

Spires Questions & Answers

1. Why has UNL Extension decided to align around the five spires of Excellence?

The five spires were developed for all of IANR including research, teaching, and extension. They were a result of external input from clientele, internal discussions of areas of excellence, and realities of current and future budget limitations.

For Extension, our alignment is critical to our participation in IANR. We also saw this as an opportunity to continue our efforts to narrow the focus of Extension into program areas for which we will document our statewide impact. We are committed to being well known for producing high impact educational programs of excellence addressing targeted issues by Nebraskans.

2. Who decides which spire I will focus on?

Faculty members in consultation with their unit administrator.

3. When should I select the spire on which I will focus?

Those decisions should be made this summer by most faculty. As Action Teams finalize the outcomes for which they will provide leadership, then a few faculty may need to re-assess that decision.

4. How do I identify the outcomes associated with an Action Team representing a spire?

A draft UNL Extension Outcomes/Goals document (<http://extension.unl.edu/Spires-Statewide%20Goals-Outcomes%206-09.pdf>) illustrates a best first guess as to the outcomes associated with each Action Team. As much as possible, it used the outcomes from our past Action Teams' logic models. Since Action Team leaders have had limited opportunity to review this alignment of outcomes, it is likely to experience some change over the summer. However, this draft UNL Extension Outcomes/Goals provides a starting point for faculty to determine their alignment.

5. How will this impact my own extension program?

Educators should place an increasing emphasis on their teaching role in subject areas where they have in-depth expertise. Focusing their work around a spire provides the opportunity to identify fewer subject areas for which they will be known and highly regarded throughout their region and across the state. Professional development in their focus area will help them keep on cutting edge in the field. Finally, educators should plan and implement educational programs that are not controlled by geographical boundaries.

Specialists should place increasing focus on mentoring educators in their teaching roles. This may include teams of specialists and educators developing Signature Programs around which educators and specialists will focus their teaching. In addition, specialists should be increasingly looking over the horizon to understand the cutting-edge research and emerging issues, sharing information with clientele on these topics, and if appropriate developing the educational resources necessary for Extension to engage in education efforts around these areas.

6 *When will Action Team leadership be identified?*

Rick and Kathleen are working on this now. Leadership from some Action Teams will stay in place. Leadership for Water, Climate, and Environment-Community will come from CRE Action Team members. Leadership for Beef, Crops of the Future, and Water, Climate, and Environment-Agriculture will come from sub-groups of Food Production and Natural Resources. Child and Youth Development and Food, Nutrition and Health will begin with current leadership and change as necessary. See Extension Directory (page 53) for current leadership.

7. *How can I help shape the action team outcome statements under our new alignment with the spires?*

During the summer the leaders of the Action Teams will be editing the goals and outcomes for review by all team members, as well as other Extension personnel with interest. Based on faculty input, goals and outcomes will be revised and more final documents developed. Be watching for draft documents from these team leaders so you can provide input. The plan is to finish this process by the end of August.

8. *When will new Action Teams representing the spires officially convene? When will Action Team listservs be updated?*

Action teams, and related work groups will assemble around their spires by Fall Conference. Faculty will write their 2010 goals based on the outcomes related to the new spires. As faculty alignment with the spires is communicated to Extension Administration, we will be updating the list serves.

9. *Will current work groups realign with spires or will new work groups be formed?*

This will depend on the work group and the outcomes identified by an Action Team. There will be some new workgroups that need to be developed. Others will sunset. Some may need to reconfigure themselves to better align with the spire. Many will remain unchanged and connect directly with the appropriate Action Team leading a spire.

10. Are 4-H/Youth Development educators to align with outcomes or subject matter within their logic/flowchart model?

This work is still in process. Based on initial input, the Action Team is leaning toward focusing on one of the eight 4-H subject matter work groups and then focus on appropriate 4-H outcomes associated with that subject area. Keep watching for more information.

11. If I am still deciding among a couple Action Teams representing a spire, how do I stay in touch with both this summer?

There will be a variety of messages that come through regarding spires asking for input. Certainly, you can stay abreast of information related to more than one group. However, by the fall, we are expecting that everyone will identify one spire where they will do the majority of their work. Where you make a contribution comes back to where you invest in your professional development and the develop/enhance the expertise for which you want to be known. The spires are not to be construed as silos, so there will be collaboration among the Action Teams; some will have shared outcomes.

12. How will office support staff be kept abreast of the spires movement?

Office/support staff have on-going access to the communication in Keeping Up and via e-mail. A formal discussion/presentation will be at the Front Door Forum.

13. Are extension specialists onboard with the spires?

For many specialists, there isn't a lot of change. However, a few specialists may find their area of expertise not well connected to the spires. They may shift their program to contributing educational products to regional or national initiatives, connecting directly with a focused clientele group in Nebraska, or continue to provide resources designed to respond to individual clientele questions. They will be meeting with their unit administrator to determine their direction for future educational efforts.

14. What are the most important aspects of this process that educators should concentrate on over the next few months?

- 1) Pick your spire of excellence.
- 2) Give input to Action Team leader requests for input on spire outcomes.
- 3) Give input to Action Team leader on possible Signature Programs (issues of critical importance and where we have resources for educational programs).
- 4) Consider potential opportunities for professional development in your spire of choice.

15. What tools are available for unit leaders to use as they communicate this transition to county extension boards?

A PowerPoint is being developed that will have its first showing at the June 19 NACEB meeting. After any necessary adjustments it will be distributed to unit administrators and county-based unit leaders.