

# Virtual Education Task Force

## Long-Term Recommendations

July 29, 2020

Report prepared by

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## Introduction

COVID-19 has only affirmed the need for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to support system-wide implementation of virtual education.

The following report outlines the ISU Extension and Outreach Virtual Education Taskforce's recommendations to proactively position the organization to respond to the emerging educational needs of Iowans in a post-pandemic world.

Seven guiding principles were developed as a framework to best meet the virtual educational needs of Iowans: prioritizing the learner, accessibility, organizational culture, collaboration, innovation, investment, and technology. These principles were based on successful virtual education strategies identified in the ISU Extension and Outreach Virtual Education Task Force: Discovering Lessons Learned short-term deliverables report (June 19, 2020).

Recommendations for long-term strategies and strategic investments in hardware, software, training, and marketing that will need to be made to achieve system-wide virtual education integration were considered from multiple perspectives within the ISU Extension and Outreach organization. The task force recognized that additional perspectives, expertise, and collaborative support from outside of our organization will be important to grow a sustainable and effective system for virtual educational delivery.

Expertise and leadership exist within the organization to assist with implementation of the vision we articulated in this report. The task force also recognizes that some of the recommendations we have included may be currently underway.

## The Long-Term Charge

Envision what ISU Extension and Outreach needs to do to be proactively positioned to respond to the emerging needs of Iowans relative to how they desire to access informal education in a post-pandemic world. This includes determining the needed strategic investments relative to hardware, software, capacity, training, marketing, and other items.

## Guiding Statement

Expand our commitment to reach all Iowans by embracing innovative tools and strategies in remote collaboration, engagement, teaching, and learning. We will focus on our audiences and their needs related to language, delivery methods, platforms, and accessible formats to help build a strong Iowa.

## Guiding Principles

**Learner-centered:** Focus on the needs and preferences of the audience when developing and delivering programming.

**Accessible:** Incorporate accessibility into the educational content and delivery to better serve all Iowans.

**Culture:** Commit individually and organizationally to creating a culture of innovation that is nimble and adaptive to changing needs and technologies.

**Collaboration:** Work across internal and external boundaries to develop and deliver responsive educational programming.

**Innovation:** Utilize educational content and delivery methods that are responsive, adaptable, forward thinking, and accessible, and that build learner capacity.

**Investment:** Make funding available for staff, technology, professional development, research, equipment, and support.

**Technology:** Utilize a variety of digital platforms and tools to best meet audience needs.

## Long-Term Strategies

**To be proactively positioned to respond to the emerging needs of Iowans relative to how they desire to access informal\* education in a post-pandemic world, ISU Extension and Outreach will need to:**

### 1) Conduct Audience Assessments

Conduct continual and intentional assessment of the educational needs of our current and potential audiences. Potential audiences may include underserved and under-represented groups that encounter barriers (e.g., economic, cultural, linguistic, health, geographic, residential), to accessing ISU Extension and Outreach educational programs.

We need to delineate how we can best use technology to reduce barriers to participating in our programming efforts.

**This will entail determining:**

- Types of educational programs in which audiences are interested
- Audience communication and learning sources, styles, languages, and preferences
- Appropriate pedagogy and andragogy to meet audience needs
- Technologies, tools, and platforms to which audiences have access and with which they are comfortable
- Short and long-term impacts of our programming

**2) Conduct Program Assessments**

Conduct continual and intentional review and assessment of educational programming to encourage the adoption, adaptation, or development of relevant curricula that meet the needs of the audience and inform future program delivery.

**Assessment questions may include:**

- What do people need to know?
- What are the gaps in learners' knowledge?
- What are the program goals?
- Do the goals of the program match the assessment of the audience?
- Do we have the right audience for the goals of the program?
- What are the learning objectives?
- Does the program need an experiential component?
- Are the audiences successfully able to join, engage, and learn as the instructor intends?
- How does the platform support the success of the program?
- Are we building learner capacity with the technology?
- What are the language needs of the audience?
- Is the virtual delivery method appropriate?
- What are the options for attendance?
  - All virtual (synchronous or asynchronous)
  - All in person
  - Hybrid or blended approach
- Is the program effective?
  - Are modifications to the program needed?
  - Does the program need to be retired?

### 3) Build and Expand Expertise

Build on content expertise by developing and investing in a professional team and supportive infrastructure dedicated to identifying needs based on audience assessment, instructional assessment, technology needs, and program assessment.

Promote an organizational and individual commitment to embracing new delivery methods and technologies.

**Provide continuous professional development in technology, teaching methods, and instructional design, such as:**

- Adult learning principles and best practices
- Best practices for non-formal,\* informal,\* and formal\* education
- Best practices for virtual education
- Technology tools and capabilities to meet instructional needs

### 4) Promote an Organizational Culture Shift

Create and support a culture of innovation that is nimble and adaptive to changing needs and technologies and nurtures a growth mindset for learning and engagement strategies.

**Culture change can be nurtured and supported by:**

- A vice president-level, system-wide initiative (similar to Structured for Success)
- An internal communication plan that prioritizes and supports the change
- Performance evaluations that include questions such as, “How do I meet the learners’ needs with my work?”
- Additional incentives for faculty and staff to prioritize learner and technology needs (e.g., awards, grants, recognition)
- Addressing inequities in lowans’ access to high-speed internet, hardware, and software by adjusting our offerings and/or making resources available to them

## Strategic Investments

**ISU Extension and Outreach will need to make strategic investments relative to hardware, software, capacity, training, marketing, and other items. Specifically, ISU Extension and Outreach needs to invest in:**

### 1) A Professional Team and Supportive Infrastructure

Make an investment in professionals dedicated to guiding and directing this effort, whether they are identified within units or organized as a separate unit. There must be a priority to identify staff and dedicate their time to this work as a primary responsibility.

### **The professional team will:**

- Identify needs based on audience assessment, instructional assessment, technology needs, and program assessment.
- Support faculty and staff by coordinating evaluation, contributing to professional development, and offering consulting and coaching to faculty and staff (similar to the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching but focused on ISU Extension and Outreach needs that include remote and informal educational delivery).
- Connect with coordinated marketing efforts for programming.
- Determine communication and processes across the organization.
- Incorporate audience/program pre and post assessment research into MyData.
- Address the need for technical support for learners/external users.
- Conduct ongoing research into technology tools and platforms to stay relevant.
- Conduct ongoing audience and program assessment to determine how our audiences want to receive, access, and engage in education.
- Conduct ongoing evaluation of our program delivery to inform future delivery.

## **2) Equipment**

- Ensure that basic hardware and software are offered to all staff.
- Invest in adaptive technologies based on the ongoing research.
- Work with program areas and teams to explore and choose non-system tools and platforms when needed based on identified learner needs.
- Prioritize public internet access via county offices.

### **\*Definitions for purposes of this document:**

**Formal education:** Structured classroom instruction from pre-K through college, often resulting in a degree or certification.

**Non-formal education:** Programs and organized or designed educational opportunities, not necessarily leading to a degree/certification.

**Informal education:** Encompasses all aspects of education in which ISU Extension and Outreach is currently engaged, as the organization carries out its mission and pursues future opportunities.

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