



nEXT Generation: Cooperative Extension for the future

Common questions

Feb. 10, 2016

Background

1. Why is UW-Extension making these changes to Cooperative Extension?

Budget cuts prompted these changes. The state's 2015-2017 biennial budget reduced University of Wisconsin System funding by \$250 million. Cooperative Extension's portion of the cut is \$3.6 million per year—8.3 percent of its ongoing state funding. We can't address this cut without fundamental changes.

Addressing the cuts provides a chance to design more modern, flexible models for education and research that address local needs. Climate survey results and other feedback collected during 2015 suggest opportunities to enhance collaboration, help faculty and staff focus on education, better apply technology, and integrate work across Cooperative Extension.

2. Can other UW-Extension or UW system funding offset these cuts?

State budget cuts affect every UW program supported by general purpose revenue (GPR), and other programs are making their own reductions. Transformative changes that reduce expenses to match permanent GPR cuts are critical to keep Cooperative Extension sustainable.

Cooperative Extension is using its one-time cash reserves to provide transition funds as *nEXT Generation* plans are implemented.

3. How far does this reorganization go?

The *nEXT Generation* initiative will affect every facet of Cooperative Extension, including county partnerships, campus-based programs and state specialists, and central administration. In each of these areas, we've established budget reduction targets proportionate to state support.

These targets include cutting \$1.2 million from county-level programs, \$1.7 million from campus programs and state specialists, and \$700,000 from central administration. Again, the more GPR funding an area receives, the greater its cuts.

4. When did discussions about reorganization begin, and how has the project proceeded to date?

The project officially started in early 2015, when the extent of the state cut to the UW System became clear and the Cooperative Extension Administrative Committee began considering how to address the division's share of state funding cuts. The committee considered existing ideas and developed new approaches that would find efficiencies and cut costs.

Recommendations for organizational and other changes took shape during fall 2015 and were presented to UW-Extension Chancellor Cathy Sandeen in December. The chancellor shared the recommendations with Cooperative Extension faculty and staff, county and tribal nation partners, and other stakeholders, receiving feedback throughout January 2016.

The chancellor reviewed about 500 individual pieces of feedback—emails, letters, resolutions, and verbal comments—before finalizing decisions. From the start, the project has relied on input from colleagues and partners, respecting Cooperative Extension's established mission, culture, and values.

Decisions

5. What key elements are included in the decisions?

The [directions from UW-Extension and UW Colleges Chancellor Cathy Sandeen](#) to the *nEXT Generation* executive co-sponsors and steering committee include:

- Structuring county and area jobs to let educators and researchers focus on education and research rather than administrative tasks.
- Keeping a Cooperative Extension office in every county while establishing multi-county areas that consolidate administration.
- Staffing each area to reflect the specific circumstances and needs of its component counties, recognizing that there's no one-size-fits-all approach.
- Respecting different levels of county investment, ensuring that each county receives services proportionate to its funding.
- Maintaining single-county areas in counties with populations over 250,000, but connecting these counties to share ideas and resources.
- Developing a statewide network for Cooperative Extension offices in tribal nations.
- Prioritizing state specialist positions and reducing supply and equipment expenses to meet budget targets for campus-based programs.

- Gradually and collaboratively establish greater flexibility in appointments for state specialists—faculty experts typically affiliated with UW System campuses—to better address emerging needs.
- Integrating technology into program delivery, educational products, and administration.
- Promoting opportunities to generate new revenue.
- Aligning administrative functions to best support products and services to tribal, county, and campus partners.
- Consolidating administrative functions with UW-Extension administration where possible for greater efficiency and flexibility.

6. How do these decisions differ from the recommendations published in December 2015?

The decisions focus on measures that offer the best potential for cost savings and hold the most promise for modernizing Cooperative Extension.

Some recommendations have been approved, but revised. These include re-drawing boundaries for a few proposed multi-county areas and establishing that each area be staffed to reflect the needs and investments of different counties.

Other recommendations—including a specific proposal to redirect 10 percent of state-specialist positions over and above the targeted cuts—will not be implemented.

7. How did feedback on the recommendations influence the chancellor’s decisions?

The chancellor reviewed every piece of feedback and held a series of conversations with county leaders, agriculture representatives, legislators, and others.

Some offered specific ideas—for example, revised county area boundaries—that are reflected in the chancellor’s decisions. Others emphasized broader themes—like the need to keep county services proportionate to county funding—that have shaped the chancellor’s charge to the *nEXT Generation* steering committee.

8. The original recommendations included frequent references to digital technology. Where does the digital push go from here?

The *nEXT Generation* steering committee and work groups will identify digital tools that help Cooperative Extension share information, deliver education, and work more efficiently. Technology supports and enhances face-to-face connections, and Extension educators will need support and resources to explore digital solutions.

Cooperative Extension should optimize its ability to connect online, recognizing the challenge of broadband access in some parts of the state. Specific projects may include

sharing research in formats that are easily accessible via mobile devices, or offering educational programming via videoconferencing.

9. Where might Cooperative Extension look to raise new revenue?

Cooperative Extension's revenue comes from a variety of sources, from state dollars, federal dollars, contracts for services, research grants, and private giving. This diversity of resources is a real strength, not only for the division but for all of UW-Extension.

The charge will be to leverage our resources and expanding them. Some ideas include "freemium" pricing on products, services, and licenses (marketing to, and charging, those out of state for products and services provided free to Wisconsin residents); supporting our already-robust ability to get grants; and investing in strategic fund raising.

We want to make it clear, too, that we are not interested in simply "chasing money," but instead will be aggressively pursuing new revenue in the service of the mission of Cooperative Extension and all of UW-Extension.

10. Will these changes mean layoffs?

No positions will be eliminated immediately, but meeting budget targets may mean cutting some positions. These cuts will take place over time, and some will occur from normal attrition.

Any notices or other action on personnel changes as a result of this reorganization will begin in late 2016 and continue through early 2017. UW Extension will provide resources and support to any employee to help with employment transitions.

Anticipated changes to Cooperative Extension may result in new positions that provide career advancement opportunities for current faculty and staff.

County programs

11. Why have some county boundary areas changed from the original recommendations? What criteria determined county boundaries?

Cooperative Extension closely reviewed all areas where county partners or others suggested alternatives. A variety of factors inform boundary proposals. These include population, geography, transportation infrastructure, commerce centers, key industries, comparative needs, county office locations, membership in other regional entities, existing partnerships, historical relationships, and more.

Counties with populations greater than 250,000 are designated single-county areas. For other areas, groupings reflect Cooperative Extension's best assessment of complex, sometimes-competing criteria.

12. Doesn't creating multi-county areas add an extra layer of management?

The new area model will consolidate current management responsibilities in ways that let more county Extension faculty and staff focus on education and community engagement—their main areas of expertise.

Right now, many faculty and staff juggle administrative duties alongside their primary roles. The new approach will promote professional focus, reduce duplication, and create clearer career paths.

13. What's happening to the county/area staffing models proposed in the recommendations?

The December 2015 recommendations included hypothetical models that showed how county and area staff might work together. Real staffing decisions will be made on an area-by-area, county-by-county basis, taking into account real local needs. Not every county or area will require the same mix of positions. The steering committee work groups will be charged with recommending optimal staffing patterns for the multi- and single-county areas.

14. How will grouping counties into areas take into account differences in funding from different counties? Won't some counties end up subsidizing services for others?

The *nEXT Generation* steering committee and work groups will develop staffing models that reflect the unique mix of needs and investments in each area. Proportionality will be an essential principle of this work—counties must continue to realize the full value of their investments. Additionally, models will be established for counties to invest more as their needs grow

15. What effect will these changes have in large counties that are designated "single-county" areas?

Cooperative Extension will review needs, structures, and staffing in more populous single-county areas, applying the same kind of assessment that other areas receive. The project also will identify new opportunities for largely urban counties to collaborate, share resources, and find efficiencies.

Campus programs and state specialists

16. The original recommendations called for a 10 percent “overcut” in campus-based specialist positions supported by long-term commitments. Why was this proposal not included in approved changes?

The intent of the original recommendation was to create a flexible pool of specialist funding that helps Cooperative Extension and its campus partners quickly respond to new needs. The 10 percent figure was meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive.

Instead, Steering Committee workgroups will explore how to best achieve this flexibility. In particular, we believe we can reach similar ends over time by working with campus leaders and others to establish greater flexibility and responsiveness.

17. How will faculty tenure be considered as Cooperative Extension restructures?

UW-Extension will continue to hire tenure and tenure-track faculty, and faculty currently moving toward tenure will continue doing so according to the normal timeline. The tenure process will not change or be suspended during reorganization.

Central administration

18. How will Cooperative Extension’s central administration change?

Administrative units will be organized to provide optimal support for work with county, tribal nation, and campus partners across Wisconsin. Work groups will identify specific steps that advance Cooperative Extension’s mission.

19. Will administrative units within Cooperative Extension merge with UW-Extension units?

The *nEXT Generation* executive co-sponsors, steering committee, and work groups will develop proposals that leverage central resources for maximum effectiveness and efficiency. It’s too soon to say exactly what these proposals might look like, but they will take into account Cooperative Extension’s unique needs in areas like human resources, information technology, and business services.

Next steps

20. What happens once changes are announced?

The chancellor has appointed a steering committee and project management team for the *nEXT Generation* initiative. Approximately 10-20 work groups will be appointed to

provide detailed implementation plans for different facets of the project. Specific workgroups will be convened over the next 6 months to dig into specific issues for implementation.

21. Who is on the *nEXT Generation* steering committee? Who is managing and staffing the project?

Members of the steering committee include:

Amber Canto	Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program state coordinator
Amanda Gevens	Associate professor and vegetable crops plant pathology extension specialist, UW-Madison
Matt Hanson	Southwest regional director
Jon Hochkammer	Outreach manager, Wisconsin Counties Association
Jeff Hoffman	Dodge County community development educator/department head and UW-Extension University Committee member
Annie Jones	Associate dean/associate director (steering committee chair)
Bill Klase	Natural resources educator and UW-Extension Committee on Academic Staff Issues member
Kevin Masarik	Senior outreach specialist/groundwater education extension specialist, Center for Watershed Science and Education, UW-Stevens Point
Rick Mills	Program development and evaluation information systems resource technician and UW-Extension University Staff Council member
Kandi O’Neil	Associate state 4-H program director/volunteer specialist
Ruth Schriefer	Iowa County family living agent and Department of Family Development chair

Dave Berard, associate program director for Community, Natural Resource, and Economic Development, is project lead for Cooperative Extension. Jay Rowan and Joi Hayes of Huron Consulting Group have been hired as project manager and deputy project manager, respectively, complementing UW-Extension’s in-house expertise.

22. What is the role of the work groups, and who will be involved?

Work groups are essential—they will turn a broad charge into a set of detailed, actionable plans, drawing on their local knowledge and on input from county and campus partners. They will be convened to work on a specific implementation issue, and they will meet intensely and for a short amount of time.

With the steering committee, they will consider county needs, business models, workforce allocation, program areas, county collaborations, interaction between county areas and statewide specialists, assessment measures, and other factors.

Members will include Cooperative extension faculty, academic staff, and university staff. The steering committee will solicit nominations for the various work groups.

23. When will Cooperative Extension faculty, staff, partners, et al., begin to see real changes?

Faculty, staff, county, tribal, and campus partners, volunteers, clients, and others will be involved in the implementation planning process through this spring. Their work will start to show results in July, likely with new position descriptions, staffing models, and revisions to familiar processes and structures. Implementation will continue through the end of 2016 and into 2017.

24. When might personnel changes take effect?

Any personnel changes resulting from this project are expected in late 2016 and early 2017.