

# Virtual Education Task Force: Discovering Lessons Learned

## Introduction

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach responded rapidly when COVID-19 was confirmed in Iowa and the university and state placed restrictions on face-to-face meeting. We canceled or postponed meetings and closed offices, but we also “virtualized” many educational offerings. We found different ways to connect with volunteers, participants, and partners. We also had to find different ways to get our work done within ISU Extension and Outreach. We could not travel to meetings, brainstorm over a cup of coffee, or build a relationship with a new colleague. Yet, all those things occurred, some better than others.

At the same time, our stakeholders, both our regular and potential users, found the answers to their questions and were educated and informed by also doing things differently. They adjusted, as did we. Once Iowa reopens, recovery begins, and restrictions are reduced, how will Iowans find information and receive informal education and how will ISU Extension and Outreach do its work? Which functions will return to in-person delivery? Which will not? What hybrids will emerge? Are there best practices for virtual delivery that can be shared and replicated? Are there failed attempts that we should learn from? What additional skills, platforms, assistance, etc., did we manage without in the short run that are important if virtual delivery remains in the long run?

## Reflective Questions

We ask that this task force assess our response and programming during the COVID-19 restrictions and identify lessons learned about virtual delivery that will position ISU Extension and Outreach to be stronger going forward. Below are a few questions to start the discussion, but the task force is encouraged to be innovative and use what we have learned during this crisis to position us for the future.

- What have we learned to date that can be shared now? What is working well and what is not? What is the best way to share experiences within ISU Extension and Outreach?
- Looking beyond the current restrictions, how will Iowans access information and education? What will be different from 2019 and a pre-COVID-19 world?
- How will we deliver our educational offerings? Will we “package” education differently? Will our audience change, or will their expectations change?
- How do we engage Iowans? Do we wait for them to come to us or do we push out more information? Will they come to us or do they expect information and education to be delivered in their home or on their phone?
- What skills do our faculty and staff need to be effective in this new world? What strategic investments should ISU Extension and Outreach consider?
- How do physical facilities such as campus, research farms, and county offices add value if Iowans shift to more online learning?
- How do we evaluate and report success and impact?

## The Charge

As Iowa reopens, ISU Extension and Outreach needs to apply the lessons learned to build a stronger position in a post-pandemic world. We ask the Virtual Education Task Force to identify ISU Extension and Outreach's opportunities and challenges relative to virtual and digital education.

### For the short-term

- Define the successes and challenges that faced ISU Extension and Outreach during the transition to a wholly online learning paradigm.
- Identify four to six successful virtual or digital strategies that ISU Extension and Outreach implemented during COVID-19 that should be sustained or expanded in a post-pandemic environment across programmatic units and county services.
- Determine who should be involved to organize, prioritize, plan, and determine evaluation methods for these strategies.
- Determine how to best disseminate those strategies across our system.
- Deliver a report and recommendations to the Leadership team by June 19.

### For the long-term

- Envision what ISU Extension and Outreach needs to do to be proactively positioned to respond to the emerging needs of lowans 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.
- Deliver a report and recommendations to the Leadership team by August 1.

## Task Force Members

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Thank you for your service on this task force to help us determine how to best serve lowans during for our state's reopening and recovery. Together we will build a strong Iowa.

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