

# Focus on Priority Setting

## **Extension Program Priority Setting — Building Involvement and Ownership**

Program priority setting builds on the foundation created by the situational analysis. A situation analysis that involved community stakeholders and is “owned” by the community serves as a basis for making decisions on program priorities.

Program priorities need to be established with an understanding of the resources that are available to help achieve the required outcomes and impact. Resources may be local, statewide, national or even international. The availability of resources or lack of resources may be a major factor in selecting Extension program priorities.

In some cases, a major concern at the county level may need to be addressed even though resources are not available. Under those circumstances, the program priority setting process needs to publicly acknowledge the limited resources. Realistic outcomes and accountability measures need to be identified for such initiatives.

Cooperative Extension is a partnership between the federal government, state government and county government. As a partnership, we are obligated to consult with our partners in the identification of program priorities. The Wisconsin State Statutes Chapter 59.56 (3) requires the involvement of a county oversight committee in the identification of program priorities for the local county Extension office.

The county oversight committee, typically the Extension Education Committee of the County Board of Supervisors, is legally obligated to be involved in the priority setting process. The scope of the involvement should be locally determined and formally documented in the records of the committee. The county executive or county administrator may also play an important role in the priority setting process.

Most county oversight committees will determine the program priorities in consultation with the local county Extension staff. Some county oversight committees may also choose to formally involve a citizen advisory committee in the priority setting process. A few county committees may choose to delegate the priority setting process to the staff of the county Extension office. This last option has the potential of a diminished sense of commitment on behalf of the committee and consequentially a lack of public support for the priorities of the local office.

## Priority Setting Filters

When the situational analysis process has been completed, the priority setting process should be guided by examining the information through a series of filters that will help determine the program priorities:

The following filters should serve as a starting point:

- CES Mission
- CES Vision
- CES Values
- CES Mandates
- CES and Local Resources Available
- Local Perspectives and Dynamics

## Overview: Mission, Vision, Values, Mandates, Resources, Local Dynamics

### Mission

According to John Bryson in *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, mission “clarifies an organization’s purpose, or why it should be doing what it does.”

### Vision

Bryson also notes, vision “clarifies what the organization should look like and how it should behave as it fulfills its mission.” Kouzes and Posner define vision as “an ideal and unique image of the future.” For a more detailed description of vision please review pages 90-148 of *The Leadership Challenge*.

### Core Organizational Values

Core organizational values are those values that refer to here-and-now beliefs about how things should be accomplished. Values help us determine what to do and what not to do. Members of an organization should be able to enumerate the organizational values and have a common interpretation of how the values will be put into practice. For people to understand the values and come to agree with them, they must participate in the process.

### Mandates

Mandates define what an organization is formally and informally required to do or not do by external authorities. Formal requirements are likely to be codified in laws, ordinances, articles of incorporation, other legal documents, and the policies and procedures of organizations. Informal mandates may be embodied in the cultural norms or expectations of key stakeholders. (Bryson, 1995)

## **CES and Local Resources Available**

The availability of local, regional, statewide and national resources will greatly influence the ability of CES faculty and staff to implement a high quality educational program. In those areas where the need is great and the resources are limited, sufficient time must be allocated for the development of the resources that are needed to carry out an effective program.

## **Local Perspectives and Dynamics**

Local perspectives, dynamics and politics may greatly influence the priority setting process. Under such circumstances care must be taken to make certain that a solid foundation is established for locally driven program initiatives. The commitment of key stakeholders is critical to the success of the program.

## **Historical Context**

“Cooperative Extension’s history is the history, of men, women and families. It is woven into the fabric of American history – and the pivotal events – that shape our world. Extension helped jumpstart the engine of American agriculture, firing up the most efficient production system in the world. Extension shaped rural society with powerful coalitions, cooperatives and associations. Extension played crucial roles in World War I, the Depression and World War II, helped create farm policies, economic structures and institutions that exist to this day. As rural and urban families changed and farm numbers fell, Extension evolved with programs tailored to fit the diverse needs of American families of all backgrounds, races, ages, abilities and income levels. In short, Cooperative Extension’s history is the history of an organization and its people intimately involved in Wisconsin’s history and everyday public affairs.”

The preceding statement from the *Peddling Progress: Extension’s Role in Public Affairs* authored by Marla Maeder acknowledges Cooperative Extension’s historic mission and the evolution of that mission as the conditions have changed in the intervening years

Federal and state legislation and administrative rules have also shaped the mission of Cooperative Extension. The Morrill Act of 1862, the Hatch Act of 1887 and Smith-Lever Act of 1914 have been amended many times in the years since their creation. Wisconsin State Statutes have also been created and amended. Changes at the federal, state and county levels will continue shape the mission of Cooperative Extension.

## **Mission**

The University of Wisconsin Board of Regents has approved the following mission statement:

*UW-Extension extends the knowledge and resources of the University of Wisconsin to people where they live and work.*

The following mission statement is an expansion of the preceding statement:

*With an office in each Wisconsin county, Cooperative Extension develops practical educational programs tailored to local needs and based on university knowledge and research.*

*County-based Extension educators are University of Wisconsin faculty and staff who are experts in agriculture and agribusiness, community and economic development, natural resources, family living and youth development.*

*Extension county-based faculty and staff live and work with the people they serve in communities across the state. Extension specialists work on UW System campuses where they access current research and knowledge. Collaboration between county and campus faculty is the hallmark of Cooperative Extension in Wisconsin.*

*Cooperative Extension partners with local, county, state, and federal government to address public issues. Faculty and staff plan and carry out programs with a wide array of community partners – volunteers, business and educational groups and advisors.*

*Using state-of-the-art technology, Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension brings educational programs to even the most remote parts of the state. Communication and computer networks link county Extension offices and UW campus departments with other universities, state and federal agencies and other sources of knowledge and information around the world.*

Several program areas have also crafted their own mission statements:

The Family Living Program Area Mission is:

*UW-Extension Family Living Programs provide education promoting family strengths and help communities become positive environments for family life. Program respond to community needs with research-based education and partnerships that support Wisconsin families and communities.*

The 4-H Youth Development Program Area Mission is:

*4-H Youth Development: A catalyst for positive community youth development.*

Many county Extension offices also have mission statements. The following examples are illustrative of the statements currently available on the WWW sites maintained by the county Extension offices.

Grant County

*Extending the resources and knowledge of the University of Wisconsin System to the people of Grant County is the mission of the Extension team. The educational mission of UW-Extension is based on the "Wisconsin Idea" (i.e., the boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the state).*

Waukesha County:

*The mission of Waukesha County University of Wisconsin Extension is to deliver research-based information to improve the quality of life for families in the areas of family living, youth development, community resource development, agriculture, and horticulture. UW Extension provides community-based education for families, business, government and organizations using non-traditional educational methods.*

Waupaca County:

*The goal of UW-Extension is to make the resources and knowledge of the University system available to the residents of all counties. Waupaca County UW-Extension educators provide leadership and teach non-tuition classes in informal settings including lecturing, counseling and demonstrations. Programs are offered through satellite, educational teleconference network (ETN), newspaper and publications.”*

## **Vision**

Vision statements should provide an “ideal and unique image of the future.”

The following vision statement for Wisconsin Cooperative Extension was prepared by a representative group of faculty and staff colleagues in August, 2000.

*Wisconsin’s educational network for engaging people and their communities in positive change.*

Several program areas have also prepared their own vision statements.

4-H Youth Development:

*UW-Extension 4-H Youth Development integrates research, education and community-based partnerships, enabling youth to learn and practice skills to be productive citizens.*

Family Living:

*UW-Extension Family Living Programs is a leader in education and a valued partner in the implementation of strategies to achieve family and community goals.*

## **Core Organizational Values**

The following Cooperative Extension values were identified by a representative group of staff, faculty and administrators at a statewide meeting on August 2-3, 2000:

- **Research, scholarship and community knowledge.** We apply research

to address local issues and concerns. We hold ourselves accountable for the highest standards of scholarship. We respect and apply the knowledge of the people we serve.

- **Local needs and interests.** We build the capacity of citizens to engage in the public work that helps them solve their own problems. The local community provides the context for our work. To address local needs, our continuing local presence is vital.
- **Excellence and innovation.** We explore new approaches to meeting educational needs. We demonstrate the highest standards for program quality and effectiveness.
- **Partnerships.** We seek partnerships with county, tribal, state and federal governments, private and public organizations, campus and county staff, volunteers and community residents. Our success depends on shared interests, responsibility, resources and recognition.
- **Honesty and Integrity.** We are stewards of the public's trust and resources. We create respectful, supportive work environments by acting on our organization's values.
- **Diversity.** We seek diversity in our faculty, staff and clientele and welcome differences in people, ideas, programs and partnerships.
- **People are our most important resource.** We continuously improve the practices that enable us to hire and retain the highest quality workforce. We embrace open communication and strive to improve our workplace.

## **Mandates**

Cooperative Extension programs at the federal, state and county levels are required to comply with a number of state and federal laws and administrative rules. Mandates for Cooperative Extension programs are provided in the following:

### Morrill Act – 1862

Established 51 land-grant universities such as University of Wisconsin – Madison.

### Hatch Act – 1887

Established agricultural experiment stations in connection with the state land-grant universities.

### Morrill Act – 1890

Established 16 predominately black land-grant universities such as Alabama A&M University and extended land-grant status to Tuskegee Institute.

### Smith-Lever Act – 1914, 1953, 1955, 1962, 1972, 1980, 1985, 1988

Established the Cooperative Extension Service and required “ a full and detailed reporting of its operations.”

#### Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964

Specifies that no person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Proactive measures to assure equal opportunity are mandated in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These affirmative action activities are undertaken to make up for historic and continuing discrimination and the continuing impact of historical discrimination. In Cooperative Extension, affirmative action efforts should continue until program participation by underrepresented minorities reflects proportionate representation in the population of potential recipients.

#### Title XI, Education Amendments of 1972

Prohibits discrimination against individuals in federally funded programs or activities, and in every aspect of programs and employment because of their gender. Title XI provisions include prohibitions against male/female job-related stereotyping, sexual harassment, unequal opportunities for training, advancement and other benefits of employment.

#### Food and Agriculture Act – 1977

Required the USDA to submit a comprehensive evaluation of the Cooperative Extension Service.

#### Food and Agriculture Act – 1981

Authorized USDA to conduct a regular evaluation of research, extension and teaching programs.

#### Government Performance and Results Act – 1993

Required stakeholder involvement and the development of strategic plans by 1998. Reports containing numerical measurements of the achievement of performance objectives compared to goals by the year 2000

#### Morrill Act – 1994

Established 29 tribal college land-grant institutions such as the College of the Menominee Nation and the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College in Wisconsin.

#### Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act – 1994

Established the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) to **coordinate** USDA and state cooperative agricultural research, extension, and education programs.

#### Americans with Disabilities Act Title II:

Program Access – prohibits public entities from discriminating against or excluding people from programs, services or activities on the basis of disability.

#### Wisconsin State Statutes 59.56 – Cultural affairs; education; recreation:

A (county) board **may** establish and maintain an educational program in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin referred to in this subsection as “University Extension Program.” ... The committee on Agriculture and Extension Education is delegated the authority to formulate and execute the university extension

program (in the county). Current interpretation of this statute may also include the County Executive and other administrative structures within county government. This process is referred to as the county oversight structure.

### Wisconsin State Statutes

Wisconsin law prohibits discrimination in educational programs, services, activities, courses, and facilities based on the following: ancestry, marital status, creed, sexual orientation, pregnancy, genetic testing, parental status, political affiliation.

### **Other formal and informal mandates may be included in the following:**

1. UW-System and UW-Extension Policies and Procedures
2. UWEX Cooperative Extension Policies and Procedures
3. Academic Department Policies and Procedures
4. County Government Policies, Procedures and Rules

### **Questions for Priority Setting**

- What are the top priorities among the various concerns and needs that were identified during the situational analysis?
- What do we know about these priorities?
- Which of these top priorities match with Extension's mission and Mandates?
- Are resources available and/or accessible for addressing these priorities?
- Is someone else, another group or agency, better equipped to deal with this priority than Extension?
- Who else is already working on this priority? What role or contribution might Extension have? Who might we partner with?

### **Working Together as a County Office Team**

County office units are encouraged to work together to develop a county office plan of work that clearly communicates to local citizens and stakeholders in the county the program priorities and plans for the total county Extension office. Positive public perceptions of the county Extension program are enhanced by a "team approach" that identifies the working relationships among the various program areas and the synergism that results from a multidisciplinary approach to the solution of community problems.

# Communicating Program Priorities

Program priorities should be communicated broadly and shared with all your stakeholders, collaborators and constituents. Community needs that have been identified, but are not addressed by Extension program priorities, should be communicated to other appropriate groups, agencies and organizations within the community.