



Step 6a: Filtering Issues

Now that information has been collected from multiple sources, the next step is to synthesize it in a way that can guide planning for action to address community needs. In a sense, this will be like weaving together different themes to tell a story or perhaps several stories. No doubt, though, that this can be a daunting task with a lot of information to absorb and process. Given that each information source has strengths and drawbacks, the use of filters to prioritize issues can be helpful. These filters include:

- how important an issue is to your community at-large
- how important an issue is to various populations within your community, especially populations that have been underrepresented in past OEE programming and/or those that may provide new “markets” for Extension resources
- what is actionable/feasible given a reasonable potential to add or shift resources or to partner with other organizations
- lessons learned from previous programming efforts

If one was to articulate a single filter through which to process all data, it would be the question: How can OEE maximize its impact in Colorado communities?

To start filtering, a [Community Toolbox](#) developed by the University of Kansas suggests first listing the major takeaways from each of the methods used (the perceptions survey, secondary data, key informants, and the CNA surveys). You can create a new spreadsheet or add on to the Secondary and Key Informant Data spreadsheet to accomplish this. In the spreadsheet, list important issues identified by each method and note similarities and differences between methods. If some findings contradict others, what differences in values, experiences, and priorities might that reflect? Might they be due to differences in the accuracy of the methods?

Use your survey results to pay particular attention to priorities of those who are less familiar with the Office of Engagement & Extension/CSUE and key demographic groups that may have been underrepresented in survey responses and your community. If we want to expand our reach and maximize impact, it is important to identify priorities of those who have not been represented well in past OEE programming. Discuss as staff in order to gain the best shared understanding you can of priority issues.

Beyond that exercise, various tools exist to help you filter and prioritize issues to address as a county Extension office. The table below lists some of these tools and considerations for their use, and the actual tools along with others you may choose to use are found on Extension’s CNA webpage.

Tool	Description	Pros	Cons	When to Use
Core competency identification	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
Cut Before You Add	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
2x2 Prioritization Matrix	Consider current and potential offerings from the perspective of what is impactful and feasible	Helps you prioritize both new and existing programs; Straightforward and intuitive	Still requires judgment as to whether you want to take on high impact initiatives that require significant time & effort	When you need a simple tool to help you prioritize which issues to address; When there is already broad agreement on your mission

Identifying and leveraging 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, the Cut Before You Add and 2x2 Prioritization Matrix can help you make more pointed decisions about issues to address. Note that the Nominal Group Technique ("dot voting", for example) can be used in conjunction with many other tools in order to gather individual input for group decision-making.