



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
EXTENSION

Strategic Plan

September 2018

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Executive Summary

Over the last century, University of Vermont (UVM) Extension has evolved with the needs of Vermont's communities and in response to changes within higher education. During the last nearly 30 years, UVM Extension has undergone a quiet, significant and unintended restructuring of its organization and operations in response to ever-increasing financial constraints. Despite these challenges, UVM Extension personnel have developed innovative ways to continue to provide programs and services throughout the state. We initiated this strategic planning process with the intent of identifying and planning the actions necessary to grow and sustain our programs for the next 100 years and beyond.

Extension's fiscal challenges stem from a relative decline in federal and state formula funding over the past three decades. This has resulted in:

- a decline in the number of faculty, from over 90 in 1992 to a low of 12 in fiscal year 2018;
- a reduction in our presence across the state, from 14 county offices to 11 regional offices; and
- an entrepreneurial culture for securing grants.

Our operating budget now exceeds \$20 million, but we are approaching the point where our base funding will be spread so thin that we won't be able to sustain our current programs and the administration necessary to support them. This plan reflects organizational and structural adaptations to guide resource allocations to advance the work within the Result Areas.

Our **Purpose** is to:
Cultivate healthy communities

Our **Mission** is to:
Provide and facilitate research, education and outreach with our partners for the people of Vermont

Result Areas

UVM Extension will work towards its stated purpose by organizing its work around four Result Areas over the next seven to ten years:

- Result Area 1: Improve the financial, environmental and social sustainability of Vermont's agriculture, food and forest sectors.
- Result Area 2: Increase the resilience of families and individuals around health, education and personal and family well-being.
- Result Area 3: Engage with communities to support leadership development, capacity building and diverse voices in decision making.

- Result Area 4: Integrate business and conservation to improve the quality of the natural environment where Vermonters live, work and play.

Organizational Strategy

In order to support programs and people, we identified the following set of organization-wide strategies to guide how the entire organization works internally and with external partners in pursuit of the Result Areas:

- Revise and adopt operational structures to facilitate plan implementation.
- Construct a plan for organizational learning and employee advancement.
- Develop a strategic communications plan.
- Standardize internal communications.
- Increase collaboration with academic units.
- Integrate diversity, equity and inclusion practices in all our work.
- Deepen collaboration with external partners.
- Assess implementation of this plan and adjust our strategies as we go forward.

Program Growth and Development

The following strategies aim to support the alignment of UVM Extension's programs with the Result Areas, using inclusive and transparent processes:

- Plan programming and measure success annually through the lens of the Result Areas.
- Develop processes that increase transparency and participation in decision making.
- Rebuild faculty positions.

Funding Extension

The following strategies will guide resource allocations to advance the work within the Result Areas and make the investments necessary to position UVM Extension for long-term financial sustainability:

- Stabilize the organization so it can begin to implement this plan.
- Develop a Strategic Investments Fund.
- Develop data-driven tools to support decision making.
- Increase the financial strength of grant proposals and increase administrative efficiency in grant management.
- Diversify funding sources.

Introduction

Vermont's identity as a state is rooted in its people and the rich landscape that sustains them: tight-knit communities, a culture of civic engagement, agriculture, forests and fresh water. Since its founding in 1913, University of Vermont (UVM) Extension has provided research-facilitated education, outreach and technical assistance in service to Vermont's communities and landscape. This work has improved the quality of lives of Vermonters, supported local economies, and helped preserve the state's natural environment.

Over the last century, UVM Extension has evolved with the needs of Vermont communities and in response to changes within higher education. During the last nearly 30 years, UVM Extension has undergone a significant restructuring of its organization and operations in response to ever-increasing financial constraints. Despite these challenges, UVM Extension personnel have developed innovative ways to continue to provide programs and services throughout the state. We initiated this strategic planning process with the intent of identifying and planning the actions necessary to grow and sustain our programs for the next 100 years and beyond.

Context for Change

Extension's fiscal challenges stem from a relative decline (when accounting for inflation) in federal and state formula funding, also known as base funding, over the past three decades. The dynamic of increasing operating costs and flat funding has created a structural deficit in Extension's budget. As a result, Extension has made budgetary adjustments to accommodate this relative funding decline, which has resulted in significant changes in personnel. A major change has been the dramatic reduction in faculty numbers, from over 90 full time Extension faculty in 1990, to just 15 at the start of fiscal year (FY) 2019.

In addition to these changes in personnel, Extension has had to make two important operational changes in response to its budgetary challenges. One change is related to its office structure. Prior to 1990, UVM Extension had field offices located in every county. In response to ongoing budgetary issues, Extension chose to eliminate the county office structure (and with it "county agents") and replaced the county-based system with a regional system of smaller offices often focused on a limited number of programs. The second change was to adopt an entrepreneurial culture with respect to grants. This was a conscious decision made over ten years ago when faculty and staff were encouraged to be entrepreneurial with respect to finding funds to support their work. This "live off the land" strategy aimed to reduce reliance on formula funds and increase their control over the fate of their programs. This helped to stretch the "buying power" of base funds and helped to grow Extension's annual financial footprint to over \$20 million. In 2001, grants accounted for 14 percent of Extension's budget. By FY 2018, grant dollars comprised over 50 percent of Extension's budget, largely awarded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and supported to varying degrees by Extension base funds, which covered match requirements, facilities and administration (F&A), head tax, space charges and various administrative costs.

Although UVM Extension has grown its financial and programmatic footprint to over \$20 million a year, the organization is approaching the point where the erosion in the “buying” power of its base formula funds will no longer be able to sustain its current deployment of nearly 100 programs and the administration necessary to support them. Without a meaningful and steady increase in formula funding, Extension will either need to find new resources to support its programs and administration or begin to trim and eliminate programs and personnel. The latter option would significantly reduce the value Extension provides to Vermont and UVM.

To forestall, ameliorate or, ideally, reverse this negative outcome, UVM Extension has identified strategies that continue creating value for Vermont and UVM commensurate with its current profile. The strategic planning process aimed to:

- 1) identify ways to establish a stable and predictable fiscal situation for the next five to seven years;
- 2) enhance Extension’s ability to compete for resources in a resource-limited world;
- 3) find the resources necessary to offset the erosive force of the ongoing structural deficit;
- 4) identify the programs most needed and which Extension can best deliver;
- 5) assist in aligning its decision-making processes with its programmatic and financial goals; and
- 6) support the reunification of Extension with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs).

This plan articulates a thematic vision for UVM Extension, presented as Result Areas and strategies to pursue them. The Result Areas look out over a seven- to ten-year period. The strategies will be implemented over a shorter time frame of three to five years and, when completed, will make significant progress towards the Result Areas. This framework is supported by organization-wide strategies that, when implemented, create the necessary operational processes and structures to successfully navigate the difficult challenges of re-orienting programming, decision making and change across our organization.

The Vermont Context

Vermont is fundamentally rural. Only one metropolitan area and three micropolitan areas lie within the state; 10 of 14 counties lie outside these areas, yet still account for 46 percent of the state’s households. Consequently, rural community development is a natural priority for the state, especially through promoting small-scale agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation.

Agriculture and forestry are at the heart of Vermont culture and heritage. Vermont’s commitment to quality, integrity and sustainability has brought the state national fame in many agricultural sectors, and the Vermont brand is respected across the food and forestry industries. Vermont is a national and regional leader in agriculture. Of all the maple syrup produced in the country, 42 percent is produced here, and agricultural sales (including milk production) outstrip those of all other New England states. Vermont has more per-capita

organic farms and cheese awards than any other state and is a leader in the local-food movement through its farmer's markets and local-foods programs in schools as well as in overall local-food purchases. Remarkably, Vermont's landscape is 74 percent forested—this forested state accomplishes these agricultural feats on about one-fifth of its land area. In contrast, timber-industry activity is a lower priority for forest landowners.

Though we cherish our farms and farmers, only about 28,000 (8 percent) of Vermont's employed workforce are farmers. However, in recent years, both the number of farms and the number of farmers has been increasing, and the Vermont farmers new to agriculture account for about one-sixth of the total. The local foods movement is a key part of the explanation for this growth. Local food sales accounted for \$189 million (6.9 percent) of total food sales in Vermont in 2014, leading to over \$200 million dollars remaining in Vermont's economy.¹ From 2009 through 2015, Vermont experienced 10.5 percent job growth in the farm and food sectors of the economy (+6,073 jobs).²

Increased demand for local food means more family farms and small businesses can be successful and will make more local food available at regular grocery stores and small-town convenience stores. In this rural state of Vermont, attention to number, not size, of distributors is key to providing for our rural population.

From its inception in 1914, the role of the national Cooperative Extension System has been to work with land-grant colleges and universities to increase food production through improved agricultural production by enhancing farm production, marketing of farm products, building the agricultural labor force, and protecting the health of farmers. UVM Extension, however, is a changing organization in a changing social and natural landscape. It now integrates higher education, research, and outreach to help Vermonters put knowledge to work not only in agriculture and forestry, but also in business development, family and wellness, food and nutrition, and horticulture. UVM Extension continues a commitment to providing local education and advice with offices in 11 of Vermont's 14 counties. Building strong communities across the state is a thematic common ground that unites all of UVM Extension's work.

After nearly 20 years of independence, UVM Extension has been reintegrated into CALS. Bringing the two units together again will require a cultural integration that balances research, teaching and outreach, ideally informing the success of both the Extension and academic missions. We require a refreshed vision, realized in a strategic plan, that takes advantage of the strengths of each unit in serving UVM students and Vermont residents in the context of the state's 21st century social, economic and natural environment.

¹ VT Farm to Plate <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/getting-to-2020/1-total-local-consumption#indicator-population-indicator-2>

² VT Farm to Plate <http://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/getting-to-2020/17-jobs-and-establishments>

If UVM Extension follows this plan, it will stand out as an important and valuable organization that can help foundations, philanthropic donors and federal and state agencies accomplish their goals. In so doing, it will enhance its competitive abilities to acquire more resources to continue to offset its structural deficit and sustain, if not grow, the value it provides to Vermont and UVM.

Purpose and Mission

At the foundation of UVM Extension are its purpose and mission. To arrive at these statements, we considered the following:

- Statements should answer what UVM Extension does (purpose) and how it does it (mission).
- These statements are meant to describe a lofty but achievable end-state.
- They include simple, easily-recalled language that can be used by faculty and staff.
- They recognize the prior mission statement was not inaccurate but was too long.

Given these principles, UVM Extension's purpose and mission are:

Our **purpose** is to:
Cultivate Healthy Communities

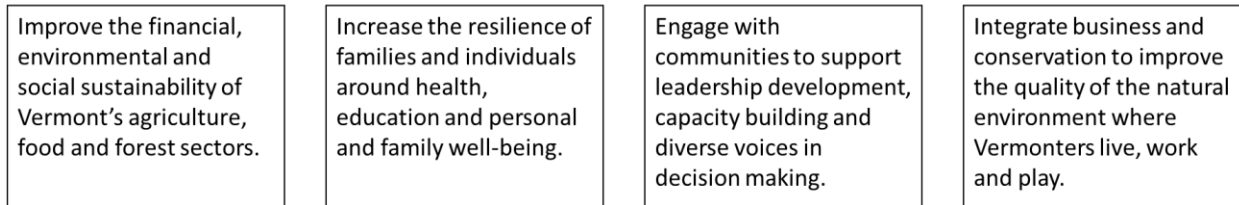
Our **mission** is to:
Provide and facilitate research, education and outreach with our partners
for the people of Vermont

Result Areas

To make progress on the purpose, UVM Extension will orient its work around four Result Areas. These provide organizational focus and direction. A number of limited, time-bound strategies implemented over a three- to five-year period, will support Each Result Area. When completed, these strategies will make significant progress towards the results. When taken together, this results framework is designed to provide boundaries for decision making about future investments and effort while remaining flexible enough for Extension to adapt to unforeseen challenges and opportunities.

UVM Extension will work towards its purpose by organizing its work around these four Result Areas over the next seven to ten years.

Cultivate Healthy Communities



Result Area Strategies

Each of these Result Areas are presented below with their shorter-term strategies. They are listed in no order. Also included are focus areas that provide illustrative topics and themes that would be included in each result area.

Result Area 1: Improve the financial, environmental and social sustainability of Vermont's agriculture, food and forest sectors

Vermont's agriculture, food and forest sectors are fundamental to the existence of a vibrant economy in our small, rural state. These sectors also contribute to the state's character and landscape in many other ways. They help shape our identity and have framed a way of life for many generations and continue to do so today.

The most recent USDA Census of Agriculture (2012) indicates that Vermont's agriculture sector is the largest in New England from an economic perspective, with dairy and maple dominating. However, the outlook for dairy has become increasingly challenging in recent years, as milk prices have remained low. Although the number of dairy farms has been steadily dwindling, Vermont has experienced increases in other types of farms such as those producing fruits, vegetables and livestock. Diversified farms are sprinkled across the landscape. A variety of farm types have developed value-added products, agritourism and other innovations that increase their viability. Broadly speaking, innovations in the Vermont food system have been recognized across the region and the nation, particularly those related to small- and mid-scale operations. Vermont is also known for our focus on environmental sustainability, with a substantial number of farms using organic and other methods to increase system resilience.

In addition to advances in food production and processing, Vermont has developed novel approaches to food distribution. The legislatively-supported Farm to Plate initiative has

strengthened collaborative efforts across the state to create and expand markets for local food products. Local sales have grown significantly, as have the methods to distribute food products. In addition to strong direct marketing channels (e.g., farmers' markets, CSA/community-supported agriculture food shares, farm stands), distribution by food hubs and a host of other innovations are helping to strengthen the local and regional food economy. Work is underway to increase availability and access to food resources for underserved populations. Among those challenged to meet their food-related needs are some of the very people involved in food production, including farmers and migrant farmworkers. Workers throughout the food sector often lack access to essential resources such as health care and adequate housing. Despite the many advances in Vermont's agriculture and food sectors, education and technical assistance are needed to promote financial, environmental and social sustainability.

Similarly, Vermont's forests play a significant role in the vitality of our economy, our communities and our environment. But challenges exist, and support is needed. According to the National Land Cover Database, Vermont is 74 percent forested, the fourth most forested state in the country. From the street trees of downtown Burlington to cherished Green Mountains, trees and forests make up a significant part of the landscape in which Vermonters live, work and play. We depend on our forests for a multitude of ecosystem services including water quality protection, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, clean air, carbon sequestration and scenic beauty. In addition, our forests provide an important economic base for employment, tourism and recreation. Forestry and wood products manufacturing contributed \$861 million to Vermont's economy in 2011. Accounting for multipliers and adding \$1.9 million from forest recreation contributed a total of \$3.4 billion and 20,605 jobs.³ However, our forested landscape faces many challenges — from threats such as climate change, the introduction and spread of new invasive pests and diseases, forest land development and an aging landowner population, to a struggling forestry workforce and a forest products industry in decline nationwide. After decades of increasing, Vermont's forest cover is beginning to decrease, as more land is developed to meet housing demands and less agricultural land reverts to forest.

A thriving economy, functioning natural systems and high quality of life for Vermonters rely on maintaining healthy forests and agricultural lands across the state's landscape. Through longstanding relationships with Vermont communities and a nationwide network of expertise, UVM Extension is uniquely positioned to help address these challenges by providing and facilitating research, education and outreach that supports the financial, environmental and social sustainability of Vermont's agriculture, food and forest sectors.

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³ The Economic Importance of Vermont's Forest Based Economy 2013, North East State Foresters Association. http://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Forest_and_Forestry/Vermont_Forests/Library/NEFA13_Econ_Importance_VT_final_web_Jan29.pdf

Three- to five-year strategies to achieve this result:

- Create opportunities for engagement in market development.
- Support individuals and business owners to implement recommended practices that accomplish owner values and goals.
- Promote the development and application of conservation practices on farm and forest land (connect to Results Area/RA 4).
- Increase Extension’s involvement in and partnerships for intergenerational transfer and business succession.
- Develop and deliver education and training on farm, forest, food safety, health and compliance issues.
- Address social justice issues for workers, farmers and businesses (e.g., access to the benefits of society such as information, expertise, healthcare, decent housing and fair wages).

FOCUS AREAS
● Agricultural- and forest - related business viability
● Farm and forest stewardship
● Intergenerational transfer
● Regulatory compliance
● Social justice

Result Area 2: Increase the resilience of families and individuals around health, education and personal and family well-being

Vermonters face a variety of challenges related to economic inequality. Impoverished individuals and families, who experience the greatest risks related to health, housing and food, have the least capacity to recover from shocks to their financial security. UVM Extension can play a critical role in increasing the resilience of families and individuals by providing programs that promote health, education, and personal and family well-being.

Geographic isolation, low-density settlement patterns, dependence on agriculture, continued population loss and economic distress characterize Vermont’s rural communities. Poverty and food insecurity contribute to poor health and poor nutrition. The percentage of food insecure households in Vermont increased from an average 9.1 percent between 1999-2001 to an average of 13.2 percent between 2011-2013 (Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, 2014). In 2013, 16 percent of Vermonters received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP), representing nearly one in seven Vermonters (Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, 2014). In Vermont, 25 percent of adults report being obese, and another 37 percent are overweight (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Overweight, obese and sedentary lifestyles often lead to or worsen many chronic diseases. The number of Vermont adults reporting chronic conditions increases with age. Among Vermonters age 65 and older, 88 percent report having one or more chronic conditions and 20 percent report having four or more (Vermont Department of Health/VDH, 2005). The prevalence of obesity among youth is troubling as well, with 24 percent of Vermont students in grades eight to twelve overweight or at risk of becoming overweight (VDH, 2006).

Although considerable research and policy attention has focused on problems associated with substance use and abuse in urban settings, studies show that rural youth also are at risk for early onset of substance use and its associated negative consequences, including chemical dependency, delinquency and reduced educational and vocational potential (Cronk & Sarvela, 1997). Providing youth with opportunities to build connections, whether to neighbors, schools, community organizations, or activities that support healthy behaviors, is central to helping them build a sense of belonging, a necessary ingredient for resilience.

Building that connection is even more critical, however, with a declining population. According to "Advance Vermont", a working group of Vermont stakeholders addressing workforce needs, "... current demographic declines and college enrollment trends will lead to a net loss of 6,664 working-age Vermonters with a degree or credential of value by the year 2025. Vermont has not yet taken significant steps needed to increase the educational level of its youngest adults. Twenty-six percent of Vermont's class of 2012 high school graduates had aspirations to go to college but did not do so. As soon as 2020, two-thirds of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education ..." According to Fortune 500 companies, the top five qualities and skills workers need are teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal, communicating and listening. Vermonters need to be competent in both life and job skills to be successful and economically stable.

UVM Extension can play a critical role in helping families, adults and youth gain mastery of skills while building connections to each other and to communities of place and practice.

Three- to five-year strategies to achieve this result:

- Increase Vermonters' ability to access, choose, grow and prepare healthy food.
- Reduce risky behaviors by offering preventative services and programs.
- Increase the number of Vermonters who attain education credentials.
- Deliver educational activities that build a workforce that can contribute to Vermont's economic growth.
- Participate in work that contributes to policy, systems, and environmental level change that contributes to resilience.

FOCUS AREAS
● Nutrition education
● Life and job skill education
● Drug and alcohol abuse prevention
● Family education
● Farm safety education

Result Area 3: Engage with communities to support leadership development, capacity building, and diverse voices in decision making

Since its founding in the 18th century, the heart of Vermont has been robust communities. Vermont is famous for its active citizenry, vibrant town meetings, and for the ease with which "regular people" can connect with state leaders.

Vermont is a small state, with an economy historically driven by agriculture. In the 21st century, Vermont finds itself in a difficult spot. It ranks 33rd in per capita GDP (gross domestic product) and ranks second for the oldest population. Most of the state’s 251 towns and cities are rural—characterized by geographic isolation, low-density settlement patterns, dependence on agriculture, continued population loss, and, all too often, economic distress. These communities have long known that they must find common cause and share resources to advance their well-being. Tough economic realities, severe challenges to the agricultural economy (particularly dairy, which is 75 percent of the sector), and a dispersed and aging population make this increasingly difficult.

UVM Extension can play a pivotal role in helping communities improve quality of life, using its expertise in community development. Community development is “a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.”⁴ In Vermont, community development is the linchpin that supports UVM Extension’s work in areas such as agriculture and natural resources. As the agriculture sector suffers, for example, UVM Extension can engage with communities to address the ripple effects of those challenges.

UVM Extension’s faculty and staff have expertise in three fundamental areas that can support a community’s ability to identify its assets and address its challenges. We teach communities the skills of effective leadership, how to develop the capacity to get things done, and the importance of ensuring a variety of voices are engaged to create community solutions that are comprehensive and serve the public good.

Vermont is blessed with many nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life in our state. Only UVM Extension, however, can bring the power of applied research to support a broad range of community needs. We are the only research university in the state, and as a land-grant institution, we are charged with serving Vermonters year after year, through effective outreach at the community level.

Three- to five-year strategies to achieve this result:

- Identify and promote characteristics of highly successful communities and economies to inform community decision making.
- Cultivate new and support existing leaders who are dedicated to building strong communities.
- Identify and share best practices for community engagement to increase civic participation and promote civil discourse.
- Catalyze asset-based community and economic development projects with diverse groups and organizations.

<p>FOCUS AREAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Leadership development● Local governance● Community building● Workforce development● Civic engagement

⁴ <http://www.peernetbc.com/what-is-community-development>

Result Area 4: Integrate business and conservation to improve the quality of the natural environment where Vermonters live, work and play

The quality of Vermont’s natural environment is critical to the health of some key industries associated with Vermont’s identity: agriculture, forestry and tourism. Key resources—such as clean water, toxin-free soils and bucolic landscapes—are all vulnerable to compromise without sustainable management, arising from high-quality research and the support of Vermonters informed about the issues. In recent years, with the increasing importance of organic agriculture and water quality, it has become increasingly important to know the total chemical profile of crop plants grown in Vermont. This in turn has led to an expanded attention to the biology and chemistry of the soil environment. At the same time, rising levels of nutrients in key water bodies such as Lake Champlain have led to adverse impacts on the environmental aesthetic of the lake and the development of algal blooms including toxic cyanobacteria, raising risks to the security of public health. The health of Vermont forests is only as good as its tree species, and increasingly more of these species are affected by pathogens and invasive insects. Vermont scientists working on the altitudinal distribution of tree species in the forests of Vermont have documented the effects of climate change on forests.

The natural environment is also key to the quality of life for Vermonters in a broader context. Climate change impacts include more frequent and more intense weather events such as Hurricane Irene, as well as changes in average annual temperatures. These impacts directly affect the welfare, public health and financial well-being of Vermonters. Hence, attention to long-term solutions, grounded in research and education about climate change adaptation and mitigation, will lead to greater security for all the state’s residents.

Finally, Vermont is blessed with a unique and diverse natural heritage, which is as unperturbed as that of any state in the region; preservation of this biodiversity is an investment in the future. Our forest and lake ecosystems harbor resources with potential value to public health and human enterprise that are, as yet, completely unknown to us, to be discovered in future inquiries.

Three- to five-year strategies to achieve this result:

- Provide educational resources that help Vermonters reduce pollution in Lake Champlain and other waterways.
- Improve stewardship of natural resources on public and private lands and waterways.
- Promote strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation, especially for agricultural and forestry-related businesses.
- Develop and increase use of renewable energy sources, especially for agricultural and forestry-related businesses.
- Translate research and client wisdom about the natural environment to promote environmentally sustainable enterprises.

FOCUS AREAS

- Water quality
- Forestry
- Climate change
- Renewable energy

Organizational Strategy

To support its programs and people, Extension is committed to adopting the following organization-wide strategies to guide how the entire organization works internally and with external partners in pursuit of the Result Areas. See [Appendix 1: Implementation Memo](#) for a list of initial actions to start moving the organizations towards full implementation of this plan.

Revise and adopt operational structures to facilitate plan implementation

- Orient faculty and program staff work around Result Areas through the creation of Result Area Teams.
- Reorganize the director's cabinet to reflect the CALS reintegration and Result Area framework.
- See [Appendix 2: Operational Structures](#) for descriptions of these groups.

Construct a plan for organizational learning and employee advancement

- Amend the annual performance evaluation process to include a review of program faculty and staff to identify those who have grown in their positions and who should be supported by additional base funding.
- Identify and provide the training and support necessary to help Extension personnel adapt to changing organizational needs.
- Continue supervisor training on performance evaluations and merit increases.
- Reinforce to supervisors and supervisees the importance of discussing professional development planning during annual performance evaluations.
- Create and make more transparent the career ladder process.
- Explore the use of merit bonuses.
- Raise gift funds for a staff professional development fund to augment the existing Bradlee Fund.

Develop a strategic communications plan

- Create a cohesive plan for communications within each Result Area and across Extension. Include messaging, marketing and branding for a variety of audiences (including those internal to the university).
- Consider using the *Start with Why* process to identify the fundamental reasons why people are inspired to work for and partner with Extension.
- Build audience-specific messaging around what Extension accomplishes, how it links research to change, and how it improves the health of Vermont communities. A preliminary outline for a messaging strategy is contained in [Appendix 3: Messaging Extension](#).
- Highlight Extension's unique ability to link university research through programs to real and meaningful change on the ground.

- Implement the use of standard digital tools to support shared needs throughout Extension, including Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software, email marketing and survey tools.
- Expand on and improve the existing relationship with University Communications.

Standardize internal communications

- Adopt regular communications practices to disseminate information from Extension leadership throughout the organization. Include updates on organizational budget status, fundraising, grants, etc.
- Reorganize the director's council to facilitate communication within Extension and between Extension and CALS (see [Appendix 4: Internal Communications](#)).
- Build communication functions into the Result Area Teams to ensure co-leads stay up to date on activities in other Result Areas, thereby increasing the potential for connectivity and collaboration.

Increase collaboration with academic units

- Continue and expand opportunities (and incentives when possible) to encourage collaboration between other groups or departments on campus and Extension to leverage research, knowledge, technical skills and funding.
- Ensure coordination with the CALS Transition Team and adapt implementation of this strategic plan, as necessary.

Integrate diversity, equity and inclusion practices in all our work

- Create a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force that examines diversity within Extension and identifies best practices for all Extension personnel to incorporate into their daily work.
- Align efforts with existing efforts within CALS and the university.
- Utilize resources from Extension and partners to ensure Extension stays current with culturally-appropriate practices that respect a variety of identities.
- Include a plenary presentation on diversity, equity and inclusion at each year's Extension Professional Improvement Conference (EPIC).

Deepen collaboration with external partners

- Map Extension's network to identify existing and potential partners.
- Develop an annual partnership plan for each Result Area that defines engagement with partners and the role UVM Extension is playing (lead, support, research, etc.).
- Invest in strategic partnerships that span multiple years, Result Areas, strategies, and programs (i.e., one partner may engage with more than one program).

- Create and support regular feedback loops with partners and stakeholders. Include mechanisms that offer opportunities for sharing progress and generating new ideas.
- Innovate and adapt programs to meet the changing needs of communities.
- Coordinate Extension work with state, multi-state and federal priorities. Share, where possible, similar measures of success and develop aligned implementation plans.
- Repopulate the Extension Advisory Board to include community partners, donors, supporters, and representatives from within the University. Coordinate, when possible with the CALS Advisory Board to enhance complementarity.
- See [Appendix 5: Engaging with Partners](#) for a set of potential activities to support partner relationships.

Assess implementation of this plan and adjust our strategies as we go forward

- Develop implementation work plan and review monthly.
- Check in regularly with the cabinet, council, Result Area teams and Extension personnel writ large.
- Revise and publish updated plan, incorporating what we've learned, by May 2019.
- Develop plan for ongoing management of new activities and responsibilities.

Program Growth and Development

The following strategies aim to support the alignment of UVM Extension's programs with the Result Areas, using inclusive and transparent processes.

Plan programming and measure success annually through the lens of the Result Areas

- Identify current programs and funding within each Result Area.
- Identify gaps and needs for additional programming and funding, as well as factors that may warrant program sunseting.
- For each Result Area, develop goals and metrics to measure program effectiveness, quality, progress, reach and coverage.
- Develop methods to account for overlap across multiple Result Areas (which is appropriate and understandable given that many Extension projects address complex problems).
- Align Albert reporting with Result Area strategies.

Develop processes that increase transparency and participation in decision making

- Develop inclusive processes that inform centralized decision making in support of organization-wide goals. Such processes will address:
 - Grant proposals
 - Income/Expense activities
 - Base-funded activities

- Gifts and foundations
- Fiscal considerations will inform but not dictate decisions. We will weight non-fiscal considerations based on their value to Extension and the state. [Appendix 6: Grant Proposal Evaluation Process](#) describes the proposed process.
- Clarify the use of the word “program” within Extension.
- Identify and develop process efficiencies where possible. Minimize bureaucracy and duplication by coordinating with, or replacing, existing processes.

Rebuild faculty positions

- Determine priority positions and develop a plan for filling them over the next three years, based on current capacity and as funding becomes available in the future.
- Explore joint faculty and staff appointments with academic units, when appropriate.
- Plan programmatic continuity and succession, accounting for retirements, resignations, unexpected departures and program sunseting.
- Support mentorship for new faculty.
- Consider the optimal ratio of faculty to program staff and administrative staff.

Funding Extension

The following strategies will guide resource allocations to advance the work within the Result Areas and make the investments necessary to situate UVM Extension for long-term financial sustainability.

Definitions of Fiscal Terms

- **Base Funds** = the sum total of:
 - Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension and other federal “formula” funds (Fund 330)
 - General operating funds (Fund 100)
- **Carryover Funds** = surplus from previous fiscal years. General operating funds surplus is in fund 108; surplus in formula funds is identified in annual fiscal report.
- **Cost Share** (aka “match”) = a financial or in-kind contribution from the university towards a grant (usually provided through the commitment of base-funded salary).
- **Facilities and Administration (F&A)** = the portion of a grant award earmarked to cover indirect expenses. The F&A “rate” is the percentage that a particular grant allows to go toward indirect (e.g., “the F&A rate of this USDA grant is 18 percent”). Under incentive-based budgeting (IBB), all F&A revenue is “booked” to the college or school’s dean’s office. A percentage (variable year-to-year) of the F&A revenue is charged as a fee to the Office of Vice President for Research (OVPR).
- **Formula Funds** (more recently referred to by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture/NIFA as *Capacity Grants*) = federal funding allocated annually to land-grant

institutions in every state, using a formula to determine the award to each institution. UVM Extension receives four formula funds: Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension Special Needs, and the Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA). These funds are used only for payroll. Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension and Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension Special Needs require a 1:1 cost share match.

- **Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension** = the federal law that established the national Cooperative Extension System in 1914, and which provides an annual appropriation to public land-grant universities. Requires a 1:1 match.
- **General Operating Funds** = revenue from a variety of sources, primarily a portion of the allocation from the state allocation to UVM, used to support UVM Extension operations.
- **Head Tax** = the annual charge associated with every employee (not including temporary employees), paid by the unit to University administration. This charge is \$8,000 in FY19.
- **Incentive Based Budgeting (IBB)** = the University-wide budgeting model that uses formulas to determine the revenue allocations to, and the fees due from, a university unit in relation to university administration. This budget model is referred to as *responsibility-based management*.

Stabilize the organization so it can begin to implement this plan

- Balance the use of general operating funds (gifts and endowments, equipment reserves, Fund 100) relative to Smith-Lever federal formula funds (Fund 330), as Smith-Lever “surpluses” can be rolled over to the next fiscal year. This will make surplus easier to access and will minimize IBB indirects. Set a goal for how much money will be used from each source each year.
- Use a percentage of Extension’s “savings balances” (Fund 108 and others) to backfill base funds, thus offsetting the structural deficit, for the next three to five years. This will create a relatively stable and predictable operating environment during this timeframe.
- Modify operating procedures and budgeting processes to align with CALS systems and strategic plan goals.

Develop a Strategic Investments Fund

- Build a strategic investment fund that holds unrestricted funds. Consider using these funds for a variety of activities, such as seed grants or replacing small grants that are inefficient to administer.

Develop data-driven tools to support decision making

To adhere to this strategic plan, Extension needs to differentiate and rank proposals and programs relative to mission alignment and operational feasibility. Evaluating existing work and

new opportunities using these criteria will guide Extension resources into alignment with the Result Areas and move the entire organization towards its purpose and mission.

To support this analysis, Extension will develop a set of quantitative and qualitative tools that provide the information and analytical lens necessary for leadership to evaluate new opportunities. These include:

- A data set capable of producing reports that communicate the following information to a wide audience:
 - the overall fiscal status of the organizations
 - how base funding is allocated (Result Areas and by “grouping”)
 - how grant funding is allocated (across result areas; use of cost share)
- A calculator to determine the relative affordability of grant proposals
- A qualitative rubric to evaluate grant alignment with Extension goals

[Appendix 7: Data Tools and Reports](#) includes details on these proposed tools.

Increase the financial strength of grant proposals and increase administrative efficiency in grant management

- Use program transparency to help identify and secure fewer, larger, higher quality grants to support programs.
- Set and communicate annual goals and performance, including any expectations for collective revenue targets.
- Consider setting a minimum grant size below which the cabinet will review and determine whether to use the strategic investment fund instead.
- Consider setting a higher threshold for the minimum effort allowed on a grant.
- Track annual average awarded and recovered F&A rate with the goal of increasing the effective F&A rate year over year.
- Clarify to what extent these strategies will apply to subawards.

Diversify funding sources

- Track changing budget composition over time with the goal of the overall budget composition reflecting a lower percentage coming from grants, increased longevity of awards, and larger grants—all critical to the long-term stability of Extension.
- Increase gift funding through UVM Foundation by coordinating asks with this plan.
- Explore the use of fee-for-service models when and where appropriate.
- Consider alternative sources of funding, including corporate partnerships and teaching.

Appendices

These appendices provide additional details on proposed implementation activities. They represent the moment-in-time version of this work at the time of plan publication. They will be updated as implementation unfolds.

Appendix 1: Implementation Memo

This memo lays out the actions for the first six months of implementation (September 2018 through February 2019), which will move us towards full integration of the plan into Extension's everyday work. If you have questions on the scope or status of activities, please contact Alison Nihart at alison.nihart@uvm.edu or 802-656-3831.

Launch Result Area Teams

- Leads: Chuck Ross, Dan Lerner, Alison Nihart
- Initial Tasks:
 - Develop Result Area co-lead role description and method for recognizing work associated with the role
 - Identify Result Area co-leads
 - Establish open monthly meetings
 - Draft annual work plan

Adopt new cabinet structure

- Lead: Chuck Ross
- Initial Tasks:
 - Establish standing meeting times
 - Develop agenda template

Plan new faculty positions

- Leads: Chuck Ross, Dan Lerner
- Initial tasks:
 - Assess budget capacity to determine number of new hires
 - Identify priority positions with faculty leadership
 - Pursue administrative approval to initiate recruitment of initial hires

Initiate Strategic Communications Process

- Lead: Dan Lerner
- Initial Tasks:
 - Convene relevant personnel
 - Define scope of work and timeline

- Inventory existing activities, audiences reached and goals
- Consider new activities, audiences, and goals

Initiate grant proposal evaluation process

- Leads: Dan Lerner, Result Area co-leads, Alison Nihart
- Initial Tasks:
 - Pilot grant affordability calculator with small group
 - Develop qualitative rubric
 - Educate principal investigators (PIs) and supervisors on process
 - Create calendar for grant reviews

Develop Relational Database

- Leads: Gary Deziel, Alison Nihart
- Initial Tasks:
 - Identify required capabilities
 - Create database with tables, queries
 - Create report visualizations

Convene Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force

- Leads: cabinet
- Initial Tasks:
 - Identify interested participants and chair
 - Define scope of work
 - Schedule monthly meetings

Assess implementation process and revise as necessary

- Leads: Alison Nihart, Chuck Ross, Dan Lerner
- Initial tasks
 - Develop implementation work plan and timeline; review monthly
 - Conduct quarterly check-ins with Result Area leads, supervisors and PIs

Appendix 2: Operational Structures

Director's Cabinet

The director's cabinet is an administrative leadership committee that supports human resource, financial, operations and programmatic decision making. The cabinet should be organized to support such decisions in the context of aligning Extension's work with the Result Areas, funding strategy and overall organizational strategy.

Members (up to 10)

- Director
- Associate director
- HR administrator
- Budget manager
- 4-H program director
- Center for Sustainable Agriculture director
- 4 Result Area co-leads

Charge

Provide overarching administrative oversight on the use of organizational resources (financial and HR).

Responsibilities

- Monitor overall organizational fiscal health, operations, and facilities.
 - Make recommendations to director on grant proposals.
 - Review non-grant activities on a semi-annual basis (income-expense and base funded activities).
 - Discuss emerging strategic, political, and directional questions.
 - Make decisions on sensitive HR topics (in executive session without Result Area co-leads).
-

Result Area Teams

Extension faculty and program staff will have the opportunity to participate in Result Area teams that meet regularly and provide overarching guidance on programmatic direction in support of alignment with the Result Areas.

Charge

Provide oversight and guidance on program direction based on Result Area goals, strategies and objectives.

Co-Leads (8)

There are two co-leads for each Result Area Team (likely one faculty member and one staff member) who will work closely with the associate director to convene the team and facilitate the work. The cabinet will recruit potential co-leads and the director will appoint them. Co-leads will serve a two-year term, subject to renewal; terms will be offset so only four people are transitioning in or out of the role each year. A role description will outline their responsibilities. This description will define the scope and expectations of the role, including an estimate of the full time equivalent (FTE) required. The selection of individuals to serve in these roles will be negotiated in collaboration with supervisors, and the commitment will be recognized through adjustments in base funding compensation and/or a commensurate reduction in other work as appropriate.

Participants

Any Extension personnel whose work relates to the Result Area. Supervisors of program staff are expected to participate on a regular basis to stay up to date on organizational direction.

Responsibilities

- Identify goals and timelines for advancing Result Area strategies.
- Determine metrics for measuring progress towards goals, including the review and potential revision of existing Albert indicators.
- Attend meetings on a monthly or quarterly basis to facilitate collaboration within Extension.
- Inventory existing programs and funding.
- Identify gaps and opportunities for programs to advance Result Areas; make recommendations to the cabinet.
- Support development, coordination, and improvement of existing programs.
- Develop joint proposals for programs and funding.
- Solicit input from partners and stakeholders.
- Promote funding opportunities.
- Assist with communications about the Result Area.
- Create opportunities for learning across Result Areas with learning teams focusing on audience, approach and product delivery.
- Advance recommendations to the cabinet.
- Participate in planning and execution of Extension Program meetings.

Appendix 3: Messaging Extension

Extension has broad constituencies and they address an extensive range of topics, both creating opportunities and dealing with challenges. Extension must have a clear brand with a clear purpose and mission, while also delivering specific messages to different constituencies and communities. To do this work well, Extension must take action to:

- Define and understand its key messages and constituency groups (see below).
- Clearly define how Extension approaches its work, which is through a range of Extension practices across a broad number of focus areas. There is a persistent perception that Extension is only about delivering direct support to farms and farmers. Although this is an important part of Extension, it is not the only way Extension delivers results.
- Continue to use a consistent logo and tagline (mission) on all project materials.
- Update general material to focus on presenting the mission, purpose and four Result Areas.
- Ensure each person on the team is able to present this framework when asked what Extension does, before focusing on the work specific to that client.
- Review standard operating procedures for marketing and branding to ensure they reflect these changes.

Key messages:

- Why we exist: Purpose and Mission
- UVM Extension works with its partners to make progress in four Result Areas.
- Within these four areas, we focus on a range of important topics. Building community is the theme that unifies these efforts.
- The services and information we provide are based on University research and the best knowledge available. We strive to ensure this information is unbiased, so it is trusted and can be used in rational decision making.
- We create and deliver applied learning opportunities through real-life problem solving backed with university-based research.

Below is a list of key audiences for UVM marketing efforts.

Key Audiences	UVM Extension to be recognized for ...
Clients and stakeholders (and potentials) who we serve Collaborators and partners	Services and information we provide are based on university research and the best knowledge available. Creating and delivering applied learning opportunities.
Funders and donors	Thinking big, being able to convene a range of different partners, and having the capacity to implement your ideas.

<p>Federal and state agencies (with whom we implement programs)</p>	<p>Sharing unbiased information with all. Providing trusted, unbiased information for good decision making. Serving as a natural convener/facilitator. Supporting existing agendas, and as a partner for implementation to leverage limited resources.</p>
<p>Policy makers and legislators</p>	<p>Driving good decision making that can be trusted. Sharing unbiased information with all. Providing trusted, unbiased information for good decision making. Delivering high impact for investment. Wise stewards of state money.</p>
<p>News and media (how the information reaches Vermont people in any relationship to UVM)</p>	<p>Connecting Result Areas with specific work, and always connecting this work to UVM. The four Result Areas we are working to achieve, highlighting specific projects within.</p>
<p>Public, farmers, taxpayers, and those who can benefit from our programs in a secondary way</p>	<p>Cultivating healthy communities by providing and facilitating research, education, and outreach with our partners for the people of Vermont. In doing so, we are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● helping grow Vermont’s economy, ● supporting healthy individuals and families, ● building communities, and ● conserving and protecting Vermont’s natural resources.

Appendix 4: Internal Communications

Director's Council

The director's council includes individuals responsible for communicating on a variety of operational and programmatic issues within Extension, CALS and UVM.

Members

- Director
- Associate director
- Human resources administrator
- Budget manager
- 8 Result Area co-leads
- Information technology
- Communications
- Planning/reporting
- Administration
- State 4-H director
- Director of Center for Sustainable Agriculture
- Faculty Senate representative
- Faculty Union representative
- Staff Council representative
- Development officer
- Internship coordinator

Responsibilities

- Provide written updates and actionable information to the director for monthly email dissemination to all Extension personnel.
- Host monthly "open mic" calls with all Extension personnel.

Appendix 5: Engaging with Partners

Extension will develop opportunities for ongoing connectivity with Extension partners through mechanisms that offer opportunities for sharing progress and generating new ideas. Some potential activities include:

- Conduct an **annual retreat** for clients, partners, and representatives from UVM to share progress and identify potential areas of opportunities.
- Conduct regular **town hall style meetings** for each Result Area (e.g., 60-minute webinars) with partners to share progress, discuss overlapping efforts, and identify funding opportunities that can be jointly pursued.
- Every five years conduct a rigorous, forward-looking **needs assessment** that measures the anticipated issues and needs of UVM Extensions clients and partners. Use the results to update the Strategic Plan. Consider hiring a consultant to conduct this work from the perspective of an outside observer.
- Annually, participate in the **Vermont Poll** to verify key strategies for the following two years. Use the outcomes of these assessments to identify new issues, strategies and projects that collaboration teams (UVM, UVM Extension, partners) could pursue.
- Create online exhibit space for each Result Area where partners can post plans, products and updates. This would serve as a central point to collect all of the different efforts as they relate to the Result Area.

Appendix 6: Grant Proposal Evaluation Process

Step 1: Prospective PI completes Excel form and project description

- **Responsibility:** The prospective PI obtains approval from their supervisor to pursue a grant and submits information about the grant opportunity to the relevant Result Area co-leads and associate director. The PI may move forward on preparing the proposal while waiting for a decision from this process.
- **Task:** The prospective PI enters fiscal information into an Excel form and completes a short project description, including indicating which Result Area(s) are the best fit for the proposal. The prospective PI then submits both documents to the relevant Result Area co-leads, the associate director, and their supervisor.
- **Output:** The Excel form includes fields for total budget, F&A rate and new hires. This calculates fiscal affordability (visualized as red/yellow/green).
- **Output:** The project description includes activities, partners and other considerations that will be useful in Step 2, when completing the qualitative rubric.

Step 2: Relevant Result Area co-leads and associate director evaluate grant opportunity

- **Responsibility:** This group is responsible for evaluating the proposal through the lens of affordability and centrality to Extension's mission.
- **Task:** The two relevant Result Area co-leads and the associate director review the PI materials and complete a qualitative rubric. If available, they will also consider stakeholder input and Albert indicators as context. The viability (e.g., methods, plan) will not be assessed during this process, though this group may provide informal feedback to the PI, with suggestions for improvement.
- **Output:** The group decides whether to approve the proposal, reject the proposal, or approve it conditionally based on cabinet approval of fiscal commitments.

Step 3: Cabinet evaluates proposals that require a commitment of significant organizational resources

- **Responsibility:** The cabinet is responsible for evaluating the proposal through the lens of affordability, centrality to Extension's mission, global fiscal considerations (base funding), PI effort and existing PI cost share. The HR administrator and business manager are responsible for bringing relevant fiscal information to the conversation. The director is responsible for alerting the PI and their supervisor of the decision. This group may conduct this work in meetings or, for expedited proposals, through email.
- **Task:** Cabinet members review the PI materials and qualitative rubric from the Result Area co-leads and associate director. They consider the relevant fiscal aspects and discuss the proposal in light of all available information, with the understanding that

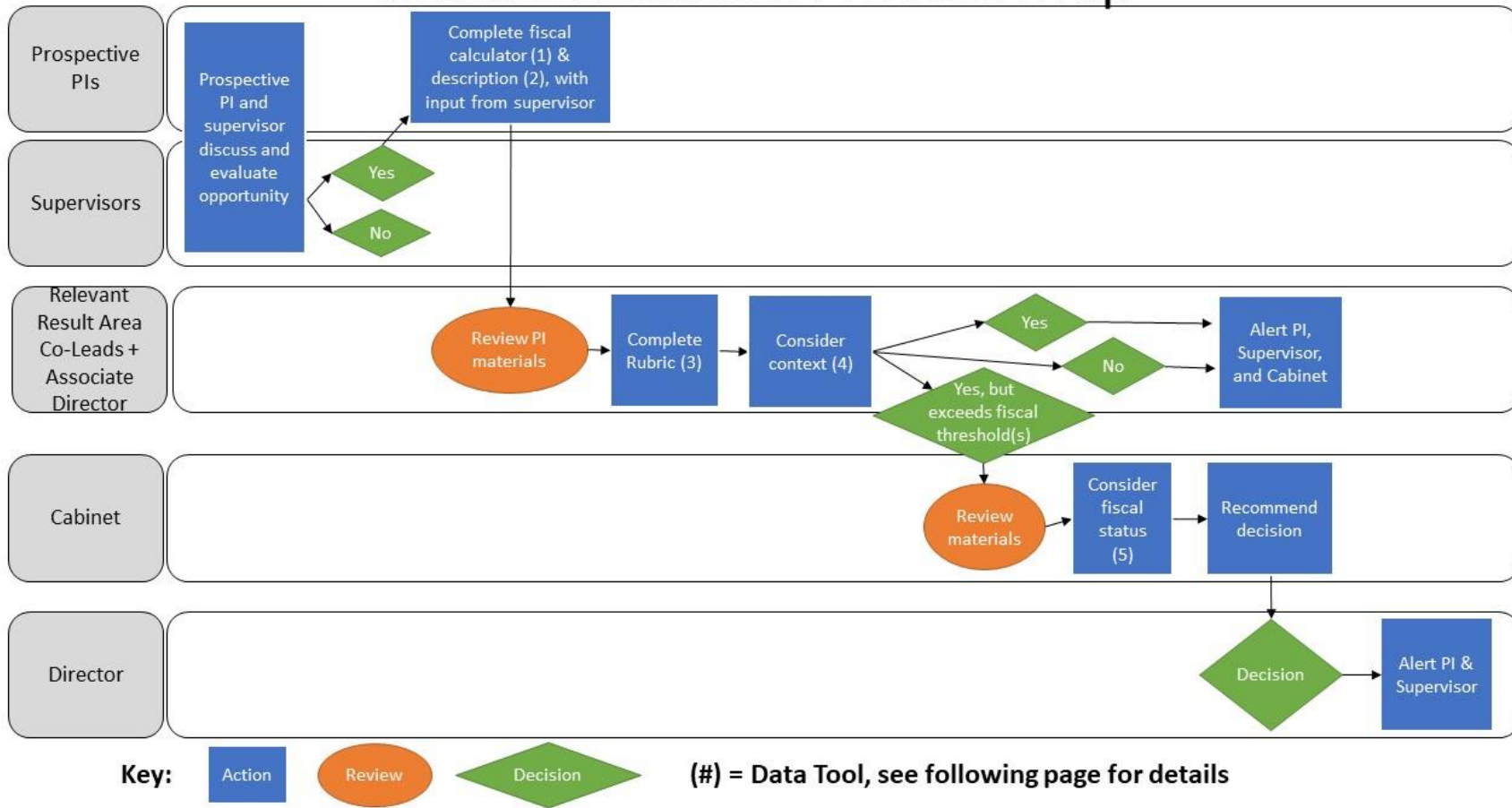
activities require varying levels of investment, which are warranted for different reasons.

- **Output:** The director makes a decision and alerts the PI and their supervisor.

Potential outcomes from this process:

- **Yes** = Pursue grant. Leadership commits to support with associated resources (e.g., match and head tax)
- **No, with suggestion for improvement** = Do not pursue grant. PI can resubmit if certain issues are addressed.
- **No** = Do not pursue grant as leadership has decided that Extension either cannot provide the support necessary or the proposed project does not align with organizational goals. Amendments are not likely to improve the proposal to the point that leadership would make a different decision.

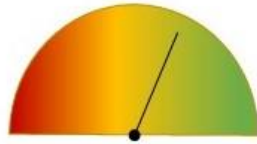
Grant Evaluation Process Map



Data Tools and Responsible Parties

Prospective PI

(1) Excel form → fiscal gauge
Quantitative information from RFP and draft budget



(2) Written project summary
Qualitative description of activities, partners, etc.

Program Leads + Associate Director

(3) Rubric
Qualitative evaluation of centrality to Extension mission, etc.

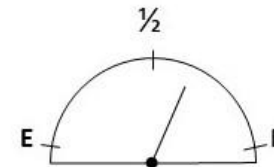
Mission	1	2	3	4	5
Collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
Result Areas	1	2	3	4	5
Etc....	1	2	3	4	5

(4) Context (if available)
Stakeholder input
Albert indicators

HR Administrator + Business Manager

(5) Fiscal Status Tracking

- Base funding status
- F&A status
- PI effort over time
- Existing PI cost share
- Investment fund



Appendix 7: Data Tools and Reports

Relational Database

To understand and make informed decisions about the scope of Extension work across the four Result Areas, Extension needs a tool that integrates financial and HR data to provide reports on questions such as:

- How much grant, gift and base funding is allocated to each Result Area and employee groupings (defined as 4-H, faculty, operating)?
- How much grant cost share is going to each Result Area?
- How does our base funding availability change throughout the fiscal year?
- What percentage of a given person's effort is committed now or will be in the future?
- Which grant-funded staff have funding that is ending soon?

This is best accomplished through a relational database, which will be updated regularly by the budget manager and the HR director. Reports will primarily be reviewed by the cabinet, though others (e.g., managers of grant-funded employees) will be able to request reports as needed.

SPA Reports

- How much base funding is already committed to cost share on awarded grant submissions?
- How many grants have been awarded in the past year?

Grant Affordability Calculator

This Excel-based calculator (potentially web-based in the future) will be completed by prospective principal investigators (PIs) seeking approval to pursue a grant. PIs will complete the form with the following fiscal information:

- Total award amount
- Start date and end date
- Number of university fiscal years award "brackets"
- Number and FTE of new employees
- F&A rate
- Match required
- Salary savings from base funding

The relevant Result Area co-leads and the associate director review the form. If a proposal exceeds certain fiscal thresholds (e.g., minimum size, minimum F&A, cost share needed, head tax), the proposal will be referred to the cabinet for approval.

Qualitative Rubric

The co-leads of the Result Area(s) relevant to the proposal complete a rubric, which is then considered during the grant proposal evaluation process. Evaluators will rate the proposal on factors such as collaboration, alignment with Result Areas and strategic significance. The rubric tool will complement the grant affordability calculator. It will provide a qualitative assessment that provides nuance and justification for the pursuit of less fiscally efficient grants.