

5-1-2022

Understanding the Needs of Residents in Sevier County to Plan Impactful Programs

Kari Ure

Utah State University, kari.ure@usu.edu

Lendel K. Narine

Utah State University, lendel.narine@usu.edu

McKay Erickson

Utah State University, mckay.erickson@usu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ure, Kari; Narine, Lendel K.; and Erickson, McKay (2022) "Understanding the Needs of Residents in Sevier County to Plan Impactful Programs," *Outcomes and Impact Quarterly*. Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 5.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26077/36e4-866e>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/oiq/vol2/iss1/5>

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Understanding the Needs of Residents in Sevier County to Plan Impactful Programs

Kari Ure, Lendel Narine, and McKay Erickson

Abstract

USU Extension provides evidence-based community education in response to community needs. A needs assessment was conducted in Sevier County UT in 2021 to determine critical needs of residents. The results of the assessment will guide Extension programming in Sevier County.

Introduction

The gap between the current state of what is and the desired state of what should be is identified as a need (Altschuld, 2004). Results of a needs assessment provides a snapshot of priority issues affecting residents and enables Utah State University (USU) Extension to plan and implement responsive programs to fulfill the land grant mission (Narine et al., 2021). A needs assessment was conducted in 2021 to understand the critical issues affecting residents in Sevier County, Utah. The assessment sought perspectives of critical needs of youth and adults in the county, and results will be used to allocate resources to priority educational programs. Therefore, the results of the assessment provide a rationale for effective resource allocation to relevant educational programs to meet residents' needs in Sevier County.

Response

An online survey was used to gather data for the needs assessment. The one-time survey included a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions asked participants to rate the level of effort USU Extension in Sevier County should give to 10 youth issues and 24 adult issues on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*No effort*) to 5 (*Very high effort*). Participants also were asked to indicate their preference for participating (i.e., delivery method) in educational programming, and their preferred mode of communication with Extension. Open-ended questions were included to allow participants to describe their perceptions about the needs of youth and adults.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A mean score was calculated for each issue item based on the frequency distribution of sample responses to the Likert-type scale items. Then, items were ranked from high to low priority using the item mean scores. The mean score ranged from 1 to 5 and interpreted as follows; 1.00 – 1.50 = *No Effort*, 1.51 – 2.50 = *Low Effort*, 2.51 – 3.50 = *Moderate Effort*, 3.51 – 4.50 = *High Effort*, and 4.51 – 5.00 = *Very High Effort*. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were first categorized and then quantified to understand the frequency of responses within categories.

Participants

The target population were residents of Sevier County, Utah. Data were gathered from educators, religious leaders, physicians, mental health therapists, county and city service employees, city mayors and city councils, health department employees, and community non-profit service

providers. The sample size was 240 respondents ($n = 240$), and data were gathered using a convenience sampling technique.

Results

Youth Needs in Sevier County

Table 1 shows residents' perceptions towards the level of effort USU Extension in Sevier County should place on youth issues. To ensure participants could answer the youth survey items, youth issue items were only presented to participants who worked with, or were parents/guardians of children under the age of 18. Most participants (83%, $n = 198$) identified that they worked with or cared for children under age 18. The results found in Table 1 shows that the top five priority needs relating to youth were suicide, social media addiction, mental health, substance abuse and career readiness. Over half the number of respondents (57%) indicated USU Extension should place a very high level of effort on the issue of youth suicide.

Table 1. Priority Youth Issues for USU Extension in Sevier County – Quantitative List

Rank	Issue Item	Frequency (%)					Mean (1-5)
		No Effort	Low Effort	Moderate Effort	High Effort	Very High Effort	
1	Youth suicide	0	1	12	30	57	4.43
2	Youth social media addiction	0	4	12	36	48	4.29
3	Youth mental health	0	1	20	32	47	4.25
4	Youth substance abuse	0	2	18	39	40	4.17
5	Youth career readiness	0	3	16	43	38	4.16
6	Youth family relationships	1	4	17	40	38	4.10
7	Youth appropriate technology use	1	4	21	44	30	3.98
8	Youth bullying	1	6	24	38	32	3.95
9	Youth peer pressure	1	4	30	35	31	3.91
10	Youth academic stress	2	9	42	31	16	3.52

Respondents were asked one follow-up open-ended question on their opinions on the top issues affecting youth in Sevier County. This question allowed respondents to list additional issues that were not presented in the initial list and to further describe their perceptions about needs. Table 2 shows common categories from responses to the open-ended question. In addition to the six common categories shown in Table 2, resilience among youth in Sevier County was also referenced in multiple ways by participants. The results in Table 2 illustrates the consistency in

need areas when compared to the quantitative findings in Table 1; youth mental health, substance abuse, and suicide were emerging themes from the respondents' comments.

Table 2. Priority Youth Issues for USU Extension in Sevier County – Qualitative List

Rank	Issue Item	Number of Comments
1	Youth mental health	41
2	Youth substance abuse	36
3	Youth suicide	34
4	Youth electronic abuse/social media	31
5	Youth bullying	25
6	Youth family relationships	17

Adult Needs in Sevier County

Table 3 shows residents' perceptions towards the level of effort USU Extension in Sevier County should place on the top 10 priority issue items. From Table 3, adult respondents ($n = 240$) indicated the highest priority issues related to suicide, mental health, and family relationships. Over half the number of respondents (54%) indicated USU Extension should place a very high level of effort on issues relating to suicides.

Table 3. Priority Adult Issues for USU Extension in Sevier County – Quantitative List

Rank	Issue Item	Frequency (%)					Mean (1-5)
		No Effort	Low Effort	Moderate Effort	High Effort	Very High Effort	
1	Suicide	0	1	13	31	54	4.37
2	Mental health	0	2	20	36	41	4.16
3	Family relationships	0	4	21	37	37	4.07
4	Parenting	1	5	20	36	38	4.03
5	Financial education	1	0	28	38	33	4.01
6	Substance abuse	0	4	22	45	29	3.98
7	Social media addiction	1	6	22	38	33	3.94
8	Community/social skills	0	6	26	40	28	3.89
9	Conflict resolution	0	5	29	37	29	3.88
10	Grief, loss, trauma	0	4	35	38	23	3.78

A follow-up open-ended question sought participants’ opinions on the top issues affecting adults in Sevier County. This question allowed respondents to list additional issues that were not presented in the initial list and to further describe their perceptions about needs. Table 4 shows residents’ perceptions of the top issues affecting adult residents in Sevier County. Although ranked 6 in the quantitative results in Table 3, substance abuse was the most common category across responses. Similar to Table 3, family relationships and mental health were emergent themes.

Table 4. Priority Adult Issues for USU Extension in Sevier County – Qualitative List

Rank	Issue Item	Number of Comments
1	Substance abuse	46
2	Parenting/marriage/family relationships	45
3	Mental health	42
4	Employment options	31
5	Financial literacy	28
6	Housing	22

Delivery and Notification Preferences

In an effort to provide convenient educational programming to residents, two close-ended questions asked about participants preferences for participation in Extension programs. These results are summarized in Figures 1 (left). Most participants (54%) indicated they preferred a combination of in-person and online methods for educational programs. In addition, Figure 1 (right) shows most respondents (48%) preferred to use email to receive information from Extension.

Figures 1: Residents’ Preferences for Engaging with Extension

Figure 1. Residents’ Preferences for Participating in Extension Programs.

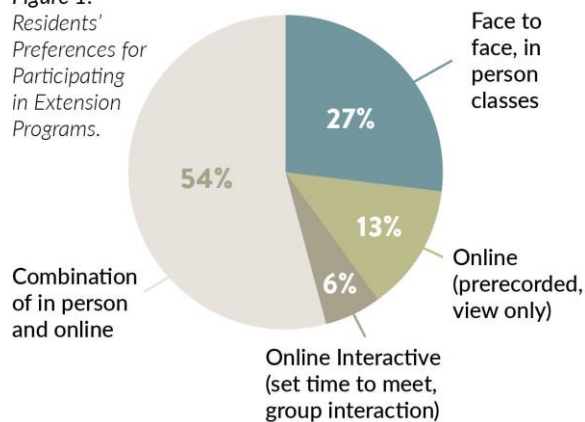
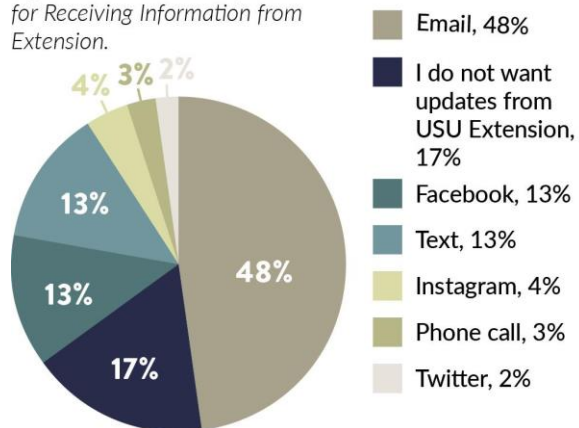


Figure 2. Residents’ Preferences for Receiving Information from Extension.



Public Value

The findings provide a framework for planning and implementing educational Extension programs in Sevier County. A summary report of results was published and distributed to county stakeholders to facilitate partnerships in addressing priority issues. Findings of the assessment will be used by USU Extension in Sevier County to plan and deliver relevant and responsive educational programs to residents. The priority focus of these programs will relate broadly to youth and adult mental health, substance abuse, and family relationships. The 2021 needs assessment will guide resource allocation in Extension to creating impactful educational programs as well as provide justification for programming for grant applications and other sources of external funding.

References

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