



Extension Program Delivery Using an Engaged Model

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Virginia Cooperative Extension Program Planning Series Overview

The Virginia Cooperative Extension Program Planning Publication Series has been developed to provide background and guidance for Extension professionals on the use of different delivery models in program planning and implementation. The series consists of nine publications:

1. Extension Program Delivery Using an Engaged Model
2. Extension Program Delivery Using an Expert Model
3. Combining Engaged and Expert Extension Program Delivery Models – the Hybrid or Blended Model
4. Developing an Advisory Board
5. Identifying Community Needs
6. Setting Your Goals for Success
7. Breaking Down and Prioritizing Changes
8. Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating Progress
9. Celebrating Success

These publications have been developed to serve as tools as you consider how and when to use different program delivery models in your Extension programming. Additional perspectives are provided from previous study participants who talk about what these models mean to them ([Appendix](#)). In addition, there are places where you will be asked questions to

guide your reflection. The information you provide there allows you to connect the ideas to your work, while also allowing me to continually improve the publication. I will also be developing ongoing training around the publications. Consider participating in that once it becomes available. Provide your [email address](#), if you are interested in participating.

Abstract

Being “engaged” is critical to the success of Cooperative Extension, as well as land-grant universities and other forms of higher education. This publication defines engagement within the Cooperative Extension context and explains how it connects with our educational approaches. A conceptual framework for engagement is provided, identifying the key players, their roles, and showing how they relate to one another. The publication ends with a brief discussion of evaluation within an engaged programming context. This publication is part of the Extension Program Planning Series. These publications are intended as guides to shape your programming.

Introduction

Cooperative Extension has historically provided expertise in rural communities, specifically within an agricultural context. Historian Nathan Sorber, in his 2018 book, “Land-Grant Colleges and Popular Revolt,” explains how Cooperative Extension allowed land-grant universities to evolve into a more sustainable model, meeting a critical need for education in rural communities. Meeting this need through Extension provided political support and funding for the development of state, and land-grant universities. The land-grant university is unique to the United States providing academics, research, and outreach all within one institution.

The early model of Cooperative Extension program delivery is often referred to as “the expert model” (Rogers 1995). The expert model will be addressed in detail in the second publication of this series, “Extension Program Delivery Using an Expert Model.”

Discussion related to increasing engagement in Cooperative Extension began as early as the 1960s (Fessler 1964; Vines et al. 1963) and continues today (Reed et al. 2015; Sorber 2018). This publication is intended to provide an overview of what engagement means for Cooperative Extension today and to support Extension professionals in increasing engagement in their work. As you read through this publication, take time to reflect, and record how you use engaged approaches to program delivery in your work, contributing further to the learning in this area. You can also [share your comments](#) with me so I can use this to inform my future work.

The Working Definition of Engagement in Cooperative Extension

A working definition of engagement in Cooperative Extension was developed as part of a research project (Vines 2018). The definition reads:

The engaged model of program delivery in Cooperative Extension is characterized by community involvement in all aspects of program development, sharing in the identification of issues to be addressed, developing a process for implementation and development of knowledge, evaluation and securing funding. Expertise and learning processes are shared. In the engaged model, Extension serves as a conduit

between the community and the university. The engaged model is based on relationships with the community developed through continual interaction, partnerships and collaborations. Relationships and learning extend beyond traditional program boundaries. Learning experiences involving an engaged model are robust and rich, as the community works in both formal and informal settings to identify problems and develop solutions (Vines 2018, p.7).

Many of the educators interviewed for this project saw the use of the engaged model as critical to ensuring success for Cooperative Extension into the future. The reasons educators shared relevant to why they use an engaged model of program delivery fit into seven categories.

The categories are as follows: (1) [to develop solutions in complex situations](#), (2) [to address specific types of topics](#), (3) [to build and strengthen relationships and social networks](#), (4) [to provide customized learning experiences that meet the needs of specific audiences](#), (5) [to develop and improve program support](#), (6) [to achieve better learning outcomes and sustainability of solutions](#), and (7) [to meet needs based on Extension’s role](#). Use the links to read selected quotes from the educators who participated in the study related to the specific categories.

Cooperative Extension’s Engaged Educational Approaches

Merrill Ewert defined four educational approaches through which Cooperative Extension works – service, information delivery, facilitation, and transformative education (figure 1) (Franz and Townson 2008).

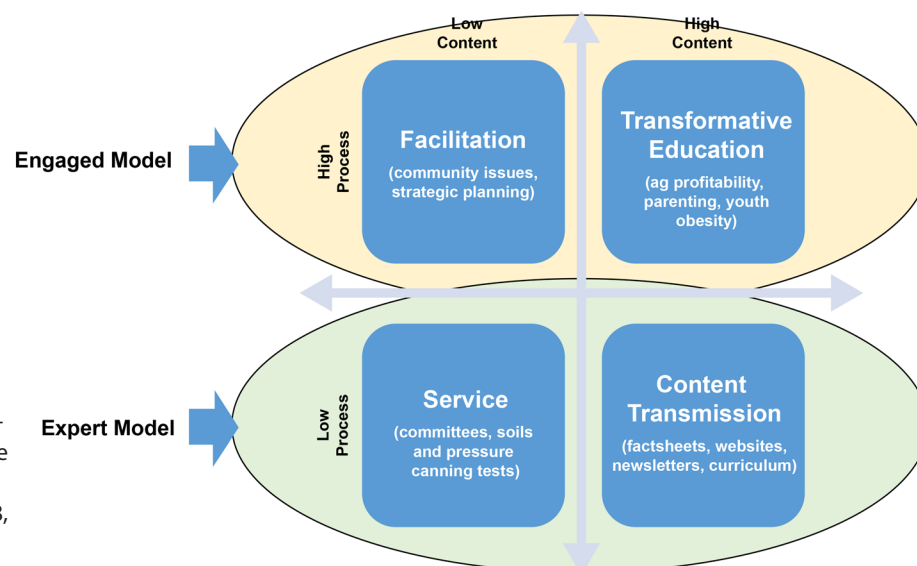


Figure 1. Educational approaches for Cooperative Extension, adapted from Franz and Townson 2008, Franz 2017.

Facilitation and transformative education emphasize the role of Cooperative Extension in providing process for community education. In the role of facilitation, the Extension professional moderates discussions among those with multiple perspectives. In this role, the educator is focused on bringing out diverse opinions and making sure that decision making is inclusive and equitable. Transformative learning emphasizes behavior change at the individual or community level. Franz and Townson (2008) emphasize the importance of ongoing relationships and using multiple methods to achieve transformative learning. For transformative learning in a community setting, the Extension professional incorporates learning content to help community members interact and work collaboratively to drive community change. These are consistent with engaged program delivery.

In facilitation, space is provided for the community to interact through effective dialogue to resolve a contentious issue, such as locating a waste treatment facility, addressing a zoning change, etc. An Extension professional working in these situations will often utilize their internal Cooperative Extension and community networks to provide education that is unbiased and able to guide the development of recommendations and policy. However, they also strive to create an environment and process that allow community members to explore areas of agreement, as well as areas of disagreement in a civil manner that emphasizes mutual respect. The outcome of facilitation is highly contextualized, based on the shared values of those represented in the facilitation.

Within an engaged model of program delivery, the emphasis on transformative education is placed on the

community level. Situations requiring transformative education at the community level include responses to the global COVID-19 virus, racial inequity, food insecurity, food system disruption, etc. While individual change is the basis for change at the community level, individual change is not enough. Community members must come together in order to develop a collective direction for change. Facilitation may be key in the initial stages of transformative education, although facilitation often ends with a recommendation or policy. Transformative education is only beginning at that point, as the root causes of the situation are explored and resolved.

Engaged Program Delivery Reflection 1

What are examples of issue areas in which you have used facilitation to address a community need?

What are examples of issue areas in which you have used transformative education to address a community need?

Are there needs in your community that you are currently struggling to address? [Go to survey.](#)

The Conceptual Framework for an Engaged Model of Program Delivery

The conceptual framework for the engaged model identifies the roles of Cooperative Extension and the university, clientele, and sources of political and financial support in both facilitation and transformative education

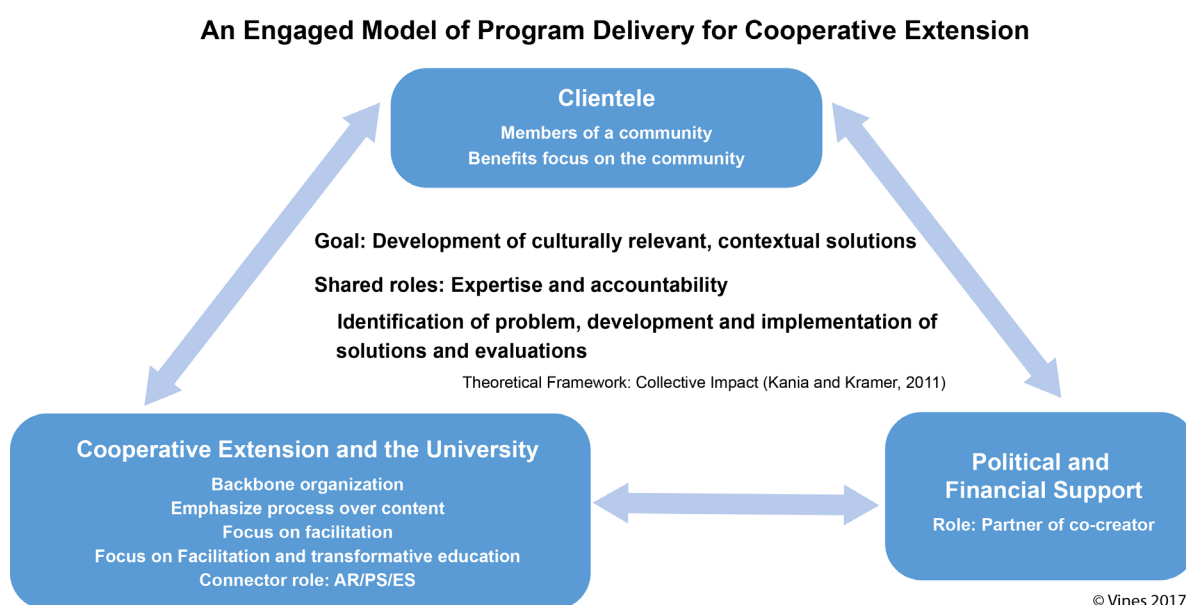


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for an Engaged Model of Program Delivery for Cooperative Extension.

(figure 2). An engaged model of program delivery is recommended when an issue is so complex that it will benefit from viewpoints of individuals with multiple perspectives and when there is no clear solution.

Another test for use of this model is whether providing a solution for this issue has long- or short-term benefits. If there are long-term benefits, the engaged approach is noted as providing greater community buy-in and sustainability for solutions, and thus would be recommended. The engaged process will take longer to develop and implement than an expert approach, which also supports the use of the engaged model for

The engaged model of program delivery differs from the expert model primarily in the shared roles of all partners in defining the situation, providing expertise, and developing solutions. Collective impact theory of Kania and Kramer (2011) effectively defines how this model works, particularly when considering needs for transformational education at the community level. Another area of difference is the importance of two-way, ongoing communication occurring among all partners in the engaged approach as they work together to identify the problem and to develop solutions.

Roles for Partners in an Engaged Approach

For purposes of the study to compare engaged and expert models of program delivery in Cooperative Extension, three types of partners were identified. These included: 1) Cooperative Extension professionals at the local and campus level, 2) clientele, and 3) sources of political and financial support. In this section we look at the roles each of these partners play within an engaged approach

Cooperative Extension professionals at the local and campus level

Although identified together in the conceptual framework and as part of the same entity, faculty representing

Cooperative Extension and the university may be singular or multiple depending on the scope of the program. If there are multiple professionals representing Cooperative Extension and the university, they may play unique or shared roles. Extension faculty at the local and university level often move fluidly across many roles when working in an engaged approach. Using the normative traditions developed by Peters et al. (2010), faculty using an engaged approach serve in a connector role carrying out the roles of action researcher, public scholar, and education organizer, depending on the situation and what is needed.

Community may be defined in multiple ways, either as place-based or interest-based. A county, ZIP code, or neighborhood may define a community. Or a shared interest in managing a crop or participating in a specific pastime may define a community. Today, there is a greater emphasis on virtual communities, erasing traditional geographic boundaries such as counties, states, and countries. We generally think of Extension professionals as either working in a community or on campus. Changing how we think about community also changes how we think about the roles of professionals working in Cooperative Extension. Traditionally we think of educators or agents as the local Extension professionals with day-to-day connections and strong relationships with geographically defined communities.

From that traditional perspective, the local professionals were supported by subject-matter specialists. However, this is challenging as we consider that a subject-matter specialist may be the primary point of contact for the university when we consider interest-based and virtual communities. Engaged program planning is dependent on strong relationships between communities and the university. This emphasizes the need to study and strengthen internal linkages across multiple university roles.

Using the perspective of collective impact, Cooperative Extension and the university often are the backbone organization (figure 3), a role they may share with other

Conceptualization of Collective Impact (Kania and Kramer, 2011)



Figure 3. Conceptualization of Collective Impact (Kania and Kramer 2011).

community organizations. The primary objective of the backbone organization is to make sure the project is supported and managed to make progress. This may require facilitating discussions and supporting timelines, sending out meeting reminders, accessing community or university resources or sources of expertise, and keeping the work of the community-based team moving forward. The backbone role reflects the concept of shared accountability. In addition, as the Cooperative Extension and university professionals work with the team, they also contribute university research and knowledge as part of their shared expertise. This may include identifying a research partner, accessing research findings, or identifying an individual to serve as a resource. Another critical role of the backbone organization is working behind the scenes to guide the team to ensure that all members of the community are represented and contributing.

Clientele

Community members or program clientele are critically important to the success of an engaged model. Their work involves accurately defining the problem, root causes, and solutions. Clientele must be actively involved in all steps of the programming process as they interpret and develop the most appropriate course of action for their community. They help define and locate local expertise needed to help determine community direction and action that is most appropriate to the community. In addition, clientele in an engaged approach can influence the research agenda of the university as they identify needs. They can make sure Cooperative Extension and the university are doing the work that is most relevant and necessary for society by emphasizing their local context.

Volunteer leaders and advisory groups have traditionally been a part of the Cooperative Extension programming process. As we move to greater engagement, their roles expand as they take more ownership in the program. Extension professionals need to instill an overall attitude of inclusivity across communities and work with our volunteers to identify where certain groups or perspectives may be missing from the work.

Sources of political and financial support

One of the exciting aspects of engaged programming is the idea that sources of political and financial support serve as co-creators or partners with community and Cooperative Extension in engaged program planning processes. The expert program model requires the development of reports that let supporters or funders know what results their efforts have achieved. With

the engaged model, the providers of this support are integrally involved in evaluating the success of the work, as they help to guide the process. They can direct their support in the areas where they see opportunity for greatest programmatic benefit. They may also help connect the programming to other supporters within their unique networks.

Engaged Program Delivery Reflection 2

How does the role of Cooperative Extension professionals at the local and state level differ in your work from what is presented here?

How does the role of clientele differ in your work from what is presented here?

How does the role of sources of political and financial support differ in your work from what is presented here? [Go to survey.](#)

Evaluation of Success for the Engaged Extension Professional

The traditional, expert model of program delivery emphasizes adoption of new practices or use of educational materials as a measure of success. These measures are very much numerically focused. How many people attended the session or used the resources? How many people indicated they might change their behavior? Generally, Extension's impact is calculated and predicted as you consider how changes in individual practices make a difference at the community or societal level.

Success in an engaged model is the product of strong relationships, networks, and often occurs over a long period of time. Most of the priority needs of communities are complex, resulting from multiple underlying and contributing factors. There are multiple ways in which evaluation might be approached. Development of relationships and networks may be difficult to measure, because changes observed over a set period, such as an annual evaluation cycle, may be small. However, these relationships are critically important for the success of an engaged Extension program. Identification of key partnerships may be more meaningful in this approach than dollars contributed. As Extension professionals work in this manner, the number of collaborators should increase, and their networks should expand. The engaged model is based on shared expertise and shared learning, so the value that the Extension professional provides should be considered, in addition to how well they identify and promote the expertise of their collaborators.

How does their inventory of expertise expand over time? Finally, the outcomes of the engaged approach will be incremental, as underlying and contributing factors are addressed.

Engaged Program Delivery Reflection 3

How do you evaluate your programs that occur in an engaged delivery approach?

How is your performance evaluated for your engaged work?

Please provide your email address if you would like to receive a copy of your responses. [Go to survey.](#)

Conclusions

The engaged model of program delivery is an effective method of working with communities to resolve issues and develop sustainable solutions for complex problems that are interpreted specific to the local context. Facilitation and transformative education are the primary educational approaches associated with the engaged program model. The role of the Extension professional in carrying out engaged program planning varies depending on their role in the Extension organization, as well as what is occurring at any point in time within the community. The development of relationships with community partners including clientele, as well as political and financial supporters, are critical to the success of engaged program planning. Evaluation measures for engaged program planning require collaboration with the community. Success depends on identifying internal and external sources of expertise, and the community's iterative, incremental success in working to resolve a complex issue.

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To quote Marshall Stewart's presentation to the VCE program teams on March 29, 2021, as "Extension is a thought, not a line item," it continually evolves. This publication is interactive so you can note these changes or your thoughts on different components over time, or feel free to share them directly with me at kvines@vt.edu.

Educator Interview Responses

Related to Use of the Engaged Model of Program Delivery

Why Engage? To develop solutions in complex situations

Respondents in the original 2016 study reported using the engaged model of program delivery in situations where there were unsolved questions, complex situations, and dynamic situations such as emerging issues. In addition, there is a wide array of types of topics that Extension educators described as being conducive to an engaged model of program delivery. These include community-wide issues, industry-specific issues, and on-farm research. In addition, topics where there may be multiple solutions, or where change is possible were included. Review and reflect on why and how the Extension educators use the engaged model in their work to achieve the following. For each of these the state number, program area, and pseudonym identified by the interviewee is provided.

Complex issues of local and national importance

Changes in agriculture (State 1 ANR Educator, Rocky)

“Some of the different areas that are more engaging than others, where we’re looking at different issues that there are a lot of unknowns there. Agriculture’s always changing, and there are issues with the environment and technology, and concerns as well, about the climate. All these are different issues that are coming up, and we’re looking at how we can be the most sustainable as we move forward as a state, a nation, and the world. These are things we’re looking at all the time, and engage as much input as we can from the people we serve. And sometimes it’s something where we’re learning together, and actually there are many times that there are grants that really promote this. So, there are opportunities there to get some funding to do this type of programming in this area. And we’ve done some of that in the last few years.”

Providing healthier food options in schools (State 2 FCS Educator, Pookie)

“Well, success of past programs that have done that [encouraged use of the engaged model], are common

sense. Let’s see. I am blessed to work in a community that, for the most part, works really well together. So, one example is that I have two program assistants that go in and teach nutrition education in the elementary school. And they’re hearing from the teachers that the school breakfasts need to be healthier, that they’re filled with too much sugar right now. And then they’re trying to teach these kids [about nutrition]. I’m also hearing the same thing from parents. ‘My kid eats a healthy breakfast at home, and then they have to go to school and they’re presented with this breakfast whether they need it or not,’ because everyone gets the breakfast [in our school district]. So, parents are frustrated, teachers are frustrated, and of course, a lot of it goes against what my program assistants are trying to do. Well, at the same time, our community health assessment headed up by our health department was identifying obesity as a top priority to work on. So, I approached the health department director and I said, ‘I would really love to work on something with healthier options in the schools.’ And that came out to be one of the action steps. So, we’re just in the process of forming the group now to tackle that, to work with the school and the menus, and we’re trying to see what we can do. And even in the classroom, so if it’s a classroom party or to just having healthier snacks or no food. You don’t have to have food to have a party ... that would be an example of kind of hearing the needs from a variety of sources, and then working with others in the community to address it.”

New programs

Planning a new program for fruit school (State 2 ANR Educator, Maudine)

“New programs are derived from a felt need within a clientele. That said, we ought ... take this to our fruit school, for example, this year. It’s a one-day conference that felt like we received a few clientele that said, ‘Well, why don’t you offer this? Or why don’t you offer that?’ So, that’s a new program. So anytime there’s a new program, I would lean on the engaged model more to get input from peers or clientele. The areas where I’m not an expert, I use the engaged model. So outside of agronomy and farm management, which are my specializations, I would work hard to use that engaged model. But even in program areas or specialization areas where I feel

comfortable and confident, you're always trying to seek input and advice on how to help clientele more. So, yeah -- the short answer is new programs in areas outside of my expertise."

Communitywide issues: Business retention and expansion (State 2 CD Educator, Gus)

"Typically, when there's a need that the community wants to address, and they reach out to us, and then we basically come to the table and work hand-in-hand with the community on what it is they need and how, any kind of structural program that meets their needs, and then go about working with them hand-in-hand in delivering it. For instance, an example might be a business retention and expansion program where they've decided that they want this service or they need our help. We sit down together and decide what businesses they might want to target, and we put together a survey instrument based on their direct input, and implementation that typically involves them almost exclusively. Sometimes we don't even get involved in the actual implementation. We help them design the program, but oftentimes they actually deliver it. So, that might be an example." [Link to category list]

Why Engage? To address specific types of topics

The engaged model of program delivery is used to address specific types of topics. Examples provided by the Extension educators included areas in which they do not have a knowledge base, subject matter that supports peer-to-peer or co-learning, and topics that may be more open to personal interpretation. Some Extension educators responded in general that they used this model for programming that was not mandated. One specific topic area identified for use of the engaged model was local foods and food security.

In an earlier example, an Extension educator talked about how he uses this model in areas where he has less expertise to learn more about the topic from clientele (link to program planning for fruit school). Other Extension educators said that they turn to the engaged model when they lacked specific knowledge. One Extension educator said, "I think when I lack the knowledge base in the area to be presented or [do not] have the ability to identify the problem to be solved is when I use that [engaged model] the most."

On-farm research

Working with growers to find answers (State 1 ANR Educator, Ruby)

"You know, if I'm going out, literally, for some of my projects, neither I, nor the grower, nor industry really knows the answers yet. So, everybody's interested, you know, everybody. The grower will throw in their expertise. Industry would throw in their expertise. I would throw in my expertise. And then we would go forward with a, like an on-farm research project, which I do a number of, and we will all be learning together. I mean, I'm going to handle the data; I'm going to analyze the data. But we're going to come back together and discuss that data. And you know, come to some conclusions or some strong leanings. You know, if we can do multiple years of research and come up with the same answers, the same trends, you know, we get more firmer, stronger on our conclusions, we're sort of in that scenario all becoming more experts together, with questions that none of us totally know the answers to yet."

Sharing results with others (State 2 ANR Educator, Parker)

"I think I'm encouraged because when I involve people in a program, and this isn't just a meeting with tables and chairs, this could be an on-farm research project where somebody comes to me or a group of people say, 'We have this problem with corn production,' or 'We're observing this kind of insect,' or, 'We should be getting protection from this strategy,' and so on. 'We're just not seeing the protection that's maybe advertised or should be.' And so, when we engage them in the process and then we get to the end result, and they themselves find results from their own farm, from their own experiences, with data that they helped me collect or they collected in cooperating with me in a group of producers. And to hear them talk about the results that Extension helped them find and hear their conversations about the value of what that allowed them to do and not do, that's very encouraging of that process. Because they couldn't have felt the need any more than what they did, and they felt it. They had that problem -- they felt it enough to speak about it and ask the question for us to be engaged in helping them find a solution or a direction to head in -- that's encouraging."

[Interactive survey question – What are new topics you have worked with your community to address where you had to use an engaged approach?] [Link to category list]

Why Engage? To build and strengthen relationships and social networks

The engaged model of Extension program delivery also is seen as ideal for development of long-term relationships through improved interaction and shared learning.

Relationships are built through the process of solving complex issues and can be sustained over time. Extension educators used this model to develop communities of shared interest in which relationships developed with the agents and clients, among the clientele, and in online as well as face-to-face environments. Read the quotes provided by the educators about how they do this in their communities.

Providing community connection and building trust

The Amish community (State 2 ANR Educator, Agriculture 58)

“I’ve got one committee, for example, that I work with, part of an Amish population here. They very much want to make sure that they’re using other farmers and other people from their community. So, I’m helping to facilitate that, but we’re using that engaged model to make sure. That might be the best way of reaching that particular audience.”

Women in agriculture (State 2 ANR Educator, Fenster)

“Well, like I said, I use advisers quite a bit and then we get together. Just for an example, we’ve decided through a lot of the discussion that we need to engage our women in agriculture. We’ve had several programs on and off throughout – over the last 10 years -- have been highly rated, highly attended. We’ve never really focused on the women in agriculture. And we got several requests here from some of my key leaders over the last two years. So tomorrow, we’re going to get together with our advisory group to plan our Women-In-Ag education. There are [women ag leaders from] three counties going together. They’re all different ages, different places in life, different needs. And we’re going to try to use them to put together what women in agriculture really need. Because obviously, I’m not an expert in that area, because I’m not living it.”

Other community organizations (State 2 ANR Educator, Sam)

“Well, I think it’s probably the best way to develop relations -- long-term relationships -- that will result in

a continual program development kind of model. We work through that engaged approach with like Farm Credit [geographic region]. We worked on a program together with them last year. And then it’s a continual piece where they’re coming to me, asking me to develop programming. So, I think it does create some long-term relationships on program development.”

Building relationships and trust with industries

Building sources of support (State 2 ANR Educator, Sam)

“I think the industry people become much more engaged when we work with them in that kind of [engaged] model, as we ask them to be at the table versus being just a sponsor when we bring someone in. And they’re part of the development of problems to be solved and solutions presented. They can be much more engaged.”

Building relationships over time (State 1 ANR Educator, Dodge)

“I think the advantage to that is when we have regular meetings with such a diverse group of ag industry producers, people do form relationships, because you get to know each other over two years in working together. So, it’s much more relationship-driven because you have to in that [engaged] model. And I think that creates some long-term benefits, even when people leave that board. It’s a good experience for people to be on it. And I think the satisfaction of attendees, because the board is made up of a kind of a mix of the same type of stakeholders that attend it, we have a better gauge of what people want to see at the meetings for topics, types of speakers, and how the event’s organized.”

Recognizing shared expertise

Expertise from farm clientele (State 1 ANR Educator, Ruby)

“Quite frankly neither, I nor the universities are ‘ye of all knowledge.’ We don’t know it all. And if you go into something thinking that you kind of know it all, first of all, you can be, you know, there are umpteen personalities, but it can kind of come across as a little bit arrogant. These guys sort of think they know it all. And it’s foolish because when you think you know it all, a lot of times you end up being wrong. I just think it’s a more relational, positive way to go forth. Learning together, not assuming, you know, that I, we, know everything. These growers have been working the land

for, you know, three, four generations. They really know something well. And probably they know more than I do, in many ways, of the practical things. I can come in with some good suggestions. And some things that might help them, but they know it. They know a lot.”

Relationships developed as a result of on-farm research (State 1 ANR Educator, Corn)

“Well, I’ve used the word ‘relationships’ a number of times, and I truly believe part of the formula for success in Extension work is all about relationships ... Give you an example of this in on-farm research. You know, we have a meeting every year. Usually February-March time frame, where we gather the public. Usually that’s area farmers and area agronomists. And they come together, and we spend the whole day going over the research results. And I’ve had, on numerous occasions, participants of a project tell me, ‘You know the findings are important, they’re of value. What’s really the value is the discussion during the content of the program. But also, the discussion during the breaks and during lunch, and the fact that I’ve met people that I wouldn’t have met otherwise.’ And that’s a social, cultural component there that we sometimes don’t put enough focus or enough value on. So, relationships, partnerships, getting back to your original questions, I think, have been extremely important.

Teamwork vs. individual effort (State 2 CD Educator, Missy)

“It’s a culmination of a number of different -- it’s not one person saying, ‘This is how you do it.’ It’s a complete combination of thought and buy-in. It’s more than just one person saying, ‘Follow me,’ or ‘Do this.’ It’s one person saying, ‘How can we make this better? What do you think we should do?’ Bring everybody together, and then everybody moves together to solve the problem together, and you’ve got a team. And it’s also because you don’t have one person who’s established themselves as the positional leader, and you’ve got a whole team that are working on it.”

Engaged programming approaches in virtual environments

No-till agriculture listserv (State 1 ANR Educator, Conan)

“The last probably five or six years, we’ve had a no-till listserv where producers, specialists, and Extension educators, private industry people, are part of this listserv, and they can ask any question at any time. And

maybe not every day, but usually several times a week somebody will pose a question, ‘Hey, I’m thinking about doing this; does anybody have any experience doing that?’ And I think that’s been really pretty good to get some dialogue, again not in person, but basically online, to have that community of support to help people move forward and maybe not make those same mistakes. Then we’ve also used that listserv to help advertise programs that we’re having here in [this state] or in other states that maybe answer some of those questions in that area of interest. I probably need to develop that for our water crops issue team that we’re working on, put something like that together so that there could be more dialogue.”

Online program for Individuals going through divorce (State 1 FCS Educator, Crazy Cat)

“I just find it very interesting because for an online course, once they know we’re there, and we’re talking back and forth, and we’re working together, is they really get into it. They feel really good about the program. They feel like, ‘Gosh, I’m getting something out of it.’ We’ve had comments where they’ve said, ‘If I’d only had this information before the divorce, maybe we wouldn’t be divorced.’” [Link to category list]

Why Engage? To provide customized learning experiences that meet the needs of specific audiences

Extension educators spoke about using the engaged model in one-on-one interaction with clientele, and in program planning and needs assessment with committees and advisory groups. Ongoing needs assessment and interaction in face-to-face and online environments support the development of customized learning experiences that result in higher levels of learning by clientele, appropriate application of resources, and research and development of better, more sustainable solutions. Read the quotes provided by the educators about how they do this in their communities.

After-school programs (State 1 4-H Educator, Pat Bean)

“I think of something more specific to my program, when we have gone to some of the after-school programs. We’ve worked with the principals and the teachers at that school to help identify what we’re going to teach or how we can help them in their school. And

it was different when we went to one school versus another school that was in another after-school program within our county. [There were] very different needs for each of those, but I think that's a little bit smaller scale. But we're just working with them, helping to identify what would really help the students at a particular location."

Nutrition education for women returning to the workforce (State 2 FCS Educator, Mary)

"Well, besides those programs that I mentioned, when I'm called to do a program in the community, I always ask them what they're looking for. I mean, they'd just call and say, 'Oh, we'd like a nutrition program,' but I always ask for more specifics about what they're looking for or what the circumstances are. One place I go frequently, it's for women who are re-entering the workforce for whatever reason – divorce, or death of a spouse, or they've moved [and are] new to the area. And so, they're looking at a lot of different nutritional needs than the stay-at-home mom because they're trying to figure out how to pack lunches, how to have a healthy dinner on the table for their kids when they get home. So, I always try to gear what I'm going to be teaching to what they need."

On-farm research programs

In on-farm research programs, crop producers identify specific production challenges to their operation and then work with a team of specialists, Extension educators, and industry personnel to develop and implement research protocols, collect and analyze data, and then evaluate results on their farm. An added benefit is that findings are shared throughout the state. This is a highly customized program. The following quotes indicate how each agent customizes their program.

The On-Farm Research Network (State 1 ANR Educator, Dodge)

"So, this is a program where farmers are interested in a product, or maybe how two hybrids compare, and they want to be able to evaluate either management practice on their farm. So, there's a network of Extension educators that provides assistance to them in implementing their research on their farm. So, the topic, or what they want to research, is all determined by the growers. But in terms of data analysis, one is the plot layout, and then the statistics or analysis of the results are really what the university provides. So, it's a very customized approach for every individual grower, which makes it challenging sometimes. But the reason the

growers like it is because they're the ones deciding what they want to do, and we're just there to support them or help them. And we coordinate grower meetings, so all these growers can come to a meeting and share their results. And we have them present the results of their on-farm study at four locations across the state. Usually, they just come to one. The other locations where the results are presented, usually I or a couple others will present [the information] on their behalf. But usually, we try to get all the growers who did the studies come to present at their local meeting to the other farmers."

[Link to category list]

Why Engage? To develop and improve program support

The engaged model of program delivery was seen as a way to improve program support in many ways. One educator saw himself building a web of support to increase community buy-in. Others saw the value of using this approach to support program promotion. Finally, the engaged model of program delivery was seen as critical to expanding program reach to new audiences in different environments.

Building a web (State 2 ANR Educator, Pike County)

"I also think that when you have more people involved in the process then it's like a web. It goes out, and so you get more people who understand what you're trying to do, why you're trying to do that, and you get better buy-in, better acceptance of that. And so, that's important for the clientele that you're trying to help, and it's also important because the people who support you, in terms of your stakeholders, also recognize that you're being responsive to the needs of the community."

Developing and improving program support

Relationship marketing (State 2 ANR Educator, Fenster)

"I think life is about relationships [laughter]. I mean that's the long and short of it. It's just not Extension, it's everything, life in general. This is about relationships. If you ever use social media for business, it's all the same type of arguments. It's this idea you want to develop them as fans of your program. Because if they're excited about what you're doing, then they're going to want to see you succeed, and so they are going to do what they

can to make sure that program succeeds. If you're out there in the expert model and you're doing it by yourself, they have very little vested interest in whether you succeed or not. So, that gives you extra marketing and advertising muscle."

Word of mouth advertising (State 2 ANR Educator, Parker)

"So, we work with a group of 10 farmers on a project, and then another group of farmers unrelated to that group have heard about the results, and they too, in a conversation with us, praise it, or reference it, or find value in it. That's encouraging."

Increased program credibility (State 2 ANR Educator, Zoe)

"I would just like some input. As I stated earlier, I think it provides community buy-in if community is involved. If it's coming from a standpoint that the leaders need to be involved from within the community, whether that's a county commissioner, or the emergency management division, or township trustees, or something like that. Again, having that buy-in to what is trying to be done, that overall acceptance going into it, I think, builds credibility to the program, to the community."

Better program participation from clientele (State 2 ANR Educator, Maudine)

"I mean, if you're engaging a dozen farmers in an activity a month or two, or three, or four ahead of a particular program, they're going to be engaged in the program when it happens, and they're going to tell their peers about it. So, [the engaged approach results in] better participation, or increased participation, but then also better quality of discussion, of dialogue, a better quality of learning, dialogue, however you want to call that."

Engaged approach and increased program reach

Through volunteers (State 2 4-H Educator, Brick)

"So, my model is more of a volunteer-directed program delivery system than a staff-directed model. I tend to train the trainer where I train folks in this engaged model so they can go out and teach in the engaged model for those specific topics. There's only one of me. If I would teach 10 people, then I'd just have 10 people who learn. If I teach 10 people to teach 10 people, I have 100 people. So, my approach is to expand the knowledge. Let people

feel successful, engaged, and motivated, and also let them be part of our team to keep things going. I believe in the hit and run. I start a program train, I'm there for support, and then I go again and train somebody else on maybe the same program. And it also is a way for me to increase diversity, get Extension program information out, and also develop a cadre in the county for support for funding -- support for kids, support for jobs, things of that nature."

In limited promotional venues (State 2 ANR Educator, Zoe)

"It [the engaged model] also helps spread the word. I've been here 28 years, but I still don't reach everybody. Not everybody gets the newspaper, and I'm one that fortunately still has a news column, and that's not the case in all counties. But we don't have a real good radio station. So, involving community to help spread the word is as important as putting the involvement of the community into the context of the program."

[Link to category list]

Why Engage? To achieve better learning outcomes and sustainability of solutions

Numerous Extension educators in the study indicated that being able to achieve greater impact was the reason for their use of the engaged model of program delivery. Extension educators cited higher learning outcomes, application of knowledge, sustained change, and long-term impact. They also found improved ability to measure those outcomes because of their continuing interaction with the clientele. Several respondents also spoke about clientele being more aware and acknowledging the benefits of participating in the engaged educational experiences. Other Extension educators shared that through the engaged model, communities learned processes they could use to resolve future issues. Extension educators also indicated that solutions developed through use of the engaged model were more sustainable.

Increasing the quality of learning and improved educational outcomes

Learners seek solutions to a problem (State 1 ANR Educator, Bluestem)

"I think I found the engaged model to be the most effective in terms of actual implementation and utilization of knowledge and also in providing an

environment where I would say learners are more open to, and looking for, solutions to a particular problem, or looking for opportunities that they hadn't otherwise considered. The expertise model usually specifically addresses only a specific issue in time and space, where my experience would be the engaged learner model opens up opportunities that otherwise may be not explored."

On-farm research promotes engagement (State 1 ANR Educator, Lydia)

"I'd say our strongest programming that truly is engaged is our on-farm research program. To me, that's the strongest with engagement because in the final program, the Extension people aren't the only people presenting. We actually have the farmers present about their studies, and it allows them to take ownership of what they did. They're the ones explaining why they did the study that they did. It allows farmers to learn at another level regarding statistics and understanding research that they are reading about. And the questions are at a higher level with the farmers asking each other, 'Why did you set it up this way?' or 'Did you think about collecting this data?' It's just a really phenomenal process to watch. It's really highly engaging."

Behavioral change (State 1 FCS Educator, Crazy Cat)

"I think that what we're all trying to do is have behavior change, and by using the engagement model, your chances for behavior change are much greater. And so, that's where we all want to be. Although when we use the expert model, we're hoping for change. But we'd probably have a better chance of it with the engaged model."

Recognizing and achieving long-term program impact

The greatest impact and benefit to the learner (State 1 ANR Educator, Bluestem)

"Yeah, I think the engaged model for me is the most rewarding in terms of seeing folks actually buy in first, take ownership of the information presented, and make the changes. I think that's where I've seen the greatest impact of the 13 years I've been in this role, is where people have been part of an engaged learning experience It goes back to what I said earlier, my experience. The engaged model is where we frequently see the greatest impact and long-term benefit to the learner, where the expert model frequently is information

delivery, [and we're] not always very sure about implementation and application to the individual's life."

Long-term impact in beef production programming (State 1 ANR Educator, Practicum)

"The sustainability of their operation, when they graduate, that's one of the programs they highlight. And it's almost to the point I don't have to market anymore because of the participants that are graduating are marketing for me. But it's a very impactful program. But there's a lot of time and a lot of resources that go into those 35 people. But again, it's easy to have a couple of meetings where 100 or 200 people show up. It looks good on your impact that you can share; you've reached a tremendous number of people. But I'd rather change 35 people to where we've got an engaged relationship than have an expert model. But at the same time -- and I'll maybe summarize -- but the resources and the time that it takes to engage probably prevents some of us, at times, from enacting, and we fall back into the expert model. It's easier, but I don't know that it has the same kind of meaningful impact that the engaged model would have."

Statewide impact of Extension (State 1 4-H Educator, Silverado)

"You know, as Extension [educators], we're public servants. Our livelihood is dependent upon the prosperity of our customers across the whole state, and so [it's important] that we're able to show where those dollars are invested, and that the dollars are invested wisely in Extension programming efforts across the state. And part of the reason why the engaged model seems to work fairly well is because we are addressing issues of our clientele, and they feel the need, and they also are able to experience and see the impact or the difference that we make with our programming efforts."

Increased ability to measure program outcomes (State 1 ANR Educator, Practicum)

"I see the engaged model being a little bit more effective for long-term success. And so, when you can, as you work with clientele and you have multiple touches, and whether the program is over or not, as you continue to engage with them, then it helps you measure whether or not they've adopted some things. And so, I think they're more willing to adopt because there's trust, there's communication, there are a lot of things that happen in that kind of a model. And probably one of the big benefits is, I've learned a great deal from the clientele that I've had some of these long-term programs with. And it strengthens my program in the long run."

Increased program value (State 2 CD Educator, Missy)

“I think follow-up too [is important], by the educator and follow-up surveys, follow-up questions. Once you build that relationship, continuing to engage with that group, you might be able to add more value just talking to them about what they’re experiencing and offering additional suggestions and so forth. But it also will give you more tools based on understanding what was truly successful, what wasn’t, so in the future you can use that.” [Link to category list]

Why Engage? To meet needs based on Extension’s role

Several interviewees indicated seeing the engaged model of program delivery as being crucial to the future of Extension. Educators spoke of the value of this model in developing and increasing program support, beginning at the local level. One Extension educator sees his training of volunteers so they can help deliver programs as providing increased diversity for the program and developing support for funding and other benefits to the community. He said he used the engaged model, “because it is successful with building grassroots-level support, which helps us down the road with funding.”

Educators also found this approach to be conducive to achieving the mission of the Extension organization in general. The engaged approach was also identified as being consistent with the tradition in the 4-H program area. One Extension educator spoke of an engaged model of program delivery being the competitive advantage for Extension, especially in more urban areas. Others reported being able to use the connections established through engagement to provide opportunity to connect their communities to the university.

Long-term viability of Extension (State 2 ANR Educator, Zoe)

“As we’ve already talked, the expert model comes into play from time to time. But that engaged model is one that, in order to survive and be respected, and looked upon within a community, you’ve got to have that engagement, whether that’s strictly clientele at the grassroots level, or community leaders, or even other Extension educators or professionals. So, I would say 75% of the time, I’m looking at an engaged model versus an expert model.”

Strengthening connections to the university (State 1 4-H Educator, Pat Bean)

“This is a much bigger scale, on a university level. The deans were asked to come out, and we had to connect them with different groups within our community. They wanted to connect out in our local community. So, they utilized us since we knew key people within the community. We helped organize these meetings kind of like focus groups, but just to help the deans from the university campus come out and make those connections themselves. So, that’s a little bit bigger scale. So I think we do it on a big scale, and I think we do it on a very local scale too, on an individual basis, and with individual partners that we might have.”

The engaged model and 4-H

Extension 4-H educators said that the engaged model is just how 4-H operates. Other Extension educators felt they used the engaged model primarily when they were just another partner at the table and not necessarily leading the efforts. They shared that the community benefited from their connection to the university, their ability to make things happen, and their facilitation skills. This section includes their comments related to this role. One Extension educator specified using the engaged model “to get people involved even at the youth level and when I’m working with 4-H members or schools.” Listen to more thoughts from the 4-H educators in the study.

4-H uses the engages model (State 1 4-H Educator, Pat Bean)

“Well, I’m going to say the same thing I said before: it’s kind of how 4-H operates. I don’t think that we really have operated on the expert model. So, I think that’s been handed down. And that’s just kind of the process we’re always used. So, I think that’s just how it is.”

Programming for future generations (State 1 ANR Educator, Rocky)

“When we do these types of engaged models, I think we’ll learn more from it overall. I think that’s probably more of the way of the future. How we —how Extension is used -- and incorporating research too, and working with farmers and on different things as well. I think the next generation is more that type, wanting to be engaged. ... So, it’s very important to try to use that model as we move forward in Extension. Starting locally and organizationally, that’s where we have the most potential to solve problems and different issues, and then learn together. And [we can] get more buy-in

too, and be more efficient, and in agriculture, be more sustainable as we all work to use this model to work best. Overall, I think this has a lot of potential.”

Acquiring financial support

Research connection through on-farm research (State 1 ANR Educator, Rocky)

“Well, our mission – especially local – is to serve the people. And the best way to do that is to find what’s [needed] and work together to solve the issue or do programming in regard to that. And that’s the thing that we in Extension have always done. I’ve learned, I guess, because in my early career I did quite a bit of research. ... So, there’s a very close relationship between research and Extension. And sometimes we integrate those together, doing on-farm research as well. I think that model is going to be more and more [important] as funding dollars are more competitive, and there’s only so much you can do. It’s kind of a win-win situation.”

Urban youth programming (State 1 4-H Educator, Suzie)

“Well, again I think that that’s the opportunity or niche for Extension to thrive. And in urban areas where you have a lot of different organizations -- service organizations or whatever, a lot of different opportunities for people -- Extension really needs to engage in order to be the stand-out organization. And there are a lot of organizations that sit on their laurels and profess to be the experts, but there aren’t many that truly engage at all levels. I’d say that’s another thing that I’m really passionate about. That doesn’t just mean that you go to the four leaders of your community and ask them what they think. You have to engage everyone. And sometimes that engagement isn’t so comfortable. We have a countywide diversion program, and sometimes those kids land on my back step for one reason or another. And there’s a reason that the juvenile system is dropping them, because they’re looking for anything, anything that would help them. And we’re not just youth development for the 5% that are high-ability learners; we’re for all youth. And so, you can’t turn the kid away, you have to say, ‘I have the best opportunity to do the most impact right here.’ And so, you do what you can.”

Supporting the work of elected officials (State 2 ANR Educator, Parker)

“I need to be accountable to my stakeholders. Every citizen of my county that pays taxes to the general fund of the county commissioners, they should have an influence or a part in what they get out of the Extension office. Whether that’s one horticultural answer per year, or once in the spring and once in the fall. If they have needs, we need to respond to them to the best of our ability. So, the engaged model just helps me communicate with the commissioners and with the people that the commissioners represent. These are the same people that I’m teaching and educating through Extension work. We have a shared audience, a shared clientele. So, hopefully, we keep or gain traction by that relationship with our stakeholders in the engaged model.”

Strengthening program accountability (State 2 ANR Educator, Penguin, son of a dairy farmer)

“And that goes back to my dad [who is a dairy farmer] because when I was hired, I wanted to make sure everything that I did improved my dad’s profitability. And it was like I was being held accountable to the community. We should be held accountable to our communities. Are we meeting the needs that we have from our county level? And the only way to know that is to engage them and ask them. And it’s for political support. It’s for knowing that you’re doing the things that they need the most.” [Link to category list]

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