BEST is an initiative designed to improve the confidence and effectiveness of Extension educators and is being developed in three phases. These phases include: (1) Preparation – helps educators understand how students learn and how to develop an effective learning session, accommodating an audience, and marketing educational events; (2) Presentation – inservice trainings to cultivate public speaking skills; and (3) Professionalism – paramount to all we do. The Preparation Leg has been launched and includes 7 online training modules. Educators are encouraged to complete this training. The content for the Presentation Leg is in development and inservice trainings will be offered early 2015. You can access the training at: tiny.utk.edu/best-begin.

The Increasing Visibility team continues work begun in 2011 by the marketing committee formed through the strategic planning process. The team’s first step was surveying Extension personnel to benchmark currently used marketing techniques, impressions of those techniques, and assistance needed for marketing. Extension users were also surveyed to identify the most positive aspects of our relationships with them. The survey results are available in the form of online presentations as follows:

https://tiny.utk.edu/county
https://tiny.utk.edu/campusregion
https://tiny.utk.edu/Extensionuser

Results are being used to inform decisions the team is making for the marketing plan and toolkit that you will begin to see at Extension Conference this November.
Balance Life is the theme that quickly emerged for the Healthy Lifestyles team as they sought a focus for Extension’s Healthy Lifestyles Initiative. It became clear early that wellness is holistic, not simply life/work balance.

Focus groups, hosted in each region, invited input ideas for supporting healthy choices across the state. The team will review the recommendations of the focus groups at a second team meeting in August. Working with experts in the field, they will design a sustainable wellness program tailored for Extension.

The invitation for applications for Champions for Balanced Life (C4BL) have been issued. These volunteers will serve as ambassadors for the wellness program effort.

NEW TEAMS BEGIN WORK

The Policies and Procedures Committee has divided into subcommittees and have begun to identify procedures and policies. They will meet face to face in September.

Competency-Based System and Volunteer Certification Teams will hold their first meetings in August to discuss their team timeline and deliverables and determine their team’s strengths.

The County Directors Training Team will meet in August.

The Mentoring/Coaching Team has been named and will plan their first meeting for Fall 2014.

Office Standards

The Committee met in May to determine their timeline and deliverables. After dividing into subcommittees for customer service and facilities, the committee has made significant progress in drafting white papers addressing components such as engaging clientele, communication, technology, publications, safety, and several others. The committee plans to draft a document that details the desired spaces and ideal customer service in Extension offices across the state.

Information Technology

The OIT Trial is continuing on schedule with very positive feedback from individuals who have been surveyed. The trial will wrap up on October 1st, and findings of the final survey will be presented to Extension administration.

Also ready to share with the Administrative team are reports from the initiative’s five goals. Thanks to cooperation from all 95 counties, a report on the network capabilities of county offices will be ready. In efforts to automate processes, a mileage form has been created in SharePoint that will allow counties to submit mileage to support staff in the counties, which can be printed and submitted for travel reimbursement. This effort is currently in the testing stage with a few counties testing the process.

Another goal of the team was to create IT Best Practices. The first document, addressing the topic of email, has been drafted. Also, in an effort to create core competencies for staffing groups, the team is working to develop an assessment for these competencies.