

# Young Iowans Speak: Imagining Extension's Next 100 Years



## 5 GOALS FOR GREATER RELEVANCY

After a day of serious discussion, a group of young Iowans suggested that ISU Extension and Outreach strive to achieve five goals for becoming more relevant to younger constituents.

- 1** Provide opportunities for people to engage and connect with their community.
- 2** Bridge the gap between academics/research and communities/needs.
- 3** Be neutral and bring groups together to identify issues and take action.
- 4** Provide unbiased data for personal, professional, and community decision-making.
- 5** Serve all people of Iowa with a more flexible, efficient, and responsive structure.

**To find an answer, ask a question.** That is exactly what Iowa State University Extension and Outreach did in March 2014. To learn how to best serve the needs of Iowans over the next 100 years, ISU Extension and Outreach asked the people who embody Iowa's future — today's young Iowans ages 18 to 35.

"Extension's Next 100 Years: Young Iowans Speak" was the first in a series of "Extension Reconsidered" forums being held throughout the United States to mark the centennial of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the federal legislation that established the national Cooperative Extension System. The Iowa forum received support from the Kettering Foundation, which works primarily through joint learning exchanges focused on solving problems that all participants have a stake in addressing.

ISU Extension and Outreach asked young Iowans to share their views and visions of the future, as well as how Iowa State University could contribute to that future. They represented both urban and rural places and may or may not have had prior experience with or knowledge of ISU Extension and Outreach. The forum was part of a long arc of ISU Extension and Outreach strategic planning, needs assessment, and continuing efforts to engage more young people in Extension and Outreach education.

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Young Iowans want to explore, learn, and share with others in mutually supportive environments within academia and communities. They also want the university and ISU Extension and Outreach to provide more meaningful partnerships in communities and continue to foster the benefits of the arts in community work.

### What's Important to Young Iowans

**Personal satisfaction**, the young Iowans said, depends on

- fulfillment in their careers, family life, and community life;
- connections to their community on a deep personal level and support from community members;
- acceptance for who they are; and
- inclusion in community decision-making.

Young Iowans believe that diverse perspectives are needed for functional, sustainable, and livable communities.

**Professional or career satisfaction** depends on

- freedom to acquire new skills and make career-life transitions;
- independence to act and succeed in the public, private, or nonprofit sector; and
- flexibility in their work environment, which means more than simply flexible hours. Young Iowans want the flexibility to seek new roles and challenges with the same employer. They believe worker satisfaction is the key to organizational success.

**Community success depends on diversity**, the young Iowans said. Whether urban or rural, the strongest communities will

- offer a range of jobs and living opportunities for people in all stages of life and at all socioeconomic levels;
- embrace different cultures, backgrounds, preferences, and viewpoints; and
- encourage social interaction in public spaces and activities. People must want to live and work in Iowa communities.



**Show ... and tell.** Six student artists from the Iowa State University College of Design captured the young Iowans' discussions and translated the ideas into conceptual drawings – documenting the day through art. The artists shared their drawings with the group for feedback at the end of the day. Afterward, the artists merged their drawings into a 4' x 8' mural entitled "Young Iowans Speak about the Future of Extension."

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### 3 Roles for Iowa State University

The young Iowans saw three roles for the entire university — not just units labeled “extension” or “outreach.”

#### 1. Iowa State University should be a life-long partner for retooling, reinvention, and reawakening.

- This means
- making it possible for people to call on the university at any life stage, and
  - providing technical knowledge, career exploration, business and entrepreneurial assistance, or personal counseling to meet the needs of Iowans.

#### 2. Iowa State University should act as a resource to society.

- This means
- providing expertise in many areas, including the arts, education, business, design, social sciences, and technical sciences; and
  - serving individuals, as well as geographic and professional communities. ISU Extension and Outreach can play the role of “navigator,” acting in partnership with citizens to build and negotiate relationships across the broader university.

#### 3. Iowa State University should engage as a co-learner with citizens.

- This means
- rejecting the expert model,
  - valuing indigenous knowledge, and
  - learning with the people to solve problems. ISU Extension and Outreach can bring campus and community together for co-learning and for identifying and solving problems.

**Iowa State also must position itself to face certain challenges** when helping people reach their personal, professional, and community goals, the young Iowans acknowledged.

- Iowa State must not waste taxpayers’ dollars.
- Iowa State must not duplicate efforts of other not-for-profits or the private sector.
- Iowa State must not engage in activities beyond its scope and capacity, or that may be perceived as potentially taking away jobs from local people and the private sector.

### The Moral of the Story ...

ISU Extension and Outreach has served the people of Iowa for well over a hundred years, providing education, information, and technical assistance on issues that are important to youth and families, agriculture, businesses, and communities. But a history needs a future, which requires reaching the people who will determine whether that future exists.

Young Iowans are part of the Millennial generation and research shows they see the world differently than do older generations — from how they prefer to communicate to where they want to work and what motivates them to do their best. Millennials want work/life balance and flexibility, variety, frequent feedback, and a clear career path and advancement opportunities. Most of all, they want to know why the work that they’re being asked to do matters, because they want to make a difference.

Young Iowans can be great partners with ISU Extension and Outreach, because ISU Extension and Outreach is all about making a difference: growing businesses and strengthening communities; supporting a safe, sustainable, and affordable food supply; helping Iowa become the healthiest state in the nation; and preparing young people for the future. The Young Iowans Speak forum is a first step in strengthening this partnership to make a difference for Iowans.

## WHAT’S NEXT

As a result of “Extension’s Next 100 Years: Young Iowans Speak,” ISU Extension and Outreach will carry out 3 action steps.

- 1** Share this report with the young Iowans, who will check the accuracy of the research from their participant perspective.
- 2** Reconvene the group of young Iowans in spring 2015.
- 3** Conduct more extensive research about how to best interact with and serve young Iowans.

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**The Extension Reconsidered Initiative** is being carried out across the country by land-grant universities working with several organizational partners — Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, the Kettering Foundation, the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, and the Art of the Rural. Iowa State University was selected to participate in the project along with land-grant universities in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin. By the end of the year, participants at 13 forums will have reconsidered the past and imagined alternative futures for extension in a broad sense — as public work that has resonance and relevance across the whole of American higher education.

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