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MEMORANDUM

TO: 4-H Summit Task Force
FROM: Helene Dillard, Chair, Northeast Extension Directors (NEED)
DATE: December 4, 2011
SUBJECT: Input from NEED

Today, I am writing on behalf of the Northeast Extension Directors to express concerns about the process and the direction being taken for the governance of the 4-H Program, one of the best known national programs of the Cooperative Extension System.

On November 30, the NEED joined their 4-H Program Leaders via conference call to discuss the future of 4-H governance structure following the National 4-H Partnership Summit held September 13-15, 2011, under the leadership of now retired Extension Director, Gaines Smith. Some of the major concerns raised are listed below for your consideration and response.

Summit Process

- The ‘devil is always in the details’ and directors and administrators have not had any communication beyond the initial follow-up letter or other information to review. This has resulted in trust issues between Directors / Administrators / 4-H Program Leaders and the six member task force. Many feel that the process is an attempt to privatize the 4-H program. Furthermore, for many directors, the communications have felt more like “a done deal” than a process still in progress. There has been tremendous lack of clarity in messaging. Directors and Administrators are asking for clarity and a clear message that this is or is not a done deal, and if not, that it be formally presented as a **proposal** to National Extension Directors, NIFA and 4-H Council Leadership.

Recommendation:

An interactive web site immediately is established that the entire Cooperative Extension System has access to. While there is currently a link to a website available, numerous attempts to access the site have failed, so it appears that it does not work reliably and does not provide two-way communication.

- No substantive discussion time for directors and administrators has been allowed since the Summit. There was very little information provided during the NAE4-HA meeting for 4-H Program Leaders. And while it was a focus for directors and administrators at the National 4-H Luncheon held during the APLU Annual Meeting, it was more of “rah-rah” presentation session without any meaningful discussion.

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Recommendation:

The Directors and Administrators must be provided ample discussion time, through a series of “listening session” conference calls and at the upcoming March 2012 National Extension Director and Administrator meeting (2 hours), to provide input into the process. 4-H in each state is the responsibility of the Extension Director and or Administrator and there are substantial differences in approaches and structures which must be taken into careful consideration as changes to the 4-H program are proposed.

The Directors and Administrators want more comprehensive information about the task force’s proposals – particularly details (accountability; relationship with land grants, tax reporting issues, etc.) – this should come to all directors and 4-H program leaders prior to the National Extension Directors meeting in March so that this can be a major agenda item at that meeting.

Summit Direction

- A major concern is how 4-H would fit into the university structure. Some directors feel that the “privatization” to a 501c3 would be enough to push university administration to eliminate 4-H programs due to liability and other issues. Some universities are already looking for ways to do this after dealing with 4-H and the IRS.
- The Summit task force appears to not have taken into account the input from the survey distributed prior to their convening. What has been done with that input?
- There is an existing MOU between NIFA and National 4-H Council that took a year to negotiate. Why isn’t that being given time to be implemented or tweaked instead of trying something new for which minimal vetting has occurred?
- If the legal authority for 4-H resides at NIFA, why hasn’t there been communication from NIFA about this process?
- It is assumed that this will require Federal legislation in order to be implemented. Will an attempt be made to include this in the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization?
- There will have to be a final sign-off on any changes. Who has the authority to do so? Will this issue be coming to the Extension Directors for a vote?

Other comments

- Why doesn’t the NIFA 4-H staff (Lisa Lauxman) have a seat on the National 4-H Council board?
- Why hasn’t the P3 Working Group been asked to provide input into the governance discussion?

Thank you for your consideration of these issues, and we look forward to your response.

Cc: Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Interim Director, NIFA
Don Floyd, CEO, National 4-H Council
Northeast Extension Directors
Northeast 4-H Program Leaders