

Communication Memo

To: County executives, administrators, committee chairs, board chairs, and other Cooperative Extension partners
From: UW-Extension
Re: *nEXT Generation* project update
Date: March 15, 2016

This memo provides background and news on the *nEXT Generation* project to reorganize UW-Extension Cooperative Extension. UW Extension Chancellor Cathy Sandeen has made a commitment to an open and transparent process. This is the first in a series of update memos you will receive as reorganization progresses.

The following information addresses common county partner questions and concerns, starting with the imperative behind the project and potential effects on county programs.

Financial imperative

Following permanent cuts in state funding, Cooperative Extension faces a \$3.6 million annual permanent budget cut. The most recent state cuts went into effect July 1, 2015, part of an overall \$250 million biennial cut to the UW System.

Cooperative Extension intends to allocate its share of the annual cut across the division, targeting \$1.2 million from county programs, \$1.7 million from campus programs, and \$700,000 from central administration.

Reducing expenses to match state cuts is the only viable long-term solution. Cooperative Extension's limited cash reserves are helping to maintain current operations during reorganization, but cannot compensate for such a large permanent cut.

Most promising approach

Cooperative Extension's reorganization initiative began in early 2015 as a response to impending state cuts. Administration, faculty, and staff reviewed ideas from committees who investigated past UW budget cuts. We also explored recent models from other states, solicited feedback from colleagues, and surveyed county government leaders.

More than 136 local elected officials responded to the survey. County leaders emphasized the need to maintain local offices and local programming. Counties also stressed the need for flexibility—for example, the ability to hire additional educators supported by county funds.

With these and other priorities in mind, Cooperative Extension considered different options for organizing county staff and services, including the status quo. Establishing multi-county areas emerged as the most promising solution for cutting budgets while keeping strong local programs.

This approach was among the recommendations presented to Chancellor Sandeen in late December 2015. She has charged the *nEXT Generation* project with determining how administrative services and educational programming will be delivered across multi-county areas.

County-level proposals

Chancellor Sandeen [announced high-level reorganization priorities](#) on Feb. 10 after hearing feedback on draft recommendations. Key decisions affecting counties include:

- Keeping an Extension office in every county while establishing multi-county areas that consolidate administration
- Sharing some educator positions across county lines (an approach already used in some counties) to reflect real local needs
- Respecting different levels of county investment, ensuring that every county receives a level of services proportionate to its investment
- Establishing that staffing changes will affect only positions funded by state general purpose revenue, given that many county offices also have staff supported by other funding sources

Next steps

Following the chancellor's decisions, Cooperative Extension has begun an intensive planning process that will involve extensive collaboration with county partners through participation on work groups. We expect this planning process to take at least 6-8 months.

County input has already been instrumental, setting boundaries for multi-county areas and establishing that specific plans must respect local needs and investments. We will continue to

share *nEXT Generation* project recommendations, reports, and other materials as the project progresses.

Budget considerations

We understand the challenge of planning for budgets and facilities with reorganization decisions pending. Given the anticipated timeline for the project, we ask that counties consider keeping Extension budgets stable for next year. Any changes to staffing or programming will take time, likely starting in calendar year 2017.

Likewise, we ask that counties proceed with current plans for office space. Keeping an Extension office in every county is a priority for reorganization.

Project communications

You'll receive updates as the *nEXT Generation* project progresses. Email any questions or comments to nextgencommunications@ces.uwex.edu.