



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR FOR EXTENSION SERVICES

Institutional Excellence in Community Engagement: A Narrative Report on USM Extension Best Practices (2024-2026)

1. The Strategic Vision: Unity in Diversity and Sustainable Growth

The University of Southern Mindanao (USM) is guided by a resolute mission: "Unity in diversity and sustainable development in Mindanao through quality and relevant education." Throughout the 2024–2026 period, this mission has served as the strategic anchor for all institutional activities, ensuring that the University’s intellectual capital is leveraged to foster regional stability. Under the leadership of the Office of the Director for Extension Services, USM has successfully transitioned from traditional community outreach to a sophisticated model of institutionalized best practices. This evolution ensures that every initiative is grounded in quality, relevance, and a long-term vision for Mindanao’s prosperity. These projects collectively represent a holistic approach to development, beginning with a deep commitment to cultural stewardship and the protection of indigenous rights.

2. Thematic Pillar I: Cultural Stewardship and Indigenous Rights Advocacy

In the diverse landscape of Mindanao, cultural preservation is an institutional imperative. USM recognizes that regional development is only sustainable when it honors the heritage of Indigenous Peoples (IP). This pillar is realized through initiatives that empower indigenous voices by blending ancestral traditions with modern agency.

Empowering Indigenous Voices

Under the "UNIK 2025: The Kasunayan Program" and the "Harnessing Efforts for Recovery Operations (HERO)" initiative, USM—primarily through the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS)—has moved beyond aid to genuine empowerment.

- **Artistic Revitalization:** Programs in sewing and breadmaking have revitalized the artistic traditions of the Bagobo-Tagabawa community.
- **Disaster Resilience:** The development of culture-based, IP-focused information materials ensures that disaster mitigation strategies are linguistically and culturally accessible.
- **Tourism Branding:** In Bongolanon, Magpet, Cotabato, the HERO project has established a robust tourism brand for the Manobo tribe, upskilling local artisans through the introduction of the "Tahiti Depollinator" for soft broom production.

Literacy and Literacy and Advocacy (SULAT)

The "SULAT" initiative (Strengthening Understanding, Literacy, Advocacy, and Tourism) and the "LitNumBarSi" project (Literacy and Numeracy in Barangay Simone) represent the University’s commitment to education that respects local identity. Led by CASS and the College of Education (CED) in partnership with the College of Science and Mathematics (CSM), these projects utilize local languages to develop curriculum resources for B’laan youth and educators. By grounding literacy in indigenous resources, USM ensures that educational advancement does not come at the cost of cultural erasure.

National Recognition of Excellence

The University’s commitment to these practices was nationally validated on June 11, 2026, when USM received its NCCA Accreditation. This certification identifies the University as a proponent in compliance with NCCA Board Resolution No. 2017-265, recognizing our institutional capacity to implement national cultural projects. This cultural foundation is the essential precursor to the economic stability of our partner communities.

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3. Thematic Pillar II: Inclusive Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Resilience

Economic resilience is a core metric of extension success. USM’s strategy targets marginalized sectors—specifically Bangsamoro women and Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL)—to ensure that growth is truly inclusive.

Reintegration and Gender-Inclusive Development

The USM CASS project "Pathways to Reintegration" provides vocational training and personal development for PDLs, facilitating their transition back into society with dignity and marketable skills. Simultaneously, the College of Agriculture (CA) has spearheaded "EMPOWERING BANGSAMORO WOMEN THROUGH KAONG (ARENGA PINNATA) SYRUP AND VINEGAR PRODUCTION." These initiatives answer the critical "So What?" of extension work: they transform social vulnerability into economic independence and gender-inclusive leadership.

Agricultural Value-Addition and Enterprise

USM leverages its scientific expertise to turn raw local resources into high-value enterprises through the following flagship programs:

- **Mushroom Livelihood Development Program:** Led by USM PALMA, this initiative provides training and enterprise support for Oyster and Volvariella growers in Barangay Montay, Libungan, Cotabato.
- **CBDEM-Delicacies:** Conducted by the College of Business Development and Economics Management, this project focuses on the capacity building and enterprise development of traditional Maguindanaon specialties.
- **BLUE FEEDS:** Formally titled "BLUE FEEDS: Strengthening Blue Economy thru Feed Formulation Technology Skills Training," this collaboration between the CA and CSM empowers coastal and aquaculture communities with advanced technology. These gains in economic resilience are sustained through professional educational governance and inter-agency collaboration.

4. Thematic Pillar III: Collaborative Governance in Educational Advancement

Sustainable community development requires a robust educational ecosystem. Through "Project LEAD" and "Project STAR-CAMP," USM serves as a strategic partner to the Department of Education (DepEd), modernizing the secondary school landscape.

Partnership Dynamics: The USM Graduate School

A cornerstone of this pillar is "Project LEAD" (Leadership and Education Advancement through Development). As a dedicated **USM Graduate School** initiative, this project supports DepEd SDO Kidapawan City educators through in-service training. The Graduate School provides a module-based approach to innovations in school management, training school leaders to implement best practices that directly improve institutional quality at the basic education level.

Pedagogical Innovation and Robotics

Innovation extends into the classroom through the College of Education’s "Project STAR-CAMP," which capacitates teachers with contextualized Science and Mathematics pedagogies. Complementing this is "Project CEInTRix" (Science Education and Innovation Through Robotix) from the College of Engineering and Information Technology (CEIT), which introduces robotics to secondary schools. This technological modernization in schools provides a seamless transition into the University’s broader digital transformation and strategic communication initiatives.

5. Thematic Pillar IV: Digital Transformation and Strategic Communication

In the modern extension landscape, information accessibility is a prerequisite for participation. USM has institutionalized digital and media-driven strategies to amplify community impact and ensure transparency.

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The Digital Hub

The "Extension Knowledge Portal and Communication Hub (EKPCH Project)" serves as our centralized repository for extension data. By digitizing project tracking and public information, USM has fostered greater awareness and community engagement, ensuring that our resources are accessible to the public we serve.

The Blue Siren Standard

The excellence of our communication efforts reached a historic milestone on July 24, 2026, during the **first Blue Siren Awards**. The USM Extension Services Office was honored with the "Blue Siren Award" (Siren of Community Development) from DXVL 94.9 FM. This recognition, signed by Station Manager Brex Brayan C. Nicolas and USM President Jonal L. Pimentel, cited our exemplary initiatives in empowering communities and improving the quality of life in Cotabato through broadcast media and public awareness. These tools are indispensable for the transparent reporting and data-driven evaluation of our projects.

6. Governance and Accountability: Systematic Impact Monitoring

Institutional excellence is maintained through a rigorous shift toward data-driven extension. Success at USM is measured not by the volume of activities, but by documented, sustainable change in our partner communities.

Metrics and Documentation

Under "Project 5: Effective Monitoring and Evaluation," USM has developed sophisticated metrics to track project outcomes. This is complemented by "Project 11," which focuses on "Monitoring and Evaluating the Progress and Impact of USM Extension Projects." A critical component of this systematic governance was the "Training on Needs Assessment" conducted on July 11, 2026, ensuring that all interventions address verified community gaps.

Adapting to Governance Challenges

As a cognizant institution, USM views the "problems met" during implementation not as failures, but as opportunities for refining best practices. The Extension Services Office has proactively managed challenges such as **Faculty Workload balance**, the complexities of **MOA Revision and Approval delays**, and the necessity of operating within stringent budget allocations. By documenting these frictions, USM ensures that its governance model is adaptive, realistic, and resilient.

7. Conclusion: Synthesis of Best Practices and Future Outlook

The University of Southern Mindanao's extension model for 2024–2026 is defined by a powerful triad: **cultural sensitivity, economic inclusivity, and collaborative governance**. By integrating the expertise of our diverse colleges—from the cultural advocacy of CASS and the pedagogical innovation of CED to the agricultural science of the CA—we have created a holistic framework for regional transformation. This trajectory establishes a scalable blueprint for other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Mindanao and across the Philippines. USM has demonstrated that "quality and relevant education" is more than a slogan; it is a tangible force for community empowerment when backed by systematic monitoring, national accreditation, and a strategic vision for unity. As we move forward, USM remains dedicated to the pursuit of excellence, ensuring that our mission continues to translate into lasting progress for the people of Mindanao.