Cooperative Extension Strategic Planning Process

Step 5: Identification of Strategic Issues

Executive Summary

A strategic issue is a fundamental policy question or critical challenge affecting the organization's mandates, mission and values, product or service level, and mix, clients, or users, cost, financing, structure, processes, or management. The purpose of describing strategic issues is to identify the fundamental policy choices facing the organization (Bryson 2004).

In the CE Strategic Planning Process, Strategic Issues were identified using information collected through surveys, meetings, and workshops with County Extension Directors and Stakeholders including clientele, partners, collaborators, faculty, staff and volunteers. The following is a summary of two surveys completed this year. Details are available for Extension Faculty upon request.

2008 CED Strategic Issues Survey:
In fall of 2008, a survey was conducted with County Extension Directors to obtain their input regarding major Strategic Issues for Arizona Cooperative Extension to address, factors that make it a strategic issue, consequences of failure to address the issue and priority ranking for issues from high to low. The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey and 7 CEDs responded to the survey.

The major high priority strategic issues identified through this Survey were environmental, agricultural, community and human health sustainability, the need to improve effectiveness of CE programs as contributors to preparing youth, adults, families and communities for success in a global economy, plan for effective recruitment and retention of volunteers, and diminished viability and visibility of Cooperative Extension Programs.

The factors that made these issues strategic were increased population growth, finite natural resources including water and land, economic downturn with large number of families living in poverty, loss of CE resources including funding, personnel and programs, too many program focus areas.

The identified consequences of failing to address these issues included diminished knowledge and skills of the public leading to crop yield losses; degradation of natural resources; reduced health status of individuals and communities; weakened economies - especially in rural areas; lack of adequately trained faculty, staff and volunteers to meet clientele needs and demonstrate strong program impacts which will result in diminished future financial support for Cooperative Extension.

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2009 Stakeholder Survey:

The 2009 stakeholder survey had 366 respondents: 248 non-University employees and 118 University faculty and staff. In all responses and categories, the results were similar between the two groups. The highest response came from UA faculty followed closely by those who identified themselves as volunteers; then UA staff with ranchers/growers and advisory board members rounding out the top five. Female responses were almost double that of male with a majority of respondents in the 50-59 year age group followed closely by the 40-49 and 60+ year age groups. In terms of respondent’s relationship to Extension, of the 118 UA employees, 63 were faculty and 55 were staff. Non-UA respondents were dominated by volunteers (63) with grower/rancher (29) and advisory board members (27) the only other categories with more than 15 responses. Most respondents identified themselves living in urban areas (136) but that was closely followed by rural residents (125) with suburbanites trailing far behind (62). Following is a list of the key questions and the top five responses to each.

The Strategic Goals were ranked:

1. Support the positive growth and development of children and youth
2. Ensure safe, profitable and sustainable food and fiber
3. Help Arizona communities plan for changing demands on our natural resources
4. Develop leadership skills to ensure sustainable community capacity
5. Assist individuals, families and youth to become physically, mentally, emotionally and financially healthy

Strategic Goal #1: Help Arizona communities plan for changing demands on our natural resources

1. Impact decision making and policy on limited water supply
2. Impact decision making and policy on natural resources
3. Sustain profitable and efficient plant systems
4. Enhance economic vitality
5. Impact decision making and policy on agricultural security

Strategic Goal #2: Ensure safe, profitable and sustainable food and fiber

1. Impact decision making and policy on limited water supply
2. Sustain profitable and efficient plant systems
3. Impact decision making and policy on agricultural security
4. Sustain profitable and efficient animal systems
5. Connecting youth with the outdoors

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Strategic Goal #3: Develop leadership skills to ensure sustainable community capacity

1. Enhance Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education
2. Enhance citizenship & leadership
3. Connecting youth with the outdoors
4. Enhance community vitality / Enhance sound financial management (tied)

Strategic Goal #4: Support the positive growth and development of children and youth

1. Enhance Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education
2. Enhance healthy living
3. Connecting youth with the outdoors
4. Enhance citizenship & leadership
5. Enhance sound financial management

Strategic Goal #5: Assist individuals, families and youth to become physically, mentally, emotionally and financially healthy

1. Connecting youth with the outdoors
2. Enhance Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education/ Enhance healthy living (tied)
3. Enhance sound financial management
4. Enhance family & child development and care giving

List the top three issues in Arizona that Cooperative Extension needs to address. Limit your answer to three and please use one or two word answers.

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