

Be a Part of the Story – Embracing Informal Leadership (Pilot)

Situation

Due to population decline and generational difference in the perception of leadership and volunteerism, among other factors, there are open gaps emerging in leadership positions across civic and governmental organizations throughout the state of Kansas. Many organizations are struggling to realize sufficient participation to maintain, let alone grow organizational efforts. However, there are successful strategies aimed at enhancing civic engagement throughout Kansas. K-State Research and Extension faculty are positioned to collect and distribute these strategies through an educational program aimed at strengthening struggling civic and governmental organizations.

Community Development is the foundation for Extension programs and activities. Our locally rooted, democratic structure leans on Community Development principles to execute our mission. K-State's Global Campus Community Development Program defines Community Development as both "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, equality, economic opportunity and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings." With this context, it is incumbent on all Extension faculty to engage in Community Development practices to be successful in their position. However, Community Development programs often require a set of skills beyond the technical expertise required for various faculty positions. Faculty will benefit from a Community Development Extension Program that allows for their participation in delivery without the need to "retool" their technical knowledge. Increasing Extension faculty engagement with Community Development programming will serve as a catalyst to Extension's statewide status as a dynamic educational entity. Furthermore, increased engagement with civic and governmental organizations among Faculty from all program areas will elevate Extension's role in improving Kansans' lives, livelihoods and communities.

Public Value

The open gaps in civic and governmental organizations will begin to close as civic organizations see the benefits of seeking new and diverse audiences in recruitment efforts, making intentional efforts toward recruitment and understanding how to support incoming members of their organization. Informal leaders of today can become the formal leaders of tomorrow.

Outcomes

Short-Term (Knowledge)

- Strategies for local organizations (such as civic, government and other volunteer organizations) to engage constituents to further the missions of their local organizations.
- Grow awareness of the benefits of engaging new and diverse audiences.
- Extension faculty and local units will become aware of the offerings of Community Development Programming.

Indicators

- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will learn new strategies to engage constituents to assist with the furtherance of their missions.

- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will become aware of the benefits of engaging new and diverse audiences in their programmatic and recruitment efforts.
- The number of Extension faculty and local units engaged in Community Development Extension programming will increase.

Medium-Term (Behavior)

- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will become aware that informal leadership can benefit their organization.
- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will exercise skills to identify informal leaders.
- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will address the need to evolve to meet changing needs within the community.
- KSRE faculty will understand the need to increase their engagement with community and governmental organizations.

Indicators

- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will embrace informal leadership techniques to enhance their capacity to identify and deliver on community-based issues.
- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will exercise skills to identify and match informal leaders to projects important to the organization, yet meaningful to the volunteer.
- Civic, government and other volunteer organizations will increase their ability to evolve to meet their community's changing needs.
- KSRE faculty will increase their engagement with community and governmental organizations

Long-Term (Change in Condition)

- Kansas communities will seek higher levels of civic engagement.
- Constituents are comfortable with identifying their potential roles in organizations and commit to civic priorities.
- KSRE will serve as a capacity-building partner for Kansas communities

Indicators

- Kansas communities will exhibit higher levels of civic engagement.
- Constituents will more readily identify their role in civic and governmental organizations and increase their commitments to civic priorities.
- KSRE will serve as a capacity-building partner for Kansas communities

Outputs

This program will consist of a series of packaged vignette videos highlighting stories from Kansas communities. These packages will include communication scripts to allow for easy distribution at the local level through various media outlets.

Videos will feature conversations with community practitioners or voiceover narration depicting a specific practice at increasing engagement success among Kansas civic and governmental organizations.

Agents who adopt this Action Plan will receive these packages on a regular basis to distribute through mass media (social media, newsletters, websites, etc.) and to targeted community organizations. Agents will be asked to identify 3-5 civic and/or governmental organizations to share the vignettes with to ensure that there is an identifiable audience for the evaluation component of the program. One or more of the agent-identified civic and/or governmental organizations shall either be an organization that has no historical connection to Extension or has a majority of its members who have not previously engaged with Extension.

For the 2020-2021 programming year, the program will feature 13 vignettes to be delivered over a 3-month time frame starting in early 2021, but flexibility will be afforded to agents who need to adopt varying timelines. The vignette topics identified for development include:

- You for a Day
- STP (Same Ten People) Club
- If You Do What You've Always Done...
- The Power of Networks
- Successful Recognition
- Making the Ask
- Lifecycle of Volunteerism
- Generational Leadership
- Loose Connections
- The Power of Social Capital
- The Look of Leaders
- Matching Volunteers to Meaningful Work
- Youth Leadership Through Service Learning

All vignettes will be housed on a central KSRE – Community Vitality website for ease of analytics tracking and to allow for non-targeted groups to view the series. Vignettes will be uploaded to that page as they are released to the system in accordance with the early 2021 program schedule.

Program Evaluation is being developed:

- After the three-month program, agents who have regularly distributed the vignettes to groups in their community will be furnished with an evaluation instrument that can be shared with the members of each of those groups. This instrument will be uniform in design and content for consistent data gathering across the state.
- Questions on the survey will elicit qualitative and quantitative data about each individual's changes in attitudes/knowledge and behavior as well as changes that their organization has or intends to adopt as a result of exposure to the program.
- As a supplement to the evaluation of targeted groups, analytics will be gathered from the central KSRE – Community Vitality site where the vignettes will be housed. We will gather information regarding the number of times that videos are viewed and devise a mechanism to allow for unsolicited public feedback which will likely be limited to qualitative data.