

MAY 2019

LEADING EDGE DIALOGUE SERIES

NATIONAL URBAN EXTENSION CONFERENCE



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ABOUT THE LEADING EDGE DIALOGUE WHITE PAPER SERIES

Leading Edge Dialogues (LED's) were six 90-minute interactive workshops held during the 2019 National Urban Extension Conference which explored critical issues facing our cities and our universities. Each LED consisted of a multi-sector panel presentation followed by a facilitated group discussion with all attendees. This paper captures both the presentations and the innovative discussion that followed for one of the LED's. Papers have been written for each of the LED's which focused on the following topics: Youth Engagement, Preparing the Extension Workforce, Data and Policy, Fulfilling the Land Grant University Mission, Smart Cities and Urban Green Infrastructure.

PRESENTED BY



DATA AND POLICY: RESPONDING TO HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS

THE ISSUE

This Leading Edge Dialogue (LED) session was a conversation between researchers and practitioners about the importance of data-driven research when developing human services interventions. A crosscutting theme from the three panelists' presentations included the importance of data to understand and relate human stories to both enhance an organization's understanding of the issues, and for the purposes of educating policymakers.

Data is needed for decision-making particularly around human services and community development, which are complex and intersectional issues. Skill in leveraging and presenting data will position research at the forefront of social policy conversations and decisions; however, retaining current silos of data and research could lead to suboptimal policy decisions and erosion of support for public universities.

From a local government perspective, there is potential for partnerships and interface between Extension and government agencies. While elected officials and other government stakeholders in many communities may seem indifferent to data and research, this problem is not monolithic. In fact, in the government human services sector there is a thirst for better data to legitimize and support social policy decisions. While these conversations are often spearheaded by private philanthropy, some forward-thinking governments are advancing this conversation as well.

DATA AND POLICY: RESPONDING



PANELISTS

Chris Fulcher, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (CARES) at University of Missouri Extension presented on a publicly available national data, mapping, and reporting platform that includes over 33,000 GIS data layers (engagementnetwork.org). The website includes several data analysis tools, StoryMaps, and mobile data collection tools that are part of the Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (CARES) at University of Missouri Extension.

Jon Morrison Winters, Senior Planning and Development Specialist, Aging and Disability Services, City of Seattle, Human Services Department shared his experience partnering with Washington State University's Metropolitan Center for Applied Research and Extension on *Moving Toward Age Friendly Housing in King County*, a research project and report that assessed housing needs for the diverse and growing older adult population in King County, Washington.

THE ISSUE (CONT'D)

Extension has the expertise plus the ability to serve as a bridge between policymakers and communities. An example of such a collaboration is the *Moving Toward Age Friendly Housing* report, a collaboration between the City of Seattle and Washington State University's Metropolitan Center for Applied Research and Extension, which allowed the City's Aging and Disability Services to highlight issues of accessible and affordable housing in "Age Friendly" communities. These partnerships can help us enhance our programs and, more importantly, support human and community well-being.

GENERATING AND DELIBERATING

During the discussion period, presenters spoke to their passion for people which drives their interest in data, then dialogued with attendees about the value of data to tell stories about real people.

Participants favored tools that brought both people and data to the table through the use of spatial analysis and place and policy overlap. These tools include the national Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (CARES) Engagement Network website, which allows researchers and policymakers the opportunity to add context to data and understand communities at a granular level. Similarly, the Colorado State University Market Research Center not only provides data, but also assists in determining the best analysis for a particular social need, including social network analysis, scenario planning, and economic development alignment.

Participants discussed how these tools provide an opportunity to reveal deeper truths about communities through a focus on social capital, while recognizing and resolving data gaps often related to minorities, women, and other overlooked groups. Exploring those gaps allows disparities and elements of community life that are typically ignored, discounted, or forgotten, to be acknowledged. Access to such information enables decisionmakers to form a more complete picture from which to draw when constructing policies for cities or communities.

When convening all stakeholders to a common meeting place, Extension understands those stakeholders include not just the people and the data, but also the place itself and the relationships that make a community work.

TO HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS



GENERATING AND DELIBERATING CONT'D

In other words, Extension can now name the social capital that acts as an often unseen set of assets to the neighborhood.

However, data and the tools to make it visible are useless without trust between the organization and the community. Trust is one of Extension's strongest assets, key to building bridges between policymakers and the people on the ground. Years of building that mutual respect can benefit all concerned.

Finally, participants agreed that elected leaders actually did care about decisions made in their name, and that Extension could offer valuable aid to improve data accuracy, particularly in the areas of natural disasters and community health needs assessments.

ACTION

While much of the conversation in this session was focused on micro-scale improvements to current practices, such as partnering across sectors, there was no shortage of major actions that would move our communities in the direction of data-informed decision making. Efforts from private philanthropy (e.g. the Gates Foundation, Arnold Ventures) could be leveraged to advance a national conversation about using data to build an evidence base for policy interventions.

While political consensus remains a challenge, human service needs are increasingly a bipartisan priority, as an increased focus on homelessness has demonstrated in Washington State, the Puget Sound Region, and other high-cost metropolitan areas. This potentially creates an opportunity to leverage public funding toward building an evidence base, and creating and sustaining data tools.

Storytelling is important in reaching out to communities, and comparative data is crucial to its effectiveness. Extension has two options in this arena; either lead with data to help tell a compelling story, or lead with the story and then bring in the data to help prioritize strategies, approaches, and methods.

PANELISTS CONT'D

Tom Johnson, Director of Community Engagement and Economic Development at Colorado State University (CSU) presented on the university's Market Research Center, which provides various types of data visualization and analysis tools to public policy partners and other stakeholders. The Center's core competencies include cluster analysis, workforce analytics, job posting analytics, economic impact studies, and similar tools. (Note: Mr. Johnson departed CSU in fall 2019 and is now President and CEO at Elevate Rapid City in South Dakota.)

ABOUT THE WESTERN CENTER FOR METROPOLITAN CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

The Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (WCMER) is a multi-university collaboration established by the Western Extension Directors Association to increase the internal capacity of Western Extension programs to address metropolitan issues, and to elevate the stature and value of Cooperative Extension to external metropolitan audiences. Since its founding in 2014 we have focused our efforts on applied research on best Extension practices and issues facing metropolitan areas, and professional development for Extension professionals, with a goal of better aligning programs and program delivery with the needs, issues and interest of their metropolitan constituency.

SUGGESTIONS

Author Suggestions:

Utilize the national CARES Engagement Network website to add context to data and understand communities at a granular level to serve collaborative work with researchers and policymakers.

Create strong communication and marketing strategies to demonstrate the services that Extension can offer to partners engaged in community development, utilizing services such as CARES and the Market Research Center. Highlighting a case study of collaboration, as in the case of Moving Toward Age-Friendly Housing, is one way to demonstrate the value of a research-based and data-driven approach.

Be willing to reach out and partner with government and organizational actors, even without the promise of funding. These efforts can pay dividends in the long run.

Build knowledge capacity by seeking out governmental and quasi governmental agencies, such as area agencies on aging, regional planning councils, and homelessness continuums of care.

Utilize the CARES engagement network as a reference source in collaborative work with government partners.

Finally, think differently about Extension's role. Be willing to break through silos by offering to work with human services sector stakeholders to address the wicked problems with which they are grappling.

Attendee Suggestions:

Focus on "filling in" data gaps for government actors to reveal the missing pieces of social capital in diverse communities and better inform policy creation. Specifically, this new knowledge affirms the value that minorities and women bring to a neighborhood and how that value is overlooked.

Bring all stakeholders to the table, including not just the data and the people, but also the place itself, and the relationships that make a community work. Utilize tools of spatial analysis and place and policy overlap.

TO HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS



SUGGESTIONS CONT'D

Honor the trust built between Extension and the communities it serves, and carefully utilize that trust to build bridges between policymakers and the people on the ground.

Work with elected leadership to improve data accuracy, particularly in the areas of natural disasters and community health needs assessments.

Help decisionmakers to understand and engage with communities through the act of storytelling based on data.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL URBAN EXTENSION

NUEL presented a strategic analysis of urban Extension opportunities, and four common themes that emerge in the literature on the unique aspects of urban Extension, in The National Framework for Urban Extension (NUEL Steering Committee (NUEL): et al., 2015).

The following section is aligned with these themes:

- **Positioning:** How Extension is positioned at the national, state, regional, and city levels
- **Programs:** How Extension addresses the multitude of issues and priorities in the city
- **Personnel:** How Extension attracts, develops, retains, and structures competent talent
- **Partnerships:** How Extension collaborates to leverage resources for collective impact

POSITIONING

This LED and another - Fulfilling the Land Grant University Mission: Extension and Community-Based Applied Research - were closely linked in their vision for the future of Extension.

ABOUT THE WCER CONT'D

Institutional membership in the WCER has increased from six founding university Extension members: (University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of California, Colorado State University, University of Idaho, Oregon State University, and Washington State University) to 11 in 2019 with the addition of University of Florida, Michigan State University, New Mexico State University, University of Nevada Reno, and The Ohio State University. This expanded membership has allowed us to broaden our collaborations and reach, and engage in new projects that advance the knowledge base of Extension work in our metropolitan regions.

Facilitation provided by:



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DATA AND POLICY: RESPONDING TO

GROUP THOUGHTS ON DATA

"Data connects the work, the people and the issues."

"Either lead with the data to help tell a compelling story, or lead with the story and then bring in the data to help prioritize strategies, approaches, methods."

"It is the interface between Extension and communities that is crucial. Trust is often the real issue; perceptions matter."

"People are more important than data."

(Preceding quotes represent sentiment of group dialogue and are not attributed to any individual.)

POSITIONING CONT'D

Both sessions viewed it as a role-shifting challenge for Extension professionals to reach across silos of discipline and habit, and work collaboratively with diverse partners to serve community well-being. This LED, however, described several tools that could enable a more concrete application of the Land Grant University LED goals.

This LED explicates the tools that Extension can use to gather and translate community data into usable information for government and other actors at the local and regional scale. If Extension follows the ideas presented in this LED to their logical conclusion, their actualization will position Extension as a major and valued player in cities and regions across the country.

NUEL could aid Extension to realize this future in the following ways:

- Organize and manage a 'Data Conference' to allow thoughtful consideration of the issues and needs involved in this work. Session participants described a need to embark on such a project, and NUEL could potentially collaborate with interested attendees to design it.
- Discover and spotlight Extension offices across the country already successfully engaging in this work.
- Deliberate concerning alignment opportunities with data resources. This process could elevate a number of possible funding.

PROGRAMMING

This LED and another - Fulfilling the Land Grant University Mission: Extension and Community-Based Applied Research - were closely linked in their vision for the future of Extension supports or influences (i.e., convening partners around an initiative). Such work will offer new roles to play, new ground to explore, but again, as stated above, such an expansion might play well in coordination with the issues and ideas expressed in the Land Grant University LED.

Extension colleagues across the country could also deliver training to newly elected officials (e.g., in 2021) in the use of data tools and the interpretation of said data, sharing examples of Extension's work in this arena and the value that they can offer to collaborative projects.

HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS



PROGRAMMING CONT'D

Extension may also be in a position to help community partners become better advocates – which, while not programming in the strictest sense, is information they can deliver effectively.

The use of data to tell a story is integral to Extension's work with communities. However, training communities to tell their own stories has the potential to empower them even more.

PERSONNEL

Session participants asked NUEL to take on the challenge of exploring a national, regional, layered approach to looking at data and create a stronger learning community through its use.

NUEL could realize this goal by partnering with eXtension to educate Extension professionals in the use of data tools through Learning Circles and other informational opportunities. This could include the construction of an eFieldbook on the subject, which might include definitions of terms, data tools of interest, instructions for their use, and examples of successful field collaborations between government actors and Extension.

PARTNERSHIPS

Extension has successful collaborations with government actors and other community development organizations that offer models of data tool use and translation and analysis of information. Discovery and dissemination of these examples is key to their use across Extension. Several possible elements of interest in these partnerships are:

- Interviews of, and in-depth discussions with, Extension professionals involved in such collaborations.
- Examples of various types of data gaps and their exploration in ways that benefit both communities and decision makers by revealing real-life issues and experiences of minorities, women, and other overlooked groups.
- Illustrations of diverse narrative expositions that act to engage decision makers with communities through effective storytelling.

ABOUT NUEL

National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) began in 2013 as a grass-roots effort of a group of passionate and committed urban Extension educators with the mission to advocate and advance the strategic importance and long-term value of urban Extension activities by being relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally. NUEL is geared towards creating a network for collective impact currently with active participation from 23 states. NUEL is passionate and committed to moving urban Extension forward realizing each state in the Cooperative Extension System is different and may have diverse ideas and strategies for meeting urban needs.

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