



# URI OUTREACH CENTER

## Strategic Plan

2011-2015

# Executive Summary

The goal of the 2011-2015 URI Outreach Center Strategic Plan is to transform the URI Outreach Center into the University's premier conduit for research-based education that responds to the needs of Rhode Island's citizens in a timely manner.

This Plan is intended to serve as a framework that guides our decision-making in a way that achieves our mission and makes progress toward our vision. Four goals which directly support our mission and vision have been designated as priorities over the next four years. For each goal, we have identified specific strategies and actions that will provide clear direction as we move forward.

This plan is also well-aligned with the goals and objectives outlined in the comprehensive University of Rhode Island 2010-2015 Academic Strategic Plan.

*The four priority goals of the URI Outreach Center are to:*

1. Enhance delivery of traditional extension programs and responsiveness to ever-evolving environmental and economic sustainability issues facing communities and stakeholder groups.
2. Leverage funding from the land grant system and from the state to enhance our capacity to deliver programs which address environmental, economic and social needs.
3. Increase our capacity and improve the quality of URI outreach and extension programs by engaging students to enhance their success and educational experience.
4. Increase our visibility and value to the URI and RI communities as an integral link between the needs of Rhode Island citizens and URI's Land Grant and outreach mission.

## About the URI Outreach Center

Originally named the URI Cooperative Extension Education Center, the URI Outreach Center was established in 1986 to centralize and consolidate county-level extension programs in order to conserve dollars and use staff more efficiently.

As part of the nationwide land grant university system, the Center brings together multidisciplinary teams of researchers, staff and graduate and undergraduate students to work in partnership with national, state and local governments, the business community and non-profits to solve complex community problems.

The URI Outreach Center also serves as a point of access through which these groups can access research-based knowledge and obtain assistance to address a broad range of environmental and socioeconomic issues.

Our programs are vertically integrated, from research to outreach, and tailored for each audience or stakeholder group. In the land grant tradition, we extend our reach through an extensive cadre of trained volunteers who serve as early adopters of new information and practices and expand our capacity to deliver programs.

Our current focus areas include horticulture, urban agriculture and energy. However, we strive to remain programmatically flexible and responsive to changes in stakeholder demand, developing new programs and projects as the need arises and/or opportunities emerge.

A key feature of our extension and outreach activities is student engagement. Participating in outreach and extension programs provides an unparalleled experiential learning opportunity for URI students, preparing them to address interdisciplinary challenges of the 21st century.

## Vision

Within the next five years, the URI Outreach Center will be the institution of first choice for research-based education that responds to ever-evolving community needs. The Center will expand its reach by engaging residents, students, business owners, citizen groups, public agencies and key decision-makers throughout Rhode Island. The Center will grow its roots by creating new partnerships and securing and stabilizing new sources of funding.

## Mission

The mission of the URI Outreach Center is to work in partnership with the private, public and non-profit sectors to enhance the environmental, economic and social quality of Rhode Island communities through research-based programs. *The missions of the Center's three core program areas, horticulture, urban agriculture and energy, are shown in Appendix A.*

## Comparative Data

University extension and outreach programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are much like research programs. Funded in large part by external grants, certain programs grow and other programs shrink in response to both community needs and funding opportunities. This entrepreneurial business plan contrasts dramatically with the client-based Extension programs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which were funded exclusively by state dollars and federal formula funds. An ongoing challenge of the new paradigm is allocating limited resources so as to maintain program continuity and provide programs and services of the highest quality.

The entrepreneurial paradigm for extension was already in play when the Center was founded in 1986. At that time, in recognition of shrinking federal and state funds, URI consolidated extension programs offered in four Rhode Island county offices into the Cooperative Extension Education Center located on URI's Kingston Campus. The Center was designed to offer 'one stop shopping' for RI residents looking for assistance with horticulture, food safety or nutrition questions. The Center initially brought together 6 employees from different program areas. The

mission and programs of the center developed in response to funding opportunities and community needs, a tradition that is continued today.

In the 1990's the Center pursued external funds and developed new partnerships in order to expand program offerings. Working closely with the faculty in the Department of Plant Sciences and the Department of Natural Resources Science and the USDA Integrated Pest Management Program and Water Quality Extension Programs, the scope of Center programs broadened to incorporate best environmental practices for water quality and water supply management, integrated pest management and ecological sustainability. The Center also launched its environmental science education program targeting grades K-5, based in the URI Botanical Gardens (formerly known as the Learning Landscape).

The 1990s saw the emergence of volunteers as valuable multipliers of federal and state dollars. Well-trained, dedicated volunteers became vital partners in the Center's efforts to promote environmentally sustainable behaviors ranging from minimizing pesticide use to managing organic wastes through composting.

While Center programs expanded, federal support for the Center declined from 1986 to 2004: from 6 FTE (1986) to 1.6 FTE (2004). State support remained stable at 1 FTE (the Center Director).

From 2005 – 2010, the Center refocused on aggressive pursuit of external funds with the goal of maintaining and strengthening core programs and launching new initiatives. In 2008, the Center initiated a new, multi-disciplinary energy program, supported by an internal University grant and supplemented by external grants.

That same year, the Center established a funded partnership with the City of Providence's Roger Williams Park Botanical Center. This ongoing collaborative effort provides an outstanding venue from which to reach urban audiences, from community development groups interested in urban agriculture, to high school students struggling to improve their science skills to stay in school.

In light of the expanded programming, Cooperative Extension leadership increased funds allocated to the Center in 2010. State and federal funds now provide a little over 50% of the Center's budget.

## Strategic Goals

The Strategic Goals outlined in this section follow directly from the overall vision and mission of the Outreach Center described above. The goals described below are broad in scope in order to encompass programs conducted in each of the Center's focus areas.

***Goal 1 – Enhance DELIVERY of traditional extension programs and RESPONSIVENESS to ever-evolving environmental and economic sustainability issues facing communities and stakeholder groups.***

**Metrics**

- Establishment of ad hoc advisory groups for each program area
- Participation in advisory groups by University faculty partners, community leaders representing key stakeholder groups in the public, private and nonprofit sectors
- URI Outreach and Extension staff participation in short-term, time-sensitive, issue-driven partnerships
- Number of training programs or educational activities offered
- Number of individuals completing training programs
- Number of professional certifications offered
- Number of outreach events organized or attended
- Demographic and geographic diversity of program participants

**Strategy A – Deliver programs and services to proactively address the changing needs of Rhode Island communities and stakeholder groups**

*Action* – Conduct periodic surveys to understand community needs including both traditional and new stakeholder groups

*Action* – Participate in the development and implementation of statewide strategic plans developed for key Center program areas; identify areas to which URI may make a contribution and work to secure resources to support the effort

*Action* – Prioritize programming and resources to focus on highest-need areas

*Action* – Grow support network by forming ad hoc advisory committees for each program area including representatives from the University, public and private sector, non-profit agencies and other key stakeholder groups.

**Strategy B – Incorporate community-based social marketing methods and techniques into program design and implementation**

*Action* – Conduct surveys among target audiences to identify barriers to sustainable behavior (including economic, environmental, equity aspects of sustainability)

*Action* – Design programs that utilize established educational and behavior change methods

*Action* – Evaluate impacts of outreach and extension programs and services on an annual basis and apply principles of adaptive management

*Action* – Submit Annual Report of Accomplishments on federally funded programs to NIFA

*Action* – Use Ad Hoc Advisory Groups to review program successes and challenges on an annual basis and to identify emerging needs and opportunities

**Strategy C – Develop programs to reach out to new target audiences**

*Action* – In partnership with the City of Providence, increase programming at the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center, targeting low income and minority populations

*Action* – Explore opportunities to expand programming in URI Botanical Gardens in partnership with URI Horticulture staff and faculty

*Action* – Explore partnership with URI Extension FNEP program to increase availability of fresh food in low income communities

*Action* – Work to expand K-12 environment/science programming in Providence and other urban communities: during the summer and in schools and in after school programs in alignment with Grade Span Expectations

*Action* – Offer subsidized training and educational programs for disadvantaged audiences

**Strategy D – Provide opportunities for interested citizens to gain knowledge and experience assisting with Outreach Center educational programs**

*Action* – Provide specialized training that prepares volunteers for specific outreach and education activities

*Action* – Utilize cadres of trained volunteers to expand our capacity to deliver programs and science-based environmental information

*Action* – Provide opportunities and support to all volunteers on an on-going basis

*Action* – Establish energy volunteer program modeled after horticulture volunteer programs

**Strategy E – Identify and utilize emerging technologies**

*Action* – Use technology, such as classroom polling devices, web portals, online registration, to deliver improved classroom training

*Action* – Increase participation in programs by offering innovative distance education opportunities

*Action* – Prioritize technology support in budgets and employ necessary support staff

*Action* – Establish presence on social networking sites

***Goal 2 - LEVERAGE FUNDING from the Land Grant System and from the State to enhance our capacity to deliver programs which address environmental, economic and social needs.***

## **Metrics**

- Number of meetings with stakeholders in each program area to review outreach/extension goals, programs and program capacity
- Grant proposals written
- Grants awarded (total number; amount of funding)
- Funding collaborators identified; partnerships formed
- Dollars brought in through fee-based programs and fundraising activities
- Funds obtained from state agencies
- New programs/projects established
- Expansion of current programs/projects
- New FTEs added

### **Strategy A – Increase revenue generation from grants to support existing and new programs**

*Action* – Work with URI Foundation, URI Research Office and other groups to identify grant opportunities

*Action* – Provide internal grant-writing training and support for staff

*Action* – Write a minimum of 4 grants in each program area annually

### **Strategy B– Increase revenue generation from fee-based programs**

*Action* – Establish method for setting program fees to ensure that revenue covers the costs running the program including staff time OR determine how program costs can be covered from other sources

*Action* – Use feedback from surveys and ad hoc advisory committees to develop fee-based programs that meet educational and training needs of Rhode Island (e.g., programs for which there is a demand)

*Action* – Seek out partnerships with governmental agencies to run education/training programs on their behalf

### **Strategy C – Increase revenue generation through fundraising activities**

*Action* – Clarify connection between fundraising activities of the Master Gardener Foundation of RI and the longterm support of the URI Master Gardener Program operation

*Action* – Continue partnership with the Master Gardener Association and the Master Gardener Foundation to offer scholarships and other support to allow disadvantaged audiences to participate in youth educational programs

*Action* - Organize at least one major fundraising event annually

*Action* - Work with University extension leaders to develop a long-term fundraising strategy for outreach and extension programs

*Action* –Enable electronic donation through website, emails and social media

**Goal 3 – Increase the capacity and improve the quality of outreach and extension programs by ENGAGING STUDENTS to enhance their success and educational experience.**

**Metrics**

- Number of programs that engage students in experiential learning
- Number of students working as interns or fellows with our outreach programs
- Number of faculty-supervised students also trained and mentored by the Outreach Center
- Diversity and geographic distribution of students
- Outreach representation on curricula development committees
- Number of students continuing their education at URI in sustainable energy, agriculture or horticulture after graduation from CCRI or other institutions

**Strategy A – Provide experiential learning opportunities for students**

*Action* – Develop stable funding base for Energy Fellows Program and Projects

*Action* – Look for opportunities to mentor Coastal Fellows at the Outreach Center

*Action* - Develop other Fellowship/Internship opportunities as opportunities arise

*Action* – Establish ongoing partnership with Americorps program

*Action* – Seek opportunities to partner with other University entities (colleges, programs, etc) on experiential learning efforts

**Strategy B – Strengthen existing and seek out new faculty partnerships to build the relationship between outreach and academic programs including opportunities for student engagement**

*Action* – Develop programs to assist academic departments with outreach needs

*Action* – Develop and maintain a database of University outreach projects

*Action* – Seek out grant opportunities that include research and outreach components

*Action* – Maintain faculty contacts through periodic face to face meetings

*Action* – Work with faculty/departments to develop curricula based on emerging societal and community needs

**Strategy C – Look for opportunities to engage URI in statewide workforce development efforts**

*Action* – Seek opportunities to collaborate with URI programs for students to transition to URI from the Community College of Rhode Island

*Action* – Develop professional certifications and training programs in response to workforce development needs

*Action* – Partner with other state institutions on workforce development issues

*Action* – Establish relationships with industry representatives to facilitate in-the-field internship, work-study, and post-graduate job opportunities.

*Action* – Participate in annual career festivals where industry reps can perform on-the-spot interviews and receive resumes (perhaps in coordination with PLS events, etc.)

*Action* – Promote use of GreenJobsNE website maintained by Brian Maynard for industry professionals and URI students

***Goal 4 – Increase our VISIBILITY and VALUE to the URI and RI communities as an integral link between the needs of Rhode Island citizens and URI’s Land Grant mission.***

**Metrics**

- URI Outreach Center Facebook fans
- Hits on URI Outreach Center web site
- Constant Contact metrics - size of mailing list; opening rate
- Newspaper and television spots mentioning URI generated by Outreach Center staff and programs
- URI Master Gardener hotline calls and email questions
- Referrals for outreach assistance from University colleagues
- Active volunteers
- Positive program evaluations
- Faculty requesting assistance
- Invitations to serve on University committees/councils
- Joint funding requests submitted with faculty
- College/university awards received
- Undergraduate and graduate students involved in Outreach Center experiential learning or scholarly research projects
- Faculty fulfilling extension appointments by participating in URI Outreach Center programs
- Positive feedback from faculty after participating in URI Outreach Center events/programs
- Grant proposals submitted with non-URI entities
- Representation on local, state, and regional boards, committees, projects, etc.

**Strategy A – Have every Outreach Center employee serve as an effective ambassador for the University and all its programs to build taxpayer and legislative support and recruit students**

*Action* – Every outreach presentation includes a succinct overview of the mission of URI and the Center and its role at the University

*Action* – Create and wear name badges or other URI identification at public events

*Action* – Provide staff training on communicating University and outreach missions, values and programs to the public

**Strategy B – Foster an environment in which staff perform at their highest level, feel satisfied and are recognized for their success**

*Action* - Develop a set of core competencies and program area skills that Outreach Center employees should possess to anticipate and deliver quality educational programs of relevance and importance to the community

*Action* – Provide training opportunities surrounding the core competencies and program area skills

*Action* – Provide facilitation and/or support for staff seeking to hire work-study students (or others) to help accomplish program mission and goals

**Strategy C – Use outreach and extension programs as a recruiting and marketing tool for the University**

*Action* – Support development and implementation of a unified marketing campaign

*Action* – Establish presence on social networking sites

*Action* – Develop communication plan for programs conducted in the urban community

**Strategy D – Elevate the awareness of outreach as a key function within the University and the state**

*Action* – Participate in relevant URI and RI councils and committees

*Action* – Raise awareness of ongoing outreach programs within CELS and the University

**Strategy E – Promote URI as a source of objective information on environmental and sustainability issues**

*Action* – Demonstrate practical solutions to environmental issues on campus and throughout southern New England

*Action* – Provide educational programs that expand opportunities for Rhode Islanders to learn about sustainable horticulture, sustainable agriculture and sustainable energy

*Action* – Participate in state, regional, national councils, committees to apply university expertise to sustainable energy, urban agriculture and horticulture

**Strategy F – Seed or expand sustainable partnerships between the URI Outreach Center and local communities, government agencies, businesses, nonprofits and other university stakeholders.**

*Action* – Engage in short-term, time-sensitive, issue-driven partnerships to meet immediate, critical, temporary needs in the industry

*Action* – Maintain presence at regional meetings and conferences to network and build relationships with other organizations

*Action* – Use ad hoc advisory committee to make connections

*Action* – Identify other stakeholder organizations working within our program areas

*Action* – Develop a checklist to determine need for formal agreement between URI and external organizations

*Action* – Develop model for partnership agreements between URI and external organizations

# Resources

Center staff includes 7 full-time employees and 2 part-time employees. In addition, approximately 25 students are engaged in Center projects, primarily Energy Fellows but also students engaged in horticulture, urban agriculture and operational aspects of center management programs. Finally, two college employees are assigned administratively to the Center: the College Grounds Manager (Don Timpson) and the Agricultural Extension Agent (Kristen Castrataro). The Grounds Manager works primarily with greenhouse and URI Botanical Garden employees and the Agricultural Extension Agent runs an independent suite of programs.

Payroll expenses are approximately \$510,000/year. (This figure excludes the budget manager, recently assigned to the Center but continuing to work on college wide budget issues, the two administrative assignees and student payrolls). Funding sources include external grants (≈\$200,000), state funds (≈\$150,000), land grant funds (≈\$135,000) and fee accounts (≈\$26,000). Additional revenue from fee accounts is used for program operating costs and student payroll. Staff functions and funding sources are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Title	Name	Function	State	Land Grant	Other Grants	Fee Accts
Director	Marion Gold	Management	1.0			
Budget Officer (CELS)	Michael Milkman	Administration				
Office Mgr	Mamie Chen	Administration	0.3	0.6		.1
Assistant Director	Rachel Sholly	Administration & Energy Programs		1.0		
Clean Cities Program Coordinator (.5 FTE)	Wendy Lucht	Energy - Transportation Sector			.5	
Community Outreach & Engagement Specialist (.5 FTE)	Sejal Lanterman	Communication & Hort, Urban Ag Programs		.5		
Master Gardener Coordinator	Rosanne Sherry	Volunteer Training & Horticulture		.6		.4
Sustainable Horticulture Specialist	Kate Venturini	Green Industry Training; Surveys & Horticulture; Hort-Energy Interface			.9	.1
<i>Youth Science Education and Rhody Native</i>	Vanessa Venturini	K-12 STEM Education; Green Industry Training			.9	.1
Students		Office Mgt – 1 Graphic Design – 1 Hort & Urban Ag –2 Energy Fellows - 24		.1	.9	

The Center also oversees the work of the URI Master Gardener Association (URIMGA), an interdependent and affiliated group which includes 554 members and has an annual budget that runs from \$70,000 - \$100,000/year. The Director of the RI Land Grant Program, the Center Director and URIMGA leadership have been working hard to develop a constructive partnership which includes a shared vision of fundraising. The Center Director, along with the Dean of the College, are also members of the Master Gardener Foundation, a 501 3c designed to provide long-term financial support for the Master Gardener program. The specifics of how the support will be channeled to the University have not been articulated, a gap which should be addressed by the Center and the College.

The Center operates out of the Mallon Outreach Center, a 3,300 square foot facility located in the URI Botanical Gardens. Space has become extremely tight at the Center, especially in the summer when the Master Gardener phone hotline is in operation and the student Energy Fellows program is in full swing. To provide better working conditions for staff, students and volunteers, the Center is exploring external funding opportunities to expand the facility. Along with providing additional office space, the project will facilitate use of the URIBG for events and also engage students in designing, building and monitoring a facility that will serve as a state-of-the-art model for efficient and renewable energy use.

# Appendix A: Program Missions

## **Sustainable Horticulture Mission**

To promote environmental stewardship and economic viability by providing research-based education for landowners, homeowners, urban residents and the green industry.

## **Sustainable Urban Agriculture Mission**

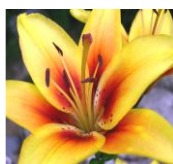
To promote the viability of community gardening and sustainable landscaping in urban areas to enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of our communities.

## **Sustainable Energy Mission**

To develop and implement locally-based solutions to global energy challenges by partnering with local, state, regional and national decision-makers, energy providers, nonprofits and the business community while training and engaging students in the process.

## Appendix B: Program Areas

# URI Outreach Center



### Sustainable Horticulture

- Master Gardener
- Learning Landscape
- Landscape Restoration
- Master Composter & Recycler
- RWP Botanical Center
- Special Events



### Urban Agriculture

- Education and Technical Assistance for Urban Gardeners
- Urban Agricultural Information & Resources
- Advocacy
- Training Opportunities
- State & Regional Collaborations



### Sustainable Energy

- Sustainable Energy Projects (efficiency & renewables)
- Energy Policy
- OCEAN STATE CLEAN CITIES COALITION
- URI Energy Fellows & Certificate Program
- Master Energy Training
- RI Energy Data Center

\_\_\_\_\_ ( ) \_\_\_\_\_