

Community Matters Now



A bi-monthly publication for Iowa leaders from Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development

FACILITATOR (CAN'T) HEAL THYSELF: THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS FROM A PARTICIPANT'S POINT OF VIEW

As a specialist in the Community and Economic Development (CED) program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Scott Timm has facilitated countless strategic planning processes for communities, local governments, organizations, and nonprofits to help them set a vision and a practical plan forward.

In his role as a facilitator, Timm is accustomed to acting as a neutral third party without a vested interest in the outcome of the planning process. But when the Oneota Community Co-op Board of Directors in Decorah, of which he is president, decided to hire a facilitator to assist in planning, Timm had the opportunity to experience strategic planning from the other side of the table—as a participant.

“My knee-jerk reaction was that perhaps I could do the facilitation, but the board wanted me to be able to fully participate in the process,” Timm said.

The Oneota board researched proposals from multiple groups and chose CED's Aimee Viniard-Weideman and Julie Robison as facilitators. (Because of his affiliation to CED, Timm abstained from the vote.)

Viniard-Weideman and Robison spent a great deal of time getting to know the board before the planning process began to ensure that the process they developed would meet Oneota's needs. And of course, the process path had some bumps along the way. A COVID-19 outbreak forced the group to begin planning virtually, which Viniard-Weideman and Robison navigated seamlessly. Then a massive storm passed through town that cut power to Decorah for a scheduled session; again, the facilitators quickly navigated through the situation and kept the group on task.

The CED facilitators supported, clearly communicated, and skillfully articulated each step of the process to the Oneota board. It was clear to everyone how the consensus-driven process built upon previous components: underlying contradictions examined weaknesses in the board's vision; strategic directions were created to address those contradictions; focused implementation narrowed down the board's strategies into specific, measurable actions; and then action planning helped the members commit to working in teams to lay out a time line for the year to come.

Each step reflected on the past to ensure that the group was on track with its planning. Each module created space for everyone to participate and have genuine discussions about how to practically move forward as an organization. Cheers rang out as the board “landed” the plan on June 12, 2022.

“Strategic planning is a daunting undertaking for any organization. Having this process facilitated by the professionals at Iowa State University allowed us to focus our energy on generating ideas while they focused on guiding us through



CED specialist Aimee Viniard-Weideman leads a planning session with the Oneota Community Co-op board of directors.

the process,” said Nate Furler, the co-op's general manager. “This guidance kept our conversations concise and focused, resulting in an organized runway for our organization to continue forward with.”

“As a participant in my own process, it was enlightening. It felt organized, we had masterful facilitators to keep us on track, and the process was clear,” Timm said. “It felt challenging, each session left me exhausted but feeling like we finally had deep discussions that were productive, not circular. I have a new appreciation for how hard it is to be in that space where you really open up about your organization's shortcomings, especially as a leader of that organization. I felt proud. I am fortunate to work with CED colleagues who are extremely talented, supportive, tactful, and fun. Onward and upward!”

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WELL WISHES FROM THE DIRECTOR

This will be my last letter as Program Director. My current contract term expires June 30 and I have decided to return to my position as Extension Specialist and Professor in the Community and Regional Planning Department for my remaining time at Iowa State University.

I have enjoyed the last seven years I have spent in this position, and I believe we've accomplished quite a bit. We've been able to put some effective teams in place, and those teams have implemented many successful programs. The articles in this *Community Matters Now* issue provide just a sampling of the exciting and successful activities underway. I am also especially proud of the hires we have made over the last seven years. CED has a great group of

people in place who care about the people and communities of this state. I am grateful for the support and encouragement my colleagues in CED, in all of Extension and Outreach, and all of you across Iowa whom I have met and with whom I've had the opportunity to work.

As I write this, a national search for the next CED Director is underway. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is nationally known as a very desirable place to be employed, and I have no doubt that the new Director will be able to continue the great work this program unit produces.

As for me, I still have several good years left (I'm not as old as my knees feel) and I am looking forward to returning to the

classroom and diving back into the world of planning and local government law. I have a lot of catching up to do. Thanks to those of you who heard rumors to the contrary and sent me well wishes on my retirement, but you can't get rid of me that easily!

Please keep in touch. My phone number (515-290-0214) and email address (gtaylor@iastate.edu) will not change.



Gary Taylor
Program Director, Iowa State University
Extension and Outreach Community and
Economic Development

EXTENSION SPECIALISTS HELP TASK FORCE WORK TOWARD RACIAL EQUITY

By Aimee Viniard-Weideman | Community Development Specialist

In February 2021, Cedar Falls Mayor Rob Green formed a Racial Equity Task Force to provide guidance and recommendations to the mayor and city council on ways to address racial equity in Cedar Falls.

The effort was prompted by a 2018 online article from 24/7 Wall Street that named the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area as a worst city in the country for Black Americans, based on wide gaps in income, unemployment, and homeownership along racial divides. While Waterloo-Cedar Falls moved off the top-ranking list in subsequent years, that article and ranking provided an opportunity for community leaders across the Cedar Valley to engage in difficult and important conversations about equity and the impact of racism in the region.

Mayor Green appointed 11 members to the Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force, including city council members, Cedar Falls residents, and Cedar Valley leaders actively engaged in racial equity work in their organizations and communities. The task force began meeting in April 2021. After

the first few meetings, the co-chairs and city contracted with the Community and Economic Development (CED) unit of Iowa State University Extension to facilitate the task force's process and meetings.

ISU community engagement specialists Aimee Viniard-Weideman and Omar Padilla assisted the task force in focusing its scope of work, reviewing available data, and making collaborative decisions about their recommendations. The City of Cedar Falls Racial Equity Task Force Report and Recommendations was presented to the Cedar Falls City Council in October 2021.

Cedar Falls is a community of 40,713 people (as of the 2020 census) located in Black Hawk County. It is the second largest city in the county after Waterloo, which has a population of 67,314. According to 2020 Census data and definitions, the population is predominantly White (racially), with the "White Alone, Not Hispanic" racial classification accounting for 86.6% of Cedar Falls' total population. Between 2010 and 2020, the city's population increased

3.7%, compared to the 0% growth in the population of Black Hawk County as a whole. Every non-White racial group category had an increase at the city and county levels over the last decade.

Building a more equitable future where every resident can thrive regardless of race, ethnicity, or color is an important indicator of community success. As task force members stated in their report, "By acknowledging our history, recognizing where we are now and making changes to enhance our future, we can ensure that Cedar Falls is a supportive and united community, strengthened by the diversity of our residents and visitors."

The task force's recommendations to the mayor and city council were as follows:

1. Establish a Cedar Falls equity committee
2. Develop a Cedar Falls equity vision and plan
3. Invest in organizational capacity and infrastructure

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Community Matters Now is published monthly for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development staff and their clients. Comments, questions, and suggestions regarding the content of this newsletter should be directed to:

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COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAFF RECOGNIZED FOR PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

By Susan Erickson | CED Program Specialist

Each spring, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach staff gather for Extension Annual Conference to learn new skills, renew old friendships and create new connections, and recognize professional achievements. This year, members of the Community and Economic Development (CED) unit earned several honors.



Susan Erikson and John Lawrence, Vice President for Extension and Outreach.

These CED staff were recognized for **years of service** to ISU Extension and Outreach: Courtney Long, 10 years; Abbie Gaffey, Himar Hernández, and Sandra Oberbroeckling, 15 years; and Susan Erickson, 20 years.

CED staff also earned several awards recognizing the quality of their work.



Top row, l-r: Sara Shonrock, John Lawrence, Omar Padilla, Luke Seaberg, Abbie Gaffey. Bottom row, l-r: Jane Goeken, Scott Timm, Julie Robison.

The **Excellence in Partnership to lowans** award was presented to the Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA) team, which includes Abbie Gaffey, Jane Goeken, Lindsay Henderson, Omar Padilla, Julie Robison, Luke Seaberg, Sara Shonrock, and Scott Timm. This team developed meaningful partnerships with multiple entities to address housing—a major issue in Iowa—through educational workshops and strategic planning sessions. The RHRA team leveraged resources such as the Extension and Outreach Indicators Portal and Data for Decision Makers to help partners in 44 communities understand

and benefit from housing-related data. The team also assisted 12 flood-damaged communities in developing a plan for using Community Development Block Grant—Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds.



Carter Oliver, John Lawrence, and Abbie Gaffey.

Gaffey and Carter Oliver, director of Harrison County Extension and Outreach, received the **Impacting lowans** award. They partnered with Harrison County Development Corporation to provide the RHRA program in seven communities. Gaffey and Oliver worked with communities to create housing action plans that included goals, focus areas, action steps, and evaluation. Their work was award worthy because they took a complex situation, built connection and trust, and provided strategic tools and knowledge to help local governments address housing and other infrastructure needs. Significant funding was brought into those communities by members who completed the program.



Amanda Eggers, John Lawrence, and Sara Shonrock.

The award for **Innovation and Excellence in Virtual Program Delivery** was presented to Shonrock and Amanda Eggers for moving the Iowa Municipals Professional Institute and Academy to a blended format, recording the highest ever attendance, and earning rave reviews from participants. By offering both virtual and in-person learning opportunities, they reached municipal professionals from smaller cities and a wider geographic range, enhancing professional skills while

also easing time and budget constraints for participants. As a result, 97 attendees received certification and 69% reported receiving a salary increase, contract extension, job promotion, or additional benefit – making a lasting impact on individual livelihoods during the pandemic.

This summer, another noteworthy award went to a multi-state team of extension professionals from ISU, North Dakota State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, South Dakota State University, University of Minnesota, and Penn State University. This team won a regional award and tied for a national runner-up award for **Excellence in Teamwork** from NACDEP, the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals. Gaffey, Lynn Adams, and Jill Sokness represented ISU on this team. For this project, six states collaborated to update the curriculum for Marketing Hometown America, a program that assists rural communities in need of a focused marketing plan to attract new residents and businesses. Working virtually through the COVID-19 pandemic, the team built upon each participating state's skills, experiences, and knowledge to improve an already excellent extension program.

Racial equity from P02

4. Be a partner for transformative change
5. Create public engagement opportunities that are welcoming and inclusive
6. Host and collaborate in public education about equity

In December 2021, during its annual goal-setting work session, the city council incorporated many of the recommendations into the city's annual plan of work. The first steps include hiring a staff person who can provide leadership to these efforts. City staff have drafted a job description for a diversity, equity, and inclusion position and expect to present that to the council for review and approval in summer 2022.

"It's vital that we continue to engage in racial equity in Cedar Falls, to ensure that everyone feels valued in our community," said Green. "I look forward to our new diversity, equity and inclusion specialist helping us to carry out the rest of the task force's recommendations, to truly be the welcoming city that we want to be. It's a whole-community effort, and we'll do it."

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