

Strengthening Michigan's Economy Through Research and Education

Roles for the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station and MSU Extension

COUNTY PROCESS GUIDE

County Extension offices will play an important role in the issue identification process by bringing together local councils, members of the MAES field station advisory groups and others in the community. These participants will compare and contrast the broad trends that have been gleaned from other processes (SOSS results, focus groups, etc.) with the realities in their local communities. From that process, they will indicate the local priorities that need to be addressed by MSUE and MAES.

Although facilitating an issue identification process obviously requires a major investment of time and effort from county staff, it also can provide longer-term benefits to the program. Because we are funded with public dollars, it is imperative that we seriously and systematically listen to our constituents, and to potential constituents. Conducting such a process can frequently foster partnerships and build networks. It is also a strong political asset to be able to show the ways that MSUE programming is determined by the citizenry.

Preliminary steps

- Meet with staff to discuss options for conducting this process
 - Review previous (2001) process and results
 - Discuss ways to involve a good representation of the community—see *the checklist for identifying county participants*
 - Discuss ways to utilize results
- Promote MSUE/MAES web survey, asking for input from county residents

Implementation steps

1. **Plan process with staff and county extension council**--Involve local council in planning a process for gathering necessary information and setting future priorities. Carefully review the composition of the council and identify other sectors of the community who need to be represented for these discussions. Consider various options for designing the process, in addition to the two group meetings (a community forum, surveys, follow-up interviews etc.)
2. **Review information from campus**—Carefully review the summarized State of the State Survey results, background data and the *Michigan Outlook* video/PowerPoint highlighting the major trends and issues. (This will be sent from campus in early December.)
3. **Gather relevant local information**—Compile information about your county (demographic data, economic trends, survey results or needs assessments from

other organizations). Summarize in ways that will be easy for council members and others to utilize.

4. **Set up at least two discussion sessions**—Using the ideas generated in step #1, Invite council members, field station advisory committee members, and others who represent different segments of the community.
5. **Conduct Session I**--Use the *Michigan Outlook* PowerPoint/video presentation from campus that focuses on topical trends in selected issue areas. Facilitate a discussion, encouraging participants to compare and contrast broad trends with local realities. (Use the accompanying facilitation guide for this discussion.)
6. **Participants gather more information**—Encourage participants to bring additional information about the county situation relative to the trends that were highlighted in the video. *(Note: This can be a way to utilize the backgrounds, interests of various council members and participants. For example, the school superintendent can bring current education data for the county.)*

Counties may also want to utilize the results from the web survey linked to MSUE web pages. These results will be available for each county; they can be checked on a regular basis.

7. **Conduct Session II**--Share information gathered by participants and discuss the implications. Use the trend mapping exercise to consider the relationships among issues, the partnership possibilities, and the roles for extension and research.
8. **Refine priorities** and develop local agenda
9. **Compile and report information to campus**—Use the internal issues id website to submit information by March 31, 2006.
10. **Report to community**—Think strategically about the best way to present the findings to community leaders. Involve council
11. **Plan future agenda** for programming and research
12. **Review annually**—This is an important role for the county extension council

Resources from campus

1. The Issue process website will have:
 - Suggestions for organizing a new Extension council, if needed
 - Suggestions for organizing the county process
 - Background information on key themes
 - SOSS survey results
 - Framework for defining and prioritizing issues
 - Trend mapping exercise
 - Discussion guide to accompany video
 - Place for submitting county results
 - Other information as needed

2. *Michigan Outlook* PowerPoint/video presentation will be sent to all counties, containing background information on major trends, available December 2005.

3. Assistance from issues process design group as needed
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