

# EFFECTIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMMING FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Effective Extension Programming for Rural Development. Mike D. Woods, Oklahoma State University; Gerald Doeksen, Oklahoma State University

This paper addresses the possible components of a rural/community development Extension program. Issues such as subject matter selection, research base, and linkages with outside organizations are discussed. The role of rural/community development in an agricultural economics academic setting is analyzed. Recommendations for successful efforts are presented.

## **EFFECTIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMMING FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Trends in the rural economy have heightened interest in educational programs to address rural economic development issues in the rural South and other regions of the country. Many state Extension organizations are revisiting rural/community development program areas and considering options for enhancing efforts.

This paper address the possible components of a rural/community development Extension program. Issues such as subject matter selection, needed research base, and linkages with outside organizations are discussed. The role of rural/community development in an academic setting is analyzed. Recommendations for successful efforts are presented.

### **Objectives:**

The general objective of this paper is to review components of an effective Extension program in rural/community development. Specific objectives include:

1. Discuss key criteria or characteristics that lead to developing and enhancing a successful program.
2. Identify institutional procedures which can strengthen these Extension programs.
3. Identify a model for a rural/community development program that has impact.

## **Role of Rural Development Educators**

There is a long history of providing assistance to local leaders in rural areas through the Land Grant System. Doeksen and Nelson (1981) present a range of decision-aids designed to aid local leaders as they deal with complex issues. Models discussed by Doeksen and Nelson include impact analysis models which provide estimates resulting from a change in the economic base. More complex simulation models link economic change to demographic variables and community service requirements. Community service budgets built on farm management concepts provide cost/demand estimates for water, sewer, solid waste, fire, ambulance, and other services. Other models provide optimum location analysis for emergency medical services and least cost route analysis for school buses or solid waste trucks. Finally, utility rate structure programs were developed for services such as rural water systems in order to evaluate alternative rate structures. All of these models have one attribute in common: a strong research base is key. Many of the impact models or service budgets mentioned above were the result of a master's thesis or Ph.D. dissertation.

Doeksen and Nelson noted three additional attributes which were critical for a successful rural development program. All three relate to the delivery process or how the model and related data is taken to the community. First, a "team" approach is encouraged involving all related agencies. For example, rural physician studies might include the State Department of Health, Sub-State Planning District, and others as appropriate. All involved agencies are included on the team-this leverages resources and gives the program much more visibility. Second, responses to community requests are handled as rapidly as possible. Community leaders appreciate a quick response and computer programs/technology facilitate this. Finally, a community specific report

is provided to local leaders. This report includes the telephone number and address of all involved. This has proven to be an excellent advertising tool.

Further discussion by Nelson and Doeksen (1984) provides recommendations for a successful program in rural development. They provided the following guidelines for agricultural economists but the suggestions fit other disciplines as well:

1. Keep it practical-address real problems of local communities
2. Listen carefully to local decisionmakers-understand the type of assistance they are asking for.
3. Do what economists do-build on your comparative advantage. The same recommendation would seem to hold for rural sociologists, political scientists, etc.
4. Utilize methods which can be understood by local leaders.
5. Be imaginative-look for unique data sources to address community problems.
6. Utilize easily understood messages-make the results easy to interpret.

These earlier articles document the interest that has existed in the past in regard to rural development programs. Current interest and assessment of rural development programs was felt to be important as well.

## Specialist Survey

In November and December 2002 a survey was sent to Southern region Extension Specialists identified as having community development or rural development assignments. A total of 45 individuals were contacted via email using a list provided by the Southern Rural Development Center. A total of 11 individuals responded to the survey. While a higher response would certainly be desired, this does represent a 24 percent response rate.

The intent of the survey was to request input and observations regarding rural development programs from specialists working throughout the South. Questions were posed regarding specific state budgets, staffing, and workload. Respondents were asked to identify reasons for increasing/decreasing levels of support for extension rural development programs. Respondents were also asked to identify criteria or characteristics that they felt lead to a “successful” rural/community development program. Finally, the respondents were asked to list components or topics that they felt should be included in a model rural/community development program within extension.

Table 1 presents results to the question of extension budget growth/decline in regard to rural development programs. Thirty-six percent of the respondents indicated budgets for rural development have increased over the past two years while 46 percent indicated a decrease. The remaining respondents indicated a stable budget.

A similar pattern emerged when asked about the level of Extension personnel devoted to rural development programming (Table 2). There were 3 respondents or 27 percent indicating an increase in personnel with 64 percent of the respondents indicating a decreasing personnel base. It was the overwhelming opinion of the respondents that Extension workloads related to rural development have increased. Ten of the eleven respondents indicated an increased workload

(Table 3). This would indicate the increased interest/demand for rural development programming has not translated into additional resources.

Respondents were asked to provide both internal and external reasons for the direction of support for rural development programs in their state. Table 4 presents a summary of the internal reasons given. Retirement followed by neglect in filling vacant positions was mentioned as a reason for downsizing. Basically, budget constraints within Extension and in many states makes growth in manpower or resources difficult. On the positive side, relevance of community/rural development and the ability to make a difference were cited as reasons for growth. Table 5 summarizes external reasons for both positive and negative directions in program growth.

Respondents were asked to identify criteria or characteristics that lead to a successful rural/community development program. Table 6 summarizes the responses and ranks the criteria by frequency of response. The most frequently cited criteria was “administrative support.” This can be demonstrated in several ways. Certainly, funding and staffing are visible real signs of support. Administrative philosophy, attitude, and public stance can all also indicate support. This support is critical at all levels including Extension Directors, Program Leaders, District Directors, and Department Heads.

Table 7 lists a summary of respondent’s idea of what should be included in a model rural/community development program. There were several specific topics mentioned including economic development, government education, leadership, infrastructure and others. Frequently, the need for a comprehensive or holistic approach was cited. No single topic stands alone-but all are necessary to effectively provide a complete rural/community development program. Another concept noted was that both educational programs and technical assistance are needed.

## **Key Concepts**

Several key concepts emerge as important for a successful extension rural development program whether reviewing the literature or reviewing existing programs. The first of these is an integrated approach including both research and extension. Certainly, teaching at the graduate or undergraduate level should be considered as well. The Land Grant concept is built upon this integrated approach to outreach efforts. A collaborative focus to Extension programming is also important. Extension is not the only service provider-other state/federal agencies are involved in these complex community issues. It should be noted this collaboration should occur not only off-campus but on-campus (multi-disciplinary) as well.

An aggressive approach to extramural funding is also an important concept. Successful efforts will probably have to rely on more than “hard” sources of funds. The strong state-level interest in rural development in many states offers many opportunities for outside funding to enhance a program. Having the ability to hire students (part-time) or associates (full-time) can really add depth to a program. Full-time associates allow some continuity especially when training and technical assistance is complex. Finally, administrative support at all levels will always be important for any program area or thrust.

One model program for rural development training is the “Southern Region Community Development Institute” sponsored the past four years by the Southern Rural Development Center. Table 8 presents a summary agenda of the most recent “Institute”. Topics covered range from strategic planning to collaborative problem solving to community services to economic development. More specialized areas of focus are identified for in-depth training and are listed in Table 9. This is one example of a taxonomy of rural/community development programming.



A final example of a comprehensive rural development program is presented in Table 10. This is the rural and community development programming offered by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. These topics include the specific program areas of community services/infrastructure; local government education; and economic development. Policy is another area of focus whether at the state or federal level. Finally, a recent effort “the Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma” is included and represents a substantial allocation of resources to 13 pilot community efforts. It should be noted, these programs are closely affiliated with the Department of Agricultural Economics but are not the only rural/community development programming efforts. Programs in home-based/micro business, leadership, and conflict resolution also are in place and well received throughout the state.

## **Summary**

This paper has provided a brief review of previous works addressing criteria for successful rural development programs. Results of a brief survey of rural/community development specialists in the South was summarized. Key concepts for successful rural development programming were discussed. The concept of an “engaged university” as noted by ECOP includes a partnership with the public, with policymakers, and with students. An effective rural development program will meet the test of being an engaged university.

**Table 1.**  
Extension budget (rural development) in my state has...

	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Increased	4	36.3%
Decreased	5	45.5%
Remained Stable	2	18.2%
Total	11	100.0%

**Table 2.**  
Extension personnel (rural development) have...

	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Increased	3	27.3%
Decreased	7	63.6%
Remained Stable	1	9.1%
Total	11	100.0%

**Table 3.**  
Extension workload (rural development) has...

	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Increased	10	90.9%
Decreased	0	0.0%
Remained Stable	0	0.0%
No Response	1	9.1%
Total	11	100.0%

**Table 4.**  
**What are the internal reasons for this direction of support for rural development programming in your state?**

Relevance
More agents are seeing opportunities for CRD program applications in their counties.
The Extension program realizes that it must expand its clientele base in the state and rural development presents a genuine opportunity to do so. In addition, few organizations have access to the type of educational programming and research base that is needed to undertake sound rural development work.
We lost 1.5 FTEs due to retirement. These positions were not filled as the funding was used for other positions in the organization and/or to make up for the reduced state funding. Our administrations like the results of our programs, but doesn't want to invest in rural development programming.
These are the key issues that our advisory council and key leaders want us to be doing.
Budget constraints at the state level have affected the funding of Extension in general - however, within the College of Agriculture, there have been initiatives to increase the support for community/economic development including support for the formation of a new department and support for a College-wide committee on community and economic development and support for multidisciplinary initiatives.
Pretty much the same as the external reasons. Just a shortfall of funds. No real change in priorities.
Need for relevance to State, response to State Extension focus groups, and development of a community economic development program.
Future funding sources will likely depend on it.
As staff has retired or left, budget concerns have caused administrators to review carefully all vacant positions. Although in our state, there is a renewed interest in rural development. Hopefully, this will translate into more staff positions as we re-focus our efforts in this area.
The agricultural paradigm remains strong - to the guy with a hammer, everything looks like a nail...

**Table 5**  
**What are the external reasons for this direction of support for rural development programming in your state?**

Positive Support	Negative Support
Interest	State revenue decline
Recognize need for information/training	State budget decline
Interest in community health issues	Less funding from state/federal sources
Major economic hardships-need new strategies	
We have the expertise	
Need for alternatives to farming	
Need to aid displaced workers (manufacturing)	

**Table 6**  
**What criteria or characteristics do you feel lead to a successful rural/community development program in extension?**

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1. Administrative Support
  2. Staffing
  3. Program Structure
  4. Funding
  5. Links to research
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**Table 7**  
**In your opinion what components or topics should be included in a model rural/community development program within extension?**

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1. Economic development
  2. Community planning
  3. Local government education
  4. Leadership development
  5. Infrastructure
  6. Civic involvement
  7. Public policy education
  8. Workforce development
  9. Natural resources management
  10. Strategic planning
  11. Grassroots leadership
  12. Business retention/expansion
  13. Asset-based development
  14. Managing land use
  15. Agriculture based issues
  16. Government Structure
  17. Holistic-education and technical assistance
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**Table 8**  
**Southern Region Community Development Institute**  
**September 23-27, 2002**  
**Talladega, Alabama**  
**Agenda**

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**Monday, September 23, 2002**

- **Welcome and Introductions**  
Each participant will spend two minutes telling about a successful community development effort and an unsuccessful effort.
- **What CDI has Done for Me**

**Tuesday, September 24, 2002**

- **Building a Vision for the Future: Strategic Planning**
- **Issue Framing**
- **Mapping the Assets of the Community: A Framework for Building Local Capacity**

**Wednesday, September 25, 2002**

- **Applying What We've Learned: Teaching by CDI Participants**
- **Building Networks: The Role of Collaboration, Partnerships and Participatory Decision Making**
- **Collaborative Problem Solving: Situation Assessment for Process Design**
- **The Service Infrastructure of Communities**
- **Evening Work Sessions: State CDI Teams Develop Action Plans**

**Thursday, September 26, 2002**

- **Building Sound Economic Development Strategies**
- **Feasibility Study Format and Explanation**
- **Basic Business Start-Up**
- **Management Issues – Financial Statements and Performance Analysis**
- **Management Issues – Business Strategic Management**
- **Management Issues – Human Resource Management**
- **Marketing Issues – Business to Consumer E-Commerce: Selling on the Internet**
- **Business Plan Forman**
- **Explaining Economic Impact Analysis**

**Friday, September 27, 2002**

- **Student Modeling of Economic Development**
  - **State Team Presentation of Action Plans**
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**Table 9**  
**Possible Content Areas-Specialized Tracks**

<u>Track</u>	<u>Content Areas</u>
Economic Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic structure of community</li> <li>• Determining economic leakages</li> <li>• Exploring value-added opportunities (farm and nonfarm)</li> <li>• Business retention and expansion</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Home-based and micro businesses</li> <li>• Exploring the use of e-commerce by local businesses</li> <li>• Agri- and econ-tourism</li> </ul>
Community Planning Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic planning and visioning</li> <li>• From Vision to Action</li> <li>• Community asset mapping</li> <li>• Needs assessment</li> <li>• Socio-demographic analysis</li> <li>• Use of GIS to map key data on your community</li> </ul>
Service Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input/output modeling for assessing the cost of local services</li> <li>• Health care</li> <li>• Telecommunication services</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Water and waste management</li> </ul>
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public issues education</li> <li>• Impact of federal policy on local government activities</li> <li>• Finance and taxation</li> <li>• Training of local elected officials</li> </ul>
Civic Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessing population diversity</li> <li>• Leadership Development</li> <li>• Building partnerships across local organization and institutions</li> <li>• Involving citizens in local issues: some key steps</li> </ul>
Youth/Adult Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the current status of local labor markets</li> <li>• Education/skills needed for the expanding sectors of the economy</li> <li>• Federal/state workforce investment policies</li> <li>• Linking with local workforce investment boards</li> </ul>

**SOURCE: Southern Rural Development Center**

**Table 10**  
**Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**  
**Rural & Community Development**

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➤ Community Services	(Doeksen)
➤ Local Government	(Lansford)
➤ Community Economic Development	(Woods)
➤ Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma	(Williams)
➤ Policy	(Sanders)

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