



# University of Wisconsin-Extension Cooperative Extension

*nEXT Generation* project

## Integration Work Group Assumptions Report

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# Executive Summary

At the outset of its work, the Integration Work Group reviewed all of the Work Group and Project Steering Committee deliverables completed to-date on the *nEXT Generation* project to determine the assumptions for how and why the organization will operate in the future.

These assumptions are divided into the following categories:

1. **Strategy:** Cooperative Extension’s long-term strategy including its purpose, products, and goals;
2. **Competitive Advantages:** The core competitive advantages that distinguish Cooperative Extension from other entities offering similar services; and
3. **Assumptions:** Assumptions about how the organization and roles should be structured or designed in the future.

The Integration Work Group will update this deliverable over the course of its work with additional assumptions and modifications.

Sincerely,

The *Integration Work Group* of the *nEXT Generation* project

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# Strategy

An organization's strategy specifies its purpose, the goals and objectives that it wants to achieve, and the values and missions that it wants to pursue. Quite simply, the strategy lays out the basic direction of the organization. The strategy should identify the products or services that the organization provides, the markets and customers to which it provides these products and services, and the value it offers to these markets and customers.

The Integration Work Group defined the major components of Cooperative Extension's organizational strategy for the future, which are listed below.

## **Purpose:**

Cooperative Extension embodies the power of the *Wisconsin Idea* by partnering to develop and connect the research and educational resources of the University of Wisconsin system with the people and communities in the state of Wisconsin to address local, statewide, and national issues.

## **Product:**

The product of Cooperative Extension is to facilitate positive impact for the people and communities of Wisconsin by:

- Performing relevant applied research;
- Applying research to develop, deliver, and evaluate educational programs; and
- Providing educational services to the people and communities of Wisconsin.

## **Goals:**

Cooperative Extension focuses on facilitating positive impacts with the goal of producing:

- Thriving youth, families, organizations, and communities;
- Stronger economies;
- Resilient and productive environments; and
- Food safety, food security, and health.

# Competitive Advantages

A competitive advantage is defined as a condition that allows an organization to produce a good or service for its customers and end users more efficiently, more effectively, or at a higher level of quality than other entities in the same market. Quite simply, a competitive advantage allows an organization to generate more value and impact than its competitors. Competitive advantages could come from a variety of factors, including cost structure, brand, quality of products, distribution network, intellectual property and customer support.

The Integration Work Group has identified the following ten attributes as competitive advantages that allow Cooperative Extension to facilitate positive impacts more effectively and efficiently than other organizations serving the people and communities in the state of Wisconsin:

- **Brand Identity:** Cooperative Extension leverages the value of its brands (e.g., UW-Extension, 4-H) to promote its programming and services throughout the state because the brands are valued and viewed as credible by the people of Wisconsin.
- **Connection to the University of Wisconsin:** Cooperative Extension delivers high-quality programs by connecting to and leveraging the knowledge, objective research, and resources of the broader University of Wisconsin system.
- **Focus on Impacts:** Cooperative Extension focuses on applying research and educational programming to produce impacts that benefit communities and people.
- **Leveraged Resources:** Cooperative Extension delivers programs efficiently and at a relatively low cost because it leverages resources like staff, volunteers, space, funds, knowledge, and expertise from partners across the state including county governments, tribal communities, UW campuses, state government agencies, external funders, etc.
- **Locally Relevant:** Cooperative Extension is a recognized presence in, and a trusted source of information to communities across the state of Wisconsin.
- **Objectivity:** Cooperative Extension facilitates impacts throughout Wisconsin by connecting to evidence-based research and resources - from within the University of Wisconsin and its broader networks - to deliver objective, contextual solutions to issues.
- **Personal Approach:** Cooperative Extension focuses on people and works directly with people and communities to identify relevant issues and facilitate positive impacts.
- **Statewide & National Network:** Cooperative Extension leverages its network in communities and campuses across the state of Wisconsin and its connection to the national extension network and multi-state initiatives to deliver proven, evidence-based, high-quality educational programming.
- **Trusted Source of Information:** Cooperative Extension delivers value to the people of Wisconsin because it has invested over the last century in understanding the needs of communities to build long-term relationships, credibility, and networks, and lay the groundwork for the next century.
- **Unique Expertise:** Cooperative Extension offers knowledge and expertise in group facilitation and process, program development, theory of change, and content by supporting and developing this knowledge and expertise in its staff.

# Assumptions

The Integration Work Group has identified the following assumptions for what Cooperative Extension should and will look like in the future after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project. The Integration Work Group will reference these throughout its work to ensure that the future roles, structures, and attributes of the organization meets these assumptions. The assumptions are grouped into themes and listed alphabetically.

## **General:**

In the future, after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project, Cooperative Extension will:

- Competitive Advantage: Retain and build on those aspects of our competitive advantage that make us unique in the marketplace of educational providers.

## **Partnerships:**

In the future, after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project, Cooperative Extension will:

- Agencies: Partner with state and federal government agencies to generate funding, share resources, and determine priorities;
- Clientele: Partner with the people of Wisconsin to facilitate impacts and deliver on the *Wisconsin Idea*;
- County Government: Partner and collaborate with county governments as an important and significant stakeholder and source of funds;
- Third Parties: Partner with third parties like municipalities, private industry, special interest groups, other universities, and non-governmental organizations to generate funds, share resources, and establish priorities that align with the mission and purpose of Cooperative Extension;
- Tribal Nations: Partner and collaborate with tribal nations and communities to improve and strengthen outreach and programming;
- University of Wisconsin: Partner with University of Wisconsin institutions and campuses as a source of funding and research-based information; and
- Volunteers: Partner with volunteers to deliver educational programming and expand the reach and capacity of educational programming, and recognize volunteers for their efforts.

## **Programming:**

In the future, after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project, Cooperative Extension will:

- Delivery Models: Develop educational programming and delivery models that are reflective of the purpose and mission of the organization, produce impacts, provide access to the intended audiences, and use the organization's resources effectively and efficiently;
- Flexibility: Build local presence models that allow for flexibility and variability based on the needs of the educational programming and audiences;
- Inclusiveness: Serve all audiences across the state of Wisconsin, focusing on serving diverse and underserved audiences;
- Relationships: Focus on building relationships with and providing services to audiences and partners across the state to support the delivery of educational programming; and
- Responsiveness: Adapt and align resources and staffing to address the emerging issues and changing needs across the state of Wisconsin quickly.

## **Organizational Design:**

In the future, after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project, Cooperative Extension will:

- Accountability: Expect all staff across the organization to be held accountable for delivering results, impacts, and outcomes, including staff in programmatic and administrative functions;
- Administrative Support: Support the mission- and purpose-driven components of the organization through effective, efficient, and streamlined administrative functions;
- Alignment: Align the strategy, systems, administrative functions, and organizational structures with the purpose and mission of the organization;
- Career Advancement: Offer opportunities for career growth, advancement and flexibility to permit staff who want to grow and develop in the organization to do so;
- Desirability: Be recognized as an employer of choice because of the mission, flexibility, and opportunities for career growth and advancement;
- Diverse Workforce: Have a diverse workforce that represents the rich diversity of the people in the state of Wisconsin;
- Measurability: Define and measure expectations, accountability, and rewards for the different roles and positions across the organization;
- Mission-Driven: Be designed and structured primarily to deliver on its mission and purpose;
- Place-Based: Be present and based in locations across the state, to access and build relationships with current and new audiences, partners and funders;
- Rewards: Reward staff across the organization for delivering results, impacts, and outcomes aligned with their stated expectations; and
- Transparency: Have clear and broadly understood organizational structures, ownership, and reporting lines.

## **Funding:**

In the future, after the implementation of the *nEXT Generation* project, Cooperative Extension will:

- Alignment: Be selective and deliberate in determining when the organization should accept or generate additional revenue and when it should turn down additional funding because the purpose for the funding does not align with Cooperative Extension's mission and goals;
- Diversification: Diversify its funding sources to build a resilient organization and mitigate long-term financial risk;
- Entrepreneurship: Encourage and support staff to generate new sources of funds that align with the organization's mission, purpose, and competitive advantages;
- Flexibility: Be flexible enough to adjust the organizational structure and staffing model to handle subsequent budget cuts and budget increases; and
- Stewardship: Create systems, structures, policies and procedures that allocate resources based on priorities and maximize return on investment.