

## STRUCTURED FOR SUCCESS

# ONE YEAR SUMMARY

Structured for Success officially launched July 1, 2020, after nearly two years of study, planning, and feedback, with the final plan announced in November 2019. We extend our thanks to extension councils for their quick and thoughtful review of the options and for making their selection of Model 1, 2, or 3 by February 2020. The plan increased the number of regions from 20 to 27, assigned additional responsibilities to regional directors, and reduced, in most cases, the number of counties they covered. Additional regional directors were hired and trained prior to the launch, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially there were 55 Model 1, three Model 2, and 42 Model 3 counties. During the first year, three counties switched from Model 3 to Model 1.

### **Together we have reached several milestones**

- We implemented the Two-Way Scorecard Communication Tool, a formal feedback methodology for the new Memorandum of Understanding between counties and Iowa State University. This survey, completed by both parties to evaluate the implementation of the MOU, has generally reported high function in all six categories and improved scores over time. While much of the value proposed with the change is being realized, there is more work to do.
- The role of the regional director has greater clarity, particularly in Model 1 and 2 counties. With the reduced number of counties assigned to each regional director there is a stronger connection to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, improved communication with councils and staff, and greater involvement in program planning and partnership development. The role of the county director in Models 1 and 3 is more clearly defined, and county directors and program coordinators have additional professional development opportunities.
- The addition of the two directors of field operations, who work closely with regional directors, also has improved consistency, oversight, and response time. In this role Gene Mohling and Bryan Whaley coach new regional directors, supervise all regional directors, and provide backfill to regions rather than pulling a regional director from other counties. Gene and Bryan have particularly emphasized county finance trainings, updates, fiscal policy, audit communication and support, and significant training to both regional directors and county directors on how to budget. We have seen an increase in the number of financially healthy county districts statewide, partly due to decreased spending during the pandemic but also due to better training and oversight. The directors of field operations have provided additional support to councils and regional directors in counties facing difficult issues regarding budget, grants, human resources, and partnerships.
- Realigning program unit assignments to regions has strengthened teams and promoted better communication. The shift has allowed regional directors to provide greater consistency in communication, programming, implementation, and supervision across the state. Their supervisory role has lessened the burden on council members of day-to-day operations and staff management. They are in the offices more often, provide more staff coaching, and address human resources issues more quickly and consistently than before. Regional directors are integrating into the county staff and are increasingly seen as part of the county team. With regional directors handling more of the administrative responsibilities, county directors and program coordinators have more time for local engagement and programming.

- Iowa State University is providing more professional development opportunities for County Services staff. A monthly HR Learning Hour is provided for both regional directors and Model 3 county directors. County directors and program coordinators are encouraged to work more closely with program specialists and deliver or assist with delivering programming and are provided opportunities to do so. The planning and implementation of the Recovery Initiatives are a good example of county staff not only getting more involved, but often providing leadership for programming.
- To date, 33 counties now offer ISU health and dental insurance to their staff and more may join during the next open enrollment period in November.

## Areas for improvement and growth going forward

- More work is needed on the relationship between county director, regional director, and councils in Model 3 counties. In some counties the relationship is sound and in others it is still evolving. For the first time in more than 10 years, county directors are receiving communications via a listserv, have a regular webinar series directly related to their work, and have established a formal peer group that they lead to prioritize important topics. For Model 3 county directors and regional directors, we are developing a curriculum of priority and elective offerings in human resources and supervision, compliance and finance, and engagement and programming. Most of these offerings already exist, but the curriculum will help staff and councils prioritize and organize a plan for professional growth.
- Iowa State continues to offer professional development opportunities for program coordinators to become more proficient in a program area and be able to deliver or assist in delivering programming locally. This includes making more educational program offerings available for county staff to deliver. The Curriculum Review Process was updated, with increased attention given to program offerings that are research-based and have evaluation tools. Iowa State also is working to improve and formalize the program planning process at the county and regional level. It will more purposefully include county staff and program specialists and be coordinated by the regional director.
- To further improve communication among counties and specialists, 4-H, Human Sciences, and Advancement realigned their county assignments to match regions more closely. Counties have been assigned a point of contact for Community and Economic Development programming, and Agriculture and Natural Resources specialists continue to strengthen linkages with county staff. Additional actions taken to improve communication within our system include the six area meetings attended by the leadership team, visits by the Vice President for Extension and Outreach to all 100 county offices, the virtual suggestion box, and the Assistant Vice President for County Services Weekly Recap.

The tone and topic of discussion have changed significantly in the months after implementing Structured for Success compared with the months leading up to the transition. Earlier unknowns and concerns have changed to greater clarity of role and purpose, renewed focus on programming, and more evidence of a well-functioning team. Making the transition during the disruption of COVID-19 speaks volumes about the character and resilience of our staff and councils.

Structured for Success has given ISU Extension and Outreach more centralized guidance and has focused our energy on moving forward instead of working against or around each other. We are completing important work while councils can retain governance and staff can focus on operations and programming. We have made great progress and we will continue to improve in the years ahead. Together we will build a strong Iowa.



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