

The Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research

*Prepared for the
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The West is urban

The American West is a region marked by large metropolitan cities surrounded by vast rural areas. Most Western states have large metropolitan populations,¹ of which nine states have 80+% of their residents in metropolitan areas and four of these nine states have over 90% of their populations residing in urban centers (2010 U.S. Census). Western cities are distinctly different from their national cohort. These cities arose in the age of the automobile, and therefore to some extent Western cities were ‘born modern’.² While metropolitan centers across the country struggle with revitalization, it is growth management that challenges cities in the West.³

Extension must embrace this reality

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. As a result, the urban Extension programs of the past offer few lessons for the development of a new urban model for the West.⁴

To remain relevant in metropolitan areas, land-grant university based Extension programs need to embrace this reality when deciding which programs they support, how these programs are delivered, and what the composition of their staff should be. Strong Extension programs are informed by research and based upon best practices. Unfortunately, there is little to no research on best practices for university outreach or faculty development to guide Extension organizations in the West.

To overcome this deficiency the WEDA Urban Task Group proposes to establish a Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (Center). This *regional* Center will: a) increase the internal capacity of Western Extension programs to address metropolitan issues, and b) elevate the stature and value of Cooperative Extension to external metropolitan audiences. The proposed Center is based on a three-year start-up plan and is comprised of a small core staff and an advisory board (see Figure 1). The overarching goal of the Center will be to help Extension better align programs with the needs, issues and interests of their metropolitan constituency.

A Regional Center to help us meet our future

The Center will operate under the guidance of the Western Extension Directors Association (WEDA). As such, WEDA will appoint an Advisory Board and designate a State Extension Director as the Association’s

¹ The terms “urban” and “metropolitan” are used interchangeably in this document. However, the authors selected the term “metropolitan” for the name of the Center, since “urban” is often associated by the media with negative issues affecting populations of color.

^{2,3,4} “Extension in the Urban West,” Western Extension Directors Association, 2008.

liaison (see Figure 1). The eventual size of the Center will depend on the activities that drive its growth. It is important that the operations of the Center be both flexible and nimble so that the Center can adapt to evolving conditions and influences in metropolitan areas.

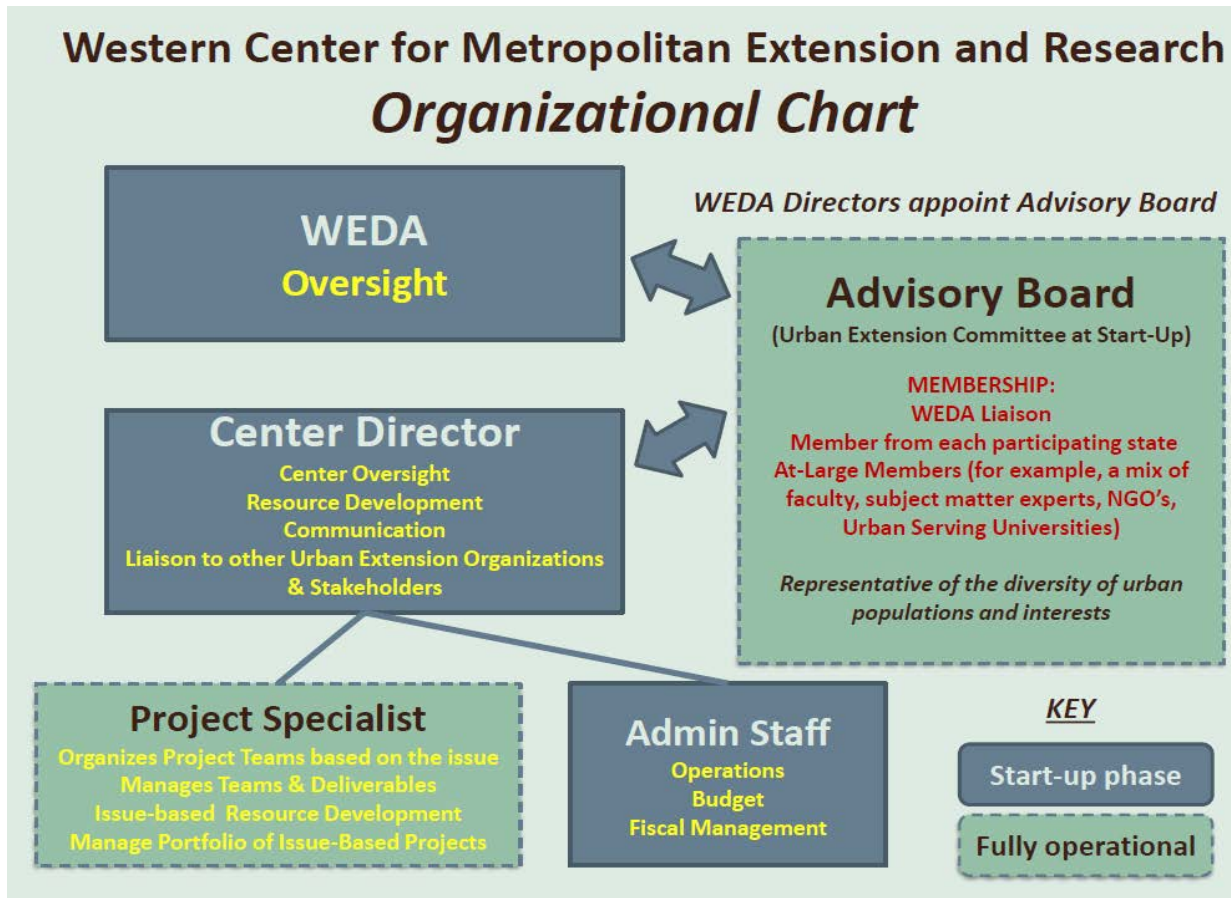


Figure 1. Organizational chart for the start-up and fully operational phases of the proposed Center

The Center will work on two major foci: **applied research** on issues and best Extension practices and **professional development for Extension educators**. Operationally, the Center's activities will integrate these two core functions such that the applied research, whether it is on best practices, new organizational models, or emerging metropolitan issues, will inform the professional development activities the Center will lead. The basic approach to Center projects is shown in Figure 2 whereby addressing a specific issue (e.g. waste water management) can achieve scholarship outputs and outcomes which then would lead to professional development outputs and outcomes.

The Center will be hosted by a Western Extension program chosen by WEDA. Washington State University Extension has offered to host the Center during its initial start-up phase and will provide a part-time Center Director and support staff. WEDA members will also support the Center's activities through contributed staff, with mutually agreed upon effort, activities, and outcomes. The Extension Director from the host institution and the WEDA liaison will jointly conduct performance evaluations for Center staff. The Center will promote equity and inclusion of diverse stakeholders.

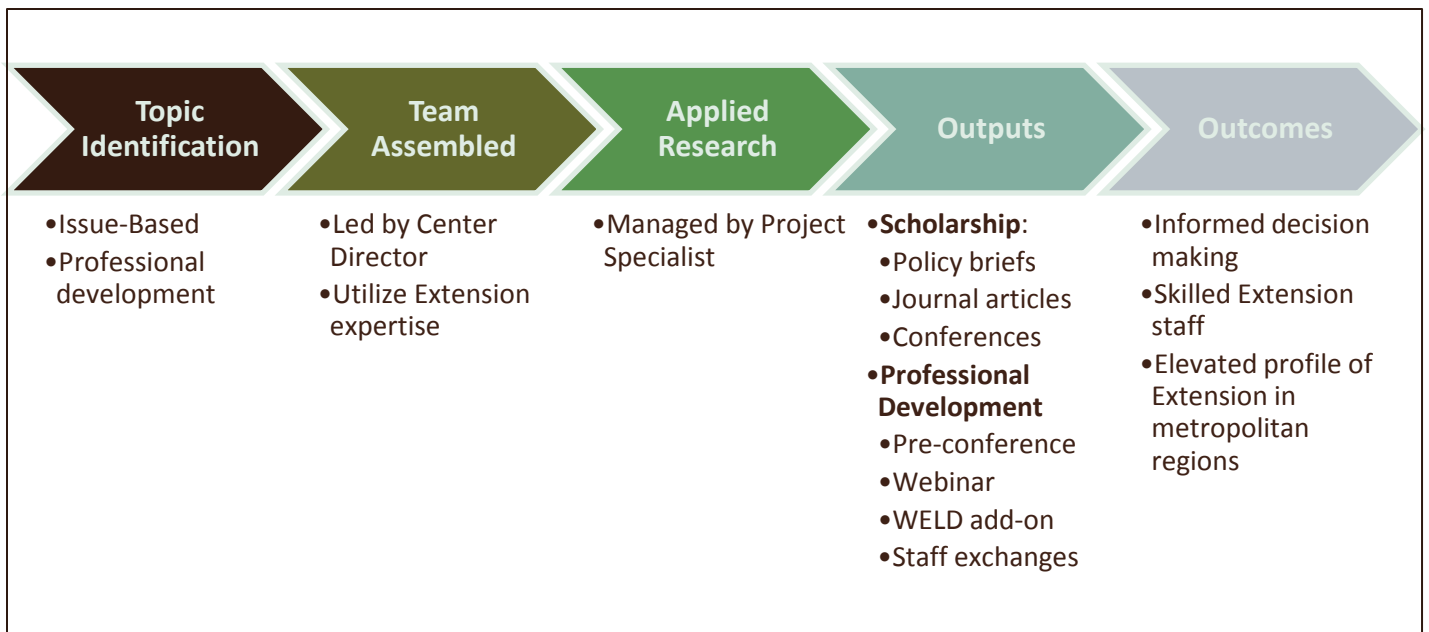


Figure 2. Schematic representation of how Center projects are developed and how applied research supports professional development activities and impacts.

Applied Research

In 2006, WEDA tasked the Western Regional Program Leadership Committee (WRPLC) to identify the characteristics of the metropolitan West and explore one or more conceptual models for metropolitan Extension work. Based upon a literature review and an informal survey of state Extension programs, the WRPLC concluded:

- A common approach to metropolitan Extension education and issue analysis does not exist in the West.
- In fact, woefully little has been published on metropolitan Extension models or how to operationalize them.¹

To overcome this deficiency, the proposed Center will have a two-pronged research agenda:

1. **Identify best practices and organizational models for metropolitan Extension.** Applied research on effective metropolitan organizational and staffing models and best practices in metropolitan program development, delivery, and evaluation will increase the opportunity for Extension professionals to be visible and valued partners who inform and address local concerns.
2. **Exploration of emerging metropolitan issues where land-grant universities can contribute to decision making and policy development.** Metropolitan issues are complex, impact multiple entities, and are often politically influenced. Objective research and recommendations will provide communities with a basis for informed decision-making. Initial identification of emerging metropolitan issues will be done by the Center’s advisory board in cooperation with metropolitan decision-makers from the public, non-profit and private sectors. In addition, the Center will periodically query Extension educators in the West and others using on-line surveys, focus groups and other means to refine issues and approaches.

¹ “Extension in the Urban West,” Western Extension Directors Association, 2008.

The Center will apply the following criteria to select projects or topics for research and development:

- the significance of the issue across Western States;
- decision-makers' stated readiness to address the issue and to use research based information in the process;
- the potential for Extension and the land-grant university system to add value to the project, and
- the possibility that the project may attract outside funding resources.

Most often, the Center's applied research will be undertaken by transdisciplinary teams¹ of experts drawn from Extension programs in the West. As such, the staffs' role will be to:

- identify the research scope of work and appropriate team composition/members;
- support these teams in their work;
- help obtain sufficient extramural funding to underwrite the research; and
- assure the quality and timeliness of the team's research products.

Within each research project, the Center will also identify potential responses or next steps that individual Extension programs can take to advance the issue under study or to share the outcomes. These responses could range from development of potential new programs to professional development opportunities for Extension staff to policy briefs used to inform local, state or regional policy and decision-making.

Professional development for Extension educators

Extension faculty and staff working in Western metropolitan areas need a unique combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to address the needs of metropolitan constituents, including:²

- project development and management skills;
- multicultural, multilingual capabilities;
- ability to work through intermediary organizations;
- ability to relate cross-generationally, especially with 25-34 year olds; and
- ability to evaluate program impacts within the context of multi-stakeholder collaborations

To assist metropolitan extension educators acquire these abilities and skills, the Center will facilitate the following range of professional development activities³.

Webinars (year 1)

Webinars will take a holistic approach. For example, if the issue were metropolitan food systems, the webinar would address how various Extension expertise such as agriculture/ horticulture, youth development, community economic development, and nutrition play a role in catalyzing and sustaining the food system and individual components. Webinars could be offered quarterly, recorded, and archived on the Center's webpage. By engaging in these conversations, metropolitan Extension professional groups may emerge.

¹ The Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis defines **Transdisciplinary research** as, essentially, team science. In a transdisciplinary research endeavor, scientists contribute their unique expertise but work entirely outside their own discipline. They strive to understand the complexities of the whole project, rather than one part of it. Transdisciplinary research allows investigators to transcend their own disciplines to inform one another's work, capture complexity, and create new intellectual spaces. <http://www.obesity-cancer.wustl.edu/en/About/What-Is-Transdisciplinary-Research>

² "Extension in the Urban West," Western Extension Directors Association, 2008.

³ Following each professional development activity is the year the Center will provide this service.

Staff exchange (year 1)

One-to-one learning remains a powerful tool. As such, staff exchanges will allow Extension faculty to observe and understand successful metropolitan Extension programs and operational models first hand, thereby gaining relevant knowledge and skills. These exchanges would be coordinated by each state as appropriate.

Build on WELD (year 2)

The Western Extension Leadership Development (WELD) program seeks to strengthen the leadership skills of Extension faculty. An extra day of specialized metropolitan training could be added to one of their in-person meetings. Additionally, the required projects, which all participants must complete, could include a staff exchange with an established metropolitan program.

Western Metropolitan Conference (years 3-5)

Center supported conferences will be single-issue focused. The Advisory Board will determine the topic for each conference. These conferences will catalyze thought and action around the issue. Prior to a conference, the Center will convene a ‘think tank’ to develop background policy papers related to the conference topic. The conferences will bring together applied researchers, outreach / engagement professionals, and decision makers to further analyze the issue and initiate action. Post-conference session could focus on identifying potential responses or next steps that Extension might take to advance the issue.

Metropolitan extension agent core competencies (on-going)

Currently several groups are discussing an approach to catalog the skills and expertise of metropolitan faculty. The Center will participate in these activities and draw from its own research with the goals of:

- identifying a core set of competencies for metropolitan extension professionals;
- guiding the professional development activities of the Center;
- supporting the training needs of Extension faculty and staff to attain these core competencies; and
- providing model language for position descriptions and job searches.

Center budget and timeline

To ensure success, it is important that the capacity of the Center and its infrastructure be adequately capitalized. In the beginning, WEDA members will be asked to support the Center’s operations through new or repurposed funds. While modest ongoing funding is suggested, the long-term approach to Center funding will be to acquire new federal, private, and foundation dollars and Center grants and contracts. The start-up budget (below) represents the minimum amount necessary to successfully launch the Center and operate it until it can become sustainable. The number of Center staff and the nature of their responsibilities will be periodically evaluated to ensure that the Center is right-sized and remains flexible to address current issues.

Startup Budget

Item	Amount*	Source
Center Director (approx. 0.5 FTE)	\$40-60,000	Contributed by WSU
Support Staff (approx. 0.15 FTE)	\$10-15,000	Contributed by WSU
Faculty time (content based)	Variable	Contributed by WEDA members
Operations (office, G&S, Travel)	\$35-40,000	Contributed by WEDA members

*Salary figures are only estimates, vary upon the host Extension program, and exclude employee benefits.

Timeline for Implementation

Upon WEDA approval, startup activities would proceed according to the following timeline:

Year 1

- Identify initial Center research and professional priorities
- Create a website and establish a repository of relevant information
- Develop webinars and staff exchanges
- Center guiding documents, policies, and procedures developed
- Initial Center infrastructure and communication systems in place

Year 2

- External funding development groundwork in place
- Expansion of Center services
- Determine feasibility of incorporating a metropolitan component to WELD
- Finalize host state (designated by WEDA) and transition Center operations

Years 3-5

- Issue-based metropolitan conference hosted in the West
- Endowment funding in place
- Center operations costs substantially offset by grants and contracts
- Nationally recognized for work transforming Extension practices in the West