Familiarity with this document will prepare participants for the National Dialogue:

Leading in a Time of Social, Economic and Political Disruption
September 23, 2020
12:00 – 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time
Via Zoom

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Please also become familiar with
ECOP Innovation for Capacity Building in Cooperative Extension

As American society evolves, and the communities that cooperative extension (CE) serves grow and change, the national CE system must embrace innovations, both radical and simple, in order to remain relevant, useful, efficient, and inclusive. This body believes that innovation is a process, not a goal. Therefore, as the scoping body for CE’s intention to increase innovation in capacity building across the national system, we strongly recommend that any group engaging in this process be able to clearly answer the following questions:

1. What are we trying to innovate on or around?
2. Why are we trying to innovate on or around it?
3. What metrics will we use to measure success of any forthcoming results?

Innovations may come in areas including but not limited to:

- how educators deliver programs across function areas;
- what programs are developed and how they are delivered;
- how we collaborate/cooperate within and beyond CE;
- what constituencies are served;
- how equity principles are employed in CE at the University and in the field;
- how we assess and communicate our impact and value;
- the style and methods used to communicate our relevancy and connect to stakeholders;
- how we position ourselves within the University and scientific establishment; and,
- how we share resources and relate to each other as state entities.

Quintessential CE successes come when it embraces dispersed leadership and co-creation to deliver programs and information to customers where they are and on their own terms. Forward-looking Extension leadership seeks out innovations that emerge from a variety of sources. Given this, we acknowledge that innovations that are responsive to community and system needs – for example, in delivery, constituent identification, program types and design, and communication methods – necessarily come from the ground up. Conversely, supporting structural innovations that require institutional or systemic change – for example institutionalizing equity principles across program areas, program restructuring, budgeting adaptation, developing new external partnerships, and positioning within the University – are the responsibility of Directors, Administrators, or other individuals in strategic vision positions.

We also recognize that the system struggles with deploying, communicating, and rewarding innovations when they happen, that educators are often not supported at institutions or within the broader CE culture to embrace the high-risk or fast failure methods that can lead to innovations or radical change, and that those educators may in fact be penalized for embracing them.

Therefore, we recommend that the purpose of any ECOP innovation focused group, populated by Director/Administrator level individuals, should be to enable, encourage, support, share, and provide a national resource to capitalize on innovation in CE. The purpose of any innovation group stood up and overseen by said body should be topic area specific and populated by those who do the work.
We also recommend that the structure of any group embody the following principles:

- **Clarity of purpose:** To ensure that the individuals at the table have both the capacity and the authority to address the stated purpose, recognizing that CE serves diverse learners.

- **Inclusive & equitable representation as a consideration and goal:** This group recognizes the human resources, infrastructure, and monetary wealth disparities across the CE system and the myriad ways a program’s limited resources has material impact on the ability to innovate and willingness to take on the risks of innovating.

- **Fail fast:** Innovating means trying new things, many of which may fail, and trying again. By creating a professional space where fast failure is not a threat to an individual members’ standing within a University is critical for true innovation to take place.

- **Intentional partnership:** A team focused on empowering, elevating, and sharing innovation across the CE system must also consider its relationship to external entities as potential partners and resources.

**Recommended Next Steps:**

It is recommended that ECOP endorse and support in a standing Innovation Committee, similar to the 4-H Leadership Committee, to embrace strategic opportunities. Through an open application process ECOP would empanel a group of no more than 10 individuals, representing each region and broad program area expertise. This committee would have the authority to name, as ex-officio members, representatives of external partners such as eXtension and NIFA. This Committee would tackle leader level innovation topics (as described above) and would provide oversight to any topic area specific groups that should be empaneled.

This structure would enable intentional partnerships between CE and external partners while allowing the Committee to leverage the resources of all parties, including but not limited to APLU’s structure, the expertise of NEDA members (for ECOP), and communities, funding sources, and on-the-ground CE innovators (for eXtension and others). This Committee may make recommendations to both ECOP and, if invited, the eXtension Board of Directors, be able to send a representative to sit on the eXtension Board of Directors as invited, present findings to APLU, convene diverse CE professionals across subject matter areas, and produce independent products. This scoping committee is willing and able to provide a selection committee with criteria upon request.

The first orders of business in support of the ground-up and top-down innovation outlined above:

1. Establish a process through which innovation topics of national importance (see list above for examples from the scoping committee) are selected for attention. Establish and move forward a process by which individuals are found and empowered to serve on those groups.

2. Prepare and present recommendations on the structural, cultural, and institutional changes that University’s may implement to empower innovation in CE at the University level AND/OR a set of guiding principles that institutions may embrace as they attempt to foster, lift roadblocks to, and empower innovation earlier in an educator/researcher’s career. These recommendations or principles should be presented at the 2019 Joint CES/ESS Annual Meeting and the 2020 APLU Annual meeting in working sessions geared towards and marketed to University Presidents, Provosts, and Deans.
ECOP Innovation: A 2-Pronged Path Forward


Innovation for the sake of innovation is neither effective nor sustainable. Therefore, it is recommended that ECOP move this work forward with an efficient and results oriented 2-pronged approach.

Prong 1: Stand up a 2-year expert group led by Michelle Rodgers that will work with the Well Connected Communities culture of health initiative to investigate, explore, and provide recommendations in support of extension innovating for system level change. Work will likely include but not be limited to

1. interviewing states not currently involved in WCC to understand the barriers/limitations to engagement in the system-wide effort,
2. discussion around integrated program areas and policy and system efforts to advance integration,
3. exploring opportunities for System level fund development that may augment RWJF (follow up to Susan Raymond Changing our World Study for ECOP with health identified),
4. updating the strategic framework for health developed in 2012 with future focus,
5. exploring the capacities and policies needed to engage other colleges across institutions and other partners in a culture of health initiative,
6. studying and recommending staffing models that work to support health framework, and
7. identifying system-level opportunities around culture of health.

It is recommended that this expert group of no more than 15 persons. A proposed group might include:

- 4 Director/Administrators or Associate Directors/Administrators
- 2 program leaders
- 1 Board of Human Science representative (Recommend Eric Porfeli Ohio State who is also on WCC Steering Committee as BOHS rep)
- 1-2 Department heads from a College of Health sciences,
- 4 external partners (potential: NIH, Foundations listed in the ERPD report, CDC, Public Health Department)
- Extension Health Director, Cooperative Extension/ECOP
- 1 EDA member

It is recommended that this group meet two times per year in person and the rest of the work be completed by distance as per the experience from the Strategic Framework for Health Task Force.

The initiative will have the ability to be supported monetarily at ~ $40,000 over two years. Those funds would predominantly be used to support periodic face to face travel to advance the work done online.

This initiative will provide a platform for how to think and work innovatively on creating a system-supported culture of health across the country, provide broader recommendations for how to adopt innovative or new processes, policies, and cultures to empower extension to affect system level change, and act as a pilot for future ECOP topic-specific innovation activities.

Prong 2: Task the ECOP Professional Development Committee, in partnership with eXtension, to take ECOP appropriate actions in response to unrealized recommendations from the 2016 report. As the 2016
recommendations focus on increasing the capacity of extension leaders (Directors and otherwise) to innovate at the LGU’s and in their work, this task falls well within the purview of the ECOP Professional Development Committee.

The following recommendations are pulled from the 2016 report. The Professional Development Committee and eXtension would be responsible for deciding how to move from the recommendations to tools, templates, services, or experiences ECOP can provide.

*Topic Area: Promoting Innovation in Extension Leadership*

- Provide training in: a. critical thinking; b. experimentation; c. creativity; d. managing difficult conversations; e. emotional intelligence; f. forward thinking.
- Rework the evaluation process to include: a. reward and recognize innovative and risk-taking behavior; b. experimentation; c. creativity; d. modify promotion and tenure documents to encourage innovation.
- Continue to challenge eXtension to provide tools to Directors that will help innovative practices.

*Topic Area: Creating a Culture of Innovation*

- Include the change process and culture of innovation in onboarding and orientation for new employees.
- Conduct webinars and innovation competitions.
- Hold conferences, webinars and Twitter town halls at the state and national levels on innovation.

*Topic Area: Hiring in Extension to Promote Innovation*

- Build expectations for innovation into job descriptions, working documents, and promotion and tenure process.

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1 This is not a comprehensive list of report recommendations. Those listed have been pre-identified as recommendations on which ECOP may be able to take appropriate action.
ECOP Health Innovation Task Force (2020-2022)

Extension Directors and Administrators
  Michelle Rodgers, University of Delaware, Chair
  Karl Martin, University of Wisconsin
  Enrique Nelson Escobar, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
  Karla Trautman, South Dakota State University

Program Leaders
  Cheryl Eschbach, Michigan State University Extension
  Suzanne Stluka, Montana State University – left for USDA-NIFA position is August 2020
  Mike Gutter, University of Florida

Deans/Department Heads
  Erik Porfeli, Ohio State University (Board on Human Sciences)
  F. Javier Nieto, Oregon State University
  Craig Newschaffer, Pennsylvania State University
  Thomas G. Coon, Oklahoma State University

External Partners
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  Richard Dunville, CDC
  Maggie E. Jones, Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute
  Janelle Gunn, CDC

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