University of Illinois

Extension

Unit #9 – Grundy, Kankakee, & Will Counties Unit Council Meeting Minutes

April 20, 2021

Call to Order

Due to the current COVID-19 guidance, the meeting was held electronically via Zoom.

In attendance: Christina Basham, Janice Blanchette, Isaac Brockman, Jamita Brown, Herb Brooks, Sasha Grabenstetter, Shannon Range, Lin Scharnhorst, Sally Skoff, James Theuri, Jennifer Wick, and Megan Walsh.

Additions to the Agenda

None.

Minutes of January 5, 2021 Meeting

The minutes of the January 5, 2021 meeting were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Lin Scharnhorst and seconded by Herb Brooks.

Financial Reports

A. Extension Fiscal Update

Financial agreements that were made in early 2020 are not expected to be met in full. The fallout of COVID-19, in this past year, has resulted in less funding. At this point, Megan Walsh noted that funding has been higher than anticipated when COVID-19 impacts are taken into consideration. We are still waiting for funding from the Will County and Grundy County boards. United Way funding has come in but is lower than expected. The University has said to prepare for 10% budget cuts across the board. In Unit 9, these cuts will be mitigated by the voluntary retirement offered to some staff. While the specifics of these cuts have not been clearly outlined, Megan noted that they are hopeful for gradual cuts going into 2022. Surprisingly, 4-H premium money has already come in. There have also been early payments for matching funds. Overall, Megan is not concerned about the decreased funding due to the fact that money was saved by cancelling or adapting events this past year.

Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Updates

The Grundy, Kankakee, and Will Offices are gradually returning staff to the offices. Still, the offices are not fully open to the public. Appointments, pick up dates, and other changes are in place to continue to serve people.

a. Summer Event Guidelines

This summer, Unit 9 staff is planning for face-to-face events. This comes as University permission has been granted and local guidelines allow. Each county will be different and events have the opportunity to change as state and local guidelines may change. Some guidelines that will be in place are: limiting events to 50 people and mandating masks in indoor and outdoor settings. These guidelines are subject to change. All rules and guidelines will apply to all people, even those who have been vaccinated. Unit 9 staff is planning a message to send to 4-H families about this summer's events and current guidelines.

B. Unit Staffing Update

There will be seven open positions in Unit 9 between now and this summer. The application and interview processes have been started for the following positions: Extension Educator (focus TBD), Grundy Office Support, Kankakee Office Support, SNAP / Policy & Environmental Change, Community Worker Positions, and Kankakee Extension Program Coordinator (4-H).

C. New Council Members

Due to term limits, we will be losing some council members. This includes two from Kankakee County and one from each Grundy County and Will County. Recommendations for new members are encouraged.

D. Foundation Updates

Megan had spoken recently with the Grundy Foundation and shared that they had a successful online auction. They believe the event went very well per the circumstances. Kankakee held their Cash Bash earlier this year and still had success. Will is sending out letters and visiting businesses to seek support. They are unable to hold their dinner fundraiser and auction, which is leading them to new methods.

E. ESAC Report

There are many changes across the state. Multiple retirements have occurred and will be occurring this year. Additionally, there are plans to put Extension in one place on campus.

Program Planning

A. Educator Reports

Jamita Brown shared that she has spent time reflecting on this past year and is looking at what she has learned and growth that has happened. She noted virtual fatigue has set in and has led to challenges in engaging with youth. As she is returning to the office, she is recognizing people's different comfort levels and adapting programming to engage as many people as possible. Some of her initiatives include Cooking Across the World, the Will County 4-H Awards Block Party, and multiple grant applications. These grants include an entrepreneurship grant, iCook & Care grant, and a DEI grant to be more inclusive to Spanish speakers. In a partnership with Cook County 4-H, Boys and Girls Club, Sasha Grabenstetter, and Money Mentors, Jamita has a goal to reach 50 or more youth in the Smart Cent\$ program. All in all, Jamita has a focus on reaching more minority and disadvantaged youth.

Shannon Range has had success in hosting online and outdoor events. Recently, she has completed the Winter Photography Class & Challenge and Wildlife Encounters 1. The photography class included youth from all over Illinois and was well-received. Wildlife Encounters has been presented to three 4-H clubs so far and has an additional one planned soon. Presently, Shannon is working on a four-week program called "Outdoor Adventures", which will include younger kids and teenagers. There are additional online activities to accompany the program. In the future, she is planning a four-week Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, & Repurpose program, more Wildlife Encounters 1, and Outdoor Leadership Train the Trainer. In addition to those natural resource programs, she is working on an Intro to Shotgun program and shared the news that there is a new shooting sports 4-H club in Kankakee County. She is also focusing on professional development. There are four grants Shannon has carried over from last year that will be utilized this year.

Brooke Baker-Katcher and Anthony Warmack are working on a bilingual program to connect with Spanish speakers in Unit 9. Also, this year's fair books are now online.

We heard that Holly has continued to work on Master Gardener programs.

Sasha shared that she is working with seven new Money Mentors, for a total of ten in the Unit. She held a "Let's Talk Money" webinar earlier this year and had success but did recognize some of the virtual fatigue noted by Jamita earlier in the meeting. Sasha also worked on a professional development day for Harbor House. Sasha will be on maternity leave from April 30, 2021 to July 26, 2021.

Currently, much of the SNAP Education / Policy & Environmental Change programming is on hold until the new individual is hired.

James Theuri shared his experiences with Zoom and face-to-face classes he has been hosting since September. He has had success in reaching out to the Pembroke Township community and providing educational programs. James's beekeeping classes have had the strongest and most consistent attendance. He has completed grants for the "Farm Stress Program" and "Farmers of Color" program, both targeted in Pembroke.

B. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Goals

Megan noted that evaluations this year will entail aspects of Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion (DEI). This information has been passed onto the Unit 9 educators.

Shannon's DEI goals include working with the primarily Black, underserved population of Pembroke. She aims to reach youth through school programs and a local church. She will focus on STEM and the environment.

Jamita's DEI goals include reaching 200 minority youth in the year, rebuilding and building community partnerships, and create awareness of Extension programming to underserved youth.

Sasha's DEI goals include reaching the Hispanic population in Will County and building connections through her diverse group of Money Mentors.

Next Meeting Date

June 15 at 6:30 pm. This meeting is currently scheduled to be held in-person in the Kankakee County office. This is subject to change.

Adjournment

Sally Skoff moved to adjourn the meeting and the motion was seconded by Herb Brooks. Janice Blanchette declared the meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.