

# STRUCTURED FOR SUCCESS: A PROPOSAL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Charge to the Committee

In September 2018, Vice President for Extension and Outreach John Lawrence established a committee to review how Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is organized in the counties and the county-to-campus connection. The committee was charged with studying what had been learned since the 2009 reorganization. The committee's task was to determine how ISU Extension and Outreach could effectively educate and serve Iowans and how the organization's structure would impact its ability to do so. In essence, the committee was to seek out structures for success.

## Overview of the Process

When an organization spends time evaluating its structure, it is not uncommon for staff to experience some level of concern. Recognizing this possibility, the Structured for Success Committee operated with transparency and provided [frequent updates](#) throughout the past year.

The committee identified three steps for finding potential structures for success:

1. Identify important functions for extension to effectively educate and serve Iowans.
2. Explore and learn from models of extension education and program delivery across Iowa and in other states.
3. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of alternative models regarding the ability to educate and serve Iowans. Specifically, the committee would examine how any proposed structure would impact ISU Extension and Outreach's ability to adjust to emerging issues; recruit, retain, and grow employees; enhance the reputation, respect, and relationship with stakeholders; and sustain and rebound through uncertain budgets.

To address these steps, the committee reviewed the 2009 reorganization, as well as ISU Extension and Outreach's current structure. The committee also reviewed council and staff perspectives gained during the 2018 Listening Sessions and from the Internal Communications Task Force.

To gain additional information, the committee conducted a survey of 100 extension councils and staff and had discussions with the 11 extension directors and staff in the North Central Region. The findings include what the committee believes are important functions that should occur locally to effectively educate and serve Iowans.

The Structured for Success White Paper summarizes the information that the committee gathered. It also includes the committee's guiding principles for effectively educating and serving Iowans.

## Identifying Structures for Success

The Structured for Success Committee was asked to determine how ISU Extension and Outreach could effectively educate and serve Iowans and how the organization's structure would impact its ability to do so. The committee incorporated information learned during the 2018 Listening Sessions and from the Internal Communications Task Force Report and gathered information about how counties currently are operating in Iowa, as well as from other states in the north central region.

## Goals

After completing this review, the committee set the following goals for identifying potential structures for success. To be successful, an organizational structure must enable ISU Extension and Outreach to:

- effectively educate and serve lowans with resources from Iowa State University;
- increase focus on engagement, programming, and partnership development;
- recruit and retain talented, professional, and passionate staff;
- reduce the burden on councils related to human resources, finance, and program selection; and
- improve communication and accountability within the ISU Extension and Outreach system.

## Strategies

The committee believes an organizational structure for success should be based on the following strategies:

- Emphasize ISU Extension and Outreach's mission in education and engagement, and position staff to be successful.
- Position councils to act more as boards of directors and less as managers. Councils should establish policy and procedure, and ISU and staff should be responsible for implementation.
- Clarify and simplify reporting lines, responsibilities, accountability, and communication.
- Develop and adopt more consistent position descriptions for ISU and county staff.
- Encourage councils to move toward competitive salary and benefits for staff to improve recruiting and retention.
- Improved retention will improve internal and external communication and relationships.
- Provide opportunities for professional growth of staff.

## **DRAFT PROPOSAL: A Renewed Partnership**

To meet these goals and strategies, the Structured for Success Committee developed the following proposal with two models for a renewed partnership between Iowa State University and county extension councils. The committee is sharing this proposed plan to start a discussion. Your feedback is needed.

### Modest Changes to Improve the Organization

This partnership proposal makes modest changes to the current system that will help ISU Extension and Outreach better serve and educate lowans.

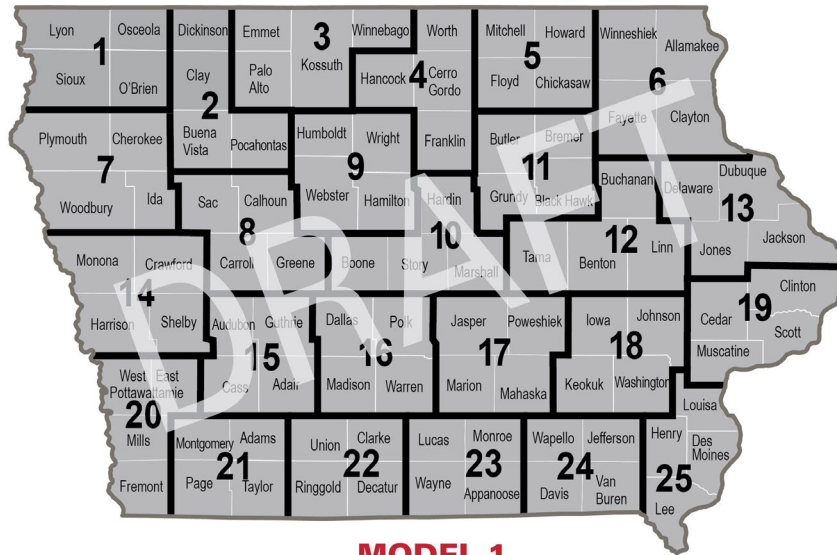
- First, it places more emphasis on local engagement and education, clarifies reporting lines throughout the system, and reduces administrative burden on county extension councils.
- Second, it provides access to the ISU health and dental insurance plan for county employees and provides a clearer career path.
- Finally, the plan asks county extension districts to pay an additional shared services fee to have ISU provide more service and assume more responsibilities and to provide access to insurance for staff.

### Please Provide Feedback

The following overview of the two models provides details about the plan and how it will impact county extension councils and their staff, their budget, and their ability to serve and educate people in their county. Please read through the plan and talk with colleagues in your county and those in neighboring counties. Discuss it with councils, staff, and regional directors.

The Structured for Success Committee wants to answer questions you may have. (Answers to frequently asked questions will be available and updated as needed.) Please provide feedback on the proposal. There will be multiple ways to provide feedback, including virtual and in-person meetings, an online suggestion box, an online survey, and phone or email.

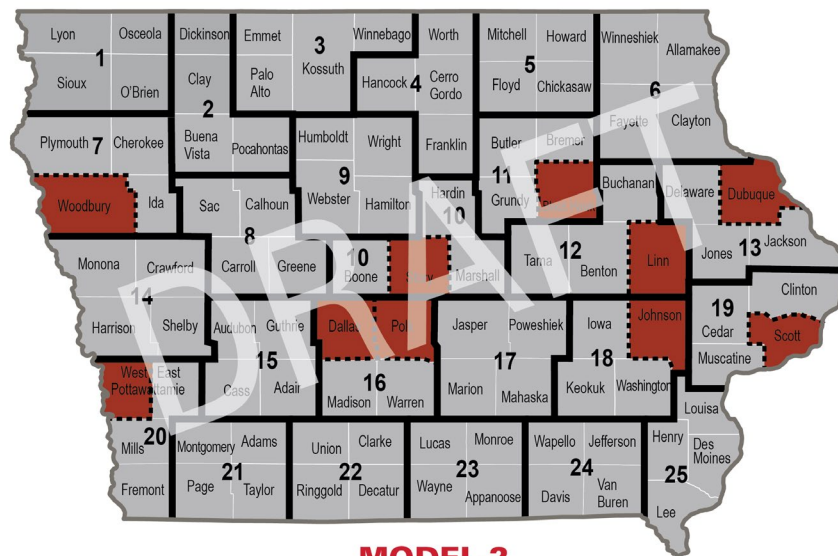
## Model 1: Twenty-Five Regions and Each Regional Director Leads Four Counties



**MODEL 1**

This model calls for 25 four-county regions with 25 ISU regional directors funded centrally. Each regional director will lead four counties and have additional responsibilities and a clarified role. Regional directors, acting on behalf of the extension councils and within the ISU Extension and Outreach mission and Iowa Code, will be responsible for human resources, financial management, and program selection, and will help councils follow appropriate rules and regulations. County staff will work closely with the regional director to develop and implement the county plan of work. County staff also will spend more time serving lowans through education and engagement. They will work with program specialists to facilitate and, where appropriate, deliver programming. County staff will be expected to affiliate with and enhance their knowledge in a program area.

## Model 2: One-County or Two-County Regional Director Option for Large Counties



**MODEL 2**

This model provides an option for a small number of large counties to fund a one-county regional director or for two counties to fund and share a two-county regional director. These regional directors will be ISU employees with the same responsibilities as the four-county regional directors. Interested counties must have an operating budget over \$350,000 and 10 or more staff as a single county or as two counties combined. ISU will contribute 20% per county for salary, benefits, and travel. The counties involved fund the remainder. The goal is that the administrative duties and number of staff managed are similar to a regional director with four counties. The position description, title, and minimum requirements are the same for all regional directors, but the service area is different. The role of county staff would be similar to Model 1.

## Model 1 and 2: Further Clarification

Using a school analogy, the council is the school board, the regional director is the superintendent, and staff are teachers.

**Extension Councils** as defined in 176A:

- enter into a memorandum of understanding with ISU Extension and Outreach for cooperation,
- employ extension professional personnel with assistance from ISU Extension and Outreach,
- establish compensation for county paid staff with input from ISU Extension and Outreach,
- prepare the annual budget and certify to the board of supervisors with assistance from ISU Extension and Outreach, and
- are responsible for extension education programming in cooperation with ISU Extension and Outreach.

**Regional directors** help implement council's responsibilities:

- integrate council priorities with ISU mission and Iowa code via a plan of work;
- provide hiring, onboarding, mentoring, supervision, and performance review for county staff;
- coordinate and implement budget and financial management;
- assure accreditation, reporting, and risk management implementation;
- collaborate with councils, staff, and program specialists on program selection and delivery following the county plan of work; and
- explore collaboration across counties and partners.

**County staff** deliver on the county plan of work:

- focus on stakeholder education and engagement;
- align with a program area and grow as an extension educator;
- engage stakeholders, develop and maintain partnerships, and assess needs;
- recruit and develop volunteers, promote programs, and nurture relationships;
- facilitate and/or deliver educational programming in partnership with specialists; and
- evaluate and report outcomes and impacts to councils, stakeholders, and ISU Extension and Outreach.

In both Model 1 and Model 2, ISU assumes more responsibility for human resource management, provides staff training, and implements Equal Opportunity Employment practices and assumes additional staff misconduct risks. Councils have formal input on hiring and performance review of regional directors through representation on the interview committee and by providing input to the assistant vice president for county services. During the first year of transition, councils will be asked for quarterly feedback on the regional director's performance and changes implemented. Program specialists report to program directors, but regional directors will provide formal input on program specialist annual performance review.

The proposed plan modifies duties and realigns service areas. Regional directors will be assigned to the newly defined regions. ISU Extension and Outreach will make assignments and will take into account input from the regional directors and extension councils. New regional directors will be hired for the remaining regions, onboarded, and trained prior to the launch date.

## Staff Recruitment and Retention

County councils are encouraged to adopt a recommended staffing model of educator, director, program coordinator (for example, CYC), and office assistant as resources allow. Current county directors are encouraged to shift their focus to education and engagement and align more closely with a program area for professional development. Program areas will develop curriculum and training appropriate for county educators, directors, and coordinators to deliver. Career path opportunities with additional experience and/or education are from director or coordinator to educator to specialist, or from director or coordinator to regional director. Educator, specialist, and regional director positions require a master's degree and experience. The Tuition Assistance Program is available to help county staff obtain additional education.

By participating in this renewed partnership, counties may provide health and dental insurance for their employees through ISU's health and dental insurance plan. To be eligible, employees must be employed at least half time (20 hours a week or more) per ISU policy. The ISU plan is an excellent plan and is offered through Blue Cross and Blue Shield. It is a large pool of employees and the plan has competitive and stable premiums. The information on the ISU Benefits webpage reflects current plans, which will be updated with the next open enrollment period in November 2019 and take effect January 1, 2020. The Structured for Success Committee proposes that counties joining the partnership enroll beginning July 1, 2020, to give staff time to review the 2020 plan and councils time to budget for employer contributions. The full information about cost and coverage will be provided for councils and staff to make decisions.

Counties joining the ISU health and dental plan will be billed by ISU monthly for the total employer and employee contributions. Counties should follow their policy on the employer contribution of insurance premiums that they provide employees. ISU Extension and Outreach can share ISU's policy on employer contribution with interested councils.

The Structured for Success Committee believes that providing county employees quality health and dental insurance, offering the opportunity for career advancement and tuition assistance, and clarifying roles and responsibilities will enhance job satisfaction and allow ISU Extension and Outreach to recruit and retain great extension professionals.

### Shared Services Fee

**The proposed plan will place more emphasis on local education and engagement, reduce administrative burden on councils, clarify roles and responsibilities for staff, and provide access to competitively priced, quality health and dental insurance. In turn, ISU and counties will be better able to recruit and retain professionals who will strengthen relationships and build trust with internal and external partners.**

However, the plan will require additional funding. ISU will allocate additional funding and counties are asked to provide additional funding to ISU Extension and Outreach to support the additional services provided.

The current Memorandum of Understanding between ISU Extension and Outreach and county extension councils charges each county a shared services fee of 2.7% of their tax revenue. In return, counties receive statewide financial accounting system licensing, training, and support; in-office network technology and hotline support; and branding support services. This partnership proposes to ask counties to pay an additional shared services fee of between 2.0 – 3.0% of their tax revenue for counties in four-county regions. Counties funding a one-county or two-county regional director will not pay the additional fee.

In return for the additional service fee, county councils will receive assistance in carrying out their responsibilities under Iowa Code. This includes assistance with human resource management, employment and civil rights compliance, financial management, and program selection and implementation. County staff can focus more attention on local relationships, marketing, and programming, and access health and dental insurance. There are still details to be finalized and they will be developed as feedback is gathered. Details will be finalized before commitments are made.

### Timeline

The Structured for Success Committee introduced the proposal August 20, 2019, via an Adobe Connect webinar. The presentation was archived for later viewing. ISU Extension and Outreach leadership will be seeking comment and feedback on the proposal until Friday, October 11. There will be multiple ways to provide feedback, including virtual and in-person meetings, an online suggestion box, an online survey, and phone or email.

This feedback will be reviewed, and revisions made, with the final version made available October 21, 2019. Extension councils will have until January 1, 2020, to indicate choice of Model 1 or 2. The change in regional boundaries, regional directors and roles and responsibilities, and access to ISU benefits will begin July 1, 2020. Half of the partnership assessment will be due November 1, 2020.

*Updated 8/21/19*