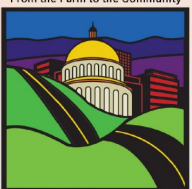# 20th Annual
National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals
Conference

Country Roads
From the Farm to the Community

Charleston, WV
June 9 - 12

NACDEP
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS

Hosted by West Virginia State University Extension Service in collaboration with West Virginia University Extension.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE
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A Message from
the NACDEP President

Country Roads Lead Us to Charleston

Few songs evoke a sense of place quite like John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads." With its imagery of rolling hills, winding roads, and heartfelt connection to the land, it captures the spirit and pride of West Virginia. This year, that same spirit welcomes us to Charleston, West Virginia, for the 2025 NACDEP Conference, taking place Monday, June 9, through Thursday, June 12.

Our theme this year, "Country Roads: From the Farm to the Community," beautifully reflects the essence of Cooperative Extension's mission—supporting communities, fostering development, and connecting rural and urban spaces through meaningful, inclusive work. Charleston's historic charm and natural beauty provide the ideal backdrop for an event centered on inspiration, collaboration, and professional growth.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to the host institution, West Virginia State University and West Virginia University (as the co-host) for their dedication and thoughtful work in bringing this year's conference to life. Special appreciation to the host committee chair, Adam Hodges (former NACDEP President), along with his co-chairs, Michael Dougherty (long-time contributing board member) and Jaime Menon (President-Elect), for their leadership and commitment. Their efforts—alongside an outstanding local planning team and numerous subcommittee chairs—have shaped an exceptional experience for us all.

This year's program is packed with over 75 concurrent sessions, an engaging poster session, and an impressive lineup of pre- and post-conference workshops. We're also excited to welcome a dynamic group of plenary speakers, each bringing valuable perspectives from across the region.

Be sure to visit with some of our exhibitors and explore new resources and opportunities that can support your work.

As we come together, I encourage each of you to connect purposefully—whether by participating in your regional meeting on Tuesday afternoon or attending the networking breakfast on Wednesday morning to explore the great work that is happening among our committees. And to our first-time attendees: welcome! We're thrilled you're here. Don't miss the Newcomer's Orientation on Monday afternoon—it's a great way to learn more about NACDEP and how it can support your professional journey.

Let these country roads not only bring us to Charleston but also lead us into deeper partnerships, new program ideas, and a shared vision for stronger, more resilient communities. Looking forward to seeing you here!

Michelle Eley

Michelle Eley, President

Scan to upload your photos and videos from the conference!

A Message from the NACDEP Chair

NACDEP Friends,

Thank you from my team at West Virginia State University for choosing to spend your time with us in Charleston, West Virginia, this year! We are excited to bring you some unique experiences we have been working on for over a year now. I am grateful that this event has been so popular that we were forced to stop registration with almost three weeks before the conference, showing us how popular this location is. While we certainly wanted everyone to be able to attend, we also wanted to assure that our events were not overcrowded.

I am encouraged that almost one third of you have registered as first-time attendees, and I am sure that this conference in Charleston will make you attendees for life. I remind my team regularly that NACDEP is where they will find their people and of the great friendships I have made over the past 15 years. No matter what area of community or economic development you work in, you will find others in NACDEP. As the future unfolds for us all, I believe that the relationships we build and maintain through NACDEP will be what helps us each with the challenges we may face.

With deepest appreciation,

Adam Hodges
Program Leader – Community Vitality and Economic Development
West Virginia State University Extension Service
2025 NACDEP Conference Chair

A Message from the NACDEP Co-Chair

Greetings NACDEP Conference Attendees:

I want to take this opportunity and welcome everyone to the 2025 NACDEP Conference.

We hope you have a good time enjoying all that Wild and Wonderful West Virginia has to offer. This week, that includes a fantastic program of professional development and networking opportunities here at the conference.

There are five concurrent sessions with five choices each session. Three of the five feature a trio of 25-minute presentations around topics related to development issues, community resilience, and capacity building and governance. The other two offer longer workshop opportunities on different topics of interest to the membership.

The conference abounds with other opportunities to learn and interact as well. These include the open reception, the plenaries, the mobile tours, the poster session, the awards banquet, and the special pre- and post-conference workshops.

So please avail yourself of all the conference – and the Mountain State – has to offer over the next few days.

Michael Dougherty
Professor & Extension Specialist, West Virginia University
2025 NACDEP Conference Co-Chair

A Message from
West Virginia State University

On behalf of West Virginia State University and our agricultural research and Extension community, I extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to Charleston for the 2025 NACDEP Annual Conference.
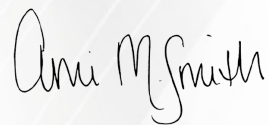
It is a true honor to host professionals from across the country who are dedicated to advancing community development through the power of Extension. Your work in building strong, resilient communities and fostering economic growth through sustainable initiatives could not be more important or more timely.

As we gather in West Virginia's capital city, nestled in the heart of Appalachia, I hope you will find inspiration not only in the conference sessions and workshops but in the place itself. Our state is a living classroom for community development, rich in heritage, challenged by change and full of potential. It's the kind of place where your work makes a difference every day.

Here at West Virginia State University, we are especially proud of our mission as an 1890 Land-Grant Institution, celebrating the 135th anniversary of the Second Morrill Act this year. Our commitment to uplifting rural populations aligns deeply with NACDEP's core values. We recognize the importance of translating research into action, cultivating leadership and engaging citizens in shaping the future of their communities.

Thank you for the work you do and for bringing your expertise, passion and creativity to Charleston. May this conference spark new ideas, strengthen your networks and remind you of the transformative power of Extension.

Welcome and enjoy your time in West Virginia.

Ami M Smith, Ph.D.
Associate Provost/Dean & Director for Agricultural Research and Extension
West Virginia State University

A Message from
West Virginia University

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of West Virginia University Extension, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 2025 NACDEP Conference, taking place June 9–12 in Charleston, West Virginia. We are honored to co-host this gathering of dedicated professionals committed to community and economic development through Extension.

This year's conference promises a dynamic lineup of workshops, presentations, and networking opportunities designed to foster collaboration and innovation. Attendees will have the chance to engage with peers from across the nation, share best practices, and explore new strategies to enhance our collective impact.

I encourage you to take full advantage of the conference offerings and to explore the charm of Charleston—from its local cuisine to its arts scene and scenic trails. Charleston offers a unique blend of rich history, cultural heritage, and natural beauty. Nestled along the Kanawha River and surrounded by the scenic Appalachian Mountains, our capital city provides an inspiring backdrop for our conference activities.

At WVU Extension, we are deeply committed to empowering communities across all 55 counties of West Virginia. Our programs span 4-H youth development, agriculture and natural resources, family and community development, and more. We truly appreciate the opportunity to partner with West Virginia State University Extension in co-hosting the NACDEP Conference as the conference aligns perfectly with our mission to facilitate knowledge exchange and promote sustainable community development. Together, let's make this conference a memorable and impactful experience!

Warm regards,

Jorge Atiles, Ph.D.
Associate VP & Dean,
Division for Land Grant Engagement
Director, WVU Extension Service

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Sunday, June 8

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Heirs' Property Workshop - Salon A & B

Monday, June 9

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Heirs' Property Workshop - Salon A & B
9:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. Community Development in Practice: Foundational Skills for Extension Community Developers - Salon C
10:00 - 11:00 a.m. NACDEP Board Meeting - Room 226
1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Diverse Teams Tackling Grand Challenges & Wicked Problems - Salon C
1:00 - 4:00 p.m. Program Leaders Meeting - Salon D & E
4:00 - 5:30 p.m. Land Use Community of Practice Meeting - Room 224
4:30 - 5:30 p.m. Newcomer Orientation - Salon C
6:00 - 6:30 p.m. Walk or ride to WVSU Downtown Center; meet in Embassy Suites lobby
6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Welcome Reception/Opening Plenary - WVSU Downtown Center (107 Capitol Street)
8:00 p.m. Dinner on your own

Tuesday, June 10

8:00 - 8:30 a.m. Welcome - Salon D & E
8:45 -10:15 a.m. Concurrent Session 1
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Concurrent Session 2
12:00 - 1:45 p.m. Lunch and Business Meeting - Salon D & E
2:00 - 3:30 p.m. Concurrent Session 3
3:45 - 4:45 p.m. Regional Meetings
5:00 - 6:00 p.m. 1890 & 1994 Meetings
7:00 p.m. Dinner on your own (State's Night Out)

Wednesday, June 11

6:00 - 8:00 a.m. NACDEP Committees Breakfast - Salon D & E
8:00 - 9:30 a.m. Housing and Extension - Salon D & E
9:45 - 11:15 a.m. Concurrent Session 4
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Lunch - Salon D & E
12:30 - 5:00 p.m. Mobile Learning Workshops; meet in Embassy Suites lobby
6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Exhibitors Reception and Poster Session - Atrium Hallway
7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Awards Banquet - Salon C, D, & E
8:30 - 10:00 p.m. Entertainment - Salon C, D, & E

Thursday, June 12

8:00 - 9:30 a.m. Concurrent Session 5
10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Funding and Partnerships for the Future - Salon D & E
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. NACDEP Board Meeting
12:00 - 5:00 p.m. Entrepreneurship in Extension: Exploring the programs and research being done by Extension staff related to entrepreneurship across the country - Salon D & E

**Salons are located on the first floor of the Embassy Suites.
Meeting rooms are located on the second floor.**

SUNDAY
June 8

Heirs' Property Special Pre-Conference Training (Separate Registration):

Sunday, June 8, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Presentation Type: Long-form Workshop
Location: Salon A & B

MONDAY
June 9

Heirs Property Workshop:

Monday, June 9, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Session Theme: Capacity Building
Presentation Type: Long-form Workshop
Location: Salon A & B

Community Development in Practice: Foundational Skills for Extension Community Developers

Hunter Goodman[1], Sreedhar Upendram[2], Dan Kahl[3], Natriez Peterson[4], Patti Schmidt[5], Jamie Rae Walker[6], Grace Langford[7]

[1]University of Arkansas Extension, Fayetteville, AR. [2]University of Tennessee Extension, Knoxville, TN. [3]University of Kentucky Extension, Lexington, KY. [4]Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX. [5]Colorado State University Extension, Fort Collins, CO. [6]Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, College Station, TX. [7]Southern Rural Development Center, Starkville, MS.

Abstract

Community Development 101 is a 3-hour pre-conference workshop which provides a basic introduction to Community Development (CD) concepts and resources. Building from the definition of community development embraced by NACDEP in 2015, this session offers a broad introduction to the practical aspects of CD in context of Extension work within the public realm. Participants will build skills and networks to enhance community and economic development capacity for their Extension programs. Participants will explore community systems and basic methods for finding community data, as well as learn practical approaches to assessing communities and working within community systems. This workshop is designed to be highly experiential and applicable to Extension program delivery for those working in all aspects of Extension in communities of place, be it rural or urban.

NACDEP Board Meeting:

- Monday, June 9, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
  Location: Room 226

Pre-Conference Workshop
Monday, June 9, 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Session Theme: Capacity Building
Presentation Type: Long-form Workshop
Location: Salon C

Diverse Teams Tackling Grand Challenges & Wicked Problems

David Close, Curt Friedel, Jerald Walz, University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville, TN. [2]Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

Abstract
Rural community leaders face two main challenges: solving immediate problems and determining how to work collaboratively and effectively with community partners in teams. Adaption-Innovation (A-I) theory aids leaders in addressing both issues by engaging team members with diverse problem-solving styles, identified by the Kirton Adaptive-Innovative Inventory (KAI). Significant gaps in these styles (20 points or more on the KAI) can lead to communication and trust issues. Thus, leaders must manage both the primary task (Problem A) and the diversity in problem-solving styles (Problem B).

Effective leaders bridge cognitive gaps by equipping team members with coping strategies and designating "bridgers"—individuals whose KAI scores fall between those of disparate team members. This workshop helps participants identify their problem-solving styles, understand cognitive gaps and learn the role of a "bridger." It also provides strategies to leverage diverse styles and cognitive diversity to enhance team success in tackling significant challenges.

- **Program Leaders' Meeting**
  Monday, June 9, 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
  Location: Salon D & E

- **Land Use Community of Practice Meeting**
  Monday, June 9, 4 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
  Location: Room 224

- **Newcomers' Orientation**
  Monday, June 8, 4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
  Loaction: Salon C

- **Transportation to Downtown Center**
  Monday, June 9, 6 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
  Location: Meet in Embassy Suites Lobby

- **Welcome Reception and Opening Plenary at Downtown Center**
  Monday, June 9, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
  Location: 107 Capital Street (WVSU Downtown Center)

- **Dinner on Your Own**
  Monday, June 9, 8 p.m. – 11 p.m.
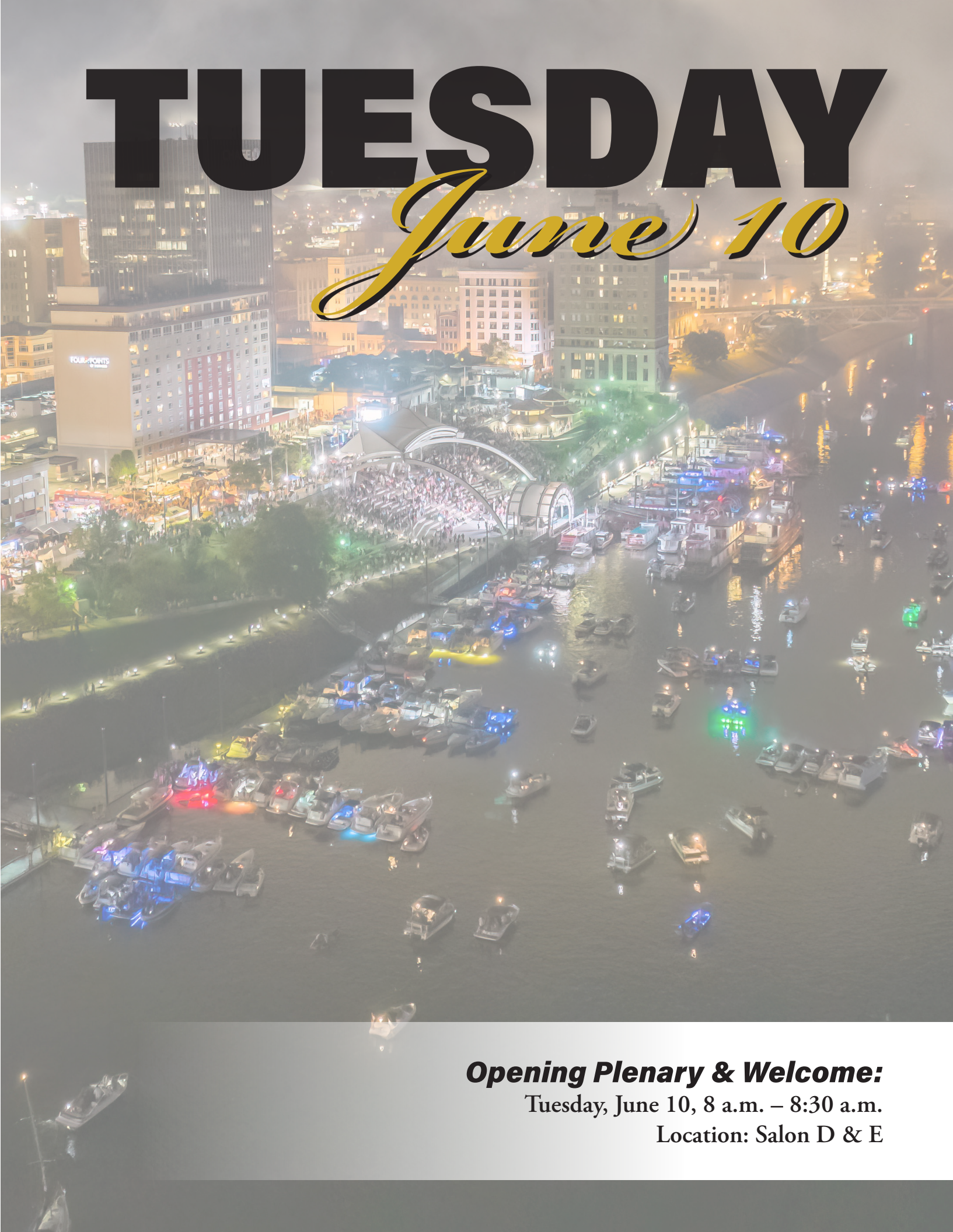
Opening Plenary & Welcome:
Tuesday, June 10, 8 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
Location: Salon D & E

Tuesday, June 10, 8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Agriculture and Development
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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Northeast Ohio Agricultural Innovation Center

Amanda Osborne[1], Shoshanah Inwood[2], Julie Wayman[3], Nicole Arnold[4], Frank Becker[5]

[1]The Ohio State University Extension, Cleveland, OH. [2]The Ohio State University, School of Environment and Natural Resources, Wooster, OH. [3]The Ohio State University Extension, Jefferson, OH. [4]The Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, OH. [5]The Ohio State University Extension, Wooster, OH.

Abstract
Northeast Ohio is home to population centers, like Cleveland and Akron/Canton, along with rich, prime soils. This region includes Ohio's highest concentration of women farmers, small- and medium-sized farms, and a significant Amish population, yet many farmers in the region struggle to make a profit selling their products. Funded by USDA Rural Development and Ohio State University Extension, The Northeast Ohio Ag Innovation Center (NEO-AIC) was developed to remove barriers and support farm growth, development and economic prosperity by addressing the gaps in technical assistance for the value- added production of food, fiber or fuel products. One of eight AICs nationally, the NEO AIC is distinguished by the emphasis on quality of life, focus on value-chain coordination, Amish liaison and the integration of a medical model team approach to client support. We will provide an overview of the Center and share how we are incorporating newly released tools for integrating health care, health insurance and childcare into farm planning.

Identifying the Weather, Climate and Water Data Needs of Wyoming's Agricultural Technical Service Providers: The Case for Community Based Approaches

Juliet Daniels[1], Dr. Kristiana Hansen[2], Windy Kay Kelly[3],[4], Rebecca Witinok-Huber[5], Micah Most[6], Emily Faith Peters[2]

[1]University of Wyoming Extension, Cheyenne, WY. [2]University of Wyoming, Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics, Laramie, WY. [3]University of Wyoming Extension, Pinedale, WY. [4]Northern Plains Climate Hub, Pinedale, WY. [5]University of Wyoming, Haub School of Environment & Natural Resources, Laramie, WY. [6]University of Wyoming Extension, Buffalo, WY.

Abstract
The frequency and severity of extreme weather events and temperatures have increased relative to historical averages in Wyoming. The semi-arid climate and prevailing rangeland and cropping systems place producers and their communities at significant exposure to weather and climate variability.

An increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events and observed and predicted changes to climate trends have been reported across the western United States. Since 1900, there has been a notable rise in annual average air temperature, ranging from 1.6° to 2.6°F above historical averages and shifts in precipitation patterns from snow-dominated to rain-dominated systems. These trends are expected to persist with ongoing climate warming, leading to reduced water availability and altered timing of runoff, which is particularly critical for Wyoming.

Agriculture is a key economic driver and cultural cornerstone in Wyoming. Changes in water availability will have ripple effects throughout Wyoming agriculture and communities. Agricultural Extension professionals and other Technical Service Providers (TSP) are a crucial resource for helping producers anticipate, adapt to and build resilience against changing weather and water conditions.

However, TSPs in Wyoming may not engage with agricultural producers on weather/climate-related topics, due to a lack of training, overwhelming commitments or reluctance to engage on controversial topics. There exists a gap in our understanding of TSPs' needs to effectively support producers regarding weather, climate and water availability. This study addresses this gap by identifying the needs of agricultural TSPs and the challenges they face as they navigate a changing climate.

CONCURRENT SESSION 1B

Tuesday, June 10, 8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Community Resilience
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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Understanding Heirs' Property: Outcomes of Extension Community Education

Portia Johnson[1], Roseanne Scammahorn[2], Kara Woods[3], Becky Smith[2]

[1]Auburn University, Auburn, AL. [2]Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS. [3]Alcorn State University, Alcorn, MS.

Abstract
Heirs' property, where land is inherited without clear legal titles, hinders economic development, disrupts families, and threatens environmental and cultural heritage. In partnership with the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center, the Southern Region Development Center (SRDC) Understanding Heirs Property at the Community Level program addresses heirs' property through a participatory action research approach, involving needs assessments, curriculum development and program implementation. Key features include training over 810 professionals, establishing a multi-university alliance and creating an updated resource hub. The program has demonstrated success in raising awareness, resolving title issues and building a network of support. By empowering Extension professionals to address heirs' property, this project promotes proactive measures like estate planning and facilitates community- driven solutions to improve land ownership security and foster equitable development. This work serves as a model for other Extension programs addressing land tenure challenges.

Rural Confluence: Where the Niobrara River Meets the Missouri River, and Science Meets Community

Jordan Rasmussen[1], Mary Emery[2], Raquel Taylor[2]

[1]University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Burwell, NE. [2]University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE.

Abstract
The "Rural Confluence" project, supported by the National Science Foundation, explores how rural communities can enhance resilience to climate change by leveraging local knowledge and fostering collaboration. Focused on the Mississippi River Basin, the initiative brings together researchers and Extension educators from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, along with partners from Oklahoma State University and Louisiana State University, to co-create innovative, community-driven solutions. Niobrara, Nebraska, serves as a focal point for this work. The community has experienced extreme weather events, including flooding, drought and windstorms, and has demonstrated resilience through historical relocations and economic reinvention. The project emphasizes participatory approaches such as oral histories and photo voice to document local expertise and capacity-building internships to develop adaptive strategies.

Over the course of the project, Niobrara residents have directed the project's trajectory, identifying challenges and opportunities to strengthen community resilience. Accomplishments include summer internships for local college students, grant-writing success, and the development of tangible resources such as warning systems and disaster preparedness plans.

This initiative provides a replicable framework for integrating local knowledge with climate and social science to address environmental challenges. It inspires collaboration and highlights practical strategies that can be adapted by other rural communities to thrive amid changing climates.

Community Building One Garden at a Time

Melissa Hamilton[1], Ariel Agenbroad[2], Jennifer Jensen[3]

[1]University of Idaho, Cascade, ID. [2]University of Idaho, Boise, ID. [3]University of Idaho, Sandpoint, ID.

Abstract
Community gardens are strong partners for Extension learners to implement hands-on learning and engagement post participation in Extension programming. They provide a physical space for community members to practice and build leadership skills, increase social capital, create a physical change in a community (creating community pride), create demonstration areas to display horticultural potential on a landscape, create a layer of community inclusion, and bolster community resilience. The UI Extension, Valley County educator has helped establish four community gardens throughout her career. In this workshop, she will share some ways they can be established to be sustainable initiatives with active leaders and engaged community members. She will also be transparent and share some observed challenges of these spaces. Opportunities to leverage the Master Gardener (MG) and 4-H programs in community development efforts will be discussed. Strategies to weave staple Extension programs (MG and 4-H), and other partner organizations, into supporting local community garden efforts will be shared for the overall goal to create a stronger and more resilient local food system.

CONCURRENT SESSION 1C

Tuesday, June 10, 8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Community Resilience
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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Empowering Communities: Strengthening Mental Health Awareness, Building Capacity and Promoting Resilience

Angelika Keene[1], Kendra Hughson[2]

[1]UF/IFAS Extension, Cocoa, FL. [2]UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL.

Abstract

"Empowering Communities: Strengthening Mental Health Awareness, Building Capacity and Promoting Resilience" highlights the urgent need for mental health resources in Brevard County, Florida, where mental health indicators fall below national benchmarks. The initiative employs Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to build community capacity by equipping individuals and organizations with skills to address mental health crises, recognize early warning signs and connect individuals to resources.

The program, targeting underserved populations and organizations, features a blend of online and in-person instruction, culminating in a three-year certification. It emphasizes reducing stigma, promoting mental health literacy and fostering supportive environments. Participants reported significant increases in confidence and competence, with notable outcomes including successful crisis interventions and improved referrals to professional resources.

This initiative underscores the critical role of Extension in addressing mental health challenges. It recommends integrating MHFA into community programs to strengthen organizational capacities, reduce stigma and enhance resilience. These outcomes position Extension as a pivotal resource in promoting mental well-being and fostering healthier, more connected communities.

Re-Entry in Action: A Simulation Approach to Understanding the Challenges of Prison Reintegration

Kristin Netterstrom Higgins

University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Public Policy Center, Little Rock, AK.

Abstract

Returning home from prison is not just an individual challenge but a community-wide process that depends on collaborative effort, social capital and sustained support. This presentation explores the power of a prison re-entry simulation, where the focus expands beyond individual reintegration to highlight a community's collective responsibility for helping neighbors succeed and avoid going back to prison.

The Arkansas Re-Entry Simulation offered by the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service engages participants in navigating the social, economic and emotional challenges of re-entry while emphasizing the importance of community networks, local resources and supportive relationships in successful reintegration.

The simulation encourages participants to consider how communities—rather than isolated systems—can work together to create environments where returning citizens can succeed. The experience highlights the role of community leaders, service providers, local organizations and neighbors in building resilience and supporting re-entry.

This presentation will provide an overview of the design and objectives of the simulation, as well as preliminary data gathered from participants in sessions offered since the launch of the program in Arkansas.

Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how community members can address systemic barriers, strengthen local support Networks and promote long-term success for individuals transitioning out of prison. This session will provide practical insights on using
simulations in training, curriculum development and policy advocacy, offering tools to integrate community development principles into re-entry programs and initiatives.

Growing Recovery Capital through Extension-Led Gardening & Nutrition Education Programming at Substance Use Recovery Centers

Nicole Breazeale, Lola Adedokun, Bethany Pratt

University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.

Abstract

This project united University of Kentucky Extension professionals to expand gardening and nutrition education at Substance Use Recovery Centers statewide. It enhanced existing programs at six sites and launched 11 new initiatives, reaching approximately 675 participants during the 2023 and 2024 seasons. In 2023, data from five sites showed 432 pounds of produce grown, valued at $806, while 10 sites in 2024 reported 1,231 pounds, saving $2,934 in food costs. Extension Agents offered programming from bi-weekly to monthly. The 164-page Recovery Garden Toolkit we developed, along with virtual professional development and a Community of Practice, provided essential training and support. Ripple Effects Mapping evaluations at three sites highlighted significant participant impacts: fostering relationships, enhancing pride, encouraging healthy diets and inspiring a return to gardening. Focus groups with 15 agents identified the importance of strong communication, varied program structures and opportunities for residents to take ownership. While evidence of moving into farming occupations was minimal, the project significantly improved participants' engagement with gardening and healthy eating, contributing meaningfully to their recovery capital.

CONCURRENT SESSION 1D

Fostering Inclusive Support Ecosystems: A Community of Practice Conversation on Rural Entrepreneurship and Extension Programming

Jason Entsminger[1], Daniel Eades[2], Xiaoyin Li[2]

[1]University of Maine, Orono, ME. [2]West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

Abstract

This 75-minute workshop fosters development of a community of practice around entrepreneurial support for historically underserved populations in rural venturing ecosystems. Leveraging an ongoing USDA NIFA-funded integrated project, participants will hear about emerging research on U.S. rural self-employment among these populations, with a focus on non-agricultural sectors. Research findings establish a baseline context upon which participants will then engage in a facilitated community of practice conversation, identifying how new knowledge and evidence might alter Extension programming to improve rural entrepreneurial support ecosystems to create more inclusive opportunity to establish thriving entrepreneurial ventures in rural contexts. Focus within this initial CoP convening will include facilitated ideation and priority-setting activities. Outcomes of processing and creation will be captured for reporting-out, including with Extension leadership and the CoP.

CONCURRENT SESSION 1E

Inclusive Broadband Expansion: Empowering Local Communities

Jessica Beckendorf, Gail Huycke

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension, Madison, WI.

Abstract

Closing the digital divide has been a key objective for communities across the United States. The University of Wisconsin – Madison Extension Broadband Team addressed this capacity gap through collaboration and network-building principles. We empowered community members via workshops, a comprehensive toolkit, webinars and technical assistance, fostering co-learning and resource sharing. Our inclusive approach encouraged local ownership of broadband planning, highlighting successful case studies and practical solutions. We facilitated knowledge sharing and relationship building across geographic boundaries, engaging all stakeholders, including Tribal entities. Over two years, we developed 15 webinars, hosted 14 workshops and provided technical assistance to over 40 communities. Attendees will learn how to apply this methodology to their own work as they learn about the program impacts and lessons learned. Participants will also have the opportunity to apply knowledge through a simulation activity that illustrates the wide range of considerations and decisions faced by communities engaged in closing the digital divide. Resources to further assist in implementing this methodology will also be shared.

CONCURRENT SESSION 2A

Tuesday, June 10, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Session Theme: Economic Development
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Digital Skills Education in Cooperative Extension: Echoes of the Past, Hope for the Future

Kenneth Sherin, Jeffrey Cates, Howard Wallace, Ashley Cummings, Kyndai Bridgers

North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

Abstract

The Cooperative Extension System has a long and storied history of helping communities adapt to transformative changes in technology. From advancing agricultural techniques in the early 20th century to promoting innovative household practices, Extension has consistently empowered individuals to thrive in evolving landscapes. Today, this mission endures through digital skills education, bridging the digital divide and fostering equitable access to opportunity in the modern age.

This session will spotlight the work of NC Cooperative Extension digital skills educators, showcasing how their programs are making a tangible difference in communities across North Carolina. A panel of seasoned educators will share insights into their strategies for engaging diverse audiences, the challenges they face and the measurable outcomes of their efforts. Participants will learn how digital literacy initiatives are empowering individuals to access critical services, expand economic opportunities and strengthen community resilience. They will share how you can incorporate digital skills into your Extension programming.

Data to Impact: Testing a Methodology for Measuring Statewide Impact of Farmers' Markets

Hannah Dankbar[1], Kelly Crane[2], Tori Davis[1]

[1]NC State University, Raleigh, NC. [2]Farmer Foodshare, Durham, NC.

Abstract

NC State Extension and the North Carolina Farmers Market Network (NCFMN) conduct an annual statewide farmers market census. The purpose of this census is to understand trends and impacts of farmers markets in order to advocate and market for farmers markets on the state level and inform targeted technical assistance and educational programs for individual markets and communities. This survey is distributed to the 210 farmers markets (NCFMN, 2025) within the state through existing networks. Metrics including total sales, visitor counts, businesses supported and market distribution are used to communicate the importance and impacts of farmers markets across the state. Other metrics on topics including market governance, nutrition assistance programs and market employment are used to inform technical assistance and educational programming for farmers markets and communities. Having statewide data is useful for promoting farmers markets as community spaces and economic opportunities for small businesses by improving technical assistance to individual markets and building support for markets within communities. Gathering and reporting valid statewide metrics can be challenging due to the diverse nature of how markets do, or do not, gather and report data. This presentation will highlight findings from the 2024 North Carolina Farmers Market Census and include discussions about methods tested to calculate valid statewide metrics. The presentation will conclude with a discussion about multiple outputs generated from the census, how the data is used for multiple purposes and recommendations for Extension praxis.

NCR-Stat Datasets: Empowering Cross-Regional Research and Extension in Community Development

Zuzana Bednarik[1], Maria Marshall[1,2]

[1]North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, West Lafayette, IN. [2]Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Abstract

The NCR-Stat database is a comprehensive data collection initiative empowering Extension professionals and researchers across land-grant universities. Initially launched in the North Central Region in 2022, it has expanded to include the Northeast and Southern Regions. Through household surveys focusing on community and community residents' well-being, economic resilience and caregiving, NCR-Stat datasets can equip Extension educators with data-driven insights for rural and urban communities. This collaborative platform enables educators to better inform stakeholders on topics related to household well-being and community development and reduces barriers to comparative research while promoting regional cooperation in both research and Extension activities.

CONCURRENT SESSION 2B

Tuesday, June 10, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Session Theme: Community Resilience
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Assessing the Impact of a Grassroots Produce Prescription Program on Participants and Local Food Systems in West Virginia

Gina Wood, Kristin McCartney

West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

Abstract

Rural populations experience greater health disparities than their urban counterparts due to socioeconomic conditions such as lower incomes, limited access to healthy food and decreased nutrition security. These issues are a common reality in West Virginia where most counties have areas designated by the USDA as food deserts and people frequently live in poverty, factors that drive the state's consistently low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption and high rates of obesity, Type 2 diabetes and other diet-sensitive chronic illnesses.

For the past five years, the West Virginia Family Nutrition Program has supported produce prescription programs, connecting people at risk for food insecurity and chronic illness with fresh produce and nutrition education through collaboration with local farmers and health care systems. Data collected from 2020-2024 demonstrate improved nutrition security and health outcomes for program participants. Surveys and interviews with local growers, program participants and health care providers and staff provide evidence that healthy food access programs, including produce prescriptions, are highly valued by all partners and provide a source of guaranteed income for small farms operations, supporting the development of local food systems. Over 90% of produce prescription program participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with the food they received through the programs. Over 40% of surveyed farmers indicated that participation in produce prescription programs increased revenue and created employment opportunities. Produce prescription programs offer potential to develop local food economies and build capacity to feed West Virginia communities from within.

Connecting Local Foods to Communities through a Local Food Value Chain in Petersburg, Virginia

Lisa Homa

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Abstract

The River Street Education (RSE) Food Hub started a collaborative project to support food sovereignty and health equity in Petersburg, Virginia. The project involved the local farmers market organization (RSE), the Petersburg Public Library, Crater Health Department, The Cameron Foundation and over 25 local growers and food producers.

The food hub began as a method to commence development of a local food system by procuring produce from local growers at market rates and providing it to the community through an indoor farm market at the Petersburg Public Library. The food hub sources local produce and food products for the market, which is a community hub serving a diverse population to create a place-based source of produce that serves the community through increased financial (accepts SNAP/EBT & SNAP match) and geographical access (located in and surrounded by low-income, low-access communities). Because of the systems in place to support aggregation, the program has also been used to provide weekly produce for 24 weeks of a pilot produce prescription program for two 20-participant cohorts, with a new one starting in 2025. The food hub is also the foundation for the community receiving Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) funds to connect seven local farmers to five free food distribution organizations, which has provided over 55,700 pounds of fresh produce and meat to over 13,500 people.

This work displays the utilization of the social ecological model to address nutrition insecurity and embraces Extension's National Framework for Health Equity and Well-Being to promote health equity.

Finding Local Food: How to Create a Local Food Guide in Your Community to Connect Consumers and Farmers

Julie Wayman

Ohio State University Extension, Jefferson, OH.

Abstract

I will be sharing about our county's local food guide. Updated annually for the past 7 years, this guide is the state's most comprehensive and accurate guide to local food. I will take attendees through the history of the project, how it evolved and share information about how it is produced. I hope to inspire others to take on this challenge and provide them with the information they will need to consider when taking on such a project. I'll share about funding, layout and updates, as well as how to pay for the printing costs. I'll have examples from other areas as well. Good community education projects are key to Extension, and this project is a consumer-focused, high-visibility project in the community that promotes healthy eating and local farms.

CONCURRENT SESSION 2C

Tuesday, June 10, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Session Theme: Capacity Building and Governance
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Removing Barriers to State Programs for Rural Communities – The Creative District Example

Jamie Bright

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Kimball, NE.

Abstract

The Nebraska Arts Council launched the Creative District Program in 2021 to support economic development using the arts as a driver. Recognizing the potential benefits of local placemaking and quality of life enhancements, I collaborated with a community as a consultant to navigate the application process. Seeing the transformative possibilities, I began promoting the program statewide through platforms like Nebraska Extension's Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference and the Rural Rendezvous webinars I host to address community development topics. While the program's grant funding often motivates participation, the complex application process poses significant challenges, especially for smaller communities lacking staff capacity or technical expertise.

In my role as a technical consultant and advocate, I supported communities by simplifying the process, providing guidance and offering encouragement. This presentation will share lessons learned from assisting four communities, with two achieving certification and two still in progress. Attendees will gain insights into strategies for overcoming barriers, the importance of emphasizing placemaking over traditional economic development models, and ways to effectively support rural communities in accessing state programs.

Building Community Capacity for Intergenerational Living Practices: Lessons Learned from Pilot Projects in Ridgway and Freeport, Pennsylvania

John Turack[1], Chi Catalone[2]

[1]Penn State Extension, Greensburg, PA. [2]Penn State Extension, Ridgway, PA.

Abstract

This session will explore intergenerational practices, objectives, methodologies and results achieved during a pilot intergenerational program that bridged generational gaps by using multidisciplinary Penn State Extension teams and community engagement to enhance residents' quality of life and visitors' experiences through education about intergenerational practices and strategies that can be incorporated into community activities, action plans and site development plans.

The *Intergenerational Living: Ridgway and Freeport* pilot communities in this program focused on establishing intergenerational strategies to incorporate young, midlife and older voices into community visioning. This multi-tier approach identified local issues, brainstormed solutions and facilitated collaborative community improvement projects. The project's program planning committee – which consisted of Penn State Extension Educators, Specialists, Faculty and Client Relationship Managers – engaged local stakeholders including borough managers, mayors, school principals, library administrators, and representatives from municipal authorities and municipal/county planning offices, senior centers, aging offices, and non-profit agencies in these Pennsylvania boroughs of Ridgway and Freeport. Each pilot community then formed its own *Intergenerational Living* planning group focused on fostering safe spaces for multigenerational idea exchange, learning and community-building discussions. The initiative encouraged active community participation across generations, with a focus on addressing local needs and leveraging local assets and resources to improve community quality of life.

The pilot projects' goals were to promote local awareness and increase understanding of effective intergenerational strategies and practices, and to showcase the positive impacts of mixed-aged groups working together to improve the quality of life in their community.

Extraordinary Governance: How Extension Can Support Constructive Partnerships Between Boards and Administrators and Enhance Community Vitality

Eric Walcott

Michigan State University Extension, East Lansing, MI.

Abstract

Local government boards and councils are responsible for making significant decisions that broadly affect their communities. In addition, board members cannot possibly be experts on all of the topics they are forced to grapple with. The board's job is to set the overall direction, allocate resources, and entrust administrators and staff to carry out the organization's work. Given these challenges, a constructive partnership between a board and administrator, whether in local government or non-profits, is essential to organizational success and thriving communities. This session will present a summary of research examining some of the most significant challenges facing county boards of commissioners in Michigan, discuss core principles that are the foundation of a constructive partnership between board and staff, and discuss how a constructive partnership can be built.

CONCURRENT SESSION 2D

Tuesday, June 10, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Session Theme: Economic Development
Presentation Type: Workshop

Connecting Rural Economic Strategic Plans to Youth and Engaging Students: Impactful Career Learning Events

Didgette McCracken

Oregon State University, John Day, Oregon.

Abstract

Can you take a strategic economic development plan and use it to guide youth learning events? Absolutely! Evaluating community needs and incorporating career learning events with k-12 schools makes for a rich experience. Learn about proven student engagement in career and technical education career day events. Explanation of the event and how to create your own, best practices and lessons learned will be presented. Planning, logistics, examples and data collection that are meaningful and impactful for student learning toward workforce development activities will be shared. Anyone interested in creating an event to reach students by connecting workforce needs and student interests should attend.

CONCURRENT SESSION 2E

Tuesday, June 10, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
Session Theme: Capacity Building and Governance
Presentation Type: Workshop

Extension's Role in Addressing Renewable Energy Planning and Siting through the U.S. Department of Energy's R-STEP program

Tamara Ogle[1], Kara Salazar[1,2], Luke Seaberg[3], Victoria Solomon[4]

[1]Purdue Extension, West Lafayette, IN. [2]Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, West Lafayette, IN. [3]Iowa State Extension, Ames, IA. [4]University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

Abstract

The U.S. Department of Energy's Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning (R-STEP) program provides an interesting opportunity to understand the role Extension can play in federal collaborative grants. This new grant program, funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), encourages state-wide collaboration between organizations, agencies and universities. In several of the states awarded an R-STEP grant, Extension professionals serve as the principal investigator or are involved on state teams. Extension professionals from Iowa, Indiana and Wisconsin will share strategies, collaborative processes and lessons learned from assembling their cross-institutional state teams to address renewable energy planning and siting how this applies to future grant opportunities. Participants will gain insights into successful partnerships, challenges faced and the role of Extension in federal grant projects.

Lunch and Business Meeting
Tuesday, June 10, Noon – 1:45 p.m.

CONCURRENT SESSION 3A

Tuesday, June 10, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Session Theme: Tourism and Development
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

AI-Powered Agritourism Toolkit: Revolutionizing Agritourism with AI and Machine Learning

Alice Dong

Colorado State University Extension, Sterling, CO.

Abstract

Agritourism provides farmers and ranchers a valuable opportunity to diversify income and connect with visitors, yet small to mid-sized operations often face challenges in planning, marketing and management due to limited resources. To address these issues, the AI-Powered Agritourism Toolkit, developed by the author using AI and Machine Learning (ML), offers an innovative web-based solution. This toolkit leverages datasets and ML to deliver user-specific insights through a chatbot. By streamlining operations, it helps users navigate complexities, enhance sustainability and create engaging visitor experiences.

Developing the Rural Tourism Institute

Ann Savage[1], Doug Arbogast[2], Mercedes Fraser[3],

Whitney Knollenberg[1], Daniel Eades[2], Simona Balazs[3]

[1]NC State University, Raleigh, NC. [2]West Virginia University, Fayetteville, WV. [3]University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.

Abstract

There has been a noted growth since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in rural tourism activities, especially those close to urban centers. This has quickly brought unforeseen management challenges but also new opportunities for many rural destinations. Where once destination organizations were tasked solely with marketing, there is a recognized need to move towards a management role that includes balancing the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism, recognizing creative partnerships and finding new measures of success. While a growing number of larger destination organizations can access resources to strategize this marketing to management shift, little support exists for rural destinations and their unique circumstances to acquire the knowledge, data and resources needed to develop and implement a sustainable destination management strategy.

To address these challenges and opportunities in the Appalachian region, West Virginia University, North Carolina State University and University of Kentucky partnered to develop the Rural Tourism Institute. With a limited support system for rural tourism in the U.S., Land-grant Universities are well positioned to harness their resources to catalyze this shift toward sustainable destination management through an integrated approach. In October 2024, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) awarded an Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE) planning grant to support the development of the Rural Tourism Institute, which will include a Rural Tourism Executive Certification program, the Rural Tourism Lab and the Rural Tourism Peer Network.

Utilizing Interpretive Guide Training to Attract New Visitors, Residents and Talent

Diane Van Wyngarden

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Ames, IA.

Abstract

Every community has exceptional stories. Interpretive guides can bring those stories to life in a way that generates economic development – if they have the training and tools to do it well.

Iowa State's Interpretive Guide training program incorporates national standards of interpretation with practical strategies to help communities provide visitor experiences that attract new visitors and residents and recruit workforce talent. The program was originally designed for staff and volunteers who lead guided programs at Iowa's diverse attractions, including conservation and outdoor recreation, historic sites, museums and industry tours; and that traditional interpretation audience continues with strong participation.

However, chambers of commerce and DMOs now also embrace this program as a method to more effectively attract workforce talent. Recognizing this Extension program as an economic tool, Iowa's state economic development office has partnered with Iowa State University Extension in funding and promotion to support this new version of community economic development education.

In the program's five years, 432 Iowans from more than 300 cities completed the Interpretive Guide training workshop. Word-of-mouth promotion by prior participants now propels large audience registrations, requiring minimal additional marketing. Evaluations via surveys, observation and anecdotal responses indicate this program is impacting diverse community assets in every region of Iowa.

CONCURRENT SESSION 3B

Tuesday, June 10, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Session Theme: Community Resilience
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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USDA 502 Home Loans – Empowering Rural Communities

Rina Castillo[1], Megan Rodriguez[2]

[1]Prairie View A&M University, Edinburg, TX. [2]Prairie View A&M University Extension, Raymondville, TX.

Abstract

The Prairie View A&M University Extension CED Rural Home Loan Packaging Program drives economic growth and resilience in rural areas by promoting homeownership among low- and moderate-income families. This initiative highlights the transformative effects of accessible housing in Hidalgo and Starr Counties, where homeownership significantly impacts economic and social outcomes.

The USDA Rural Development Section 502 Loan offers affordable financing options to eligible low- and very-low-income applicants, enabling them to purchase, build, renovate or improve homes. These loans address housing affordability challenges, enhancing family stability and contributing to long-term community wealth. Beyond empowering homeowners, the program stimulates local economies by creating construction jobs, boosting real estate activity and increasing property tax revenues. For instance, Hidalgo County, Texas, sees approximately 300 loans annually, generating over 900 construction jobs and $7.4 million in property taxes. Starr County enjoys similar proportional benefits.

This session covers program eligibility, application processes and success stories while highlighting the broader economic impacts of homeownership in reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to maximize the impact of USDA 502 Home Loans in rural areas.

Community and Economic Development Extension Professionals play a vital role in replicating the program's success elsewhere. By providing technical assistance, conducting workshops and fostering partnerships among stakeholders, these professionals help extend the benefits of homeownership, building sustainable, resilient communities and unlocking economic opportunities for rural families.

Igniting Rural Leadership: Unleashing Community Power Through Volunteer Action

David Close, Brandi Berven

University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville, TN.

Abstract

This presentation will explore the transformative potential of the LEAD95 and TELA programs, emphasizing the "train the trainer" model to extend and expand community leadership. By positioning UT Extension as the central hub, these initiatives aim to enhance local leadership capacity through the strategic engagement of volunteers. The role of nonprofits and other civic organizations will be highlighted for participants, displaying their critical contributions to local communities. The overlap between engaged volunteers and local leadership capacity offers a unique opportunity for communities to address their specific problems, challenges and opportunities. It will also discuss the importance of leveraging existing infrastructures, organizations and programs to maximize impact and sustainability.

Food Business & Food Workers: A Strategy for Underrepresented Communities

Juana Macias-Christian

Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University, Guntersville, AL.

Abstract

Are you seeking ways to reach Hispanic and underserved communities through community development programs? Your state's food safety requirements may be the answer. In Alabama, we use food safety to connect Hispanic audiences to our programs supporting businesses. Whether it is a food truck, a restaurant or a lawn care business, our programs are essential to business retention and community growth in traditionally underserved communities.

CONCURRENT SESSION 3C

Tuesday, June 10, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Session Theme: Capacity Building and Governance
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Reimagining a "Legacy Program:" Learnings from the Collaborative Redesign of the University of Minnesota Extension's Bridging Cohorts

Abbey Guggisberg

University of Minnesota Extension, Mankato, MN.

Abstract
In 1999, the University of Minnesota Extension launched Bridging Brown County, a leadership education program, in response to a natural disaster that highlighted the need for stronger community connections. This 9-month leadership capacity building initiative was successful and eventually was replicated in six additional counties. However, by 2020, changing needs necessitated a comprehensive overhaul of the program structure. Through collaboration with local leaders, a new model was developed that significantly reduced educator demand and travel requirements while expanding networking opportunities for participants across multiple counties.

This presentation will explore how the Bridging Programs have adapted to changing community needs while maintaining their historical success. I will discuss the role of community partnerships and technology in sustaining effective programming. The restructuring process was not without its challenges, and I will share insights from the iterative process of refining the program through ongoing collaboration with local coordinators.

The presentation will be divided into two parts:
- Process notes from the collaborative effort
- Impacts of the chosen restructuring model

We will highlight how Extension served as a central hub for communication and facilitation, while local community organizations made unique decisions that have had lasting effects. This case study offers valuable lessons for community developers facing similar transitions. By sharing our experiences, we aim to foster a dialogue with attendees who have undergone or are considering similar changes.

Sustaining Community-Based Programming Success Through Story-Telling: Tips for Tailored Marketing and Impact Sharing

Crystal Tyler-Mackey[1], Karen Tanner[2], Debbie Lester[2], Shannon Jarrott[3], Jill Juris[4]

[1]Virginia Tech, Richmond, VA. [2]Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. [3]Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. [4]Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.

Abstract
"Telling the story" of community-based programming is an essential strategy at all phases of the programming cycle, from inception to implementation and into the sustainability phase. One key component of marketing the programs, also discussed as impact-sharing and telling your story, is predicated upon useful data presented in an accessible, relevant manner. Moreover, if it is truly community-engaged, it is also done so in partnership with community members. In this session, a multi-state team implementing a USDA-CYFAR Sustainable Communities joint project entitled BRIDGE2Health (B2H) will share experiences in developing an iterative cycle of gathering, analyzing, visualizing and presenting data using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. CBPR methods emphasize the active involvement of community partners at every step of the research process. This presentation will highlight how marketing strategies integrated into the CBPR approach have been essential for ensuring the sustainability of community-based programming. Through collaboration with community partners, the team gathered, interpreted and shared early programming results while emphasizing the role of marketing in amplifying program impact and securing ongoing support. By leveraging diverse communication tools such as community reports, infographics, and social media posts, the team enhanced program visibility and engagement. This iterative evaluation cycle not only maintained fidelity to CBPR principles but also provided a strong foundation for sustainable, community-informed programming. In this session, the presenters share their story and facilitate feedback to glean successful strategies from workshop participants as well.

Community Leadership Program: Lessons Learned from 10 Years of Delivering an Affordable One-size-fits-many-pretty-well Leadership Cohort Series in 20+ Counties and Its Redesign for the Next Decade.

Kris Parker, Cindy Barber, Tanya Hall, Tamara Ogle, Steve Yoder

Purdue Extension, West Lafayette, IN.

Abstract
This overview of Purdue Extension's Community Leadership Program (CLP) includes practical tips for developing and adapting leadership programming. CLP is a 12-module, 36-hour, in-person cohort series delivered jointly by local and state educators in partnership with local stakeholders.

Building civic muscle is an essential component of thriving communities. CLP aims to improve the quality of life for all in-host communities by building more civically engaged leaders through the development of knowledge, skills, commitment and connections to advance positive change. CLP:

- Opens the door to opportunities to become civically engaged, strengthening participants' confidence and desire to take on community leadership roles;
- Cultivates community leaders who understand and respect
- diverse cultural backgrounds, allowing them to effectively engage and elevate underrepresented voices, fostering inclusivity and positive change;
- Increases the number, quality and diversity of leaders involved in public and nonprofit boards, committees and coalitions, as well as grassroots and volunteer efforts;
- Builds leadership knowledge and skills to understand and address important community issues and opportunities through high-quality, evidence-based content, ultimately building community resilience; and
- Connects current and emerging leaders, building relationships that can benefit communities throughout the state.

Session participants will gain implications and recommendations for community leadership programming, such as:

- Trade-offs for branded, standardized vs. customized, adaptive programming;
- Business model options and tips;
- The importance of identifying a specific target audience for leadership curriculum development; and
- Tips for yielding deep and longer-term impact with a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

Purdue Extension's Community Leadership Program is available for piloting and adaptation in other states.

Exploring Extension Workforce Development One Step at a Time: A Peer-to-Peer Conversation

Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel[1], Jason Weigle[2]

[1]Nebraska Extension, Lincoln, NE, USA. [2]Extension Foundation, Saco, ME.

Abstract
The core premise of workforce development is nothing new for Extension – we cut our teeth on helping people develop knowledge and skills that support their workplace. But what might be new is the way Extension does this, how it is being organized and the language used to describe it.

This co-learning conversation is designed to allow both the presenters and participants to share and learn from each other. The presenters will set the stage linking the fundamental concept of social contracts in education, the evolution of the workforce needs and an overview of the changes that have been happening within the educational environment. This will lay the groundwork for why Extension within the land-grant system is uniquely positioned to take the lead in connecting already-established workforce training expertise to relevant employer and employee needs. The next part of the conversation will allow the participants to take center stage. Through key questions, small groups will identify: 1) major examples of workforce efforts that have been developed or are currently being developed within their institution and 2) emerging institutional issues.

All parties will leave with: 1) background information to more accurately discuss the role and importance of workforce development within Extension programming; 2) concrete examples from other land-grant institutions of how various audiences and subject matters can be addressed within workforce development; and 3) strengthen personal confidence that they can be a resource leader within their institution for future workforce discussions.

Tuesday, June 10, 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Session Theme: Technology and Infrastructure
Presentation Type: Workshop

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Visualizing Community Assets: Leveraging Tableau Public for Data-Driven Decision-making within the Community Capitals Framework

Bailey Hanson, Christopher Seeger

Iowa State University, Ames, IA.

Abstract

Effective community development requires clear, data-driven insights to assess assets, identify gaps and guide decision-making. This hands-on workshop will introduce participants to Tableau Public, a free tool for analyzing, visualizing and sharing data. The workshop will focus on structuring data around the Community Capitals Framework utilizing the seven community capitals—natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built. Participants will learn how to use Tableau Public to create interactive dashboards that help community leaders visualize assets and make informed decisions. These dashboards will provide actionable insights into a community's strengths and needs across each of the seven capitals.

Participants will also learn how to collect, clean and structure community data using federal, state and local sources, applying the Community Capitals Framework to analyze and visualize these measures. Step-by-step instruction will guide attendees through the fundamentals of Tableau Public, enabling them to create interactive maps, charts and dashboards that highlight key trends and insights related to the seven capitals.

By the end of this session, participants will:
- Understand how Tableau Public supports data-driven decision-making.
- Learn best practices for visualizing and communicating community data.
- Gain hands-on experience in building interactive dashboards using real-world data.
- Explore case studies using data visualizations for community assessments.

This workshop is designed for community development professionals, Extension educators and local leaders interested in enhancing their data analysis and visualization skills to assess community assets, engage stakeholders and make informed, data-driven decisions. No prior experience with Tableau is required.

- **Regional Meeting: Northeast**
  Tuesday, June 10, 3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

- **Regional Meeting: North Central**
  Tuesday, June 10, 3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

- **Regional Meeting: South**
  Tuesday, June 10, 3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

- **Regional Meeting: West**
  Tuesday, June 10, 3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

- **Regional Meeting: 1890 Institutions**
  Tuesday, June 10, 5 p.m. – 6 p.m.

- **Regional Meeting: 1994 Institutions**
  Tuesday, June 10, 5 p.m. – 6 p.m.

- **Dinner on Your Own (State's Night Out)**
  Tuesday, June 10, 7 p.m. – 11 p.m.

WEDNESDAY
June 11

Committees Breakfast:

Wednesday, June 11, 6 a.m. – 8 a.m.
Location: Salon D & E

Plenary Session (Housing Forum):

Wednesday, June 11, 8 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
Location: Salon D & E

Wednesday, June 11, 9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Economic Development
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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Birmingham Community Incubator: Building Stronger Communities Through Entrepreneurship

Jon Jacobson

Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University, Birmingham, AL, USA

Abstract
The Birmingham Community Incubator (BCI), established two years ago, is committed to fostering economic growth and opportunity in the underutilized communities of Jefferson County, Alabama. Our mission is to unite like-minded organizations to create a comprehensive entrepreneurial education program that equips individuals with the skills, resources and support needed to launch and sustain successful businesses. By strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem, BCI seeks to address the unique challenges faced by these communities, encourage local innovation and stimulate job creation. The program focuses on practical, community-driven solutions that empower individuals to transform their ideas into thriving businesses, ultimately leading to long-term economic development and prosperity within the region.

Coaching Communities to Thrive: A Model for Rural Entrepreneurship Development

Shawn Kaskie[1], Jason Tuller[2]

[1]University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Kearney, NE. [2]University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Hebron, NE.

Abstract
The Nebraska Entrepreneurial Communities (eCommunities) program transforms rural economies through systematic entrepreneurship ecosystem development. Initially funded by EDA CARES Act and later USDA Rural Development, the program has impacted 25 communities across 14 Nebraska counties facing population decline. Through dedicated business coaches (eCoaches) and Extension educators, the program provides comprehensive support to rural entrepreneurs while building sustainable local support systems. Over three years, 180 businesses received direct mentoring, leading to 70 full-time and 68 part-time jobs, $13.6 million in increased revenue, and $16.3 million in combined public-private investment. The program's success has catalyzed neighboring communities to invest over $300,000 in creating their own eCoach positions. The innovative approach combines individualized business coaching with community-led ecosystem development, resulting in sustainable local entrepreneurship support structures and documented economic growth in rural Nebraska.

NCRCRD Grant-funded Building Entrepreneur Friendly Communities in the Outdoor Recreation Sector

Gwynn Stewart[1], Ami Choi[2], Kyle White[3], Neil Lindscheid[2], Myra Moss[4], Nancy Bowen-Ellzey[5]

[1]Ohio State University Extension, Caldwell, OH. [2]University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. [3]Ohio State University Extension, Medina, OH. [4]Ohio State University Extension, Zanesville, OH. [5]Ohio State University Extension, Van Wert, OH.

Abstract

This project adapts and pilots a community-based entrepreneurship curriculum tailored to the growing Outdoor Recreation (OR) Economy, which represents 2.3% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2024). Gateway communities near protected areas and public lands are crucial for supporting outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism but often face limited technical assistance and resources. Funded by a grant from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD), two universities (Ohio State University and the University of Minnesota Extensions) collaborated to customize the "Building Entrepreneur Friendly Community" curriculum to help gateway and rural communities leverage OR economic opportunities. This session explores curriculum adaptations and strategies to strengthen economic resilience and promote growth in these communities.

CONCURRENT SESSION 4B

Wednesday, June 11, 9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Community Resilience
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Engaging Future Leaders: The Experiential Scholars Program (ESP) for Undergraduate Students in Community Development Internships

Lisa Davis, Julie C. Robinson, Hunter Goodman, Brandon L. Mathews, Steve Siegelin

University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, Little Rock, AR.

Abstract

The Experiential Scholars Program (ESP) offers undergraduate students a hands-on summer internship experience focused on community development work. This presentation will highlight how the program equips students with practical skills and insights by immersing them in current projects that directly impact local communities. By pairing students with Cooperative Extension professionals, the program fosters an environment of mentorship, hands-on learning and civic engagement. Interns contribute to community assessments, program delivery and policy advocacy, while gaining critical leadership, communication and project management skills. This presentation will explore the program's structure, its benefits for both students and host organizations, and the long-term impact on building a diverse and effective workforce in community development. Attendees will learn how to implement similar programs to cultivate the next generation of leaders committed to strengthening communities.

Planning and Ordinance Development and Tracking Assistance for Residential On-site Sewage Systems in Indiana

Kara Salazar[1],[2], Daniel Walker[1],[2]

[1]Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. [2]Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, West Lafayette, IN.

Abstract

In collaboration with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP) and the Indiana Department of Health, Purdue Extension and Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant designed and delivered a three-part project to assist communities as they update their local septic ordinance regulations and to enhance local planning and management of residential on-site sewage systems in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties in Indiana.

Three prime deliverables were:

1. Ordinance Development Process: Facilitating the creation of local ordinances for onsite sewage systems through stakeholder engagement and steering committee-led collaborative planning. This process includes an environmental scan of existing ordinances, issue prioritization and development of tailored policies.
2. Database Visualization Dashboard: Establishing a web-based platform to inventory and track residential onsite sewage systems, providing timely, customizable data visualizations for local program managers using tools like ArcGIS Online.
3. Online Education Resource: Developing a comprehensive educational program covering residential onsite sewage issues, featuring information such as videos, fact sheets and links to other publications for three distinct user groups: homeowners, local governments and realtors.

Expanding Workforce Opportunities in Rural Areas Through Broadband Access: An Extension Program Perspective

Amanda Ali, Paul Hill, Dominic Bria

Utah State University, Logan, UT

Abstract

The Digital Equity Act provides significant federal funding—$2.75 billion—to expand broadband infrastructure and promote digital inclusion, creating new opportunities for rural communities nationwide (H.R. 1841, 2021). The Digital Equity Act's emphasis on creating state digital equity plans and focusing on underserved "covered populations" demonstrates the importance of Extension's involvement in program planning, delivery and evaluation. By participating in the state-led digital equity process, Extension can support rural communities in developing the infrastructure, digital literacy curricula and workforce development programs needed to fully benefit from this singular federal investment. In Utah, a targeted rural workforce development initiative was created to address the lack of well-paying jobs and job opportunities in rural communities by leveraging internet access. The Utah Legislature recognized this opportunity to pursue rural workforce development by investing in a remote work training program.

While innovative, such efforts rely heavily on technology, necessitating consistent broadband internet access. Utah's example illustrates how public-private partnerships and intentional program design can build upon existing broadband resources to deliver impactful workforce development programming, thereby narrowing the digital divide. As broadband availability continues to expand, Extension's role is vital in sustaining digital education efforts, providing rural communities with pathways to achieve greater resilience and secure stable employment. In so doing, Extension can respond to community needs and position itself as a leader for digital equity and inclusion initiatives—an essential step for advancing the broader goal of empowering all individuals to thrive in the modern digital economy (H.R. 1841, 2021).

CONCURRENT SESSION 4C

Wednesday, June 11, 9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Capacity Building and Governance
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

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Building Resiliency and Preventing Burnout: Strategies for Community Development Professionals, Leaders and Helpers

Crystal Tyler-Mackey[1], James Mason[1], Nicole Swinson[2]

[1]Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. [2]Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA.

Abstract

Extension community development professionals are pivotal in promoting social, economic and environmental well-being within urban, rural and suburban communities nationwide. However, the high demands and stresses of the roles, much like most roles in community-helping professions and leadership, increase the likelihood of those individuals experiencing burnout, which can detrimentally affect both personal well-being and the communities being served. In this session, the presenters will provide an overview of evidence-based strategies designed to foster resilience and prevent burnout among Extension community development practitioners and other professionals. Lessons and a description on a cohort-model, six-session resilience series will also be shared.

This interactive session will include an overview of burnout and its impacts, highlighting unique challenges faced by professionals in community development and other community-based Extension work. Attendees will be introduced to key risk factors contributing to burnout and learn how to identify warning signs. The presentation will also review practical strategies for fostering and enhancing resilience. The strategies to be addressed include stress management techniques, such as mindfulness, professional development opportunities and effective work-life balance/integration/negotiation practices. Additionally, creating supportive work environments will be discussed, emphasizing policies and practices that promote workplace and community well-being and collaborative peer support.

This interactive session will engage workshop participants in developing personalized resiliency plans, allowing them to share and discuss their strategies within small groups. By the end of the session, participants will have an awareness of the importance of integrating these resiliency and burnout prevention techniques into their daily professional lives.

Building Advisory Committees Using the Community Capitals Framework

Peyton Beattie[1], Linda Seals[2]

[1]University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. [2]UF/IFAS Extension, Fort Pierce, FL.

Abstract

Extension professionals often use or are required to use advisory committees to help guide the direction of their Extension programs. Advisory committees can be a valuable tool to provide direction and advocate for Extension programs. However, there are few parameters provided to ensure Extension professionals are curating a diverse and representative committee aside from demographics. Extension professionals can operationalize the Community Capitals Framework as a structure for inviting diverse and representative stakeholders to advise their Extension programs. The Community Capitals Framework indicates that equal attention should be given to each capital within a community to lead to a sustainable community with positive effect on the ecosystem, community and social well-being. With that theoretical idea in mind, Extension professionals can invite community stakeholders to represent each of the seven community capitals to ensure their advisory committee is balanced and diverse in representation.

Digital Transformation in Extension: Lessons from Purdue Extension's Digital Transformation Team

Cheyanne Geideman[1], Gina Avila[2], Andrea Hatfield[3], Cindy Barber[4]

[1]Purdue Extension, Fort Wayne, IN. [2]Purdue Extension, Valparaiso, IN.

[3]Purdue Extension, Lebanon, IN. [4]Purdue Extension, Washington, IN.

Abstract

For over 100 years, the Cooperative Extension System has been dispersing knowledge accumulated at land-grant universities with the rest of the state. They have helped many generations modernize daily practices from farming and gardening to cooking and healthy habits. Today, there is a role for Extension to play in helping everyone in the community make full use of the current digital age. Drawing on program experience, this presentation will explore Purdue Extension's digital transformation from identifying relevant programs across all areas of Extension, to identifying gaps and bringing in new programs.

Land Use and Planning Resources, Community Challenges, and Professional Needs

Jake Powell[1], Michael Dougherty[2], Rebecca Roberts[3]

[1]Utah State University, Logan, UT. [2]West Virginia University Extension, Morgantown, WV. [3]University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, WI.

Abstract

The NACDEP Land Use Community of Practice works to provide land use and planning related resources and a network of like-minded professionals for NACDEP members to leverage and develop an understanding and navigate the connections between their work and the land use and planning structures that influence it.

A panel of Extension professionals will introduce attendees to a variety of existing land use and planning related programs and resources currently available to help the communities they serve. Additionally, attendees will be invited to share current land use related efforts and programs in their local areas or states, examine what challenges exist in their communities, and explore what tools or resources could be developed in partnership with the NACDEP Land Use Community of Practice.

CONCURRENT SESSION 4E

Wednesday, June 11, 9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Session Theme: Technology and Infrastructure
Presentation Type: Workshop

Bridging the Digital Divide in Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Communities in the South

Roseanne Scammahorn[1], John Green[1], Krystle Allen[2], Dorothy Brandon[3], Rina Castillo[4], Biswanath Dari[5], Kimberly Davis[6], Roberto Gallardo[7], Catressa Gooden[6], Jimmy Henry[8], Marianna Langston[2], Conchita Newman[6], Sarah Sims[2], Yolanda Surrency[9], Terrence Wolfork[9]

[1]Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS. [2]Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Baton Rouge, LA. [3]Auburn, Normal, AL. [4]Prairie View, Prairie View, TX. [5]North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, NC. [6]Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL. [7]Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. [8]Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX. [9]Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, GA.

Abstract
The COVID-19 public health crisis, along with the measures taken to control it, highlighted existing disparities within communities. A notable example of this was the significant inequalities in broadband access and adoption, often referred to as the digital divide. This divide, which has been recognized since the mid-1990s, refers to the gap between those who have access to and the skills to use digital technology versus those who do not. Over time, research has outlined several interconnected factors that contribute to this divide. The first involves ensuring that individuals have a way to access broadband, which includes being aware of the resource, having the necessary infrastructure available and owning a device that can effectively connect to the internet. The second level of the divide centers on usage, with two key elements: whether individuals decide to adopt internet service by subscribing to it, and whether they use that access to enhance their lives—such as by accessing education, healthcare, social services, job opportunities, social connections and other essential resources. Factors influencing these decisions include access to multiple devices (e.g., not just a mobile phone) and possessing the digital skills and confidence to use online tools to improve one's quality of life. This program aims to narrow the digital divide by addressing issues related to the adoption and advancement in Socio-Economically Distressed (SED) communities in partnership with 1890 Land-Grant Universities.

Change Agents: Extension's Role in Reshaping a Small City's Labor - Management Relations

Tony Michael[1], Denis Scott[2]

[1]West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. [2]West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

Abstract
In practice, labor relations include some form of human resource management. Human resource management is a discipline of its own, but in combination with labor relations the two provide the fundamental components of labor-management relations. While there are various approaches to labor-management relations, the approach used recognized the value that both labor and management bring to the workplace.

This Extension program recognizes that organized labor has seen a resurgence in public awareness and interest in recent years as the post-COVID world saw some shift toward greater employee power, or at least the willingness to use it. Power is at the heart of labor- management relations, and our poster presents a labor-management partnership with a small city that, in partnership with Extension, built a model labor-management relationship.

Extension's labor-management partnership began in 2013 with trainings for department heads and supervisors. The training included principles of labor-management relations, conflict resolution, contract analysis and effective communication. As the City employees were represented by three separate unions, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), and the Fraternity Order of Police (FOP), each contract had to be taken into consideration.

This partnership had a primary goal: implement a vision and create a positive labor-management culture in the city. In order to achieve this goal, there was mutual agreement that training and research initiatives led by Extension should be implemented.

Lunch
- Wednesday, June 11, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
  Location: Salon D & E

Mobile Learning Workshops (Selected at Registration)
- Wednesday, June 11, 12:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. (See page 78)
  Location: Meet in Embassy Suites lobby

Reception and Poster Session
- Wednesday, June 11, 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
  Location: Atrium Hallway

Empowering Young Women Through Leadership and Growth

Morgan Walker

Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX.

Abstract
The Young Women's Empowerment Group is a transformative initiative to equip middle school girls in Beaumont, Texas, with essential life and leadership skills to foster personal growth and resilience. This program, a collaboration between Extension Agent Morgan Walker and Odom Academy Middle School Social Worker Shirley Alexander, supplied a safe and supportive environment for five young women often labeled as troubled teens. Over the course of four sessions, participants engaged in classes on Goal Setting, Financial Literacy, Dressing for Success and Pitching.

Each class was designed to address critical skills and knowledge areas, helping the participants envision and work toward a successful future. Goal-setting workshops encouraged self-reflection and actionable planning, while financial literacy sessions provided foundational tools for managing money effectively. Dressing for Success built confidence and professional awareness, and pitching exercises developed communication and presentation skills.

The program culminated in a celebratory graduation ceremony, providing an opportunity to recognize the participants' achievements and foster a sense of community. By empowering these young women with practical skills and confidence, the program demonstrated the power of collaboration and mentorship in shaping brighter futures.

This poster presentation highlights the structure, outcomes and broader implications of the Young Women's Empowerment Group, showcasing how targeted youth programs can create lasting impacts in communities.

Extension's Role in Strengthening Local Community Coalitions

Gwynn Stewart[1], Kenneth Stewart[2]

[1]Ohio State University, Caldwell, OH. [2]Ohio State University, Woodsfield, OH.

Abstract
Extension professionals are often called upon as a resource or as leaders in the community related to coalition building. Whether it is formal or informal, there is a need to hone your skills on the basics of coalition building and best practices for implementation.

"Is a coalition right for your community? Is the issue that your community is facing complex issues, requiring information and expertise from various sectors of the community, state, region or country?" Butterfoss, F. (2013). The poster will provide an overview of coalition management strategies and county-based examples from two Ohio county coalitions.

Highlighting Stories of Community Resilience through Ripple Mapping

Holli Arp[1], Scott Chazdon[2]

[1]University of Minnesota Extension, Saint Paul, MN.

[2]Consultant, Saint Paul, MN.

Abstract
The *Highlighting stories of community resilience* project invited rural communities across the state to apply to participate in a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) process to capture the elements and impacts of innovative community development efforts. REM is a group qualitative evaluation method that produces a visual mind map to tell the story of a program, depicting the effects of a program or initiative. As a participatory method, REM energizes participants, often leading to an increase in community action based on the lessons learned during the evaluation process.

Twenty-three communities applied for this opportunity, 10 were selected, and nine completed the mapping process. Projects were selected to include diversity in community size, region of the state, culture and a broad range of challenges addressed by the community.

In a review of the REM sessions, seven core elements of community resilience were identified and could easily be renamed "pathways to thriving communities." These core elements were:
1. Building and strengthening connections.
2. Innovating and responding creatively.
3. Building momentum and sustainability.
4. Collaborating and partnering.
5. Prioritizing inclusivity.

We offer definitions and examples of each of these elements, and also discuss how our findings reflect and enhance existing literature on community resilience.

Community Development's Role in Improving Child Care

Sarah Kennedy

University of Missouri Extension, St. Louis, MO.

Abstract
Child care is the backbone of the economy. Yet it is an industry that is often under-resourced and disrespected, creating a whole myriad of challenges. Without child care, adults cannot go to work, women are left out of the workforce, businesses cannot find workers, and tax revenue is lost. Additionally, child care is one of the few things that has the ability to affect three generations (i.e. parents, children, children's children), improve public safety and create thriving communities. It is going to take groups of multi-sector stakeholders collaborating around a variety of creative solutions to improve child care.

Community Development professionals play a key role in bringing together diverse stakeholders to collectively develop child care solutions for their region. This presentation will discuss some of the ways University of Missouri-Extension is developing resources and engaging diverse stakeholders to develop effective solutions to community's child care challenges. Participants will be introduced to the Business and Community Child Care database, the Child Care Change Boot Camp program and their engagement efforts with economic developers, workforce developers, government officials and child care stakeholders. Community development professionals are needed to help teach communities the skills needed to develop multiple, complex solutions to improve the child care system.

Diversity is a Strength: How to Create High-Performing Teams & Drive Business Results

Sandrine Vohra

MIKADO International, Westminster, CO.

Abstract
In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, diversity is no longer a nice-to-have, but a necessity. This presentation will explore the critical role diversity plays in driving business success, and provide actionable strategies for leveraging diverse perspectives to fuel innovation, boost productivity, and enhance employee engagement.

Topics covered include:
- Foster inclusive teams that thrive on diverse perspectives.
- Leverage diversity as a strategic business advantage to stay ahead of the competition.
- Drive business growth and revenue through diverse talent and markets.

Fireside Chat with a Veterinarian

Erin Small[1], Joanne Jones[2]

[1]Virginia Tech, Farmville, VA. [2]Virginia Tech, Charlotte County, VA.

Abstract
Positive interactions with a veterinarian go beyond just medical treatment—they help to establish an ongoing, trusting relationship that benefits both the pet and the client. Through Fireside Chat with a Veterinarian, community members had the opportunity to ask questions of, hear stories from and interact with local veterinarians in a laid-back brewery setting. Extension agents from multiple localities facilitated discussion at this event. A casual dinner allowed for community members and local farmers to connect, ask each other questions and speak with their local veterinarians in a comfortable setting. This program was a continuation of Fireside Chat with a Farmer and will continue annually as a space for community members to connect with each other and their farming community.

All Things Nebraska

Katelyn Larson[1], David Varner[1], Jamie Kleinsorge[2], Angela Johnson[2], Jason Macionus[2]

[1]University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE. [2]University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Abstract
All Things Nebraska, developed in partnership with the University of Missouri's Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems and modeled after All Things Missouri, is a platform designed to provide real-time, actionable data for individuals and communities across the state. This innovative mapping application and database are developed to meet the needs of residents, municipalities, organizations and educational institutions, including the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) system.

The platform serves as a comprehensive resource, offering thousands of curated data layers and customized reports, alongside valuable, real-time, user-generated data from across Nebraska. By archiving and making this data accessible, All Things Nebraska will empower local decision-makers and organizations to address pressing issues with greater efficiency and accuracy.

Beyond its practical applications for daily decision-making, the platform will also enhance UNL Extension's ability to respond to the state's most critical challenges. With its wide-ranging data and insights, All Things Nebraska will foster collaboration between diverse stakeholders, from government leaders and businesses to community members and industry experts.

This easy-to-use platform will be a vital tool for anyone involved in planning, development or community improvement. Public access to this wealth of information will drive informed decisions, promote local engagement, and strengthen the connections between Nebraska's communities, industry, and academic institutions. All Things Nebraska stands as a one-stop destination for data that will help shape the state's future for years to come.

Building Capacity of Small and Minority Farmers and Landowners about Climate-Smart Alley Cropping

Lila Karki, Dipendra Gurung, Sahil Ojha

University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, MD.

Abstract
Eighty-nine percent of small and minority farmers (SMF), contributing nearly 18% of agricultural production, could sequester significant amounts of carbon and lower greenhouse gas emissions through climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices. Building the capacity of SMF in the CSA nexus can be achieved through training, outreach, peer networking, field education, hands-on demonstrations, farmer coalitions, workshops, marketing and financial support. The CSA practices adopted in five counties in Maryland included alley cropping (AC) of perennial fruit trees, seasonal vegetables/herbs, and cover crops, using minimum tillage, crop diversification, use of compost/farmyard manure, efficient use of water and natural mulch. Farmers were incentivized through the provision of input support, technical services and three anticipated income streams of the practice. The understory crops will generate operational cash flow, while tree crops will increase carbon sequestration and fruit sales. The AC adopted a combination of fruit trees in rows and vegetables in alleys as understory crops. The expected carbon sequestration by apple is 17.44 NPP (gC ha-1/year), walnut 0.35-62.50 MT ha-1, hazelnut 58.5 Mg ha-1 year-1, moringa 1.7 tons C/ha, eggplant 23.13 tons/hectare and pumpkin 910 gm/plant. The CSAF practices will open the opportunity for carbon farming based on a market price of $10 - $40/ton for sequestered carbon. Similarly, reduced tillage and use of cover crops would increase income by up to $9/acre, and land value could increase by up to $4,087/acre, among other ecosystem service benefits.

Forest to Flavor: Managing White Oaks for the Future of Bourbon

Jessica Burns, Josh Winters, Jim Downs

Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, OH.

Abstract
Ohio is home to around 8 million acres of forest land, and 66% of that acreage is in Appalachian Ohio. Many of these Appalachian counties list the timber industry as a large sector of the economy. White oak is a dominant tree species in many of these forests, and the primary buyer of white oak in the region is the cooperage industry. Southern Ohio is home to one bourbon cooperage producing close to 600,000 barrels a year – all from white oak.

Due to this industry, the white oak – a valuable tree economically and environmentally – is being harvested at a high rate. In our forest ecosystems, which are normally dominated by oak and hickory, smaller, younger trees are struggling to become established due to a combination of factors such as poor management, competition and unsustainable harvest techniques. Additionally, management of this ecosystem becomes increasingly difficult when 85% of the forested land is owned by private owners, like families and businesses.

Education of private landowners on sustainable forest management techniques is an essential component of improving our forest ecosystems to sustain the demand and value of our white oaks into the future. The management decisions made today will affect our forests for a lifetime.

To respond to the need for private landowner education, A Day in the Woods has been hosting a woodland owner educational series since 2012. The goal of this program is to educate private woodland owners on sustainable management practices. To date, our programs have hosted 5,902 attendees.

Building Extension Capacity to Work Across Disciplines: Nutrition Security Efforts in West Virginia

Kerry Gabbert[1], Gina Wood[1], Kristin McCartney[1], Nancy O'Hara Tompkins[2], Laura Hill[1]

[1]West Virginia University Extension, Morgantown, WV. [2]West Virginia University School of Public Health, Morgantown, WV.

Abstract
West Virginia residents experience high rates of nutrition insecurity, which results in elevated rates of diet-related chronic disease. Multiple Extension disciplines address aspects of nutrition security, with approaches that address health, hunger and food production and distribution. However, working across Extension program areas (including Community and Economic Resource Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Agriculture and Natural Resources) to improve nutrition security poses challenges. Using the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), we designed a survey to identify barriers and facilitators to implementing nutrition security work, to better understand how to improve Extension's efforts to increase nutrition security in West Virginia. Extension professionals strongly support nutrition security efforts but lack clear, state-wide directives and planning and need more effective ways to report cross-program outcomes and impact.

Day By Day Memory Disco: Supporting Communities with Dementia Care Through Silent Disco Technology

Kathy Tutt[1], Gwynn Stewart[1], Kenneth Stewart[1], Kaylie Glenn[2]

[1]Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. [2]Day by Day Memory Project, Columbus, OH.

Abstract
Alzheimer's disease and related dementias are among the most significant public health challenges of our time, impacting millions of individuals and their care partners. As dementia care grows increasingly demanding, care partner stress and burnout have emerged as critical concerns in communities and memory care facilities. The Memory Disco Program introduces an innovative solution that combines silent disco technology with a structured musical engagement program to address these challenges. This session will explore how Memory Disco enhances resident engagement, reduces care partner stress and fosters meaningful connections. Attendees will learn about the program's methodology, outcomes from recent studies and practical community implementation strategies, as well as how the program supports workforce development, attraction and retention.

Memory Disco is a multi-sensory musical experience specifically designed for the needs of dementia care and consists of two components: silent disco technology and a musical engagement program. A silent disco is an experience where an unlimited number of headphones are connected to one transmitter, allowing each participant to listen to the same music at the same time. The silent disco technology is combined with a musical engagement consisting of 15 activity guides with playlists combining researched strategies for improving mood, cognition and behavior into a single music-based activity.

Memory Disco is a powerful tool in enhancing quality of care in residential settings. It fosters meaningful connections, uplifts moods and improves behaviors underscoring its value for residents and caregivers. The data supports recommending the program and suggests its potential for broader adoption and continued innovation.

Solar Panels for Consumers - A Primer to Educate and Inform

Kyle White

The Ohio State University, Medina, OH.

Abstract
Alternative energy continues to be a topic of interest and solar panels are intriguing as well as intimidating. The presenter received a grant to install solar panels at their office location and to research solar panel impact on energy when located in a region of the country with comparatively low sun exposure. The grant also funded teaching residential consumers basic information about solar panels, solar energy and where to go for research-based answers. Curriculum of the five-class series included how solar panels work, what to expect as far as energy savings, tax benefits, return on investment, disposal, impact of weather and fire on panels and toxic release of chemicals, other energy saving measures, knowing how solar panels impact the integrity of your roof or what they require if ground mounted. This presentation provides the curriculum that was created to teach and inform residential consumers about solar panels. The course was developed and delivered in 2024 and received high praise from the residents who attended.

Community and Economic Development Capacity in the Northeast

Stephen Alessi, Stephan Goetz

NERCRD (Penn State), State College, PA.

Abstract

The 12-state Northeast Region is often believed to have a lower capacity within the Land-Grant University and Extension system for Economic and Community Development programming. One advantage of the Northeast Region over other regions is the diversity in its Extension programs that reflect the region. Our agricultural industry is not heavily based on one commodity, and it grows some of the highest- value nutritious food in the country. We are also one of the most heavily populated regions in the United States within the Northeast Corridor from Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD) wanted to understand better the programming and research capacity within the region that aligned with the priority program areas of NERCRD. The priority programming areas for the NERCRD are Community and Economic Development, Resilience and Innovation, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation, Food Systems, Nutrition Security and Agriculture. This study aims to help identify programming or research gaps within the region, identify personnel within the region that are working in these program areas, and develop cross-discipline teams to work on important issues facing rural communities today.

Agritourism Visitor Regional Connections: Using Mobile Data to Illustrate the Regional Eco to Seasonal on Farm Attractions

DeeDee LeMier

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Abstract

This presentation digs into case study examples of visitor patterns to agritourism operations in Minnesota. As highly seasonal tourism activities, agritourism operations can be overlooked as a contributor to the surrounding region. They are often tucked around a bend and out of sight and may not be connected to traditional economic development organizations. Additionally, agritourism operations may require additional support to navigate ordinances, conditional use permits and other regulations. Mobile data provides an innovative way to bring agritourism activities into larger conversations around economic development and community development.

- **Awards Banquet (Dinner)**
  Wednesday, June 11, 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
  Location: Salon C, D, E

- **Special Entertainment**
  Wednesday, June 11, 8:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
  Location: Salon C, D, E

THURSDAY
June 12

Thursday, June 12, 8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
Session Theme: Technology and Infrastructure
Presentation Type: Three 25-minute Presentations

Transforming Text to Images: Prompt Engineering Principles for Generative AI Use in Extension

Alice Dong[1], Paul Hill[2], Aubree Miller[3]

[1]Colorado State University Extension, Sterling, CO. [2]Utah State University Extension, Hurricane, UT. [3]Utah State University Extension, Saint George, UT.

Abstract
Generative AI (GenAI) systems facilitate the creation of visual images by utilizing extensive datasets to interpret text-based instructions. Effective prompt engineering is essential for optimizing the output of AI-generated images. This article examines various GenAI systems and their functionalities, explores text-to-image prompt engineering principles and their application in Extension work, aiming to enhance the effectiveness of visual content creation with respect to educational materials, data visualization and promotional content. The article also provides guidance and examples to assist Extension professionals in leveraging GenAI for improved communication and engagement. Recommendations include crafting detailed prompts and continuously refining them for desired results, ultimately fostering innovation in Extension work.

Artificial Intelligence Use in Extension: Insights from Ohio and Why Human Work Still Matters

Brian Raison, Sudarshan Adhikari, Thomas W. Blaine

The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Abstract
This study investigated the current use of artificial intelligence (AI) at Ohio State University Extension. Objectives: 1. Identify/analyze how educators, staff and administrators currently use AI; 2. Identify challenges/obstacles to using AI in Extension work; 3. Learn if they felt AI improved efficiency; 4. Differentiate Extension's human work from AI output to respond to funders or partners who may see AI as a means of conducting Extension's work at no apparent cost. Findings indicate personnel were divided on AI's value. Positive arguments for continued human Extension outreach were collected. These findings may provide insight to Extension organizations nationwide.

GNAR Fundamentals: A New Training Resource for Gateway Community Resilience

Jake Powell

Utah State University, Logan, UT.

Abstract
Small towns and cities located near natural amenities such as national parks, other major public lands, destination resorts and scenic rivers often provide the "staging area" from which visitors experience these landscapes. Throughout the United States, many of these communities are being "discovered." As a result, these communities are increasingly transitioning from popular places to visit to popular places to live, work and play. As a result, a growing number of small gateway communities are experiencing complex planning and management challenges. However, unlike urban or suburban communities, these towns and cities confront these challenges with limited resources. Rural community leaders and staff often lack basic planning training and are unfortunately overwhelmed with the many tasks the community is already facing.

This presentation will detail the steps taken by an Extension program called the Gateway and Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative to develop an online Extension training series containing modules specifically tailored to assist gateway communities in understanding the importance and then how to address the following planning challenges: establishing a values-based community vision, asset-based development, meaningful community engagement, and regional collaboration and public lands coordination.

This series was created using a process that tested curriculum, solicited feedback and inquired about community needs through a webinar series rather than stakeholder meetings. The presentation will discuss how that unique process shaped the resultant course content and resources and how it may be an applicable process for other similar extension courses.

Local Sourcing Innovation in Independent and Locally Owned Groceries

Erica Blair, Rial Carver, Jacob Miller-Klugesherz, Samuel Baumer, Clara Misenhelter

Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.

Abstract
Local and regional food systems support community vitality, strengthen local economies and enhance overall wellbeing. While independent and locally owned grocery stores are a crucial part of the food system, many often lack local food offerings. This is a missed opportunity for both grocers and producers: local food offerings can give grocers a competitive edge, while independent grocery stores can serve as stable marketing outlets for producers.

Independent and locally owned grocery stores have great potential to sell more local food, but they face numerous barriers. These include, but are not limited to, labor, supply chain complexities and variable/seasonal sourcing. To address these issues, innovative local sourcing models are needed.

This presentation will explore key findings from a research project focused on identifying such models used by rural and independent grocery stores across the country. Drawing insights from case studies developed by the Rural Grocery Initiative and USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, we will discuss how these innovative models can help independent and locally owned grocers overcome structural challenges, integrate more effectively into local and regional supply chains, and build more resilient, community-centered food systems.

Farmers Markets – Building Sustainable Communities

Ramona Madhosingh-Hector

University of Florida/IFAS Extension, Plant City, FL.

Abstract
Farmers markets provide opportunities for communities to create gathering places, contribute to sense of place, and support action items identified in sustainability and climate action plans. Farmers markets may also contribute to attaining Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal #11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal #12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). In this session, participants will learn how Extension supported a regional farmers market entity to infuse its operations with a sustainability ethic that uses curated sustainability actions that fit the niche locations of markets.

Designing Consumer Driven Retail Strategies for Economic Viability of Local Food Systems

Kristin McCartney[1], Jess Toon[2], Gina Wood[1], Kerry Gabbert[1]

[1]West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. [2]Coalfield Development Corporation, Charleston, WV.

Abstract

In West Virginia, less than 5% of convenience and small box retail stores carry produce, and those stores make up 76% of the food retailers in the state. It is no surprise then that almost half (46%) of West Virginia adults reported eating fruit one time a day or less, and 19% ate vegetables one time a day or less. To better guide the development of retail strategies targeting rural, low-income audiences, in 2024, the West Virginia Family Nutrition Program partnered with the West Virginia Rural Grocer Program to increase capacity of rural, local grocers by collecting consumer preferences, accessibility, demographics and food insecurity as part of the enrollment process for the West Virginia Family Nutrition program's Kids Market @ the Store intervention and providing expanded opportunities for equipment loans and technical assistance. The top three items respondents were looking for in a store were that it offered fresh produce, offered fresh meat dairy and eggs and that it was a regular grocery store vs. convenience store; however, it was not important that the store be a national chain. A total of 19 stores participated in technical assistance and received cold storage because of the partnership. Health can be leveraged to fund the development of local food infrastructure. Partnerships between Extension, farmers and nonprofits can facilitate data-driven strategies that will allow for creation of a local food system that is consumer-driven, economically sound and effective at expanding access to healthy foods and education.

Reducing Infant Mortality in At-Risk Populations: A Community- Centered Approach

Camica Sanderson

Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS.

Abstract

Infant mortality remains a considerable public health concern in the United States, with disparities affecting at-risk populations. The goal of this project is to address this issue, using data from the Kids Count and Centers for Disease Control datasets to analyze the trends and causes of infant mortality. The project proposes a community-based health education program to empower participants to improve maternal and infant health outcomes. The objective of this session is to guide participants in identifying local health needs, developing culturally appropriate educational materials and implementing programs to address key issues such as prenatal care, nutrition, breastfeeding and safe sleep practices. Additionally, participants will learn how to assess the effectiveness of these programs once implemented and ensure program sustainability through local partnerships. This session will equip attendees with the knowledge and tools necessary to create impactful, long-lasting health education initiatives that can reduce infant mortality within their communities.

Building Bridges: Linking Public Health to Community Development

Marisa Hawkins

Alabama Extension at Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL.

Abstract

In this session, Extension professionals will learn about the connection between social determinants of health (SDOH) and community development in Extension programs. SDOH encompasses many factors relevant to Extension's community development initiatives, including economic stability, education, social and community context, health care access, and neighborhood environment. Extension programs, often rooted in community engagement, aim to empower individuals and communities by addressing these determinants to improve and enhance economic well-being.

Exploring Adaptive Approaches to Emergency Preparedness Programming

Michelle Eley[1], Kimberly Davis[2], Kittrane Sanders[3]

[1]North Carolina A&T State University, Cooperative Extension, Greensboro, NC. [2]Cooperative Extension Program, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL. [3]Harnett County Center, Lillington, NC.

Abstract
With the increasing frequency and intensity of natural and man-made disasters, we have seen how individuals and communities are often overwhelmed and lack effective preparedness when proactive steps are not taken before anticipated disaster events. In Extension, disaster education has been one of the practical approaches to preparing communities and helping individuals make personal decisions on how they can reduce the impacts of such events. This session will highlight the non-formal education being conducted by Extension educators to reach a broader population while strengthening institutional capacity to work in an interdisciplinary manner in providing adaptive disaster educational programs to their variety of clientele. The session will highlight program activities and what constitutes community readiness, as well as discuss creative ways to enhance the sharing of resources across institutional lines.

CONCURRENT SESSION 5D
Thursday, June 12, 8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
Session Theme: Tourism and Development
Presentation Type: Workshop

Rural Tourism Growth in the New River Gorge Region: Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons Learned for Destination Management in Small Communities

Lauren Weatherford[1], Lisa Strader[2], Becky Sullivan[3], Tabitha Stover[4], Doug Arbogast[5], Ami Cook[1], Daniel Eades[5], Tracy McCoy[6]

[1]West Virginia University, Fayetteville, WV. [2]Visit Southern West Virginia, Beckley, WV. [3]New River Gorge CVB, Fayetteville, WV. [4]Visit Fayetteville, Fayetteville, WV. [5]West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. [6]Summersville CVB, Summersville, WV.

Abstract
The increase of tourism visitation to West Virginia's New River Gorge region is a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the area's recent designation as a national park, which has brought significant opportunities and challenges for the surrounding communities. This presentation will bring together destination management research outcomes for rural environments from West Virginia University Extension with the experiences of local Convention and Visitor Bureau directors and community stakeholders. This session will include a review of the research, educational interventions conducted by West Virginia University faculty, future initiatives and interactive discussion.

CONCURRENT SESSION 5E

Thursday, June 12, 8:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
Session Theme: Technology and Infrastructure
Presentation Type: Workshop

From Access to Impact: Implementing Educational Programming for E-Commerce Remote Work and Digital Skills

Kathryn Leach[1], Paul Hill[2], Dominic Bria[3], Amanda Ali[3], Abbey Bean[2], Courtney Howard[4], Mary Komenas[5], Roseanne Scammahorn[6], Kenneth Sherin[7], Getachew Ferede[8], Isaias Tesfalidet[8], Melissa Cook[9]

[1]University of Idaho, Boise, ID. [2]Utah State University, St. George, UT. [3]Utah State University, Logan, UT. [4]Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, GA. [5]Purdue University, LaPorte, IN. [6]Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS. [7]North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC. [8]University of Maryland, College Park, MD. [9]University of Wyoming, Basin, Wyoming.

Abstract

Join this roundtable to hear from Extension educators who are narrowing the digital divide through digital navigator, remote work and e-commerce programs. Discover models implemented by Fort Valley State University, North Carolina State University, Purdue University, the Southern Rural Development Center, the University of Idaho, the University of Maryland and Utah State University, as well as the outcomes they have achieved. Engage with a mobile lab to explore free digital tools, identify ways to incorporate digital skills training into ongoing Extension offerings, and develop strategies for launching digital equity initiatives tailored to local needs. Participants will also craft action plans for sustaining this work, connect with a broader national community of practice for continued support and growth, and determine next steps to become part of this effort. By the workshop's conclusion, attendees will be equipped with the resources, partnerships and confidence to integrate digital skills development into community advancement activities.

Entrepreneurship in Extension: Exploring the Programs and Research Being Done by Extension Staff Related to Entrepreneurship Across the Country

Neil Linscheid[1], Shawn Kaskie[2], Maggie Cornelius[3], Mary Emery[2], Andy Northrop[4], Lisa Taylor[3], Kyle White[5], Jason Entsminger[6], Daniel Eades[7]

[1]University of Minnesota Extension, Saint Paul, MN. [2]University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension, Lincoln, NE. [3]University of Wisconsin– Madison Division of Extension, Madison, WI. [4]Michigan State University Extension, East Lansing, MI. [5]The Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, OH. [6]University of Maine Cooperative Extension & Maine Business School, Orono, ME. [7]West Virginia University Extension Service, Morgantown, WV.

Abstract

Entrepreneurship programming within Cooperative Extension systems takes varied approaches and emphases. Some programs focus on direct interventions with firms and prospective entrepreneurs, while others build interventions for communities and their leaders. Some programs address the unique needs of historically underserved populations and communities, while others are broad-based programs or shift based on participant groups. These Extension programs include outreach education, research and integrated approaches. The conceptual understanding of entrepreneurialism within these programs also varies, as do the means of evaluating program outcomes and impacts. Given this heterogeneity of approaches across the nation's Cooperative Extension systems, building a community of practice where program approaches and best practices can be shared holds promise for improving coordination, sharing evaluative tools, filling capacity gaps through collaborative multi-state implementation, and fostering connections with groups beyond the Extension system working on rural entrepreneurship issues. This proposed workshop convenes interested parties to kickstart new exchanges around these entrepreneurship programming goals.

This interactive NACDEP workshop will bring together Extension professionals focused on entrepreneurship programming. Building on the initial idea of sharing entrepreneurship-related activities (10–15 minutes per institution) and fostering collaborative discussions, we will adopt a participatory "walk about" method. Beyond just the organizers, attendees will have opportunities to showcase their work, learn from others, and engage in meaningful two-way conversations rather than relying on traditional PowerPoint presentations. To ensure a more focused dialogue, we will clarify our definition of entrepreneurship, distinguishing it from related concepts such as small business and innovation.

- **NACDEP Board Meeting**
  Thursday, June 12, 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

- **Post-Conference Workshop**
  Thursday, June 12, Noon – 2:30 p.m
  Session Theme: Economic Development
  Presentation Type: Long-form Workshop

MOBILE LEARNING WORKSHOPS
Wednesday, June 11, 12:30 – 5:00 p.m.
Location: Meet in Embassy Suites lobby

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Elk River Railway Bikes – A Ride Through Economic Revitalization

Join us for an unforgettable adventure on the **Elk River Railway Bikes**, where outdoor recreation meets economic revitalization. This two-hour excursion will take you on a scenic rail biking journey along the historic Elk River, highlighting how tourism and outdoor industries are driving economic growth in West Virginia.

As you pedal along the tracks, local experts will share insights into the region's economic transformation, the impact of heritage tourism, and efforts to repurpose historic rail lines for sustainable business opportunities. Whether you're a community developer, outdoor enthusiast, or economic strategist, this experience will provide valuable takeaways on leveraging natural assets for local growth.

This event takes place **rain or shine** – *please dress accordingly.*

Location: Elk River Rail Riders, 19 Ivy Lane, Clay, WV 25043
Departure Time: 12:15 p.m.
Arrival Time: 1:30 p.m.
Participants: 36 participants

Exploring Charleston's Rich Heritage

Step back in time with this immersive historical workshop, featuring three iconic Charleston landmarks that tell the story of resilience, innovation, and legacy. With **two workshops running simultaneously**, this **two-hour experience** provides an in-depth look at Charleston's past while showcasing how history continues to shape the region's future. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. This engaging workshop includes visits to the following sites:

- **J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works** – Discover the fascinating history of salt production in West Virginia and how this family-run business continues a centuries-old tradition with a sustainable, modern approach. Location: 4797 Midland Drive, Charleston, WV 25306
- **Booker T. Washington Historical Site** – Learn about the early life and impact of Booker T. Washington, one of the most influential African American leaders in history, and his journey from humble beginnings to national prominence. Location: 4203 Malden Drive, Charleston, WV 25306
- **Spring Hill Cemetery** – Explore the resting place of notable historical figures and uncover the stories that shaped Charleston's cultural and economic landscape. Location: 1555 Farnsworth Drive, Charleston, WV 25301

Location: 1555 Farnsworth Drive, Charleston, WV 25301
Departure Time: 12:30 p.m.
Arrival Time: 1:00 p.m.
Participants: 30 participants (2 groups of 15 running simultaneously)

Discover the Heart of West Virginia

Immerse yourself in West Virginia's rich cultural and political heritage with an exclusive guided tour of the Capitol Complex and Culture Center. With **three tours running at staggered times**, participants will have an intimate and engaging experience while gaining a deeper appreciation of the state's history and heritage. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. This workshop offers a behind-the-scenes look at two of the state's most significant landmarks:

- **West Virginia State Capitol** – Explore the grandeur of the gold-domed Capitol, the heart of the state's government. Learn about its stunning architecture, history, and the legislative process that shapes West Virginia's future.
- **West Virginia Culture Center** – Discover the state's artistic, historical, and musical legacy through captivating exhibits, rare artifacts, and stories that celebrate West Virginia's diverse cultural identity.

Location: West Virginia State Capitol Complex and Culture Center, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East, Charleston, WV 25305
Departure Time: 12:30 p.m.
Arrival Times (drop off and pick up): 3 staggered groups
- Group 1: 1:00-2:30 p.m.
- Group 2: 1:30-3:00 p.m.
- Group 3: 2:00-3:30 p.m.
Participants: 90 participants (3 groups of 30)

Community Vitality Workshop: Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Public Art

Explore the dynamic intersections of entrepreneurship, community development, and public art in this engaging Community Vitality Workshop. This three-stop workshop highlights local efforts to foster economic growth, food access, and cultural vibrancy in Charleston. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. This workshop includes stops at the following locations.

- **West Virginia State University Economic Development Center (WVSU EDC)** – Discover how this hub supports small businesses, startups, and community innovation through mentorship, training, and resource development. Location: 1506 Kanawha Boulevard West, Charleston, WV 25312
- **Miss Ruby's Corner Market** – Visit this beloved neighborhood market, a model for sustainable food access and local entrepreneurship, offering fresh produce and artisanal goods while supporting community wellness.
- **Elk City Murals** – Experience Charleston's thriving arts scene with a guided walking tour through Elk City's vibrant murals, showcasing the power of public art in revitalizing communities and preserving cultural identity.

Departure Time: 12:30 p.m.
Arrival Time: 1:00 p.m.
Participants: 15 participants

Charleston Downtown Walking Workshop

Welcome to Charleston! Delve into the fascinating history, present, and promising future of Charleston and its downtown area on this workshop. This district is overflowing in history, architecture and art. Guests will learn the best highlights. Discover the ongoing community and economic developments shaping the city's future, driven by visionary city leaders and local partners. The workshop concludes in the bustling heart of downtown. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. The workshop will be split into two groups with two tours and a final gathering.

Departure and Arrival Times: Group 1 – 12:45-1:00 p.m. | Group 2: 2:45-3:00 p.m.
Participants: 23 participants per group

See you in Wichita, Kansas,
for NACDEP 2026!

June 15-18, 2026
Drury Plaza Hotel Wichita