



Economic and Community Development Issues and Priorities for Extension and Research



A Survey of Extension Professionals in the Northeast

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD) and the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP/Northeast Region) conducted an on-line survey in May 2005 to assess the rural development priorities and perspectives of Extension professionals. A total of 63 educators, specialists and administrators responded to the survey – providing us with a unique picture of the economic and community development issues and priorities facing states across the Northeast. This brief report highlights the results from this survey and suggests several issues worthy of future consideration.

- Of those responding to the survey, 51% were county or regionally based educators and 32% were campus-based faculty or specialists. Eleven percent were administrators and 6% identified themselves as ‘others’.
- The majority of respondents came from Pennsylvania and New York, followed by West Virginia and Maine.
- Forty-one percent indicated that more than 75% of their time is devoted to community development research or extension while 19% noted that this programming area represented less than 10% of their time.
- When asked about their “primary” programming areas, respondents identified economic development, civic engagement, and group processes and facilitation most frequently.
- Economic development, land use, community engagement and planning were seen by the most respondents as the most critical emerging issues in their state.
- When asked about the most critical research needs in their states, economic development, entrepreneurship, community development, land use and leadership were cited most often.
- Twelve percent of respondents noted that they desired to play a more active role in research projects but that time limitations were the most frequent impediment to doing so.
- Land use and sprawl, economic development and entrepreneurship are the issues most commonly identified as lending themselves to multi-state collaboration.
- Land use and sprawl/smart growth, economic development and entrepreneurship were cited as the issues respondents would most like to work on with others in northeast.
- When respondents were asked about services and assistance from The Northeast Center that would help them most in their community development efforts, “communication and information sharing within the region,” and “helping to develop extension program and curriculum development” were cited the most often.
- With respect to the assistance respondents looked to The Northeast Center for, assisting with multi-state grant projects and facilitating communication among the region’s Extension programs was identified by many respondents as being the most beneficial.
- Related to the services and assistance they most look to NACDEP to provide “increasing communication among Extension professionals” and “increasing access to programs and resources” were cited most frequently followed closely by “expanding the national political support for Extension community development programs.”

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ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN EXTENSION

Nationally, Cooperative Extension is well positioned to work with citizens and communities in building strong, vibrant and sustainable communities. While the language used to describe our community development work may be different than it was a century ago, we have a long history of working with communities. Indeed, Cooperative Extension has had significant long-term social and economic impact on the viability of communities throughout the Northeast.

Communities everywhere face important and new challenges in the 21st Century. Never before have the challenges facing local communities been more urgent, diverse or complex. Although community development programming varies from state-to-state and region-to-region, a key role for Cooperative Extension has long been to facilitate community learning, dialog and decision-making – each of which benefits from a greater alignment between community needs and our collective research and Extension portfolio.

The Northeast is home to approximately 25% of the nation's total and 11% of its non-metro population. It is important to realize, however, that the Northeast has relatively few Extension FTEs. The region also has comparatively few, and a declining number of FTEs devoted to Community and Resource Development. (See Appendix A)

There is a clear and compelling need for the Cooperative Extension System to continually assess and strengthen its commitment to, and role in, delivering the science-based information these communities need in order to make the most informed and effective choices possible. Rather than being seen as a separate program area in competition for scarce resources, economic and community development skills and information need to be increasingly seen as an integral component of almost everything that the Land Grant System was designed to achieve.

SURVEY RESULTS

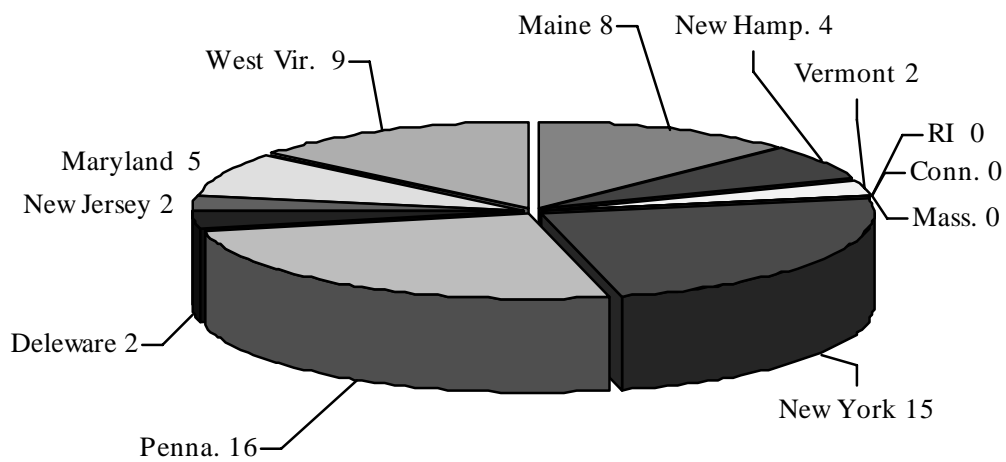
The following discussion provides a summary of the survey's results. A full listing of ideas and issues raised is available on the web-site of The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, at <http://www.nercrd.psu.edu>

Respondent Characteristics

Of those responding to the survey, 51% (32) were county or regionally based educators and 32% (20) were campus-based faculty or specialists. Eleven percent (7) were administrators and 6% (4) identified themselves as 'others.'

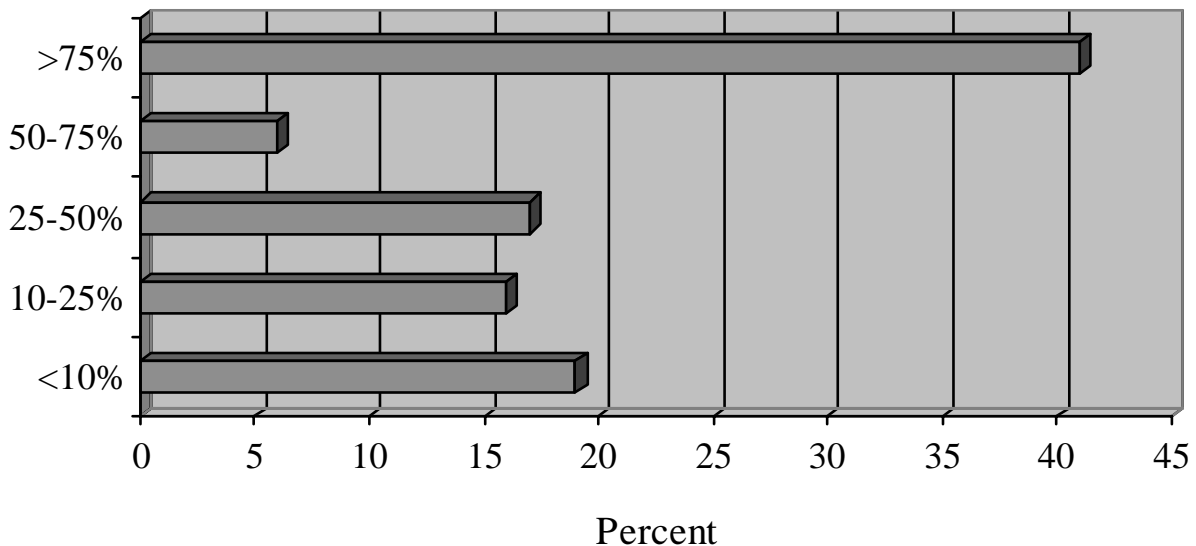
As the chart below indicates, the majority of respondents came from Pennsylvania and New York, followed by West Virginia and Maine. There were no respondents from the southern New England states.

Respondents by State



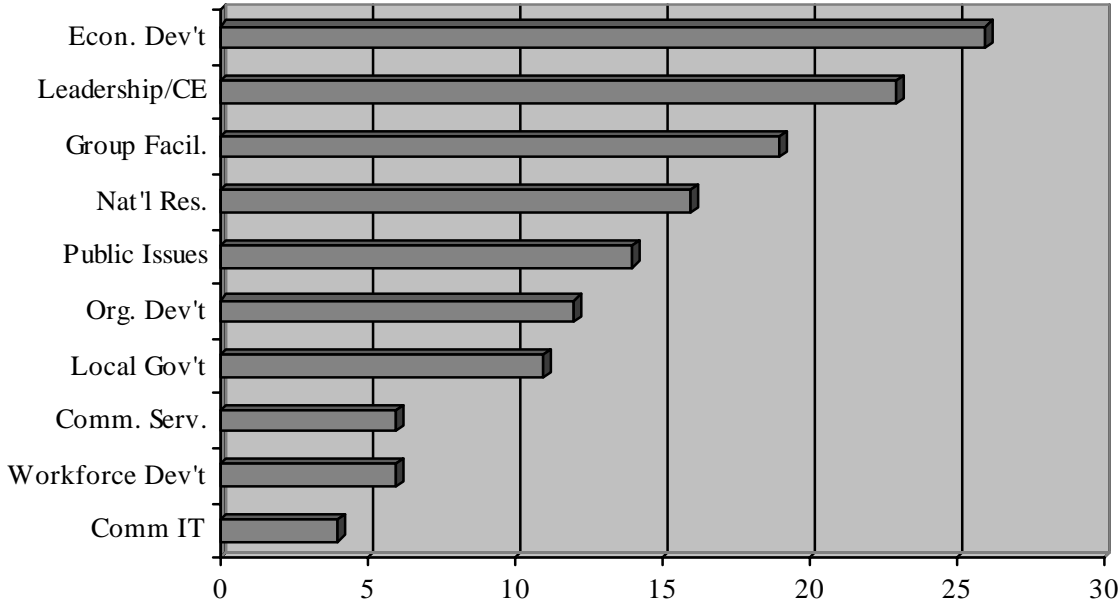
Of these, 41% indicated more than 75% of their time is devoted to community development research or extension while 19% indicated that this programming area represented less than 10% of their time. The chart below highlights these results.

Time Allocated to CD Research or Extension



When asked about their “primary” programming areas, respondents identified economic development, civic engagement, and group processes and facilitation most frequently. The chart below details the other responses to this part of the survey. Individual responses to this and other questions are reported in Appendix B.

Primary Program Area



Emerging Issues¹

The survey asked respondents to identify the three or four most important community development issues (emerging in their state) that the Extension System should be positioned to respond to. Key issues relate to economic development, land use, and community engagement and planning. It is worth considering that, in general, Extension is better known for land use and community engagement programming than it is for programming around economic development topics. If employment, entrepreneurship, revitalization, and value-added are combined with economic development, these five issue areas account for about 25% of all responses.

Land use and sprawl responses account for about 17% of total responses. “Community engagement” and “planning” together account for about 12% of the responses. Smaller categories (averaging around 5 responses each) included aging, education, environment, funding, government, health care, housing, resources, taxes, technology, tourism, and youth. These can be grouped in a variety of ways. For example, tourism might be a part of economic development. Other issues

¹ It may be worth noting that in 189 responses the word “rural” only appears in 18 of the entries. This could be a function of increasingly complex economic and community interrelationships that tend to blur the lines between earlier typologies of rural, suburban and urban.

are closely associated with community engagement and planning and a few responses related to changing demographics and increasing diversity. Remaining “other” responses included food safety, military base closures, white tailed deer management, and lack of basic money management skills.

Research Needs

The most commonly identified research needs from the survey dealt with the roles of Extension personnel in research and analysis. Twelve percent expressed their desire to play a more active role in research projects. Most cited funding or time constraints as the reason why their research role is limited. Another 12%, grouped in the research methods/communication category, expressed a need for assistance with data analysis as well as access to more appropriate statistics.

A broad range of research topics were included in the responses at rates lower than the extension-related issues. Economic development was the most commonly identified research topic. Combined responses for research on economic development and entrepreneurship accounted for 14% of the total.

Several topics were identified at slightly lower rates. Community development, land use, leadership development, tourism, and youth each accounted for 6% to 8% of total responses. Agricultural and governance issues each accounted for 4%.

Twenty-two percent of the responses did not fit well into a specific category and were placed in the “other” category. Among these topics are obesity, economic security of families, rural retirement, and revitalization. Some responses in this category were difficult to interpret or did not identify a research topic.

Multi-State Collaboration

As might be expected from the issues identified above, land use and sprawl, economic development and entrepreneurship are the issues most commonly identified as lending themselves to multi-state collaboration.

Land use responses accounted for 15% of the total, and sprawl/smart growth accounted for another 6%. Combining responses for these related issues, more than one in five respondents believe these areas are well suited for collaboration. Economic development was also widely recognized in these responses. Combining economic development, business development, and entrepreneurship, these related issues account for 15% of the responses. At 8%, information technology accounted for a significant portion of the responses. IT has not been cited this frequently in response to other survey questions.

Other issues commonly identified include agriculture/food systems and leadership development, both at 8%. An additional 8% of respondents stated that all or some unspecified topics are well suited for multi-state collaboration. The “other” category accounts for 12% of the responses. Coastal development, racial issues, aging, and government expenditure are among the topics in this category.

Interest in Working Collaboratively With Others in the Northeast

When asked about their interest in working collaboratively with others in the region, respondents offered an abundance of program areas and topics. This question received more responses than the other survey questions, and a broader range of topics is covered by the responses. This suggests that Extension professionals seem quite willing to work with colleagues from the Northeast.

Responses in the all/unspecified category, at 15%, were more abundant than for any single issue. These respondents stated that either (1) they would be willing to work collaboratively on any topic, or (2) they would work on any topics included in their responses to other survey questions.

Land use and sprawl/smart growth combined to account for 14% of the responses, and economic development and entrepreneurship combined for 10%. Community development, leadership development, and youth each accounted for 8% of the responses.

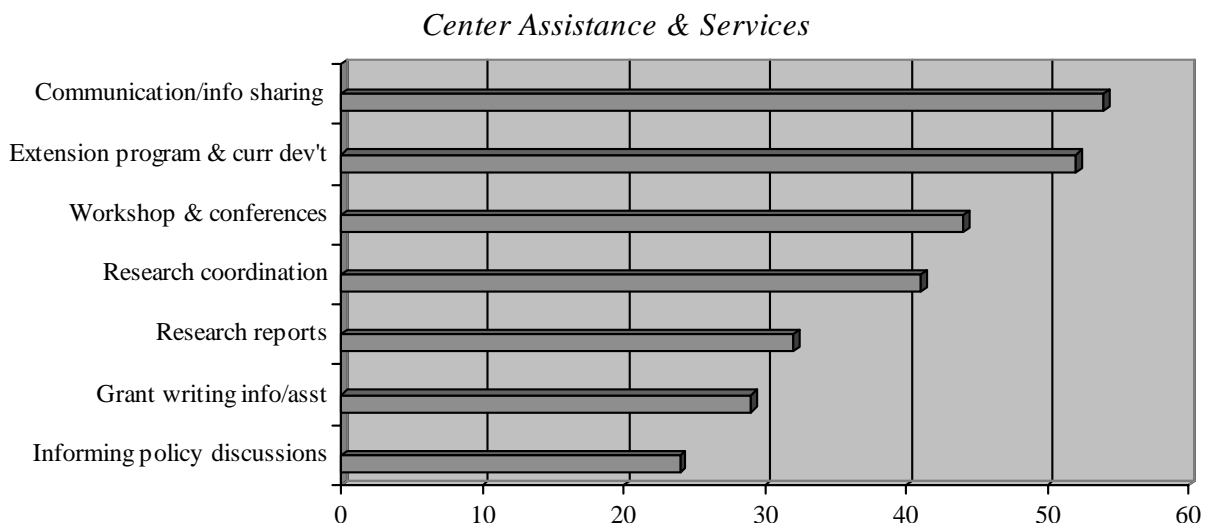
Topics with lower response rates include agriculture, education, health, resources, revitalization, and tourism. Cross-border issues, at 3%, appeared in this set of responses. This is noteworthy because this topic did not appear in responses to other survey questions.

The “other” category accounts for 13% of the total responses. Policy issues, retirement, organizational development, and outreach to underserved audiences were among the topics included in this category.

Assistance From The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

When respondents were asked about services and assistance from The Northeast Center that would help them most in their community development efforts, “communication and information sharing within the region,” and helping to develop “extension program and curriculum development” were cited the most frequently – 52% and 54% respectively. The chart below highlights the other responses to this part of the survey.

Center Assistance with Multi-State Grant Projects



With respect to the assistance, respondents looked to The Northeast Center regarding multi-state grant projects; facilitating communication among the region's Extension programs is identified by many respondents as being the most helpful. Thirty-eight percent of survey responses identified roles The Center can take in fostering better information-sharing in the region. Within the communication category, specific roles that stand out among the responses include: (1) to identify research opportunities and (2) to identify or connect parties sharing similar research interests.

Funding concerns were broken down based on roles that facilitate funding opportunities as opposed to the role of providing funding for regional projects. As a facilitator of funding opportunities, most respondents suggest The Northeast Center could help increase regional awareness of grant opportunities. These responses account for 29% of total survey responses. It should be noted that many of these responses involve communication issues but were placed in a separate category because they deal specifically with funding. Another 18% suggested that The Center could serve as a provider of funding to support regional projects.

A smaller percentage of respondents (9%) suggest that The Northeast Center could arrange forums or meetings in order to bring together extension personnel who are interested in similar issues. Other responses included extension personnel development and providing impact evaluation of regional projects.

Involvement and Assistance From the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP)

The survey also asked respondents about their membership and expectations from NACDEP. Of those that responded to the survey, 35% (22) were NACDEP members while 65% (41) were not. When asked about their use of NACDEP's website since the 2005 conference in Las Vegas, NV, 35% noted that they had recently visited the site while 65% indicated that they had not.

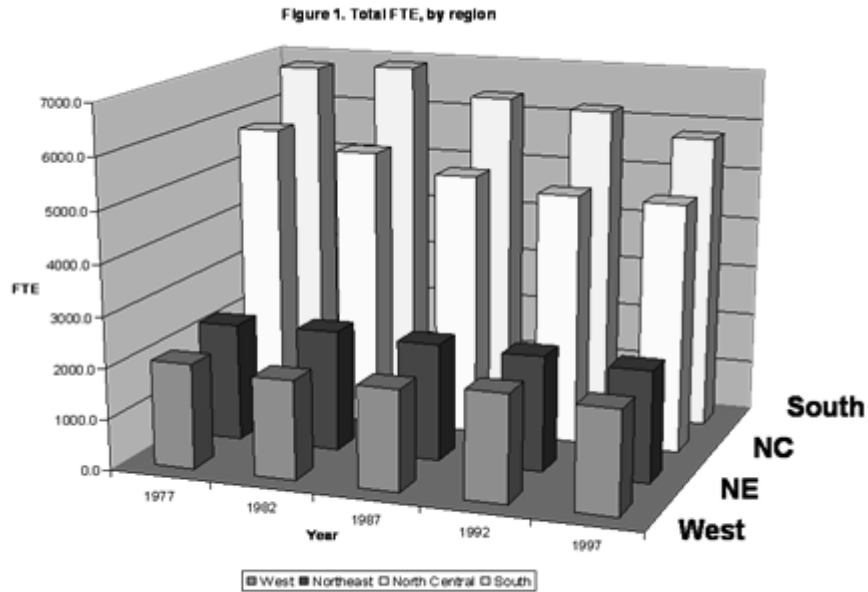
Related to the services and assistance they most look to NACDEP to provide, "increasing communication among Extension professionals" and "increasing access to programs and resources" were cited most frequently followed closely by "expanding the national political support for Extension community development programs." "Providing regional and national conferences" and "expanding regional and national communications" were cited by a number of other respondents. "Professional leadership opportunities" and "professional certification opportunities" were considered important by only a small number of respondents – less than 3% in each case.

Additional Comments and Suggestions

The majority of additional comments related to the idea that economic and community development is the context in which most other Extension and research efforts take place and this needs to be recognized as such. The need for additional resources to support research and extension in this area was also frequently raised. Many respondents were happy to see NACDEP up and running and thankful for The Northeast Center and this opportunity. A number of others lamented the dichotomy between research and extension.

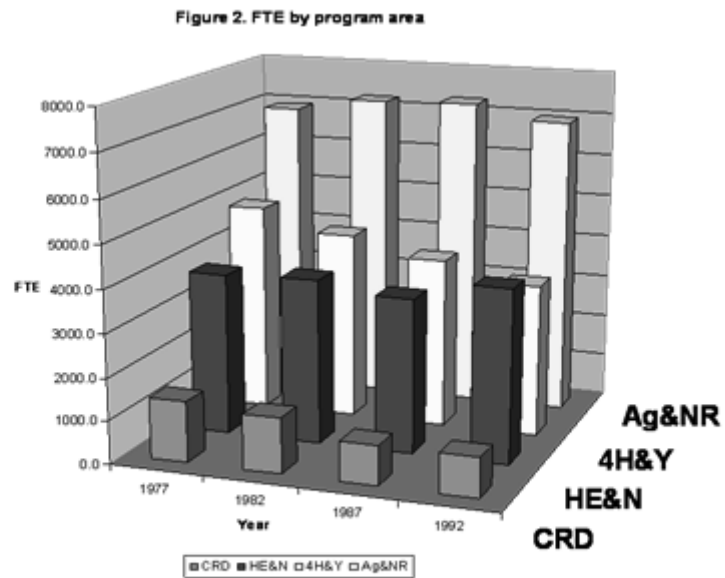
Appendix A Distribution of Extension Resources by Region

Total Extension FTE by Region, 1977-1997



Source: M. Ahearn et al., *Regional Trends in Extension Resources* (2004)

Total Extension FTE by Program Area, 1977-1997



Source: M. Ahearn et al., *Regional Trends in Extension Resources* (2004)

Total Extension FTE by Program Area, Northeast Only, 1977-1992

Figure 4. Percent of FTE by Program Area, Northeast

