

UNH Cooperative Extension State Advisory Council
Thursday, April 22, 2004

Anna Boudreau as vice chair welcomed the group since Chris Streeter was called out of town. Council members and Extension staff introduced themselves.

John Pike welcomed the group and shared good budget news – we have dug ourselves out of a deep deficit through 12 staff taking advantage of a separation incentive plan and other strategies. The down side is a void in programming but some counties are stepping up to the plate to help fill this void. The second year of the current biennium starts July 1 and the legislature had approved a 3% increase. We don't know if this will stand. John pointed out a resolution passed by Sullivan County supporting full funding of Cooperative Extension forestry services in each county. John also shared a sample MOU between the county and UNHCE for services, a letter sent by Chris Streeter to our federal delegation to retain federal funding and a letter on university support from Erick Leadbeater to President Hart with her supportive response. Continuing to build local relationships with legislators is critical for maintaining support. John announced that we plan to fill three state level positions - a small fruit/vegetable specialist (sustainable horticulture), the agriculture program leader (75% program leader, 25% small farms specialist) and a family education and policy specialist.

Paul provided an update on other staff positions. The marine educator (Meeker position) will be filled and an additional marine educator will be added with a five year grant. In Merrimack County the agriculture educator position is being posted and Charlene is exploring ways to fill the family and consumer resources position. In Strafford County two people will share a part time 4-H Youth Development educator position. Rockingham County and Sullivan County are actively dealing with staff vacancies. Belknap County is also discussing how to deal with the family and consumer resources vacancy.

John shared the status of funds from the state level for the Cooperative Extension forestry and wildlife program. A lot of work behind the scenes is protecting the program from state cuts to date. George Bald as agency head has been key for this. This situation shows the importance of diversifying our funding to remain sustainable.

Anna reported on the Program Area Structure Team recommendations. The team reviewed structures of Cooperative Extension and businesses around the country. The group decided that organizational culture needed to change along with the structure. The initiative in general is about accountability at all levels-what are we doing and why? Are we meeting people's needs? How do we measure effective performance? How do we document that impact and reward people for that impact? In relation to accountability, Council member roles include helping Extension determine issues to address through programming (i.e. gap analysis, state caucus), become familiar with programs and impact and evaluate staff performance. A sub committee of the State Advisory Council may be needed to look at how to improve the role of council members in performance review of staff.

Questions about the recommendations focused on challenges and risks of implementing the recommendations, the cautions for implementing a merit system, staff working with advisory councils in setting and monitoring goals and training for staff to better manage their increased work loads. A point was made to keep local advisory council input and involvement strong in this work.

Amy Ouellette announced the five interdisciplinary issue teams for staff participation: achieving financial security, civic participation and leadership, land use and water quality, healthy lifestyles and economic viability of natural resource businesses. Nancy mentioned that three additional interdisciplinary program teams for staff participation: Reaching all learners in Extension Education (inclusive instruction), volunteer interdisciplinary work team and program development and evaluation council.

Paul shared the new advisory council performance review form for staff. Council members want to be sure people read and use the feedback and involve program leaders in the review. The timeline for the performance review was discussed. Some councils start new members in January so they serve several months before performance review input is needed. Concern was expressed about systematically getting council members out in the field to see educators in action. It was suggested each council member should represent a discipline to better understand and evaluate staff. Council members would benefit by receiving a copy of the plan of work at the beginning of the year and reviewing it with staff half way through the year and at the end of the year. These points reveal the critical job of the council nomination committee. Paul will redistribute the guiding document/procedures (including nominating procedures) for councils to members.

Liz Conrad reported on the Public Awareness and funding strategies (PAFS) initiative. Harmony, Liz, Anne, Erick and Dick are leading this effort. The group studied the MOU, conducted a core funding analysis (county, state and federal), reviewed support of elected officials and USNH trustees and learned from the Extension story at Michigan State University. They decided to focus on the local level with the creation of Public Awareness Teams (PATs) since grassroots outreach is most effective. Group members worked with each county council to start thinking about setting up a PAT. The goal is to mobilize by building relationships before there is a crisis and to involve staff, the university and volunteers. Systems, reporting and training are needed to support this effort so we can learn from the results. The group started to converse with USNH trustees and county commissioners about Extension. The trustees want us to promote the university as a whole rather than singling out Extension with the legislature. County commissioners are dealing with unfunded mandates and rapid change in demographics. The group found that Extension is valued. Next steps: help PATs move ahead, document efforts and results and take time to learn to prepare for the next budget cycle to sustain our funding by telling that UNHCE is doing right things the right way.

Liz shared the PAT work in Rockingham County and described where they are heading. They are focusing on President Hart's visit as a key awareness effort. Council members shared tips for involving delegation members and the media.

Paul recorded the following needs for PATs to do their work:

- consistent accountability
- systems support to make the work easier (items all the teams can use)
- a way to share successes from county to county
- get help from the university as needed
- how to write a press release workshop for council members
- profiles of legislators including information on their committee roles and interests
- updating county web pages
- share “hooks” used to bring in supporters

Liz asked the group if the PAT effort is the right response to their concerns. There was a positive response to the efforts and thanks to Rockingham County for starting the process. The state committee will continue to focus on local awareness of Extension and positioning for next budget cycle. They are working on developing the story to tell.

Suzann Knight presented information on The Family Lifeskills Program as the recipient of the 2004 Maynard and Audrey Heckel Extension Educator Fellowship Award. She highlighted the requirements of the contract for the program, the population of people being served and impact of the program through a video. The \$1,000 award that comes with the Fellowship will be used for a curriculum retreat with the LEAP staff.

Liz led the group in listing roles for advisory councils:

- public awareness
- performance appraisal
- nominating council members
- finance subcommittee to understand and attain county budget (a proposal for all councils to have this)
- program development and evaluation

John brought the group up to date on the Sullivan County strategy for filling the Extension forestry and wildlife position. There was a retirement and no funding to fill the position due to less federal funds and level state funding. The county wants a forester. There is at least one vacancy in half the counties. A 1988 legislative study committee put a cap on county funds for Extension staff salaries. All future salary increases then had to come from the state. This worked fine until the current state budget deficit. There is a suggestion that all ten counties should get together and look at per capita investment in Extension based on how each county is doing financially. There is also interest in having the state remain accountable for \$ overall for consistency. There is fear that highest per capita counties could really suffer from others learning the differences in per capita investment from county to county. This is especially true with the multi-county work that is done. There was a suggestion to create a statewide rainy day fund with county dollars to be used during tough times. There is also a fear that counties that put out extra funding will not have state money return to the positions. Erick suggests we push on our federal funders. Paul mentioned that some of our state legislators have tried to make our case in D.C. The current PAFS group will take this on.

Jack suggested the state council chairs meet more often to be more educated about the issues and better positioned to deal with them locally. This would also allow for important sharing across counties and more concentration of power. Paul could also communicate more frequently with committee members (pass on the Biweekly update, etc.). Members prefer bulleted reports of high points instead of a whole report. A list serve or discussion forum could be set up for council members. Need to be aware of not getting into information overload. We need to continue to build our alliances between the council and statewide organizations.