

Foundations of Political Effectiveness in Cooperative Extension—2009

Case study: OZAUKEE COUNTY

Situation

In October 2007, Paul Roback, CNRED educator in Ozaukee County, accepted the position of CNRED educator in Washington County. After several years of budget cuts to the Ozaukee Extension office budget, Roback realized that his departure would make the vacant CNRED position vulnerable to elimination in the 2008 Ozaukee Budget. This was the third time in as many years that Roback was concerned that the CNRED position would be eliminated.

In 2005, the chair of the Extension oversight committee made public his intentions to eliminate the CNRED and Family Living positions. In 2006, the county increased its funding to the county economic development corporation (EDC) to allow this organization to hire a full-time executive director. Several county board members and the county administrator had difficulty understanding the difference between a CNRED educator and an executive director of an EDC.

Response

In response to the possible CNRED position elimination in 2005, then Assistant Program Leader Tom Blewett and Roback met with the Extension oversight committee. Blewett provided a statewide perspective of CNRED programming and Roback provided information on local programming. Whenever the Chair of the committee questioned how state initiatives tied into local programming, Roback was able to provide several specific examples with measurable outcomes.

In response to the confusion about CNRED roles in 2006, Roback met with the President of the EDC and developed a document detailing the roles of the CNRED educator and the EDC Executive Director. Although there were a few minor areas of overlap, a detailed explanation was offered for how Roback would transition out of those responsibilities and take on added responsibilities in other program areas. Specifically, Roback would increase programming in land use in to assist the county in meeting its contractual deadline with comprehensive planning.

To ensure that the CNRED position would continue after Roback's departure in 2007, Roback developed a detailed document outlining the roles of the CNRED educator in Ozaukee County. This document included:

- Specific skill sets Roback developed in the role of Ozaukee CNRED educator
- Time allocated per program area
- Detailed information on educational programs, including the administrative support Roback provided for numerous county programs
- Future needs for each program identified by Roback and community stakeholders (citizens, local elected officials, public officials and non-profits)

- Connections between CNRED programs and the priorities that were emerging through the county's strategic planning process, which was facilitated by the county's administrative office

After Roback developed this document, he solicited comments from Tom Blewett and the Vice-Chair of the Extension oversight committee. The Vice-Chair identified the connection between CNRED programming and the strategic planning priorities. This was invaluable political capital moving forward through the upcoming county budget process.

Results

In each of the three years, a greater understanding of Extension and CNRED programming was achieved and the CNRED position remained in the budget. However, these responses were for specific situations and events over three years. In reality, it took more than 14 years to build the political capital with the county board to ensure the successful funding of the CNRED position.

Roback's predecessor developed strong programming over 10 years in the position and was well liked by community stakeholders. Roback continued this tradition and developed programming based on needs assessments and worked closely with numerous county board supervisors and departments on a variety of programs.

Building such relationships takes time (years) and patience. Additionally, the Ozaukee County UW-Extension department head worked tirelessly to explain and demonstrate the value of Extension to the county administrator, board chair and Extension oversight committee. The district director, dean's office and CNRED program area office provided additional resources and support. Working collaboratively and having honest conversations with each of these individuals was integral to ensuring the successful continuation of the CNRED position.

Evidence

Funding for a CNRED educator was included in the 2008 Ozaukee budget. When a visioning session was held for the position, many of the priorities identified by community stakeholders at this session were previously identified in Roback's 2007 document. The new CNRED educator started in Ozaukee County in June 2008.