

**Strengthening Communities:
The Role of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawaii at Manoa**

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As a land grant college, the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources services the community through its educational, research and outreach programs. The community to be served can range from specific geographic areas to school-community complexes, to where people live and to their extended living areas where they may recreate or participate in various activities. The CTAHR committee working on initiatives for “Strengthening Communities” emphasized the need to focus on foundational skills, tools and competencies that produce positive, contributing members of society. This paper presents major issues that need to be addressed to accomplish these goals, existing programs already in place that CTAHR has provided to respond to existing community needs and additional measures and actions that can be taken to further strengthen communities throughout the State of Hawaii.

The six following issues were considered to be those that needed the greatest and most immediate attention:

- Developing skills in leadership, teamwork, collaboration and dealing with diversity
- Enhancing access to data, information and resources
- Filling gaps in data and information
- Expanding youth development education outreach
- Promoting CTAHR programs
- Developing parenting and family resource management skills

A. ISSUE: Developing skills in leadership, teamwork, collaboration, and dealing with diversity

Monies and staffing are short, yet community needs keep growing. Agencies, organizations and families are hard pressed to meet growing community needs. Collaborating and/or partnering with others would build upon existing strengths and maximize resources. Given that people need to collaborate more, there still exists many barriers to successful collaboration.

Barriers to successful collaboration may be divided into two main categories:

- 1) **Structural issues** affecting the logistics of building collaborations include: limited funding and/or restrictions on existing monies, conflicting organizational missions and policies, lack of memorandums of agreement, difficulty in measuring outcomes and accountability,
- 2) **Relational issues** that influence whether groups work together include: cultural diversity issues including conflicting values and beliefs, personalities/egos clash, concern with who gets what "billing" in promotional materials, hidden agendas, past history/baggage and turf issues.

At present, there is no cohesive curriculum or training within the College and community, that addresses all the barriers to building effective collaborations and that promote teaching which address varied learning styles.

CTAHR offers statewide leadership programs and technical expertise in working with: Family Community Leadership (FCL), Agricultural Leadership, Family and Community Education (FCE) and 4-H programs. These programs each have their own curriculum and training and cadres of volunteers and program graduates that provide thousands of volunteer hours, valuable in-kind contributions and extensive community contacts.

Gap areas (or opportunities to enhance program strengths) include: lack of cohesive curriculum and training in building collaborations, turf issues amongst staff and programs, overextended staff and underfunded programs.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

Develop and/or adapt curriculum and conduct training in building effective collaborations and create opportunities to build new collaborations within the College and/or amongst the community at-large.

B. ISSUE: Enhancing Access to Data, Information, and Resources

Access to credible data, information, and resources is an important element in strengthening communities. The knowledge base it makes available is crucial in enabling Hawaii's people to make informed decisions that improve the quality of their lives, families, and communities. It is necessary for policy and program development, setting priorities in the community, and advocacy efforts. Moreover, it is essential in results based accountability that is increasingly being adopted by all sectors of our society, both public and private. The new accountability focuses on *outcomes*, not inputs, and measures *results* rather than process. Measuring results provides policy makers, program managers, community members, and others with information regarding the status of a performance. This enables them to ascertain whether goals have been reached, milestones have been met, or success has been achieved. The lack of such information makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make informed and objective decisions.

However, the data and information systems in agriculture and the family that are needed in building strong communities are severely lacking. Some of the problems currently encountered include:

- lack of knowledge of the data, information, and resources that are available
- data and information scattered among too many different agencies
- too much data in certain areas and too little data in areas of interest
- long waiting period to obtain data from agencies
- data may not be meaningful if not presented in context
- data may not be reliable, valid, or collected consistently over time
- trend data and national/county comparisons may be lacking

- user often lacks sufficient expertise and resources to retrieve the needed data and information

What is needed are central collection and reporting points for data, information, and resources on (1) agriculture and (2) children, families, and communities.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

CTAHR has a set of initiatives that can serve as the core of virtual web-based systems to:

- provide a “one-stop” center for data, information, and resources on agriculture and children, families, and communities
- assist a larger pool of clients cost effectively
- provide information that is valid, reliable, and timely
- deliver data and information in user-friendly formats
- integrate disciplinary/content information and technological expertise to the benefit of users

In the agricultural area, CTAHR has a rich repository of data and information that is scattered among its departments, county offices, web sites, and PIO. In addition, data and information on land, water, climate, crops, transportation, and other relevant issues can be found in other UH colleges and federal, state, and county agencies. These should be integrated into a comprehensive data system that serves as *the* resource on agriculture in Hawaii.

In the human capital area, CTAHR can build on the Data Center on Children and Families (uhfamily.Hawaii.edu) that presents indicator based data from governmental and private agencies over time and by county, state, and the nation. The Data Center also discusses the importance of the indicator, offers references for data cited, and provides links to other sources. Although still in the initial stages of development, it is gaining recognition as *the* most comprehensive collection of data and information on Hawaii’s children and families.

Other strategies can be used to provide greater access to data, information, and resources to CTAHR’s clientele, particularly those in rural areas. For example, keeping county office “doors open” longer than the traditional work days and hours and providing a “travel SWAT team” can demonstrate that the college is truly responsive to the needs of the people it serves.

C. ISSUE: Filling Gaps in Data and Information

Efforts to strengthen communities are dependent on reliable and valid assessments of its people and where they live--the children, families, and community conditions that are the targets (outcomes) of the initiatives. Without such information, it is difficult to ascertain whether goals have been reached, milestones have been met, or success has been achieved. The lack of data is an impediment to informed and objective decision making.

Although there is a perception that there is an abundance of data on Hawaii’s people and communities, reviews of the situation have consistently indicated a paucity of information on:

- positive indicators that address the strengths of children, families, and communities
- indicator-data that is available at the sub-county (community) level
- indicators that allow comparisons across counties and sub-counties
- emerging issues, such as number and location of homeless families and the social capital in communities
- indicator-data that are consistently collected over time

In addition, there is a great need for training on outcomes-based performance and the use of indicator data to assess progress toward goals. This will assist community members and agencies to meet the expectations of governmental agencies and philanthropic funders who have adopted results based accountability. In brief, filling gaps in the knowledge base and educating people on the use of data to strengthen their communities are two areas that are crucial in building stronger communities.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

CTAHR has a core set of activities that can serve as the foundation for the work on filling data and information gaps. It has administered the respected *Hawaii Kids Count* project (funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and with counterpart units in other states) that annually reports on the well being of the state's children. It has the beginnings of a companion report on family well being, *Hawaii Family Touchstones*, that has been issued once. However, other than a few indicators contained in the aforementioned reports, there is no in-depth report that assesses the status of Hawaii's communities. Moreover, many of the shortcomings identified above (e.g., lack of positive indicators and sub-county level data) also apply to our present knowledge base on children, families, and communities.

CTAHR has also sponsored a modest project on training county extension agents on the collection and reporting of non-quantitative outcomes data.

CTAHR should conduct a biennial survey that fills the gaps in data and information on the outcomes of community strengthening initiatives. The focus of the indicators should be on the children and families in the communities and the quality of the communities in which they live. The work should make every effort to overcome the paucity of information that currently exist and impede effective community building efforts.

D. ISSUE: Expanding Youth Development Educational Outreach

National data on Hawaii's youth, their educational performance and opportunities, and family concerns indicate great need for CTAHR involvement through its existing programs and new programs. Collaboration with other successful programs is also essential.

- A high percentage of Hawaii's school age children are performing at average or below average on the SAT test scores; 55% of 4th grade students scored below the basic reading level in 1998; 40% of 8th grade students scored below the basic reading level in 1998

- Hawaii ranked # 33 in percent of teens not attending school and not working (ages 16-19) (1996 figures)
- Hawaii ranked # 17 in percent of children in poverty (1996 figures)
- Hawaii ranked # 20 in percent of families with children headed by a single parent (1996 figures)
- The number of children being home schooled continues to increase
- There are a number of "problems" in the public school system affecting the delivery of "quality" teaching
- The student-teacher ratio in the public school system presents challenges to students who need individual attention or extra support to perform at a higher standard
- Funding for educational curricula, computers, and other teaching materials in the public schools is outdated, limited and inadequate in many schools

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE:

4-H is the nation's largest non-formal educational program for youth! Initially utilizing the club method as the primary delivery mode, today, 4-H works collaboratively with schools and other youth organizations, in assisting youth to build life skills which will help them to become contributing, productive, self-directed members in a culturally diverse, changing society. The foundation of the 4-H educational program is "experiential learning." 4-H educational curricula complements and supports learning experiences in the classroom and provides opportunities for youth to learn and excel in a "non-threatening" environment.

To expand the youth development educational outreach, CTAHR faculty can:

- Work collaboratively with schools and other youth organizations to:
- Promote the Educational Resource Library, the national CYFERNET (Children, Youth, and Families Educational Network--information on the web site), and other educational resources available through the College
- Train A+ and youth organization staff to utilize the educational curricula available through the National 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System (over 140 curriculum juried curricula!)
- Provide youth development staff training, "Moving Ahead Together" for A+ and other youth development staff
- Continue to expand the literacy program(s) currently being implemented in the counties: "Read To Me", "Reading Aprons", "RAPP" (Read And Play In the Park"), etc.
- Expand the kindergarten transition program, "KAMP" to include more schools throughout the state
- Recruit and train more youth to become involved with the 4-H Community Service Learning project
- Recruit and train more adults (including FCE and FCL volunteers) to expand our literacy program outreach

E. ISSUE: Promoting CTAHR Programs

There is a need to promote CTAHR family/community directed programs to key decision-makers and the general populace of Hawaii. CTAHR programs have extensive national resource ties, via the land grant college system, in youth curriculums, leadership training programs for community members, and family resource management programs which can impact a larger audience given a higher profile.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

1. Utilization of Mass Media
 - A. Radio Programs
 - Ex. Ray Uchida's – Agricultural Talk Show
 - B. Newspaper
 - Regular Column in family/home/nutrition section
 - Directed Storylines on specific national and local events
Ex. National Food Safety Month
 - C. CTAHR Website expansion/development
 - Ex. Ask the Expert, Child and Family Statistical Databases, Nutrition, Healthy Living
 - D. Television Talk Shows
 - Guest spots on Morning Talk Shows for Event Promotions
2. Development of Media Guides to CTAHR Programs
 - A. University Relations Office is presently asking for FCL "stories" for UH Malamalama newsletter to UH Alumni
 - B. Brochures/Printed Materials need to be high quality and consistent in format
3. Coordinate Publicity Efforts for Public Events
 - A. Community Fairs, Expos, etc.
 - Event organizers need promotional materials and speakers to publicize events
 - B. Develop a Speakers Bureau
 - Presentations to clientele groups, community organizations and clubs
 - C. CTAHR Booths at various events to the extent there is a critical mass-large in size and message

F. ISSUE: Developing Parenting and Family Resource Management Skills

Many families need assistance in managing the challenges of daily living. Issues such as personal and family finance, food safety and nutrition and parenting skills all need to be addressed.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE:

CTAHR expertise can be used in the following areas to provide various opportunities:

- **Leadership Development:** Provide opportunities for learning and sharing; Enable opportunities for mentoring
- **Children, Youth and Families:** Provide youth and family education programs to improve economic, environmental and social conditions of at-risk individuals and families
- **Volunteers:** Offer community education in gardening, food safety, career guidance and financial counseling
- **Food Security and Family Resource Management:** Offer consumer education and training and technical assistance

These issues confronting Hawaii's communities and their families today can all be addressed through enhancing existing CTAHR programs, developing new CTAHR programs, and by continuing existing partnerships or establishing new ones with other successful family and youth-oriented programs in our communities. These collective efforts will definitely have an impact leading to empowered, strengthened communities.