committee Chair EC Meeting with VDHR-NWW Committee Chair EC Meeting with VDHR-SWW Committee Chair 11-28-23: EC Meeting with MGMT Committee Chairs EC Meeting with IM-CP Committee Chair EC Meeting with PBG Committee Chairs EC Meeting with FST Committee Chairs EC Meeting with GDER Committee Chairs 12-02-23: EC Meeting – Discussion on FY24 Projects; FY24 Research Plan and Budget developed 04-11-24: EC Strategy Meeting (in Minnesota) 04-12-24: EC Strategy Meeting (in Minnesota) 05-01-24: EC Meeting – Special funding meeting to respond to FY24 Budget Revision requirement Monthly: USWBSI Co-Chair Meetings – Priorities
FY24 Review Panels (RP)	13	06-26-23: EC w/ RA-CP Chair Funding Cycle Overview 07-13-23: EC w/ RA-CP Chair Funding Cycle Overview 11-23: Review panel consensus meetings
Research-based Planning Meetings	3	05-16-23: Planning Meeting for HWW-CP 04-19-24: Planning Meeting for GDER/PBG 05-20-24: Planning Meeting for VDHR-NWW-CP
Forum Organizing Committee (FOC) Planning Meetings	7	06-23-23: FOC Co-Chair 2023 Draft Program Review 07-28-23: FOC Co-Chair Keynote Discussion 10-13-23: FOC Co-Chair Keynote Discussion 11-09-23: FOC Prep for onsite 12-04-23: FOC Co-Chair Practice Session 03-28-24: FOC Co-Chair 2024 Planning Meeting 04-04-24: FOC 2024 Kick-off Meeting
Comm Plan Advisory Team	1	03-01-24: Advisory Team Meeting communications survey review
Graduate Student and Post Docs in FHB (GPFHB) Organizers	4	06-30-23: Trivia Night (virtual) 09-14-23: Prep/Planning for Webinar 10-05-23: Tips for Scientific Poster Creation (M. Lewandowski) 12-04-23: Networking Social Event during NFHB Forum 02-07-24: Organizer Webinar Planning for Year 04-25-24: Diagnosing FHB Webinar (N. Kleczewski)
Outreach Meetings	1	03-13-23: Scabinar for practitioner stakeholders (virtual)

Table 2. Summary of USWBSI Nominations and Elections during award period. †

Executive Committee	2 Appointments	Executive Committee Appointments: Barley and Spring Wheat. All were elected.
Steering Committee	6 Appointments	Steering Committee Appointments: Seed Industry, Malting Industry, Plant Breeder Public (Barley), Pathology (Barley), and Food Safety & Toxicology Representatives. All were elected.
Research Committees	13 Appointments	Research Committees appointments/re-appointments: MGMT: 3 members, chair FST: 2 members, chair GDER: 1 member PBG: 3 members
Coordinated Project Committees	9 Appointments	Coordinated Project Committees appointments/re-appointments: DUR-CP: chair HWW-CP: 1 member, chair VDHR-SPR: 1 member, chair VDHR-SWW: 2 members

† BAR-CP – Barley Coordinated Project
 DUR-CP – Durum Coordinated Project
 FST – Food Safety & Toxicology
 GDER – Gene Discovery & Engineering Resistance
 HWW-CP – Hard Winter Wheat Coordinated Project

IM-CP – FHB Management – Integrated Management Coordinated Project
 MGMT – FHB Management
 PBG – Pathogen Biology & Genetics
 VDHR NWW – Variety Development & Uniform Nurseries Northern Soft Winter Wheat Region
 VDHR SPR – Variety Development & Uniform Nurseries Spring Wheat Region
 VDHR SWW – Variety Development & Uniform Nurseries Southern Soft Red Winter Wheat Region

3. What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?

Opportunities were offered for students/post-docs to interact during the 2023 National FHB Forum as well as year-round. NFHB Forum activities included poster sessions for interaction between authors and attendees, all poster competition authors also provided a preview video for the Virtual Poster Room offering additional visibility of their work and serving as a preparatory tool for their interactions. A “Nuts & Bolts” workshop during the NFHB Forum also aided newer scientists in the basics of inoculation methods and FHB rating. An onsite networking event was a professional development highlight, with nearly 30 students and post-docs attending to informally connect and meet each other. Two student volunteers organized the activities and targeted communications encouraged participation. This past year, two educational webinars were held, one featuring tips for creating an effective scientific poster and the other on diagnosing FHB, additionally a virtual social trivia event was held to increase networking during the year. The Scabinar also provided training on the latest FHB Management techniques and practices for growers, crop consultants, and extension and industry professionals.

4. How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

Information is disseminated through the USWBSI’s listservs, website, emails, blogs, FHB-alerts, online articles, Forum proceedings, extension-based materials, press releases, social media and newsletters.

5. What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals and objectives?

The comprehensive USWBSI NFO workplan will be executed consistently for all the expected activities and requirements, while being responsive to unanticipated circumstances. Some personnel adjustments were incorporated to offset the reduction in expense, because of the reduced FY24 budget, however all currently planned activities are still on track to be implemented.