

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Structured for Success: Common Themes from Frequently Asked Questions¹

We have read and considered all the questions and comments we have received regarding Structured for Success. This document summarizes common themes of questions and comments submitted during five virtual listening sessions in September, during the area-wide meetings and other face-to-face sessions in August and September, and via the virtual suggestion box on the Vice President for Extension and Outreach webpage.

— John D. Lawrence, Iowa State University Vice President for Extension and Outreach

General Structured for Success proposal

- **(New question and answer) What prompted Structured for Success?**

It has been 10 years since the last reorganization of ISU Extension and Outreach, and it was time to look at what we have learned since 2009. With Structured for Success we wanted to identify what is working well and what is not, and what we can do to better educate and serve Iowans. We examined what we learned from the 2018 listening sessions and from the Internal Communications Task Force. The committee also gathered information about how counties currently are operating in Iowa, as well as from other state extension services in the north central region.

As the committee developed models for consideration, they determined, that to be successful, an organizational structure must enable ISU Extension and Outreach to:

- effectively educate and serve Iowans 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.

- **Please address the lack of county staff representation on the Structured for Success committee.**

Two county directors represented county staff on the Structured for Success committee; one recently became a regional director. Our committee was not large but did strive to represent all staff groups in the discussions. Please provide feedback and suggestions using the means being made available (virtual suggestion box, area-wide meetings, etc.). By sharing ideas and concerns at feedback meetings and via the virtual suggestion box, you are giving input into the process of creating a proposed model.

¹ This document updates the previous version from Sept. 10, 2019.

- **Can we offer a different model for consideration?**

(Updated answer) We are currently taking comments, questions, and suggestions on the proposed Model 1 and Model 2. If you wish to make a comment (individual or group) as an outline for a different model, yes, we are open to a third or fourth model. **A group of county directors has proposed a third model. We're reviewing their draft with Iowa State Human Resources and University Counsel and expect to share a third model after the review is complete.** Our objective is that **any model** should enhance local programming, reduce burden on councils, and assure ISU Extension and Outreach a seat at the county table on programming and personnel.

- **Why is there a concern about removing the burden from county extension councils?**

(Updated answer) This was a comment often heard during the listening sessions in 2018. It came from council members who felt that they were spending more time and taking on more responsibilities than they had anticipated. In the 2009 reorganization, many responsibilities were shifted to councils, which increased their liability and workload. The models are focused on addressing that issue.

It appears that some council members don't feel burdened by the responsibilities **outlined in the Extension Council Reference Manual appendix, [Extension Council Responsibilities](#).**

- **Our current county programming partnerships don't align with new regions. Will we be allowed to keep these partnerships?**

We strongly encourage collaboration and regional programming. We hope that regional directors will identify opportunities for collaborating across counties; working across regional lines is encouraged. Long-standing partnerships providing engagement and educational programming are important to ISU Extension and Outreach.

- **How important is a county program plan of work and how will all involved be held accountable for creating and following a county program plan of work?**

(Updated answer) An objective of the proposal is to increase the capacity for local programming. County councils are responsible for programming decisions with input from ISU Extension and Outreach. Regional directors working with councils, staff, and specialists to develop a plan of work are expected to provide programming in all four program areas and recognize opportunities to collaborate across county lines within their region.

The proposal calls for program areas to develop programming appropriate for county staff to facilitate, partner on, or deliver, and provide training to staff to help them be successful. We still want counties to use Iowa State University approved programs. Specialists in the field and on campus will continue to be an important part of program delivery and, at times, a limiting factor. We do believe that increased communication and collaboration with county and field specialists will benefit local programming.

The **county program** plan of work is a written plan developed in collaboration with councils, staff, and specialists, and provides a method of accountability. Responsibilities are assigned and accepted as the plan is developed, before it is formally adopted by the extension council. **The plan of work schedules programming that is current and meets the needs of constituents. Creating the plan is an opportunity for county councils and staff to outline local needs with program specialists, identify**

Iowa State University programming that provides needed education and resources, and identify potential agency partners outside Iowa State University.

- **What do you see the county office staffing looking like in the new model?**

(Updated answer) County staffing should include the people who are needed to fulfill the responsibilities of county offices and Iowa State as outlined by Iowa Code 176A and the requirements agreed upon by counties in the Memorandum of Understanding with Iowa State University.

This proposal considers the responsibilities of the elected council, a regional director and program specialists who are Iowa State employees, and county hired/paid bookkeeper, office assistant/manager, county director, program coordinator, county youth coordinator, and program specialists/educators as deemed necessary and funded by the county. County budgets and priorities will determine much of the county staffing decisions.

[County-staff-led recommendations](#) proposed in 2018 are still useful as a starting point for council discussions. Model 1 does propose changes to these position recommendations. As Structured for Success models are finalized, county position descriptions/expectations will be modified accordingly and made available.

- **(New question and answer) The increased services fee would roughly double the county contribution to the partnership. Will we see a detailed budget or breakdown showing how the money will be spent? It is difficult for counties to increase monetary support while we are not receiving more services, especially for programming.**

Please note that the proposed models offer more services than the current MOU and provide more value than is offered today. Details of how the money will be used will be provided before councils will be asked to commit funds.

- **(New question and answer) When the Structured for Success models are implemented, how will individuals at the county, regional, and state levels be held accountable?**

We plan to develop a “two-way scorecard” based on the MOU. This scorecard will provide a formal way to provide feedback to partners. Counties will be able to score regional directors, program specialists, and campus administration on defined responsibilities. Similarly, counties will receive feedback on defined expectations.

Regional directors

- **How will the gap between current skills of regional directors and their future role be addressed?**

There will be training for regional directors as well as expectations defining their new responsibilities. The assistant vice president for county services supervises the regional directors and will be in regular contact with councils regarding progress on the proposal and performance of their regional director. Initially, there will be a formal quarterly check-in with councils and staff regarding progress on the plan and on regional director performance.

Current regional directors will be assigned to newly formed regions with input from councils. Additional training will be provided to all regional directors to match the new job expectations, regardless of previous training and experience.

- **How will regional director assignments be made?**

Final region boundaries are yet to be determined. Current regional directors will be assigned to the newly formed regions with input from councils and regional directors. We encourage staff to contact John Lawrence or Andrea Nelson and to talk to the chair of the county extension council with concerns regarding assignment of existing regional directors.

There will be an interview process for hiring new regional directors; we will provide a method for county staff to provide input on regional directors. Councils will be a part of the interview committee and provide formal input on any new hires.

- **How will regional directors manage human resources and supervision of county staff for four counties?**

By having one regional director supervise staff from multiple counties, there will be efficiency gains compared to multiple people being supervisors. A goal of having the regional director take on more supervision is to have one individual be able to mentor, coach, and evaluate more staff; to have that individual specialize and train; and to hold that individual accountable to do it well. The second goal is to free county directors to shift attention to local programming.

Many of our ISU Extension and Outreach team (e.g., field specialists, regional directors) are coached and evaluated without daily supervision. If the council believes that constant supervision of county staff is necessary, then we will work out a plan for that location. The council, staff, and regional director will work to define daily operation responsibilities that occur now. The discussion will be about which responsibilities will change under the model selected.

Field specialists

- **Where do field specialists fit into the model?**

The Internal Communications Task Force recommended developing consistent program area teams across units for implementation across the state. Program leaders are being asked to consider how their field specialists' coverage areas will align with regions once they are finalized.

Program specialists in every discipline will continue to provide regional directors and county staff and councils with input on priority programs. Regional directors will retain responsibilities to work with council program committees and county staff to develop county program plans of work based on community needs and recommended programs.

The current proposal will have a modest effect on day-to-day function of the program specialist roles. Specialists are expected to partner more closely with county staff on local programming to help build the capacity and confidence of county staff, as well as a stronger connection and voice with the program unit.

County directors and/or county program coordinators

- **What is the role of county directors and/or county program coordinators?**

County extension councils will maintain the ability to have county directors, but we will be encouraging councils to have county directors do less administration and more engagement and education. We also are asking that they be formally connected to a program unit and help maintain the programming direction for the county.

The county program coordinator (and other county staff) should continue to focus attention on programming, partnerships, engagement, and education. People know and trust the county staff and that is important; the proposal calls for the county staff to be the face of extension in the county and shift more focus on engagement and education.

While there will be a shift in some responsibilities such as human resources, budget, and finance, many counties are well on their way with the proposed model. In these counties, county directors have healthy relationships with the council and are making great headway in building community partners and increasing the diversity of staff and program participants. These counties serve as examples of what this model wants for all counties.

- **What are the responsibilities of county program coordinators as educators?**

The proposal calls for county staff to focus more attention on engagement, education, partnership development, marketing, and other local programming in their county.

The Structured for Success Committee very much values the local engagement of county staff, including program coordination. To support a stronger focus on engagement and educational programming, the proposal recommends that county directors focus more on engagement and education, and designate a program area, which will create a closer connection to program units.

Finding the right balance between teaching, partnering, and coordinating will likely evolve. We see county directors being a complement to field specialists, not a substitute, when teaching. We need to look at opportunities – programs or curriculum that are appropriate for county staff to teach that specialists may not have time to deliver. Or perhaps there are parts of the program that the county staff member delivers, and specialists teach other parts. There is a county educator position defined as having a master's degree and providing education that might be comparable to a specialist in some fields. Currently there are not many of these county educator positions in Iowa counties, however, this is the norm in other state extension systems.

- **Why do county program coordinators need to have program area affiliation?**

County staff will need to work with their council on choosing which program area to more closely align with to ensure it meets the needs of the county. Having a person on county staff with a designated program area will create a closer connection to program units and improve communications between program unit specialists and county offices. We hope staff will self-select to best serve the needs of the county. This will make it possible to bring another perspective to representing the program unit in programming conversations.