Assessing Rural and Urban Community Assets and Needs to Inform Extension Program Planning

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A needs assessment is a useful tool for prioritizing community needs and allocating resources. Prioritizing community needs helps ensure Extension programs are relevant and targeted towards specific audiences. This study prioritized normative needs of urban and rural Utah residents using a needs assessment framework. Convenience data were gathered from 1,043 adult Utah residents, and the raking method was used to weigh the sample by selected population characteristics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and nonparametric statistics) were used for data analysis. A calculated Point-Score represented the difference between residents' perceived importance and satisfaction of various community assets. Results showed affordable housing, affordable medical clinics, well-paying jobs, quality public schools, and affordable internet were the top five needs in urban areas. Utah rural residents ranked well-paying jobs, quality public schools, steady jobs, emergency healthcare, and affordable housing as high priority needs in their communities. Utah State University Extension should tailor existing programs to address urban and rural community needs, allocate resources to create new programs aligned to those needs, facilitate collaborations with local organizations, and conduct timely needs assessments to monitor changing community needs.

Keywords: Extension, needs assessment, normative need, rural, urban, relevance, impact

Introduction and Literature Review

The overarching role of Cooperative Extension (Extension) is to extend university-generated and evidence-based research to the public (Rasmussen, 1989). This remains a core mission of land-grant universities in the U.S. Webster and Ingram (2007) indicated traditional Extension programming was geared towards meeting the needs of rural populations. However, reflecting on Extension's Centennial, Henning et al. (2014) discussed the need for Extension to be responsive to demographic and societal changes. Henning et al. indicated Extension should adapt its programming to serve *all* audiences to remain relevant and competitive. Extension can be expected to meet the needs of a diverse clientele by adjusting its educational methodologies, programming focus, and program delivery methods to appeal to different target audiences.

Utah State University (USU) Extension focuses on five major programming areas defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These areas are (a) global food security and hunger, (b) climate change and natural resource use, (c) sustainable energy, (d) food safety, and (e) childhood obesity, nutrition, and community. Extension programs vary considerably in scope, complexity, audience, educational activities, and desired outcomes and impact. While a livestock management program in global food security and hunger can focus on improving livestock health, a program in childhood obesity can target healthy eating habits in low-income communities. Given the diversity of program areas, USU Extension aims to meet the needs of all audiences.

With a broad range of programming, Extension has demonstrated its ability and flexibility to respond to needs of different audiences. For example, the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) of Extension is a nationwide collaborative effort focused on emergency management programming for audiences affected by natural disasters. Meanwhile, the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) was formed in 2013 to strengthen responsive programming that meets the needs of clientele in metropolitan areas. Another example is the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) which operates through Extension and provides nutrition education programs to low-income families. Such examples demonstrate the value of Extension services to different audiences. However, it presents an ongoing challenge – how can Extension address the urgent needs of diverse audiences with limited financial and human resources?

With complex program planning models and diverse clientele, Extension professionals commonly differentiate between the needs of urban and rural communities when tailoring programs (Fox et al., 2017; Webster & Ingram, 2007). The changing demographics and recognized differences between urban and rural clientele led to the creation of National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL). In 2015, NUEL presented a National Framework for Urban Extension to the Extension Committee on Organizational Policy (ECOP). This report outlined the need for Extension to be responsive to changing audiences and the potential value of urban Extension programming; urban Extension is now a high priority for ECOP (Fox et al., 2017). As a result, Extension in several states developed strategic plans specifically to serve urban clientele. For example, Harder et al. (2019) outlined organizational priorities for the University of Florida's Extension to serve audiences in urban areas. Strategic actions taken by Extension signaled the importance of meeting the needs of both urban and rural audiences. However, Fox et al. (2017) noted metropolitan areas are unique due to the diversity in cultures, beliefs, and norms of those populations. In serving urban audiences, Ruemenapp (2017) indicated Extension must understand priority issues in urban areas to create impactful programs.

Boone et al. (2002) argued that program planning in Extension is complex given such variety in programming. Extension uses several program-development models to guide program planning (Franz et al., 2015). As discussed by Franz et al. (2015), Boyle (1981) developed a 15-step program planning development model, Caffarella and Ratcliff Daffron (2013) introduced a

nonlinear planning model with ten interdependent concepts, and Conklin (1997) illustrated a model with three distinct components, each comprised of multiple subcomponents. Regardless of complexity, most program planning and development models appear to converge and agree on the importance of conducting needs assessments.

With new survey technology platforms becoming more accessible and affordable, Extension adapted elements of different program planning models. One such adaptation focused on the strategic application of needs assessments; Boyle (1981) argued a needs assessment was the first step of the program planning process. This adaptation allowed Extension to readily improve participatory program planning through stakeholder involvement in the needs assessment process (Garst & McCawley, 2015). For example, with better survey platforms, improved questionnaire designs can capture rigorous data on stakeholder and clientele issues (Garst & McCawley, 2015). Franz (2013) also recognized the potential of improved participatory research methods such as focus groups to encourage community engagement. Increasing stakeholder input helps secure support and acceptance for community development programs and continued funding for Extension services (Garst & McCawley, 2015).

A needs assessment involves a set of procedures that informs program planning and resource allocation based on identified needs (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). This is an important step in program planning activities because it helps to prioritize resources. According to Altschuld and Watkins (2014), once needs are identified, "there are limited resources for improvement, so priorities must be set" (p. 6). As reflected in this statement, a needs assessment in Extension is valuable because it provides administrators with much-needed insights to strategically prioritize and meet the critical needs of diverse clientele, even with limited resources. Therefore, it was essential for USU Extension to incorporate needs assessments as a part of their program planning process to address critical issues facing a diverse and changing clientele.

Extension must provide relevant programming to fulfill the land-grant mission of improving the lives of people (Rasmussen, 1989). Thus, maintaining relevance is a critical priority for USU Extension; how useful are research-based Extension programs if it fails to provide practical and timely information for its intended audience? One way of maintaining program relevance is through continuous interactions with and feedback from target audiences. For instance, USU Extension recently developed educational programs addressing the opioid epidemic and rural unemployment for communities based on participatory community forums with stakeholders. Extension should remain responsive and adaptive to a changing landscape and ensure resources are set around high-priority community issues (Cummings & Silliman, 2019; Gagnon et al., 2015; Garst & McCawley, 2015; Harder et al., 2009).

Extension successfully led the U.S. agricultural revolution when leaders worried the food supply would eventually fail to match urban demands (Garst & McCawley, 2015). This achievement highlighted Extension's unique position to develop relevant programs and services for rural and

urban communities. It is important for Extension to communicate the public value of its impacts to citizens and stakeholders. With public support, Extension programs can generate profound public trust and community-supported relationships (Gagnon et al., 2015). However, perceived programming impact and value depend on Extension's ability to assess, monitor, and focus on persistent and emerging needs of target audiences. Therefore, this study assessed the needs of urban and rural Utah residents to inform resource allocation and programming at USU Extension.

Theoretical Framework

Extension programs exist to address societal problems (Henning et al., 2014; Rasmussen, 1989). With limited resources, Extension must prioritize its efforts to target urgent needs of its clientele. USU Extension should effectively allocate resources to respond to persisting and emerging social, environmental, and economic problems facing Utah. A comprehensive and valid needs assessment is an appropriate method to guide the allocation of resources to address critical issues of a given audience (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

By definition, a needs assessment is "a systematic set of priorities undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p. 4). Within this context, a need is defined as the difference between an existing and desired state; it represents the gap between "what is" and "what should be" (Boyle, 1981; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). Similarly, Kaufman (1988) stated a need is a discrepancy between desired and actual results. Boyle (1981) described a normative need as value judgments of primary users (i.e., Extension clientele), bounded by resources of a system (e.g., Extension). Thus, by focusing on normative needs, the primary purpose of the needs assessment is to inform measures for system improvement based on clientele's perceptions of current and desired societal conditions.

Lewin's (1939) field theory of motivation provides an indication of the consequence of a need within a system. The theory states a system is naturally in equilibrium. However, tension within the system results in a deviation from the natural state; Lewin notes tension is the cause of disequilibrium within a system. Similarly, Weiner (1971) stated disequilibrium is reflected by a state of unpleasantness (i.e., dissatisfaction). As a result, there is a strong tendency to restore balance by addressing the need or tension. A movement away from equilibrium due to tension motivates actions by individuals within the system (Burnes & Cooke, 2012; Wheeler, 2008). Therefore, individuals within the system seek the cause of disequilibrium, express it as a need or gap, then seek solutions to close the gap. Steps taken to address an identified need will restore system equilibrium. Hence, a needs assessment allows shared involvement in the identification and prioritization of normative needs of an audience while providing suitable measures for addressing those needs (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). A needs assessment guided this research in understanding the high priority needs of clientele to inform resource allocation in USU Extension program planning.

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) identified three levels of needs in a system. Needs exist for the (a) primary user, (b) service provider, and (c) system resources. The three levels are interdependent; system resources affect the capacity of the service provider to serve the primary user. Within the context of this study, system resources refer to the greater Extension system, USU Extension is the service provider, and residents of Utah are the primary users. A needs assessment (NA) focused on the primary user examines "those for whom the system ultimately exists; they are at the heart of the NA process" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p. 11). The primary users of USU Extension are clientele. Therefore, this study assessed the normative needs of Extension clients in Utah. The present situation or current condition is the current use of resources for Extension programming, while the desired situation is optimally allocating resource programming that meets high priority needs of target audiences. Results of this study are geared towards assessing the high priority needs of Utah residents to inform the efficient allocation of Extension resources.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the normative needs of residents in Utah. As pointed out in the literature, Extension aims to respond to the needs of a diverse clientele in both rural and urban areas (Fox et al., 2017; Harder et al., 2019; Ruemenapp, 2017; Webster & Ingram, 2007). Therefore, the objectives were to (a) assess normative needs of residents in urban Utah counties and (b) assess normative needs of residents in rural Utah. The results are intended to inform Extension program planning and provide a rationale for resource allocation in Extension.

Methodology

This study followed a correlational design (Ary et al., 2014) and gathered primary data from residents of Utah. The target population was the adult residents of Utah. Data were collected through a convenience sampling technique, and the final sample size was 1,043 respondents ($n = 1,043$). The raking, or iterative proportional fitting, method was used to weigh the sample data to reflect the target population characteristics (Cohen, 2011; Lamm & Lamm, 2019). Cohen (2011) indicated the iterative proportional fitting method is a stratification procedure post-data collection to correct for sample weights, so sample characteristics add up to known population parameters. In this study, sample data were weighted based on age, sex, and county population size according to the 2018 census data for Utah (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). As a result, sample characteristics were identical to population parameters with respect to age, sex, and county of residence. Data were collected using an online survey company, Qualtrics®. After the study was deemed exempt by USU Institutional Review Board, Qualtrics® was hired to recruit participants of the target population using their existing research opt-in panels (Warner et al., 2017). A closed-ended questionnaire was used to gather data in June 2019.

Urban and rural county designations were determined by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy [FORHP] (2016). FORHP developed Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes (RUCAs) to assign rural and urban counties based on population density. For example, a county with RUCA

codes two or three has at least 400 square miles and a population density of approximately 35 people (FORHP, 2016). The sample proportion of rural to urban respondents was consistent with the FORHP designations in Utah; there were 915 respondents from urban counties (88%) and 128 from rural counties (12%). The urban to rural ratio of the sample is also somewhat consistent with U.S. Census Bureau Population and Housing Unit Counts of 2010, which designated 91% of the Utah population as urban and 9% as rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

An expert panel provided detailed feedback on the questionnaire design. The panel consisted of three Extension program directors, two Extension specialists, and the Associate Vice President for Extension at USU Extension. The expert panel had combined experience in Extension administration, nonformal education, program evaluation, agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and youth programming. The final 30-item list of community assets and services in the researcher-made questionnaire was selected after an extensive literature review and expert panel input. First, secondary data from governmental and nongovernmental organizations, such as the Utah Department of Health, Utah Foundation, and Utah Community Action, were reviewed to develop an exhaustive list of community services and localized issues across Utah. Additional items were then adapted from needs assessments conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and North Carolina State University Extension. Finally, the list was reviewed by the expert panel and reduced to 30 items. The final 30-item list was also reviewed by the panel for content validity. Questionnaire development followed Dillman et al.'s (2014) discussion on the basics of crafting effective questions and constructing close-ended questions. A pilot test was conducted with 50 participants of the target population. Questionnaire revisions included minor rewording of statements, the addition of two new items, and minor changes to response options.

Data were analyzed using descriptive frequencies and nonparametric statistics. Respondents were provided the 30-item list of community assets, services, and issues and asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, their perception of the importance of the asset (i.e., perceived importance) and their satisfaction with the current state of the asset (i.e., perceived satisfaction). Since ordinal data were gathered on perceived importance and satisfaction, original data were reduced to standardized scores, referred to as a Point-Score (PS), that ranged from 0 – 1. The PS represents a modified index of the net difference between items within subsections of the assessment (Lieberson, 1976). The PS was calculated using the frequency distribution of responses to each item instead of means, and as a result, does not rely on any parametric assumptions. Therefore, the PS allowed a direct comparison and ranking across community assets examined. The standardized PS was interpreted as 0 – 0.20: *Not Important or Very Dissatisfied,* 0.21 – 0.40: *Of Little Importance or Dissatisfied,* 0.41 – 0.60: *Moderately Important or Moderately Satisfied,* 0.61 – 0.80: *Important or Satisfied,* 0.81 – 1.00: *Very Important or Very Satisfied*.

This study focused on residents' perceptions of the importance of community assets and their level of satisfaction towards the current state of these assets in urban and rural counties, respectively. The difference between an individual's perceived importance and satisfaction

towards a community asset represents a normative need. If an individual believes a community asset is very important, and he/she is satisfied with the state of that asset in their community, then there is no need to improve the state of the asset. In contrast, if a resident believes the asset is very important, and he/she is dissatisfied with the current state of the asset, then there is a need to improve the state or condition of the asset. Ideally, residents' perceptions towards the importance of a community asset should match their satisfaction with the asset; this represents a state of equilibrium as described in Lewin's (1939) field theory of motivation. Therefore, perception of the asset's importance is a proxy indicator for the "desired" condition (i.e., "what should be"). Residents' satisfaction with the asset is a proxy indicator for the "current" state of the asset (i.e., "what is"). Table 1 demonstrates the conditions necessary for a normative need.

Table 1. Matrix Describing a Normative Need

Community Asset	Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Not Important	Need does not exist	Need does not exist
Important	**Need exist**	Need does not exist

The matrix in Table 1 shows the combination of perceived importance and satisfaction that results in a normative need within a community. The priority of a need is determined by the quantitative gap between perceived satisfaction and perceived importance (i.e., satisfaction – importance). That is, the gap between the current and desired state, or gap between "what is" and "what should be." A wide negative gap between the current and desired state indicates a high priority need, a narrow negative gap indicates a less urgent need, and a positive gap suggests a need does not exist. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to estimate the difference or gap between perceived importance and satisfaction for each item assessed in the survey. This test is a nonparametric alternative to the paired *t*-test and is used to compare two related samples with repeated measurements (e.g., pre-test and post-test scores). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was preferred to the paired *t*-test since all items were measured on an ordinal five-point Likert-type scale and were not ratio or scale variables. The Wilcoxon test statistic (z) was used as an indicator for the magnitude of the difference or gap between the current and desired state. Therefore, a negative z-statistic indicates a need exists for the respective item; an item with a lower negative z-statistic is of greater priority compared to other items, and those with a positive z-statistic were not described as a need.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the final questionnaire consisted of 30 pre-defined community assets and services; an optional open-ended question was not included for respondents to describe additional concerns. Therefore, it is unlikely this study assessed all needs of residents in Utah. Second, while the raking method was used to weight the sample data based on population parameters, the data was gathered using a convenience sampling approach. As such, this study does not claim to provide irrefutable and generalizable findings; results are intended to add to the decision-making process in Extension resource allocations. Lastly, Utah demographics are rapidly changing, and as a result, urban and rural issues are not static; this study only presents a snapshot of community needs in 2019.

Results and Discussion

With respect to objective (a), Table 2 shows the normative needs of residents in urban Utah counties, ranked from most urgent to least urgent based on the *z*-statistic of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The top five needs in urban counties were affordable housing options, affordable medical clinics, well-paying jobs, quality public schools, and affordable internet connection. While residents indicated affordable housing options were very important, they were dissatisfied with the state of this issue. In addition, though residents of urban counties indicated affordable medical clinics, well-paying jobs, quality public schools, and affordable internet connection were all very important, they were moderately satisfied with the current state of these services. Emergency healthcare facilities, affordable food options, and steady jobs were also very important to residents of urban counties and assessed as high-priority needs. While there were distinct differences between perceived importance and satisfaction for the top ten needs, there was room for improvement in most areas, as shown in Table 2.

The list of needs in Table 2 presents a wide range of opportunities for impactful Extension programming. USU Extension can demonstrate impact by creating programs to close the hypothetical gap between perceived importance and perceived satisfaction (i.e., current and desired states). For example, a program on home mortgages for first-time homeowners can be connected to the issue of affordable housing options, which was ranked as the most urgent need in urban areas. Another program on health savings accounts and health insurance is related to affordable medical clinics. It is critical for Extension programs to connect to a societal need; to have an impactful program suggests it closes the gap between "what is" and "what should be" with respect to societal conditions (Boyle, 1981).

Table 2. Community Assets in Urban Counties (n = 915)

Rank by Priority	Community Asset/Service/Issue	Point-Score (PS)		[Need]
		Importance	*Satisfaction*	*z*
1	Affordable housing options	0.83	0.39	-24.59
2	Affordable medical clinics	0.86	0.48	-24.38
3	Well-paying jobs	0.85	0.50	-23.65
4	Quality public schools	0.85	0.54	-23.17
5	Affordable internet connection	0.81	0.53	-20.80
6	Emergency healthcare facilities	0.86	0.62	-20.49
7	Affordable food options	0.82	0.57	-20.27
8	Community shelters for domestic violence	0.77	0.53	-19.52
9	Community services for mental health	0.76	0.50	-19.07
10	Steady jobs	0.82	0.61	-18.37
11	Community shelters for natural disasters	0.70	0.51	-15.87
12	Community services for alcohol or drug abuse treatment	0.70	0.54	-13.16
13	Healthy food options	0.76	0.65	-11.54
14	School lunch programs	0.70	0.58	-10.23
15	Family counselling services	0.67	0.56	-9.55
16	Individual counselling services	0.67	0.56	-9.04

Rank by Priority	Community Asset/Service/Issue	Point-Score (PS)		[Need]
		Importance	*Satisfaction*	*z*
17	Employment opportunities for youth	0.67	0.56	-8.69
18	Home financial planning services	0.61	0.52	-7.05
19	Affordable clothing stores	0.68	0.60	-6.30
20	Public parks	0.76	0.71	-5.28
21	Vocational skills programs	0.60	0.58	-2.16
22	Senior living communities	0.63	0.59	-2.00
23	Senior citizen centers	0.61	0.59	-1.02
24	Community gardens	0.56	0.53	-0.87
25	Reliable public transportation	0.62	0.60	-0.67
26	Public libraries	0.72	0.73	1.22
27	High-quality childcare facilities	0.50	0.56	2.75
28	Organized activities for adults	0.53	0.53	3.11
29	Grocery stores accepting food stamps	0.57	0.63	4.18
30	Community meeting spaces (e.g., townhalls)	0.51	0.60	10.24

For objective (b), Table 3 shows the community needs of residents in rural counties. The top five needs of rural residents were well-paying jobs, quality public schools, steady jobs, emergency healthcare facilities, and affordable housing options. Residents indicated well-paying jobs and affordable housing options were very important; however, they were dissatisfied with these services. Similarly, residents perceived quality public schools, steady jobs, and emergency healthcare facilities were very important, but they were moderately satisfied with the current state of these issues. Affordable medical clinics, food options, and internet connections were also very important to residents of rural counties and were assessed as high-priority needs.

The negative *z*-statistic across many items shows a need to address almost all items listed in Table 3. USU Extension programs can target any need specified in Table 3. Impactful programs can focus on creating jobs for rural residents, providing professional development training for K-12 teachers, afterschool activities for students, or conducting workshops on individual and family financial management.

Table 3. Community Assets in Rural Counties (n = 128)

Rank by Priority	Community Asset/Service/Issue	Point-Score (PS)		[Need]
		Importance	*Satisfaction*	*Z*
1	Well-paying jobs	0.86	0.38	-9.14
2	Quality public schools	0.87	0.51	-8.47
3	Steady jobs	0.83	0.44	-8.31
4	Emergency healthcare facilities	0.88	0.55	-8.15
5	Affordable housing options	0.80	0.40	-8.02
6	Affordable medical clinics	0.86	0.45	-7.29
7	Affordable food options	0.84	0.52	-7.10
8	Affordable internet connection	0.84	0.50	-6.18
9	Employment opportunities for youth	0.72	0.43	-5.87
10	Healthy food options	0.78	0.55	-5.53
11	Community shelters for domestic violence	0.74	0.47	-5.44
12	Community services for mental health	0.73	0.48	-5.20

Rank by Priority	Community Asset/Service/Issue	Point-Score (PS)		[Need] Z
		Importance	*Satisfaction*	
13	Community shelters for natural disasters	0.63	0.48	-4.93
14	Community services for alcohol or drug abuse treatment	0.69	0.47	-4.68
15	Affordable clothing stores	0.70	0.45	-4.62
16	School lunch programs	0.70	0.59	-2.67
17	Family counselling services	0.64	0.51	-2.61
18	Senior living communities	0.63	0.54	-2.24
19	Individual counselling services	0.64	0.52	-2.19
20	Home financial planning services	0.61	0.52	-2.12
21	Reliable public transportation	0.59	0.46	-1.76
22	Senior citizen centers	0.60	0.59	-1.39
23	Public parks	0.73	0.66	-1.14
24	Vocational skills programs	0.59	0.57	-0.66
25	Organized activities for adults	0.52	0.46	-0.66
26	High-quality childcare facilities	0.54	0.49	-0.40
27	Public libraries	0.75	0.69	-0.23
28	Community gardens	0.48	0.47	-0.11
29	Grocery stores accepting food stamps	0.60	0.64	0.95
30	Community meeting spaces (e.g., townhalls)	0.53	0.64	3.51

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This study sought to assess and describe community needs in Utah. The findings provided evidence on gaps in social, economic, and environmental conditions of rural and urban communities. The study categorically defined a need as the gap between current and desired conditions (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). This study quantitatively measured both conditions as a basis for identifying the normative needs of urban and rural residents. Identified needs demonstrate various societal issues exist, some of which may be considered beyond the scope of Extension programming in Utah. However, it presents opportunities for USU Extension to partner with community and grassroots organizations to tackle emerging and persisting problems affecting communities. Such organizations can include local community groups or social development nongovernmental organizations. These collaborations are especially important when dealing with complex issues that require multi-tiered programming efforts. Collaborations can also keep Extension professionals up to date on critical issues affecting rural and urban communities, and even vulnerable populations. This is one way for Extension to remain relevant by adapting programming to serve diverse audiences, as emphasized by Henning et al. (2014). Overall, results allow USU Extension to understand critical community needs and allocate resources to address those needs of Utah residents.

Results indicated affordable housing options, affordable medical clinics, well-paying jobs, quality public schools, and affordable internet connection were the top five needs of urban counties. While this may appear outside the scope of Extension at first, these needs fall into the USU Extension programming area of childhood obesity, nutrition, and community. Furthermore,

there are several current examples of Extension efforts that align with these urban needs. USU Extension provides a statewide online course on personal financial management. The course provides participants with the knowledge and skills to budget, save, and create long-term financial goals. It also addresses credit scores, loans, and planning for emergency situations. Given the top needs of urban residents, such a program can be tailored to cover additional topics such as mortgages and health savings plans to address affordable housing options and medical clinics.

Another example of a relevant program for urban audiences is found in the USU Extension 4-H program. The 4-H program works with schools throughout the state to deliver afterschool programs and organize extracurricular events. This 4-H initiative can be tailored to help improve the overall quality of public schools. Here, Extension professionals can work closely with parents and school educators in urban communities to determine steps for quality improvement of afterschool events. One example is for schools to integrate problem-solving and STEM skills into 4-H extracurricular activities to support positive youth development. These examples demonstrate the creativity and possibilities for Extension professionals to adapt existing programs to the needs of urban audiences. While new programs will be necessary to address emerging problems, program planners and administrators can allocate resources to align existing efforts to critical urban needs.

Results of this study also supported the notion of changing rural issues. The top five needs of rural counties were well-paying jobs, quality public schools, steady jobs, emergency healthcare facilities, and affordable housing options. Thus, rural needs should not only be contextualized as traditional agricultural issues. These top five needs also fall under the USU Extension programming area of childhood obesity, nutrition, and community. Given that two of the top five needs in rural counties related to employment, Extension is already well-positioned to provide relevant programming to address those needs. USU Extension piloted a program in 2018, the Rural Online Initiative, to provide rural residents with the skills to seek and maintain remote work opportunities. This was a direct response to rising unemployment and rural-urban migration in rural counties. The value of such programs is further supported and justified with results from this needs assessment. Other Extension programs pertaining to rural needs include personal financial management and 4-H afterschool activities. As urban and rural needs continue to change, it is important for Extension professionals to consider new ways of connecting with different target audiences.

Overall, the results of this study showed urban and rural counties exhibited common high-priority needs. This study recommends USU Extension: (a) tailor existing programs to tackle revealed needs in urban counties, (b) allocate resources to creating new programs that align to community needs, (c) facilitate strong internal partnerships between rural and urban county Extension offices to develop programs that addresses both rural and urban needs, (d) seek external partnerships with community-led organizations to share resources, create programmatic

goals, and implement collective impact initiatives, and (e) conduct timely county-level and state-level needs assessments to monitor changing needs.

Results reflected and further supported the changing social landscapes of urban and rural counties. They show the importance of a responsive Extension system that monitors community needs. This study provided necessary information for USU Extension to allocate resources to creating impactful and relevant programming for residents. While there are many examples of innovative and impactful Extension programs, Cummings and Silliman (2019) argued Extension must leverage its role as a convener of people to affect high-priority issues. This suggests a need for strong partnerships with local organizations and county agencies to increase the presence of Extension in local communities. Gagnon et al. (2015) also emphasized the importance of communicating public value to citizens for community engagement and support.

Extension frequently feels pressure to do more with less (Harder et al., 2009). As change agents, Extension professionals can assume a leadership role in being responsive and adaptive in a changing landscape. For example, they can proactively seek to implement innovative ways to monitor clientele needs and deliver relevant programs (Gagnon et al., 2015). Extension must also pursue approaches beyond traditional forms of outreach and engagement (e.g., public television, radio, face-to-face workshops, and printed newsletters). By embracing current and future technologies (e.g., podcasting, live streaming, group messaging apps, and video conferencing), Extension can better connect with new and existing clientele. Moreover, Extension professionals must be involved in or informed by the needs assessment process to ensure the creation, implementation, and delivery of relevant, timely, and impactful Extension programming.

This study has implications for the future of Extension. It demonstrates an urgency to respond to changing needs and community issues by planning, implementing, and delivering relevant and timely Extension programs. While the study provides evidence to support existing Extension efforts, it also shows opportunities for Extension to collaborate with rural and urban counties to find solutions to address normative needs. The list of community assets and needs presented provides targeted information on resource allocation to relevant program areas. Gagnon et al. (2015), Cummings and Silliman (2019), Garst and McCawley (2015), and Henning et al. (2014) all offered robust discussions on the impending role of Extension. These authors urged Extension to be responsive, adaptive, and predictive to respond to the changing needs of rural and urban audiences. This directly relates to the mission of Extension as discussed by Rasmussen (1989). This study builds on the ongoing dialogue within Extension to collectively find solutions as a leader in community capacity-building efforts by creating relevant and impactful programs.

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