University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Structural Review:

Recommendations for Organizational Restructuring

Performed for:

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Performed by:

TEConomy Partners, LLC

Executive Summary

TECONOMY PARTNERS LLC

Innovating Tomorrow's Economic Landscape

Overview

The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension (CES) exists to deploy the know-how, knowledge, and research findings of the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture, Food and Environment (CAFE) to benefit all Kentuckians across the state. CES is a large-scale organization with programs spanning numerous areas of focus, including the food and agriculture value-chain; community and economic development; health and family well-being; and, youth education and development.

Recognizing that there are currently both internal and external concerns related to the existing CES organizational structure, CAFE engaged TEConomy Partners, LLC to examine its current management structure and advise on how county-level management might be deployed most effectively.

TEConomy assessed the challenges currently facing UK Cooperative Extension by reviewing current organizational charts, audit reports, job descriptions, and employee/facility reports, and by interviewing 25 CES personnel from a wide variety of backgrounds across all facets of CES. Based on its observations, TEConomy outlined the following key findings:

Human Resources

- CES District Directors have too many direct reports. This limits consistent interactions, mentorship and guidance and impacts the ability to provide feedback beyond performance evaluations.
- Morale is low among CES personnel.
- There is often tension between County leadership expectations and UK expectations.
- UK policies and procedures are not always strictly adhered to in County offices.
- There are mixed reviews on the relevance and value of the training offered to CES personnel.
- It can be difficult to ensure that programs and curricula developed by subject-matter-experts are delivered proficiently.

Financial Compliance

- District Directors are unable to effectively monitor all transactional financial activity due to their large number of direct reports.
- There is little consistency amongst the offices with regards to fiscal policies and procedures.
- There have been significant findings by UK Internal Audit regarding issues of fiscal compliance and mismanagement of funds.
- The development, tracking, and management of annual budgets is different across counties.
- As the number of Extension facilities has increased over the years, the level of financial and managerial responsibilities has increased.

Communication

- Many interviewees expressed frustration regarding the flow of internal communication.
- Information is disseminated to staff within the County offices with varied messaging.

- It does not appear that information is shared amongst the County offices with any sort of frequency.
- There appears to be inconsistency in how County Boards and their respective subject matter councils are managed, and therefore also an inconsistency in delivering UK Cooperative Extension communications.

Recommendations

To prepare recommendations, Teconomy considered all feedback received and compared the current administrative model against other Extension organizational models deployed across the nation. Three primary organizational models were studied: the county manager model utilizing a dedicated county manager in each office; the dual-role model with one agent splitting time between programming and office management; and the area manager model whereby a dedicated manager is responsible for a small grouping of counties.

TEConomy recommends that UK CES adopt the Area Manager organizational model.

- Area Manager duties are:
    - Employee Management/Employee Development
    - Financial Oversight and Public Accountability
    - Liaison to County Boards/Councils
    - Facilities Management
    - Internal and External Communication

TEConomy recommends hiring 30 Area Managers, who would be responsible for, on average:

- four county offices
- 18.5 direct reports
- 8.5 indirect reports
- 5.5 facilities

TEConomy recommends using the following variables to establish Areas:

- Number of direct reports located in each county
- Number of indirect reports located in each county
- Number of facilities owned and operated by Extension within each County
- Overall size of the county budget (a general proxy for the amount of programmatic activity being undertaken within each county)
- Geographic distance between county offices

TEConomy recommends applying the following guidelines when establishing areas:

- An Area should have a maximum of five counties.
- Counties should be divided in such a manner that the number of direct reports, indirect reports, and facilities are similar in size and closely match the ratios identified previously.
- Counties should be contiguous to cut down on geographic distance.
- Counties that collaborate on programmatic efforts should be placed in the same Area if possible.

TEConomy recommends the following with respect to senior CES administration:

- Eliminate the positions of the seven District Directors
- Create two regions, each supervised by a Regional County Operations Directors.
    - Area Managers report to Regional County Operations Directors.
- Hire additional Fiscal Compliance Officers.

Benefits of the Area Manager model:

- Increased supervision, guidance, and support. Performance feedback to agents will be timely and more meaningful.
- More agile decision making with an Area Manager that is more accessible.
- More uniformity in compliance with policies and procedures.
- County staff will feel more in touch with UK.
- Enable closer fiscal oversight.
- Promote positive relations amongst neighboring counties.
- Improved and more regular communications from the main campus to the Counties.

Implementation:

- UK should consider a mix of internal and external candidates when filling the role of Area Managers.
- Ongoing leadership and management training should be a requirement for all Area Managers.
- Ongoing supervision and leadership training should be a requirement for all County Agents and Extension Staff Assistants serving in supervisory roles.
- Continue the county agent mentoring program and expand that to support staff.
- Fund Area Manager salaries through UK so there is freedom to allocate duties based on area need versus county expectations.
- Process all Extension related expenses thru UK and not just travel expenses.
- Ensure clear, concise and uniform financial systems, policies and procedures are in place across the system.
- Extension staff assistants should be responsible for the day to day financial transaction activities in each county. All Extension staff should receive appropriate financial training to complete these jobs efficiently and according to UK policies and procedures.
- Financial oversight and reconciliation will be the responsibility of the Area Managers.
- Individual staff meetings led by a member of the Extension Leadership team should be held in each county office to explain the new organizational structure. The same information should be provided by Extension Leadership to County Extension Boards.
- Maintain constant communication with county offices during this transition.
- All information from main campus that is communicated at staff meetings should be followed with written summaries that are the same for all 120 counties.