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Final Project Report

***Building on Community Assets
To Increase Workforce Capacity***

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Building on Community Assets to Increase Workforce Capacity: Making Workforce Preparation Training Succeed in Northeast Communities

Report Contents/Impact:

Through the Workforce Preparation Initiative Team, Cooperative Extension at the national level has provided leadership to stimulate individual state interest in extension's involvement in workforce development educational programming that addresses the workforce needs of their state. Many states have initiated programming but are not knowledgeable of the efforts taking place within national extension regions or nationally. In response to this lack of information that can stimulate multi-state collaborations and cross-state program fertilization, the states in the northeast extension region conducted a workforce development conference. The conference was designed to be a capacity building effort that would support the improvement of rural communities economic competitiveness and diversification.

The proposed workforce development training event sought to address the following objectives:

- Enhance participants' understanding of regional workforce preparation issues and workplace needs.
- Train extension professionals in the process of community asset building and in developing implementation strategies that will build social and economic capital through workforce development programming.
- Provide training that assists extension professionals in accessing and building relationships with the nation's newly emerging workforce development system.
- Highlight local and regional programs that demonstrate the use of collaboration to address workforce needs.
- Identify and showcase program evaluation methodologies that are effective in the documentation of workforce development collaborations and partnerships.

The conference was planned and implemented through the efforts of the multi-state planning team. The challenge of the team was to design a conference that could address the needs of both the smaller and larger northeast states. The conference's agenda was designed by the team to offer participants with information that would facilitate networking among extension professional and county/state organizations and agencies with similar programming interests. How to use the community asset-building process served as a core training component of the conference. This newly emerging process offers extension professionals with a means to assist communities in building upon their social and economic strengths to provide workforce development opportunities. Another key component of the conference focused on the "how to" document impact results from collaborative community-based educational programming. The training offered participants program solutions to address workforce issues affecting youth, agriculture and rural communities. Larry Cote, director of West Virginia Cooperative Extension, provided his thoughts about how an engaged university brings its expertise to address workforce issues within a state's communities.

The forty conference participants represented nine states and the District of Columbia. Professionals from Indiana and Alabama joined northeast states representatives for the conference proceedings. Participants were university faculty, county educators, university administrators and non-extension professionals working within academic areas of youth, family living, agricultural and community development.

The conference evaluation reported that participants planned to use the information in a range of applications. These were as specific as using learned techniques or program ideas in current program delivery to using the information in state strategic planning or providing “my Dean an overview to help focus our plans for development of the WIA program.” The networking that occurred was reported as positive outcome. Participants reported spending time with presenters to discuss ways that professionals from their state and other northeast states can collaborate in the use of a program. Getting to know other key workforce development individuals from other states was reported as a resource to move workforce programming forward in their residence state.

The overarching goal of the conference was to increase learning about the range of workforce development programming efforts taking place in the northeast states and to facilitate networking among extension professionals with workforce development program responsibilities that would lead to an increase in the delivery of workforce development programming in the northeast states. The ultimate goal is to increase workforce development programming to benefit rural residents and communities of the northeast states.

To facilitate further dissemination of the conference information, state contacts have been identified for each participating state (see end of report). These individuals have volunteered to be available resources within their states to answer questions about the conference and to respond to a six-month and one-year follow-up survey that focuses on reporting how the conference content has been used in their state.

The conference has the potential to influence future workforce development multi-state collaborations. As states develop their individual workforce preparation program strengths, multi-state programming can extend the total workforce development effort in the northeast by using collaborators with specific program expertise. Collaborative program sharing efforts have the potential to free resources and extend program impact.

Keywords: workforce development, workforce preparation, workforce training, youth workforce programming, agricultural workforce programming, Workforce Investment Act.

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