

Struggling to Find Your Niche? This Toolkit can Help!

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Introduction

This toolkit provides a “playbook” of actions that Extension professionals and administrators can use to address specific challenges in urban communities particularly as it relates to policy, systems, and environmental change within organizations. The toolkit offers a professional development guide and workbook to build targeted competencies for work within the urban context. This work is applicable across the *urban-rural continuum* despite its focus on the urban context.

This project, which began in October 2021, is supported through a two-year Deep Dive fellowship funded by the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (WCMER).

Methods

The development of the toolkit is conducted over a two-year process. The first year focused on data gathering through literature searches, developing a conceptual framework (see **Figure 1**), and composing a white paper highlighting the findings. The second year uses a survey tool to collect data from Extension professionals and administrators across the land grant university system. The survey data will be analyzed relative to the conceptual framework to identify the training needs of participants. The conceptual framework includes elements from Korn Ferry’s Four Dimensions of Leadership and Talent (i.e., competencies, experiences, traits, drivers).

The Deep Dive Fellows will develop an outline of training sessions and it is anticipated that the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) Professional Development Action Team will assist with implementation and evaluation.

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“Personnel serving the Extension mission face unique challenges due to the context of *urban communities*...”
(Fox et al., 2019)

Activities you can do **NOW** to better understand your urban context
Handouts, instructions, and online versions available at request
(Developed from year one research)

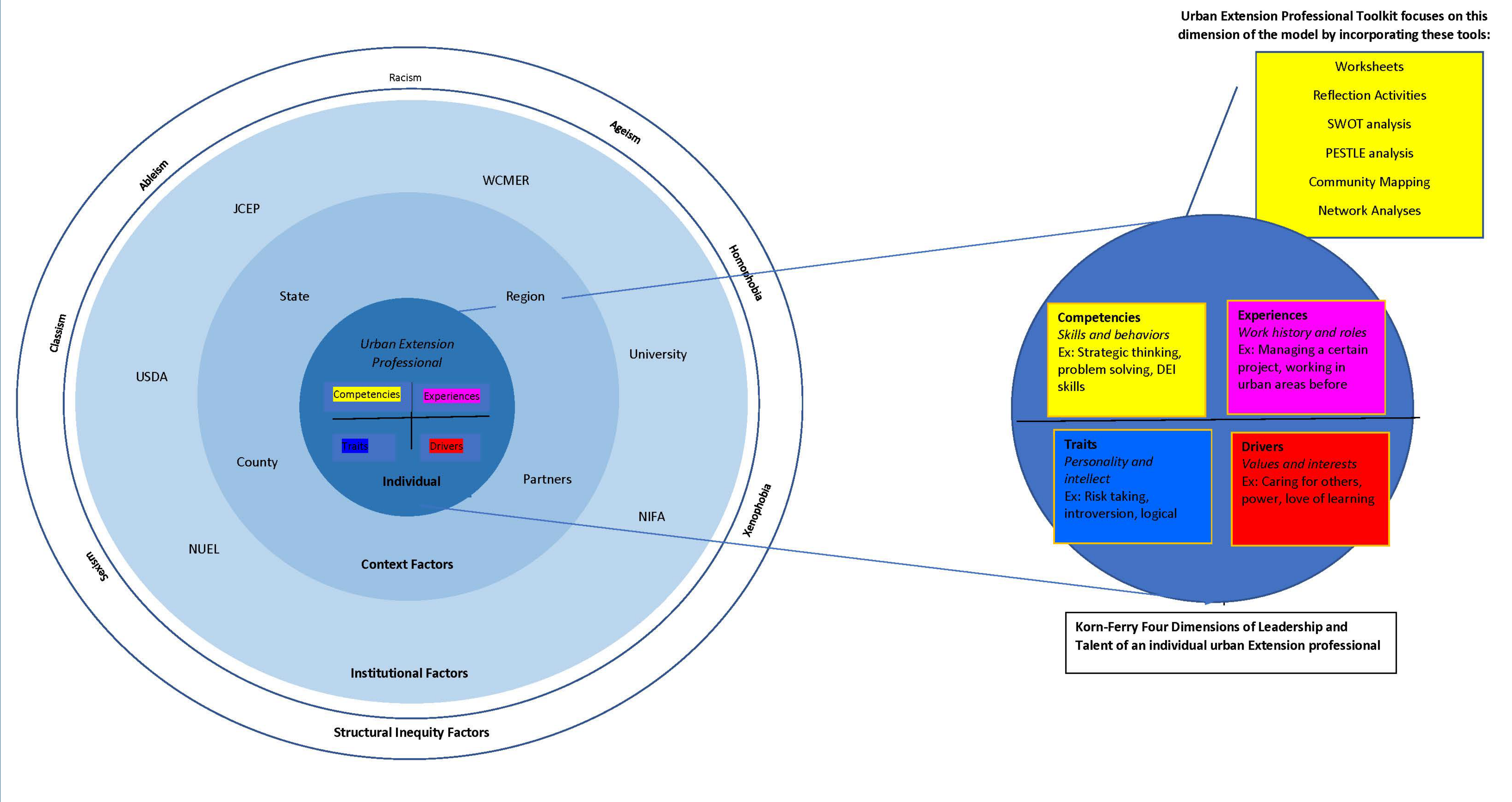


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Used in Toolkit Development

Table 2: PESTLE Worksheet Sample

| Category | Factors | Potential Program Impact |
|---------------|---------|--------------------------|
| Political | | |
| Economic | | |
| Social | | |
| Technological | | |
| Legal | | |
| Environmental | | |

We Want Your Input!



Survey closes 9/30/2023.

Results

A multi-year search of Extension focused journals reveal that no specific toolkit exists to support onboarding, professional growth, and competency development of Extension professionals in urban areas. **Table 1** shows the search terms used in Journal of Extension (JOE) and Journal of Human Sciences and Extension (JHSE), premier journals for the Extension profession. The Deep Dive Fellows also characterized the focus of the articles that contained the term – few focused on the personnel aspect while others were workplace or organizationally focused on coaching and mentoring. When the term “toolkit” was found, it did not focus on professional development for urban Extension.

Table 1: Summary of Journal Searches, 2010-2022

| SEARCH TERM | JOE results | JHSE results |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Toolkit | 69 | 17 |
| DEI (focus on competency) | 174 | 6 |
| Urban | 500 | 115 |
| Urban professional | 367 | 69 |
| Competency | 466 | 40 |
| Onboarding | 16 | 11 |
| Cultural | 567 | 104 |

Since no urban Extension toolkit exists, the WCMER Fellows developed worksheets based on the market research (see **Figure 1** for examples) to assist Extension professionals with examining the context for urban Extension work. One worksheet is designed around the PESTLE model which supports strategic planning by assessing long term trends across sectors (see **Table 2**). An extended SWOT and conceptual framework were also developed. These models can help urban Extension professionals respond to changing situations, develop new products, and meet the needs of their clients. The models will be included in the final toolkit.

Next Steps

The Deep Dive Fellows will analyze the survey data based on participant and land grant typology and make recommendations for trainings and metrics to be included in the Urban Extension Toolkit.

A pilot launch of the toolkit may also be supported by the Fellows in conjunction with NUEL.

References

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