INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ISSUE-BASED REVIEW
for
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

GUIDELINES
March 3, 2000

INTRODUCTION
The mission of the county extension and center-based research and extension programs in Nebraska is to generate and/or interpret research-based information that addresses issues of importance to our constituents. The basis for our success is to correctly identify those issues and then follow through with effective issue-based programming. A well-planned and conducted issue-based review can be a useful tool for the planning and implementation of high impact programs.

As faculty and administration develop an issue-based review, the following objectives should be carefully considered:

1. Utilize external input to identify and assess emerging issues.
2. Identify strategies to address those issues with some consideration of appropriate resource reallocation.
3. Reflect upon the process and the outcome with third party input.

It is important for administration and faculty to understand that issue-based reviews are substantially different than departmental comprehensive reviews. Departmental reviews are discipline-based and address specific programs within the missions of instruction (graduate and undergraduate), research, extension and service. The programmatic emphasis for departmental reviews is state-wide. **Discipline-specific activities of faculty and staff at Research and Extension should be reviewed during the relevant departmental review.** Their unique contributions to state-wide initiatives should be integrated into the department review.

In contrast, an issue-based review focuses entirely on the current and evolving issues that affect District and, to some extent, regional clientele. Identification of **external issues** is program independent. The process should emphasize evolving rather than current issues and it should be heavily dependent on clientele input, rather than internalized priority setting. **Internal issues** are incorporated into the issue- based review to the extent that they will affect the unit's ability to address external issues. External issues are frequently defined by multi-discipline, multi-organization, or multi-agency parameters. Consequently, solutions are often found in interdisciplinary, broad-based partnerships and collaborations. A unit must carefully ensure that its process for identifying external issues is not biased by existing programs, faculty and staff expertise, or past traditions. Clientele input coupled with a careful assessment of current demographic data and trends are essential. Issue-based reviews are not conducted to identify issues that current programs and faculty/staff can align with, but to identify emerging challenges that the Research and Extension Center/District should consider for future programming.

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The IANR Strategic Plan should be considered as a broad perspective of the issues facing Nebraskans. The District issue-based review should consider unique in-district opportunities and challenges. The subsequent development of District Action Plans should address immediate issues for the District. As such, these Action Plans generally emphasize a three to five-year window focused on the District's contribution to the IANR Strategic Plan. Consequently, the IANR Strategic Plan is useful in describing statewide initiatives, but should not constitute the basis of the District's visioning process.

The following process describes a method that can be used to accomplish the objectives of an issue-based review. This method is not intended to be prescriptive but to provide one strategy that addresses the intent and objectives of an issue-based review. The actual process should engender flexibility and creativity so that the objectives of the issue-based review can be accomplished. It is suggested that the actual process be proposed and reviewed by the Steering Committee, the faculty and staff, the Deans and the Review Team Chair to ensure congruency.

Step 1: Notification and District Faculty/Staff Orientation
All faculty, staff and the Review Team Chair should receive these for an issue-based review at the initiation of the process.

At least one year prior to the review, a faculty meeting or retreat should be held to:

1. Receive an orientation/overview of the issue-based review process and expectations by the Deans.
2. Review prior planning documents.
3. Review and discuss the issue-based review process.
4. Contemplate the previous issue-based review document and assign a committee to identify accomplishments.
5. Nominate a Steering Committee and a Review Team Chair. The Review Team Chair should be identified early in the process to ensure a coordinated review process that is understood and acceptable to all involved parties.
6. Identify a preliminary time line for the review.

Step 2: Formation and Charge of Steering Committee
The Steering Committee provides important and effective leadership for the issue-based review. The Steering Committee is appointed and usually chaired by the District Director.

The responsibilities of the Steering Committee are to:

1. Propose a review process for consideration and approval by District faculty/staff and the Deans with consultation of the Review Team Chair. This process may be unique to each issue because of' the nature of the, issue and/or the availability of data or information.
2. Supervise the formation and membership of issue teams and support their efforts to acquire timely demographic and other data. Ensure that current demographic projections are part of each issue team's deliberations and consider appointment and utilization of an REC/District Demographic Team to support all issue teams.
3. Meet frequently to monitor process and advise issue teams.
4. Ensure that input is satisfactorily summarized and that key internal and external issues are identified.
5. Serve as a linking mechanism between issue teams.
6. Plan and conduct the District Retreat.
7. Solicit nominees for the Chair and members of the Review Team and make recommendations to IANR administration.

8. If requested, serve as liaison to members of' the Review Team who are addressing specific issues in the report.
9. Serve as a draft committee for the unit response to the Review Team report.

<u>Step 3</u>: Identify Potential External Issues
District faculty should assess primary data (focus groups, surveys or other forms of citizen input), secondary data (IANR Listening Sessions, census data, Rural Nebraska Poll, Bureau of Business Research data, etc.) as well as faculty/staff input to identify a broad spectrum of potential external issues.

External Issues *- Those issues that are of major concern to learners and consumers. External issues are both current **(1-5 years)** and evolving **(>5 years)**. External issues are often best under-stood with clientele input.*

> *[NOTE: The issue-based review should look beyond the current planning window (3-5 years for ARD projects, 3-5 years for IANR Action Plans, 5-6 years for unit reviews, and extension action plans are annually updated with a 3-5 year rolling horizon) to anticipate and describe evolving external issues.]*

<u>Step 4</u>: Clarify and Prioritize Issues
Utilize faculty/staff input to clarify and prioritize, issues. Issues may be grouped under logical areas such as rural revitalization, youth development or agricultural profitability to facilitate discussion. Identify 3-8 issues for further study and clientele input. This could be accomplished by a variety of means including, but not limited to, faculty meetings, virtual interaction, etc. Once issues are identified by clientele input or other environmental scans, those issues should be agreed upon by the faculty and staff within the unit. At that point, issue teams can be established (see Steering Committee responsibilities),

Demographics. Timely demographic information and accurate interpretation of trends is a key to an effective issue-based review. One strategy is to appoint a Demographics Team. This team might consist of demographers (local, university, other organizations and agencies) as well as policy and economics resource people who can identify data resources and conduct trend analysis. Another strategy is to approach demographics on an issue by issue basis. In either case, the goal is to understand the potential scope and scale of external issues using appropriate data. Sources of demographic data include the College of Business Administration, the state demographer, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the Rural Poll. The Agricultural Census is an additional resource. Secondary data sets are available nationally that allow national comparisons, not only demographically, but programmatically as institutions address demographic trends. Another component of this visioning process would be projections of impacts of regulations, farm policy, marketing alternatives, and international influences on a District’s agriculture, economy and communities.

<u>Step 5</u>: Form Issue Teams and Characterize Issues
Issue teams can be populated voluntarily, by invitation and/or by assignment; clientele representatives may be appropriate. Look for diversity and cross-over interests and capabilities to expand thinking and enhance creativity. Faculty and staff could select up to two issues and commit to being on those issue teams. A chair should be selected by the issue team members.

An expanded discovery process that includes clientele input from surveys or focus group interviews can be used. The District should provide financial support for this process. Active engagement provides clientele with a sense of ownership in District programming. Effective engagement can also validate IANR and its units as focused, innovative and responsive. These teams will be strongly encouraged to solicit input from departmental faculty, other districts, potential agency collaborators and other partners. Each issue team will conduct a situational analysis, analyze the demographics, suggest a probable future and recommend strategies by which the issue might be addressed. This effort should result in a document serving as a draft chapter for the self-study document.

Step 6: District Retreat

The objectives of the District Retreat are to:

1. Report and analyze issue team information (demographics, issue analysis, action strategies, etc.).
2. Clarify strategies emphasizing specific action steps to respond to external issues. Look for linkages between issues that would facilitate accomplishment.
3. Select 3 to 5 issues for the Issue-Based Review.
4. Suggest revisions in draft documents.

As such, the District Retreat should include all faculty as well as selected clientele or partners who could contribute to the discussion.

The format for the District Retreat could include the following:

1. Report a summary of the deliberations and recommendations of each issue team,
2. Open discussion or each issue to include clarification of response strategies. This discussion should address:
    a. Where can we, as a unit, make the most significant change and provide the greatest assistance to our clientele?
    b. What are the immediate issues for our clientele within the next two years
    c. What are the evolving issues for our clientele beyond the next two years?

    In addition, this discussion should:
    d. be based on an asset model rather than a deficit model,
    e. synthesize rather than compile information,
    f. incorporate clientele input,
    g. focus on unique niches of opportunity,
    h. be supported by demographic evidence when available.
3. Prioritize and/or select issues for the review.
4. Clarify action plans.
5. Identify internal issues (see below).
6. Discuss preparation of the self-study document.
7. Discuss the nature of interaction with the Review Team to include preparation for and conduct of the site visit.

Identify Internal Issues

Internal Issues - Issues that are unique to the District that impact the unit's ability to address external issues. Internal issues, while important, should command a smaller portion of the total *review or be handled in a separate venue.*

These issues may include such things as resources, personnel, unit governance, physical plant, committees and their function, and other issues that could influence the productivity of the unit.

A separate team can be identified to review internal issues and make recommendations. This team could be comprised of District faculty and staff as well as key resources from beyond the unit. Strategic information can be assembled under the direction of the District Director. In some cases, internal issues may be better handled by the use of a consultant or other integrative strategies. Internal issues and recommendations could be part of the self-study document.

Step 7: Compile Self-Study Document

Writers or writing teams are selected by the Steering Committee to summarize the retreat discussion and address the following for each issue:

1. Document the issue development process including how clientele were involved.
2. Demonstrate a systematic needs assessment to include demographic and other data related to the issue.
3. Brief overview of previous work relevant to the issue.
4. Relationship of each issue to other high-priority regional, state or national issues.
5. List of 'working assumptions' based on demographics, projected trends, and potential regulatory changes to frame the issue and the subsequent recommendations.
6. Summary of program opportunity (potential outcomes).
7. Present action strategies.
8. Identify potential collaborators (institutions, organizations, agencies, and/or individuals) should be identified for each issue.
9. Identify resources needed (internal and external) as well as potential sources of funds. Consider resource redirection and/or reallocation needed to address the issue.
10. Develop specific questions for the Review Team.

In addition to the discussion of each specific issue, the self-study document should include:

1. A summary of the most recent review and the status of the recommendations.
2. Integration of all topics to be addressed by the Review team, either by specific issue, or as separate REC/District issues (refer to pages 6-7).
3. A section on the unique strengths of the REC/District.
4. A process for on-going evaluation and implementation of the review recommendations.

The draft document should be reviewed by the Dean's before finalization to ensure that it meets the intent of an issue-based review.

The final self-study document should be submitted to the Deans 8-10 weeks prior to the site visit.

Step 8: Identify and Populate the Review Team

The Review Team should consist of 4-6 members representing broad interests and backgrounds, as well as diversity. At least one team member should be from outside IANR and the University of Nebraska.

Responsibilities:

To stimulate the unit's strategic vision, the Review Team should:

1. Challenge existing paradigms and openly question the status quo,
2. Pose alternatives,
3. Encourage thinking across boundaries,
4. Ask why,
5. Ask why not,
6. Add new dimensions,
7. Challenge traditions, and
8. Catalyze change.

The review team is expected to address the following:

1. Outcomes of previous review (the previous review should be an appendix of the current self-study document).
2. Action plan objectives and inspirations.

3. Issues/concerns that may have been omitted in the document.
4. Unit strategies for programming with reduced resources.
5. Specific programmatic niches for the REC/District.
6. Internal and external environment.
7. Important issues and leadership roles for the District and its collaborators.
8. Potential collaborators and partnerships.
9. Programmatic activities which could be reduced, delegated to other organizations/agencies or deleted.
10. Identification of appropriate target audiences for curriculum-based delivery in extension.
11. Unit strategies to integrate teaching, research and extension.
12. The role of extended education among all subunits.
13. Diversity plans.
14. Evaluate the review process for issue-based reviews.

Step 9: Site Visit
Authorization for Review Team Visit
The District must request formal approval from the Deans to convene the Review Team. A Review Team visit will not be authorized until the Deans have approved the self-study document, the proposed time line, schedule for the visit, and the composition of the Review Team.

Preparation for the Review Team Visit
The Review Team should receive the self-study document at least eight weeks prior to the site visit. The Team should review the document and notify the unit of any additional information or clarification needed at least 2-4 week prior to the visit. All District personnel should be encouraged to read the self-study document prior to the Review Team visit.

Orientation of the Review Team
The Deans should provide each Review Team member a complete set of the previous review material. Clear guidance from administration on the objectives of an issue-based review should be provided to the Review Team (e.g. IANR Issue-Based Review for Research and Extension Centers Guidelines). The Review Team should meet with the District Director and respective Deans prior to the review. Other district review documents and recommendations should be part of the orientation. The Steering Committee must be involved in the Review Team orientation.

Considerations for an Effective Site Visit
1. Typically, **three days** should be allowed for an on-site visit.
2. The Review Team should have time scheduled on site, prior to the beginning of the review, to organize (approximately 2 hours).
3. Oral reports by District faculty and staff to the Review Team should not reiterate the self-study document.
4. Selected clientele groups and partners (including County Boards) could be provided an opportunity to meet with the Review Team.
5. Selected IANR Unit Administrators (based on issues raised in the self-study document) could participate in the on-site visit in the same capacity as the Deans. Unit Administrators should be involved in the evaluation of the issues and those on site should have scheduled time to meet with the Review Team.
6. Sessions should be scheduled so that all faculty and staff can be present (which is an administrative expectation) during all presentations.

<u>Step 10</u>: Follow-Up and Completion of Review Process

1. The Review Team should prepare the final report within 45 days of the on-site visit.
2. The Review Team report should be distributed to all faculty and staff. A district-wide retreat could be used to address issues and develop a response.
3. The District Director and faculty should develop a time line of activity to address the recommendations.
4. The unit response should be completed 60 days after receipt of the Review Team report.
5. The Dean's should integrate and emphasize the review in the annual unit evaluation.
6. The unit should inform the clientele of the recommendations, the proposed response and then on a regular basis (e.g. annually) provide an update of progress.

The District Director should report to the other District Directors at their next meeting on review process, content and recommendations.

TIME LINE OF ACTIVITIES

<u>Time</u>	<u>Action</u>
12 months prior to the site visit	Initiate the review process with an orientation by the Deans.
8-10 weeks prior to the site visit	The Deans should receive a final draft of the self-study document.
8 weeks prior to the site visit	Finalize the Review Team and provide a thorough orientation (meeting or conference call). This should include probable assignments of primary responsibilities for each Review Team member.
6-8 weeks prior to the site visit	*Review Team receives the self-study document. - The Review Team should discuss (meeting or conference call) the document and identify any additional information that is needed or specific questions for the Chair to address. - The Review Team should immediately notify the unit of any additional questions or information needed.
Within 45 days after the site visit	*The Review Team submits the final report to visit Deans. - Upon approval of the Deans, the Review Team report is forwarded to the District Director and distributed to all faculty and staff - Schedule a district-wide retreat to address issues and develop a response. - The District Director and faculty develop a time line of activity to address the recommendations.
60 days after receipt of the Review Team Report	Unit response submitted to the Deans.