

Strategic Plan | Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

DRAFT 9.8.2023

Dear Extension Colleagues,

Over the next few months we will be creating a five-year strategic plan for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. As we build this strategic plan, we want to hear from you. The following is a working draft. After each section of the draft, there are questions you may respond to.

You can share your responses to the questions individually via a survey and collectively through your regional and unit meetings in September and October. We will collect feedback through October 6 and incorporate that feedback into a final draft by the end of 2023.

Thank you for taking time to review this first draft and provide your insights and ideas.

Jason Henderson, Vice President Extension & Outreach

Extension's Purpose

Extension **makes life better for lowans and the world** by working together with our federal, state, and local partners to address the real needs of people, families, communities and the environment we live in. Extension is in a unique position to discover innovative solutions to complex issues through education, research and outreach.

As part of the [land grant university system](#), Extension is charged with offering practical education that focuses on state and local needs, conducting research about the challenges facing our communities, and extending the benefits of education and research beyond the university campus to help people and communities seize emerging opportunities.

As a vital part of **Iowa State University**, Extension embraces the following four pillars outlined in the [university's strategic plan](#): Innovative Solutions, Education Experiences, Community Engagement, and Knowledge and Discovery. These pillars give structure and direction on how we will make a difference for our state and world in the years ahead.

As a part of the **State of Iowa**, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach [was formed to](#) “provide for aid in disseminating among the people of Iowa useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture, home economics, and community and economic development, and to encourage the application of the information in the counties of the state” in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and County Extension Councils.

Extension's Purpose QUESTIONS

Extension **makes life better for lowans and the world** by working together with our federal, state, and local partners to address the real needs of people, families, communities and the environment we live in. (see page 1)

What of this statement do you agree with?

What of this statement don't you agree with?

Why do you think Extension exists?

Forces of Change

Extension operates in an environment requiring increased transparency and accountability as conversations around new models of education, trust in public institutions and the need for trusted, public research for policy and practical applications challenge the funding for land grant universities and extension and outreach.

As Extension looks to its future, it will be shaped by:

- A Complex and Uncertain World
- Shifting Demographics in our State and World
- The Rapidly Changing Environment We Live in
- Advancing Technologies

A Complex and Uncertain World

The world's complex and uncertain nature requires Extension to be adaptable and responsive. Extension can play a crucial role in providing research-based information, fostering critical thinking and promoting informed decision-making in an environment characterized by rapid changes, questionable information and conflicting viewpoints.

Shifting Demographics in our State and World

As demographics change, Extension will need to adapt its programs and services to meet the evolving needs of its many audiences. By considering the preferences, values and interests of different age groups, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds, Extension can play a vital role in addressing issues related to economic disparity, an aging population, local cultures and bridging generational gaps.

The Rapidly Changing Environment We Live In

Unpredictable and unusual weather events are becoming more common, causing property damage, loss of life and disruptions to agriculture, communities and economies. Extension can help people and communities adapt to changing climate conditions like drought, flood and extreme temperatures through innovative practices that help maintain water quality and the balance between human development and the natural world.

Advancing Technologies

The rapid advancement of technology provides both opportunities and challenges for Extension. Embracing digital tools, online platforms and data-driven approaches will enable Extension to reach broader audiences, enhance educational delivery and provide innovative solutions. It will also require ensuring digital equity and accessibility for all communities.

Forces of Change QUESTIONS

As Extension looks to its future, it will be shaped by: (see pages 2-3)

- A Complex and Uncertain World
- Shifting Demographics in our State and World
- The Rapidly Changing Environment We Live In
- Advancing Technologies

Is there anything you would change to these forces of change?

What other forces of change does Extension need to pay attention to?

Our Commitment

To deliver on our purpose, respond to the forces of change and ensure that we are making life better in Iowa and the world, Extension will:

- **Foster a culture of innovation** that embraces change, encourages creativity and strives to find better ways to empower all Iowans to thrive.
- **Focus on addressing local needs** with adaptive, responsive, multi-disciplinary, systems-based approaches to research, education and outreach, that help to navigate a complex, risky and uncertain world.
- **Engage all communities of people across Iowa** to work together to create adaptive responses to complex issues, bridging forces of isolation and connecting our rich and varied communities.
- **Collaborate across our university disciplines, departments and colleges** to discover and develop the most trusted research-based educational programs and resources that address real-life issues facing Iowans and the world.
- **Use the most advanced, relevant and appropriate technology** to reach people where they are at, whether in person or virtual environments, ensuring access for all Iowans.

Our Commitment QUESTIONS

Extension will: (see page 4)

- Foster a culture of innovation
- Focus on addressing local needs
- Engage all communities of people across Iowa
- Collaborate across our university disciplines, departments and colleges
- Use the most advanced, relevant and appropriate technology

What is encouraging to you about these commitments?

What is concerning to you about these commitments?

What other commitments should Extension consider?

Priority Areas of Focus

To have the greatest impact Extension will focus on a set of issue areas that reflect the needs of Iowa and the world and where Extension’s research, education and outreach can make a positive difference.

The following table shows representative examples of Priority Areas of Focus and Community Impacts that emerged in 2023 through Extension faculty and staff meetings, participant surveys and discussions with county, state and federal partners. During September and October 2023, Extension faculty staff and county partners will have opportunities to add to the list of potential priority focus areas through individual surveys and regional and unit meetings.

The final priority areas of focus will be identified by early 2024. Community impacts will then be identified by Extension faculty, staff and leaders for each of the final priority areas of focus. Representative examples are shown below:

EXAMPLES of Priority Areas of Focus	EXAMPLES of Community Impacts
Being Iowa’s Rapid Response Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ % of farmers supported in ag disease ▪ # of communities implementing weather and climate adaption mitigation, resilience strategies ▪ # of farmers adopting climate smart agriculture
Building Leaders for Today and Tomorrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of 4-H youth leaders ▪ % of city clerks with Extension certificates ▪ # of people graduating from leadership programs running for office
Creating Healthy Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced nitrogen and phosphorus loads in Iowa’s waterways ▪ No food deserts in Iowa ▪ Reduced emergency visits for children with asthma
Ensuring all Iowans have the Resources to Thrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ % of low income households with broadband access ▪ # of small urban farms accessing Extension resources ▪ % of children with developmental delays that receive intervention services by age 4
Forging New Economic Engines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of business started, retained; jobs started, retained ▪ # of new value-added agriculture investments ▪ # of people with business owner skills
Helping Families Flourish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social determinants of health metrics ▪ % of families with access to safe, affordable childcare ▪ % of families living in poverty

<p>Preparing Iowa for a Digital, Data-Driven World</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of communities helped with broadband access ▪ \$ savings from digital agriculture technology ▪ # of digital ready business certifications
<p>Upskilling Iowa’s Workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ # of 4-H youth that are STEM ready ▪ # of childcare certifications ▪ # of certifications & continuing education credits

Priority Areas of Focus QUESTIONS

To have the greatest impact Extension will focus on a set of issue areas that reflect the needs of Iowa and the world and where Extension’s research, education and outreach can make a positive difference. **(See pages 5-6)**

What does focus mean to you?

What difference would it make if Extension has priority areas of focus?

How many priority areas of focus should Extension concentrate on over the next five years?

What additional areas of focus should Extension consider?

For each proposed area of focus, please provide 1-2 examples of community impacts that could be considered for that priority area of focus.

Pivotal to our Success

We began this strategic plan stating that Extension **makes life better for Iowans and the world**, by working together to address the real needs of people, families, communities and the environment we live in.

If we are to deliver on our purpose, respond to the forces of change, fulfill our commitments and truly impact priority areas of life in Iowa and the world, we will need to grow and change as individuals and as an organization. Our success will depend on many factors, including,

- **Our shift in thinking to “start with the end in mind.”** We must define why we do what we do, clearly identifying the issues we are addressing and the impact we intend to make, then we can focus on ensuring that we have the people and resources to deliver on those promises.
- **Our ability to build the strongest connections and collaborations** within our organization and communities, and with our federal, state and local partners.
- **Our nimbleness to operate at both the individual and community level.** Building Individual skills and forging an environment for people to thrive.
- **Our willingness to embrace a diversity of thoughts and perspectives** reflective of the rich and varied communities across the state.
- **Our commitment to establishing data-driven decision-making** processes and utilizing analytics to assess program effectiveness and guide resource allocation.

Pivotal to our Success QUESTIONS

Our success will depend on many factors, including, **(See Page 7)**

- Our shift in thinking to “start with the end in mind”
- Our ability to build the strongest connections and collaborations
- Our nimbleness to operate at both the individual and community level
- Our willingness to embrace a diversity of thoughts and perspectives
- Our commitment to establishing data-driven decision-making

What comments do you have about these factors that are pivotal to our success?

What other factors will be pivotal to Extension’s success in the future?

Next Steps and Timeline

September 8 – October 6, 2023

- Extension faculty and staff and County Extension Council members are invited to review the strategic plan draft and individually provide responses to the questions in the draft through a survey.

September 12 – October 17, 2023

- Extension faculty and staff will have an opportunity to engage in discussions with colleagues and collectively respond to the questions in the strategic plan draft during regional and area meetings.

October – December 2023

- Feedback incorporated and final edits made to the strategic plan
- Priority areas of focus identified

January 2024

- Strategic plan released and action planning begins
- Individual, unit and program teams align 2024 plans of work with the strategic plan
- Request for Proposals announced for strategic interdisciplinary initiatives related the priority areas of focus
- Organizational and operational barriers to strategic plan priorities identified

March 2024

- Strategic interdisciplinary initiative grants related to priority areas of focus are announced
- Annual Conference - Identify ways we will work together to achieve the vision outlined in the strategic plan and address our barriers to the vision
- Identify opportunities to diversify and generate revenue

Final QUESTIONS

What questions do you have about the strategic plan?

What additional comments do you have about the strategic plan?