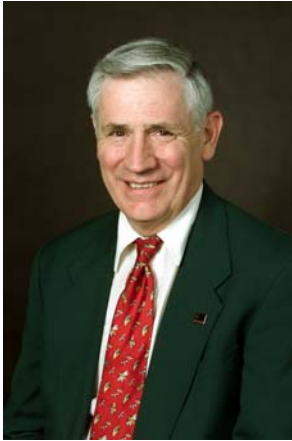


Building Better Communities Through Leadership and Economic Development:

Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma



Message from the Directors



Dr. David E. Foster,
Assoc. Director OCES

We are pleased to present the results of our Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma. For some time, legislative leaders have urged the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service to be aggressive in supporting leadership and economic development in our state. House Resolution 1044 and Senate Resolution 57 are recent examples of that sentiment.

Extension has begun to prepare a response that would engage local leaders and subsequently link them to the capacity of their land-grant university to help improve their communities and ensure a brighter future. The first step in this process was to conduct listening sessions across the state. Sessions were held in all 77 counties, with more than 2,700 persons participating. The results of those sessions, available through your local county Extension office, suggest a wide variety of community needs and opportunities that can be successfully addressed by local leaders who are adequately prepared and have the needed technical support. That is where

Oklahoma State University, Cooperative Extension, and the Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma can play an important role.

The preparation of local leaders to address community improvement through leadership training is not new. Many agencies, organizations, and institutions have offered leadership development programs. Concerned citizens from communities across Oklahoma have participated in such programs. Nevertheless, results that have a long-term impact in the community have been infrequent.

Turning leadership training into meaningful results for the community is the goal of the Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma (*Initiative*). During the past year local Extension personnel have worked with community leaders to pilot the *Initiative* concept. As you read the following, you will sense the enthusiasm and positive outlook that has emanated from each project. The next step in the *Initiative* process is to capture that enthusiasm and to link the aspirations of community leaders with the capacity of OSU to help develop strategies, identify resources, and turn dreams into reality.

The *Initiative* project is simply the beginning. It demonstrates what can happen when community leaders partner with their local Extension office to hone leadership skills and to access the capacity of OSU and the land-grant university system to improve their community and enrich the lives of those who call it home. Long-term benefits will come only through a partnership from which local leaders, the county Extension office, and OSU all learn, benefit, and grow.



Dr. Joe Williams
Initiative Director

Building Better Communities Through Leadership and Economic Development: Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma

Background

Preliminary results of the 2000 census indicate that citizens in rural and urban Oklahoma communities continue to suffer from low per capita income and less than quality jobs. Many policy makers have also indicated that there is a need for effective leadership in many of these communities. Low income levels relate to lower property values, less tax revenue and, therefore, less than adequate financing for local government and infrastructure development. Determined effort must be made to assist communities to develop the infrastructure necessary to nurture a sustainable economy and improve their overall quality of life through the process of developing new leaders or improving the skills of persons already in a leadership role.

The *Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma* is a part of Extension's effort to develop and empower local leaders so that they, in turn, can move their communities forward. In other words, the focus of this program, which provided funds to 17 Oklahoma counties last year, is to educate leaders, not just to successfully complete a project. Some of the *Initiative* participants did work on a project, but the projects are seen as vehicles by which formal leadership training can be turned into action—a way to continue leadership training through practical experience.

Request for Proposals

From April to June 2002, the 77 county Extension offices across the state of Oklahoma were invited to submit proposals for leadership development programs to be funded by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. The program was titled the "Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma". Community, county or multi-community/county proposals were welcomed and encouraged. Preference was given to proposals demonstrating broad based participation from community members and groups in their economic and leadership development efforts. Strong local Extension staff interest and commitment was also a prerequisite for community selection. County educators were encouraged to consider interdisciplinary areas when developing the proposals. By the end of June, proposals representing 37 counties had been submitted. Several of the proposals were multi-county efforts.

Leadership capacity is not comparable across communities/counties. Some have benefited from a variety of leadership training opportunities and have a cadre of leaders ready to identify a project and work toward its implementation. Others have lacked opportunity to train leaders. These communities should start with leadership training and allow project identification to wait until the leaders are better equipped to initiate their chosen project. Consequently, a total of 13 proposals, representing 17 counties, were accepted in two categories.

Two Categories of *Initiative* Proposals and Recipients:

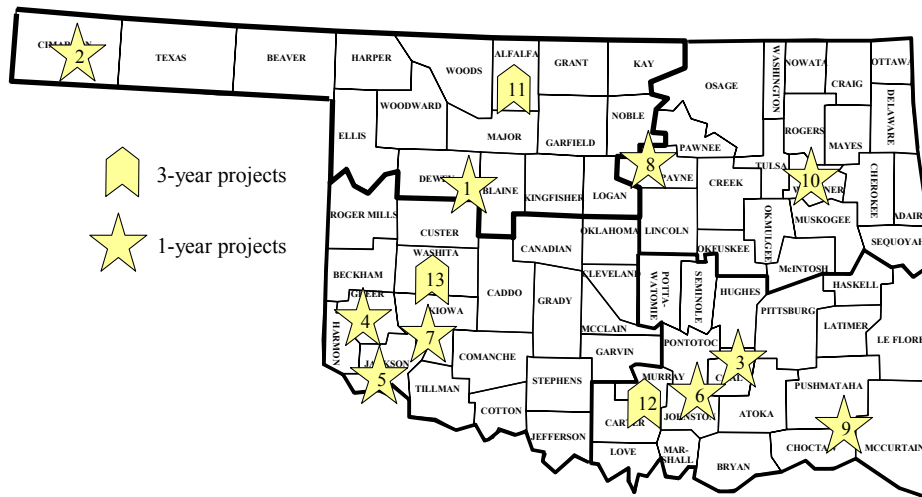
Initial Leadership Training: These one-year proposals focused on skill building through leadership training. The primary focus was on initial leadership training, organizational skills, and visioning. As part of the training, the class was given the opportunity to identify a project. Communities were able to apply for funding to support their project, subject to the availability of funding. Grant funds of up to \$10,000 were awarded to each of ten projects in this category.

1. Blaine, Custer, and Dewey Counties
2. Cimarron County
3. Coal County
4. Greer County
5. Jackson County
6. Johnston County
7. Kiowa County
8. Payne County
9. Pushmataha, Choctaw, and McCurtain Counties
10. Wagoner County

Comprehensive Leadership Training: These three-year proposals also focused on skill building through leadership training, but, in addition, these proposals identified a community project that related to leadership development and/or economic development. Grant funds of up to \$100,000 were awarded to each of three projects in this category.

11. Alfalfa County
12. Murray County
13. Washita County

Oklahoma *Initiative* Counties



Grant recipients, including local citizens and extension educators, committed considerable time and resources to the *Initiative* effort. To start, a training session was held in November 2002 to kick-off the statewide project. Representatives from each of the 13 *Initiative* projects attended this three-day retreat held at the Postal training facility in Norman, OK. The three days were full of fun, food, and fellowship, but also a lot of hard work. In general, each project brought about 8 local residents to the retreat, including one or two Extension educators. The other team members were volunteers from the community who were considered “core” members of the local project.

Benefits offered to communities participating in the *Initiative* included:

1. Training was provided in community leadership and economic development. OCES Specialists, as well as other agency personnel, provided training in:
 - Economic Diversification
 - Community Planning
 - Service Infrastructure
 - Local Government
 - Civic Engagement and Leadership Development
 - Youth and Adult Workforce Development
2. Regional training programs were offered to community teams. These regional training programs provided team members with intermediate and advance training in the topics listed above and others.
3. Educational material, technical assistance, and problem solving expertise to aid in leadership and community economic development were provided.
4. Sustained follow-up, technical assistance, and support were made available to the participating communities.
5. Technical assistance to help evaluate the project was made available to the communities.

See Tables 1 and 2 for a comprehensive summary of educational programs and technical assistance offered to the projects.

***Initiative* Goals**

The *Initiative* effort has several goals:

1. Enhance and develop the effectiveness of community leaders and Extension Educators to identify and address critical issues confronting the community and county, especially those relating to leadership and community economic development.
2. Demonstrate to the community/county the full range of assistance available from OCES through Oklahoma State University, a land-grant university in Oklahoma.
3. Provide a long-term, in-depth commitment to selected communities in order to aid in the planning and implementation of development efforts.
4. Document impacts of the pilot projects with thorough evaluation.
5. Set the stage for an ongoing community/county improvement program based on leadership and economic development.

Table 1
Technical Assistance Provided

Technical Assistance	Number of Projects Participating
Retail Trends	13
Economic Trends	13
Leadership Survey	10
Community Survey	7
Strategic Planning	4
Health Planning	3
Secret Shopper	3
Main Street Survey	2
Closing Evaluation	2
Threshold Analysis	1
Tourism Survey	1
Housing Survey	1
Business Survey	1
Change Survey	1

Table 2
Educational Programs and Workshops Offered

Educational Programs	Number of Projects Participating
True Colors	9
Economic Trends	8
County Government	7
Tourism	7
Asset Mapping	6
PRIDE	6
Conflict Management	5
Goal Setting/Planning	5
Grant Writing	5
Understanding Leadership	5
Community Economics	4
Team Building	3
Website Development	3
Communication	2
Community Change	2
E-Commerce	2
Economic Development/CARE	2
Entrepreneurship	2
Etiquette/Business Etiquette	2
Health Forum	2
Kings and Kingmakers	2
Lazy Fair	2
Personal Power Tools	2
SBA Loans	2
State Government	2
Working with Volunteers	2
7 Habits of Effective People	1
Effective Use of Committees	1
Ethics	1
Mediation	1
Parliamentary Procedure	1
Self Esteem	1
State Industry International	1
Visual Merchandising	1

Initiative Projects in Brief

Alfalfa County [Extension Educator – Shelly Davis]: “Alfalfa County Tourism Promotion and Opportunities.” The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma is a three-year grant to promote tourism and economic opportunities in Alfalfa County. The initiative goals are to market tourist sites and the county’s natural resources to visitors as well as to educate the residents of the opportunities available. **(A 3-year project.)**

Blaine, Custer and Dewey Counties [Extension Educators – Alvin Woodruff (Blaine County, Ronald Wright (Custer County), and Michael Weber (Dewey County)]: “Blaine-Custer-Dewey Leadership Initiative Program.” The Blaine-Custer-Dewey Leadership Initiative Program was designed to provide leadership training for interested participants from the small communities of the three counties. The programs were designed to develop or enhance the abilities of individuals to be leaders in their communities. Their leadership will then enhance the economic welfare of those communities.

Cimarron County [Extension Educator – Marty Albright]: “Cimarron County LEAD: Leadership and Education Development.” One of the major goals of this group was to bring together leaders from the four communities so that they could work as a county team as opposed to on their own.

Coal County [Extension Educator – Barbara Elkins]: “The COAL-ition Leadership Program.” Our project was designed to train and develop leaders in our community. We also wanted to strengthen the coalition that was already in existence. Our desire was, and still is, that our community’s progress in the future will not have to be dependent on the same five people doing everything over and over again.

Greer County [Extension Educator – Jeff Dill]: “The Greer County Extension Leadership Project.” The Greer County Extension Leadership Project was created to encourage a group of Greer County citizens to cooperate in the development of our rural community and economy. Participants participated for a calendar year in gaining important leadership and development skills they will use to carry forward with their community and economic development activities.

Jackson County [Extension Educator – Gary Strickland]: “Jackson County’s Economic Development Leadership Training Conference.” This Jackson County project was a program to enhance both the knowledge and interaction in the areas of community and economic development. One of our most important goals was to form and train Economic Development Teams in each community in Jackson County and from these groups form a County-Wide Economic Development Team. The County Team could then offer broad based perspective for both community and county Economic Development projects and issues.

Johnston County [Extension Educator – Ginny McCarthick]: “The Tishomingo Development Team.” The mission of this project was to “Make Tishomingo a Place where people will want to live and work.” This was accomplished by organizing a

leadership development program for the membership and the community and by taking on projects that would allow the members to learn by doing.

Kiowa County [Extension Educator – Kent Orrell]: “The Kiowa County Leadership Program.” This was a program designed to promote Rural Development through unifying efforts of the residents of Kiowa County to work together and promote Kiowa County and the activities and events in Kiowa County.

Murray County [Extension Educator – Debbie Sharp]: “Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development in Murray County.” Our project can be described with three words “*Bringing People Together*”. For the first time in history two communities have joined hands, developed a strategic plan, and have started moving “together” to enhance tourism while protecting our region’s natural environment. **(A 3-year project.)**

Payne County [Extension Educator – Nathan Anderson]: “Leadership Legacy for Sister Cities Perkins and Yale.” The Leadership Legacy for Sister Cities of Perkins and Yale has planted the seed of leadership in these two communities. The community graduates are growing as leaders and are spreading the leadership seeds in their communities by becoming active and involved to help their community grow.

Pushmataha, Choctaw, and McCurtain Counties [Extension Educators – Nancy Tucker and Laverda Johnson (Choctaw-Pushmataha Unit) and Dennis Bailey (McCurtain County)]: “Junior Southeast Leadership Program.” The objective of the Junior Southeast Leadership program was to strengthen youth leadership and foster a positive change by educating a culturally diverse group of underserved youth in the Southeast Oklahoma counties of Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha in areas of communication skills, government, community resources, parliamentary procedure, arts and humanities, and volunteerism. The final goal for the program was for each county team to develop and implement a countywide service-learning project that would benefit their home county.

Porter, OK in Wagoner County [Extension Educator – Alan Parnell]: “Porter: A Blooming Community.” In this project, leadership training brought forth the opportunity for economic development in Porter. The project focused on common ground development and growth of the community.

Washita County [Extension Educator – Dirk Webb]: “Washita County Leadership and Entrepreneurial Program.” Washita County Leadership & Entrepreneurial program was put in place to develop and cultivate leadership and confidence in individuals. This is critical for tomorrow’s business and civic leaders who will grow in our communities. **(A 3-year project.)**

Quotable Quotes

“This [project] is a definite economic boost for the county and the timing couldn’t be better.”

--Steve Booher,
Editor, *Cherokee Messenger*

“I really want to thank you for planning this. It was great for small rural communities. I know it took planning and time, but it was worth it. Thanks again!”

--Vicki Litsch, Town of Thomas

“This project really allowed potentially new and existing leaders to learn together better ways to accomplish putting the framework of community programs together which will involve more citizens of our community.”

--Roger Cospers,
Clarita City Manager

Concerning the SRDC Conference in Talladega, AL:

“ I see now what I have been doing wrong. This training helped me to see that what I was doing was not bad, but it was how I was presenting it to people that was causing me problems.”

--Winn Rice, Clarita, OK

“We have received more good from the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service and the Greer County Office in the past year than I can ever remember before.”

--T.A. Allen,
President/Greer County Extension Leadership Committee

“This type of training is ultimately beneficial to our county community. Rural areas need this to be able to survive in the future. This is a great effort.”

--Altus Community Leader

“Thanks Gary and the OSU Team. I enjoyed all of the sessions and hopefully I can use my knowledge to help Jackson County and Blair be a better place to live”.

--Blair Community Leader

“You have taken the time to attend conferences, develop information and bring to the city information that we as city council members do not have time to research. With this information, we can do our jobs better.”

--Mayor of Tishomingo

“In a word, we feel your leadership program is mostly responsible for this new found attitude of our citizens and those of the entire county.”

--Wilt Brown, City Manager Hobart.

“This has been an excellent project. We are really getting where we need to be. This grant has brought together the entire county and I hope we can continue the same progress for several years”.

-- Dub Moore,
President First National Bank of Davis

“You can’t put a price on what this grant has done for Murray County. How does one put value on building communities, developing working relationships, connecting to work together and building partnerships that will last for years to come?”

--Murray County Participant

“The kinds of projects that this group is planning are exactly the type that I would be willing to help with if at all possible.”

-- State Rep. Randall Erwin

“We are very pleased with participation especially of new potential leaders stepping up to the commitment. Now they are motivated and interested in certain projects to improve our community. The training is not only providing education but motivation and interest in leaders.”

--Sharon Crisjohn, Yale

“People can alter their lives by altering their attitudes, and I have seen this happen with one of the youth leadership participants in our school.”

-- Malinda Martin,
Counselor, Antlers High School

“If it hadn’t been for the leadership project, we would not have known of all the opportunities and programs available.”

-- Porter Resident

“It is one of a few programs in the county that crosses all boundaries (i.e. social-economic) and brings all its assets to bear on our most pressing problem, loss of business opportunities and out migration of young people.”

-- Doug M., Econ Dev. Director
Washita County

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Initiative First Year Statistics



Total
leaders
trained:
557



Total
newspaper
articles
published:
126



Total
citizen
contacts:
3,145



Total
videos
developed:
6



Total
programs
presented:
112



Total
newsletters
published:
31



Total
radio
broadcasts:
36



Total other
promotional
items
developed:
19