

BACKGROUND

A thorough [program review](#) of Ohio State University Extension Community Development was conducted in the fall of 2019. A four-person external review team examined all pertinent information and reports dedicated to Community Development. Information was gathered from OSU Extension colleagues and a host of stakeholders and partners that included: CFAES Advancement, Community Development personnel, Extension Cabinet, The Dean's Cabinet, external partners, internal partners/faculty, and Central State University Extension.

The external reviewers also spoke with OSU Extension Community Development leadership to help fill in any blanks that required additional information, e.g., explaining about funding county CD positions and how two county positions are based on each county's need of an economic development director. The leadership also explained the relatively new positions of field specialists and their role within Community Development and OSU Extension.

Lastly, the external program review team spent a considerable amount of time talking and listening to community development professionals to gain a clear understanding of their roles and how CD fits within OSU Extension.

After two days on the Columbus campus, the external review team compiled their report, which can be found [here](#).

After initially sharing the report with Extension Community Development leadership, the report was then provided to all Community Development professionals for review.

The intent was to conduct a deep dive into the report at the in-person April 2020 Community Development in-service, but that was transitioned to a virtual zoom meeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the hope was a face-to-face meeting would take place in August 2020 where the external review report could be discussed.

Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic caused the August in-service to be conducted via Zoom. Recognizing the need to discuss the report and to develop action strategies, Community Development leadership elected to facilitate a discussion using Zoom and the breakout room feature. Due to the depth of the content, it was decided that Community Development professionals would review the report in August and September and develop strategies to address the reviewers' findings.

In describing the Community Development professionals, the external reviews noted the following overall positive aspects:

- Virtually every group shared positive comments.
 - 'Dedicated, professional, committed individuals with extensive experience.'
- Leadership is responsive, open-minded, and proactive.
- Community Development has a hard-working, high-quality team.
- Multiple resources and partners are available within the college and across campus.
- There is high demand for our work – a broad suite of issues identified and potential priority areas.

- Community Development work has recognized valuable and relevant programs.
- Partners value current programs and are willing to pay for programs and services.
- Many positive collaborations exist (faculty in college and other program areas in county).
- Personnel are appropriately proactive and reactive to issues statewide/locally.

The External Review report identified five key findings for Community Development to consider. They are identified as: Communication, Alignment with University and Extension Mission and Goals, Current and Relevant Programming, Engagement with Partners, and Staffing Patterns.

KEY FINDING: COMMUNICATION

- Every group interviewed noted that Community Development needs to better communicate who they are, what they do, and the value they bring to Extension, the university, and the state.
- Better communication is viewed to inform and enhance visibility.
- People are not talking about Community Development work, in part, because they have difficulty defining it.
- There is a need for communication to upper administration as well as partners and clientele.
- A more specific definition of Community Development may be needed.

External Review Recommendations

- Create clearer definition of Community Development.
- Develop a clear, consistent, and easy-to-understand message.
- Develop clear public value statements based on impactful Community Development programs.
- Use language the public can understand.

Communication

Action Strategies

1. Create a clear definition of what it means to be a Community Development professional.
2. Create a 30-second elevator speech: Community Development is . . .
3. Create specific marketing materials so clientele can easily understand our brand and what we do.
4. Create educational videos to promote upcoming program offerings.
5. Promote the value of our educational content and programming; work with the Knowledge Exchange (KX) and OSU Extension Publishing.

KEY FINDING: ALIGNMENT WITH UNIVERSITY AND EXTENSION MISSION AND GOALS

- The mission of Ohio State University Extension is: *We create opportunities for people to explore how science-based knowledge can improve social, economic, and environmental conditions.*
- The mission of OSU Extension Community Development is helping communities enhance their well-being and create social, economic, and environmental conditions in which they can thrive.
- Community Development's vision is to be a leader in community development education and partner in the implementation of strategies to achieve community and organizational goals.

External Review Recommendations

- Consider ways to incorporate Community Development's vision into opportunities for the overall Extension organization.
 - Are there opportunities for staff development based on Community Development knowledge and expertise (evaluation, facilitation, community development for all)? Within this context, a review of the four emphasis areas of programming CD provides (economic development, leadership development, organizational capacity building, and community planning) may be useful to consider opportunities to reorganize, more clearly define, and/or simplify this message.

Alignment with University and Extension Mission and Goals

Action Strategies

1. Extension program leadership convene a yearly meeting to identify current trends and create cross programmatic teams to develop state-wide educational content.
 - a. That is, identify topics or themes in which all four program areas can participate. Workforce development issues were identified as a key theme as well as leadership development and creation of videos for educational content. Once identified, reach out to CFAES faculty for additional perspective and interest.
 - b. Ensure content-driven material is consistent with key CFAES programmatic themes.
2. Create an up-to-date resource directory that clearly identifies specializations and research interests.

KEY FINDING: CURRENT AND RELEVANT PROGRAMMING

- The Crowdsourcing Insight Summary (found [here](#)) provided multiple examples of pressing issues Community Development staff could address to best meet the needs of Ohioans.
 - Themes included workforce development, economic development, drug and alcohol challenges, and collaborations and partnerships with communities and elected officials.
 - Many of these issues are currently being addressed by Community Development professionals, yet there are significant issues that are not being adequately addressed.
 - What are key Community Development programs?
 - What Community Development programs do you think could be retired?
 - What Community Development programs would you like to see developed?

External Review Recommendations

- Reduce the breadth of programming to focus on strengths, value, and outcomes. Extension has difficulty letting go of good programs to begin new programs that may be more relevant currently. If Community Development will better define and prioritize its roles in Ohio, then staff assignments and staff replacements over time may be transformed into higher value impacts and outcomes and better integrated into the overall Extension system.
- The Community Development team should consider more transdisciplinary work around central issues. Examples include the farm crisis task force and opioid task force. Sometimes it takes a crisis to make these issue teams connect.

Current and Relevant Programming

Action Strategies

1. Create an inventory of programmatic specializations for each professional.
2. Bring in an outside facilitator to help community development identify current programming as well as future programming based on talent of CD professionals.
3. At least once a year, CD professionals meet to identify key programs to be developed - the goal being responsive to state and community needs.
 - a. Have frank discussion on current programming that could be transitioned.
 - b. Provide resources necessary to create new content with identified evaluation component.
4. Identify urban county programmatic needs.

KEY FINDING: ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS

- Community Development partners in delivering evidence-based programs and services to individuals, organizations, and communities to develop skilled and engaged leaders, sustainable and livable communities, and greater vitality with a more defined sense of purpose.
- Ohio State campus research faculty expressed a desire to work more with Extension – there are some examples of successful partnerships that have taken place.

External Review Recommendations

- Identify and use “connectors” to connect Community Development with the wide range of resources that exist within the university.
- Like many Extension programs, Community Development has more opportunities than resources. The panel heard several people talk about leveraging Community Development resources through interdisciplinary and cross-college connections.
- Consider ways to partner further with county commissioners in defining local Extension efforts.

Engagement with Partners

Action Strategies

1. Convene Community Development professionals to identify the following:
 - a. an inventory of current successful partnerships with college partners
 - b. an inventory of successful local partnerships
 - c. an inventory of successful cross programmatic programs
 - i. Develop an accessible document sharing successful partnerships.
 1. Share with Extension program leadership.
 - ii. Work with Area Leaders and all county personnel to promote successful collaborations.
 - iii. Create yearly documentation to celebrate successful partnerships.
2. Extension Community Development leadership work with Department of Extension Chair to meet with other department chairs in CFAES to discuss potential programming and research opportunities.
3. Partner with Central State University Extension to fulfill Ohio’s land-grant mission and leverage Extension programming.
4. Work with OSU Extension Learning and Organizational Development (LOD) to develop online curriculum, teaching, etc.

KEY FINDING: STAFFING

- Since the 1990s, staffing numbers have been reduced dramatically in the Community Development area across the country.
- In OSU Extension Community Development, there are currently seven county educators, four dual-program county educators, four field specialists, a program assistant, the assistant director (state program leader) and 13 others including Sea Grant in the OSU system working on Community Development -related programs.
- There are fewer split/combo county educators than there once were. Multiple people during the interview process suggested the need for more of these positions.
- There is a need for a Community Development succession plan.

External Review Recommendations

- Expand the Community Development reach and be responsive to local needs by partnering with other program areas for staffing and cross-training.
- Add more dual-appointment personnel at the local level.
- Community Development to seek partnerships with 4-H for the long-term.
- Evaluate the need for more field specialists.
- The ultimate challenge for OSU Extension is to define, communicate, and measure the scope of work that is and will be performed with existing resources.

Staffing

Action Strategies

1. Develop a succession plan to prepare for upcoming retirements.
2. Develop an ideal plan for the number of county community development professionals and state-wide or field specialists.
3. Work with Extension leadership to define dual county program educators.
4. Community Development leadership focus on alternative funding methods.
5. Identify funding mechanisms to support/purchase tools - graphic design and marketing.
6. Develop specific position descriptions for emerging issues.
7. Identify urban county staffing needs.
8. Identify grants coordinator.

CONTRIBUTORS

During virtual sessions on August 6, August 26, and September 30, 2020, CD professionals held in-depth discussions concerning the recommendations for the five key findings from the external review committee, intending to develop action strategies to address the findings.

Discussion notes were collected and summarized by Gage Smith, program assistant, CD. David Civittolo, interim assistant director, CD, prepared the Action Strategies report.

CD professionals who contributed to the discussions:

**OSU Extension Community Development
Program Review Recommendation Discussions
August 6, August 26, September 30, 2020**

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