

Program Development

Our Goal

Because of its dynamic role in providing practical education to help people and society meet the challenges of change, extension re-examines and renews its program structures and priorities on a regular basis.

The goal of extension is to be a relevant, dynamic, and flexible organization able to make a significant impact on problems caused by rapid changes in the global economy, the environment, demographics, family structures, values, social interaction, and the sustainability of resources. These changes cut across issues and program areas and provide the broad context in which specific opportunities are identified for extension programming.

To meet the challenges of change, extension initiated the concept of **signature issues** programming to focus efforts around a specific need, problem, or concern. Issues provide a basis for establishing program objectives, selecting program content, allocating time and resources, selecting target clientele, and determining delivery methods.

For extension, issues are matters of wide public concern arising out of complex human problems. Issues programming begins with the identification of important needs, and then proceeds to focus organizational resources, program content, and delivery methods to meet those needs.

Historically, many extension programs have focused on major issues or had their origins in the traditional discipline bases associated with extension and its clientele. While discipline-based programs will continue to be appropriate, especially to deal with technological solutions to problems, many of today's major issues are more complex and require long-term, multidisciplinary approaches. Thus, today's issues programming has its origin in matters of wide public concern, outside the context and disciplinary structures of the organization.

Extension exists at three levels — national, state, and county — and program planning occurs at all three levels. The issues change and become more specific at each level.

Extension Program Development

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides coordination for programming efforts that support base programs and national initiatives.

National Base Programs and Initiatives

Base programs are the major educational efforts central to the extension mission and common to most units of extension at all levels. Historically, they have been described as major projects, program areas, or core programs. Base programs support the seven major areas in which extension provides educational programming. Base programs receive significant resources throughout extension at the national, state, and county levels. All states provide educational programming in these areas with varying emphasis. They are the ongoing priorities of extension, involving many discipline-based and multidisciplinary programs. They can be thought of as extension's foundation.

National initiatives are extension's commitment to respond to important societal problems of broad concern with allocations of additional resources and significantly increased effort to achieve a major impact on national priorities. Initiatives are the current most significant and complex issues on which

extension has the potential to make a difference, usually in cooperation with other agencies, groups, and units of government. National initiatives usually arise out of one or more components of the base programs. National initiatives are in the spotlight for a period of time until a significant impact is achieved, the need has subsided, or the increased allocation of resources and effort result in the program becoming an ongoing part of base programs.

Over the years, national initiatives have included topics such as water quality, food safety and quality, workforce preparation, animal waste management, Avian Influenza, human nutrition, and childhood obesity. For more information about national base programs and initiatives, visit NIFA’s website at www.cris.nifa.usda.gov.

Relationship of National, State, and Local Priorities

The national extension program includes various levels, each contributing to the overall goals of extension. Program objectives and activities become more specific as they move from the national level to the state and county levels of the system. Individual states and counties may give higher priority to different dimensions of the national initiatives, depending on needs. At the local level, programs become more precisely defined and focus on specific activities for certain clientele. For example, in the national initiative on water quality, state and local programs might address specific issues such as surface runoff, groundwater contamination and use of fertilizers and pesticides.

While national initiatives address broad issues confronting many states, program development at the local level looks at county-based priorities, which are then communicated to the state level to join the research and knowledge base of the university. The result is a cohesive statewide program plan that relates to statewide and national issues. This statewide plan, in turn, becomes the basis for more specific program plans and related activities of extension staff to meet the priority needs of local citizens.

ISU Extension and Outreach Program Development

We took time to talk to Iowans and learn what key issues they felt ISU Extension and Outreach could address with Iowa State resources. From those conversations, we identified four signature issues that encompass the needs they want ISU Extension and Outreach to continue to address with programming.

Those four issues - economic development, health and well-being, K-12 youth outreach, and food and the environment – are the umbrellas over our multi-disciplinary programming, created within and across our program areas (Agriculture and Natural Resources, Human Sciences, 4-H Youth Development, or Community and Economic Development). For a detailed description of each issue, refer to Appendix 17



Programs in each of the signature issue areas are available to all counties, but the appropriate level of programming in any given county depends upon local needs, funding, and priorities.

Program development process allows for a deeper look at the issues, both ongoing and emerging, within each of the signature areas and allows for more thoughtful and meaningful plans on how to address issues.

Our process encourages more collaboration with local, regional, and state partners and creativity in delivering programs that will make measurable and reportable impacts across the state. From county to campus, there are many people involved in assessing needs, designing education, developing programs, implementing learning activities, and evaluating how we are doing in reaching

our mission. Often a council will need to make decisions about partnerships (see Appendix 18, County Extension Office Collaboration Considerations) to assist in the decision making process.

Our program development process provides a structure that improves communication and coordination among the many people involved in programming. Our process helps us:

- Be more effective as an organization
- Focus our efforts and resources according to identified needs
- Identify priorities using a systematic approach, providing a stronger sense of confidence that real needs are being met and the right programs are being provided to improve quality of life in Iowa.

Diversity and Inclusion in Programming

ISU Extension and Outreach Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan

[Iowa State University's Principles of Community](#) describes six principles which the university celebrates and advances diversity by creating a safe place in which people can express themselves freely and share unique talents (Respect, Purpose, Cooperation, Richness of Diversity, Freedom from Discrimination, Honest and respectful expression of ideas www.diversity.iastate.edu/principles-of-community). Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect by fostering an environment of inclusion that moves beyond simple tolerance to recognizing the richness in individual identities of people. Diversity, therefore, is an active process that requires continuous dedication to promote the success of present and future generations of students, faculty, and staff.

ISU Extension and Outreach works to supports the ISU Principles of Community by actively working toward creating such an environment through the implementation of the [ISU Extension and Outreach Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan](#) or [www.extension.iastate.edu/professionaldevelopment/diversity- and-inclusion-strategic-plan](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/professionaldevelopment/diversity-and-inclusion-strategic-plan).

It is our goal to create an inclusive workplace environment that will foster genuine respect, appreciation of differences, and open communication.

Guidelines

As ISU Extension and Outreach employees, we work to improve the lives of Iowans by building partnerships and providing research-based learning experiences. We seek opportunities to assist individuals, families, communities, organizations, businesses, and industries based on the merit of the task and its potential impact on society and not on the basis of age, culture, ethnicity, gender identification and presentation, language and linguistic ability, physical ability and quality, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. We strive to act professionally at all times and know that as employees of the state of Iowa, we must treat all of its residents with dignity and respect. We reserve the right to be different and to hold different beliefs, and acknowledge this right for others.

Vision and Goals

We strive to embody diversity and inclusion in ISU Extension and Outreach programs, practices and people. As diversity is embraced by ISU Extension and Outreach employees and becomes an integral part of our organizational culture, other organizations will strive to emulate what we have done.

Embracing diversity as an ISU Extension and Outreach cultural value that leads to increased programming to diverse and underrepresented communities or clientele groups will increase the importance of engaging underserved communities or clientele groups in Iowa.

To achieve this vision, ISU Extension and Outreach commits to the following organizational goals:

Goal 1: Embedding diversity and inclusion in organizational culture

- **Implement diversity and inclusion professional development**
- **Review internal structure regarding diversity and inclusion**
- **Partner with youth as catalyst for change**

As a result, ISU Extension and Outreach will create an environment in which everyone feels welcome, respected, and safe. It is highly recommended that each ISU Extension and Outreach program/unit has an active diversity committee with specific responsibilities and accountability for addressing equity and diversity issues in the program/unit. It is also highly recommended that every ISU Extension and Outreach employee has a diversity-related goal that aligns with the ISU Extension and Outreach Diversity and Inclusion Strategic plan.

Goal 2: Modeling and marketing diversity and inclusion

- **Develop culturally relevant practices**
- **Create diversity and inclusion marketing messages**

Accordingly, ISU Extension and Outreach develops research-based educational programs that address diversity issues, promote, and model best practices. ISU Extension and Outreach will actively engage with the leadership of diverse audiences. Program areas will strive to provide educational services to diverse and underserved audiences.

Goal 3: Leveling the field to recruit and hire

- **Create practices for diverse hiring**
- **Diversify councils to reflect their counties**

We strive to increase diverse and under-represented populations by using recruiting and hiring practices designed to diversify the applicant pool, as well as being inclusive in leadership and policy opportunities.

Goal 4: Linking our values and resources

- **Assess, adapt, and incentivize resources**

As an organization and a community, we aspire to build a Strong Iowa and recognize the importance of aligning our values of respect and inclusion with the time, resources, and commitment to achieve the vision of this diversity and inclusion strategic plan.

Components of the Program Development Process

Needs Assessment

Input from clients and stakeholders, along with real-time inputs, is synthesized into assessment data that is shared across the state and with program directors.

Council members typically collaborate with staff and others in the community to identify, assess, and analyze educational needs – a gap between the current situation and the desired situation. Sometimes groups or individuals are not aware of their needs or do not view them as priorities. Sometimes educators perceive a need when, in fact, there is not. Answering these questions can help determine if an actual need exists:

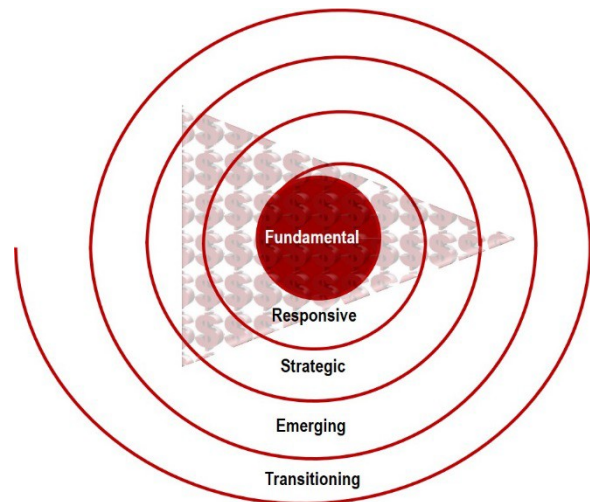
- What is the basis of the need?
- How widespread is it?
- Why is it important?

- How do others feel about it?
- What are the potential consequences if no effort is made to fulfill or meet the need?

The needs identification process will likely reveal a number of issues, some extension can address and some that others will need to address, with or without extension assistance. The added value that extension brings to an issue is our capacity for providing research-based education. Other organizations may take a more “action oriented” approach to an issue. Making this distinction may help councils identify those issues that are right for extension, and it can help extension work with partners to identify opportunities for collaboration.

As our **program portfolio model** shows, we must set priorities about our programming given our available funds.

- At the heart of our portfolio are programs that are fundamental to our system and long-term partnerships.
- Next are programs that are responsive to needs assessments and changing demographics.
- Strategic programs integrate resources across the university and land-grant system, are multi-disciplinary and diversified, and address signature issues.
- We address emerging program opportunities that need an educational response.
- Finally, we must transition programs that can be spun off to a partner, sustained locally, or for which an educational need no longer exists.



The following criteria should be used to determine if we can address a need:

- Does the issue, problem, or concern fall within our mission?
- Can the issue be addressed through educational strategies?
- Is there expertise available to help address the issue?
- Has the issue been identified by others as being of great concern in the county and/or region?

Once we have eliminated issues that do not align with our fundamental principles, we can prioritize remaining efforts using the following criteria:

- The number of people affected by the issue.
- How addressing the issue would contribute to organizational goals.
- The urgency of the issue.
- The degree to which addressing the issue will have a positive or negative effect on addressing other issues.
- The size of the gap between the current and desired states.
- The degree to which an educational intervention would be effective.
- The availability of resources.
- The commitment of organizations and audiences.

Other prioritizing inquiries relate more specifically to the local situation, such as:

- Will addressing this issue broaden our reach in the community/county?
- How well is this issue being addressed by others in the community/county?

Finally, some consideration must be given to what we are trying to achieve at the local level — visibility, numbers, repeat customers, support from funders, impact, or some combination of these goals. A sample process that councils can follow is located in Appendix 6, Learning Module 23, Program Planning Process.

Program Development

Program directors set priorities that address our mission, critical needs, and/or emerging issues. Goals must include measurement of outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Program specialists apply current research-based information and best educational practices for transformational learning to design learning opportunities. They develop curriculum and establish plans for needed materials, delivery, and evaluation. To assist council members in making program decisions, a program catalog is available with more than 100 programs. The catalog serves as a guide for determining in which programs a council wishes to invest. Instructions for using the catalog and table of contents are located in Appendix 6, Learning Module 4. Council members should also review available program dollars in the current budget before making final program decisions.

Program categories include:

- **Core programs** – These programs address federal and state priorities or mandates. They are listed in the program catalog, but can be replaced temporarily to shift resources to a new priority when a need arises. A core program may have limited course offerings at any one time.
- **Emerging issues** – These programs are developed and piloted to address issues emerging in Iowa and can include emergency response, grant requirements, and institutional priorities. These may become core programs or fade away over time. They are listed as experimental in the program catalog.
- **Custom programs** – These programs are developed for a unique need to targeted audiences. They are not listed in the program catalog.

Schedule Programs

Councils should consider how soon they want to implement the program, what is realistic given the nature of the program, whether the audience would be more receptive in one season or situation than another, and whether there are timing issues to consider for effective marketing and funding either through grants, county dollars, or donations. Having a plan on paper is important, but goals won't be met unless the plan is carried out. Plans for implementation will vary by program design, which in most cases is carried out by the program specialist with the assistance of county staff.

Marketing

Effective marketing is a key implementation component. Assuming the program has been designed to meet the needs of target markets, further marketing considerations include effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform people of the program. Typically this includes publicity through social media, brochures, word of mouth, news releases, and other methods.

Program Delivery

Program specialists, Iowa Master Gardeners, community partners, and trained county staff typically deliver researched education to community members through face-to-face meetings. In addition, many programs today are delivered through Adobe Connect, Zoom, or videos on YouTube. The electronic modes of delivery lessens travel and time and is available on demand. Councils will want to take the time to examine the best delivery method for their intended audience.

Evaluation

Evaluation results are consolidated statewide and are used for future decisions when the program development process starts a new cycle. Evaluation results are also used when reporting to stakeholders.

Evaluation plans should be developed during program design. The planning group should determine what aspects (process, results/outcomes, effectiveness or methods) it wishes to evaluate. Planners need to determine at what point the evaluation will take place. Will it be after each component activity or event, or will the evaluation be conducted after the program is complete to see if participants have used the new information or gained new skills?

From whom to gather information is also a consideration. Will you seek information from all participants or only a sample group? Finally, evaluation plans should take into consideration who should receive the results. The format and content might vary depending on whether it is intended for internal or external use. In other words, the questions may vary depending on whether the results are to be used by educators to modify programs or used by funders to determine continued support.

Some critical questions that should guide monitoring and evaluating are:

- What progress are we making toward our goals and objectives?
- Are the strategies we picked helping us to reach our goals and objectives?
- What changes are we seeing in program participants and the condition of the problems/issues we are addressing as a result of our program?

Program evaluation can take many forms and can occur at several levels of specificity.

- **Level I** – At this level, an evaluation might assess inputs to the program by inquiring about participants’ general reactions to the program content, method of delivery, access, marketing, etc.
- **Level II** – Here, evaluation assesses outputs such as whether participants gained new knowledge, changed attitudes, or acquired new skills.
- **Level III** - This level is one that extension is striving for in appropriate program areas. Here, evaluation assesses the extent to which new practices are adopted or behavior is changed. This third level is commonly referred to as “impact” evaluation.

Evaluation findings should be given considerable weight in future program planning. A program may be found to be successful without need for change, or there may be room for revisions that will improve the program’s effectiveness in meeting stated goals. Evaluators also need to consider whether a program has served its purpose and might be phased out.

Roles and Responsibilities

Program Development Process

All County, Field, and State Staff

- Collect impact data and share success stories with clients, funders, partners, stakeholders, public policy leaders, and others. See Appendix 6, Learning Module 13 for more information on success stories.

County Extension Councils

Conduct informal needs assessment by listening to community clients and citizens.

- Participate in formal needs assessment process.
- Talk with program specialists to learn of emerging trends and needs.
- Provide funding for programs.
- Participate in training and development as appropriate.

County Staff

- Conduct informal needs assessment by listening to community clients and citizens.
- Participate in formal needs assessment process.
- Talk with program specialists to learn of emerging trends and needs.
- Participate in training and development.
- Train for and deliver selected programs.
- Evaluate delivered programs and report results to direct supervisor, extension council, regional director, and program specialist(s).
- Report on program impact and upcoming programs regularly.

Regional Directors

- Assist in informal needs assessment by listening to community clients and citizens.
- Participate in formal needs assessment process.
- Talk with program specialists to learn of emerging trends and needs.
- Collect and report needs. Provide training on council and staff roles in program development process; provide opportunities for councils and county staff to discuss with program specialists.
- Coordinate priority programming and scheduling within region and with program director.
- Encourage evaluation and reporting, coordinating reporting between direct supervisor, extension council, regional director, and program specialist(s).

Program Directors

- Aggregate needs assessments from regional directors, program areas, and other stakeholders; determine which will and will not be addressed.
- Communicate with councils on how programming decisions were made.
- Lead efforts to locate and acquire resources to support programs. Redirect resources to address emergencies.
- Ensure effective educational programming is developed and delivered to meet identified needs.
- Confirm appropriate program training and development is provided.
- Conduct program evaluations. Report on programs at delivery stages and during evaluation process.

Program Specialists

- Stay abreast of research, trends, and market demand in area of expertise, locating pre-existing curriculum to implement or develop new curriculum.
- Work with councils and county staff to schedule and conduct programming.
- Partner with councils to match appropriate programming with identified needs and assist in the identification and/or acquisition of resources.
- Conduct program evaluation. Inform councils and staff about program outcomes.
- Provide training for county staff.
- Participate in content and process specific professional development.
- Report on impacts and upcoming programs regularly.