

## Geographic Structure Decisions

Building on the foundations laid by the [initial programming and organizational work groups](#), the Integration Work Group (IWG) made a set of six formal recommendations for changes to Cooperative Extension's structures, positions, and partnership agreements, focusing on restructuring geographic administration. On February 9, the group released its [first set of six recommendations](#) for a 2-week feedback period by staff, partners, and stakeholders. By February 23, the project received comments from over 300 individuals, which the project management team (PMT) synthesized into a [feedback results report](#). With the preliminary results, the Executive Sponsors approved the [implementation of Area Extension Directors](#) on March 3. The following week, the IWG finished reviewing both the results report and the raw feedback before making changes and finalizing the remaining 5 recommendations, which were then presented to the sponsors on March 21.

This week, the Executive Sponsors approved the next five decisions related to the structure and staffing for county offices in the future. These decisions are detailed on subsequent pages. We suggest reading these decisions sequentially as the concepts presented in each lay the groundwork for subsequent decisions.

- [Maintain an Extension Office in Every County](#)
- [Connecting Counties and Tribes with Regional & Statewide Resources](#)
- [Differentiating County- and Tribe-Based Educational Positions](#)
- [Sharing Educational Positions Across Counties/Tribes](#)
- [Establishing New Agreements Between Counties & Cooperative Extension](#)

We encourage you to contact us with any questions or comments at [nextgencommunications@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:nextgencommunications@ces.uwex.edu).

Sincerely,

Executive Sponsors of the *nEXT Generation* project

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## Maintain an Extension Office in Every County

### Background

Through authority granted by both state statute and by UW System policy, Cooperative Extension is charged with fulfilling the Wisconsin Idea by providing the people of Wisconsin access to education beyond formal university classrooms. We currently have staff and offices in each of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

### Decision

**Cooperative Extension will maintain an Extension Office in every county willing to commit to continued funding and space for Cooperative Extension staff.** Cooperative Extension recognizes the value in keeping a local presence in every county and keeping the shortest distance possible between the people of Wisconsin and the Extension staff delivering programming to them.

Cooperative Extension requires dedicated office space for every staff member that the county is co-funding with Cooperative Extension (Extension Educators, Associate Extension Educators, and Program Coordinators; see Recommendation #3 for more information), along with necessary office supplies and access to appropriate space for programming. Support from county-based support staff, access to appropriate facilities and office space will be codified within a negotiated MOU. Cooperative Extension also requires consistent co-branding across all county offices to reflect the brand identities of both Cooperative Extension and the county government.

While there may continue to be some variability between counties, negotiated MOU agreements between counties and Cooperative Extension will specify minimum standards for any UW Extension office.

### Rationale

It is critical to maintain an Extension Office in every county willing to continue partnering with Cooperative Extension to successfully accomplish Cooperative Extension's mission and continue the vibrant relationships with counties. The reasons for this decision are:

- **Proximity:** We want to maintain the shortest possible distance between Cooperative Extension staff and the people of Wisconsin that we serve to continue our focus on local issues and relevant education.
- **Accessibility:** We want to ensure that the people of Wisconsin and county governments can easily access the resources of the University of Wisconsin System and campuses through local Cooperative Extension staff.
- **Visibility:** We want to ensure that the partnership between Cooperative Extension and county governments is visible and prominent to continue promoting the county government's role as a provider of educational programming and services, and delivering on the Wisconsin Idea.

### Next Steps

Following the selection of Assistant Deans and Area Extension Directors (AEDs), the AEDs will begin working with each county to define their priorities and develop agreements for programs and staffing.

## Connecting Counties and Tribes with Regional & Statewide Resources

### Background

Cooperative Extension has historically had two main groups of faculty and staff providing educational programming around the state:

- Locally-based **Educators** who deliver programming relevant to local populations and whose salary and fringe are funded 40% by the county or tribe and 60% by Cooperative Extension; and
- **Specialists** located in Cooperative Extension or on UW System campuses who focus on developing and delivering more specialized programming across the state and whose salary and fringe are funded by Cooperative Extension and/or a UW System campus.

Historically, if a county or tribe wanted programming in a particular academic area, then it needed to hire a county-based Educator. Specialists have provided programming to counties and tribes as well, but it has not always been easy for the Specialists to identify which counties needed programming or for the counties to identify which Specialists are available to meet their needs.

### Decision

**Cooperative Extension will provide local communities improved, intentional access to regional outreach and research positions that will be primarily funded by Cooperative Extension. The individuals in these positions will work in county offices, in tribes, on UW campuses or in Extension centers, but will serve broad audiences based on local, regional, and statewide needs.** Examples include:

- **Extension Specialists:** Faculty focused on performing applied research and scholarship in a specialized discipline in support of developing and delivering programs to local audiences and Cooperative Extension colleagues; and
- **Outreach Programmers:** Staff focused on developing and supporting programming through specialized content expertise and providing technical assistance to Cooperative Extension colleagues.

**These faculty and staff will serve a broader geography with a deeper set of expertise.** For example, an Extension Specialist focused on cranberry production might be located in a county Extension office and serve growers in all of Wisconsin's cranberry-growing counties, even if a cranberry-growing county does not invest in a local agricultural position.

**Area Extension Directors will help coordinate with the Extension Specialists and Outreach Programmers to ensure local needs are met.** For example, an Area Extension Director could call on these faculty and staff when a rapid response is required in a specialized area, such as a public health concern, to ensure the counties and tribes in their area have access to the necessary information.

**Cooperative Extension will continue to invest in positions based at UW campuses, in addition to these regional positions.** These campus-based positions will be connected with county-based and regional positions more intentionally through the Area Extension Directors.

### Rationale

The reasons for this decision are:

- **Accessibility:** Counties and tribes will be able to access educational programs even if they are not funding or housing these positions directly.
- **Specialization:** These positions will be considerably more specialized in their areas of focus, enabling counties and tribes to access a broader and deeper array of educational programs and specialists.
- **Flexibility & Speed:** These positions will enable counties and tribes to address emerging issues through new or adapted programs quickly and efficiently.
- **Matching long-term funding sources with long-term salary commitments:** County funds, that are subject to annual allocations, are not well-suited to funding long-term faculty positions. Tenured faculty positions require a

long-term funding commitment. Cooperative Extension will assume responsibility for long-term faculty funding positions along with the responsibility of granting tenure. These tenured positions will serve a broader geographic area of multiple counties.

### **Next Steps**

Future recommendations will outline the Academic/Programming structures that will house Extension Specialists and Outreach Programers. Under the new model, Area Extension Directors will connect counties and tribe with faculty and staff who serve the state or the region.

## Differentiating County- and Tribe-Based Educational Positions

### Background

There are roughly 350 locally-based faculty and staff serving as educators in Cooperative Extension - nearly half of all the faculty and staff in Cooperative Extension. This reflects our educational mission and our deep value of education.

Practically, however, those serving as educators differ on a wide range of qualifications and responsibilities, like:

- Educational attainment, ranging from bachelor's degrees or high school diplomas (for current Food Wlse and peer educators) to doctorates (for research-focused faculty members);
- Employment relationships, ranging from annual staff appointments to tenured faculty positions; and
- Educational methods, ranging from providing community-based peer training to creating new educational programs by applying independent research.

Grouping staff with such a wide array of responsibilities and qualifications under the same position has created a number of issues. In some cases, the outlined responsibilities for a position may not match the qualifications or intentions. Also, some educators may perform similar responsibilities but have different qualifications or employment relationships (e.g., some may be tenured faculty while others may be academic staff).

### The Decision

In addition to the regional and statewide positions listed in the previous recommendation, **Cooperative Extension will create three different positions that counties or tribes may fund in the future:**

- **Associate Extension Educators:** Staff with a high school diploma or bachelor's degree [e.g., FoodWlse and peer educators], focused on teaching, delivering programs, and providing educational services throughout the county or tribe. These staff will leverage curricula and educational materials developed by statewide resources based on the UW campuses and Extension centers;
- **Extension Educators:** Staff with a bachelor's degree or master's degree focused on independently adapting research-based programs to be most relevant to the residents of the county or tribe and delivering those programs to the residents; and
- **Program Coordinators:** Staff with a bachelor's degree or master's degree focused on providing operational support to volunteers, Associate Extension Educators, and other faculty and staff delivering a specified program within a county or tribe.

These positions better align job responsibilities with educational qualifications. **Staff serving in these positions will be aligned with a disciplinary focus** (e.g., 4-H Community Club Program Coordinator, Organizational Development Extension Educator, FoodWlse Associate Extension Educator). **The use of these positions will be determined by program needs and not all of these positions will be utilized in a given program.** For example, if a program is largely delivered by volunteers then it may require Program Coordinators, rather than Extension Educators.

### Rationale for the Decision

The reasons for this decision are:

- **Alignment:** These new positions will better align the responsibilities with qualifications to ensure all faculty and staff are set up for success and that their programming efforts optimally use and leverage their talents, skills, and abilities.
- **Flexibility:** These positions will allow for more flexibility in how programs are delivered, and positively moves the organization away from the one-size-fits-all approach in the current model.
- **Diversified Applicant Pool:** There will be new opportunities for people with diverse experiences and backgrounds to apply for positions within the organization that were not there before because of minimum qualification barriers.

## Next Steps

The Integration Work Group is incorporating these position types into the overall *nEXT Generation* model. Area Extension Directors will be able to discuss opportunities for counties to deploy these new position types in their discussions this spring.

## Sharing Educational Positions Across Counties/Tribes

### Background

Of the 350 county-based Educators, roughly 250 are co-funded by the counties or tribes (the other 100 are largely funded through grants in the FoodWIse program). Nearly 95% of these locally-funded Educators are assigned full-time to work with an individual county. Only 17 Educators are assigned to work in two counties and three Educators are assigned to work in three counties. Though some of these sharing relationships have been in place for years, most have emerged in the past two years to address vacancies in certain counties given reduced budgets.

The all-or-nothing approach of requiring counties to fund full-time Educator positions if they want access to certain programs has created inequities across the state related to workload, retention, and accessibility. Some counties have hired an additional full-time Educator to meet a part-time programming need, while others have left certain programming needs unfulfilled because they could not fund or justify a full-time position. 4-H Youth Development Educators offer a good example of this situation: If a county wants to have the 4-H Community Club program, then they must fund at least one full-time 4-H Youth Development position. In one county, a full-time 4-H Youth Development Educator supports one club (five volunteers and 24 youth) while in another county, a full-time Educator supports 19 clubs (114 volunteers, and 344 youth). Although most 4-H Youth Development Educators provide programming beyond the 4-H Community Club program, this incongruence highlights the lack of flexibility in current hiring practices.

This all-or-nothing approach has also created a situation where many Educators must be generalists, covering a broad array of topics and programs. For example, Family Living Educators cover programs ranging from nutrition to financial literacy, parenting to drug addiction. Many of the initial nine Work Groups on the *nEXT Generation* project cited the need to allow Educators to specialize more into narrower disciplines, both to allow for richer programming and for Educators to stay current in the field. However, the current structure of one Educator to one county does not allow for specialization except in larger counties, like Milwaukee and Dane, that can support multiple Educators within the same discipline.

### The Decision

**Counties and tribes will be allowed to share or hire part-time Associate Extension Educators, Extension Educators and Program Coordinators in the future. The Area Extension Directors will advise and guide counties and tribes on options for sharing staff based on their knowledge of the programming needs across neighboring counties and tribes.**

As the examples in Figure 1. below illustrate, county and tribal assignments could take a variety of forms. Some counties and tribes may choose to continue funding full-time positions in the future; others may choose to split funding for certain positions with one or more counties and tribes. Given that areas are only administrative boundaries for the Area Extension Directors, counties or tribes will not be restricted to only co-funding positions with others in their area. For example, if two adjacent counties in two different areas determine that they each need a part-time Horticulture Associate Extension Educator, then the two Area Extension Directors would work together to hire and onboard one full-time staff member. In these situations, Cooperative Extension will identify one Area Extension Director as the formal hiring and managerial authority to avoid situations of staff having two direct supervisors.

Sharing staff will also allow for more specialized positions. As an example, if three neighboring counties identify that they each need Family Living programming, then they could each individually fund full-time Family Living Extension Educators or they could collectively fund three specialized Extension Educators - one focused on parenting, one focused on nutrition, and one focused on financial literacy. **Shared positions will be outlined in annual contracts between counties and Cooperative Extension. Area Extension Directors will negotiate shared positions with counties.**

### Rationale for the Decision

The reasons for this decision are:

- **Flexibility:** Counties and tribes will be able to fund part-time or full-time staff based on their programming needs.

- **Cost Sharing:** Counties and tribes will be able to split or share the costs for certain staff if they cannot fund full-time positions.
- **Specialization:** Cooperative Extension will be able to structure positions to be more specialized, offering counties and tribes the opportunity to more accurately meet their programming needs at a local level.

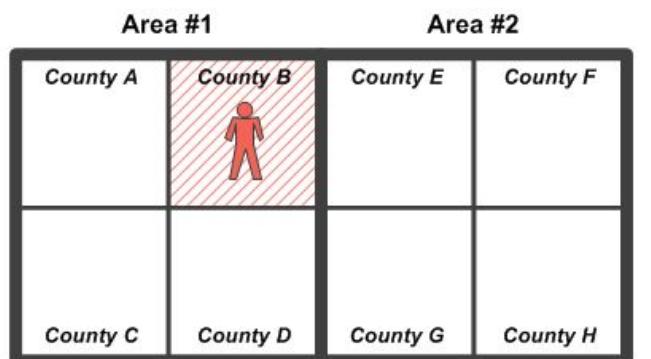
## Next Steps

Cooperative Extension will not require any counties to share positions, but Area Extension Directors will assist in matching counties who have expressed a desire to support a part-time position. Shared positions will be an option that Area Extension Directors will discuss with interested counties as part of their planning meetings this spring.

**Figure 1: Examples of Possible Staff Sharing Configurations**

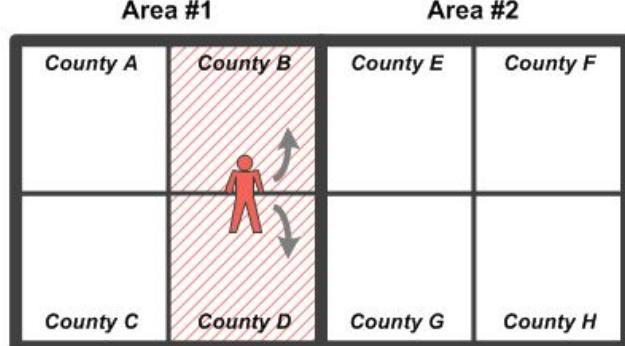
**Example #1: Staff Dedicated to a Single County**

County B identifies a need for dairy programming.  
County B contracts with Cooperative Extension to fund a full-time Dairy Associate Extension Educator.  
A Dairy Associate Extension Educator works full-time for County B delivering dairy programming.



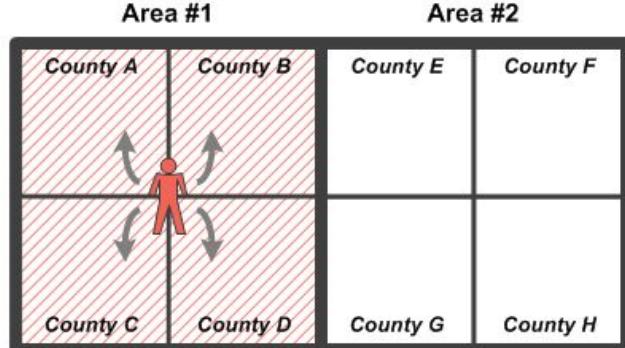
**Example #2: Staff Dedicated to a Few Counties in a Single Area**

Counties B and D identify a need for parenting programming, but cannot individually fund a full-time Parenting Extension Educator.  
Both counties individually contract with Cooperative Extension to fund half of a Parenting Extension Educator.  
A Parenting Extension Educator works part-time for both counties delivering parenting programming.



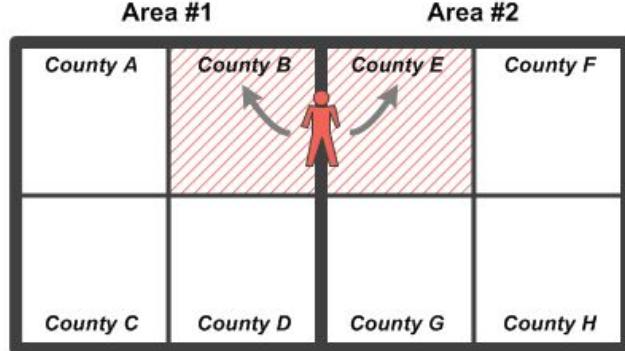
**Example #3: Staff Dedicated to All Counties in a Single Area**

Counties A, B, C and D identify a need for leadership programming, but each county only needs a quarter of a Leadership Extension Educator.  
All four counties individually contract with Cooperative Extension to fund a quarter of a Leadership Extension Educator.  
A Leadership Extension Educator works part-time for all four counties delivering leadership programming.



**Example #4: Staff Dedicated to a Two Counties in a Different Areas**

Counties B and E identify a need for 4-H community club programming, but given the number of clubs in the two counties, each county only needs half of a 4-H Community Club Program Coordinator.  
Both counties individually contract with Cooperative Extension to fund half of a 4-H Community Club Program Coordinator.  
A 4-H Community Club Program Coordinator works part-time for both counties.



## Establishing New Agreements Between Counties & Cooperative Extension

### Background

Currently, each county signs an annual contract with Cooperative Extension identifying the general programs they are funding and the amount that they are paying to Cooperative Extension. The amount of fees are determined based on the salary and fringe rates for the identified staff, who may be paid at different rates.

Determining county investment tied directly to salary and fringe costs creates a number of issues. It requires additional negotiation effort by both parties each time there is a staff change or a salary change. For example, whenever staff receive a raise or promotion, Cooperative Extension and the county need to negotiate for an increase in the fees. Also, if Cooperative Extension and the county determine that they need to shift staff between counties, then the contract must be renegotiated to reflect the difference in staff salaries even if the position remains the same.

In addition to contributing to salary and fringe in the annual contracts, counties set aside money in the county budgets for travel and professional development for the faculty and staff they fund. Since each county can have different expense policies, faculty and staff across Cooperative Extension receive different levels of support. Staff who are shared between counties need to navigate multiple counties' accounting systems and policies, plus those for Cooperative Extension.

Like expense and travel policies, IT policies and services also vary between counties.

### The Decision

We will institute two agreements between Cooperative Extension and individual counties in the future:

- An annual **Contract** that identifies the FTE and types of positions that the county will fund and the fees for those positions; and
- A multi-year **Memoranda of Understanding** (MOU) to supplement the annual contracts that standardizes processes, expectations, and lines of authority between Cooperative Extension and the county.
- Cooperative Extension will alter the current timing of county contracts so in the future, the agreements will run from January-December on a calendar year in alignment with county budgets.

The MOU will identify the types of services and programs that Cooperative Extension can provide to the county (depending on the positions it funds) and the types of services and resources the county will provide to Cooperative Extension (e.g., office space for staff, office supplies). The MOU will also outline general approval processes (e.g., hiring process and authority for new staff, approval process for annual contracts) and expectations for how the counties and Cooperative Extension will work together.

Building on the MOU, Area Extension Directors will develop an annual contract with individual counties that will identify the FTE and types of positions the county is funding (e.g., 1.0 FTE of 4-H Youth Development Program Coordinator, 0.5 FTE of Family Living Extension Educator). The contract will not contain the names of staff serving in those positions, just the position titles and associated FTE. The contract will be up for renegotiation annually to allow counties the opportunity to make changes based on their needs.

Each county will pay standard fees based on the discipline and position level (e.g., 1.0 FTE of a 4-H Youth Development Program Coordinator might cost a different amount than 1.0 FTE of a Master Gardener Program Coordinator). These fees will be relatively standard across the state, but Cooperative Extension could modify the fees charged to each county based on economic indicators. Fees paid by counties will not dictate staff salary levels.

These fees will contribute to the costs for salary, fringe, travel, professional development, and technology (e.g., hardware) for the staff funded by counties, meaning that the counties will not be required to separately set aside money and develop line items in their budgets for travel, technology, and professional development as they do currently.

Given that counties will pay standard fees for each position instead of specific staff, the fees will not change in a given year unless both parties agree to change the positions or FTE. For example, the fees for the counties would remain the same even if Cooperative Extension provides mid-year raises to the staff or if the county and Cooperative Extension agree to change staffing for a position before the next contract begins. These fees may change year-over-year based on the availability of funding, cost of living changes, and other metrics.

## Rationale for the Decision

The reasons for this decision are:

- **Clarity:** Both Cooperative Extension and the counties will clearly understand their expectations, responsibilities, and lines of authority.
- **Transparency:** Counties will now have full information of and insight into the suite of programs and types of staff available to meet local needs.
- **Predictability:** Counties will now know their all-in costs for the contracts with Cooperative Extension at the beginning of the year, and will not need to adjust their budgets mid-year unless they decide to increase or decrease the FTE for their positions.
- **Reduced Administrative Burden:** Counties will not need to set aside separate funding and support for technology, travel, and professional development for Cooperative Extension staff (though funding will still be needed for county employees supporting Cooperative Extension), and will be able to reduce the amount of administrative effort required to support the Extension office.
- **Standardization:** Staff serving counties will have one set of policies and procedures to follow for travel, professional development, etc. rather than needing to follow the policies and procedures for each individual county plus Cooperative Extension.

## Next Steps

- Assistant Deans and Area Extension Directors will be responsible for working with counties on both MOUs and annual contracts.
- Cooperative Extension selected two Assistant Deans who will begin the selection of Area Extension Directors in the next week.
- The Assistant Deans and Area Extension Directors will begin negotiations of annual contracts and MOUs with the counties in their areas later this spring.