Journal of Extension

Volume 56 | Number 4 Article 20

8-1-2018

Using Speed Meetings to Connect Extension Experts with University Health Researchers

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Journal of Extension
www.joe.org

August 2018
Volume 56
Number 4
Article # 4IAW3
Ideas at Work

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Abstract

Speed meetings are an innovative approach to creating partnerships among Extension experts and university health researchers. Extension educators play a pivotal role in providing community-based education, building partnerships across the state, and disseminating local research on a community level. The Extension Health Research team at Michigan State University has organized and held four speed meetings to educate researchers and faculty on Extension's history, infrastructure, and existing health programs. Participants at the speed meetings gained familiarity with Extension, and subsequent connections made with educators have strengthened research and funding opportunities in mutually beneficial ways.

Keywords: community-based research, Cooperative Extension national framework for health and wellness, health extension, innovative funding, university partnerships

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Introduction

Cooperative Extension's National Framework for Health and Wellness helps Extension strategically address programmatic areas of health at many levels and identifies the need for Extension to create partnerships and secure innovative funding to respond to Americans' health conditions and disparities (Braun et al., 2014; Braun & Rodgers, 2018; Rodgers & Braun, 2015). Such partnerships can be found within the university system. Extension has identified health partners at land-grant universities who are experiencing increasing pressure to conduct community-based research and engage with communities for better health outcomes. Extension professionals are

excellent research partners for these individuals because they are experts in translating science, making community connections, and providing learning opportunities. Indeed, Extension is well known for productively applying knowledge to community needs (Phillips, et al., 2013; Scutchfield, Harris, Tanner, & Murray, 2007). Additionally, researchers at academic medical schools have suggested implementing "health extension" models to accelerate change in primary care and to integrate public health, translated research, and patient education (Grumbach & Mold, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2013; Scutchfield et al., 2007). Here, too, Extension can play a vital role. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension's model of health extension uses the existing Cooperative Extension System and includes multidirectional relationships among local educators, campus- and clinic-based researchers, and health partners in communities working together to improve health outcomes (Dwyer et al., 2017).

Use of Speed Meetings to Inform Researchers About Extension

A speed meeting approach introduces MSU Extension professionals to research faculty located throughout the state. The event is on the main university campus and connects remotely to community-based scientists. A primary objective of the speed meeting is to expose university researchers to the breadth and depth of Extension's health-related programs. The event is a 2-hr working lunch with presentations by a variety of Extension experts who highlight program need, target audiences, educational objectives, outcomes, and potential future research opportunities.

Attendees receive a packet containing an agenda, Extension program impact reports, presenter contact information, and marketing materials that include a general overview of MSU Extension. Following the speed meeting, optional time with presenters for one-on-one conversations takes place. See Table 1 for tasks associated with organizing a speed meeting event. Prior to the event, presenters are trained on the format and given a branded PowerPoint template with a recommended order of talking points and questions to guide discussions about possible projects with researchers.

Table 1.

Time Frame and Tasks for Organizing a Speed Meeting

Time frame	Tasks
4 months before event	Determine date and time for event.
	Locate and reserve meeting space based on accessible parking, technology needs, and videoconferencing capability.
	Locate and reserve remote web-based Zoom videoconferencing at sites and technology support.
	Determine event budget.
2 months before event	Develop host invitations from administration to send to academic unit leads.
	Create electronic RSVP form that is active 5 to 6 weeks before event.
	Include RSVP link with invitations.
	Create flyer with event detail, RSVP link, and email invitees.
	Determine food vendors and confirm delivery dates.

	Invite and secure presenters and provide slide outline and draft agenda of presenter order.
	Set date and time for presenter informational meeting.
1 month before event	Monitor event RSVP, download registrants' information into file.
	Make table tents identifying presenters.
	Hold informational meeting with presenters.
1 week before event	Send personalized email reminder to registrants and presenters.
	Provide information about location, technology connections, parking, and lunch.
	Print agendas, presenter resources information and handouts.
After event	Email survey link for event evaluation to attendees.
	Follow-up on requests for more information.
	Send thank-you notes to off-site event coordinators.
	Debrief event with planning committee.

Speed Meeting Format and Attendance

MSU Extension has held four speed meeting events (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), reaching a total of 230 university health researchers. In the first year, 31 campus-based researchers attended and participants at two remote sites viewed through the university online conference system. The audience was entirely MSU College of Human Medicine faculty. In 2016, the speed meeting audience size doubled at the remote sites. The invitation list expanded to include MSU's College of Osteopathic Medicine, College of Nursing, School of Social Work, and Departments of Human Development and Family Sciences and Food Science and Human Nutrition. The Extension director emailed invitations to all university deans and directors, who in turn invited department faculty.

In 2016, to accommodate more programs, the format was changed from nine presenters speaking for 10 min each to 10 presenters speaking for 9 min each. An additional half-hour was added to include strategic networking among researchers and Extension experts. The event had its highest attendance in 2016, with 78 attendees from 15 departments, schools, and colleges. In 2017, the speed meeting had 63 attendees and included eight remote sites, targeting every MSU community-based medical school campus (Dwyer et al., 2017). In 2018, local Extension staff hosted remote locations, and 100-word abstracts of each presentation focusing on research opportunities were added to attendee packets. Attendees have included deans, public health scientists, medical students, professors, Extension professionals, community health employees, and primary care clinical staff.

Speed Meeting Outcomes

A nine-question online survey was emailed to registrants via Qualtrics. The purposes of the survey were to identify areas for process improvement and to measure program outcomes. Participants indicated the site they attended, whether the event was a good use of time, whether they would recommend the event to colleagues, and whom to invite to future meetings. Participants rated how familiar they were with MSU Extension before and after the event. Open-ended questions allowed participants to identify suggestions for improvement, preferences regarding follow-up contact, and which presentations (if any) they wanted and to make general comments.

Sixty speed meeting participants (*n* = 24 in 2016, *n* = 17 in 2017, *n* = 19 in 2018) replied to the survey (43% overall response). Nearly 75% of the respondents had attended the event on campus, and 25% had attended remotely. Familiarity with Extension varied before the meeting. Over half (55%) had not used Extension in the past but knew it was part of the university, and an additional 9% had never heard of Extension at all. The speed meetings resulted in 100% of participants reporting being either familiar (66%) or very familiar (34%) with Extension after the event. Table 2 shows a list of Extension programs highlighted during the events. Overall, 82% of speed meeting participants agreed it was a good use of their time, and 95% would recommend the event to a colleague. Participants requesting follow-up contact with Extension provided their names and email addresses. In 2016 and 2017, 29% of survey respondents requested presenter slides; this increased to 47% in 2018.

Table 2.

Extension Speed Meeting Presentations to Researchers by Year

Presentation	Year(s)
Food Corps—Connecting Kids to Healthy Food in Schools	2016
Smarter Lunchrooms—Nutrition Policy Changes	2016
Nurturing Families—Parenting Education	2016
Online Food Safety for Food Service Workers	2016
Youth Civic Engagement and Leadership	2016
Building Strong Adolescents—Parenting Education	2016
National Diabetes Prevention Program	2016, 2018
4-H Mentoring Program	2016
Matter of Balance—Falls Prevention	2016
4-H Healthy Living Program	2016
North Central Research Aging Network	2017
Extension's Response to Flint Water Crisis	2017
4-H Youth Health Challenge	2017
Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs (Diabetes PATH)	2017, 2018
Dining with Diabetes	2017
Policy, Systems, & Environment for Childcare Providers	2017
RELAX: Alternatives to Anger	2017
Michigan's Response to Farm Crisis/Suicide Prevention	2017
Financial Literacy Programs	2017
BEES—Building Early Emotional Skills in Children	2017
Marquette Area Climate Change Adaptation Project	2018
Homeownership and Foreclosure Prevention Education	2018

Farmer Stress and Mental Health	2018
Michigan 4-H Youth Development Program Overview	2018
Powerful Tools for Caregivers	2018
Stress Less with Mindfulness	2018
MSU Extension Efforts on the Opioid Crisis	2018
Food Safety on the Farm	2018

Conclusion and Implications

Speed meetings have increased awareness of current Extension work in the field of human health. With the success of the speed meeting approach, other MSU Extension program areas are adopting this fast-paced meeting style to highlight their programs, making it a strategic effort by MSU Extension to facilitate connections between Extension educators and researchers. In addition to highlighting Extension health programs, the research skills of Extension educators are promoted so that their skills can be matched with the priorities of departments, schools, and colleges within the university. Ideas for future iterations of the event include conducting a reverse speed meeting, allowing university health researchers to share how Extension has been involved as a partner in past projects or having the researchers share their dissemination and translational science needs with Extension staff to create new partnerships.

Speed meetings have been a successful approach to forming creative partnerships between Extension educators and university health researchers. Not all land-grant university research faculty are aware of Extension, despite being part of the same institution. Universities with academic health centers in particular may wish to connect with Extension to provide a foundation for delivering research-based health education in communities (Scutchfield et al., 2007). Speed meetings are concise and fast-paced, bringing together Extension professionals and researchers to increase the visibility of Extension's long-standing community network and expansive health education expertise. Long-term outcomes for speed meetings may ultimately (a) increase opportunities for funding, (b) encourage the adoption of evidence-based programs, and (c) foster dissemination of health research findings throughout communities.

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