

UW- Extension Budget Reshaping Process: Cooperative Extension

Background:

Cooperative Extension uses a resource sharing and decentralized model whereby each unit (program area/campus and district) manages their own budgets. Base and one-time savings are shared on a 50/50 basis with the Dean's office. We have been intentional and purposeful over several budget cycles to strategically refill vacant positions and increase our pool of one-time resources. Developing this budget flexibility is particularly critical to Cooperative Extension due to our funding relationships with the state government/UW System, federal government, and 74 county and tribal partners. We are particularly concerned about the county budgets for 2010 and the distinct possibility that we will either have to fund the remaining 40% of tenured faculty whose appointment the county decides not to continue or need to provide some bridge funding to keep the county positions whole. Either way, we may need to use our accumulated one-time funds to cover these obligations. Finally, we are working with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to bridge funding for our Basin Educator program, another potential draw on our one-time accumulated funds.

Describe the inclusive, collaborative, and consultative process utilized to make decisions.

We have worked with our colleagues across the state (counties and campuses) to inform them on budget processes (definitions, current situation, and alternative strategies), engage them in collecting input through the Dean's blog, and worked with their representatives on the Academic Leadership Standing Committee and the Cooperative Extension Administrative Committee to simulate various reductions in both county and state-based situations. I have also been communicating with the Deans of the various Colleges on our UW campuses with which we have Inter Institutional Agreements. I have discussed with them and the appropriate UW-Extension Cooperative Extension Program Directors strategies to put in place to meet reductions that we both may be facing.

Summarize your overall recommendations and the rationale for each of the recommendations.

Cooperative Extension will manage the budget reductions through the use of one-time resources. As stated above, we have been purposefully accumulating one-time funds. The impact has been primarily seen in personnel as we have held positions open longer and have suspended filling positions since the first of the calendar year in order to generate the one-time resources. The suspension will continue until we better know the status of the budgets for our county partners. Open positions means that we have gone without program coverage in some situations.

We are also accumulating positions that could be used to address the situation where the one-time/lapses evolve into base cuts. This, of course, would make permanent some – but not all – of the vacant positions that we have accumulated. We would bridge a base cut with one-time resources in order to be more strategic (working within the implementation of our strategic plan) in reducing our work force.

Recommendation #1: Keep vacant positions open longer to accumulate one-time resources. The Cooperative Extension budget is 90% personnel, and keeping vacant positions open is the only way to accumulate one-time resources.

Recommendation #2: Monitor our spending on, but continue important initiatives and professional development. We invest heavily in the development of our colleagues. Reducing these costs (again while maintaining important investments) will allow us to continue to operate, without major interruption to educational programming.

Recommendation #3: No new initiatives will be introduced. Our goal is to stabilize program coverage and to work with our county partners to maintain our crucially important local presence. We will continue the implementation of our strategic plan and continue to contribute to the UWC/UWEX institutional strategic plan. Time and resources will be used to implement the strategic plan as a means to address both our future position in Wisconsin and strategies to address budget reductions.

Provide an overview of how the recommendations impact the strategic goals of the division and institution.

Program coverage: There will be coverage gaps and if the one-time reductions turn into base cuts, we would be unable to provide the same level of educational programming that we have done in the past. This is particularly challenging for Cooperative Extension as we have had overtures from a few (and growing number of) counties to expand our program to include CNRED faculty. I have been telling partners and constituents that 'less means less' so that expectations are being clearly communicated. Less program coverage also reduces our ability to meet divisional and institutional strategic goals. We will, of course, focus our remaining resources on these goals. We also need to ensure that we are meeting the goals of our federal partner specified in our formal Plans of Work and reported on in our Annual Reports.

Staff development: Staff will have to forego some professional development in the short-term. We are being as strategic as possible so that we can best serve our constituents and meet divisional and institutional strategic goals.

Staff value: People are our greatest asset, and we will strive to keep everyone possible employed. If the lapse turns into a base cut, then all units (administrative, program area/campus, and districts) will need to evaluate and prioritize needs to meet the demands for our educational programs and the associated demands for support resources to carry these out. Our inability to recruit will also impact diversifying our workforce.