



Executive Summary

VCE COVID19 Reflections

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Cooperative
Extension**

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Process

What we did and why we did it

In response to a call for taking time to reflect on our work during Covid-19, we created an online reflection tool using a google form. Faculty and staff were able to report as often as they wanted to encourage on-going reflection. The google form also allowed users to see what others were doing.

The form launched on April 3, 2020 and remained open through August, 2020.

46 total responses by 33 people

- 4 unit responses

- 2 program team responses

- 26 individual responses

Highlights

Opportunities

- Supportive colleagues and clients
- Administrative flexibility and leadership
- New partnerships
- New ways of working

Challenges

- Uncertainty for planning
- Digital divide
- Losing audiences
- Managing stress
- Learning new ways of working

Key Take-Aways

- We're more nimble than we think! VCE has the organizational capacity to change delivery methods but that change varies considerably based on individual employee skills, willingness to change and personal capacity for the change.
- Internal capacity for a range of online work from program delivery to virtual collaborations has increased.
- Limitations and concerns of employees (stress, personal situations, health status) need to be acknowledged and addressed before major change can be fully and successfully implemented.
- Employees relied heavily on each other for learning new skills, professional and personal support, and feeling connected.



Results

01

Actions

01

The most frequent ACTION reported was moving a program or training online.

Changing Virginia Association of Adult 4-H Volunteer Leaders spring conference from in-person to online.

Virtual EquiSmartz Communications Contest to Qualify Youth for National Contest

ACTION Themes

Personnel

Changes to Office procedures

Moving Meetings Online

Volunteers

New opportunities for volunteering online

Trainings continued in online format

Programs

Existing programs adapted to online format

Existing programs adapted to snail mail, phone, drop offs, drive throughs

Existing programs adapted to video format

Existing programs cancelled or postponed

ACTION Themes Cont'd

Programs

New programs offered online via zoom, fb live or videos

New videos offered on covid related topics

New programs offered through activity packets

New working groups created within VCE to deliver statewide programs

Program Participants

Existing program participants specific Covid19 needs addressed

Community Involvement

COVID information & resources shared with local governments, local community partners, schools and other agencies

Masks sewn and delivered locally

Food donations delivered locally

New partnerships developed

ACTION Themes Cont'd

Personal actions

Professional development opportunities

Organized programming materials

Networks strengthened

Practice ongoing needs assessment & prioritization

02

Decisions

02

The most frequent
DECISION reported
was making
programming
changes.

One interesting experience has been evaluating fitness/nutrition tracking apps and figuring out how to utilize those in place of pen/paper food and exercise logs. The system we've come up with, I believe, will actually be much less work for the agent, due to reducing some of the paperwork burden that comes with trying to collect/respond to things by hand.

Canceled many in person programs while shifting their focus to online gatherings.

DECISIONS Themes

Administrative / Office

- Meeting more often

- Moving Meetings Online

External Stakeholders

- New partnerships and collaborations

- New program delivery methods with existing stakeholders

Programming

- Cancelling programming/events

- Moving programming to online format

- Expanding reach with new online format

- Using broad range of online resources

- Adjusting expectations for programmatic reach

DECISIONS Themes Cont'd

Tools

Learning new tools for online delivery

Tools, Zoom, Trello, Camtasia, Canvas/Destiny, Google Drive, social media platforms

Existing Resources

Exploring already existing internal resources to share with participants

Examining existing resources to update

Exploring external resources available

Personal

Building personal skillsets

Increased time for professional development

Self-care

03

Results of decisions

03

The most frequent
RESULT reported
was building
internal capacity.

One reflection I've had thus far is that I feel like even though I'm physically distanced from members of the team, I have seen them more (virtually) and talked with them more than I believe I ever would have without COVID-19. It feels like one of the most focused and efficient teams I've worked on in a long time.

RESULTS Themes

Appreciation

Feeling appreciated by clients and community

New Audiences and awareness of Extension

Increased awareness of VCE

Reaching new audiences through online programs

External Collaborations and networks

New partnerships and collaborations

Stronger networks

Internal Capacity Building

New internal partnerships and collaborations

New skills to reach audiences in new ways

New funding and resources leveraged

RESULTS Themes Cont'd.

Internal Efficiency

- More time for programming with decreased travel
- Improved access to specialists
- Virtual delivery modes can work

Personal Growth / Work Life Balance

- More time for professional development and training
- Improved work life balance

Program challenges

- Clients without internet access
- Adding new clients

04

Opportunities

04

The most frequent
OPPORTUNITY
reported was
programmatically
progress.

The single most important thing we can do right now is to not allow this change to be temporary, but to embrace all the positives that have come from it and to move forward a new, changed, more in-tune, more relevant, more understanding, stronger organization with a fresh perspective on the needs and priorities of clients and personnel alike.

OPPORTUNITY Themes

Relevance / timeliness

Virtual visibility

Viewed as relevant and timely

Personal Learning / development

Learning new skills for virtual work and programs

Using time for planning all aspects of the program

External Stakeholders and Partners

New partnerships and collaborations

Pivoting to provide partners new types of resources or programs

Internal Collaborations

Deliberate cross program area

Tapping in to diversity of Extension expertise

OPPORTUNITY Themes Cont'd

Program opportunities

- Program team successes

- Online programs can be more evergreen

- Infrastructure being built for online programs

- Unit program coalescing around one issue

- Opportunity / growth mindset

05

Concerns

05

The most frequent **CONCERN** reported was personal.

Not being enough for my families, not being everything to everyone like I want to be... struggling to keep up with the information overload and being up to date so that I can help connect others or support my community in the best way possible

Balancing homeschooling kids with work from home for my partner and myself. What our new normal will look like (and grieving what has been lost from our pre-COVID lives).

CONCERNS Themes

Financial / economic

- Viability of VCE in challenging economic times
- Overall U.S. economic situation
- Personal financial concerns

Planning

- Knowing how to plan future programs

Programmatic

- How to spend program planning time
- Relevance of VCE's response
- Impact on specific types of programs
- Losing momentum from successful programs

CONCERNS Themes Cont'd

Clients

Vulnerable populations

Digital divide

Losing clients / members

Engaging youth

Operations

New agents

Personnel evaluations

06

Lessons

06

The most frequent
LESSON reported
was personal.

Personal connections can happen through Zoom – but the space and time have to be created just as when you build them into face to face interactions.

*I can do more than I thought from home.
Reinforcing that I don't mind being alone.*

LESSONS Themes

Personal

WFH can work

People are good, we're all in this together.

Viability of VCE in challenging economic times

Personal limits

Program Delivery

Using other media

Can reach new audiences virtually

Organizational

Need standardized and modern payment methods

Ag is essential to our work

Leadership is critical in times of crises

Hard to be nimble without the resources

07

Helpful

07

**The most frequent
HELPFUL item
reported was
colleagues.**

Having a few key colleagues who I can be real with and we can have times of mutual encouragement and “seeing” the other for the good and value they possess.

Having someone like Mark Sumner as a technical support. He is invaluable through the entire process and without his help and guidance, we could not have accomplished this.

HELPFUL Themes

Work from home

- Flexibility

- Work – life balance

Administrative support and information

- Leadership

- Updates

VCE Resources

- Providing the technical tools needed

- Resources to use new tools

- Training opportunities

HELPFUL Themes Cont'd

Colleagues

Supportive

Innovative / willing to figure things out

Connecting

Self Care

Personal ways to care for self (driving, faith, family, etc.)

Reflecting

Programming Strategies

Communicating with clients

Comfort with technology

Continuing to move forward