
Building Political Support for Extension in the 21st Century

This document has been prepared per a request from ECOP for the System. Many of the concepts are applicable to the research part of the Research-Extension Partnership. I encourage the Experiment Station Directors to add to/or use any of the materials as they deem appropriate. Again, emphasize this is a not a Policy Document. It is a handbook — of concepts, opinions and, in many cases, assumptions about the present and future. PGB

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to **stimulate the Cooperative Extension System to analyze the stark new realities of the changing political environment.** Sustaining public funding in this changing environment will require a re-examination of the current strategies. Questions about accountability, the message and the image projected must be addressed.

The document is divided into **three sections.**

The first section focuses on the changing political environment. The second section suggests implications for building an effective future support strategy. The third section includes resource materials that may be useful in analyzing the current support efforts and building a strategy for the future.

This is **not a policy statement.** Rather it is a resource to be used to stimulate discussion and assist in building effective support strategies. Feel free to utilize the materials as appropriate for each situation.

I. The Changing Political Environment

The national elections of 1994 set a new agenda for this nation — an agenda that focused on a smaller federal government, a balanced federal budget requiring **less funding for many historical domestic programs.** The Congressional leadership has also embraced the concept of moving budgetary and program administrative responsibilities for many federal programs back to state and local governments. In many respects the changing political environment at the federal level is not partisan. For example, the goal of a balanced federal budget is a priority of both major political parties. The means to achieve such a goal, however, becomes very partisan.

A significant factor in this changing political environment is the demand for **greater accountability.** This emphasis on being accountable is not new for the System. Accountability requirements have gone through a variety of different approaches throughout the history of Extension. However, the focus of today's accountability question focuses on — **What will be the impact (value) of this program for the future? Give me specifics, not generalizations.**

In many cases, the prevailing political environment at the national level is also a dominating force at the state and local government levels. Similar questions on accountability are being raised at all levels of government.

The following factors are identified to assist in **describing today's changing political environment**. Many of these factors apply to all levels of government.

- Many political decision-makers are interested in and supportive of programs that can make a contribution to the future — to national and state priorities, relevant economic and social issues. Historical contributions and values are of little interest. Since politicians are faced with decisions about the future, Extension must recognize that **the future is the basis for building political support**.
- Many politicians face the challenge of getting re-elected. Therefore, political decision-makers are interested in and supportive of programs and activities that constituents value and support. Extension administrators and other staff must communicate about the value and impact of extension programs. However, they are often viewed with some skepticism. To overcome the perception of a “captive messenger,” it is necessary to cultivate a **cadre of friends/advocates** from government, business, civic groups, state and federal organizations, and among the general public who are their constituents. They are the voters.
- Many difficult challenges face the politician today. Holding public office is difficult because of budget constraints, complex policy issues and the influence of well-organized special interests. Remember that politicians are people with all of the talents and shortcomings found in the general population. **They need to be challenged**, yet treated with respect and recognition.
- Many people do not recognize that **political support is soft**. Building and maintaining a strong base of support is a continuous process. Don't try to build support only at the time of a crisis. The System must have constant activity in good times and bad.
- Many politicians like to develop **partnerships around their special interests**. Therefore, an effective partnership must be based on the policy issues of interest to the politician. A relationship must be continuous with substantial educational contributions to the analysis, interpretation and legislative options for the politician's special policy interest.
- Many federal and state political decision-makers are supportive of “performance-based budgeting.” In fact, many legislative leaders believe that performance-based budgeting will be a fact of life in the future. So, in the budgetary process, our attention needs to focus on program impact (outcomes). Our challenge will be to assure that the **outcomes are consistent with the expectations of both the public and the policy decision-makers**.
- Many politicians are committed to a limit on the number of years in office (term limits). Their focus is on a smaller government that focuses on relevant programs. They believe that the **private sector** should assume responsibilities for many of the federal programs now funded with federal resources. In fact, competition with the private sector will be a continuing challenge when communicating with political decision-makers and with the private sector itself.
- Many political cultures have changed in recent years. Most state legislatures used to be a group of part-time representatives. The leadership was primarily **from rural areas of the state**. Legislative aides were few in number and most were part-time — in many cases, university students. Now these roles are filled by full-time professionals. An increasing trend is for legislative aides to gain experience in the Capitol and then await their turn to run for the legislature themselves.

- Many additional **state legislative support groups have been created**. A few years ago, groups such as Legislative Aides, the Legislative Audit Bureau, Fiscal Bureau, and Reference Bureau did not exist in their present form, size or with today's political influence. Representatives from these groups are frequently the focal point for decisions on major policy and fiscal issues. (The titles of these groups will vary among states; however, the responsibilities are similar.)
- Many new issues surround the philosophical changes about the role and functions of government. For example, it is interesting how debate and consensus-building on controversial issues is or is not taking place. There appears to be much more **“dialogue and listening”** on the part of politicians at the expense of real leadership. The debate doesn't seem to progress to the stage of deliberation and decision. So, one of the things we must try to decipher is **what do people really want from their government?** What do decision-makers think their constituents really want from government and how do we position our support in the deliberation and decision-making about the programs?
- Many political decision-makers interested in downsizing government have not analyzed the **ultimate impact on society**. For example, does Extension have a role in filling some of the gaps caused by reductions in other federal or state programs? How will Extension be affected by reductions in research funding? Or conversely, will research be affected by cutting the Extension budget? The System should try to understand the long-range implications of these and other scenarios and be prepared to present a consistent message.
- Many new members of Congress do not **understand or support Extension**. Our traditional support in Congress, including legislative aides, is being challenged by the new members. So, the challenge is to provide the new members with a message reflecting support of the constituents in their home districts. It will then be much easier for the leadership of our traditional supporters to defend our future.
- Many people believe that the System needs to re-examine its political support base. As programs focus on new issues, many of the constituents change. The challenge is to build an expanded support base and yet maintain the traditional base. A relevant question often asked is: “Is this possible?” and “Is it inevitable that Extension will lose some of its traditional base?”
- Many polls indicate that a majority of the American population want changes in government programs. People believe the government is inefficient and **wasteful of their tax dollars**. However, the people are very reluctant to reduce or eliminate programs that affect their lifestyles. A political scientist recently said, **“The American people don't know what they want.”** Perhaps this has implications for the System.
- Many political decision-makers are advocating increases as well as an expansion of the “user-fee” concept in order to avoid raising taxes. Many agencies providing programs that are labeled “service” are being required to utilize user fees as a portion of their budget. This concept is being utilized at the federal level and in many states. The System must be prepared to face this reality in the future.
- Many politicians depend on their **home (district) offices** to get a fresh perspective on the feelings of people. Extension needs to re-examine its relationships with the home offices of the Congressional delegations. In many cases, these offices can use existing programs and resource materials to satisfy requests from constituents
- Many key Congressional committees are no longer controlled by individuals (legislators and staff) who have a rural or agricultural background — thus, the need for a more extended orientation with many **direct experiences with Extension programs**.

II. Implications for Extension — of the Changing Political Environment

The implication of this changing political environment is quite obvious — **the threat of substantial reductions in public funding** from all levels of government. The System must face the reality of this threat with a creative, broad-based strategy for maintaining public support. The following suggestions should provide the basis for discussion of appropriate approaches to sustaining a broad and active base of public support.

- **Involvement:** The System must accept the reality that **all states/territories must be involved in a very aggressive and rigorous strategy to enhance support.** It is important to recognize the need to continuously demonstrate to traditional, new and potential supporters at all levels that programs are relevant and on the cutting edge of contemporary issues, and have the potential to make a significant difference in **the future** to the lives of people across the nation. In many situations, the System “talks at” people, rather than demonstrating the value of program by involving policy decision-makers. The Extension System must be proactive in planning and delivering its message.
- **Leadership:** The challenge **to institutionalize an effective support strategy for the System is the responsibility of the directors and administrators.** They are the ones who must create responsive structures, assign responsibilities and clearly define the message to be communicated. As leaders, they must demonstrate optimism, self-confidence and idealism. The director/administrator must mobilize a cadre of strong and effective supporters throughout the state/territory.

The responsibility for communicating with political decision-makers should not be delegated to a communication or journalism unit. It is a responsibility that needs leadership from the head of the organization with appropriate involvement of all the parts — including some very important roles for the communication units. Many directors/administrators have been successful in employing someone in the director’s office to provide leadership and coordination. Former legislative aides who have had direct experiences with the legislative process have proven to be extremely effective in these positions.

- **Accountability:** The System must again address the **issue of accountability.** A basic question that must be focused on is **“How is the System going to describe the potential future impact of its programs?”** As a part of this discussion, questions like the following seem relevant. **“What are politicians looking for in their focus on impact?”** “What message are political decision-makers looking for to avoid substantial fiscal reductions?” “How important are constituents in the new political environment?” It is very clear that descriptions of past accomplishments are not very effective. Rather, in today’s political environment, the focus must be on the future — **why is Extension/research a priority that justifies public funding in the future?**
- **Program:** Many in the private, public, and political sectors do not understand how Extension has changed in the last ten years. And **some of the traditional supporters do not understand** that the changes have been positive and keep Extension relevant. For example, some traditional clientele and supporters think that the changes mean that the System has disavowed its long-term commitment to agriculture. They do not see that changing the agriculture program to focus on priority issues of biotechnology, international marketing, farm profitability, and sustainability of the resource base for agricultural production focuses the program on today’s most relevant issues. They do not see that community economic development programs enhance the total economy of rural communities that can no longer remain solely dependent upon agriculture. They do not see that many youth from rural areas, including farm youth, also have alcohol and drug problems. So, the benefits of the **significant changes in program have not yet been effectively communicated to the public or to many political decision-makers.** Also, Extension has not received the recognition due for these significant changes.

- **Mission:** The System has responded to the challenge of change throughout its history. However, we need to keep in mind that the Extension System is under a **great deal of scrutiny over its present and future programs**. Some members of Congress, some Congressional aides, and many state legislators criticize Extension for moving from its basic mission and about the breadth of its social programs. The challenge is to communicate that Extension has not abandoned its basic mission. It has **redirected its resources** to focus on the relevant issues within its mission. This focus of resources on the important issues has been directed by the people at the local level — the constituents of the politicians.
- **Partnerships:** The System has structural relationships at the national, state, and local levels of government. In addition, Extension is part of the higher education Land-Grant System with direct relationship with NASULGC **This structural arrangement is the envy of many other organizations and agencies**. It is extremely important that a more effective communication system be developed between the national and state levels, as well as between NASULGC and the state partners.

So, the political environment of the 1990’s has changed. The System must come to understand this change and determine how to effectively build support and influence in this new culture. The System has no control over the availability of state and federal resources or the competition from mandates such as new prisons or the accelerating costs of medical care. The System can only control its competitive position in the changing political environment.

III. Resource Materials for Building a Strategy for Support

This **third part** of the document provides a broad array of resource materials. It is designed so that a state/territory/county **can select and utilize** any of the materials in building a support strategy for their situation. Included are the following:

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Note. Many of the materials included in this section have been taken from various sources. They include materials from: Michigan, New York, Texas, Wisconsin, NASULGC and CSREES. Thanks to James Butler Linda Kay Benning, Joan Gill, Stephen Johnson, Myron Johnsrud, Mark Lederer and Mike Tate.

A. Principles — A Foundation for a Strategy

The Cooperative Extension System must be creative in developing a broader base of external support in this changing and more competitive political environment. The following principles can serve as a framework for building a strategy.

- **Multi-level state strategy.** Each state needs a long-range strategy with concrete action plans for communication at each level: university administrators and regent/trustee board members, county cooperators and commissioners/supervisors, various clientele and support groups, potential new support groups, state legislators, and federal Congressional representatives. A good strategy will identify the materials and resources needed and assign responsibilities for each activity and communication effort.
- **Multiple audiences.** There are multiple audiences for a common message, each requiring different emphasis and communications technique. The message communicated must be simple, clear, and futuristic. The message and the methods must be adapted to suit the audience. A video about the economic impact of the program may be suitable for a civic group, but a one-on-one luncheon discussion on access to university resources may be more effective with a university regent/trustee.
- **Investments in the effort.** The Cooperative Extension System, and each state Extension Service, must be willing to invest substantial funds, time and energy to the communications/support effort. Attitudes and beliefs cannot be changed overnight, nor can they be significantly changed in a two-hour meeting or a one-shot press release or brochure. An effective communications strategy needs time, intensive effort, and a planned, continuous sequence of specific activities and communications addressed to a variety of audiences in a variety of different ways. Publications, media relations, one-on-one meetings and planned events take time and resources. But only a significant investment in continuous activities of this nature will yield long-term results.
- **Leadership roles.** The challenge for the CES System and for each State/Territory director/administrator is to effectively implement a well-planned support strategy in each state's organization. Each state director/administrator must designate the state support strategy and implementation of the action plan as a priority for each state's management team. The plan should assign specific leadership roles and responsibilities for each level and type of communication in the plan.
- **Internal legitimization and support.** The support and involvement of the total land-grant university is as important to external support of the extension function as it is to the resident instruction and research functions. This support and involvement is most effectively achieved through the support and commitment to Extension by key University administrators and boards of regents/trustees. These influentials can be encouraged to express this commitment publicly in policy statements, news interviews, their personal involvement in highly visible Extension activities, and in communications with other parts of the University.
- **Changes in programs.** A quality program is essential for the message to be effective. It is important in communicating that the program has changed that we make it clear that Extension has not moved from its basic mission, has not added a whole new set of social programs, but has refocused its resources on the relevant issues within its mission and priority initiatives.
- **Relevant experiences.** Local real-life examples and personal experiences of Extension programs carry the strongest message of their values and contributions to people and society. A member of Congress concerned about small business development will be interested in economic development efforts in his district, while a county board supervisor may be concerned with recycling programs in his/her county.

B. Building Support Within the University

The original concept of the land-grant university was that teaching, research **and public service (extension or continuing education)** are all equally important functions of every school, college and department — every department. Historically, the land-grant university concept has had three major purposes:

- To broaden the horizons of learning and scholarly exploration to include all fields of human and scientific endeavor.
- To provide higher education to the common people — rather than only to the upper class elite.
- To make the University's knowledge and resources available to people of all ages, in their fields, factories, and homes, and to apply these resources to the problems of society — the extension concept.

As an integral part of the land-grant universities, extension programs are based on public and private research and the knowledge base of the University. They are carried out by University faculty and staff.

Meeting our responsibility to serve the people cannot be achieved without the support and **commitment of the total university**. Public service or Extension responsibilities should not be limited to certain faculty or departments anointed by history, tradition or even funding. A total commitment should be interpreted to include at least five different types of action within the university. They are:

- **A Policy Commitment from the Board of Regents/Trustees**

This commitment means that the Board of Regents/Trustees support **a formal policy** stating the importance of Extension. This policy should include the concept that extending a university's knowledge base to benefit the state and society at large should be an integral function of its departments, colleges and schools, comparable in importance to resident instruction and research.

- **A Commitment for Research and Extension to Collaborate**

A quality extension program cannot tolerate a research agenda irrelevant to the issues of the day. Likewise, the research community becomes frustrated when Extension doesn't fully utilize the latest available research and technology

An example is the recent industrial extension initiatives now underway at many of the nation's land-grant universities. Extension has a responsibility to involve the engineering research faculty in applying their many innovations to the manufacturing needs of small and medium-sized manufacturers.

- **A Commitment to Provide Access**

Extension must commit itself to provide access to citizens affected by the issues focused on in the program. Traditional and geographical areas should not determine access. Extension's challenge is to invest in technologies that can expand people's **access to the university**.

- **A Commitment to Adequately Fund the Extension Function**

The university must make a commitment that **Extension funding is of equal importance as funding for instruction and research**. Extension should not be used as a source of funds for other functions of the university when resources are scarce. Extension must also have the flexibility to reallocate funds from departments with lower priorities to departments and units that are focusing on the higher priorities of people and communities.

- **A Commitment to Reward Faculty/Staff Who Perform Extension Functions**

This commitment means that the talents of faculty performing the extension function **must be rewarded** in promotion, tenure, salary decisions, professional development opportunities, public recognition, awards, travel funding, governance roles, and committee assignments.

The University must recognize that an effective Extension educator requires a rare mix of scholarly expertise combined with real life experience, political savvy, strong public relations and communication skills, imagination, creativity — and lots of hard work.

C. Building Support at the National Level

A National Network

The Cooperative Extension System has the potential to develop a **national network for building support**. However, it would be extremely important for all states/territories to enthusiastically participate in the effort. This network would be developed by the Extension directors/administrators or their legislative liaisons, who would communicate with prominent political and private sector leaders in every state/territory, each of whom knows a member of Congress on a first-name basis. These leaders would receive periodic information/briefings about Extension needs, priority programs, and issues from their own state/territory. These individuals would be asked to make Congressional and executive branch contacts at critical junctures throughout the legislative process. This national initiative network will supplement, rather than duplicate or substitute for the volunteer leaders or CARET.

Other ideas about this network:

- An advisory committee of local citizens might be very helpful in designing a network in a state.
- The focus of the network would be to support present and future programs.
- The Extension director/administrator in each state/territory would identify individual leaders from his/her own state to participate in the network and would assume responsibilities for communicating with these leaders.
- The members of the network in each state/territory could remain relatively invisible. No meetings or announcement of appointments would take place.
- A key to the success of the network would be a commitment from individuals Who know and have some influence with members of Congress or Congressional aides and the executive departments.
- A common message could be communicated to the individuals in this network. The message would be that Extension offers a relevant, high quality program that is responsive to the changing needs of people, provides access to university resources, and provides the crucial linkages to make a significant impact on high priority issues. These concepts would be illustrated by using futuristic program examples related to interests of the Congressional contacts.
- The NASULGC should develop a system for two-way communications about relevant actions at national levels on a weekly basis — or whenever necessary. The states/territories would respond with political action and status reports of recent back home developments.

- This network also has the potential to communicate with other relevant targeted audiences at the national level. Some of these contacts would include:
 - USDA
 - Office of Management and Budget
 - Other federal departments and agencies
 - Lobbyists
 - National farm organizations and commodity groups
 - National environmental groups
 - Other national social, business, civic and educational organizations
- This national network has the potential for systematic involvement of the county agent associations and Epsilon Sigma Phi. This involvement would depend on the leadership of the Extension director/administrator. These groups can be very effective if they become a part of the overall strategy of the state/territory

Background Materials on Federal Budget Process

The Federal Budget authority is:

1. Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution
 2. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921
 3. The Congressional Budget Act of 1974
- There are three Fiscal Year Budgets being considered at any given time. Any Fiscal Year Budget has a three-year history. The following describes this process.

“Year” 1: Development of Executive Budget (Development of Budget Begins Two Years Before It Will Take Effect)

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| * October-May | Program Level |
| * May-July | Agency Level |
| * July-September | Department Level |
| * September | Department Submission to OMB |
| * September-January | OMB |
| * January | President Transmits Budget to Congress |

“Year” 2: Congressional Budget Period

- * January
Congress Receives Executive Budget
- * January-March
Action of Appropriations Committees
Appropriations Hearings Begin
 - * House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies
 - * Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies
- * May 15
Congress Adopts 1st Budget Resolution
- * May 15-September 15
Appropriations Bills Enacted by Congress

- * September 15
2nd Budget Resolution
- * September 25
Congress Completes Reconciliation
- * October 1
New Fiscal Year Begins

“Year” 3: Outlay Year

- * October 1-September 30
Actual Program Outlays
- * January-May
Budget Supplementals, Rescissions and Deferrals

The Roles of Congressional Staff

Each member of Congress has a staff to assist him/her during a term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principle functions of key staff.

Commonly Used Titles:

Administrative Assistant (AA), or Chief of Staff: The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Administrative Assistant is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.

Legislative Director (LD), Senior Legislative Assistant or Legislative Coordinator: The Legislative Director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In many Congressional offices there are several Legislative Assistants and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different Legislative Assistant for health, environment, taxes, etc.

Press Secretary or Communications Director: The Press Secretary’s responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member’s views or position on specific issues

Appointments Secretary, Personal Secretary or Scheduler: The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a member’s time among the many demands that arise from Congressional responsibilities, staff requirements and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the District. etc

Caseworker: The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests. The Caseworkers responsibilities may include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies (e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veterans’ benefits, passports, etc.). There are often several Caseworkers in a Congressional office.

Other Staff Titles: Other titles used in a Congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, Receptionist.

D. Building Support at the State Level

A State Network

- It is recognized that the executive and legislative branches of government are very **different from one state to another**. However, whatever governmental structures exist, it is extremely important to develop **a network for communicating support at the state level**. This network may also communicate to the national level. Some states have incorporated formal structures through which an effective network is developed. Other states have effective networks that are less formal.

Following are examples of potential groups that could be part of a state network. The key is to provide coordination and to effectively communicate with these potential audiences:

- Land-grant university administrators and boards of regents/trustees
- Other universities/community colleges
- State legislators
- State agencies
- State and regional branches of federal agencies
- Advisory groups
- Adjunct Extension groups (e.g., 4-H Foundation, state 4-H Leaders Council)
- Farm and commodity organizations
- Environmental groups

The Budget Process

The development and approval of a biennial or annual state budget is **a major assignment for the executive and legislative branches of state government**. While it provides opportunities, it can also be fraught with disappointments and frustrations. In most situations, Extension has a major stake in the state budget; therefore, success is very important-

The biennial/annual **state budget process could be conceptualized as a three-part process: 1) program, 2) budgetary, and 3) political**. The challenge is to recognize each of these three dimensions and to integrate them into one process. It can very easily be viewed as a budgetary process — with generalized program statements reflecting the values of the institution. The politics of the process are usually not adequately considered until very late — generally when the budget is being considered by the legislature. Again the challenge is to identify a framework in which all these dimensions - budgetary, program, and political are considered together and then to establish systematic procedures that fully recognize each dimension at every step in the process.

An example would be a request for increased funding for a water quality program. The program justification must clearly indicate the value to the people affected, as well as to the environment. The requested budget must clearly reflect the expertise necessary to have a quality program. Legislators and supporters must be involved in drafting the proposal. Legislators who might oppose the proposal must be neutralized.

Following are some additional ideas that could be utilized as a part of the legislative process:

- Find out the committee assignments for all of your legislators.
- Match up areas of interest with the programming of Extension staff members. Use this as the basis for fostering ongoing communication linkages
- Facilitate communication around issues of common concern between legislators and their constituents.
- Pay attention to the type of issues that seem to foster interest from your legislators.

The Election Process

- The following are ideas for actions that could become a part of a state network.

Candidate Filing Dates

- Know who's running — meet new candidates and ask about Cooperative Extension
- Send notes to officials who have decided not to run again, thanking them for their service, wishing them well, etc.

Primary Election

- Send notes to new candidates in an effort to foster general awareness of Extension programming.
- Encourage your public television and radio stations to sponsor a candidates' meeting. Co-sponsorship may be appropriate; be sure there is a good moderator and that all candidates have equal time to make remarks.

General Election

- The same strategies apply as with the primary election.

After the Election

Write congratulatory letters to all winners, making them aware of Extension's

- Involvement in the community.
- Write a note to losing candidates wishing them well; they may become elected officials in the future.
- Begin to gather information about the newly elected officials.
- Begin working to develop a strategy plan for working with elected officials during the next two years.

E. Suggestions for Preparing Constituents for Relating to Congress or a State Legislature

This material provides suggestions that the Cooperative Extension System can use with those constituents who are willing to support the System. Again, each state/territory needs to adapt to their particular situation.

Corresponding with Legislators

Your correspondence with your elected officials is important. **Don't underestimate the importance of your letters and calls.** Indeed, such correspondence is a responsibility even an obligation in a democracy. After all, how can elected officials effectively represent you if you fail to inform them of your views. Congress appreciates your efforts because it is their best source of "hearing" the views of their constituents.

Writing an effective letter is not difficult. A well-worded, one-page factual letter can be persuasive in communicating your support on an issue and can reinforce and strengthen a legislator's position and it gives visible evidence that there is constituent support.

Here are some tips to help make your correspondence more effective:

Reasons for Writing

- To express **your views on an issue.**
- To help elected officials **understand your position.**
- To seek assistance and support as a constituent: budget support, program information or information on pending legislation.
- To seek information and ask questions
- To solicit his or her views and position on issues.
- To **express appreciation for a job well done** or for their particular vote. Often times we overlook appreciation for their support.

Important Courtesies

- Be friendly — politicians are human too.
- Be polite — even if you disagree, he or she deserves respect.
- Be reasonable — don't ask the impossible.
- **Don't threaten, especially with your vote.**
- Don't demand final or immediate commitment. It takes time to gather information and facts pertinent to legislative and appropriation bills.
- Be appreciative — for a job well done when it is deserved

Format
(This applies to Congress and the State Legislature)

- Address your letter properly. name and address should be on the letter and envelope.

The Honorable John Smith
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith

OR

The Honorable John Doe
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman Doe

- Use your personal stationery

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Congressional Committee or the Speaker of the House of Representatives, it is proper to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman/Madam

Chairwoman

Dear Mr. Speaker:

(The same approach can be used in the state.)

- Write legibly or type if possible and use only one side of the paper.
- Check your spelling.
- Put your full return address on both letter and envelope since these are often separated.
- Sign your letter above either printed or typed name.
- Include your title if you wish.
- Keep a copy of your correspondence and material also accompanying any letter for your records.
- **Send a copy to the Extension director/administrator.**

Content

- Letters should be courteous, brief, and to the point.
- **Make your letter personal and use your own words.** Obvious campaign letters get less attention, remember it is your opinion that your elected official has interest in receiving. Let them know you are a constituent.
- Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of your letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify the legislation accordingly (e.g., H.R. ____ or S. _____)
- **State your reason for writing**, be specific, support your position with facts, highlight your main points, offer to provide further information, if desired. Use news clippings if available or supporting evidence.
- Ask for a response and for your legislators position on a bill or issue.
- If your legislator has taken action of which you approve, **thank him or her.**

Strategy

(Congressional examples used but this also applies to state legislators)

- Concentrate on your Congressional delegation and **especially your own representative and senators.** However, don't neglect chairmen of key committees and subcommittees having jurisdiction over an issue. If your Congressman or senator is not on a key committee ask them to communicate your message to them.
- Don't send copies, each deserves a personal letter.
- **Be patient.** If you don't receive a response in a reasonable time, send a follow-up note and enclose a copy of your letter.
- **Be constructive.** Help seek a solution if the issue is a tough one. If you believe certain legislation is the wrong approach, explain why and offer an alternative if you can
- After stating your position ask them for their position.
- If a response seems evasive or noncommittal, politely write back for clarification.

Timing of Correspondence

- **Timing is important.** Write when your views can have the greatest impact — while the issue is still in committee — while there is still time for effective action.
- The best timing is during the months of March and April, when public hearings are being held on budget requests, and when the elected congressmen or senators will be home for personal communications, etc.

At Home

- **Get acquainted with the home offices of your congressional representatives and senators.** These are the local ears and eyes of what is going on at the “home front.” Get to know the staff members in these offices. They are in daily contact with their Washington offices on Capitol Hill. You can even relay messages and concerns through these offices. They also know when the elected congressmen or senators will be home for personal communications, etc.

Meeting with Legislators

- **Make an appointment by letter or phone.** You may be lucky enough to just walk into the office and make connections, but it’s not likely.
- Outline in your letter or call, the issues you wish to discuss at the meeting. Make reference to previous contact or communications, if any. Your legislator will appreciate a chance to be as knowledgeable about you as possible.
- Restrict your visit agenda to not more than **three (3) issues** and set priorities.
- Recommend **specific solutions** to the problems you are discussing.
- **Make the people whom your legislator represents the frame of reference for your presentation.** Your legislator will be interested in programs and problems that relate to his constituents.
- Develop your presentation so it will **be direct, concise and not excessive** in length (plan on 15 minutes). This will help with busy schedules, and your thoughtfulness will be appreciated. Also have a two-minute version.
- **Prepare a brief (one-page) written account of the points you wish to make, complete with contact information, and leave it with your legislator.** This can include documentation of facts you may not have had time to present orally.
- Don’t be late for your appointment.
- **Don’t be disappointed if your legislator is late.**
- Don’t be disappointed if some circumstances prevent your legislator from making the meeting. You will see an assistant (probably legislative) who will be knowledgeable about your problems and of the legislator’s point of view. You can accomplish just as much under these circumstances.
- **Don’t overstay your welcome.** You may want to come again and this impression will be lasting. Make your brief presentation and if your legislator wishes to prolong the conversation, you will be able to sense it.
- Don’t try to solve all of your problems in one visit. Present only those issues (not more than three) of greatest concern to you and about which your legislator can do something.
- **Don’t overlook the importance of a visit or communication with the local office of your congressman or senator.** Such offices are in daily contact with their Washington offices and can relay your message to that office.
- **Offer to provide additional information.** Hopefully your presentation will inspire him or her to want additional facts, one of your objectives.

F. Building Support at the Local Level

A very attractive concept cited by former House Speaker Tip O’Neill is: “**All of politics is local.**” The concept should also be very attractive to the Cooperative Extension System Extension programs are local and, therefore, the potential for a close understanding and partnership exists between politicians and the Extension program

The Cooperative Extension System has the potential to have each local Extension office include in their program of work the **involvement of political leaders.** This potential is yet to be fully realized.

Local governments within and among the states are very different in structure and the functions performed. Consequently, the relationships with Extension will vary a great deal. The challenge is to develop a strategy that is appropriate for the situation in each state/territory The **following suggestions from Extension staff members** illustrate the type of activities where the County Extension Director generally provides the leadership. The title County Extension Director will vary a great deal among states. They may be useful in building a strategy at the local level.

- After elections, write a **congratulatory note** to newly-elected officials. Make plans for personal contact. Also, after elections, write to outgoing officials, thanking them for their service.
- Right after an election, **collect information** on the newly-elected policymakers from that district.
- Develop a **strategy plan** among Extension staff members for ensuring ongoing contacts.
- During pre-election periods, share general information (possibly distributed by volunteers) about Extension with all candidates.
- Host an **annual “get-together”** (dinner, picnic, lunch, etc.) with state and federal legislators and county board members/commissioners, along with advisory committees, in order to help them all to better understand Extension and its programs
- Send brief **periodic updates** to state (and possibly federal) legislators which highlight major educational programming efforts.
- Match county staff with county board members/commissioners (according to interests, etc.) and **encourage them to invite the policymakers to programs**, etc. Examples of reporting strategies to the county board members of commissioners include:
 - Provide annual written report.
 - Extension staff members report monthly or quarterly at Board/Commissioner meetings.
 - Send county board members/commissioners a monthly report or newsletter highlighting program activities.
 - Develop a special report on annual accomplishments and upcoming initiatives.
 - Clientele, including youth, can effectively describe their involvement in programs to county board members/commissioners at a regular meeting or at a special event.
- Work with county board members/commissioners through county administration (this really depends on the political structure and “climate” in a particular county)
- Include **public officials in the Extension advisory committee.**

- Make sure that advisory committees are **diverse groups that represent each county/district**. Encourage committee members to regularly contact their elected officials.
- Regularly inform county board members/commissioners, and legislators, about special events, awards, etc. that involve their constituents.

This listing of **suggestions** is relevant for all county staff members. It is always important to remember, though, that **good communication among Extension staff** members is imperative to strengthening partnerships with policymakers.

- Personally work to develop basic **“political savvy.”** This involves being politically astute but non-partisan and it primarily means that there is a need to carefully follow the news and to pay attention to local people and issues.
- Become knowledgeable about the **county government process** and structure, including budget timing, etc.
- **Communicate with director/administrator** and other appropriate staff members concerning contacts with various policymakers. What are the possibilities for follow-up?
- Become knowledgeable about the **roles and responsibilities of county board members/commissioners**. Know them as individuals — their interests, biases, etc. Don’t wait for them to come to you. Go find out what you can do to help them in their jobs.
- Take advantage of **informal opportunities** (coffee, etc.) to talk with commissioners and other policymakers.
- Provide copies of bulletins and other resource materials when appropriate.
- Discover the policymakers (state, local and federal elected and appointed) who are interested in issue areas where you are programming. Find ways to:
 - share information about programming efforts and issues of concern.
 - involve policymakers in educational efforts.
 - facilitate communication on issues with their constituents.
 - encourage constituents to be politically aware and actively involved.
 - work with policymakers concerning local problems/concerns.
- Get to know the **aides of legislators (state and federal)**, particularly those who are concerned with your subject matter.
- Use the **expertise of policymakers and/or their staff members** concerning specific issues. They also might serve as resource people in leadership programs (e.g., about the policymaking process or about citizen involvement strategies).
- Get to know the special interest groups and the **politically active clientele in the county** in your programming area (e.g., economic development, youth issues, etc.).
- Be physically present and involved so that **policymakers will know Extension staff members**. Be informed about, and show interest in, the issues of concern to them
- Share information about demographics and about the **issue identification process**.

- Attend **legislative receptions** or other such social events in order to network with the particular legislator and with other individuals and groups.
- **Involve policymakers** in special programs (e.g., EFNEP graduation, awards programs).
- Be sure to **follow up specific contacts** (a conversation on an issue, obtaining resource materials, etc.) with a brief note.

G. The Message to Communicate

During the last ten years, the Cooperative Extension System faced **the major challenge of relevance** in a society that was encountering phenomenal change. To meet this challenge, the System initiated a number of **significant actions**, which provided a vision — a direction for the future. The **impact of these changes** is seen in the new programs, relationships, funding and structures throughout the System.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Access • Reference • Linkages |
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A major challenge continues to be **communication with the public and political leaders about these changes**. Some traditional clientele and supporters, for example, think that the changes mean that Extension **has disavowed its long-term commitment to agriculture**. They do not see that changing the agriculture program to focus on priority issues of biotechnology, international marketing, farm profitability, and sustainability of the resource base for agricultural production focuses the program on today's most relevant issues. They do not see that the economy of rural communities can no longer remain solely dependent upon agriculture. That is why the Community Economic Development programs focusing on a diversified group of small businesses is so important to a rural economy.

Programs for farm youths that focus on social problems such as alcohol and drug problems are often criticized. Yet, a higher percentage of rural youth have these problems than do youth from urban areas. So, the benefits of the significant changes in programs have not yet been effectively communicated to the public or political decision-makers

A potential communication strategy is to identify three or four **key concepts about the Cooperative Extension System** and utilize them in describing the present and potential future impact of programs. Following are four concepts that political decision-makers will value when analyzing the potential impact of Extension programs.

EDUCATION: Extension is an educational institution. The programs are **based on the knowledge base of the University**. This base of knowledge provides people with the basis for making decisions — that affect and impact their lives and the communities in which they live.

ACCESS: Extension is the **door to the University for millions of people**, wherever they live and work. University research, knowledge and resources are available through the local Extension office and a wide variety of modern delivery methods. The linkage between the campus specialist and the local agent is the bridge between people's needs and the knowledge base of the University.

RELEVANCE: Extension has remained true to its mission helping people improve their lives. However, programs have had to change in order to focus on the most critical issues and needs. Extension has reallocated resources to respond to the important new issues. Extensions linkages with the people and with constantly emerging research insures that programs are relevant, on the cutting edge, and have significant impact on the highest priority issues facing people, businesses and communities.

LINKAGES: Extension is a **federal/state/county partnership** and a national network. Extension is the lead agency for practical problem-solving education coordinating the roles of many other cooperating agencies and organizations. Extension's strong linkages with public and private groups, funding partners, countless volunteers and clientele are crucial in helping Extension identify and address critical issues with relevant programs

In communicating the **message** about the value of Extension, we must recognize the importance of **accountability** to political decision-makers. Legislators at the federal and state level are making tough decisions about limited resources. Extension is in the enviable position of being able to demonstrate a continuing impact on people and communities in a very efficient structure

H. Responsibilities in Building Support

The challenge to **institutionalize an effective support strategy for Extension** is the responsibility of the **directors and administrators**. They are the ones who must create responsive structures, assign responsibilities and clearly define the message to be communicated. As leaders, they must demonstrate optimism, self-confidence and idealism. They must mobilize a cadre of strong and effective supporters throughout the state/territory.

The responsibility for communicating with political decision-makers should not be delegated to a communication or journalism unit. It is a responsibility that needs leadership from the head of the organization with appropriate involvement of all the parts — including some very Important roles for the communication units. Many directors/administrators have been successful in employing someone in the director's office to provide leadership and coordination. Former legislative aides who have had direct experiences with the legislative process have proven to be extremely effective.

Following is a general listing roles that various positions in the organization might perform. However, it is again recognized that each state is different and an appropriate plan for each situation needs to be developed.

Extension Administration

- Communicate and **coordinate the strategy** and message with the Presidents'/Chancellors' office in order to avoid conflict and achieve cooperation.
- Work directly to assure the **federal and state budget support necessary** in order to maintain and build a vital, relevant and dynamic organization that extends the University to every county in the state.
- **Arrange for the contacts needed**, from counties, campus, etc. to build and maintain such support.
- Strengthen a network of communication with **relevant interest groups** and with other policymakers (Executive Departments, etc.).
- **Visit legislators** (federal and state) when you do not have any specific requests.
- Encourage county efforts to foster **ongoing communication with all policymakers**.
- **Communicate regularly** within the organization, including the county staff, about the current budget situation (including time lines when appropriate) and also about relevant interests and contacts that involve a particular area of the state.

Regional Directors

- Help the staff in each county **plan a strategy** and action plan for implementation.
- Facilitate the **sharing of information** between counties in terms of specific legislators (this is particularly important when several counties share a legislator) and in terms of the various action plans.
- Encourage and **support county efforts**
- **Facilitate training** and mentoring experiences as needed.

County Extension Directors (titles are different in various states)

- **Coordinate** the efforts for communication with **all elected officials in the county**.
- **Facilitate the effort to gain support** for the county budget.
- **Facilitate discussion among county staff members** concerning the development of an appropriate communications strategy for that particular county.
- Help the staff to regularly share, assess and adapt such a **strategy plan**
- Provide training, support, resources, etc. in order to **help each new staff member develop a basic level of “political savvy”** within the first few months of employment in the county. Introduce new staff members to local policymakers as appropriate

District Extension Positions

- Develop **information networks** with the various relevant interest groups and agencies.
- **Share information** concerning such contacts with others
- Work with the county staffs in the relevant counties to help **foster more contacts with policymakers** concerning specific issues.

County Extension Staff

(In some states, regional or district positions have replaced county positions. Accommodations to the following will have to be made based on position responsibilities.)

- Personally work **to develop basic “political savvy.”** This involves being politically astute but non-partisan and it primarily means that there is a need to carefully follow the news and to pay attention to local people and issues.
- Get to know the **aides of legislators** (state and federal), particularly those who are concerned with your subject matter.
- **Communicate with director/administrator** and other appropriate staff members concerning contacts with various policymakers. What are the possibilities for follow ups What are the “connecting points?”

- **Identify the policymakers** (state, local and federal elected and appointed) who are interested in issue areas where you are programming. Find ways to:
 - share information about programming efforts and issues of concern
 - involve policymakers in educational efforts
 - facilitate communication on such issues with their constituents
 - encourage constituents to be politically aware and actively involved
 - work with policymakers concerning local problems/concerns

Extension Specialists and Program Leaders

- Discover the **legislators and legislative aides**, state and federal, who are working in areas of interest to you. Develop an ongoing, informal relationship focused on mutual information sharing.
- **Involve such staff members**, as appropriate, in programming efforts and share with them information that you gather concerning that specific issue area.
- **Share any relevant insights or bits of information** concerning the aide and/or the legislator with the Extension director/administrator as appropriate.

I. Political Questions with Some Potential Answers

In today's **political environment**, a variety of difficult questions are being raised. For example:

- Who has Extension **moved way beyond its original legislative purpose** of serving farmers?
- With the number of farmers at its lowest level in this century, **why do we need to continue the Extension Service?**
- Who is Extension **serving urban areas?** Other resources are available to do what Extension is doing in urban areas.
- Who have **Extension resources been shifted** from agriculture and natural resources to family, youth, and social programs?
- Who is **Extension involved in programming that duplicates** that of social service agencies?

These and many **other difficult questions** are being raised at all three levels of government.

Following are a variety of answers that can be used to respond in a positive manner to these and other questions.

- The mission of the Cooperative Extension System is to help people all across the nation improve their lives through an educational process that focused scientific knowledge on issues and needs. Its strategic planning process solicits information from private sources as well as public sources at all government levels. At the state and county levels, a variety of structures are in use to involve citizens, staff, and relevant collaborators in strategic planning. Input into this process, therefore, involves the participation of people from all parts of our nation and reflects their needs.

- During the last twenty years, significant shifts in Extension programming have occurred within the agricultural and natural resources area. More emphasis now is placed with environmental and management issues and public issues such as the rural-urban interface. For example, water quality programming more than tripled during the period and integrated pest management grew from a concept to a significant program today that permeates the entire agriculture and natural resources program. These shifts have been possible by devoting fewer resources to traditional production issues where the private sector has been able to provide more information and assistance. In other program areas, CES is focusing more sharply on issues such as food safety and quality; nutrition; and children, youth and families at risk.
- The proportion of the total CES program devoted to agriculture and natural resources climbed from 38% in 1974 to 48% in 1994. The proportion for 4-H and youth development declined from 33% to 24% over the same period. Home economics increased 3% and community resource development work declined slightly.
- Extension programs also have expanded in the large urban counties where 63% of the American people now reside (315 counties or 10% of all counties). These county Extension offices now employ 21% of the professional field staff. This expansion has been possible largely through additional resources being allocated by local units of government and by partnering with other local agencies and the private sector. Nationally, 77% of the cost of operating county Extension offices is provided from state and county sources.
- Although Extension programs have expanded in the large urban counties, approximately 75% of the “non-agriculture” program (Nutrition, Diet and Health; Natural Resources and Environmental Management; Leadership and Volunteer Development; 4-H and Youth Development; Family Development and Resource Management; and Community Resource and Economic Development) is carried out in rural areas.
- The federal enabling legislation, Smith-Lever Act of 1914, stated the purpose was to provide instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture, home economics and related subjects. No mention was made of rural or urban locations. Since 1914, this legislation has been modified to expand even further the Extension purposes, including solar energy, urban youth, etc.
- Extension educational programs, such as youth and family development, family resource management, and human nutrition, are programs that complement the service and regulatory programs of other agencies. Furthermore, Extension collaborates with various social service agencies on their educational programs at the local, state and national levels. This helps assure effective use of funds and mutual benefits to the clientele. Examples of collaboration range from youth and family development programs at HUD housing projects to human nutrition education in concert with the USDA food stamp program.
- Extension’s purpose is broader than farmers; agriculture is more than farmers; it is the entire food and fiber chain from production to consumption. The well-being of agriculture does not stop at the farm gate.
- Extension serves mid-sized farm operations and provides programs for limited resource and part-time farmers. In fact, Extension is often criticized for not paying enough attention to large, commercial farmers.

- The Extension System sets priorities at the national, state, and county levels on a continuous basis to remain proactive to issues facing citizens. Currently, Extension is focused on seven base programs with eight targeted initiatives within these base programs. Thus, Extension may be something to a lot of people, but it is not everything to everybody.
- The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) was formed by the merger of the Extension Service (ES) and the Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS) CSREES has a joint mission of working with partners and customers to advance research, extension, and higher education in the food and agricultural sciences and related environmental and human sciences to benefit people, communities and the nation.
- The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is a publicly funded, nonformal, educational system that links the education and research resources and activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 74 land-grant universities, and 3,517 county and city administrative units. This infrastructure is supported by federal, state and local funding, and CSREES is the federal component of the CES.
- CSREES is the federal government's lead agency for higher education in the food and agricultural sciences. Through higher education programs, USDA supports and encourages efforts aimed at providing the expertise required by the nation's modern, high-technology, knowledge-based food and agricultural system.
- Through reorganization, the complete programmatic integration of the former CSRS and ES has occurred and duplication of effort between the two agencies was eliminated. Accomplishments include: establishing a pivotal organization for science and program leadership for the university research system, as well as system and policy management, while creating an effective process for coordination, planning and quick response to issues; significantly reducing the number of administrators as well as decreasing the level of administration; reducing the number of supervisors in the new agencies; and building upon the concept of enhanced technology to allow effective communication in our modern technological society.
- County offices, with significant input from the local community, choose to provide various educational opportunities for its customers. Extension information is research-based and takes into account the broader impacts of certain types of behavior, such as pesticide use and its impact on regional water quality.
- In addition, many of these efforts are supported at the local level by volunteers. Across the nation, Extension agents work each year with nearly 3 million volunteers who, in turn, work with about 48 million other adults and youth. On the average, volunteers invest about 51 days for every day an Extension professional invests in working with volunteers The value of volunteer time is four times greater than the combined federal, state, and local funding
- For every \$1 of federal funds provided for CES programs, approximately \$4 of state, county, and non-tax dollars are generated. Additionally, public funds for CES result in private and "in-kind" services and contributed time of nearly 3 million volunteers. The total value of this monetary and nonmonetary support is estimated at \$5.6 billion.