The Oklahoma Community Listening Sessions are an ambitious undertaking of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. Citizens of Oklahoma will be invited to identify, discuss, and define their community's current and future needs at forums to be held in every Oklahoma county beginning in September 2002. The OCES and their network of county, district, area, and state educators will sponsor this broad approach to needs assessment.

**Why is Extension conducting the Listening Sessions?**

For some time, legislative leaders, especially those from rural Oklahoma, have urged Extension to take an aggressive approach in supporting leadership and economic development for rural Oklahoma. House Resolution 1044 and Senate Resolution 57 are recent examples of that sentiment. Each resolution was identical in intent and nature and both encouraged the Extension to focus its resources on the needs of individual Oklahoma communities. Recognizing that Extension has offices in all 77 counties, the legislature recommended that this be accomplished through a process that accommodates a broad cross section of citizen input to identify issues and address those priorities that fall within Extension's mandate and capacity to deliver.

The Listening Sessions will be an important component for setting the stage for the next Extension initiative. The information gathered from the sessions will be invaluable to Extension and the communities. This is the first step in developing the Extension long-range plan of work for 2004-09 and will require Extension to think with a community focus in mind.

**Why are the Listening Sessions valuable to Extension, and how will the local county Extension operations benefit?**

As Extension begins its long-range strategic planning process, the involvement of citizens in identifying needs and concerns in their community is crucial. The follow-up Focus Forums with experts and staff from local and state agencies will be extremely valuable. The results from the Listening Sessions will assist counties in developing their long-range plan of work for 2004-09.

Also, state legislators may use the data from the Listening Sessions for policy development ideas next legislative session and beyond. Legislative leaders are urging Extension to assist with economic and community development. Presently, Extension does not have the financial or human resources at the state, area, district, or county levels to respond fully to the requests. The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma and other activities are being used to support this effort. The success of such efforts will be most helpful in attracting funding and resources needed to sustain a comprehensive program.

**Will the Listening Sessions be conducted in every county?**

The intent is to conduct a minimum of one listening session in each county. The County Extension Director and District Director will decide whether more than one listening session should be conducted in a county. It may be that geographic location could be a barrier for people attending, therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct more than one session. It is Extension's goal to have participation by a broad cross section of citizens in order to have a mix of community leaders and citizens, including non-traditional Extension clientele.

**Will the Listening Sessions be a substitute for the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings?**

The Listening Sessions and their companion Focus Forums may be considered as a substitute for the PAC requirement for the upcoming program cycle. If adequate information is not derived from the Listening Sessions, a PAC may be necessary to compile the appropriate data for the particular program area.

**Who should be invited to participate in the Listening Sessions?**

The Listening Sessions should include citizens in the community that can identify, discuss, and define their community's current and future needs and opportunities. This process will accommodate a broad cross section of citizen input to identify issues and address those priorities. Extension will use the generated issues and priorities to define and address those which are within the scope of Extension's capacity to deliver and fit within our mission.

The Listening Sessions need to have a target audience for the counties to invite. The invited guests should also include non-traditional Extension clientele. The following
is a suggested list of individuals that may be interested in attending or recommending and inviting others to attend:

- Local citizenry
- Business owners
- Congressional members and staff
- State, County, and local elected leaders
- Bankers
- Mayors
- City Council Members
- County Commissioners
- County Excise Board members
- County Fair Board members
- County Budget Board members
- Local School Board members
- City Managers
- County Health Department personnel
- County Department of Human Services personnel
- Chambers of Commerce members
- Grass-roots groups
- Church organizations
- County agricultural and civic groups
- Oklahoma Ag Leadership Program past participants
- State and community leadership program participants
- USDA personnel
- Conservation District personnel
- YMCA’s
- Boys and Girls clubs
- Scout Troops
- Family and Youth Services
- 4-H and FFA clubs
- School administrators, counselors and local teachers
- Home school and private school organizations
- Individuals from county OCES Newsletter lists

This list is not all-inclusive, but gives Educators a broad spectrum of individuals that may provide critical input and would be valuable to this process.

How does OCES plan on utilizing the data that is generated from the Listening Sessions?
The data gathered at these grassroots sessions will be shared with legislators and other agencies and organizations. Also, the information will be extremely valuable to county educators and will be the first step in developing a county long-range plan of work for 2004-09.

What if issues are raised at the Listening Sessions that are outside the scope and resources of the four-based program areas of Extension?
After the Listening Sessions are conducted, a series of Focus Forums will be held to prioritize items identified in Listening Sessions and explore how to respond to needs of the people. In the Focus Forums, critical elements and priority items will be defined for each county. Also, the Focus Forums will identify the appropriate and responsible persons, agencies, and organizations to address the issues if they are outside of the four-based program areas of Extension.

When does Extension plan on having the Listening Sessions?
The County Extension sponsored Listening Sessions will be held September through the first half of December 2002 to provide the community with an opportunity to assess the needs of the community, county, and region.

Will training be provided for county staff prior to the Listening Sessions?
Yes, there will be a Listening Session Orientation conducted at the district level. The purpose of the orientation session is to acquaint county educators with the purpose for the Listening Sessions and how to market them. The four district meetings are scheduled in August.

Assigned facilitator teams, consisting of, but not limited to two members, will be established in each Extension district. The teams may consist of a county educator, state, area, or district specialist, and a volunteer leader or citizen at large. Facilitator and Recorder training will be held to set guidelines for facilitators and establish ground rules for how the listening session will be conducted and how individuals will be treated.
Will there be marketing materials available to assist counties in getting the word out about the Listening Sessions?
Agricultural Communications Services has developed a marketing kit that consists of draft press releases, newspaper ads, radio spots, etc. This will provide county staff with the tools they need to publicize the event in their communities and to recruit individuals to attend the Listening Sessions.

What is the timeline for completing the Listening Sessions?
During the months of June through August 2002 a committee of county, area, district, and state educators designed plans for conducting the Listening Sessions. During this time frame facilitators were identified and asked to participate in a facilitator training. The county educator orientation and facilitator training will be held in each Extension District in August. Lastly, counties will determine their dates for conducting the Listening Session and begin to identify the meeting location, as well as potential participants from their target audience.

The County Extension sponsored Listening Sessions will be held September through the first half of December 2002, to provide the community at large with an opportunity to assess its needs.

After the Listening Sessions are finalized, state Extension staff will prepare a copy of the findings of the Listening Sessions from December 2002 through January 2003. A draft copy will be reviewed by the Extension Administrative group. Before the 2003 legislative session in February, a final copy of the findings will be presented to members of the legislature and distributed to individuals that participated in the Listening Sessions and other stakeholders.

What are the responsibilities of the county staff for the Listening Sessions?
The Listening Sessions will be a team approach between county educators, state, area, and district specialists, as well as volunteer leaders. The county staff will:
* Attend county educator orientation and possibly facilitator training if they are interested in being a member of the facilitator teams.
* Set a date and secure a location for their county Listening Session.
* Implement the Listening Session in their county.
* Identify and invite participants from the target audience.
* Recruit individuals to attend the Listening Sessions
* Publicize the event in the county.
* Assist the facilitator team in conducting the Listening Session.

During the next few months how will counties find out additional information about the Listening Sessions?
Information regarding the Listening Sessions will be in Extension News every other week. Also, information will be provided on the OCES website under Listening Session (http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls).

What type of facility is needed to conduct the Listening Sessions?
The type of facility needed to conduct the meeting should accommodate approximately 30 to 50 people; depending on the number you expect to attend. (There will be a general gathering of all Listening Session participants, then breakout sessions for smaller group discussion.) The Listening Sessions will last approximately 2 1/2 hours. Extension will ask other agencies and groups to attend and invite their constituencies, but Extension will be the hosting organization.

How much will the Listening Sessions cost the county?
If refreshments are provided at the sessions, the counties must provide local sponsorship to cover the costs. Any resource materials, travel expenses by facilitator teams, or materials for the Listening Sessions will be the responsibility of the state OCES office.
Oklahoma Community
Listening Session Timeline

What is the timeline for implementing the results of the Listening Sessions?

**September – December 2002**
Sponsor Listening Sessions to provide the community at large with an opportunity to assess needs of the community, county, and region
- Publicize event
- Conduct the Listening Sessions
- Compile and submit results electronically

**December 2002– February 2003**
How do we respond to constituents?
- Share timeline with Listening Session participants
- Set up list serve of Listening Session participants
- Communicate with participants at least twice prior to February 2003

**February 2003**
Present final copy of findings from the Listening Sessions
- Print and distribute findings from the Listening Sessions to elected leaders and stakeholders
- Identify stakeholders to participate in Focus Forum
- Review the format of the Focus Forum

**March 2003 – May 2003**
Conduct Focus Forums to prioritize items identified in Listening Sessions and explore how to respond to needs of the people
- Define critical elements and priority items for the county
- Discharge the battery of information compiled at the Listening Sessions
  - Who is the most appropriate to address the findings?
  - How can Extension respond to the findings?
  - Who can address the findings at the community level?
- Compile and submit results electronically
- Identify appropriate responsible persons, agencies, and organizations

**June – July 2003**
Develop Local Issue/Impact Teams to address the needs identified at the Listening Sessions
- Determine how priorities for the county will be addressed
- Work with partnering agencies to develop local issue teams
- Work on priorities that are aligned with Extension’s mission and resources

**August – October 2003**
Introduce Issues and Long Range Plan for Extension
- Prepare draft copy of long-range plan for Extension
- Send draft copy to Extension Administrative group for review
- Finalize long-range plan for Extension document for next five years
- Print and distribute long-range plan for Extension document to stakeholders

**January 2004 – 2009**
Implement Long Range Plan for Extension
Validate and communicate results