



Impact Statement

Project Title: Reorganization of the Cooperative Extension Program at the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Issue: The Cooperative Extension Program at Southern University (SUCEP), the 1890 institution in Louisiana, has a long withstanding history of serving the most marginalized families in Louisiana since its inception. The efforts of the Cooperative Extension program focus primarily on Family & Consumer Sciences, (Family and Human Development and Nutrition, Health and Wellness); Agricultural & Natural Resources, (Small Farm Initiatives and Urban Agriculture); Community & Economic Development (Small Business Development) and 4-H / Youth Development. As with most 1890 extension programs, our agents are co-housed in county offices with their 1862 counterparts, where they collaborate on projects and programs where possible. The state of Louisiana has 64 parishes (counties). The SUCEP has agents housed in 1/3 of the parishes, often clustered in geographic regions, based upon old demographics and population models. A comprehensive, systematic evaluation of program staffing has not been completed in the last 15 – 20 years, resulting in what appears to be missed opportunities for both the organization and for our constituents.

Daily, the state office faculty and staff, get calls and request for assistance from across the state, particularly, from small gardeners, and communities and schools with high minority populations. Because of our history and reputation of working with the most marginalized citizens of Louisiana, we always attempt to make the appropriate referrals or assist if a solution is a part of our portfolio of offerings and / or capabilities. However, this is becoming more and more difficult. One of the most paramount challenges SUCEP faces is increasing request and demands from the constituents, especially in those parishes without an 1890 agent or even those parishes with just one agent.

Youth development is a key opportunity for the SUCEP and with only three 4-H / Youth Developments agents, in Orleans, St. Helena / Tangipahoa and St. Landry Parishes, the majority of the youth who could benefit from this programming are not served. It is important to note, that each of the current SUCEP agents in the 24 parishes where they are located, indicated that they needed at least ½ FTE devoted specifically to youth. Unfortunately, without additional funding streams and resources, it will be difficult to increase the FTE's in this area.

If the SUCEP is going to maximize its presence and footprint in Louisiana, it is time to reassess agents' locations and programming efforts, without neglecting other program areas.

What has been done:

As a part of a much larger strategic planning process, we decided to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Cooperative Extension Program. The primary purpose of this project was to assess whether or not our current Extension staffing plan was capable of meeting the futuristic needs and trends of families, communities, businesses, youth and farmers served by the 1890 Cooperative Extension Program. Simply stated, we wanted to determine if the Cooperative Extensions agents were housed in the best locations to provide the greatest positive impacts to the constituents served. Additionally, we wanted to know if the existing plan was providing maximum use of the human capital resources when compared to the expressed and unmet needs of our constituents.

This assessment included using secondary sources such as census records, the agricultural census demographics, public school statistics, local and community newspapers, parish websites and social media sites, current extension employees and most importantly, the inquiries and request of assistance phone logs collected by the state office. Additionally, we are traveling around the state, meeting with municipalities and interested stakeholders, to assess how the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center can be of better service to those communities.

Impacts/New Partnerships:

A project of this nature will be ever ongoing and ever evolving. As demographics in the state change, there will be a need for shifts in programming. One major impact of this effort is enhanced communication and collaboration with the other campuses of the Southern University System. Also, this effort has resulted in us taking the SUCEP message to new communities across the state of Louisiana.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)

As a result of the assessment, we realized that we should start exploring the benefits of shifting positions to different parishes and equipping our agents with varying skills sets, so they can have a greatest impact on the communities they serve. We have decided not to fill positions in parishes where it is more challenging to document the impacts, especially in cases, when the previous agent has retired or ended employment for other reasons. We have also decided to explore training and professional development opportunities for existing agents so they can work with the youth in the parishes where they currently are. We are also aggressively seeking external funds to assist with program delivery in all disciplines, to include youth development.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?

I began this FSLI journey at the same time I stepped into the leadership role for the SUCEP. Being able to hear the issues / challenges of my cohort at other universities across the country, proved to me that I was not alone in this journey. When I assumed this role, Louisiana was experiencing civil unrest and had recently been devastated by the 1,000 year flood of 2016, which changed the landscape of the capitol city and surrounding areas. One of the first lessons I learned in the FSLI experience was dealing with adversity and leading in times of adversity. Those lessons taught me how to best approach controversial topics and aided in having those crucial conversations about change. Attempting to move an organization such as the SUCEP, from the past into 2019 and beyond, has been an overwhelming lesson in change.

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