

EXTENSION IN THE URBAN WEST

Introduction

Land grant universities have the special responsibility not only to educate and conduct research, but to engage society and communities within the states they serve. As we move into the 21st Century, the model of the university engaged in addressing societal issues is as important now as it ever was. This engagement is facilitated by the *power to convene*.

As noted at a recent conference on the role of universities in the future (“Toward a Resilient Metropolis: The Role of State and Land Grant Universities in the 21st Century,” Virginia Tech, 2006), this *convening power* is broad. It may be used to convene scholars and students in traditional, professional, or executive education modes leading to degrees or certificates, or used simply to expand awareness. It may convene researchers both directly and through networks, to address issues of concern to federal agencies and national institutions. Or it may convene scholars, professionals, public officials, and leaders in government, business, and special interest groups as part of its outreach function.

In no place is the power to convene more important than in the West. Every western state has at least one urban center, many of which are surrounded by vast sparsely populated “hinterlands.” With that understanding, Extension leaders in the West have embarked on an initiative to position Extension as an

urban-serving institution. This paper outlines the elements required for Extension to be successful at programming in urban areas, including the underlying problems that need to be addressed. The organizational evolution to this approach will differ depending on local circumstance and state experience.

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In Search of an Urban Extension Model

In 2006, the Western Extension Directors Association (WEDA) tasked the Western Regional Program Leadership Committee (WRPLC) to identify the characteristics of the urban West and explore one or more conceptual models for urban Extension work.

Based upon a literature review and survey of the states, the WRPLC concluded that a common approach to urban education and issue analysis does not exist in the West. Most Extension programming in western metropolitan areas is adapted from rural experiences, not programming developed from an urban perspective. Moreover, the federal land grant

system does not include an urban agenda. Since Extension was largely uninvolved in developing the urban-serving institutions that came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, there are a limited number of urban Extension programs reflective of urban values and approaches at these sites. As a result, the urban Extension programs of the past offer few lessons for the development of a new urban model for the West.

To move towards a new urban Extension model, the Directors tasked the WRPLC to examine urban issues in the West and articulate best practices for urban Extension programming. Their charges included:

1. To examine and validate our assumptions about characteristics and future trends of the “urban West”;
2. To develop and refine one or more models of urban Extension; and
3. To explore the feasibility of establishing an urban research and extension center in the West to provide the needed research base for urban Extension programs.

The process started with an invitational meeting of regionally recognized Extension educators, urban scholars, and local government personnel to gather perspectives on urban issues prerequisite to the development of a blueprint for Extension in the urban West. The meeting, held in Las Vegas in January of 2007, was designed to initiate discussion on this agenda. Subsequent review and interaction among Extension educators and urban scholars have added definition to the initial proceedings.

This work has confirmed that the concept of the urban West does serve as a viable organizer

for metropolitan Extension programs. What follows are 1) an examination of the unique qualities of the urban West and 2) identification of the elements of an urban Extension model. However, the full model development process remains ahead. Similarly, while an urban research and extension center is proposed, no attempt was made to assess the feasibility of such a center.

While urban centers across the country struggle with revitalization, cities in the West are challenged by growth management.

The Urban West

Beyond having the most densely populated metropolitan centers, the West is distinctly different from the other regions in the country. While urban centers across the country struggle with revitalization, cities in the West are challenged by growth management. This conclusion is supported by the recent work of the Brookings Institution on behalf of the consortium of Urban Serving Universities. Their work, and indeed the location of most urban-serving universities, is centered in the nation’s oldest cities. The report *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America’s Older Industrial Cities* (Brookings Institution, 2007) concludes that “older industrial cities are heavily concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest.”

Over the past five decades, globalization and rapid technical change have created challenges for traditional industrialized U.S. cities. They have become trapped in a cycle of decline that includes, but is not limited to:

- The shift from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge-based one that has left many older industrial cities grappling to find their economic niche.
- Extreme economic and residential decentralization that has left the poor and minorities isolated in the urban core, spatially cut off from education and employment opportunities.
- Sixty-plus years of federal, state, and local policies that have largely stacked the deck against cities, undermining their ability to attract and retain business and residents (Brookings Institution, 2007).

The end result is urban decay and loss of population. In sharp contrast, western cities are concerned with issues of growth.

Dealing with issues of growth versus decline is a defining difference that sets western cities apart from their national cohort. Growth and its socioeconomic consequences permeate local politics, social structures, and public policy formation.

While western cities share the defining reality of rapid expansion, differences do exist among urban areas in the West. There are at least three sub-regions, which include the coastal states, the Southwest, and the Rocky Mountain States. In addition, there are a number of mega-regions of great commonality: the Cascade Corridor in the Pacific Northwest (Vancouver, BC to the San Francisco Bay Area), the Coastal Southwest (uniting Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, and Las Vegas), and the Inter-mountain West (including the Boise–Salt Lake City–Colorado Springs region). During a discussion of these delineations, a Las Vegas

conference participant commented that “Fresno has more in common with New Mexico than San Francisco.”

Dealing with issues of growth versus decline is the defining difference that sets western cities apart from their national cohort.

Despite their differences, the commonalities among western urban areas are dominant. Much of that commonality results from the shared sequences of western development and geographic proximity to the Pacific Rim. Western metropolitan areas developed much later than their cohorts elsewhere, resulting in different characteristics than other regions of the country. Western cities were born in the age of the automobile, or as one conferee indicated, “the West was born modern.”

The West has served as the population release valve for the nation, and remains a frontier in the minds of many. The importance of federal lands cannot be overstated (for example, 87% of the state of Nevada is federally owned). Given the magnitude of federal lands and the vast distances in the West, the pattern of development may appear like city-states, where densely populated urban areas emerge like islands from a sea of undeveloped, even barren lands. Consequently and perhaps counter to conventional wisdom, the West is the most urbanized region in the country.

Another conferee noted that the West also holds “a disproportional share of high

amenity landscapes,” which continues to impact the pace and quality of in-migration. In the Seattle–Portland mega-region, youth attracted to the relatively inexpensive cost of living, green demographic, and accessible culture have contributed to the area’s evolution by creating their own urban magnetism.

Consistent with the phenomena of growth, the urban West is becoming more diverse. People of color are approaching a majority in many cities, income levels and educational attainment are increasing, and the poor are being displaced to suburbs while inner city household size is decreasing. Based on their views of economic opportunity, the population of 25–34 year olds is growing in urban areas. This new western melting pot represents a comparative advantage for the West in some technical fields, yet even with educational attainment rates higher than the rest of the United States, urban poverty is also increasing faster than in other regions.

The rich diversity of people and separation by great distances produce similar issues for many cities in the West. They are uniformly concerned with density, transportation, health, safety, economic development, income distribution, and maintaining a high quality of western life. On a smaller number of variables, emphasis on unique issues such as water quality, human rights, or land planning might dominate in a given metropolitan area.

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At the same time, cities are legal creatures of states, which in the West typically have interests that transcend those of city subdivisions. Municipal and state interests in the earlier developed regions of the Northeast and Midwest more closely paralleled each other. In the West, however, there is often a political divide between urban and rural interests. Issues of federal land ownership, agricultural labor, immigration, and property rights are often viewed differently by rural residents in the vast regions between western cities vis-à-vis their metro counterparts.

Urban Extension programming must take this rich tapestry of diversity and commonalities into account. The elements for a new urban Extension model outlined below were formulated in response to this reality.

The Elements of a Western Urban Extension Model

As evidenced by presentations and exhibits at recent national urban Extension conferences, there is good Extension work being conducted in urban areas. The effort here is not intended to show any absence of support for that work. Rather, it is to suggest that from those experiences, we can begin to identify the elements of a model for urban Extension that will add focus and facilitate the highest probability of success in the western region. Drawing from the literature, Extension history, and the experience of urban-serving universities, there appear to be several elements that others have found integral for success and sustainability.

These elements center around the following implications for Extension in the urban West: different demographics; issues of growth; recognition that Extension, while unique, is only one of many urban actors; and the fact that many land grant universities are not located in population centers combine to suggest the need for a new model. After studying these issues, the Las Vegas conference participants recommend the following vision statement for urban Extension:

**EXTENSION CONNECTS
UNIVERSITY RESOURCES TO URBAN
AREAS THROUGH HIGH QUALITY APPLIED
RESEARCH, NON-FORMAL EDUCATION,
AND ACCESS TO CREDIT PROGRAMS.**

We expect each state, their universities, and metropolitan areas to identify their own programmatic themes following the convening process. While we have purposefully avoided the identification of new urban programs, we offer several organizational elements as likely factors in the success of an urban Extension initiative. These generally revolve around collaboration and partnership, staffing models, appropriate technology, institutional centrality, and financial sustainability.

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Positioning urban Extension as the front door to the university. In states where the land grant is not located in a metropolitan

center, Extension should be positioned as the front door to the university in the city—the gateway to research and education. As with all front doors, it must have curb appeal to be considered desirable by the neighborhood.

Extension needs to be based in metropolitan functional areas that may not coincide either with political boundaries or academic disciplines. Extension may need to develop new models of collaboration and community integration where staff and programs are co-housed with non-governmental organizations, existing urban-serving universities, or other urban agencies.

Progress towards a sustainable metropolis will require interdisciplinary approaches formed by scholars from a broad spectrum of academic disciplines from the planning and policy professions moving beyond the lens of a single discipline.

Urban Extension programs need to be issue-driven. Urban issues are very complex. Their analysis and solutions do not conform to traditional university structures or academic calendars. Contributions and insights from single disciplines, while important, are not sufficient to help transform urban society. Any university response must therefore be interdisciplinary in nature. Progress towards a sustainable metropolis will require interdisciplinary approaches formed by scholars from a broad spectrum of academic disciplines from the planning and policy professions moving beyond the lens of a single discipline.

The importance of the urban-serving role within the mission of the university is paramount. Given the realities outlined above, Extension's access to the full faculty resources of the university is essential. Once established, Extension can use this expanded capacity to make the case for managing outreach programs throughout the regions it serves.

Facilitating access to research should be a key function of any urban Extension initiative.

Access to university research. One universal concept in all recent assessments of urban stakeholders is their desire to access the research of their land grant university. While the enabling legislation for Cooperative Extension clearly positions the organization at the application end of the continuum on the creation and utilization of knowledge, there is no restriction on involvement of Extension personnel that should prevent a greater connection between research and urban issue resolution. In fact, this is consistent with the current emphasis at the federal level on integrating research, Extension, and education.

Facilitating access to research should be a key function of any urban Extension initiative. The traditional model has Extension field staff bringing the needs of various stakeholders to the attention of land grant researchers, who investigate the issues and provide research results to Extension educators to take back to stakeholders. Although this model has been effective in the past, today's stakeholders want to be more active in the research process.

Advances in technology make information from anyplace in the world immediately accessible. However, the validity of this information is often questionable. The relevance and value of Extension in this context is proactively confirming what is credible research and assisting stakeholders in interpreting and applying research results to local real-world situations. Each state will need to determine how to best enable this process within their infrastructure.

Applied research and engaged scholarship are integral to urban Extension. Engaged scholarship has been defined by a number of groups and individuals. In the report *New Times Demand New Scholarship II* (2007), a group of research universities gathered to renew the civic mission of higher education describe engaged scholarship as "research... that partners university scholarly resources with those in the public and private sectors to enrich knowledge, address and help solve critical societal issues, and contribute to the public good."

One missing and oft-requested element in the metropolitan policy arena is access to university-based engaged scholarship and applied research that can inform decision-making. In the absence of university engagement, metropolitan areas must rely on private sector consultancies for input to policy processes, often at higher cost and more uncertain reliability.

We propose that new urban Extension programming embrace engaged scholarship and the use of applied research on topics and issues of interest to urban decision-makers, including those in local government, the nonprofit sector, and community organizations.

Applied research and engaged scholarship are not new to Extension. How this plays out will be different in various states, with some being particularly aggressive in developing an Extension-applied research emphasis to nurture the integration process described above. Cornell University, for example, has developed applied research and Extension councils and program work teams, while Kansas State University has created a position titled Associate Director of Extension and Applied Research.

Formal adoption of engaged scholarship and applied research as operating principles for urban Extension is clearly consistent with the general direction of the federal land grant system, which defines applied research as finding practical ways to advance new knowledge for the benefit of individuals and society. As discussed earlier, applied research and engaged scholarship are highly consistent with the needs of urban jurisdictions and their residents.

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Non-formal education remains a mainstay of Extension programming. While non-formal education is comfortable territory for Extension, it is a very crowded field in most cities, and one where Extension may not presently enjoy a competitive advantage. Given constrained resources, it is simply not feasible within the large population base of metropolitan areas to meet the needs of a significant portion of the population, even with the ex-

tensive utilization of volunteers. To reach the maximum number of end-users in these areas, we propose that the target audience be modified to include an emphasis on working with organizational intermediaries who provide direct service and program delivery.

An important target audience of urban Extension programs should be the staffs of organizations that work with the public. This is often referred to as a “train the trainer” model. The resulting educational programs will be aimed at helping urban-based organizations succeed in their work. The end product remains enhancing the public good. Much of the new training activity can likely be fee-based, contract, or grant funded. This approach provides the opportunity to use extramural funds to further expand programs and thus further increase their impact. It is in this manner that urban Extension can maximize its impact.

Access to degree programs. At the front door of the university, urban audiences are looking for access to degree programs. There is not an urban center in the West without a large number of underserved, place-bound residents. Where appropriate, Extension can partner in the delivery of degree, certificate, credit, and non-credit programs for these residents. This is not to suggest that Extension should become a teaching institution, but rather that it possesses the capacity to facilitate the delivery of degrees as well as non-formal programs.

Over the past decade, many states have expanded the role and expectations for Extension to become a part of their state-wide strategies for increasing access to post-secondary education. A 1998 example from South Dakota is illustrative of this type of redesign:

at the same time that the Regents approved a title change from County Extension Agent to County Extension Educator, they charged Extension with expanding “educational opportunities by giving local access to both credit and non-credit courses.” Other states facilitate the delivery of full degree programs at Extension centers.

In states where the land grant university is remote from metropolitan centers, urban-located Extension offices should also be used to create special opportunities for service learning, externships, and internships. Urban-based youth programs could focus on workforce preparation, further education, and training.

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Working through others as a mechanism for increasing impact. As suggested above, there is likely an inverse relationship between population size and the impacts of a direct service model. As Extension shifts from retail service (a mass audience approach) to wholesale delivery (working through agencies and those of influence), new organizational forms and teaching technologies will be required. An ever-increasing amount of Extension’s impacts will be judged on activities conducted through intermediaries.

Because of the political complexity of metropolitan regions, care will be required to position university Extension at the appropriate level or domain in local or state government.

Metropolitan programming needs to involve collaboration with agencies, other educational institutions (including both urban-serving universities and land grants), and/or non-governmental organizations. As a result, Extension must develop tools and utilize evaluation methodologies to assure its contribution to and impact on joint projects are both understood and recognized.

A new urban Extension staffing approach. The new urban Extension program tailored to more applied research activities, engaged scholarship, and non-formal education for the staffs of public and community organizations will require changes in Extension’s traditional staffing model. Today, in most western metro Extension offices, the emphasis is on a few long-term programs supplemented by short-term grant-funded projects. Embracing engaged scholarship, applied research, and a new approach to non-formal education will probably reverse this balance, resulting in the need for more staff with project development and management skills rather than in-depth knowledge of subject content.

With an emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness, engaging the public in applied research and contracted non-formal education is likely to require fewer full-time, tenured, or tenure-track faculty. Instead, a project model that purchases expertise on an as-needed basis may be more appropriate.

Urban Extension staff must reflect the diversity and interests of metropolitan populations. New urban Extension educators will increasingly need to be multicultural, multilingual, suburban/urban-savvy, and able to relate cross-generationally. New urban Extension

sion staff will also need the support, skills, and finances to reach back into the university to obtain needed project expertise as well as into the metropolitan area s/he serves. Mechanisms must exist within the university to enable resources from the broad range of academic disciplines to be applied to urban and regional issues.

Within urban Extension, a lead individual should represent the university to the region. Such an individual must have sufficient legitimacy in both the university and the region to successfully broker resources between the two systems.

The Extension educator in this model is a project developer, communicator, broker, and information translator, not necessarily just a program manager. S/he will need to be knowledgeable of social/educational processes and have access to a complete university from which to draw resources.

New urban Extension educators will increasingly need to be multicultural, multilingual, suburban/urban-savvy, and able to relate cross-generationally.

An expanded funding model. A financial model for future urban Extension programs will recognize that urban communities are organizationally complex. County governments, traditionally important partners of Extension, will remain an important, but not always the exclusive funding partner. Non-governmental organizations, cities, and philanthropies will

be significant collaborators and should be cultivated as financial partners. Great care must be exercised to avoid the alienation of pre-existing and valued partners.

Undoubtedly, extramural grants will play an important role in funding new urban Extension activities that are short-term and require project-specific staff. At the same time, more stable, ongoing funding is needed for long-term programs and core staff. A balance is needed between these extramural and traditional funding sources.

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An Urban Research and Extension Center for the West

Extension programs are based upon and informed by research. Unfortunately, research on urban issues is not universally available to Extension organizations in the West. To overcome this deficiency, the Las Vegas conferees suggest developing an urban research and extension center for the West.

The mission of such a center would focus on the development of interdisciplinary research on issues affecting the urban West, with project identification, recruitment of researchers, and securing funding for research collaborations as important contributions. The research would be useful to Extension faculty located in and providing service to cities, and in turn,

municipal leaders would be significantly involved in proposal development, authorization, and implementation.

An urban research and extension center could be patterned after the four USDA rural development centers. However, given the present focus of the USDA on agriculture and rural communities, it would be unrealistic to expect financial support from that agency for urban issues. Instead, start-up support from a national foundation in preparation for an overture to Congress and/or an urban-based federal agency might be more appropriate.

Summary Framework

The WRPLC identified the following elements as requisite to the successful implementation of an urban Extension model. Not every state or region will be able to employ all 10 of these components at inception, but we believe that success is more likely with adoption of as many as possible.

1. Mechanisms must exist within land grant universities to enable resources from the broad range of academic disciplines to be applied to urban and regional issues.
2. Urban Extension programs must reflect the diversity and interests of metropolitan populations, which may differ from other areas of each state.
3. Given the arbitrariness of political boundaries, urban Extension delivery areas may need to be cross-jurisdictional in order to

assemble appropriate resources. County Extension autonomy, if applicable, should not be negatively impacted by the designation of these urban delivery areas.

4. Funding for Extension urban partnerships should include public and/or private entities in addition to county governments.
5. Programming should be issue/problem-based.
6. Urban Extension educators must recognize that the staffs of nonprofit organizations and public entities are important audiences.
7. A lead individual (or office) should be designated to represent the university to the region. Such an individual (or office) must have sufficient legitimacy in both the university and region to successfully broker resources between the two systems.
8. Stable, ongoing funding is necessary for long-term, core activities. Extramural support may be required for startup and specific programs.
9. A successful urban Extension model must include staff who not only have relevant disciplinary credentials, but also the competencies needed to effectively work in an urban environment.
10. Urban program development and administration must remain within the regular state Cooperative Extension organization, which will continue to provide program oversight. Nothing in the development of an urban model should be construed to suggest a separate management system.

Caveats, Cautions, and Closing Comments

Not all states will choose, nor will all urban Extension programming be able to employ the full range of elements suggested above. However, to maximize the probability of being able to “grow the pie” rather than reallocating among existing resources, we suggest the largest number of these elements as possible be implemented.

While the Las Vegas conferees and the writers of this document embraced the urban challenge as a transformational opportunity for Extension, everyone understands it will not be an easy task. With major programmatic shifts come perceived winners and losers. There must be strategies to deal with changes in the urban programming mix and careful advocacy within the organization and among traditional partners. Partnership development with other providers of urban education and research will also help to overcome actual and perceived barriers.

One potential barrier is the historical emphasis on tenure appointments in western states. Tenured county faculty in particular are found most frequently in the West. This is understood to be a more significant demarcation—and challenge—in the western region than elsewhere.

In closing, we want to emphasize that in order to embrace a new metropolitan model, Extension need not abandon state-wide agendas; rather, they must incorporate the needs of urban areas and understand that those needs often differ from the other areas they serve. In this way, the growth management issues of Portland and Las Vegas may be viewed as similar in a way that the environmental agenda of Oregon and development agenda of Nevada might not. It is this conceptualization that will allow Extension in the West to successfully implement an urban model.

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