



## Select Issues to Address

Environmental scans and needs assessments are excellent tools to uncover a range of possible issues that Extension staff may address. Ultimately, staff must choose which issues to take on, and this step doesn't always involve picking the most commonly cited issues. Instead, selecting issues involves putting your list of potential issues through filters such as your core competencies and return-on-investment (ROI). The table below lists tools that may assist you with this filtering process.

<b>Tool</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>	<b>When to Use</b>
<b>Core competency identification</b>	Identify your unique set of competencies that drive success	Aligns potential issues with our strengths, expertise, and what makes us unique compared to other organizations in a program space	Can sometimes be difficult to clearly define specific individual or group competencies	When you need to narrow down the issues you choose to address and want to leverage your strengths to do so
<b>Cut Before You Add</b>	Reflect on current (and potential) offerings to see where to invest and where to cut back	Helps you prioritize both new and existing programs; Straightforward and intuitive	Benefits from a broad understanding of you or your team's overall strategy; Implies that you already know your core competencies	When you are considering taking on new initiatives but may need to cut back on existing initiatives first; When you already understand your broader strategy and core competencies
<b>2x2 Prioritization Matrix</b>	Consider current and potential offerings from the perspective of what is impactful and feasible	Helps you prioritize both new and existing programs;	Consider current and potential offerings from the perspective of what is impactful and feasible	When you need a simple tool to help you prioritize which issues to address; When there is already broad agreement on your mission

Identifying [core competencies](#) can be an important first step. Leveraging these core competencies can solidify your niche in providing educational resources and can allow you to maximize your ROI on program development, as the time and effort (inputs) required to generate a certain output or outcome may be relatively low. That said, just because an issue is outside of your core competencies doesn't mean that you shouldn't pursue it. The important point is to weigh the costs and benefits of developing or refining a given program/resource with the costs and benefits of developing or refining a different program or resource. If you already have a good understanding of your competencies and this understanding is shared across your team (if applicable), the Cut Before You Add and 2x2 Prioritization Matrix can help you make more pointed decisions about issues to address.

Other tools to help with issue selection are included at the end of this section. Note that the Nominal Group Technique can be used in conjunction with many other tools presented throughout this guidebook in order to gather individual input for group decision-making, including input from your diverse network. The Strategy Canvas introduced for environmental scans can also help with issue selection and other parts of the program planning process.

County Extension offices can identify the issues they plan to address in a County Program Plan or similar document in order to provide a shared and transparent strategy across the office. PRUs can utilize county-identified issues to narrow down the list of issues they plan to address in Plan of Work documents. Individuals can identify issues in Plans to Invest based on County Program Plans, PRU Plans of Work, and their own inclinations.

Note that once issues have been identified, particularly by PRUs, opportunities for collaboration are likely to present themselves. For example, if one program team identifies mental health as an issue to address, and 4-H identifies youth mental health as an issue, those two groups may collaborate. Similarly, business management may apply across community development, food systems, and agricultural program teams. Although issues may emerge after planning documents are completed – especially since “triggering events” such as wildfires or insect outbreaks can present great opportunities for Extension interventions - formally identifying issues in the planning process provides a key opportunity for collaboration across the organization (Donaldson J. L., 2020).