

Dual Scan Approach

In this approach, the county Extension office identifies needs and concerns related to the Extension program area. Each program area undertakes its own process to identify needs, concerns and assets relevant to its content area. In addition, the county office may engage in one of the other approaches in order to identify issues beyond the Extension program area focus.

Description of Process

Each program area within the county Extension office selects its own approach and tools. (See Appendix 3) appropriate for understanding the local situation relevant to the program area. For example, the Agricultural/Natural Resources staff might convene a meeting of farmers, agricultural lenders, cooperative representatives, agricultural businesspersons, farming organization representatives and others with an interest in agriculture/natural resources. Using the nominal group process, issues relevant to the agricultural/natural resource area are identified.

Family Living Education staff might choose to use a mail survey to identify family issues. The mailing list could include different family types (traditional, single parent, household with elderly parents, etc.), minority families, agencies that work with families, as well as other organizations that represent families. Responses to survey questions are compiled and tabulated. The highest priority issues are based upon the frequency of responses.

4-H Youth Development staff could convene a series of focus groups to identify issues facing youth. Participants might include youth, youth organization representatives, community leaders, 4-H leaders and representatives from agencies serving or with a focus on youth. From the focus groups, a consensus list of highest priority issues could be developed.

Community, Natural Resource and Economic Development staff could utilize recent community-wide needs assessments (face to face meetings and workshops, future directions surveys, etc.) to develop a list of high priority issues for the CNRED program area.

Each program area is responsible for the collection and summarization of reliable information.

To ensure a broad overview of issues facing the county beyond the Extension program area focus, countywide issue identification could be included. Any of the other approaches could be used. Before undertaking such a process, however, the county Extension office needs to determine if other countywide assessments exist or are being planned and if the results are compatible with the needs of the county Extension planning effort.

Case Example provided by Dave Such, Sheboygan County.

Areas of Consideration

The greatest advantage of this approach is the flexibility each program area has to determine which approach and techniques it will use to identify and prioritize issues. In all cases, a broader-based, countywide issues identification processes should be used, if relevant. A disadvantage is that two processes need to be conducted, assuming that another agency or organization has done no relevant countywide planning assessment.