Guidelines for Writing an Individual Plan of Work

What is a plan of work?

A plan of work is a written document developed by Extension educators to serve as a guide for educational programming over a 1-5 year period of time. The plan should provide a snapshot of the situation that guides an overall work focus and highlights an educational program.

A plan of work should not attempt to cover everything you do. It should focus on priority programs and the elements and activities which make up those programs. Other routine or ongoing responsibilities need not be reflected in the program plan, but can be captured in the timeline or "other responsibilities" sections.

Depending on your program responsibilities you may just develop one Plan of Work and all your programming activities fall under a single Extension Program. While others may have 2 or 3 major Programs and therefore need to develop multiple plans of work covering each of their major Extension Programs

Why should you write a plan of work?

To strengthen program quality

The most important reason for writing a plan of work is to assist in program development and to enhance programming. Creating a plan facilitates the development of an appropriate, realistic and manageable educational program which focuses on intended outcomes that are relevant and meaningful to those we serve. A good plan of work increases the likelihood that those intended outcomes will be realized.

To communicate your plans with others

A current plan of work demonstrates to stakeholders, colleagues, partners and others that your work is based on needs and priorities. It clearly identifies intended outcomes that are logical and appropriate to those identified needs and priorities and expresses a commitment to regular re-examination of those issues, needs and priorities. It demonstrates thoughtful attention to the content and process most appropriate for the audiences and identifies the research base behind the programming.

To connect your work to that of the larger organization

A plan of work demonstrates the interconnectedness of Extension at the state, county and individual level. A high-quality plan of work is developed and aligned with statewide priorities to facilitate the collective impact of Extension across the state. Plans of work need to also be also developed in consideration of the county plan of work. Taken as a whole, all individual plans of work within a county should cumulatively address that which is included in the county plan of work.

What is included in a plan of work?

Plans include the following elements

- **Program Name:** A brief title should communicate what is included.
  - What are you addressing? Examples might include: pesticide safety, nutrition education, or youth leadership development.

- **Situation Statement:** Provide a succinct summary of relevant data and supporting research that describes the need/opportunity for this program in the area you serve.
  - What is the opportunity, need, problem or emerging issue?
  - What data substantiates the need for Extension programming?
  - What is the unique role Extension serves in addressing this problem?
  - What are the costs of not addressing this situation?

- **Statewide Program Goal:** Identify the statewide program area goal the program is addressing.

- **Target Audience(s):** Identify the audience(s) you intend to reach through Extension learning opportunities.
  - Who is most affected and could benefit from Extension educational programming that addresses this situation?
  - Which populations are currently underserved or not served by programming related to this situation?

- **Collaboration:** Include individuals or organizations that are partners or collaborators.

- **Program Outcomes:** Describe the intended result and anticipated changes in the target audience (outcomes) and how the change will be measured (indicators). Short-term outcomes address change that can be accomplished in a relatively short time frame, such as knowledge, awareness, skills, attitude, opinions and motivations or intention to change. Medium-term outcomes represent when participants start using the knowledge from your program and are often are measured within several months of the program and include actions or changed behavior or practice, increased participation, planning or policy change based on what participants learned. Long-term outcomes occur when lives are improved through time by using their knowledge. These outcomes often are measured a year or more after completion of the program and include changes in economic well-being, civic engagement and program efficiencies, as well as changed lives. Indicators are the specific, observable, and measurable characteristic or change that will represent achievement of the outcome.
  - What knowledge or skill gains and behavior changes do you expect to see?
  - What difference will this program make in the lives of participants or citizens?
  - Is there any economic, societal, or environmental benefit to the individual participant, local community or state?
  - How will you know if the outcome has occurred?

- **Program Delivery:** List the educational, outreach, or research activities and/or products that you plan to deliver this year for your target audience(s). These should be driven by a combination of theory, best practice, experience, and stakeholder engagement. If these activities are successfully completed, your short term outcomes should be realized, which are in response to the situation and progress should begin to reaching medium term outcomes.
  - What methods will be used for different target audiences?
  - What methods will be used to specifically reach underserved and underrepresented clientele?
  - Why will these educational activities work (draw on research evidence or practical experience)?
  - How will you utilize state Specialists, partners/collaborators, volunteers in delivering programming?

- **Evaluation Plan:** Identify specific evaluation methods and strategies to measure your intended outcomes and whether your response was implemented as planned. An evaluation also provides information to help you improve your programs over time.
    - What data will you collect to assess the impact of your program efforts?
    - What survey instruments / other tools will you use?
    - Will you be collecting data before and after the program or only after the program? Will you collect follow-up data?

- **Marketing & Diversity Plan:** Identify the strategies to market the program to the target audience, to increase outreach to underserved audiences, and to share the program impacts with stakeholder groups.
    - How will this program be marketed to your target audience?
    - What promotional tools will you use to maximize the reach and impact of your programming (e.g. online marketing, social media, direct mail, etc.)?
    - How will you market your program impacts?
    - What partnerships/collaborations can be fostered to increase participation by underserved audiences?
    - What intentional and specific measures will you take to increase outreach to underserved audiences and increase program diversity?
    - What barriers may prevent underserved audiences from participating in programming and how can they be removed?