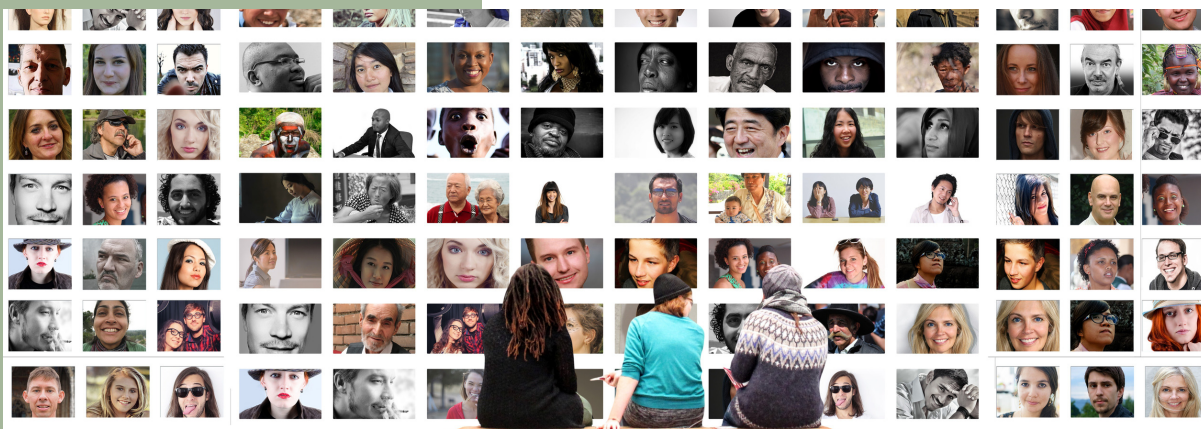


MAY 2019

# LEADING EDGE DIALOGUE SERIES

## NATIONAL URBAN EXTENSION CONFERENCE



AUTHOR

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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



## STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN EXTENSION WORKFORCE

### THE ISSUE

For several decades, Extension leaders have studied how personnel working in high population density, or urban, areas can be most effective (Brown, 1965; Fox, 2017; Harriman & Daugherty, 1992; Krofta & Panshin, 1989; Miller, 1973; Schaefer, Huegel, & Mazzotti, 1992; Yep, 1981; Young & Vavrina, 2014). While there are similarities to Extension staffing and workforce development in all geographic areas, personnel serving the Extension mission in urban areas face unique challenges due to the context of urban communities:

**Scale** – Due to the sheer number of people living in urban communities, the ratio of Extension personnel to residents and key stakeholders is usually far greater in urban areas than in rural areas. This challenges the reach and effectiveness of Extension's long-established engagement strategies which have relied heavily on direct education. Reaching large numbers of people requires new approaches to program planning, delivery, and evaluation.

**Diversity** – The significant diversity in urban communities needs to be reflected among Extension personnel whenever possible. However, while a diverse Extension workforce is valuable for providing relevant communication and programming for diverse audiences, it is unlikely that personnel in any single urban Extension office can represent every audience in the community. Personnel must also possess the cultural competence needed to cultivate partnerships with trusted community advocates who, in turn, can help expand Extension's reach to diverse audiences.

# STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN



## PANELISTS

**Dr. Julie Fox**, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Urban Engagement, Ohio State University Extension

**Brenda G. Rogers, M.S.**, District Extension Director, University of Florida IFAS Extension

**Dr. Allen Malone**, 1890 Administrator, Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Program Unit, Alabama A&M University

## THE ISSUE (CONT'D)

**Complexity** – Extension personnel in urban areas need to navigate a complex web of public and private organizations which are both collaborators and competitors for resources and audiences. These large organizations often invest in personnel with focused skill sets whereas Extension work most often requires several skill sets. While all Extension personnel navigate university systems and community needs, urban personnel must also navigate multiple jurisdictions and numerous partnerships.

**Urban Rural Interface** – With commuters, visitors, and resources flowing through urban areas, Extension personnel must understand the local urban-rural interface. Personnel in all types of positions – from state and area leaders to local educators, specialists and even volunteers – need to work in a highly complex and integrated nature. Hiring “best practices” can better attract the right people rather than just perpetuating existing recruitment practices. Extension’s quest to better address **capacity** issues as well as **attract, hire, retain, develop, and recognize** competent personnel in the city requires new strategies to build on the knowledge base established through previous research and practice (Fox, 2017).

## GENERATING AND DELIBERATING

Session attendees discussed how Extension workforce challenges can be addressed collectively with Extension leaders and university Human Resource (HR) professionals.

### Capacity

The ratio of Extension personnel to residents in urban communities is far greater than that of rural communities. To improve that ratio in urban communities, Extension can explore ways to fund positions beyond traditional approaches, and find other public and private partners willing to co-invest in Extension positions. This would require new strategies for hiring and supporting personnel that align with co-investors' priorities and policies as well as those of Extension. However, when few options exist to increase the number of positions, Extension can better network and leverage faculty, staff, students, and volunteers in new ways to fulfill the Extension mission within urban communities. Addressing capacity requires rethinking and adjusting hiring and partnering strategies and practices.

# EXTENSION WORKFORCE



## GENERATING AND DELIBERATING CONT'D

### Attraction and Retention

Attracting and retaining a qualified, effective, and stable urban Extension workforce requires both effort and flexibility. Administrators and HR system leaders should first understand the urban Extension context, then be prepared to articulate the “why” of new positions, and collaborate to meet the urban need. Finally, leaders need to create position descriptions tailored to the urban environment and explore new ways to recruit talent, recognizing three critical factors:

- **Relevance** – Extension must present opportunities for employment in ways that are relevant to people looking for a job or career in urban communities. Potential recruits may not see how their experience and interests align with the Extension mission if recruiting practices don’t reach new audiences and recruiting materials only reflect rural and suburban environments.
- **Compensation** - Competing organizations frequently compensate personnel better, based on the local living wage rather than the university Extension standard pay range. This influences both who will apply for Extension positions and, once they are hired, who will remain for the long term.
- **Educational requirements** – Extension should reconsider whether positions truly require graduate degrees, as they may actually exclude candidates with the skills and competencies required for the job. If willing, Extension as a system can shift from traditional educational requirements for some positions and be rewarded with a more effective, stable and diverse urban workforce. For instance, an urban county may choose to value experience over education in the hiring process to increase the diversity of their workforce, thereby helping to overcome historical inequities in access to higher education.

### Competencies and Professional Development

A fundamental element of human resource systems is identifying individual and team competencies, which are defined as a set of observable performance dimensions, including individual knowledge, skills, attitudes, and observable behaviors or characteristics (McClelland, 1973; Mirabile, 1997). Competencies have also been described as collective team processes and organizational capabilities (Athey & Orth, 1999). Extension personnel across geographic settings need a similar core set of competencies.

## 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.

# STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN

## ABOUT THE WCMER CONT'D

Institutional membership in the WCMER 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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## GENERATING AND DELIBERATING CONT'D

However, because of the scale, diversity, and complexity in urban communities, how these competencies are demonstrated and the degree to which individuals and teams apply related competencies are unique (Fehlis, 1992; Fox, 2017; Krofta & Panshin, 1989; Urban Task Force, 1996b; Webster & Ingram, 2007).

Personnel may need assistance building such competencies as:

- cultural competency,
- inclusive community engagement and facilitation,
- resourcefulness and networking across multiple settings,
- navigating complex systems, multiple partnership agreements, and strategic relationships,
- grant-writing/reporting,
- evaluation (how to track impact when working with partners), using technology/social media to engage diverse audiences,
- urban-rural interdependence and interface,
- an entrepreneurial mindset (proactive strategic orientation, willingness to take risks, innovativeness),
- leadership, management, ability to generate resources, etc.,
- social emotional intelligence and communications, and
- expertise in urban issues as recognized by partners and people Extension serves.

Session attendees made the following suggestions to improve professional development for Extension personnel working in urban communities:

- Incorporate the urban context into all professional development statewide.
- Develop an onboarding tool for personnel new to Extension in urban areas (i.e. interactive modules, videos, etc.).
- Define and develop the role of county directors and staff in resource and partnership development and management.
- Update the skills of existing employees, validating the importance of people-skills with diverse audiences and content knowledge for all personnel.
- Engage teams with a mixture of subject matter expertise and transdisciplinary team development and management skills.

# EXTENSION WORKFORCE



## GENERATING AND DELIBERATING CONT'D

- Create a professional development platform to teach administrators how to deal effectively with urban issues.
- Utilize professional development tools already developed by eXtension, NUEL and the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) organizations.

## ACTIONS

### Culture and Cultural Competencies

A 2017 survey of urban Extension personnel, conducted by NUEL, revealed that while personnel can likely access professional development, there are opportunities to improve urban Extension regarding cultural competencies with respect to:

- position descriptions,
- onboarding and professional development,
- clear expectations and goals, and
- mentoring with other urban-specific personnel.

Culture is reflected in two ways – internally in the workplace, and externally with partners and community members. Administrators in particular should recognize that workplace culture influences the value and influence of Extension in urban communities. Extension should:

- Have an inclusive work office culture that encourages employees to respect differences, specific traits, unique positions, and roles.
- Consider how internal and external communications reflect culture.
- Understand that cultural connections are important and hire and develop personnel able to establish such relationships in the community.
- Ensure that employees value urban context and urban-rural interconnections.
- Address language barriers that can impede staff effectiveness in reaching and communicating with certain populations. How can Extension start to deal more deeply with language differences?

## 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.

# STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN



## ACTIONS CONT'D

To increase Extension's ability to engage with greater cultural competence, we should partner with state leadership; human resources department leaders; learning and organizational development units; and our university office of diversity, equity, and inclusion to:

- Increase prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
- Build capacity by increasing the number, types, and diversity of personnel.
- Provide relevant and innovative professional development resources and experiences based on types of positions and learning readiness.
- Launch systems to support networking and communications among personnel working with urban communities.
- Initiate recognition in ways that support promotion, and address career paths for all types of positions.
- Create meaningful connections between urban personnel as well as between urban and rural personnel. It's imperative that when addressing urban context, Extension does not unintentionally create division between urban, suburban, and rural personnel. Recognizing that the urban context presents unique opportunities and challenges does not diminish the value of Extension in rural and suburban communities.

## SUGGESTIONS

To be effective in urban areas Extension needs to:

- Develop a diverse urban Extension workforce to meet the needs of diverse urban communities, which may require new and unique approaches at the office and organization levels.
- Create an inclusive workforce that embraces change.
- Demonstrate leadership competencies for the 21st Century.

Extension is and should be an integral partner in urban communities, as we have been in our rural communities. We reinforce this partnership by remaining relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally.

# EXTENSION WORKFORCE



## SUGGESTIONS CONT'D

### Relevant locally

- Support personnel in being adaptive to changing urban needs and demographics so that Extension remains relevant and positioned to address emerging needs. If Extension does not respond to such demands, other organizations will fill that niche.
- Reward staff for engagement in addition to education.
- Hire people who bring new perspectives and skill sets.
- Enable personnel to build meaningful relationships with a wide range of urban stakeholders so that Extension is positioned as a collaborator, not a competitor.
- Encourage personnel to communicate the value and impact of urban Extension in their community and state in order to sustain urban resources and partnerships over time.
- Stop the campus-county divide by helping HR develop an authentic understanding of the reality of urban communities and Extension's role.
- Embrace novel staffing approaches such as hiring resident community conveners with stipends rather than always thinking the HR solution is full-time permanent personnel (Collins & Gaolach, 2018).

### Responsive statewide

- Put systems in place to bring together urban personnel from around the state or region to prepare to respond to emerging opportunities and build staffing cohorts and peer-learning.
- Orient all state leadership to provide a foundational knowledge of the urban Extension context.
- Hire and/or leverage statewide specialists who understand the urban context.

### Recognized (and supported) nationally

- Multi-state mentoring of urban professionals would help states with fewer urban areas or urban personnel.

# STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN



## 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

## NATIONAL URBAN EXTENSION LEADERS FOCUS

NUEL has long recognized the unique professional development needs of Extension staff working in urban communities by creating a Professional Development Action Team and addressing professional development as one of 6 goals in its National Urban Extension Initiative: Implementation Plan. (<https://nuel.extension.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/NUEL-Implementation-Plan-Final-April-2019.pdf>). The plan lays out 4 tasks designed to advance the capabilities of current Extension personnel in urban areas, and address recruitment and training of new staff.

Goal: Create authentic professional development activities to address the needs of Extension personnel in urban areas:

- Task 1: NUEL will launch a national professional development survey to help prioritize the professional development needs of urban Extension professionals.
- Task 2: NUEL will develop a repository of job descriptions for urban Extension positions and training materials related to professional competencies.
- Task 3: NUEL will develop a series of urban focused professional development trainings and a national badging system; this will be done in collaboration with JCEP, Extension professional associations, and eXtension.
- Task 4: NUEL will explore the potential of developing a national or regional mentoring program for new Extension professionals working in urban centers.

# EXTENSION WORKFORCE



## POSITIONING

- Improving awareness and accessibility of Extension in the city requires university-wide support – it's not simply a local effort. By implementing suggestions to address attracting, retaining, developing, and recognizing talent in our urban areas, we may strengthen those aspects for our rural counterparts as well.
- Communication resources should reflect the diversity of people and environments in urban counties.

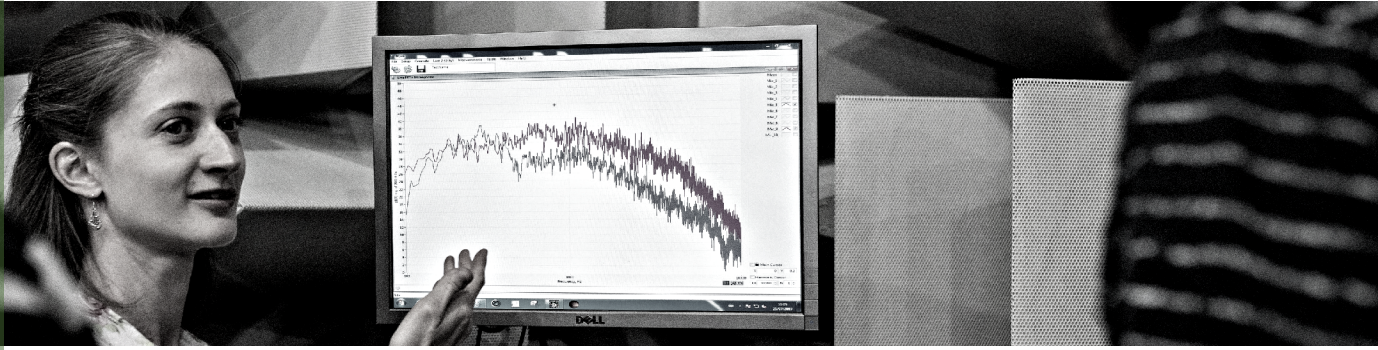
## PROGRAMMING

- Personnel and programming connect through the attraction, development, and recognition of specialized program expertise. Leverage faculty, staff, and students to provide relevant solutions for local needs.
- In addition to specialization, Extension has multiple disciplines or content areas that can come together to address comprehensive interdisciplinary issues.
- Continue collaborating with JCEP organizations to improve impact in the city.
- The staffing model used by Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) illustrates one method of hiring members of the community to work with limited resource audiences.
- We need to balance community needs with our instructional requirements; sometimes a short term program builds important relationships and does more good than a more comprehensive educational program.
- What programs or projects should generate cost recovery for staff?
- How do we make the most of reporting impact for various stakeholders?
- With the large number of residents and key stakeholders in urban counties, Extension professionals invest a great deal of time working on collaborative initiatives rather than primarily developing or implementing existing programs they deliver themselves.

## PARTNERSHIPS

- Personnel and partnerships connect through local, state, and national opportunities. Personnel benefit from professional development on strategic partnerships and campus support with grants, contracts, gifts, and fees.
- Community partners representing the constituents Extension serves should be engaged in the process of interviewing prospective Extension personnel.
- Leverage Extension's networks to share resources for common good.
- Stakeholders need relevant educational tools that describe and illustrate urban Extension. Consider co-funding personnel with other agencies and organizations (i.e. urban parks, urban-serving universities, etc.).

# STAFFING: PREPARING THE URBAN



## PARTNERSHIPS CONT'D

- How can Extension better engage elected officials and other large urban-serving universities?
- With more diversified funding portfolios, personnel must invest more time and expertise in sourcing and managing multiple resources on various timelines beyond county, state, and federal fiscal cycles (Krofta & Panshin, 1989).

## PERSONNEL

A few common and key workforce considerations include:

- Personnel must be able to build meaningful relationships with a wide range of urban stakeholders so that Extension is positioned as a collaborator, not a competitor.
- Personnel must be adaptive to changing urban needs and demographics so Extension remains relevant and positioned to address emerging needs.
- Personnel must be able to communicate the value and impact of urban Extension in their community and state in order to sustain urban resources and partnerships over time.
- Volunteers can help fill a gap in staff capacity, but volunteer structures and systems may need to be adjusted to support this. For example, many community members are looking for short-term volunteer opportunities rather than a long-term commitment (e.g., helping with a 4-H event rather than serving as a club leader). With a large number of volunteers, recruitment and management could be a full-time job in urban areas.
- Refer to established and emerging competency frameworks. Competency frameworks can help guide what each type of position needs to be successful.
- In addition to competencies, recognize the relevant motivations, characteristics, and experiences.

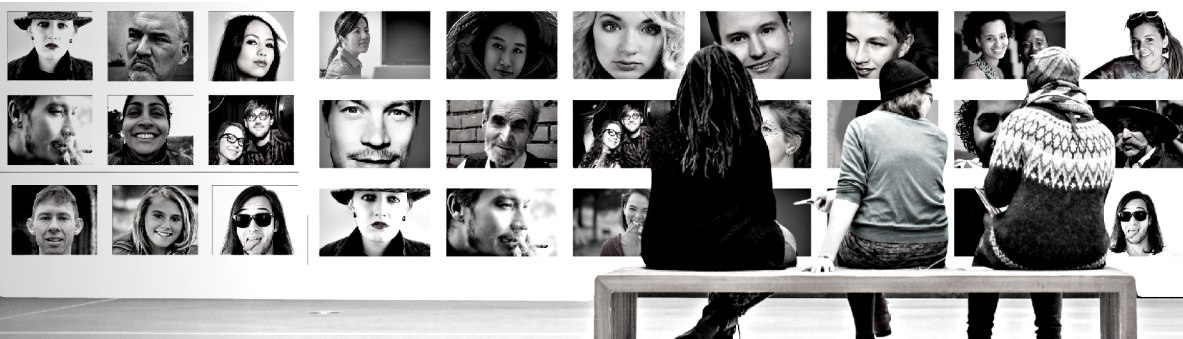
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# EXTENSION WORKFORCE



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