Full Issue, Volume 10, Issue 2

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Journal of Human Sciences and Extension

Volume 10, Number 2
2022
ISSN 2325-5226

Special Issue:
Extension Engagement with Urban Communities

Julie Fox, Guest Editor
Donna J. Peterson and Scott R. Cummings, Co-Editors
Foreword

The last few years have been filled with social, economic, and environmental change as well as upheaval, unrest, and a global pandemic. It seems like all are at unprecedented levels not experienced by the last several generations. We are being challenged to face and address the current and historical impacts of racism in America. We are coming to the widespread realization that climate change is real and is impacting the lives of millions. We are seeing people doubt long-held democratic views and norms and question science. Are we seeing the fabric of the United States torn beyond repair, as some might suggest, or a door open to a new era? Indeed, the United States and the world are on the precipice.

In 2014, as the Cooperative Extension Service was celebrating its centennial anniversary, it too faced its own precipice. Would it and could it continue to be a successful driver of personal and community change for the good of America? During the 20th century, Extension and its parent Land-Grant Universities (LGUs) helped drive a revolution in agricultural production, freeing up the necessary workforce to fuel the Industrial Revolution. LGUs trained many of the engineers and applied scientists that developed the innovations necessary to drive the industrialization of the nation.

In the century since Extension was created, not only has the economy of the United States changed, so have the predominant communities and faces of the people who live in these communities. U.S. Census data show that in 1914, 54.4% of the United States population lived in rural communities, and 45.6% lived in urban areas. As of the 2020 U.S. Census, 86% of the United States population lived in metropolitan areas. The United States has also become more diverse. U.S. Census projects indicate the United States will continue this trajectory through much of the current century.

Extension’s viability and success hinge on its ability to respond and adapt to the changing demographics of the nation. Extension will be required to recognize and draw on the assets it has developed during its first century to continue to have societal value. Extension will also need to recognize the deficits or liabilities the system has in meeting the unique aspects of urban communities and residents, then develop strategies to overcome them. To achieve this, Extension will need to amplify the unheard voices of the many disenfranchised living in the heart of our cities and play a crucial role in bridging our nation’s urban/rural divide.

As the national Extension system began its centennial celebration, a small group of Extension professionals who were passionate about working in urban communities came together with the goal of elevating the awareness, conversation, and appreciation for the outstanding Extension work being done in cities across the country. As that spirited group of grassroots leaders embarked upon those initial goals, it was with a shared understanding of why it was both the right thing to do along with a reorganization of how the work aligned with Extension’s mission.
and values. They also acknowledge that for the long-term viability and success of Extension, working in urban communities with diverse populations and telling the story about that work effectively was also the strategic thing for Extension to do. This was the beginning of the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL).

By the end of 2015, NUEL had become a working group of the national Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) focused on advancing the strategic importance and long-term value of urban Extension activities by being relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally. To reinvigorate a national discussion and move toward a more sustainable and integrated approach to urban Extension, NUEL penned *The National Framework for Urban Extension*. The framework laid out a “Call to Action” of the national Extension system. In early 2019, ECOP approved a *National Urban Extension Initiative: Implementation Plan* developed by NUEL to address the six areas identified in the framework that Extension needed to focus on to improve and expand its efforts in urban communities. The six areas or goals are to:

- Create a substantial Extension presence in cities and metropolitan areas and ensure a viable future by responding to the demographic trend of urbanization.
- Create a wide range of partnerships and collaborations at a multitude of levels with organizations where roles are distinct, yet missions are aligned, where visibility, credit, and resources are shared.
- Develop programming and other urban Extension initiatives that are transdisciplinary in nature, meet the needs of urban residents, and address the issues of urban communities.
- Create authentic professional development activities to address the needs of Extension personnel in urban areas.
- Examine how current funding structures are utilized and how existing funding lines can be transformed or created from idea generation, dialogue, and fresh innovations to ensure they are more inclusive and complimentary.
- Empower urban advocates internally, within such groups as ECOP, USDA-NIFA, and National Extension Directors Association, and externally that support NUEL’s acknowledged purpose of advancing the strategic importance and long-term value of urban Extension activities by being relevant locally, responsive statewide, and recognized nationally.

Since 2019, NUEL, ECOP, and hundreds of Extension professionals working in urban communities across the country have been working and participating in activities that have made progress toward achieving one or more of these goals. As the chair and vice-chair of the NUEL, we are excited to have the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension* contribute to this work by publishing this special issue focused on Extension’s engagement in urban communities. This special issue of the *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension* contains a comprehensive series of articles from experts who have synthesized the diverse work and future opportunities for
Extension as it continues to address the needs and issues of urban communities and residents. We hope that these articles will guide and inform Extension’s efforts to respond and adapt to the nation’s changing demographics.

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Resources


Thank you to the entire planning team for the 2022 National Urban Extension Conference. The list of contributors, formal and informal, is extensive.

One thing remains constant, the urban Extension connection began through what was originally called Big Cities Conferences and now has the support of the grassroots National Urban Extension Leaders. The proactive innovation and resilient determination of those who came before us and those who lead beyond us, strengthen Extension’s ability to serve our mission in the urban context.

This urban-themed issue of the Journal of Human Science and Extension honors the many individuals and teams making a difference through the Land-Grant University Extension network.
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Editors’ Introduction

Extension Engagement with Urban Communities: Editors’ Introduction to the Urban-Themed Issue of JHSE

This introductory article for the special issue of the Journal of Human Sciences and Extension (JHSE) highlights respectful Extension research and engagement with dynamic urban communities. Like the 2017 urban-themed issue of JHSE, the intent is not to diminish the importance of rural and suburban Extension engagement but to better understand unique experiences of Extension in urban communities. The 35 contributing authors represent a range of geographic and programmatic viewpoints. Insights shared

- demonstrate that diversity in our cities is multidimensional;
- reinforce the importance of culturally relevant engagement;
- address issues of access, equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging;
- highlight the impact of Extension investment in urban partnerships and communities;
- underscore the complexity in metropolitan areas; and
- emphasize the value and potential of our national networks.

Content in the introductory section indicates national support for urban Extension and presents perspective on diversity. The second section includes seven articles on Extension engagement with urban communities across the country. A few Extension leaders share what they are learning through book and media reviews. Article authors in the final section discuss a sense of belonging and practices to create the future of urban Extension. Articles provide food for thought, opportunities for practical replication or local adaptation, and ideas to keep the dialogue on urban Extension moving forward.

Urban influence in the United States compelled Extension to connect the Land-Grant University mission with metropolitan communities where significant diversity and challenging complexities require relevant Extension commitments. The urban conversation is not new to Extension, but continuity and commitment are stronger than ever. Invited articles build upon

- National Urban Extension Leader resources,
- Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (WCMER) projects,
- National Urban Extension Conferences,
- Epsilon Sigma Phi’s affinity group for urban and culturally diverse audiences,
- Joint Council of Extension Professional (JCEP) urban interest groups,
- Extension Foundation urban initiatives,
- Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) urban explorations, and
• JHSE’s 2017 urban-themed issue that added to the national conversation on urban Extension through a distinct collection of articles for decision-makers.

The 2022 urban-themed issue of JHSE begins with an introductory section to provide context related to national urban Extension networks and perspective on diversity in urban communities. The seven urban Extension in Action articles demonstrate innovation and impacts across all regions of the United States. Three national Extension leaders share book and media reviews, providing glimpses into resources that can benefit urban Extension professionals. The closing section explores two important topics, beginning with how Extension can create a sense of belonging for clientele, personnel, volunteers, and partners and finishing with a focus on shaping the future of urban Extension together. Authors were invited to represent programmatic, geographic, and author diversity. The term urban is contextual throughout this issue, referring to populations ranging from approximately 50,000 to more than 8 million. While diversity and complexity are common in all urban environments, every area of the country reflects local context, unique history, current conditions, and vision of the community.

Invited Articles: Introductory Section

• In the Foreword, current and incoming chairs of the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) recognize the need to continue addressing shifting demographics, the progress of national urban Extension networks, and the goals outlined in the NUEL Implementation Plan.

• This article on Extension engagement with urban communities summarizes the purpose, content, and reflection on the urban-themed issue of JHSE, reinforcing the journal’s commitment to bridging research and practice.

• Acknowledging that diversity at state and county levels can be abstract, the authors of Visualizing Diversity, Krohn, Davis-Manigaulte, Fulcher, and Tiffany, demonstrate how spatial data can be better understood to improve urban community engagement. They recognize that data tell the story of people and encourage readers to mindfully access meaningful datasets and maps to deepen perspective, move beyond broad generalizations, and relevantly address local priorities.

Invited Articles: Urban Extension in Action Section

• Through a case study approach to a familiar issue of food systems, Cuite and Errickson illustrate the multidimensional reality of the terms urban and diversity, emphasizing the value of engaging various specific community members and partners in meaningful ways in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, as opposed to offering programs strictly by Extension for the community. They convincingly conclude that there is no single “urban community,” but rather, each one has distinct needs.
Data science, resident voice, and partnerships are also essential in advancing health equity and well-being in urban America. These and other recommendations in Cooperative Extension’s National Framework for Health Equity and Well Being come to life through examples of urban Extension engagement throughout the country thanks to Burton, O’Neal, Yelland, Stluka, and Rennekamp.

Moncloa and Rodriguez effectively made a case for intercultural competence as a fundamental capacity for urban Extension professionals. Their qualitative research addressed the influence of immigrant youth, the impact of culturally responsive mentoring, and the value of cultural brokers, trust, and cultural belonging when engaging with youth and families.

Research on belongingness was explored through a study with urban Latinx youth who identify as LGTBQ+. Guided by intersectionality and minority stress frameworks, authenticity, and indicators of belonging, Gonzalez, Reese, and Connaughton-Espino build upon 4-H’s practices for inclusion of individuals of all genders and sexual orientations.

Urban communities are fertile ground for programs that use gardens and nature-based activities to improve personal and community well-being. Jepsen, Akgerman, Funkenbusch, Calero, and Kelejian share experiences from four states that integrate Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) into urban agriculture programming, including community gardens, farm markets, and agritourism venues. In this article, they include a wealth of resources for Extension professionals to engage with clientele with differing abilities.

With a focus on Somali youth living in the Minneapolis metro area, Tzenis demonstrates the value of engaging with youth, families, and trusted community partners in culturally responsive program design. Other Extension considerations included an asset-based approach, a sociocultural lens, collaborative community engagement strategies, and prioritizing relationships with youth and families through personalized communication and natural interactions that build trust. Her own personal reflection included examining the cultural, political, and social origins of her own perspective.

Understanding linkages between Extension and faith-based organizations was the focus of Young and Jones as they explored the value of these relationships in urban communities. Readers will better understand six types of faith-based groups and opportunities to bring together the resources of the university and the social capital of these trusted community organizations.

Invited Articles: Book/Media Reviews

Book and media reviews are included in this special issue of JHSE to share critical analysis of resources relevant to urban Extension professionals. With an increasing number of books,
videos, blogs, podcasts, and other media, the exchange of ideas with diverse perspectives can expand perspective, stimulate dialogue, and create meaning when applied in the urban context.

- As Extension navigates beyond the pandemic, this first media review offers timely insights. Killian, an advisory board member with the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (WCMER) and University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Southern Area Director, shared his insights from the book *The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done*. He provides leadership to more than 120 faculty and staff and eight offices in three counties. With the scale of opportunities in urban communities, he reinforces the value of beginning with a focus on the right things and avoiding overcommitting.

- Urban community development often begins with a focus on economic advancements, sustainability, urban planning, social justice, and other important interests. Kelly, board member and treasurer for the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP) and North Central District Extension Director for North Carolina Extension, reflected on Extension’s role in urban community revitalization and the documentary *Julian Price – Envisioning Community. Investing in People*. This authentic approach to community is inspiring.

- Innovation is apparent in urban communities and in Extension. Immendorf, Design Strategist for the Extension Foundation, links principles from the book *Lean Impact: How to Innovate for Radically Greater Social Good* with Extension Impact Collaborative methodologies. She includes examples from seven urban Extension teams that participated in Impact Collaborative Summits to go further faster to make local, meaningful impact.

Invited Articles: Closing Section

- A sense of belonging in urban Extension is a common theme woven through many of the articles in this issue of JHSE. It is an essential topic in urban communities as Extension engages with diverse internal and external stakeholders. Authors Madhosingh-Hector and Seals draw upon numerous Extension initiatives that share a common commitment to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Through interviews with urban Extension professionals, they explore current practices, challenges, and opportunities. They acknowledge Extension is making progress, and they recognize the need for shared strategies and techniques to support long-term engagement with measurable impacts.

- The article on futuring perspectives and practices for urban Extension brings together two authors – Garner, a graduate student new to the urban Extension experience, and Fox, a seasoned urban Extension professional. They recognize that for more than a century, university leaders have explored the future of Extension but never has the
degree of uncertainty, urgency, and complexity so profoundly challenged current plans and future forecasts. Garner and Fox assert that the future of urban Extension improves through developing futuring literacy; experimenting with innovative futuring approaches; managing decision making as Extension creates the future, and entrepreneurially addressing change throughout the futuring process.

**Conclusion**

Connecting urban communities with Land-Grant Universities emerges through authentic relationships with people who live and work in neighborhoods throughout metropolitan areas. This people-centered approach, combined with the elements of the national urban Extension framework, advances Extension positioning, programs, personnel, and partnerships. Articles in this urban-themed issue shed light on progress and opportunity for relevance, access, equity, inclusion, and belonging with Extension.

This collection of articles, along with the 2022 National Urban Extension Conference, provides opportunities to keep the urban Extension conversation going through local, state, regional, and national networks. Even with varying social, political, environmental, economic, and historical contexts across the country, shared commitment unites Extension professionals who address the complexity, diversity, and urban-suburban-rural flows in densely populated communities. Extension innovation is alive and well along the rural-urban continuum. In service of the Extension mission, faculty, staff, students, and community volunteers join efforts to address the complex issues and advance well-being in dynamic urban communities.

Julie Fox, Guest Editor
Urban Extension-Themed Special Issue

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Acknowledgments

This themed issue of the JHSE was made possible through the vision and contributions of the authors, reviewers, JHSE editorial team, and National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL). In addition to the electronic version, a limited quantity of this special edition was printed with support from The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Washington State University Extension, the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research, and Mississippi State University. Copies were distributed at the 2022 National Urban Extension Conference.

The editors thank Michelle Gaston, Project Coordinator at The Ohio State University, for her assistance in organizing the manuscript review and revision process, communicating with authors and reviewers, formatting and editing articles, and checking references. The editors also thank Haley Stark, Graduate Assistant at MSU, and Tia Gregory, Data Management Coordinator at MSU, for their assistance in preparing this issue for publication.

Resources

2022 National Urban Extension Conference. https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/nuec22/home
Extension Impact Collaborative. https://extension.org/ic
https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/jhse/vol5/iss2/

National Urban Extension Conferences, in the Urban Extension Library. https://urban-extension.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/library

National Urban Extension Leader Resources. https://nuel.extension.org/resources


Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research (WCMER) Projects.
https://metroextension.wsu.edu/projects
Visualizing Diversity: Spatial Data as a Resource Enabling Extension to Better Engage Communities

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Effective Extension programming relies on engaging people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures. Extension educators sometimes struggle with how best to engage communities that are not “traditional” program audiences. Centering data visualization on the strength of Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other potentially marginalized communities can assist Extension’s work to engage diverse staff, program participants, and advisory board members. For example, using maps to understand what languages people speak at home strengthens the connections between Extension programs and community participants and can inform staff recruitment and advisory board composition. However, maps of aggregated areas like counties can mask socioeconomic and demographic diversity. The level of analysis (nation, state, county, census tract, block group) and the analytic categories in the dataset shape the stories data can tell. Extension can draw on maps that use granular and comparable levels of analysis (census tracts and block groups, rather than counties) and reduce the risks of abstraction by engaging communities and acquiring primary data to reflect reality at finer levels of geography better. In this article, we will focus on visualizing data in two very different, highly diverse cities: New York City, NY (population 8,823,000), and Albuquerque, NM (population 929,000).

*Keywords:* DEI, mapping, languages, engagement, data, demographics, county, census

Engaging people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures stands as a high priority objective for Extension, an objective that is especially salient in urban Extension programming. Yet Extension educators sometimes struggle with how best to engage communities who are not “traditional” program audiences. Centering data visualization on the strength of Black, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other potentially marginalized communities can assist Extension’s work to engage diverse staff, program participants, and advisory board members.
Race/ethnicity and language are frequently used pathways to assess diversity and can be well visualized using maps. The level of granularity (national, state, county, census tract) shapes the stories the data can tell, as does the nuance and quality of inquiries used to develop the data. Using data to understand what languages people speak most comfortably can strengthen the connections between Extension programs and community participants and inform staff recruitment and advisory board composition. Knowledge of languages spoken at home by community members can aid Extension organizations to ensure that program offerings, volunteer opportunities, resource materials, and recruitment of new staff are designed to engage and welcome all community members. This includes, but is not limited to, translation of written resources, curricula, and presentations. Understanding how to use data to explore the diversity of languages in communities served by Extension opens doors to understanding other dimensions of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion.

People have been creating maps to visualize data and make “invisible” processes visible in understandable ways for centuries. The current practice of mapping natural and social processes has roots in Alexander von Humboldt’s publication of *Cosmos* and its accompanying atlas nearly 200 years ago (Cheshire & Uberti, 2021, p. 18). Extension has a unique role in using and acquiring local primary data and enhancing it with contextual data to tell a grounded story about people and places, the issues that impact communities/regions, and the programs and policies that may benefit human lives and natural processes. Extension can engage communities to minimize data abstraction and provide the needed contextual awareness that lifts local stories and strengthens diversity. We propose that understanding, critically exploring, and visualizing data are valuable components of Extension’s grounded storytelling and community engagement efforts.

In this article, we will focus on visualizing data in two very different, highly diverse cities: New York City, NY (population 8,823,000), and Albuquerque, NM (population 929,000). The power of data is in the details: Extension has traditionally operated at a county level and relied on county-level data. Analysis and visualization can move from county-level data that masks data diversity to census tract and block group unit level data that shines a light on the spatial and temporal variability of data, enabling Extension to meet people where they are. National, state, and county-level data can be highly abstract. Maps generated at that level of abstraction may often be only a blunt policy instrument, while what is needed is granular primary and secondary data to provide more precise identification of issues. The more granular we are in developing interventions (building on local knowledge of assets/issues), the better Extension can be at engaging people, building partnerships, and growing solutions to pressing problems. This tailored approach is also apt to be more sustainable and cost-effective from an economic point of view.
The Modifiable Areal Unit Problem and Its Significance for Urban Extension

A strength of Extension is its capacity to focus on people and places. Gathering and visualizing data can enhance this strength, especially if we ground-truth the data and discern when the data are overly abstract or grouped within arbitrary or overly large geographic units. Counties are important local government entities and are often relied upon to address local needs. However, counties vary widely in both size and population. County boundaries are often delineated arbitrarily and through political processes, with each state taking a different approach.

In geography, there is a phenomenon known as the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem (MAUP) (Openshaw & Taylor, 1979). The problem referred to by MAUP is that aggregation of information in an area with arbitrary boundaries can change with the redrawing of the unit boundaries, such as we see with counties and other common geographical units. These aggregated areas also mask spatial variability related to diversity and other socioeconomic and demographic data. Areas that have arbitrary and variable boundaries are not comparable. When we compare county-level data, we risk comparing apples and oranges because the size and populations of the counties vary so widely.

We see the MAUP problem play out across a variety of disciplines that deal with spatial statistics. Correlations found at an individual level become less pronounced as they are explored in larger aggregated areas. The reverse is also true where apparent relationships at an aggregated level disappear as the data are disaggregated (Openshaw, 1984). Useable knowledge informing effective interventions requires careful, critical choices as to the level of spatial data analyzed and generally draws on more granular geographic data.

Individual information often must be aggregated to protect privacy. It can be difficult to find the “Goldilocks” level of analysis needed to avoid MAUP, preserve confidentiality, and generate meaningful understanding. If an area is too small, there may not be a large enough population to explore questions of interest. If an area is too large, there is risk of overgeneralization and missing local assets and issues.

Not all information is affected by MAUP in the same way (Nelson & Brewer, 2017). The U.S. Census collects data at a variety of geographic levels. The smallest of these is the census block, which has no population requirements and is delineated based on natural or artificial boundaries. Census block groups are an aggregation of census blocks and generally have populations between 600 and 3,000 people. Census tracts are an aggregation of block groups and generally have populations between 2,500 and 8,000. Counties are then made of several census tracts, and each tract is nested neatly within its county, each block group within its tract, and each block within its block group. For privacy reasons, many statistics are suppressed at the census block level. However, levels such as census block group and census tract are found to preserve statistical relationships better than ZIP code tabulation areas (an approximation of ZIP codes
which are based on routes, rather than areas) or counties (Krieger et al., 2002; Nelson & Brewer, 2017).

The Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (CARES; https://careshq.org) built a system for mapping America’s diversity using the CARES mapping engine for data at a variety of geographic levels, including county, census tract, and block group level data. Sub-county data lift the spatial variability of diversity, as shown in the following examples. For brevities sake, this article highlights diversity in two cities: Albuquerque and New York City. However, the data can be visualized for any community in the United States at https://cares.page.link/M2bp. The reader is encouraged to explore diversity in their community or region and overlay a wealth of associated socioeconomic and demographic data that may better inform conditions related to people and place.

Mapping Language Diversity

Knowledge of the languages spoken by people in their homes provides Extension with a vital resource for diversifying staff, program participants, advisory groups, and programming to engage communities effectively in Extension efforts. English is the principal and sometimes the sole language in which Extension currently operates at the same time as Extension often seeks to reach participants in communities where majorities speak a language other than English at home. There are strong efforts toward not only translating but also co-creating resources in multiple languages to fully engage the strengths of local communities and develop necessary relationships for authentic collaboration in programming. Like efforts to map data about human and natural processes, work to develop multilingual capacity is not entirely new, and there is history on which Extension can build its current efforts. For example, more than 100 years ago, Extension urban home demonstrations were sometimes “conducted in seven languages, as it was in Utica in 1918.” (Smith, 2013, p. 160). Visualizing granular data on language use can aid Extension in strengthening its capacity to create and offer programming in people’s preferred languages.

A simple language diversity index was calculated from American Community Survey (ACS 2015-2019) five-year estimates of the language spoken at home. Figure 1 offers an example from Albuquerque, NM, which measures the chance of any random two residents in an area speaking the same language, but it does not consider the relatedness of languages. The index is calculated as $A = 1 - \sum (i^2)$, where $i$ successively takes on the values of the total number of speakers of a language divided by the total population (Greenberg, 1956). With this measure, a score closer to 1 indicates a higher level of language diversity, while a score of zero indicates that everyone speaks the same language. Language diversity calculated this way at both the county and census tract levels around the city of Albuquerque, NM, is shown in Figure 1.

In Figure 1, the smoothing effect of county level aggregation with the index score is visible. The census tract level better illuminates the higher levels of language diversity within the city of
Albuquerque and areas within the surrounding counties with high Native American populations. On the maps, the areas with deeper colors have higher language diversity.

Figure 1. Maps Visualizing Languages Spoken at Home in Albuquerque and Nearby Communities, Contrasting County Level and Census Tract Data

New York has a much larger immigrant population. The importance of granular data is clear. The tract level map of New York highlights the spatial variation of diversity, while the county level map looks homogenous (see Figure 2). Much of Queens is a deep blue at the census tract level, which indicates a very high level of diversity, but there are pockets of low diversity that stand out, such as the area around the Corona neighborhood. The census tract level data also provides insight into Brooklyn, which appears evenly split, with a high diversity area in the southwestern portion and lower diversity in the northeastern portion. You can see an interactive version of this map online at https://cares.page.link/zQX6.
Extension educators are ideally positioned to understand and build upon the diversity illuminated by maps using census tract level data, drawing on their lived experiences and connection with the lived experiences of program participants, as well as their understanding of data. This exercise in mapping language diversity highlights the importance of analysis and visualization of data at the sub-county level. We can expand this example further by mapping the most common languages spoken in an area. By combining these two metrics, we hope to demonstrate the utility of sub-county level analysis and present its potential as a practical application that Extension personnel can use in their work.

We mapped the most common language spoken at home around Albuquerque as measured in the 2010-2014 ACS (see Figure 3). The tract level data show small areas of Native American languages and one census tract of other Indo-European languages that are lost at the county level map. At both the county and tract levels, “Spanish” and “Other” are the most common categories.
Changes in the census questions asked can illuminate or erase diversity. In this case, earlier ACS data included specific information about Native American languages that were dropped in the surveys starting in 2016. To enable direct comparison with newer ACS data, older, more detailed language categories were recoded into the newer categories, which caused a loss of precision in the data. One consequence is that areas with a high level of Native American speakers have been lumped into the “Other” category. Recognizing the consequences of this change in data gathering is important for Extension programs seeking to be equitable and inclusive, and the local knowledge and lived experiences of Extension educators and participants serve as a vital corrective to the abstract and apparently homogenous data.

In the more recent ACS data, the areas with high Native American populations again stand out. However, we also see additional census tracts with Vietnamese and Chinese speakers at home (see Figure 4). While the county level map did not change between survey years, at the tract level, we can see changes that would otherwise be missed at the county level. You can see an interactive version of this map online at [https://cares.page.link/Ukva](https://cares.page.link/Ukva). Note that in this and other
maps identifying the most common language spoken at home, the language groups are consolidated to reflect 2015-2019 ACS categories so that Native American languages are placed in the “Other” category. This makes local knowledge of languages spoken and local community connections immensely significant. See our discussion in the section on “The Consequences of Consolidated Categories” and comparable visualizations of those data in Figures 7 and 8.

**Figure 4. The Most Common Language Spoken at Home Around Albuquerque as Measured in the 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS)**

The language maps of New York show striking contrasts between the county and census tract levels (see Figure 5). On the county level map, each county in the frame has more Spanish speakers than any other language. However, when we dig a little deeper to the census tract level, we see many more languages represented.
Figure 5. The Most Common Language Spoken at Home Around New York City as Measured in the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (ACS)

Drawing on data from the 2015-2019 ACS survey, the county level map shown in Figure 6 is the same as Figure 5, but the spatial distribution has changed between the years at the census tract level. For Extension personnel working in New York, maps such as these at the census tract level, along with input from local leaders, organizations, and individuals, can help inform programming that is responsive to changing community needs. You can access an interactive version of this map online at https://cares.page.link/P5QW.
The Consequences of Consolidated Categories

How data is gathered (the questions asked, the reach of the survey) determines both accuracy and nuance. This is demonstrated in Figure 7 and Figure 8, which show changes in language categories used in the 2010-2014 ACS (32 options) and the consolidated categories used in the 2015-2019 ACS (14 options) (see Figure 7 and Figure 8, respectively). In both figures, the data used are from the 2010-2014 ACS. In the first panel on each figure, the data have been recoded to reflect the consolidated language categories used to generate the 2015-2019 ACS. The loss in nuance and granularity is clear. Much understanding about what languages people speak at home is lost when the consolidated data are mapped.

Figure 7, for example, demonstrates how the reduction in the number of language categories erases Indigenous languages spoken by large communities in and around Albuquerque by naming them “Other” rather than “Navajo” and “Other Native American,” as is done when the full data are mapped. Local knowledge and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by
Extension can help to address this erasure. A similar loss of nuance when the 2015-2019 categories are used to map languages spoken in New York City is evident (see Figure 8).

Granularity and centering how data are visualized on the strengths and diversity of local populations matters from a public policy, economic, and equity perspective. Changes in the American Community Survey (ACS) reduced details gathered about Native North American languages and many other languages, making local knowledge an even more important complement to ACS and census datasets. As shown above, the impact of these changes can be readily visualized when maps using the earlier, more nuanced data are laid side-by-side with maps using more recent data.

Figure 7. Language Diversity in Albuquerque and the Surrounding Area Shown in Two Versions of 2010-2014 ACS Language

| Note. The first panel consolidates the data into the 14 categories used in the 2015-2019 ACS while the second panel presents the full 32 language categories used in the original 2010-2014 survey (also see Figure 3). |
**Figure 8. Language Diversity in New York City and the Surrounding Area Shown in Two Versions of 2010-2014 ACS Language**

*Note.* The first panel consolidates the data into the 14 categories used in the 2015-2019 ACS while the second panel presents the full 32 language categories used in the original 2010-2014 survey (also see Figure 5).

**Representing Race and Ethnicity**

The unit of analysis (state, county, census tract, census block group) and the demographic categories used determine what maps illuminate. The maps shown in Figure 9 were made to emulate and extend the maps first produced by The Brookings Institute, where the authors conducted their analyses at the county level ([https://www.brookings.edu/research/mapping-americas-diversity-with-the-2020-census](https://www.brookings.edu/research/mapping-americas-diversity-with-the-2020-census)). Using the national average of representation by each racial or ethnic group, the Brookings Institute maps show counties that have a higher-than-average representation of specific groups. The contrast between the county level maps shown in Figure 9 and the more nuanced maps using census tract data shown in Figure 10 is evident. At the county level, the categories “Hispanic or Latino” and “two or more” races/ethnicities are highly represented around Albuquerque; around New York City, “Hispanic or Latino,” “Asian/Pacific Islander,” and “two or more” races/ethnicities are highly represented. At the
census tract level, we see many other groups represented in both Albuquerque and New York City, with all demographic groups but “Native American/Alaska Native” highly represented around New York City. There are multiple ways to represent the same type of data, illuminating different social relationships. The Brookings Institute determined that a relative value for mapping the racial/ethnic composition of an area’s population (“higher than the national average”) was of value. Framing questions and the geographic units mapped are key elements in generating knowledge that illuminates the strength of diversity and fosters inclusion rather than erasure of local assets.

Figure 9. Maps Showing Areas with Higher Than National Average Proportions of Non-White Racial and Ethnic Groups in the Albuquerque and New York City Areas Developed Using County-Level Data
The Path Forward

Mapping is inherently an abstraction of reality. It is a powerful tool that must be used mindfully. One role that Extension can play, given its presence in communities throughout the United States, is to ground maps in local understandings so they address locally important questions. Extension can draw on maps that use granular and comparable levels of analysis (census tracts and block groups, rather than counties) and reduce the risks of abstraction by engaging communities and acquiring primary data to reflect reality at finer levels of geography better. Extension has a unique role in interpreting local primary data and enhancing it with contextual data to tell a grounded story about people and places, the issues that are impacting communities/regions, and the programs and policies that will benefit human lives and natural processes.
The technologies are in place to make this happen. Leadership alignment is needed to train and position Extension to serve as a sentinel organization and partner with other anchor community organizations to utilize mapping fully as a tool for community engagement, program excellence, and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This brief article focused on how data can be visualized, considered the differences between commonly used county level data and census tract data, and explored the impact of how data are categorized on the maps produced. The article focused specifically on selecting and visualizing data, which is a deliberate limitation of the article. We believe that well-understood and carefully visualized data are resources for lifting local stories and strengthening diversity within Extension. We hope this discussion of visualizing diversity data will provide a bridge to the practical use of maps to inform Extension practices.

References


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Decision on Author Order: We saw the conceptualization and development of this article as a joint effort, and each of us brought unique contributions. Justin Krohn is listed first because he designed and generated the maps and is shouldering the role of corresponding author. The other three authors are listed alphabetically by last name.

Acknowledgments

The Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (University of Missouri and University of Missouri Extension) provided the technology infrastructure to conduct the spatial analysis required for this article. We would also like to express appreciation to Carol Parker and Julie Fox for their insights and suggestions.

Resources

We hope this article encourages readers to use mapping to explore and visualize local data. There is no need to become a demographer or specialist in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The following websites offer useful tools for exploring questions that are generated by and relevant to local communities and contexts.

CARES hosts over 30,000 map layers and 6,000 data indicators from more than 700 datasets for topics ranging from agriculture, the environment, education, health, economics, demographics, and many more. Maps and data can be queried and exported.
Community Data Tools. [https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/community-data-tools/](https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/community-data-tools/)
The Community Data Tools developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Extension Division offers links to a range of data access and mapping sites and resources.

Map a Syst. [https://www.mapasyst.org/](https://www.mapasyst.org/)
Map a Syst is a community dedicated to geospatial technology and education whose goal is “to inspire people to use mapping for outreach and engagement and provide resources to help people put mapping to work in their lives.”

Mapping 101. [https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/mapping-your-food-system/](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/ffed/mapping-your-food-system/)
Iowa State’s Mapping 101 offers easy-to-use tutorials that walk participants through QGIS—a free, open-source geographic information system (mapping software). Participants can develop their own maps for a project, program, or area of interest relevant to their particular place.

National Association of Realtors. [https://www.nar.realtor/](https://www.nar.realtor/)
The website of the National Association of Realtors offers housing statistics at the national, regional, and metro-market level and can be used in tandem with environmental risk assessment sites like [https://floodfactor.com/](https://floodfactor.com/).

National Equity Atlas. [https://nationalequityatlas.org/](https://nationalequityatlas.org/)
The National Equity Atlas offers actionable data and strategies to advance racial equity and shared prosperity with a focus on equity metrics. Data can be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, nativity, ancestry, and income.

Online Mapping Tools. [https://extension.unh.edu/nhnriguide/mapping-options/online-mapping-tools](https://extension.unh.edu/nhnriguide/mapping-options/online-mapping-tools)
The University of New Hampshire’s Online Mapping Tools site offers a variety of free and easy to use mapping resources.

Social Explorer. [https://www.socialexplorer.com](https://www.socialexplorer.com)
Social Explorer provides resources and thousands of maps visualizing demography, economy, health, education, and more with a focus on the United States.

StatsAmerica. [https://www.statsamerica.org/](https://www.statsamerica.org/)
StatsAmerica provides actionable data for economic developers to use in site requests, development metrics, grant writing, and strategic planning.

United States Census. [https://www.census.gov/data.html](https://www.census.gov/data.html)
The U.S. Census provides a wide variety of data tools to view various census data including demographics, business dynamics, commuting, geocoding, and more.
Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/data-viz](https://www.urban.org/data-viz)

The Urban Institute’s data site provides statistics, graphs, and maps on economic and social policy with strong resources on urban and equity issues.

University-Specific Resources.
For example, Cornell University’s Geographic Information Systems program ([https://guides.library.cornell.edu/gis](https://guides.library.cornell.edu/gis)) provide a variety of learning and mapping resources to users with library access.
Strengthening Urban Food Systems Through Extension Programming and Community Engagement: A Case Study of New Brunswick, New Jersey

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Cooperative Extension (Extension) can, and in many cases already does, engage in well-rooted partnerships with urban audiences. Yet, it is important to recognize that there are many layers to the diversity that exists within urban audiences—there is no single “urban community.” This article presents a case study of food security programming in New Brunswick, New Jersey, including collaborations between Rutgers Cooperative Extension and multiple community organizations to illustrate important considerations for engaging in urban Extension initiatives. Specifically, challenges exist in identifying urban audiences, including those who are hidden, especially as the demographics of city residents can vary greatly within a single geographic area. Solutions include the development of deep community partnerships and creative engagement of university students, with the latter participating as both an audience to benefit from Extension programming and as partners in program implementation. Evaluating urban Extension programming can provide important information as to whether a particular program is meeting the needs of the target audience, but a challenge exists in distinguishing the impact of a single Extension program operating in what is often an ecosystem of programs addressing food insecurity in an urban area.

Keywords: food insecurity, urban food systems, healthy food

Food insecurity is negatively associated with health outcomes across the lifespan (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). Challenges within the urban food system include multiple factors that can dramatically affect food security and the ability to consume a healthy diet, including the issue of the availability of healthy and culturally appropriate foods (Jones et al., 2021; Laska et al., 2010; Newman et al., 2017). Even when these foods are available, accessibility can be an issue (Baek, 2016). For example, people may lack transportation and/or time to reach the locations where food is available. Further, places where food is sold may not be readily accessible to differently-abled urban residents. For those without a personal vehicle or public transportation options, accessing stores by foot may require frequent trips due to the inability to carry substantial amounts of food home physically. This can pose an additional burden for residents of urban areas with respect to both time and physical limitations.
Despite the availability and accessibility issues, it is the affordability of food, whether people can buy healthy, culturally appropriate food given their available financial resources, that is most aligned with how food insecurity is often defined and measured. For example, a commonly used definition of “food insecurity” is the limited access to adequate food due to lack of money or other resources (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2020). In addition, the most commonly used measure of food insecurity in the United States is the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module (Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012). Most questions on the scale ask specifically about being able to afford food. While this is the most common conceptualization, others have expanded beyond affordability, particularly within the realm of community food security (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). For example, the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance has a more expansive definition of food security as “access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate food at all times and in socially acceptable ways” (New Brunswick Community Food Alliance, 2012, p. 1).

Availability, accessibility, and affordability are all important to consider because food insecurity is multifaceted. Solving one component of the problem in isolation may not be sufficient (Murrell & Jones, 2020). While Cooperative Extension (Extension) programs focused specifically on food insecurity are essential to consider, urban food system programming more broadly has been shown to provide additive benefits for urban areas. Not only does it affect the production, sale, and consumption of food in urban areas, but it can have economic and environmental impacts on these areas (Diekmann et al., 2017). Extension professionals are increasingly engaged in initiatives to improve localized urban food systems (Clark et al., 2016). These initiatives occur largely through programming related to urban agriculture, including home and community gardening, and creating alternative marketplaces for local foods, such as farmer’s markets and community-supported agriculture programs (Diekmann et al., 2020). Together, these diverse programs can provide a comprehensive, systems-based approach to address food insecurity in urban areas.

Extension professionals may be well-positioned to address food insecurity in urban communities. While urban Extension programming can improve food access, availability, and affordability within cities, there are several important considerations in creating programming to meet these goals. For Extension to have a vibrant future serving traditional and underserved audiences in urban areas, programs and partnerships must develop novel approaches to reach diverse community members.

This article presents an overview of food security and food systems programming that has been designed and developed by Rutgers Cooperative Extension and collaborating partners to bring a diverse community together toward solving the problem of food insecurity in urban New Brunswick, New Jersey. The featured programs highlight important considerations for engaging in food insecurity work in urban areas. Specifically, new and veteran Extension professionals might strengthen the impact of their work in urban areas by identifying urban populations and
their unique needs, engaging community members as more than simply program participants, creating high-level community-Extension partnerships, engaging students in urban Extension work, and evaluating urban programming.

**Context: Food Security Programming in New Brunswick**

New Brunswick is a vibrant city of approximately 55,000 people located in central New Jersey. It is home to Rutgers-New Brunswick, the largest public university in the state, as well as the global headquarters of Johnson & Johnson. These anchor institutions make New Brunswick well situated for public and private partnerships to improve health and food security within the city.

The demographics of the city have changed significantly over the past few decades. New Brunswick is diverse with many immigrants, most recently from Central and South America. More than half the population of New Brunswick is under 35 years of age, and in some neighborhoods in the city, the prevalence of child poverty is approaching 50% (Newman et al., 2017).

**New Brunswick Food Security Programming in Brief**

As New Jersey’s Land-Grant University, Rutgers has been an active participant in New Brunswick’s evolving food security landscape. Rutgers Cooperative Extension has led initiatives such as the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market (NBCFM), which was established in 2009 as a partnership between Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Johnson & Johnson, and the City of New Brunswick to address food availability and affordability. Rutgers Cooperative Extension has also collaborated on many city-wide, community-led food initiatives. For instance, Rutgers Cooperative Extension professionals have held leadership roles within the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance and Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick and have served as members of the Feeding New Brunswick Network. Due to the breadth of community food initiatives in New Brunswick, a full review is beyond the scope of this article. Select examples are presented in Table 1 to demonstrate the approaches employed by Rutgers Cooperative Extension professionals in collaboration with the New Brunswick community to improve food access and engagement.
Table 1. Select Examples of Extension-Partnered Food Security Programming in New Brunswick, New Jersey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Extension Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeding New Brunswick Network</td>
<td>Affiliation of New Brunswick emergency food providers connects via monthly meetings and events.</td>
<td>Collectively promote food security by increasing access to healthy, culturally appropriate food in New Brunswick.</td>
<td>Extension partners with this collective network of pantries to maximize emergency food system outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick</td>
<td>Volunteers deliver pre-made meals and fresh produce (in partnership with NBCFM) to elderly and homebound residents in New Brunswick and surrounding areas.</td>
<td>Enrich the lives of seniors and assist them in maintaining independence by providing nutritious food, human connections, and social services support.</td>
<td>Community initiative has expanded to include an Extension-partnered fresh produce delivery program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community Farmers Market</td>
<td>Three weekly farmer’s markets dedicated to fruit and vegetable sales are held in two New Brunswick locations.</td>
<td>Increase fresh food access and intake, community engagement with urban green spaces for improved health and well-being.</td>
<td>Program led by Extension professionals in partnership with Johnson &amp; Johnson and the City of New Brunswick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community Farmers Market (NBCFM) Market Ambassadors</td>
<td>A three-year project that assessed community food preferences, made desirable foods available via collaboration with local farmers, and promoted available healthy foods to New Brunswick communities.</td>
<td>Increase availability of and access to fresh, culturally relevant foods; improve community engagement with NBCFM; increase sales for local farmers.</td>
<td>Project led by Extension professionals in partnership with bilingual community members with support from the USDA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community Food Alliance</td>
<td>Alliance of community members and leaders working together to strengthen the local food system.</td>
<td>Ensure neighbors, children, and the community have easy access to nutritious and affordable food choices.</td>
<td>Extension professionals serving as active members of NBCFA working groups strengthened connections between community leaders, residents, and Extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community Food Assessment</td>
<td>New Brunswick food systems stakeholders completed a multi-year, three-phase food assessment and planning process.</td>
<td>Support efforts to improve community food security in New Brunswick.</td>
<td>Co-led by Extension professional, with other Rutgers researchers and a bilingual team of community members and student researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Extension Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veggie Rx</td>
<td>Prescription produce program for patients of HIPHOP Promise Clinic, a student-run free health clinic for low-income individuals. Clinicians provide “prescriptions” for free produce that can be redeemed at the NBCFM.</td>
<td>Increase fresh fruit and vegetable access for limited resource patients at risk for chronic disease.</td>
<td>Co-led by Extension professionals in collaboration with medical school faculty and a team of medical students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Considerations for Addressing Community Food Insecurity**

**Identifying Urban Populations and Their Unique Needs**

Identifying the audience and their unique needs is a critical step in developing Extension programming (Garst & McCawley, 2015) and may be especially challenging for Extension professionals working in urban areas (Ruemenapp, 2018). It is imperative to recognize that “urban” communities are not all the same, even within a single geographic area. Urban residents are themselves diverse, and thus no two urban areas are identical. Even within one geographical urban area, there are often multiple communities that experience different challenges, utilize different support systems, and may respond differently to Extension programming and interventions. Many communities within an urban area might come together based on ethnicity, race, culture, language, income, age, ability, and other factors, including geographic location within the same city. For example, in New Brunswick, several waves of immigration have resulted in a shifting demographic makeup of the city. Through the middle of the last century, multiple waves of Hungarian immigrants moved to New Brunswick (Weiss, 2006). Later there were influxes of immigrants from the Caribbean, and over the past (approximately) 30 years, many immigrants from Central and South America have moved to the city, with a notably large population from Oaxaca, Mexico. At the same time, there are several historically black neighborhoods in New Brunswick (Newman et al., 2017). Simply using the term “urban” to refer to the residents of New Brunswick does not capture even this level of diversity, and immigration demographics represent only one component of urban residents’ characteristics.

Extension professionals must also consider that some urban populations can be at first hidden from view; however, this does not mean these community members would not like or benefit from Extension programming, simply that it can be more challenging to identify and engage them. For example, homebound seniors may have challenges accessing a program if only traditional Extension outreach efforts are employed. In-person program recruitment will miss many of these homebound individuals as may online or email-based recruitment since this group tends to have lower technological literacy than other populations (Anderson & Perrin, 2017).
Though important, identifying these “hidden” populations can be challenging. Connecting with cultural, religious, or social service agency leaders can provide an opportunity for Extension professionals to reach audiences in a more meaningful way than Extension professionals could manage on their own. In New Brunswick, a collaboration with the advocacy group Lazos America Unida has increased Extension’s engagement with undocumented populations (Newman et al., 2017). Of course, there is always the chance that hidden populations are among the community but not yet served by any community organizations. Whether because they are too few or simply choose to remain hidden, Extension professionals may opt to employ gentle but ongoing efforts to reach these groups.

Additionally, a specific concern is that the number of languages spoken amongst members of an urban audience may pose a barrier to comprehensive engagement with Extension. Unfortunately, a lack of translation resources among Extension professionals is a real concern in many areas (Angima et al., 2016; Wyman et al., 2011). Steps to increase the language skills among Extension professionals might include additional hires of bilingual staff and faculty as well as professional development opportunities for those already serving in Extension. Universities are increasingly expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Iverson, 2008), and community partners may prove to be a key resource in this area. In particular, community leaders and residents have the potential to serve as cultural ambassadors to aid Extension professionals not only in language skills but in developing a deeper connection and cultural understanding among residents whose heritage differs from their own.

Once the populations of interest are identified, the community’s needs should be identified in partnership with the community (Ruemenapp, 2018). Needs assessments can be conducted with a variety of tools and approaches, which are often used together to capture broad community perspectives more fully (Garst & McCawley, 2015). Many collaborative research- and community-building approaches can help co-create the understanding of community needs (Lynch et al., 2021) The New Brunswick Community Food Assessment and Action Plan used many of these methods (Newman et al., 2017). In this example, the research team conducted almost 150 interviews during a three-year period, half with staff from community-based organizations and half with food pantry clients and other low-income residents. A hallmark of community-partnered research (Hardy et al., 2016), engaging Spanish-speaking community members who designed and conducted interviews with residents was a critical component to both overcoming language and cultural barriers and fully including residents and their insights in the research process. After the food assessment was completed, findings were shared widely within the community. Engaged community members worked closely with the research team to create the New Brunswick Food System Action Plan, which outlined proposed work for the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance over the following three-year period. To do this, the team held more than 30 small-group planning meetings and one large, full-day community food planning conference, which was attended by more than 60 residents and stakeholders. Though the amount of time and work involved for community-engaged research can be significantly
greater than more traditional approaches (Terosky, 2018), the short- and long-term rewards such collaborations yield, such as deeper and lasting connections between Extension professionals and community members, are well worth the effort.

Another formal approach to better understanding the community and food insecurity issues within New Brunswick is demonstrated by the NBCFM’s Market Ambassador initiative, launched in 2019 with the goal of strengthening and expanding community engagement. The program included a comprehensive survey of community residents to identify preferences for locally grown and ethnic crops along with barriers to food access. The survey was administered by three trained Market Ambassadors, community members who were hired as Extension staff for the project. Detailed interviews with farmer’s market customers expanded on survey findings by collecting additional in-depth information regarding community food preferences. The data were analyzed by Rutgers Cooperative Extension professionals and used in close collaboration with New Jersey farmers to make desirable foods available at the NBCFM during the 2019-2021 seasons. The synergistic collaboration of urban residents working as Ambassadors, Rutgers Cooperative Extension professionals, and local farmers demonstrates how data collection and analysis by trained researchers done in partnership with community members can smoothly- and quickly- translate into practical, meaningful outcomes in a community-based program.

Another community-engaged research project within urban New Brunswick involved interviews designed to understand how residents apply their own food values to evaluate locally produced value-added products at the NBCFM. Using the Food Choice Process Model (Furst et al., 1996) as a guide, interviews with New Brunswick residents revealed that seasonality, familiarity, and social value are all important factors in how New Brunswick residents evaluate their food choices (Quick et al., 2022). The theme of social value reflects community valuation of food equity and opportunity for local food entrepreneurs, qualities that may not be at first considered when thinking about food products themselves but that are important pieces of a sustainable and equitable food system and an important component of how residents think about the food they purchase.

Informal community assessment methods can also generate important information when consciously implemented, thus should not be overlooked. For example, attending and participating (when appropriate) in community meetings can improve understanding of community needs, generate ideas for new programming, and provide community feedback on developing proposals and program ideas. Whereas meetings organized by Extension professionals for the purpose of collecting data may require a higher level of effort yet yield limited results (e.g., if attendance is low), Extension professional attendance at meetings organized by community groups can allow for the observation of genuine community interactions and uninhibited comments that may inform program development.
Engaging Community Members Beyond Program Participation

One way to foster genuine connections between community members and Extension professionals is to involve community members at meaningful levels in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs instead of offering programs strictly by Extension for the community. As Ruemenapp (2018) points out, “Extension cannot approach these audiences or urban communities with a ‘Savior’ or ‘Lone Ranger’ attitude” (p. 171).

In the example of the NBCFM Market Ambassadors program, community partnerships were key to collecting data and maximizing the effectiveness of implementation strategies based on the results of the data collection phase. The Market Ambassadors were New Brunswick-area residents recruited in collaboration with local organizations and hired into the program as Rutgers Cooperative Extension staff. This strengthened community connections with Rutgers Cooperative Extension and created local employment opportunities for residents.

In the early stages of the program, the Market Ambassadors engaged in data collection by helping to design and administer a comprehensive community survey. Thus, the Market Ambassadors were listed on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol after completing the existing ethics training required at the university (i.e., CITI human subjects training). Though required of all individuals directly engaged in the research effort, these trainings may not be well suited to the needs of community researchers (Anderson et al., 2012), especially if technological or language barriers exist. Further, while training is crucial from the protection of human subjects’ perspective, as currently configured in many universities, the required trainings may be a barrier to including community members in the research components of programming.

To promote the availability and affordability of preferred food choices and help audiences overcome barriers to utilizing the NBCFM as a resource during the later phases, the Market Ambassadors participated in community events as program representatives. Maintaining a presence with collaborating organizations to reach diverse local community members reinforced the connectivity between the NBCFM and local residents over time, particularly as the local Market Ambassadors became familiar points of contact.

Hiring New Brunswick-area residents as Market Ambassadors resulted in successful program outcomes and demonstrates the importance of considering community members’ diverse workplace skills. Expanding beyond traditional program development and delivery skill sets (Fox et al., 2017), acknowledge that approaches to staffing may have to be more flexible for successful urban Extension programming. Since much Extension program work relies on effective relationship building, community members bring valuable interpersonal connections when hired as program staff, contributing to success.
Creating Organizational-Level Community Partnerships for Increased Relevance and Sustainability of Programming

Extension professionals joining and actively participating in community groups can increase collaboration and encourage new partnerships between Extension and communities (National Urban Extension Leaders [NUEL], 2015). In New Brunswick, Extension professionals serve as active members of the two largest anti-hunger coalitions in the city, the Feeding New Brunswick Network (FNBN) and the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance, and as members of other smaller organizations.

Because urban areas may be complex in terms of the number of organizations operating with the space (Fox et al., 2017), developing collaborative networks and alliances can increase the likelihood of successfully meeting objectives. For example, there are many individually operated food pantries in New Brunswick. However, they have achieved collective success by developing the Feeding New Brunswick Network, an organization of affiliated pantries that meet monthly to address shared concerns and needs. Rather than developing many individual relationships with pantries, Extension professionals in New Brunswick have found success by collaborating with the coalition of pantries for research and programming initiatives. Additionally, Extension professionals have worked with the coalition to replicate the model in other nearby locations, with one Extension professional serving as a founding member of the Metuchen Edison Assistance League, a coalition of food pantries located nearby and based on the FNBN model.

In a similar “network” model, residents, organizational leaders, and Extension professionals worked closely together with support from USDA and Johnson & Johnson to develop the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance. Topic-focused working groups that span the mission of the Alliance are led by a diverse collaborative group of community and Extension leaders focused on healthy food access, urban agriculture, food and economic development, food advocacy and policy, and community engagement. Collectively, working group members engaging around initiatives relevant to local residents, such as the healthfulness of school meals, can yield exponentially higher results than individual efforts.

Successful food security programming in New Brunswick has long relied upon strong connections between Extension professionals and community leaders. In the Market Ambassadors program example, engaging residents through connections with church leaders, cultural program coordinators, and others who directly serve as trusted community contacts allowed for the dissemination of information. Also important, it fostered the creation of an open communication channel through which community voices can continue to be heard by Extension professionals as programming evolves.

Along with community groups, developing close collaborations with the government is also important (Diekmann et al., 2017). The City of New Brunswick has been a willing partner on multiple initiatives of the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance, Feeding New Brunswick
Network, and New Brunswick Community Farmers Market. Collaboratively developing programs and events with the city as an official partner ensures an efficient yet comprehensive process to address logistics such as permitting, parking, space usage, and public safety while also providing opportunities to increase engagement of local residents through city media and promotion channels. In a prime example, the City of New Brunswick partners with Rutgers Cooperative Extension and Johnson & Johnson to sponsor the New Brunswick Community Farmers Markets, which receive additional community support and promotion through New Brunswick City Center, a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to promoting the central business district of New Brunswick. The city also works closely with farmer’s market leadership to ensure a fair and effective process for obtaining vendor permits and parking in the market’s urban locations.

Engaging community partners from the beginning is key to developing programs with the community rather than for the community. Engaging city government is essential to reduce the likelihood that unexpected logistical concerns will arise in the process. Programs with a single champion could be more vulnerable to deterioration with time or changes in resources, whereas programs supported by deep community partnerships and secure institutional backing may be more likely to achieve both short- and long-term success and to remain resilient as communities and their needs evolve.

**Engaging University Students in Extension Programming**

Community-engaged research, scholarship, and service, long the domain of Extension (Franz, 2014), are increasingly recognized as important in universities writ large (Eatman et al., 2018; Stanton, 2007). Therefore, as universities train students in the traditional approaches of research, scholarship, and service, training them in publicly-engaged scholarship and service is also essential. One way to accomplish this is through academic coursework. For example, one of the authors teaches a first-year seminar called “Food Insecurity in New Brunswick: A Service-Learning Approach,” where students volunteer in food pantries in the community for course credit. Another example is in a course called “Women, Food, and Health,” where the other author led students’ assessment of a personal dietary intake and food budget along with the determination of New Brunswick living expenses to place their own food costs in the context of an urban community environment. Even if Extension professionals cannot create their own classes, guest lecturing in others’ classes is a meaningful way to involve undergraduate students in Extension work on food insecurity. These guest lectureships may take place in a broad range of curricula but are often especially welcome in departments of nutrition, agriculture, and economics.

Additionally, many opportunities to engage students in food security work via internships and experiential or service-learning credits, even within a singular program. As an example, interns with the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market have assisted with projects related to
community food preferences for value-added products, business development and agricultural economics, communications and marketing, winter crop production in an urban setting, and nutrition education for adults and youth.

Volunteering is an important way for students to get involved and a critical element of the success of urban Extension (NUEL, 2015). The Rutgers-New Brunswick Student Food Pantry recruits students to be “Social Media Ambassadors” in the hope they can raise awareness of the pantry and concurrently reduce social stigma around pantry use since stigma can have a negative impact on seeking the needed food assistance (Delos Reyes et al., 2021). Students regularly volunteer at other pantries throughout the city and assist the Feeding New Brunswick Network. Medical student volunteers have collaborated closely with Extension personnel to implement Veggie Rx. This fruit and vegetable prescription program increases fresh food access for low-income urban residents at risk for chronic disease. Via Veggie Rx, medical students see patients at a no-cost clinic and offer health screenings at a mobile community soup kitchen. These student volunteers explain the importance of fruit and vegetables to their patient’s overall health and then distribute and track data on the “prescriptions” that are “filled” for fruits and vegetables at local farmer’s markets. Also, having volunteered to analyze data and present findings at conferences, these students have successfully engaged in program design, delivery, and evaluation, benefitting their own learning and the well-being of community members.

Partnering with centers of community-engaged service learning, such as the Rutgers Collaborative Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement, is an opportunity to work with students on food insecurity solutions, as well as to make new connections between Extension and the community. Both authors have partnered with the Collaborative Center and its students to host topical webinars and meetings that fostered solutions-based discussions relative to food insecurity. Additionally, both have done guest lecturers in the Advancing Community Development undergraduate class and hosted Collaborative Center students for experienced-based community internships. This Center consistently seeks ways to engage its students directly with community initiatives and organizations in the city. Supporting this process by expanding Extension partnerships benefits Extension personnel, university students, and perhaps most importantly, community residents.

One of the most important considerations when involving students in any food insecurity research or programming is that they often bring firsthand food insecurity experiences to their work. For example, approximately one-in-three Rutgers-New Brunswick students are food insecure (Cuite et al., 2020), and many likely had experiences with food insecurity as children (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2018). Sensitivity to the possibility that students have or have had lived experiences of food insecurity, rather than the assumption that students are food secure, should be the norm when bringing students into this area of Extension work, whether it’s through classes, internships, or volunteer opportunities. Along with community audiences, Extension professionals may also consider university students as a non-traditional target audience. While
university departments and programs such as Student Affairs, Residential Life, etc., may provide direct support to students, Extension professionals who are increasingly well-versed and familiar with the issues connected to food insecurity can also serve as a support network for university students.

**Evaluating Community-Based Extension Programs**

Both formal and informal evaluation tactics can be useful toward determining whether Extension programs are succeeding in meeting their objectives and serving community needs. Collective impact assessment is one important approach that Extension professionals use to ensure that communities are engaged at every phase of program development and evaluation and that Extension professionals are working toward goals shared by the community (Franz, 2014; Hanleybrown et al., 2012).

One of the first questions program evaluation can help answer is whether the program serves the intended audience. Repeated evaluations over time may be needed to identify which audiences are participating in programs, how this is changing, and who might be missing.

At the NBCFM, extensive sales and customer data tracking sheets, along with on-site and online surveys, are used to collect feedback and outcome measures from diverse audiences. In the Veggie Rx program, pre- and post-intervention surveys are employed with the goal of understanding who the program serves and to recognize audiences who may be missing. To that end, clinic patients enrolled in Veggie Rx but who did not use their fresh produce prescriptions are surveyed to assess program barriers and determine ways to make the program more accessible. This important information guides program changes each year, allowing Extension personnel to reevaluate how well they continually meet community needs.

Many Extension professionals may already be familiar with the traditional approach to program evaluation—examining the impact of a program on the pre-determined outcomes of interest (Duttweiler, 2008). When operating in an urban area, often with multiple co-occurring programs, the overlapping efforts can make it difficult to distinguish individual impacts of any one specific program. It is important to note that when trying to understand the effects of programming on food insecurity, systematic changes in poverty levels and other policy changes may also have a significantly larger impact than any one program in isolation. For example, the NBCFM experienced a decrease in sales during 2015-2016, but it was unclear if the market program was not reaching the intended audience or whether there was an increase in other opportunities to procure fresh produce throughout the city. Sales and attendance have since increased with more targeted outreach efforts conducted in collaboration with community partners and Extension professionals.
It is also important to recognize that in some cases, a successful program outcome can put other programs or even that same program in jeopardy. In 2012, after advocacy on behalf of the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance and many Extension professionals, a full-service grocery store opened in New Brunswick (NJBiz, 2012). After 20 years without a full-service grocery store to provide regular access to fresh fruits and vegetables, increasing healthy food access through this store benefited the community at large, even if it meant increased competition and the potential for decreased sales for the NBCFM. Because improved healthy food access across the community is a goal of Extension, the new grocery store met the larger objectives of Extension and the city. Luckily, NBCFM’s sales of fruits and vegetables also held steady during the store’s opening years, indicating both were meeting consumer needs.

As the goal of much urban Extension programming is serving a community in need, sometimes the research and evaluation pieces cannot be the primary focus of the program. Despite their usefulness to Extension practice and scholarship, there are some instances in which evaluation components must be a very minimal piece of a project. One example is demonstrated by an expansion of the New Brunswick-based Veggie Rx program. The initial program format consisted of Extension professionals working with medical students at their student-run free clinic, which serves approximately 40 patients per year. In this setting, a combination of survey research and interviews was effective to gauge preferences, intended and actual program participation, and dietary intake. Further, it was feasible to collect related health outcomes from electronic medical records. At present, an expansion of the program into a much larger community-based health center is in progress. Though the health center is a willing partner, it is not feasible to incorporate an evaluation component into their aspects of the Veggie Rx program implementation. Therefore, the primary program focus will be on providing fresh produce access and measuring what behaviors can be assessed at the NBCFM when patients fill their prescriptions and redeem their produce vouchers. Considering the program’s primary goal is to improve food access for increased health benefits, this is an acceptable trade-off because the increased program reach into a low-income and at-risk population will likely increase impact. However, a challenge exists in that the expectation for Extension professionals to demonstrate program outcomes, including obtaining (and in some cases retaining) program funding, remains.

A final challenge for conducting urban programs in close partnership with communities is that, even if programs are evaluated successfully and seen as efficacious, they are not necessarily recognized as part of Extension (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2017). Specifically, community partners may be recognized as the lead or sponsor of programs, maintaining a disconnect between community perception and the role of Extension. In this regard, including measurement of how well any given program does in spreading awareness and appreciation of Extension itself in urban areas may be worth considering, as this may contribute to the continued viability of Extension in evolving urban landscapes.


Conclusion

Extension can, and in many cases already does, engage in well-rooted partnerships with urban audiences. Yet, it is important to recognize there are many layers to the diversity that exists within urban audiences. There is no single “urban community,” but rather, each one has distinct needs.

The examples presented within the context of New Brunswick, New Jersey, including collaborations between Rutgers Cooperative Extension and the New Brunswick Community Food Assessment, the NBCFM, Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick, and others, illustrate important considerations for engaging in urban Extension initiatives. This case study leads to the following key recommendations for Extension professionals to meaningfully engage the community in urban food systems programming:

- Identify the urban audience(s) to be engaged, including groups who may be traditionally underserved or hard-to-reach.
- Invite community members to actively participate in program design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure the programming is relevant and wanted.
- Conduct a comprehensive, customized needs assessment to understand the unique community you aim to serve.
- Collaborate with existing (or consider creating new) organizational networks, groups of organizations that work together to address common goals.
- Before launching the program, assess the implications of planned programming to other organizations working in the food systems space.
- Contact local government and other active community organizations and invite them to participate as collaborative partners.
- When possible, hire community residents as Extension team members to solidify their involvement in the programming while strengthening local connections.
- Consider involving university students who can provide program support while learning valuable community engagement skills.
- Evaluate community-based programs to collect information valuable to Extension professionals and the community itself, making sure your outcome metrics can further serve community members.

This is an exciting time for Extension professionals to be working as partners with urban communities. There are challenges, as in all areas of Extension, but the range of successful projects and partnerships in New Brunswick demonstrate opportunities for similar work to be conducted in other urban communities. The presentation of specific considerations in the context of successful urban program implementation examples contributes to the expanding understanding of how Extension professionals situate themselves and their work in partnership with urban communities.
References


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**Acknowledgments**

The authors thank Julie Fox, Michelle Gaston, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on this manuscript. We also thank our Rutgers University and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School colleagues and the students with whom we collaborate on these programs. We particularly thank our colleagues who work at the New Brunswick Community Farmers Market and our community partner organizations. Most importantly, we thank the New Brunswick residents who have been partners and/or participants in our food insecurity programming and research projects.
Cooperative Extension in Urban America: Place-Based Approaches for Improving Health

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While the bulk of Cooperative Extension’s (Extension) historical work has been with rural populations, its future work should also address the needs of those living in urban areas. The opportunity to live a long and healthy life is paramount among those needs. Cooperative Extension’s National Framework for Health Equity and Well-Being (Framework) provides a roadmap by which Cooperative Extension can help ensure that all people have that opportunity. The central premise of the Framework is that future work of Extension must include but extend beyond the promotion of healthy behaviors to place-based approaches for improving conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play. Recommendations for doing so include advancing health equity as a systemwide value, integrating data science with community voice to surface health inequities, investing in health-focused work, initiating new partnerships, and utilizing community development principles to influence social determinants of health. This article sequentially introduces the reader to the five recommendations and highlights how each of those recommendations is already being put into practice in urban areas of the United States.

*Keywords*: health, determinants, urban, well-being, equity

Since its creation in 1914, Extension has played an important role in improving our nation’s health. Much of its early work focused on basic sanitation, healthy eating, and food preservation. At that time, most Extension staff were based in rural areas of the country, and as a result, individuals living in more urban areas may not have had access to the health-related programs of Extension. Over time, however, Extension’s portfolio of health-related work has evolved to
include efforts related to physical activity, chronic disease prevention and management, nutrition security, mental health, immunization education, substance misuse prevention, environmental health, and healthy aging.

The purpose of this article is to provide a present-day “snapshot” of Extension’s health-focused work in urban areas of the United States organized around five high-level recommendations contained in Cooperative Extension’s National Framework for Health Equity and Well Being (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy Health Innovation Task Force, 2021). Included are examples of how Extension personnel serving urban areas of the nation are already implementing core elements of those recommendations in their work.

A Roadmap for Health Extension

In 2012, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) appointed a National Task Force on Health to identify systemwide priorities for guiding Extension’s health-related work for the next three to five years. Approved by ECOP in 2014, Cooperative Extension’s National Framework for Health and Wellness (Braun et al., 2014) was instrumental in establishing health as a priority for Extension. It also served to raise the visibility of Extension’s health-related work and catalyzed the establishment of new programs, partnerships, and professional development opportunities (Braun & Rodgers, 2018).

The following decade gave rise to an increased focus on the social determinants of health (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2017) across the public health and healthcare communities. Also gaining attention were the inequities in health outcomes between various groups. It soon became evident that a sole focus on promoting healthy behaviors was insufficient to close the health outcome gap that exists between those with the resources needed to maintain or improve their health and those who do not. Consequently, place-based work to improve community conditions began to gain momentum (Dankwa-Mullen & Perez-Stable, 2016).

By 2020, the need for a refreshed framework became evident. Accordingly, ECOP appointed a Health Innovation Task Force to provide recommendations for system-level change that would further advance Extension’s health-related work. Members of the task force were selected based on their expertise in areas such as health equity, public health, community engagement, prevention science, evaluation, and healthcare. The task force quickly identified updating the framework as a high-priority task and charged a work team with leading the framework update. Drafts of the framework document were vetted widely across Extension with a special effort to surface the voices of HBCUs and tribal colleges. After more than a year of work by the subgroup, Cooperative Extension’s National Framework for Health Equity and Well-Being was approved by ECOP in July 2021.
Included in the updated Framework are five high-level recommendations for Extension.

- **Advance health equity as a core system value** to ensure all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as they can be.
- **Utilize community assessment processes** that integrate data science and resident voice to identify and address health inequities with greater precision.
- **Invest in the success and visibility** of Extension’s health-related professionals, programs, and initiatives.
- **Establish partnerships** with academic units, universities, government agencies, corporations, non-profit organizations, and foundations that share a commitment to reducing or eliminating health inequities.
- **Utilize a community development approach** to advance the work of coalitions focused on influencing the social determinants of health.

The following sections explore each of the recommendations in greater detail and include brief descriptions of where the recommendation is already being implemented in various urban areas of the nation.

**Health Equity as a Core Value**

When a group experiences suboptimal health because of policies, practices, or conditions that are preventable, unfair, or unjust, the deleterious effects on those groups are referred to as health inequities. Long-standing inequities, including some that have been introduced and promulgated by federal, state, and local policies, have put some population groups at increased risk of experiencing illnesses, having worse outcomes when they do get sick, and worse overall health.

The National Academies of Sciences defines structurally-driven health disparities as those brought about by “the dimensions of social identity and location that organize or structure differential access to opportunities for health including race, ethnicity, gender, employment and socioeconomic status, disability, immigration status, geography, and more” (NASEM, 2017).

Fortunately, many of these inequities are remediable. When a society is committed to health equity as a common value, people work together to ensure that everyone, regardless of race, neighborhood, or financial status, has fair and equal access to a healthy community of opportunity (PolicyLink, 2020).

Consequently, it is recommended that CES adopt an organizational perspective that frames racism as a public health issue in a manner like other threats to public health. This shift in Extension’s strategic direction is long overdue and is critical to growing Extension’s role in reducing inequities in health outcomes. But organizational barriers to working in new ways must be removed if Extension professionals are to be successful in eliminating such inequities (Harder, 2019).
It is important to note that some individuals may view efforts to address barriers to health as being outside of Extension’s core work and mission. Others may see efforts to drive resources toward groups that have been historically underserved as taking resources away from those who currently benefit from the work of Extension. Not only are these beliefs historically inaccurate, but they also jeopardize the future of Extension (ECOP Health Innovation Task Force, 2021). The following projects are two examples of CES work currently in progress that exemplify health equity as a core value.

In Nebraska, Extension has played a key role in creating the Well Connected Communities Health Equity Coalition in the city Lincoln. This coalition focuses on eliminating the 20-year life expectancy gap which exists between various neighborhoods of the city. The coalition conducted focus groups by and with community members impacted by health inequities which sought a deeper understanding of health disparities. By better understanding health equity from the perspective of those living, learning, working, and worshiping in a particular neighborhood, the coalition was able to amplify the voices of adults and youth who live there and advocate for the resources needed to eliminate the current life expectancy gap. The coalition used an asset-based approach to develop a strategic plan for catalyzing action focused on various dimensions of community change.

In New Hampshire, limited data were available regarding the food and health behaviors of the Hispanic population at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, programs and policies to aid this population were at risk of not achieving their goals. Accordingly, the Dao Research Lab at the Department of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) implemented a survey in collaboration with UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) to assess the perceived physical and psychosocial wellbeing of the Hispanic population in New Hampshire during the pandemic. Results are being used to inform the development of resources, future interventions, and programming for that population.

Integrate Data Science and Resident Voice

Many past efforts to advance community health have been framed within an expert paradigm of prescribing what a community or group needed to achieve optimal health. More recent research demonstrates this approach was ineffective and likely exacerbated health inequities among some social groups. Identifying the specific drivers of inequity requires authentic community engagement with health-disparate populations. Further, granular and inclusive data must be utilized to enhance and support resident voice. It is nearly impossible to identify precisely and alter existing inequities without these things.

Data science is a growing field of study that is rapidly transforming how we use data to answer complex questions, including those related to health inequities and well-being. Innovative data science techniques can be used to collect and analyze complex data rigorously, but also to make predictions, identify trends, enhance efficiency, and accurately target effort. According to Dean
Linda P. Fried of Columbia University’s School of Public Health, data science is a major part of the solutions needed for public health, and we must “use science to raise the floor and the ceiling of health for everyone” (Goldsmith et al., 2021, p. 1).

The previously mentioned initiative in New Hampshire that assessed the relationship between the food environment, food insecurity, and health behaviors among Hispanics during COVID-19 exemplifies many data science recommendations for Extension. Their team surveyed a representative sample of the Hispanic population on 13 existing measures of well-being, conducted proximity calculations between subjects’ residential addresses and food sources, and aggregated data from six state and federal databases to geolocate a variety of food sources. With this data, targeted universalism (Powell et al., 2019) – setting universal goals with focused approaches for varying groups – can be practiced as holistic issues among the broader Hispanic population are identified. Geo-specific data is then used to inform appropriate interventions for various micro-locations.

Resident voice, also called community voice, is a process of co-learning that can strengthen engagement from a wide range of people, particularly those who are underserved, marginalized, and underheard. Without purposeful engagement with these populations, their voices are often not heard nor included in policies and other decisions that affect their day-to-day lives. The literature has consistently shown that community-based participatory research, of which resident voice is a part, is effective in collaboratively developing, implementing, and sustaining initiatives that seek to address inequities and improve the social determinants of health (e.g., Williamson et al., 2020).

In Kansas City, resident voice was used to inform an initiative to address food deserts in Wyandotte County, where 27,000 people are food insecure or without food access. Alongside the Unified Government, a grocery co-op, and other stakeholders, Extension organized listening sessions that gathered and engaged 350 residents. Through this process, residents were able to engage in participatory decision-making regarding healthy and affordable foods they would like to see in the store, thus making it a more desirable place to shop. Not only did one co-op break ground because of these and related initiatives, but additional underserved and underrepresented communities that lack food access were identified, and additional efforts in those areas are underway. Extension professionals are uniquely centered to engage their communities to determine the most critical needs of disadvantaged populations by collecting reliable, extensive data.

Investments to Ensure Success

While the implementation of this Framework must be grounded in an assessment of what is already being done, it also must be innovative and adaptable to meet the emerging initiatives of partners, funders, and urban communities. For example, the current priorities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the federal partner and a primary funder of the Cooperative...
Extension System, are nutrition security, climate change, market opportunities, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (USDA, 2021). In addition, the usage and adoption of the word “health” nationally across Extension systems have increased, along with its presence in strategic planning, which shows commitment to an investment in future health initiatives.

To do this work, hiring initiatives focused on seeking out professionals who hold health-focused degrees, such as public health, must be pursued. The Extension system must also invest in the success of these health-related professionals, such as explicitly offering unique professional development opportunities focused on health and well-being. For example, the National Health Outreach Conference, an annual gathering of Extension faculty and staff with an explicit focus on health, offers attendees a robust array of professional development offerings. It can also serve as a forum for Extension to engage with relevant partners to plan and implement initiatives on a national scale (Braun & Rodgers, 2018).

Increasing funding for work in disadvantaged communities, especially those in urban areas, is also critical if Extension is to be successful in reducing health inequities. Recently, an investment by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supported work by Extension personnel and community partners to increase public awareness of health inequities and increase access and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. Emerging as the Extension Collaborative on Immunization Teaching & Engagement (EXCITE), the effort ultimately involved the Extension Foundation, ECOP, USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the CDC as implementation partners. Through this effort, funds were made available to all 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-Grant institutions.

Community partnerships lie at the heart of the EXCITE work conducted by Cornell University Cooperative Extension in New York City (CUCE-NYC). In early 2021, CUCE-NYC Executive Director Jennifer Tiffany learned that 70 medical students volunteering with the community engagement team at Weill Cornell Medicine’s Clinical and Translational Sciences Center (CTSC) were trained and certified to administer COVID-19 vaccinations but had nowhere to do so since they were only available on evenings and weekends. Building on long-standing partnerships, CUCE-NYC connected them with the Community Healthcare Network (CHN) of federally qualified health centers serving neighborhoods throughout NYC so the medical students could volunteer with community-based vaccination clinics.

The first vaccine clinic involving the students took place at a church in the Jamaica, Queens neighborhood, and within five hours, they would administer all 176 allocated doses. According to Jeff Zhu, the CTSC’s managing director of community engagement and research, “it was a resounding success,” a sentiment also conveyed by Rev. Patrick O’Connor of the First Presbyterian Church. The day’s success was attributed to the strong existing organizational partnerships, the community context, and Extension’s ability to make quick connections between organizations with shared interests.
The partnership to take COVID-19 vaccinations to people in their community grew from there. It was a key asset when EXCITE sought collaborations nationwide. In the months leading up to the start of the EXCITE program, community-based pop-up clinics brought vaccinations to 3,505 people. Plans solidified to partner with FEMA to establish ongoing community-based vaccination sites in churches in East New York, Washington Heights, Harlem, and South Jamaica. EXCITE support started on June 1, 2021, and since then, the partnership clinics have administered more than 25,000 additional vaccinations, adapting to the rapidly changing pandemic and policy environment.

When New York’s emergency declaration ended in late June 2021, medical and nursing students shifted to offering basic health screenings until they were able to resume administering shots under the PREP Act. The community-based FEMA sites continued until the end of July 2021, with support from the NYC Black Nurses Alliance. Community-based pop-up clinics stayed strong and accessible using an innovative “back-pack model” developed by Dr. Freddy Molano, Community Healthcare Network’s Vice President for Infectious Disease and LGBT Programs and a lead organizer for the pop-up clinics. With the advent of new variants and a new NYS emergency declaration, the work continues to adapt and build nimble partnerships that bring COVID-19 vaccines to people in their home communities. The partnerships are grounded in a long-standing commitment to advance health equity, racial justice, and life-long health for all.

As a result of the EXCITE work, the ECOP Health Innovation Task Force is in ongoing conversations about how Extension can become a longer-term partner in immunization education and clinic access efforts with special attention to medically underserved and low-uptake communities. Equity and access are central to this conversation.

The South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension Better Choices, Better Health (BCBH) program seeks to increase self-efficacy, help people improve their self-management of chronic conditions, enhance the daily lives of adults as they age, and create a new revenue stream for the institution (Contreras & Anderson, 2020). To expand the program’s reach, SDSU formed a partnership with the Community Health Worker Collaborative of South Dakota (CHWSD) to advocate for it becoming an approved training program under South Dakota Medicaid. With that approval granted, individuals who wish to utilize the BCBH curriculum now complete a training course offered by SDSU before offering the program in the communities they serve. SDSU has now hired a community outreach coordinator who will collaborate with a variety of state and local partners to expand offerings of the training required to administer the program.

SDSU Extension itself has hired three additional community health workers who have led 21 workshops with 99 participants. By leveraging Extension’s role and capacity to work across sectors in communities, programs such as BCBH now play a role in creating equitable health policies and positions that will positively impact the social, economic, and environmental contexts in which people live, learn, work, and play.
Establish Partnerships

The Framework also advocates Extension to increase partnerships with academic units, government agencies, and non-profit organizations that work to address the social determinants of health. Such partnerships allow for the complementary use of skills, expertise, resources, and infrastructure to implement comprehensive approaches for reducing health inequities.

The role of Academic Health Centers (AHCs) has historically centered around providing high-quality medical care to patients, educating physicians-in-training, and conducting innovative research to advance clinical care (Ramsey & Miller, 2009). Despite advancements in medicine, many challenges in population health remain as the rates of preventable diseases, premature mortality, and health disparities in the United States are higher than in other comparable countries (Murphy et al., 2017). Driven by the social determinants of health, the high rates of morbidity, mortality, and associated disparities in the United States require a community-centered approach to health and well-being. As AHCs begin to expand their missions to include addressing the social determinants of health (Park et al., 2019) and health becomes a more prominent focus within the Extension system, there is a timely opportunity for strong collaboration towards the advancement of population health outcomes in the United States.

Faculty and researchers at academic medical centers, health science programs, and other academic units offer expertise related to various health conditions, including chronic disease prevention and management, mental health, substance abuse and misuse, and immunization-preventable illnesses. Extension offers complementary expertise in community capacity building and addressing social determinants through community outreach and education. Effective partnerships between the two can generate high-impact initiatives that advance health equity.

Gutter and colleagues (2020) highlight the advantages of promoting community health collaboration between Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) programs and Extension. The CTSA program provides financial support for approximately 60 academic medical centers to develop, demonstrate, and disseminate medical advancements in translational research. CTSA hubs are required to address the needs of special populations, such as those experiencing health disparities, and have incorporated partnership strategies such as leveraging community organizations, telehealth, and others to improve the health outcomes of designated health disparate populations. The vast reach of Extension, along with the existing resources of CTSA programs, provide a unique opportunity for strategic collaboration to advance the shared mission of advancing health equity. Today, CTSA programs are rethinking their historical reliance on an expert model of innovation diffusion to one based on authentic community engagement.

In Florida, a partnership between the University of Florida’s Clinical and Translational Science Institute (UF CTSI) and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension (UF IFAS Extension) has led to the development of a multistate project to increase the uptake of vaccinations for COVID-19 and influenza in high risk, including urban, communities...
across five states. The PANDEMIC (Program to Alleviate National Disparities in Ethnic and Minority Immunizations in the Community) study is working in three urban communities, including St. Louis, Missouri, the Bronx, New York, and Sacramento County, California. The project’s overall goal is to increase the uptake of vaccinations for COVID-19 and influenza.

PANDEMIC utilizes a community-engaged approach, including partnerships with community health workers, community and faith-based organizations, and health departments to address disparities in adult immunization among migrant farmworkers, Native American, Hispanic, and Black populations. Through six intervention strategies, a combination of evidence-based and innovative, the PANDEMIC study has the potential to impact vaccination rates among these high-priority populations significantly. Additionally, it will demonstrate the power of strategic partnership between academic medical centers and Extension.

In addition to partnerships with internal academic units, government agencies, and non-profit organizations, strategic partnerships between Land-Grant Universities would allow greater impact within states, across regions, and beyond.

Extension also has a long history of collaboration with state and county health departments and other local government agencies. There are many examples of how local Extension professionals have worked with local government agencies to advance health through traditional education and outreach.

**Utilize a Community Development Approach**

Addressing the social determinants of health will require that Extension adopt new ways of working that extend beyond face-to-face delivery of educational programs. While promoting behavior change through formal education will remain an important part of Extension’s health portfolio, its impact on overall health and well-being is limited. It is estimated that as much as 70% of an individual’s health is determined by factors other than their behaviors (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2014).

According to the NASEM (2017) addressing the social determinants of health will require the creation of multi-sector, multi-generational coalitions steadfastly committed to creating sustainable community change. Extension has extensive experience mobilizing community action around a wide array of community issues, including health equity (Buys & Koukel, 2018). Furthermore, there are many different roles that Extension can play within a community coalition, moving in and out of these roles as appropriate. These roles include convening, facilitating, managing, supporting, resourcing, and leading.

The skills needed to work in these new ways align well with those possessed by Extension’s community development professionals. Through the years, Extension has historically employed
many faculty and staff who have expertise in community development, but not all Extension staff possess skills in facilitating community change.

Coalitions must bring together representatives of education, government, health and healthcare, non-profit organizations, and business with community residents with lived experience in a particular locale to be most effective. Together, they collaboratively plan and implement efforts to address the barriers that stand in the way of the achievement of shared health goals.

More and more, community development professionals are looking at their work through an equity lens by embracing a concept called equitable development. Equitable development is “an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant.” It is increasingly considered an effective “placed-based action strategy for creating strong and livable communities” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2021). Equitable development is driven by “clear expectations that the outcomes from development need to be responsive to underserved populations and vulnerable groups.” When looked at through a health lens, it is about being responsive to the needs of those experiencing the greatest health inequities or health burden.

Being responsive to the needs of communities experiencing health inequities while balancing the distribution of finite resources is a challenge that many community development professionals face. One solution is the utilization of an approach called targeted universalism. Targeted universalism begins with the fundamental belief that we are all part of a society where everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive. Using a targeted universalism approach, a community begins with a discussion about a universal health status that everyone should be able to achieve. That is followed by the development of targeted strategies by which groups can achieve those universal goals. Success with a targeted universalism approach is dependent upon moving past the idea that driving resources to one group means taking away from another (Powell et al., 2019).

In Texas, Prairie View A&M University has become an active partner in community-based efforts to improve health outcomes in 10 Houston communities. The overall goal of the effort is to create “complete communities” that provide residents with the health resources they need to experience the best health they can through all stages of life. Extension’s role in that effort focused on expanding awareness of health resources, improving access to healthy food, promoting self-care practices, and building strong families. Four Prairie View A&M colleges worked together to provide leadership and support to the Healthy Houston Initiative. These include the College of Agriculture and Human Sciences, College of Nursing, College of Juvenile Justice, and the College of Business.

For the Healthy Houston Initiative, Extension staff from all program areas work together to reach residents where they live on their terms. Examples include creating a mobile kitchen unit and Extension activities conducted in association with farmer’s markets and pop-up grocery stores. In addition, a promising new effort called the Community Agriculture School Sustainability
Program is teaching young people about innovative growing systems such as aquaponics and hydroponics as well as the economic, social, and environmental considerations of agricultural production systems. Through the program, youth learn about the basics of gardening, agricultural entrepreneurship, and developing a marketing plan.

The Ohio State University uses authentic resident engagement and community development principles to support the transformation of a high poverty, distressed community adjacent to its Columbus campus. The seeds of revitalization came in 1995 when Ohio State and the City of Columbus joined forces to create a non-profit community redevelopment corporation. The core of the effort is the creation of a planned neighborhood consisting of affordable rent-to-own homes. Supported by the rebuilding of the Weinland Park Elementary School and the creation of the adjacent Shoenbaum Family Center, children in Weinland Park now have a well-supported continuum of learning from birth to age 10.

Today, the Weinland Park Collaborative brings together business, education, government, and philanthropy representatives to coordinate a broad array of activities across the neighborhood. Activities of the Collaborative focus on such things as public safety, housing, employment, healthy living, resident engagement, youth development, and education. In particular, Ohio State University Extension has provided programs focused on workforce development, entrepreneurship, homeownership, tax preparation, infant mortality, and supportive services for tenants. Because of its value to the community, Ohio State University Extension was provided free office space to operate a branch office in a newly constructed property owned by the Community Housing Network.

**Conclusion**

As showcased in this article, Extension faculty and staff in many locations across the country are demonstrating a new way of working, focusing on the constellation of contextual factors that are preventing the residents of some urban communities from being as healthy as they can be. These efforts augment the historical work of Extension to build health literacy and promote healthy behaviors. While the examples included in this article constitute a sample of place-based efforts to improve population health and reduce inequities in health status, Extension professionals in more locations across the country must follow the lead of their pioneering peers.

Wider adoption of place-based approaches, particularly in urban areas, will require moving beyond a prescriptive, expert-based model of university outreach to a community-engaged approach focused on collaborative solution-finding with and for communities. It will also necessitate changes in the criteria by which Extension faculty and staff are evaluated as well as providing them with the training and resources needed to work in new ways. Finally, clear signals from Extension leadership regarding the importance of equity in decisions about where to focus time and resources will be necessary for staff to feel supported in engaging in work that focuses on the needs of those struggling to make a living and live a healthy life.
References


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Perspectives of 4-H Professionals: Practices to Engage Immigrant Youth in 4-H Teens as Teachers Programs

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Immigrant youth in the United States face historical and systemic challenges in American schools. Out-of-school mentoring programs, such as the 4-H Teenagers as Teachers model, have a positive impact on diverse youth outcomes. This qualitative study presents practices associated with engaging immigrant youth as teachers in urban 4-H youth development programs. Purposeful sampling identified 11 4-H professionals from three regions: West, Midwest, and Northeast. Five professionals are immigrants, and six are of White European descent. Building on the essential elements of teenagers as teachers programs and immigrant mentoring research, 4-H professionals indicated that cultural competence, including empathy and commitment to immigrant teens, is essential. They regard English language acquisition, acculturation, and support of youth and family well-being as critical components of culturally relevant mentoring. Study findings translate into recommendations for positive immigrant youth-adult mentorships practices that youth development program educators are encouraged to operationalize based on local interests, needs, and resources.

Keywords: immigrant adolescents, out-of-school, teenagers as teachers

Globalization is about the movement of capital, production and distribution, populations, and cultures (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Globalization generates an unprecedented enrollment of children of immigrants in American schools and in youth development organizations. Hence, the education of immigrant youth should be understood within these transnational spaces opened up by globalization that shape children’s life trajectories and options for the future (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrant youth are a heterogeneous population, and they reflect multiple family origins, racial and ethnic backgrounds, migration histories, and home languages. For example, some immigrant youth come from educated backgrounds, others have experienced intermittent disruptions in their education, and some youth have not experienced literacy beyond their indigenous language. Some are escaping political, religious, or ethnic persecution. Others are motivated by the opportunity of better jobs and education. Some arrive in the United States as documented migrants, while others cross the border as undocumented migrants. Some youth arrive with family members or extended families, and other youth arrive as unaccompanied minors (Oberoi, 2016). Immigrant youth settle in rural, suburban, and urban communities in the
United States and have varied household incomes. Some migrate from city to city, or state to state in search of better opportunities, while others stay in the same region (Batalova et al., 2021). Thus, the needs and outcomes of immigrant youth will vary according to their histories and trajectories. The term “immigrant” refers to individuals residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. Refugees are a subset of the immigrant population and make up a relatively small proportion of the U.S. immigrant population. Refugee youth and their families are unable to go home in the face of persecution. Immigrants and their U.S.-born children were approximately 85.7 million people or 26% of the U.S. population. Children and youth ages 5 to 17 comprised 5% of immigrants and 18% of the U.S.-born population (Batalova et al., 2021).

Second-generation children are born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent, accounting for 88% (15.6 million) of all children under age 18. The remaining 12% (2.2 million) were born outside the United States (Batalova et al., 2021). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) assert second-generation youth are often raised in home settings where the heritage culture is strong. Immigrant youth and second-generation children often face historical and systemic challenges in American schools as they negotiate cultural discrepancies between their home, school, and youth program environments (Kim et al., 2018).

Immigrant youth and second-generation youth make up a large population group, highlighting the importance of efforts to improve youth’s overall well-being. In recent years, Latinx immigrant youth have demonstrated increases in educational attainment, yet they still fall behind their White counterparts in social and economic indicators (Foxen & Mather, 2016). In general, Asian and Pacific Islander immigrant youth fare better than Latinx immigrant youth (Enchautegui, 2014). A strategy to support immigrant youth in culturally responsive ways is to involve adults in youth’s lives through mentoring that can begin to address these gaps (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Educational and youth development programs often experience challenges in providing culturally responsive programming, even when studies have shown the importance of using this approach for the success of immigrant youth (Neri et al., 2019; Simpkins et al., 2017).

**Theoretical Influences and Research Question**

This study is guided by theoretical frameworks that highlight the importance of relationships for supporting youth development. From a positive youth development perspective (Lerner et al., 2011), mentoring relationships are viewed as an ecological, developmental asset, and the mutual interactions between youth and their mentors serve as a protective factor in the healthy development of youth. In a large longitudinal study of new immigrants from diverse sending countries, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) found that “relational engagement,” described as quality relationships with peers, coaches, teachers, and administrators in school settings, served as a protective factor for immigrant youth and positively predicted academic engagement. Out-of-school programs such as Cooperative Extension’s (Extension) 4-H Youth Development Program (4-H), specifically the 4-H Teenagers as Teachers (4-H TAT) model, has been used as a strategy to engage immigrant youth in community-based learning opportunities.
to promote positive youth development and engage immigrant and diverse youth in 4-H in a variety of contexts (Bird & Subramaniam, 2011; Bolshakova, et al., 2018.; Ripberger & Blalock, 2013; Smith & Enfield, 2002). In the teenagers as teachers model, adolescents learn to teach younger children by first learning child development, group management, public speaking, evaluating their own teaching skills, and learning the subject they will be teaching (Emil et al., 2007; Lee & Murdock, 2001). This model has contributed to positive youth development outcomes for diverse youth (Worker et al., 2018); increased youth’s performance in school and sense of responsibility (Hammond-Diedrich & Walsh, 2006); and improved organizational skills, abilities to work with children, and public speaking (Bird & Subramaniam, 2011).

In 4-H TAT programs, adolescents have access to a trusted adult, teacher, community member, or older person who trains and mentors youth, supports the mentees’ development, and serves as a natural mentor. Natural mentors provide “ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the young person” (Thompson et al., 2016, p. 48). A qualitative study by Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) describes mentors who provide emotional support and function as “institutional agents” to Mexican high-school-aged youth. These mentors transmitted institutional information and resources about educational institutions and helped youth navigate these systems.

Relationships between mentors and immigrant youth emphasize the importance of understanding the concepts of culture and cultural competence. Culture is “the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people” (Bennett, 1998, p. 3). Cultural competence, also known as intercultural competence, is a “set of cognitive, affective and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett, 2008, p. 97). Quality mentoring relationships with immigrant youth are characterized by adults who are culturally competent, non-judgmental, empathetic, and focus on relationship building (Chau et al., n.d.; MENTOR, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2014). Most studies found that matching mentors who share ethnic, racial, and cultural characteristics with youth is important to youth (Sanchez et al., 2014). However, in situations where mixed race or ethnicity matching takes place, Jucovy (2002) suggests mentors should have similarities with mentees and should receive intercultural competency training.

Cultural competence is associated with culturally responsive teaching, an approach that emphasizes “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of cultural reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Gay adds “seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students” (Ibid). For youth development programs, we extend this concept to teaching and mentoring immigrant youth (Sanchez et al., 2014).
Previous research on promising practices of teenagers as teachers programs with diverse youth describes 10 essential elements for successful programs (Lee & Murdock, 2001). These elements include active teen recruitment, team building, initial and ongoing training, detailed curricula, communication and support plans, recognition, evaluation, and the support of dedicated adults. There is limited research on mentoring immigrant youth (Birman & Morland, 2014), and to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical research on practices to train and mentor immigrant youth to serve as 4-H teenage teachers. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature and aims to explore practices for engaging immigrant youth. The research question is: What are the promising practices for training and mentoring immigrant youth to serve as teen teachers?

Method

This qualitative study was conducted in 2021 and draws upon open-ended interviews with 11 4-H youth-serving professionals. The first author of this manuscript is an immigrant from Peru and is engaged in applied research and program development with immigrant youth. The second author is a second-generation immigrant from Mexico, and her programs serve first and second-generation immigrant youth.

Participants

We used purposive sampling and relied on the 4-H Program Leaders Working Group, Access, Equity and Belonging Committee for recommendations of 4-H professionals who engaged immigrant adolescents in teenagers as teachers programs. Maxwell (1997) defines purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). Selection criteria included 1) the 4-H professional directed or facilitated a teenagers as teachers program that had been in operation for more than one year, 2) the program engaged immigrant youth as teen teachers, 3) the program sustained the majority of young people’s participation over time, and 4) had a positive reputation for supporting healthy youth development within their state.

Our study included 11 4-H professionals from three states which corresponds to three regions in the United States: West, Midwest, and Northeast. To ensure confidentiality of the study’s participants, we did not include what state each interviewee works in, nor did we share detailed descriptions of 4-H TAT programs since few individuals in these states work with immigrant youth and families.

In all localities, programs were implemented in an urban U.S. city that serves newcomer and second-generation immigrant youth in partnership with local organizations. The localities in the West are cities that range from 178,000 to 525,000 in population. Immigrant youth are primarily from Mexico and Central American countries. 4-H TAT programs were implemented in partnerships with schools or with organizations that serve immigrant youth year-round. Three
4-H professionals who mentored teens are immigrants or second-generation immigrants from Mexico, and the other two self-identified as White. The localities in the Midwest are cities that range from 117,000 to 828,000 people. Immigrant youth are primarily from Mexico, India, China, Burma, and the Philippines. 4-H TAT programs were implemented in partnership with colleges and immigrant youth-serving organizations during the summer months. The 4-H professional is from Puerto Rico. The localities in the Northeast are cities that range from 32,000 to 66,000 people. Immigrant youth are primarily refugees from African countries, Canada, the Philippines, India, and Korea. 4-H TAT programs were implemented in partnership with immigrant youth-serving organizations during the summer months. Three 4-H professionals self-identified as White. All White professionals had 1-13 years of experience working with vulnerable populations before joining Extension. Participants worked for Extension from 2-15 years. Table 1 includes interviewees’ pseudonyms, demographic characteristics, and program duration.

**Table 1. Interviewee Gender and Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Generation/Race</th>
<th>Program Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xochitl Dominguez</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Puerto Rico/1st</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Morales</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bolivian/1st</td>
<td>Year-round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila Dorado</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican/1st</td>
<td>Year-round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Brown</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Year-round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Ramirez</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican/2nd</td>
<td>School year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Real</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican/2nd</td>
<td>School year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Walter</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>School year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Owens</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Scott</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Miller</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorie Pierce</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Data collection included open-ended semi-structured interviews with 4-H professionals via Zoom, and these interviews were recorded. Interviews sought to understand the guiding philosophy of 4-H programs, strategies, and challenges for recruiting, engaging, and sustaining the participation of immigrant adolescents as teen teachers in youth programs. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. Sample questions are included in Table 2. All interviews were conducted in English, with some use of Spanish. The data were automatically transcribed by Zoom, and researchers cleaned up the transcripts while listening to the audio recording. Team group discussions about the data set were documented in memos for analysis. Data collection protocols were approved by the University of California, Davis Institutional Review Board.
Table 2. Sample Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asked of 4-H Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can you tell me a little about your personal background?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What qualities and skills are needed to work with immigrant youth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you describe the background of the young people that serve as teen teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What strategies do you use to recruit immigrant teens to serve as teen teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What strategies do you use to train immigrant teens to serve as teen teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is it about your organization that helps you to support and retain immigrant teens?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

We analyzed this qualitative dataset (see Table 3 for analysis process) using three coding cycles. We read the interview transcripts and highlighted segments of the text using a priori nodes from immigrant mentoring research. These nodes included mentor’s cultural competency, culturally relevant activities, support English language acquisition, advice and counsel youth, encourage family cohesion, and utilize various forms of communication (Chau et al., n.d.; MENTOR, 2009). We also included the teenagers as teachers essential elements (Lee & Murdock, 2001). In the second coding cycle, we used grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and integrated analysis with respect to conceptual frameworks, organization infrastructure, program elements, and community relationships (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2019). After each coding cycle, the team discussed the data to achieve inter-rater reliability, and decisions were made by consensus (Saldaña, 2009). All coding was done “manually” in the cloud using Box to facilitate access to documents and using multiple color highlights to identify themes. We used Excel to compare and contrast themes among 4-H professionals.

Table 3. Data Analysis Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coding cycle 1: A priori nodes</td>
<td>Broad coding using a priori nodes based on literature review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-rater reliability</td>
<td>Both team members coded all interviews. Inter-rater reliability was conducted weekly, and differences were resolved via discussion and consensus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding cycle 2: Refined coding</td>
<td>Grounded analysis to refine coding. Reviewed uncoded data to assess the need for additional nodes. Integrated analysis with respect to organizations’ conceptual frameworks, organization infrastructure, program elements, and community relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis phase 1: Potential key practice identification</td>
<td>Identified potential key practices based on the magnitude of nodes (number of interviewees where a practice was featured), as well as prominence of the concept (how much it was described or articulated).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis phase 2: Key practices confirmation</td>
<td>Identified practices pursued by at least two 4-H professionals with similar ethnic backgrounds. Reviewed original transcripts to check findings. Each practice was discussed and agreed upon by the team. Analytical memos were coded and analyzed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis Phase | Description
--- | ---
Coding cycle 3: Key practices | Key practices were entered into an Excel sheet as themes and data were coded to facilitate analysis. Data from immigrant 4-H professionals and data from White/European American 4-H professionals were grouped to compare their similarities and differences.
Analysis phase 3: Key practices | Explored differences in practices by ethnicity/background and perspectives.

We illustrate frequently mentioned ideas or those we felt were particularly innovative or unique. The quotes in this article were selected to represent a general theme in the participants’ responses or for their richness and range.

Findings

To train and mentor immigrant youth as adolescent teachers, all 4-H professionals used practices that are consistent with those of mainstream positive youth development (e.g., Gambone & Connell, 2004; Lerner et al., 2011). For example, they cultivate youth’s strengths and assets, encourage engagement with staff and program activities, foster a sense of social belonging, and offer a broad system of supports. Staff and youth emphasize team-building activities and youth voice to ensure programs reflect youth interests. All 4-H professionals employed evidence-based strategies for teenagers as teacher programs (Arnold et al., 2016; Lee & Murdock, 2001).

All interviewees negotiated the urban context to engage immigrant youth by establishing and sustaining partnerships with educational, community, or religious organizations. All 4-H professionals described recruiting teens to teach in neighborhoods where programming takes place or within the school or partnering organization to reduce transportation issues. For example, Dominguez shared, “I have several community partners that know the communities I’m serving, and I use them as my scouts to help me identify youth that might be interested in that kind of work.” Ramirez conveys how the partnership with a school provided access to a dedicated space for programming but also provided support in recruiting and sustaining the participation of immigrant youth in the program. Partnerships with community-based organizations facilitate building rapport with the immigrant community.

Of interest are the variations in mentoring practices among 4-H professionals that were specifically aimed at immigrant teenagers. Our data revealed three themes that are consistent with the immigrant mentoring literature: cultural competence, culturally responsive mentoring, and parent or family involvement (Oberoi, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2014). This study offers nuanced descriptions of these practices in 4-H teens as teachers programs.
Cultural Competence

Our analysis reveals varying perspectives on what counts as cultural competence. Some 4-H professionals described the importance of acquiring basic knowledge of the history and background of teen teachers and their families. For example, De Villalobos shared,

Having knowledge in terms of the community and the immigrants’ experiences, because if we recognize these groups as immigrants, they don’t all have the same social conditions or the same experiences. For that reason, it is very important to identify ways to learn and recognize those differences.

4-H professionals described personality traits that are important for relational engagement (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009) with immigrant populations, such as compassion, empathy, respect, active listening, trustworthiness, and willingness to work with immigrant youth. 4-H professionals included a willingness and commitment to engage with immigrant youth as a description of cultural competence. Olson stated, “The willingness to work with the population, to learn about the population and help address those preconceived notions and that institutional racism that exists in our communities, and naming that.” Brown conveyed that

Cultural humility is something that I think is really important as you move forward … and to recognize that you are going to make mistakes. … I think probably the skill that is most needed is just the willingness and the desire to want to work with people who maybe you wouldn’t typically work with.

For a subgroup of 4-H professionals who did not share a similar ethnicity with immigrant youth in their programs, cultural competence included partnering with cultural brokers to facilitate communication and mentoring. Cultural brokering is the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change (Jezewski, 1990). Interviewees described cultural brokers as individuals who are bilingual/bicultural or multilingual/multicultural and are either immigrants or are immersed in the community. For most 4-H professionals, cultural brokers were adults or trusted leaders of another youth-serving organization with an established cultural partnership with the immigrant community. An essential function of cultural brokers is augmenting and enhancing communication with youth. Dominguez shared,

I had not been serving only immigrants that come from my same ethnicity and that means that it can be a different language. For example, I had been working with immigrant youth and refugee youth from Burma. They have different dialects, which means that Spanish is not something we have in common. But, recognizing I don’t have those skills, I rely on people that do have that and help with the communication piece.
Walter described the role of a cultural broker as someone who facilitates relationships with parents. Cultural brokers, as trusted adults, were also mentors to teenagers in 4-H TAT. Walter shared,

> If you have mentors that are part of the community where you’re teaching, it helps the kids and the parents to have a greater trust of what’s going on. Because she knows things about families that I have no idea. If the kid doesn’t show up to teach when he is supposed to be there, I don’t know what’s going on. But she always knew the little details that I wouldn’t know.

Trust is a key component of positive youth development, and cultural brokers are described as serving a fundamental role in facilitating cultural bridge-building between 4-H professionals and the immigrant community.

**Culturally Responsive Mentoring**

Our analysis offers varying perspectives on the nature and function of mentoring relationships between professionals and immigrant teens. We include subthemes on instructional techniques, mentor roles, and fostering youth’s cultural assets (Benson et al., 1998; Moll et al., 1992).

**Instructional Techniques**

4-H professionals described culturally responsive teaching and mentoring in divergent ways. Most 4-H professionals expressed the significance of repeated teaching practice as a strategy for teens’ language acquisition and increased confidence to teach. Several 4-H professionals provide youth scripts or other methods of instruction. Ramirez developed presentations for and with teens, and teens practiced teaching. In the process, they also practiced “anticipating any issues or problems that might come up. Like what happens if you run out of time, what happens if you are not prepared, and the technology is not working.” 4-H professionals described these as effective strategies to increase the teens’ comfort with English and teaching.

During summer 4-H TAT programs, professionals responded to teens’ sporadic participation in the program by adhering to the program’s schedule. Pierce described conversations she had with youth: “If I have a relationship with them, I could say, ‘Okay, you were not here on Tuesday, what happened? What’s up?’” She connected with youth to identify youth’s challenges to participation, and she shared that often she could not change the schedule when this was the issue. Similarly, Owens shared she trusted youth to arrive at the program on time. She added,

> We started at 5:30, and we ended at 7:30 [p.m.]. In the communities that I work with time is not a thing, so I used to have kids that would come in at like seven. But we’re going to end at 7:30 p.m., and I say to them, “I’m so glad you’re here, but we’re still going to end at 7:30 because I have a place I have to go next.”
In 4-H TAT programs that went beyond summer months in scope, professionals expressed the need to have an understanding and compassionate outlook when discussing accountability with immigrant teens. Ramirez responded to youth’s off-and-on participation in the program with empathy and flexibility. She stated,

> The different socio-economic status and those different responsibilities that come from being in a family of immigrants or from a lower socio-economic scale had a heavy impact on their participation in the program. Being flexible, compassionate, and understanding really comes into play and is really important.

Dorado is aware that teen teachers who do not show up to the program may be experiencing adversity and stated, “I think that when immigrant teenagers are not showing up, how can we support them, so they do show up.” Dorado’s response to better support youth included recruiting 12 teens when the program only needed two teen teachers. By recruiting more teens, youth rotated, took turns, and taught younger children when their competing family or job demands allowed them time to teach.

**Mentor-Mentee Relationships**

Our analysis reveals divergent perspectives on the mentor-mentee relationship. Some professionals perceived themselves as role models, partners in a youth-adult partnership, and program facilitators. In these roles, professionals engaged in mentorship within the boundaries of the program. In addition to these roles, other professionals engaged with teens in “long-standing relationships” that went beyond the 4-H TAT program.

Owens shared she invested time in getting to know teens by inquiring about youth’s interest in food and music and sharing her own interests with them. By getting to know teen teachers, Owens maintained relationships with teens that went beyond the program setting and interacted with youth in the community and as young adults in college. Dorado described her role as going beyond job responsibilities to include driving teens around, taking a 2 a.m. call from a teenager that is crying, helping them navigate college transcripts, or writing a resume. She added, “A lot of these things have less to do with job responsibilities and more to do with a commitment to help immigrant youth.” Several professionals described driving youth to places even though their organizational policies did not allow this. Domingues shared, “We don’t have official vehicles. I have to admit that I break the rules, and when youth need it, I do it.”

Some professionals also served as counselors in response to youth’s needs for well-being. Ramirez described having conversations with youth about what is home to them: “having to deal with all those emotions of missing home. We had a lot of conversations about being homesick and missing the city that they grew up in and missing their family.” By listening to youth, Ramirez gained insight into teens’ backgrounds and challenges and was able to understand better
and support youth. Real included conversations on mental health with immigrant teenagers as part of the program in response to youth’s expressed needs. She stated, “Some of them [youth] opened up and said, ‘I suffered with depression, and I’ve gone through this, and I’ve been bullied.” Real described providing guidance, support, and space to foster youth’s interests and passions. Oatman acted as an institutional agent (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003) and connected immigrant and refugee youth with organizations that help youth and families with trauma-informed care. Culturally responsive teaching and mentoring include responding to the need for mental health and well-being with immigrant youth.

**Cultural Assets**

4-H professionals described integrating youth voice in programming to facilitate additional culturally relevant leadership or learning opportunities for and with immigrant youth. These activities provided youth with opportunities to foster their cultural pride and contribute to social justice. Dorado described the development of a teenager as a teacher’s soccer program, which flourished due to youth interest and experience, even though there was no curriculum or guide to follow. She also engaged youth in community service activities and organized a retreat to watch a movie. Owens extended the summer program and described offering activities in response to youth’s interest, such as learning about community justice, food systems, and nutrition.

One 4-H professional engaged youth in dialogue during training sessions. Domingues shared,

> We have different sessions that we offer on how to manage difficult conversations, like cultural awareness. … To help develop appreciation for their own culture, to feel proud about it. We talk about diversity and what equity means in terms of teens teachers and the work they are doing to make programs accessible to all youth in their county.

The absence of additional perspectives on this component of culturally relevant mentoring illustrates the challenges professionals have to implement culturally responsive strategies in 4-H TAT programs.

**Involving Parents**

Most professionals stated they involved parents at the beginning of the program to describe the opportunity, complete enrollment forms, or obtain permissions for travel. Two professionals described expanding their mentoring practices to parents of immigrant youth.

We extend the concept of familismo, a dimension of Latinx culture, defined as including the immediate or extended family as part of the nuclear family, to familismo mentorship. This approach embraces the youth and family or extended family into a mentoring relationship. For example, two bilingual 4-H professionals used familismo mentorship with Latinx immigrant youth. Dorado shared an experience where she advised youth and supported parents in their
parenting roles. She stated, “Parents told me, ‘Can you talk to Danny about him going to college, or picking his career?’” In this example, Dorado was trusted to resolve a family concern. Furthermore, Dorado expressed how talking to parents about matters that concerned them was a need that could not be left unattended in the program: “it’s keeping the conversation going with families, which I think it’s a critical accommodation for teens to be in the program.” Similarly, Real shared, “Many times, I’m not only mentoring the youth, but also the parents.” Real responds to parents who seek advice with their children’s schooling, virtual parent-teacher conferences, and career or college opportunities. These 4-H professionals embraced a collective mentorship approach in response to the need for guidance from immigrant youth and parents.

**Discussion**

Our conversations with 11 4-H professionals increased our understanding of the realities and challenges of integrating culturally responsive teaching and mentoring into 4-H TAT programs with immigrant teen teachers. However, before discussing the results, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that defined our study. First, our focus was on 4-H professionals who engaged immigrant adolescents in 4-H TAT programs from three U.S. regions. Thus, perspectives discussed here may not reflect those of 4-H professionals from other regions of the United States. We focused our study at the program level and did not explore how the organization supports or hinders professionals’ youth development practice. In addition, by focusing solely on purposive sampling, we did not capture the perspectives of professionals who are not known to be engaging immigrant youth to serve as teen teachers. Our original research plan included youth focus group interviews, but due to the pandemic and the resulting digital opportunity gap, we were unable to engage in conversations with youth. All interviewees implemented programs in urban settings, and the perspectives of professionals from suburban and rural settings are not included. This is an important area for further exploration.

The experiences and stories of 4-H professionals remind us that cultural competence, a dynamic and long-lasting endeavor, is co-created with immigrant teens within programs and communities. 4-H professionals engaged in mutual learning with youth, cultural brokers, and communities to develop their cultural competence. This included gaining knowledge and applying skills in teaching and mentoring. Professionals described personality traits that are important for relational engagement (Suárez-Orozco, 2009). These traits included compassion, empathy, respect, active listening, trustworthiness, and willingness to work with immigrant youth. Diaz et al. (2021) identified these personality traits and others as essential for intercultural competence.

We found a nuanced difference in mentoring approaches between 4-H professionals who shared a similar lived experience with youth (immigrant or second-generation) and non-immigrant professionals. Immigrant professionals’ roles extended beyond their job responsibilities to support youth. These professionals assisted immigrant youth and families to navigate adversity.
and foster well-being. Moreover, immigrant professionals strengthened immigrant youth’s cultural assets and co-created spaces for leadership, dialogue, and activities that matter to them.

We were surprised by what we interpret to be a tension between program length and an assimilationist perspective to the norms of established programs. In summer programs, most professionals emphasized youth’s assimilation to program schedule and timeliness. Professionals engaged youth in conversations to deepen the relationship, yet only one professional described long-lasting relationships. 4-H professionals who engaged youth beyond the summer months invested time in adapting the program to meet youth’s schedules, engaged youth in conversations of their immigrant experience, supported teens’ mental health and well-being, integrated and fostered youth’s cultural assets into programming, and developed long-lasting relationships. Longer relationships between mentors and mentees in dyadic relationships are associated with positive youth development outcomes (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However, Birman and Morland (2014) state there are no empirical studies on whether and how mentoring is related to the acculturation process of youth from immigrant families. Our study indicates this is an area for future research.

Our study supports the need to engage 4-H culturally competent professionals to mentor immigrant adolescents in teenagers as teachers’ models. Consistent with empirical research on mentoring immigrant youth, in an ideal situation, 4-H professionals will have a shared living experience with immigrant youth (Birman & Morland, 2014). Our study suggests that when this is not feasible, 4-H professionals who have previous experience working with vulnerable populations will engage cultural brokers to facilitate cultural bridge-building.

**Program Recommendations**

Immigrant youth make up 17.8 million children of the U.S. youth population (Batalova et al., 2021), yet this study only identified 11 4-H professionals in the nation who engaged immigrant youth in the 4-H TAT model. This indicates that immigrant adolescents are not fully included in this 4-H program model. We suggest the following recommendations for Extension 4-H professionals to operationalize in ways that reflect local interests, needs, and resources to support immigrant youth to engage as teen teachers:

- Build an organizational culture that normalizes cultural responsiveness and affirms and builds on immigrant youth and families’ cultural and social capital.
- Cultivate relationships between 4-H professionals and cultural brokers to facilitate greater cultural understanding and to inform program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Engage in professional development to map local resources and integrate trauma-informed care to address adolescents’ social and emotional learning. (Erbstein & Fabionar, 2019; Marshall et al., 2016).
• Create learning environments that promote cultural belonging by including relevant material for youth, facilitate English language acquisition, respect and value immigrant youths’ economic responsibilities, and honor youth and familial heritage.
• Build trust with parents and caregivers to facilitate familismo or collective mentoring.

Research Recommendations

This exploratory study describes culturally relevant teaching and mentoring strategies in 4-H TAT programs. Future research could utilize Simpkins et al. (2017) culturally relevant framework for out-of-school programs to operationalize these practices within the context of immigrant youth-serving organizations. Secondly, investigating the role of mentoring in acculturation would benefit programs and immigrant youth and families. Thirdly, similar to the work of Bruce and Bridgeland (2014), which describes youths’ perspectives on outcomes and availability of mentoring programs, there is a need to include immigrant adolescents’ perspectives on effective teenagers as teachers models. Finally, it is important to understand whether and how the locality in which adolescents teach influences practitioners and youths practice. Research in these areas will offer important insights for program development, facilitate the inclusion of immigrant youth’s contributions to these program models, and foster the well-being of immigrant and refugee youth.

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*Esther Rodriguez*, B.A., was a Community Education Specialist in the 4-H Youth Development Program in Kern County, California during data collection and analysis. She is a community health advocate for Cornerstone Associates in Oregon.

**Acknowledgments**

This project was supported by the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
“I’m Going to Live My Life Freely”: Authenticity as an Indicator of Belonging Among Urban Latinx LGBTQ+ Youth

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While there is a growing body of scholarship on the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in school and community settings, less is known about Latinx LGBTQ+ youth specifically. In response, this phenomenological study examined the experiences of eight Latinx LGBTQ+ youth relative to school and community belonging, with a specific focus on urban environments, using intersectionality and minority stress frameworks, and Lee and Robbins’ operational definition of belongingness. Three overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) navigating challenges, (b) the importance of an inclusive climate, and (c) thriving through adversity. Further, authenticity was identified as an additional indicator of belonging among Latinx LGBTQ+ youth. This article reviews the study’s findings, explores implications for Extension research and practice, and suggests strategies for educators and youth-serving professionals.

Keywords: belonging, Latinx, LGBTQ+ youth, Extension, school, community

Belongingness, or belonging, is defined as a fundamental human need to feel valued and supported as a member of a group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Lee and Robbins (1995) conceptualized belonging as consisting of three overarching indicators: companionship, which refers to meaningful interpersonal relationships; affiliation, which reflects a human need to socialize with peers, particularly those with similar qualities, and build social networks; and connectedness, which describes the sense of feeling comfortable with and embraced within a larger social context beyond friends and family. The benefits that belonging bring to healthy youth development are well-documented (Newman et al., 2007; Slaten et al., 2016), particularly within school and community contexts, where youth spend most of their time (Haugen et al., 2019). Belonging is especially significant to young people who face harassment and discrimination in relation to one or more of their marginalized social identities, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or whose gender and/or sexual identity falls outside of heterosexual and/or cisgender designations ([LGBTQ+] Gonzalez et al., 2021; Hatchel et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2021; Murray & Dailey, 2020).
A vast body of research has illustrated that LGBTQ+ youth benefit psychologically, socioemotionally, and academically when they experience companionship, affiliation, and connectedness, all of which are related to belonging (Lee & Robbins, 1995; Murray & Dailey, 2020). Specifically, supportive adults and peers, access to LGBTQ+ affirming clubs or spaces, and LGBTQ+ representation in programming and curricular materials have been linked to fewer school absences, improved educational outcomes, and higher self-esteem (Barr et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2017; Johns et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020; Seelman et al., 2015). Authenticity—defined as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true or core self in one’s daily enterprise” (Goldman & Kernis, 2002, p. 18)—has also been linked to psychological well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals (Herek & Garnets, 2007). Indeed, inclusive spaces and high-quality social bonds to adults and peers in schools and communities foster supportive environments for youth to engage in “self-discovery,” (Erikson, 1968, p. 87) allowing space for them to build a positive “sense of inner identity,” confidence, and other coping skills that help buffer against identity-related stress (Waterman, 1982, p. 354). Likewise, within higher education settings, LGBTQ+ resource centers have played a crucial role in cultivating connection and support among LGBTQ+ students and improving the campus climate through education and advocacy (Strayhorn, 2019; Tetreault et al., 2013; Woodford et al., 2018).

Despite their shared challenges, LGBTQ+ youth are not a monolith. As such, one-size-fits-all approaches to supporting LGBTQ+ young people often fall short of meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ youth who are navigating a complex intersection of oppressions beyond heterosexism and transgender oppression (Brockenbrough, 2016; Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020). For example, “safe space” programs, which have historically focused solely on reducing anti-LGBTQ+ bias, cannot sufficiently address the additional barriers faced by LGBTQ+ youth with multiple marginalized positionalities (Blackburn & McCready, 2009). Indeed, urban LGBTQ+ youth of color—including those who are Latina/o/x, referred to hereafter by the inclusive term Latinx—face unique challenges that often exacerbate minority stress, described as chronically high levels of stress experienced by members of minoritized groups and often associated with prejudice or discrimination (Shramko, et al., 2018). Research on minority stress underscores the urgency for a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced by LGBTQ+ youth with multiple marginalized identities, including those who are Latinx, and the need for strategies to address those challenges in a culturally responsive manner (Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020). In an effort to inform discourses on how to best support Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and thereby reduce minority stress, this qualitative study used an in-depth phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of urban Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in school and community settings relative to belonging. For the purposes of this study, we define “school” as encompassing both K-12 and higher education contexts. Our conceptualization of community includes all out-of-school environments within participants’ cities or towns of residence, such as youth-serving organizations, centers, groups, and other establishments. This article reviews the study’s findings and outlines implications for research and practice in school and community contexts, with a specific focus on urban Extension.
At the Intersections: Being Latinx and LGBTQ+

Many young people who are both Latinx and LGBTQ+ experience bullying and harassment related to their race/ethnicity and their LGBTQ+ identities (Kosciw et al., 2020). A study conducted by Zongrone and colleagues (2020) of LGBTQ+ students in K-12 settings found that 41.6% of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth participants were victimized due to both their race/ethnicity and their sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ youth who experienced dual victimization reported lower levels of school belonging and higher levels of depression compared to participants who experienced only one form of victimization or neither (Zongrone et al., 2020). Some research has also found that LGBTQ+-affirming clubs, such as Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), may not adequately respond to the needs of LGBTQ+ students of color, including those who are Latinx (McCready, 2004; Poteat & Scheer, 2016). In addition, complex and accurate representation of Latinx LGBTQ+ in popular media is severely lacking (The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2020), which may keep some Latinx LGBTQ+ youth from fully identifying with and embracing their Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).

Also worth noting are the factors—such as culture, geography, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and gender, among others—that impact how Latinx LGBTQ+ youth navigate or experience their gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and/or queer identities (Gonzalez et al., 2020). For example, Zongrone and colleagues (2020) found that Latinx LGBTQ+ youth born outside of the United States and those for whom English was a second language experienced greater levels of victimization related to their race and ethnicity than those who were born in the United States and for whom English was their first language. In addition, Latinx LGBTQ+ people born in the United States have reported a higher degree of family acceptance than Latinx LGBTQ+ immigrants, which contributes to their overall sense of belonging (Ryan et al., 2010). To better comprehend Latinx LGBTQ+ youth belonging, research must reflect the complex variations of this demographic’s social identities and experiences.

Despite the need for additional scholarship, literature specific to Latinx LGBTQ+ youth remains scarce (Brockenbrough, 2016; Kane et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2009); research related to Latinx LGBTQ+ youth belonging is even more limited (Kosciw et al., 2020). To that end, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth as they relate to school and community belonging, with a specific focus on urban environments. The overarching research questions guiding our study were (a) What are the lived experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in urban settings as they relate to belonging across school and community contexts, and (b) What do urban Latinx LGBTQ+ youth need to feel a sense of belonging in school and community settings?
Method

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks helped guide the conceptualization of this study, interview protocol development, and data analysis and interpretation: minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), and Lee and Robbins’ (1995) indicators of belongingness. Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) postulates that LGBTQ+ individuals experience numerous repeated, lifelong stressors related to their sexual identity: both distal stressors such as prejudice, discrimination, and victimization experienced in their communities, and proximal stressors such as internalized homophobia. These stressors may harm one’s safety and self-perception while inhibiting their access to supportive resources and positive coping mechanisms, which may increase their risk of adverse psychosocial and health outcomes.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the intersectionality framework expands upon the minority stress theory by considering how multiple characteristics such as race and ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation intersect and interact simultaneously to shape one’s lived experiences. Individuals holding multiple marginalized identities experience interaction disadvantages, social norms, and expectations. Thus, intersectionality posits that Latinx LGBTQ+ experience unique stigma and excess stressors related to both their sexuality and race and ethnicity, among other characteristics. Our study explores the elements of Latinx identity as related to LGTBQ+ identities that may influence a young person’s feelings of belonging and acceptance in their schools and communities.

We used Lee and Robbins’ (1995) indicators of belonging—companionship, affiliation, and connectedness—to help us structure our interview protocol and develop our codes. The framework provides a lens and corresponding measurement tools for understanding the subjective, underlying aspects of belonging of a particular community (Lee & Robins, 1995). In the current study, Latinx LGBTQ+ youth participants were asked to reflect how different types or characteristics of social support and climates in their schools and communities may have fostered or diminished their sense of belonging and the impact of these experiences on their psychosocial development and overall well-being. These three frameworks provide empirical support for exploring the unique cultural, social, and lived experiences at the intersection of Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities that may impact a young person’s sense of belonging across school and community contexts.

Data Collection and Methodology

To add to the nascent literature on the lived experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth within their schools and communities, we applied a phenomenological methodology for data collection and analysis. A phenomenological research approach is used to explore and document cultural phenomena, experiences, and consciousness from the first-person perspective of members of the
target population (Moustakas, 1994). Though we also assessed belongingness in the familial context, the current study presents results of themes related to belonging in school and community domains only.

Eight self-identified Latinx LGBTQ+ youth were interviewed using a two-interview alternative to Seidman’s (2006) three-interview phenomenological approach. The first in-depth, semi-structured interview asked participants to describe their life history and present-day experiences related to belonging. This interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The second interview took place about a week after the first and allowed the participant to reflect upon the meaning of these experiences. The second interviews were conducted remotely and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants also completed a paper or electronic demographic questionnaire prior to beginning the first interview. Two of the eight participants completed their first interview in person. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the study, the remaining six participants completed both interviews via Zoom, using only the audio option. All remote interviews were conducted in the secure settings of any of the members of the research team’s home or work office, and the participant was asked to also be in a location where privacy and concentration could be maintained. Participants were given the option to have the interview conducted in Spanish or English during the recruitment process; however, all participants opted to conduct the interviews in English. All study materials were approved by the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University and updated to reflect COVID-19 restrictions for research activities.

Sample

Participants were eligible for the study if they identified as (a) Latinx; (b) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or held an identity that does not conform to dominant social norms related to sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTQ+); and (c) were between the ages of 18 and 24. This study asked youth aged 18-24 to reflect on their experiences growing up and present day. The term “youth” is used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations (UN) to refer to young people 15-24 (United Nations, 2013). To better understand the impact of place and community on belonging, our goal was to recruit participants who grew up and/or lived in North Carolina at a point in time, but this was not a criterion for inclusion.

The research team emailed a recruitment message and flyers with information related to the study to LGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations, LGBTQ+ university centers, and Latinx-serving organizations throughout North Carolina. These organizations were identified through the authors’ existing contacts and knowledge plus internet searches. Participants were also identified and recruited using snowball sampling. Participants who expressed interest as a response to the flyer and/or the recruitment email completed a secure online form with their contact information, accessible only to the research team. Participants were then contacted by phone to review the
consent process, the overall aims of the study, the risks and benefits of participation, eligibility criteria, and how interview content would be used. Two interviews were scheduled with eligible participants who remained interested in the study. Participants received a gift valued at $40-$50 after completing both interviews.

In all, 14 individuals signed up for the study. Four participants never responded to follow-up communication to confirm qualifications. One participant did not schedule interviews. One person was interested but was unable to secure a private location to participate. Ultimately, eight participants qualified and completed both interviews.

The final sample consisted of eight participants, ages 18-24 (see Table 1). All participants identified their race/ethnicity as Latinx/Hispanic, and three also indicated their race as White. Seven participants identified as cisgender and one as unsure, with three identifying their gender identity as man, four as woman, and one as non-binary. Participants identified as bisexual ($n = 4$), lesbian ($n = 1$), gay ($n = 1$), and queer ($n = 2$). Five participants were born in the United States. Participants identified their caregivers’ country of origin as Mexico ($n = 4$), Colombia ($n = 2$), Venezuela ($n = 1$), and Cuba ($n = 1$). All eight participants reported growing up in a community described as urban or suburban.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed to ensure accurate transcription. Participant codes and pseudonyms (including for third-party individuals) were used in all transcripts and reports to ensure that participant identities were kept separate from the data. We also used vague language when describing localities in written reports.

We performed a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts in multiple steps (Moustakas, 1994). First, we read the transcripts numerous times to familiarize ourselves with the data, documenting our initial thoughts about potential codes and themes. We inductively reviewed transcripts line-by-line using horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) to identify excerpts that captured the essence of participants’ experiences related to belonging. Preliminary codes— informed by the research question, the theoretical framework, and existing literature—were then assigned to the data to describe the emerging themes. Recurrent codes were grouped and defined by overarching patterns and themes to capture both what Latinx LGBTQ+ youth experienced within the phenomenon of belongingness to school and community as well as how these participants experienced belongingness (Moustakas, 1994).

The research team took efforts to reduce bias and improve the trustworthiness of the data analysis process, including prolonged engagement with the data and the use of reflective memoing; providing detailed notes about the development and hierarchies of codes and themes; and debriefing with other research team members to reach an agreed-upon set of themes and exemplar quotes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
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Findings

The study’s findings yielded three overarching thematic categories. The first, navigating challenges, refers to coping with adversity in relation to sexual orientation, gender, and multiple marginalized identities. The importance of an inclusive climate is the second thematic category and consists of representation, support by adults, support by peers, and LGBTQ+ affirming spaces. Finally, thriving through adversity includes embracing authenticity, creating community, and taking action.

Navigating Challenges

Navigating challenges refers to the adversity participants faced in relation to their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and/or multiple, marginalized identities. Four of the participants disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity(ies) to friends during high school, and four waited until after high school. Nevertheless, six participants described their school climate as indifferent and, at times, unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ students. Camila, who attended a Catholic school, shared that some of her teachers and peers in middle and high school publicly expressed that being gay was a “sin.” In addition, even though Sofia did not come out as bisexual until college, she recalled,

I just like never saw, like queerness or the LGBT community even, like, present and I mean, that probably speaks for itself. ... The climate was definitely, I would say, cold. ... Like, they’re not gonna welcome you with open arms.

Similarly, Sonya revealed that sexuality and gender identity “wasn’t something that was talked about ... no one that I can remember was out and proud.” Likewise, Isabel shared that her high school was one in which sexuality and gender identity were never openly discussed, which kept her from embracing her sexuality: “I didn’t have the resources or the environment or really necessarily felt supported to even come to terms with [my sexuality] on my own.”

Mateo described facing bullying and harassment in response to his perceived sexual orientation and gender expression. Mateo recalled, “Ever since elementary school, I’ve always been bullied for acting more feminine than other guys.” He later added, “In middle school, it was more of the same as, like, you know, you dress weird, you look weird, you act very feminine, like are you gay?” While Sofia, Camila, and Sonya never experienced bullying or harassment because of their sexual orientation, they all recalled hearing anti-LGBTQ+ epithets and the word “gay” used as an insult.

All participants discussed the added challenges of navigating multiple, marginalized identities. For instance, Nina admitted that being LGBTQ+, Latina, and an immigrant made it more difficult to find spaces where she experienced a sense of belonging because “there’s a feeling of displacement.” For example, when describing her experience at a local Pride festival, Nina
admitted, “It was just so white. ... I know there’s a community there, but I also didn’t feel like I belonged in that one.” In part, Sergio was initially reluctant to embrace his LGBTQ+ identity because he didn’t see Latinxs represented in the LGBTQ+ community, which he perceived as “mostly like these rich white kids.” Mateo revealed that the bullying he experienced because of his perceived sexual orientation and gender expression was exacerbated by “being poor and looking different and acting different from the rest.” Further, Carlos recounted a specific activity, facilitated by his Gender and Sexuality Alliance advisor, which prompted him to reflect on his own positionality:

I remember one time we did the ... the privilege game, where you get in the line, and you walk. I remember doing it and I ended up, I was literally the only person like, all the way in the back. ... I’m this queer, brown immigrant dude and like, I’m on the bottom of like, everyone. ... That’s literally how the world sees me.

Three participants specifically expressed that a lack of belonging in the communities where they lived was exacerbated when they left their urban centers and traveled to more rural areas. For example, Carlos recalled, “I’m like this brown immigrant queer person in like the middle of the country. It feels scary for sure ... it does feel like I’m the odd one out.” Sonya recounted feeling a sense of isolation when “visible signs of it being a more conservative community” became more frequent, such as Confederate flags and “very conservative traditional Baptist Methodist” churches.

**The Importance of an Inclusive Climate**

The importance of an inclusive climate describes the value participants placed on aspects of school and community environments that facilitated belonging, including representation, support, and LGBTQ+ affirming spaces. For the participants who experienced fears of rejection or actual rejection from family, having a place in school and identifying a community of people where they felt a sense of belonging was of utmost importance. These inclusive and affirming spaces were identified by having openly LGBTQ+ staff and/or welcoming staff, signs, stickers or use of affirming documentation (e.g., forms asking for pronouns), and giving participants the opportunity to talk about their identities openly.

Half of the participants shared experiences of having supportive spaces, especially trusted adults, in high school. These participants were only out to some friends at that point, and it is likely the supportive school environment contributed to self-disclosure of their LGBTQ+ identity. For Camila, who attended a Catholic high school and couldn’t be open about her sexuality at home, having a teacher that acknowledged Latinx and queer history in the classroom gave her “the space to talk about her Latinx identity and queer identity.” For Carlos, attending a school that had a GSA made a significant difference in his life:

I would never, like ever, be where I am without GSA. If I didn’t have the support I had at school, it probably would have been a lot worse than it was. But knowing that I had that
also made it a lot less painful to go through all that I went through and knowing that I had people to talk to about anything, even though I didn’t have the support of my parents.

For another participant, Nina, who was aware of her sexual orientation in middle school, a time she described as “A gay crisis ... it was a very difficult time to navigate,” eventually found support from teachers that made her feel like she belonged at school:

Just knowing that these people that I looked up to, and that had helped me through school, knowing that they had my back. It did make me feel like I had a place at the school. ... I knew my teachers weren’t going to kick me out or act any different towards me if they knew I was gay.

For three participants, inclusive spaces were only identified when they went to college, outside of the community where they grew up. These participants expressed how open and welcoming LGBTQ+ spaces allowed them to accept themselves. Isabel shared that the college she attended had broader LGBTQ+ representation:

Not just students, but you had faculty that reflect what the students kind of wanted to see. I had several non-binary professors. I had several gay professors who were out open about it. ... So because of that climate, it provided me the environment and I guess the safe space, to kind of slowly come into my own sexuality.

Sonya had a similar experience and shared,

The visibility of it [LGBTQ+ identities] and seeing it and, you know, people were talking about it, whether it was other students, you know, on campus like handing out flyers or holding up posters or whatever. I felt like the presence of those things.

For Sonya, seeing the focus and support for and by other LGBTQ+ people helped her feel validated and gave her a sense of belonging: “So I do feel like the community I’ve built in a college setting has been a lot more, like I have felt more myself and more like a part of something that I like I feel like I belong in than I have in the past.”

Programs outside of the school setting were also important. For Sergio, finding a space that was not only LGBTQ+ affirming but also welcoming to youth of color marked an important change in his feelings of belonging:

That was a space [educational summer program] where I met other LGBT Latinx people, which was just something that I really never met before. And so because I saw people who looked like me and were like me and you know we all shared the same ambitions, I felt so comfortable in who I was just because I wasn’t different anymore. I was like, there are people like me and it was almost common, so I was no longer like this one of a kind person who stood out like a sore thumb.
Participants shared their recommendations for ensuring that schools and community environments are inclusive and supportive. For example, the physical space should have some type of indication that it is a welcoming environment, such as “a safe space sticker or a gay flag or they [teachers] talk about it [that is a safe space] in class.” Nina also recommended that counselors at schools have information on their desk or the wall that lets students know who they can talk to or where to get more information about sexual orientation and gender identity:

Because I spent a lot of time in the counselor’s office when I was figuring out things like college applications. So, if they would have had like a flyer on their desk or something, just so kids know that that’s an option, right?

Participants also recommended more education for teachers and other school staff about the supports that LGBTQ+ youth need, how to intervene if they see bullying happening and how to let LGBTQ+ students know with whom they can talk. For example, one participant mentioned that at his school, “I didn’t know that they [teachers] would you know, help me for being, because of my sexual orientation. That’s why I don’t know how to approach them with ... I am being bullied because of this.”

Four participants talked about how making LGBTQ history and literature part of the curriculum would also help students see reflections of their experiences. Mateo suggested that teachers prepare “lesson plans about more information ... about LGBT things ... and give more information to students.” Isabel also shared,

I wish I would have had the education or like classes dedicated to the community [the LGBTQ community] that would have helped me a lot, not only coming to my sexuality sooner, but like feel a lot more supported to come into my sexuality.

Regarding out-of-school environments, youth centers that cater to LGBTQ+ youth and Latinx youth were viewed as important. Sonya described that

Spaces where I felt like people were vocal about their own experiences and ... there are people who shared my identity and maybe shared some of my experience, if not exact, but, you know, understood kind of where I was at now, and we’re not necessarily afraid to be vocal about it.

Nina talked about ensuring these centers are accessible to young people without their own transportation:

Obviously, I was not going to ask my mom for a ride, right? And like, my friends are busy and stuff like that. So like, if there was a way for kids to actually be able to access those places, especially in low income areas.
Thriving Through Adversity

Thriving through adversity refers to participants’ capacity to develop positive coping strategies for navigating hardship and cultivating a greater sense of belonging, including creating a new community, embracing authenticity, and taking action. When inclusive and affirming spaces and connections were limited in their schools and communities growing up, several participants coped by actively seeking out and cultivating their own support networks elsewhere. For instance, Isabel remarked, “Sometimes home isn’t perfect, so you just have to take the opportunity to find and make your own home. ... It’s allowed me to really surround myself with people who love and support me.”

Four other participants also described their ability to find solace and belonging after purposely creating their own communities to connect with peers who shared similar identities and lived experiences. Sofia recalled,

I finally started building my community my junior year of college. ... [But] my senior year of college [was] my most defining one where I finally had a community that was intentionally built of other Latinas at the same college. ... I graduated a year ago, and some of those women are still my pretty close friends.

Sergio also sought out and discovered a community of other Latinx LGBTQ+ peers where he finally felt accepted: “My friend group is predominantly LGBTQ and it was all okay; it was all accepted. We’re all like these Latinx boys who were expressing our identities and because there was no shame, there was no discrimination. We were accepted.”

For all participants, their experience of belonging included embracing their Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities and living authentically without fear or shame. For instance, Mateo linked belonging to being “my true self,” and Sofia highlighted the importance of finding spaces and people where and with whom she could be “really, truly like, authentically, myself.” In addition, Carlos observed he no longer had to “hide [himself] from anybody” after forming his own support community. He felt “normal” around people who shared the same identities and obstacles. Likewise, Isabel felt “alleviated” to find a space where she could be her true self, stating, “I don’t have to worry about not ... belonging when it comes to my chosen family. I feel like that was the family that also helped me come to terms with my own sexuality.” Isabel then added, “I’m going to live my life freely and either you can be a part of the journey or just simply close the door behind you.” By embracing their identities and living authentically, participants described feeling more skilled and confident navigating adversity. Mateo observed,

I don’t have to follow what they want me to follow. Like, I could just decide on my own, make my own path so it taught me to not care what others think. Especially in the Latino community, like, if they tell me that’s not right, because you know, you’re a guy, it doesn’t matter.
Four participants recalled how their experiences of hardship and lack of belonging growing up heightened their desire to help other Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in similar positions. They hoped to take action by sharing their personal stories and offering direct support to other Latinx LGBTQ+ youth. Mateo described, “Since I went through it, I can understand what they’re going through. So, I could go to them to comfort them and also defend them from the bullies or whoever is doing the crime and give them advice, help.” Isabel detailed her commitment to uplifting her community by educating herself:

I have taken several classes about the community like LGBTQ studies, just because I want to further educate myself on how I can support students that I work with. … I want to make sure that I’m supporting and serving all types of students, including those in the community.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and understand the needs of urban Latinx LGBTQ+ youth relative to belonging in school and community settings. Guided by intersectionality and minority stress theoretical frameworks and Lee and Robbins’ operational definition of belongingness, our study highlights the unique challenges faced by Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and reveals factors that nurture and inhibit their sense of belonging. Participants’ experiences of belonging are consistent with the three indicators of belonging as defined by Lee and Robbins (1995): companionship, affiliation, and connectedness. In addition, our results extend Lee and Robbins’ conceptualization of belonging to include authenticity, which all participants described as contributing to their overall sense of belonging. Specifically, embracing authenticity emerged as a subtheme of thriving through adversity. Specifically, all participants expressed the importance of embracing their Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities and being part of social groups or communities where they could authentically be themselves, particularly given previous instances of exclusion and rejection.

Participants’ experiences of their school environments ranged from hostile to affirming, with K-12 contexts being substantially less inclusive than higher education settings, a finding that aligns with existing scholarship (Kosciw et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2019; Tetreault, 2013). For example, four participants waited until after high school or until university to disclose their LGBTQ+ identities, where they found it easier to create a community with other LGBTQ+ and/or Latinx youth and more fully embrace themselves. The two participants who attended Catholic schools described instances of religious-based exclusion by both staff and peers. Consistent with literature related to minority stress and intersectionality frameworks (Shramko et al., 2018; Zongrone et al., 2020), the challenges experienced by all participants were exacerbated by their multiple, marginalized positionalities across both school and community contexts.

While findings underscore the unmet needs of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in their schools and the communities where they lived relative to belonging, they also reveal the value of supportive
Authenticity as an Indicator of Belonging Among Urban Latinx LGBTQ+ Youth

adults and inclusive spaces across school and community settings, particularly among youth whose families are not accepting. Further, positive interpersonal relationships and inclusive spaces are reflective of Lee and Robbins’ (1995) three indicators of belonging. Indeed, a vast body of scholarship echoes the impact of supportive adults and inclusive spaces on LGBTQ+ youth’s physical, socio-emotional, and academic well-being (Barr et al., 2016; Johns et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020) and their overall sense of belonging.

Participants developed positive and effective strategies to navigate and overcome hardships by connecting and creating community with those who share similar positionalities and lived experiences, fully embracing their Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities, and taking action to support other LGBTQ+ youth. Creating community with those who share similar qualities aligns with Lee and Robbins’ affiliation indicator (1995). In addition, embracing their Latinx and LGBTQ+ identities is consistent with a sense of authenticity, which we view as key to belonging, particularly for LGBTQ+ people of color who often experience exclusion and rejection because of their multiple, marginalized positionalities.

The study identified several suggestions for increasing school and community belonging among urban Latinx LGBTQ+ youth. Participants shared the value of affirming displays—such as a safe-space sticker, a Pride flag, and LGBTQ+-related resources—to indicate support. Participants also recommended additional professional development to assist school staff and youth-serving professionals in improving their knowledge, skills, and dispositions relative to supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Capacity building to assist professionals in implementing culturally responsive practices to understand and meet the complex needs of LGBTQ+ youth of color has been identified as a need by other scholars (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Brockenbrough, 2016; Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020). Participants also expressed the importance of curriculum and programming that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ people and underscored the value of LGBTQ+ and Latinx representation in school and programmatic content and materials. They also suggested that community centers and youth-related programs be accessible to youth via public transportation. These recommendations align with existing research (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2020) and reiterate the importance of an inclusive and affirming climate.

Strengths and Limitations

Our study contributes to the literature by highlighting the experiences of urban Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in schools and community environments, identifying authenticity as an indicator of belonging for LGBTQ+ youth and expanding the literature on minority stress. The participants’ experiences in this study emphasize the importance of considering the multiple identities of LGBTQ+ youth when building support systems, such as GSAs so that a youth’s full identity is supported.

Despite its strengths, this study is not without its limitations. First, our sample size consisted of eight Latinx LGBTQ+ youth residing in urban locations across North Carolina; as such, findings
are not generalizable to Latinx LGBTQ+ youth in other regions of the country, including and especially those living in rural areas. In addition, our findings do not fully capture the experiences of Latinx transgender youth, as only one of the participants indicated a non-binary identity; in contrast, seven of the eight participants identified as LGB. Further, we relied heavily on LGBTQ+ university resource centers and LGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations for participant recruitment. Participants associated with these organizations may have different experiences relative to belonging than those with no association. In addition, the majority of participants attended college or were planning to attend college. The belonging experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth with different post-secondary trajectories may be distinct from this study’s participants.

Finally, due to limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, six of the eight participants were interviewed virtually using only audio. The lack of in-person contact may have impacted rapport building and comfort level between the facilitator and the participant, thereby limiting the extent to which participants disclosed details of their personal experiences. Moreover, challenges accessing a private space or reliable internet may have limited some young people’s ability to participate. For example, at least one prospective participant cited a lack of private space as their reason for not participating.

**Implications for Extension Research and Practice**

This study’s findings have significant implications for Extension research and practice. First, while this study’s broad focus on school and community contexts is relevant to Extension, future research is needed to more fully comprehend Latinx LGBTQ+ youth belonging within Extension-specific environments, as well as other community contexts outside of school. In addition, our study was limited to participants in North Carolina. Research in this area should be expanded to include the experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ youth across all regions of the United States and in both urban/suburban and rural areas. Further, seven of the eight participants identified as cisgender. The overwhelming majority of scholarship on Latinx LGBTQ+ youth focuses on the experiences of those who are LGB (Kosciw, 2020; Ryan et al., 2009). Future studies on Latinx LGBTQ+ youth must intentionally recruit and include transgender and gender-expansive participants. Though we did not explicitly recruit participants from private schools, two of the eight participants had attended private schools throughout all or some of their K-12 careers. Further research is needed to explore the differences between private and public school experiences for LGBTQ+ youth in general and Latinx LGBTQ+ youth specifically. Finally, more research is needed to examine authenticity as an indicator of belonging among LGBTQ+ youth, including those who are Latinx.

With regard to practice, our findings demonstrate that Latinx LGBTQ+ youth benefit substantially from adult and peer support across school and community contexts. Ensuring Latinx LGBTQ+ youth are listened to and engaged in decision-making processes—including as
participants in Extension-sponsored programs—is one way to demonstrate that their voices and lived experiences are valued. Given the complex challenges faced by many Latinx LGBTQ+ youths, professional development is needed to ensure Extension professionals have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively implement practices that both actively support Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and are culturally responsive. In addition, Extension professionals should be aware of behaviors that may inadvertently make Latinx LGBTQ+ youth feel a lack of support or affirmation. Further, professionals must take steps to consider how and the extent to which Latinx LGBTQ+ youth’s intersecting positionalities impact and inform their experience of being LGBTQ+. To that end, being intentional about representing Latinx and LGBTQ+ youth in curricular, marketing, and programming materials may increase participation among this population. Part of cultivating a supportive and affirming environment also includes having a physical space where Latinx LGBTQ+ youth may gather and not only feel like they can show up as their authentic selves but that they have an actual community of peers and trusted adults to turn to for support. Even if all Latinx LGBTQ+ youth does not utilize such a space, the knowledge that it exists and can be accessed when and if needed may contribute to a greater sense of belonging.

Learning how to best support LGBTQ+ youth in general and Latinx LGBTQ+ youth specifically is new territory for many Extension professionals. As such, continuously examining and addressing personal and institutional biases about LGBTQ+ and Latinx people is paramount. Seeking guidance and collaboration on best practices, non-discrimination policies, and recommended protocol relative to LGBTQ+ youth—including privacy and confidentiality, pronouns, bathrooms, and overnight lodging—is also recommended. For those working in 4-H, reviewing the Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee on LGBTQ+ Youth’s Practices for Inclusion of Individuals of All Genders and Sexual Orientations (Program Leaders Working Group, 2020) is a worthwhile place to start. Resources and training opportunities for supporting LGBTQ+ youth are also included on the group’s website at https://access-equity-belonging.extension.org/about/lgbtq-youth-community.

References


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Accessibility and Inclusion as an Approach to Enhancing Local Extension Programs

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Providing accessible learning opportunities and inclusive programs are critical to Extension’s mission. Creating inclusive environments is more than consideration for individuals’ personal identity. Using principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) is an approach to intentionally build community and create new opportunities for education and growth. The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal law requiring businesses and events to be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states, “no qualified individual with a disability may be discriminated against in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” The legislation applies to Extension buildings, programs, and gardens that are available to the public. This article highlights Extension’s relevance for creating accessible spaces and programs with examples from four U.S. states. Extension professionals within AgrAbility, occupational health, and therapeutic horticulture describe their experiences integrating IDEA to enhance urban agricultural programs. They share best management practices and additional resources applicable for community gardens, greenhouses, agritourism, and urban agricultural spaces. When Extension professionals and their collaborators strive to make urban programming accessible, they enhance the quality of life for participants. Applying disability service concepts to urban communities maximizes the Land Grant’s mission to create inclusive environments, ultimately impacting agricultural sustainability.

Keywords: agriculture, farming, gardening, disability, accessibility, inclusion, AgrAbility
Providing accessible learning opportunities and inclusive programming are critical components of the Extension mission. Accessibility does not benefit just one population but rather builds upon Extension efforts to embrace principles of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA). This approach has been embraced by urban growing spaces and community gardens across the country. It is especially important as renewed values are placed on opportunities to learn and grow through agriculture.

Truly embracing the term inclusive means more than exhibiting personal respect for individual participants and their identities. Inclusivity prioritizes practices that ensure accessibility, allowing all audiences to participate in community programming, employment, and recreation (Cummins et al., 2012). Accessibility and inclusion, or lack thereof, are highlighted when educational or community-centered activities and programs occur in non-traditional spaces, as is often the case in agriculturally-focused venues.

It is estimated that one in four Americans—that’s 61 million people—have a disability that impacts their life activities (Okoro et al., 2018). While many Americans are born without a congenital disability, it is important to recognize that as people age, the likelihood that they will have a disability increases significantly. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate 50% of all Americans aged 65 or older have a disability (CDC, 2016). One in four women are reported to have a disability, and it increases to two in five persons with a disability if they are non-Hispanic American Indians and Alaskan natives (Okoro et al., 2018). For persons with a disability, the CDC further calculates the following percentages: 13.7% have a mobility disability with serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs; 10.8% have a cognition disability with serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions; 5.9% are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing; and 4.6% have a vision disability with blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses (Okoro et al., 2018).

Percentages of adults with disability increase as poverty increases. Mobility disability is nearly five times as common among middle-aged adults living below the poverty level compared to those whose income was twice the poverty level (CDC, 2016).

Extension professionals are trained to teach through a variety of modalities, including in-person presentations or demonstrations; interactive discussions; virtual workshops and webinars; and working with large groups while providing side-by-side instruction and individualized support. Attention to accessibility is an important part of these educational opportunities. When Extension professionals offer audience-sensitive programming, they naturally increase inclusive programming opportunities to involve more clientele (Cummins et al., 2012; Mouton & Bruce, 2013; Taylor-Winney et al., 2019). Beyond the educational content, Extension educators provide a welcoming environment by creating, maintaining, and promoting accessible learning spaces. (Bravo, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012).
Extension educators who make programs accessible are not only creating successful programs, but they are also complying with state and federal law (McBreen, 1994). As outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990/2008), people with disabilities are entitled to access all areas of public life. These public accommodation spaces include nonprofit organizations, community libraries, public parks, educational institutions, museums, and government buildings. Extension offices are included on this list.

The question can be asked, “How can Extension programs and activities be designed for accessibility by all?” Designing accessible programs takes into consideration a realm of conditions to meet a plethora of needs. Acknowledging these considerations takes into account physical accessibility needs (e.g., walking surfaces, restroom design, or access to adaptive tools), a space or program’s sensory profile (e.g., noise levels, lighting, and exposure to weather), and communication methods (e.g., spoken or written language, visual signage, or audio communication). Persons with disabilities have the same expectations and interests as non-disabled community members. It is a matter of legal obligation for them to have access to public spaces whether they are by themselves, accompanied by a care provider, or spending time with friends and family. Knowing they can easily and safely access a space, event, or educational program is vital to their independence, quality of life, and ability to engage within their community.

The purpose of this article is to provide a basic understanding of accessibility and principles of universal design (Bravo, 2015) to support the Extension educator in addressing not only the needs of farmers and community members with disabilities but the broader needs of the entire community. The authors offer examples of tools, resources, and adaptive design to create an accessible learning environment. Programs in Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, and North Carolina highlight Extension colleagues who have adapted physical settings, programming, and individualized support for persons with disabilities. These programs exemplify strategies for integrating accessibility into urban agriculture programming, including community gardens, farm markets, and agritourism venues.

Background of U.S. Disability Laws

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life (ADA, 1990/2008). The purpose of the law is to ensure people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a history or record of such an impairment, and is perceived by others as having such an impairment. The ADA also
makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on their association with a person with a disability.

Meeting compliance with federal disability laws has several approaches. It is important to have a basic understanding of common terms used when describing or referencing accessibility:

**Accessibility** is when the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered, and products, services, and facilities are built or modified so they can be used by people of all abilities (CDC, 2020).

**Assistive technology** is equipment, software, and devices to increase or maintain function, productivity, and independence (Assistive Technology Industry Association, 2022).

**Accommodation or modification** is an alteration to how a program is offered, so a person with a disability can attend and participate (ADA, 1990/2008; CDC, 2016).

**Universal design** is an accommodation practice not to target persons with disabilities but rather to make areas accessible for all persons regardless of their disability status. The design and composition of an environment so it may be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible in the most independent and natural manner possible in the widest possible range of situations without the need for adaptation, modification, assistive devices, or specialized solutions by any persons of any age or size or having any particular physical, sensory, mental health, or intellectual ability or disability and in relation to electronic systems, and electronics-based process of creating products, services or systems so they may be used by any person (Bravo, 2015; National Disability Authority, n.d.).

Meeting compliance of accessibility from an Extension perspective takes into consideration several layers. Examples of items that need to be accessible include the promotional or marketing materials, the course materials and curriculum, program presentations and webinar content, signs, parking spaces, and buildings, especially with regards to restrooms and emergency exits. For agricultural programs, accessibility also means meeting access accommodations of physical spaces, such as public gardens, greenhouses, and other growing spaces of fruits, vegetables, and livestock.

**Programs Serving Persons with Disabilities**

A variety of programs are available for Extension professionals to address the many facets of accessibility, especially in an urban environment. Some programs provide direct consultation for persons with disabilities to match the environment with the person’s ability. Others utilize the principles of universal design to create accessible spaces for both active and passive engagement.
Horticultural Therapy

Horticultural therapy has very specific defined goals and is typically found in medical settings, including but not limited to hospitals, rehabilitation centers, mental health facilities, long-term care facilities, and group homes. Haller and Capra (2017) identify four elements necessary for intervention in horticultural therapy: a client, a trained horticultural therapy professional, defined goals, and plant material. All four elements must be present to consider an activity horticultural therapy (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Horticultural Therapy Practice: Elements and Process (adapted from Haller & Capra, 2017)](image)

The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), with a mission “to promote and advance the profession of horticultural therapy as a therapeutic intervention and rehabilitative modality,” is the national leader for professional development of horticultural therapy and therapeutic horticulture (AHTA, 2022). Often these terms are used interchangeably, but they represent two different forms of therapy.

AHTA states the formal definition of horticultural therapy as “the participation in horticultural activities facilitated by a registered horticultural therapist to achieve specific goals within an established treatment, rehabilitation, or vocational plan” (AHTA, 2022).

Therapeutic Horticulture

Therapeutic horticulture has broader overarching goals rather than specific, defined goals. Therapeutic programs may also be led by individuals who have some training in horticulture and allied human service fields but are not professionally registered. For example, several Master
Gardener organizations across the country provide opportunities for therapeutic gardening. These programs are conceived and led by Master Gardeners who have worked in fields such as special education, psychiatric nursing, and speech therapy. Therapeutic horticulture programs are found in more informal settings that can include senior centers, public gardens, and schools with a goal to improve the overall wellness of individuals, groups, or communities.

Both horticultural therapy and therapeutic horticulture focus on the process rather than the end product and have an important function in human health. Horticultural therapy requires active participation on the part of the client to reach the stated goals, while therapeutic horticulture includes forms of “active and passive involvement” (AHTA, 2022). Therapeutic horticulture programs can be offered to a broader audience, while horticultural therapy targets specific goals with a modality that is unique in the engagement of individuals with the natural world around them. Haller et al. (2019) do an excellent job outlining the many ways therapy programs of both types can be used in a variety of garden settings, including community gardens, urban gardens, therapy gardens, enclosed gardens, agricultural settings, developed landscapes, woodlands, and wilderness settings.

Most programs offered through Extension fall into the category of therapeutic horticulture. Not every state Extension program offers therapeutic programming, and currently, there is not a central location to find existing programs.

**AgrAbility**

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), the AgrAbility Project has the vision to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities (National AgrAbility Project, n.d.). Funds are awarded to state teams comprised of a Land-Grant University and a nonprofit organization. AgrAbility programs are not available in all states. Current programs are listed on the AgrAbility website (https://www.AgrAbility.org).

Unique services are provided by this program to provide direct services to agricultural workers with personal consultations for workplace accommodations. AgrAbility staff can work in tandem or in isolation of state-specific vocational services to meet the needs of an accessible workplace environment, depending on the knowledge and capacity of case workers’ knowledge for agricultural operations and equipment. The program also offers educational programs, resources, and networking opportunities to incorporate new technologies and disability services for persons involved in agriculture. Examples of these resources are provided in the resource section of this article. Working across regions in the United States, many state-funded programs have adapted their programs to meet the local disability needs for urban agriculturalists and veterans as well as for assistance-supported employment.
Community Gardens

Unlike private gardens, community gardens involve the convergence of multiple individuals coming together to grow food, provide open space and greenery, and serve differing local needs within the geographic district it serves (Ferris et al., 2001). They can enhance sustainability and food security issues as well as increase health and mental well-being. Public gardens are used by and beneficial for individuals of any age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as their disabled and non-disabled status. “What distinguishes a community garden from a private garden is the fact that it is in some sense a public garden in terms of ownership, access, and degree of democratic control” (p. 560).

Community gardens are found in a variety of settings with different purposes and management styles. Common types of community gardens include leisure gardens, school and children gardens, crime diversion gardens, healing and therapy gardens, entrepreneurial gardens, demonstration gardens, and neighborhood ecological restoration areas (Ferris et al., 2001).

Experiential Learning Model

The foundation of experiential learning is the application of hands-on learning, with active reflection and translation of what the learners are doing. It is not simply learning a skill through repetitive practice. Best used in adult education, experiential learning allows for hands-on skills and critical thinking skills to be improved and put into action (Peterson, 2019).

Kolb (1984) describes experiential learning as a four-part cycle as it engages with the learners:

1) The learner has concrete experience with the content being taught.
2) The learner reflects on the experience by comparing it to prior experiences.
3) Based on experience and reflection, the learner conceptualizes new ideas about the content being taught.
4) The learner acts on their new ideas by experimenting in an experiential setting.

Combining the experiential learning model of “do, reflect, apply” for persons with disabilities allows participants to be actively engaged in urban agricultural programs when such programs include adaptive practices or accessible experiences. Participants increase their knowledge, learn new ways to apply that knowledge, develop their skills, gain confidence and clarify their values while entering, establishing, building, and managing successful urban farm enterprises or accessible garden plots.

Highlights of Four U.S. Programs

Within communities, urban agricultural programs have appeared in various formats. It is not uncommon to see gardens on the properties of hospitals, schools, and rehabilitation centers. Also popular with job service agencies, agriculture is a welcomed skill, lifestyle, and stress reliever.
The authors, who all have an Extension appointment and serve persons with disabilities, share highlights of their state’s urban agricultural outreach programs focusing on how they offer disability services and adaptive features for physical spaces. While several authors are associated with an AgrAbility program, being a part of an AgrAbility program is not a requirement for meeting the accessibility needs of clientele when working in Extension-related positions.

**Missouri**

The University of Missouri Extension (MU Extension) initiated an AgrAbility program 25 years ago with a focus on disability and adaptive agriculture to promote productivity and independent living for agriculturalists with disabilities and their families. Rural and urban agriculture, commercial small plot accessible gardening, horticulture therapy, or even therapeutic gardening are not new concepts in Missouri. MU Extension is committed to ensuring equitable opportunities and services through greater access, full participation, and economic self-sufficiency. Outreach efforts are intentional in designing accessible physical environments and providing education-based programs that are inclusive to all individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds and ability levels.

The Missouri AgrAbility program uses educational workshops and informational-based resources to assist individuals with disabilities, including veterans and their families, in urban (Columbia, Joplin, Kansas City, Springfield, St. Louis) and non-urban areas who engage in agricultural operations as a means to enhance their income. Adaptive urban agriculture has ranged in scale and intensity, from square foot accessible community gardens to church-operated commercial urban farms.

Occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation are two examples of Missouri’s health and human service fields that are closely connected to horticultural therapy by similar techniques, treatment strategies, shared facilities, program settings, and clients served. Allied health and vocational rehabilitation professionals collaborated with MU Extension 4-H, agricultural business, agronomy, horticulture, and livestock Extension specialists to develop and deliver experiential, accessible gardens and adaptive, hands-on programs.

Educational workshops are presented by trained facilitators. Online and face-to-face programs provide participants with an experiential, hands-on approach to urban agriculture with accessible small plot gardening techniques. Concepts about basic principles of ergonomic and energy conservation involved in community gardening and adaptive agriculture are taught. Primary considerations of the gardening process are based on the grip, reach, and body positioning, as well as exposure to accessibility issues in planning the garden, such as pathways and watering systems, are presented. Participants also learn how to apply assistive technology techniques, adapt equipment, and modify tools. Emphasis is placed on ways to access the garden, especially for persons who use wheelchairs, those with low vision, and those with mobility limitations.
Informational-based resources include techniques about how to adapt your garden as well as adaptive agriculture tip sheets, booklets, and toolkits that suggest safe strategies to help farmers with disabilities identify specialized resources from the literature, Internet, and commercial arena. AgrAbility concepts are also presented and include the provision of service, potential for financial assistance, injury prevention, and promotion of health for agriculturalists with disabilities.

**Veteran Urban Farm**

Another Missouri initiative is the Veteran Urban Farm, whose goal is to improve basic food and agricultural literacy, especially for people who lack connections to or experiences with agriculture. The Veteran Urban Farm is a working farm located in Columbia, Missouri. It is a place for veterans with diseases, disabilities, and disorders and their dependents to build community and heal in a healthy, therapeutic environment. Veterans with disabilities and their families use their produce to feed at-risk community members using their home-grown products.

**New Mexico**

In New Mexico, farmers and growers of all ages and backgrounds can access support through the New Mexico AgrAbility Project (NMAP), a collaborative effort between New Mexico State University’s Cooperative Extension Service, Mandy’s Farm, the University of New Mexico’s Occupational Therapy Program, and the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (NMTAP). Through NMAP, farmers born with or have developed a new disability can access technical assistance, adaptive technology and tools, occupational therapy support and evaluations, and farmer education focused on reducing risk of injury, increasing accessibility in day-to-day work environments, and increasing agricultural productivity for disabled farmers. While services through NMAP are offered statewide, the majority of NMAP service recipients are disabled residents of Central New Mexico, specifically Albuquerque and the surrounding areas. Albuquerque is divided by the Rio Grande, along which a sprawling urban community has developed, referred to as the Albuquerque Metro Area. Traversing four New Mexico counties: Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia, this urban center boasts between 750,000 and 1,000,000 residents. Individuals and families practice urban farming throughout many of these communities, both within typical subdivided communities in more crowded regions and properties comprising several acres or more in the South or North Valleys and East Mountains.

**Mandy’s Farm Apprenticeship Programming**

Through Mandy’s Farm, a nonprofit organization focused on opportunities for individuals with disabilities, prospective farmers with disabilities who are interested in launching their own urban farming operation or who would like to pursue employment within an existing farming operation, can participate in the AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program. Housed across two sites, comprising over seven acres of urban farmland in the Rio Grande Valley, the AgrAbility
Apprenticeship Program provides intensive hands-on, virtual, and classroom-based teaching for prospective farmers with disabilities. Apprentices complete a year-long learning phase designed to prepare them to work on an existing farm or start a micro-farming business of their own. They obtain invaluable experience in fruit and vegetable cultivation, farm operations and infrastructure, water conservation, soil amendment, animal husbandry, and worksite safety. Farming infrastructure, curriculum, and program design are uniquely focused on being accessible to people with a wide range of literacy levels, disabilities, communication styles, sensory needs, body sizes, and mobility needs. After completing their apprenticeship, disabled farmers can choose to incubate their small business at Mandy’s Farm, with full access to water, farmland, infrastructure, adaptive tools, technical assistance, and other resources.

**Accessibility and Inclusion.** While a variety of programs focused on cultivating small-scale farming exist, Mandy’s Farm is unique in its focus on integrating disabled farmers into the agricultural ecosystem, especially those who are considered to have more intensive support needs. Intensive support needs include individuals with disabilities who need extensive physical assistance, benefit from augmentative communication, require enhanced assistance related to personal and medical care, or require significant prompting and other cues when completing daily tasks. Many farming spaces embrace a whole-systems approach in relation to the ecology, infrastructure, and human activity within growing spaces while neglecting to consider accessibility and principles of universal design. To create a healthier and more inclusive community, Mandy’s Farm embraces permaculture practices and universal design principles focused on careful observation and planning, cultivating growing spaces that embrace different levels of mobility, continuous quality improvement, leveraging adaptive tools and equipment, using and valuing renewable resources, eliminating waste, embracing existing ecosystems and biodiversity, working slowly and strategically, and embracing challenges as an opportunity for change and creative problem-solving.

These attitudes and philosophies are supplemented by an adaptive curriculum focused on providing farmers with a variety of concrete techniques and tools they can implement within their own gardens and small-farming businesses like a wide range of raised bed heights and vertical gardening styles, an array of adaptive tools, and leveraging access to automation and assistive technology. The program curriculum embraces a strengths-based philosophy in addressing the needs of the land, as well as the needs of disabled farmers. The program focuses on each farmer’s unique skills and assets and leverages those to create success.

In preparing team members for their roles in delivering accessible and inclusive programming, Mandy’s Farm prioritizes training focused on disability inclusion and accessibility, as well as anti-ableism practices and opportunities for advocacy. Training is provided internally to employees, volunteers, board members and externally to community businesses and nonprofit organizations. Training is led by a Mandy’s Farm team member who identifies as disabled and is...
focused on developing strategies to mitigate societal and physical barriers, both on-site at Mandy’s Farm and in the community.

Given the uniquely diverse setting that Mandy’s Farm operates in, programming within Mandy’s Farm is also focused on the intersectionality between disability and race. While only 12.8% of working-age people (21-64 years old) in New Mexico have a disability, according to the American Community Survey, the rate of disability in New Mexico is much higher in communities of color (Cornell University, 2018). Of White New Mexicans, 12.5% identify as disabled, compared to 13.9% of Latinx residents and 16% of Native Americans. Mandy’s Farm acknowledges that while disability status is not influenced by an individual’s race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, social status, age, or income, access to healthcare and diagnosis, early intervention, and long-term support are deeply influenced by these factors. Mandy’s Farm has worked to embrace inclusivity and dismantle discriminatory practices by centering the lived experiences of disabled individuals who identify as members of other marginalized groups rather than those of caregivers, healthcare providers, or clinicians. Furthermore, Mandy’s Farm has examined and is working to address how implicit bias and discriminatory processes are embedded in organization planning, program design, physical space, printed materials, policies and procedures, training programs, advocacy initiatives, and calls-to-action.

**Engaging the Broader Community.** Mandy’s Farm has leveraged community interest in farming to expand knowledge around agriculture, accessibility, and universal design. Through education and outreach provided to employee teams on corporate retreats, students of all ages on school field trips, service learning projects, and other community groups, Mandy’s Farm has introduced a wide cross-section of the community to the unique environment of the urban farm. Members of the public have accessed education in agriculture, utilizing adaptive tools, visual signage, indoor and outdoor classroom design considerations, allowing Mandy’s Farm team to share inclusive practices and accessibility measures with the broader community.

**Ohio**

Ohio State University Extension (OSU Extension) has programs and Extension teams in AgrAbility, urban agriculture, horticulture, and Master Gardening. The role of Ohio AgrAbility (OAP) is highlighted in this article. OAP is a partnership between OSU Extension and EasterSeals Serving Greater Cincinnati. While the primary client base is farmers, networks are extended to additional rural and urban agriculturists through workshops, presentations, and outreach resources. Through multidisciplinary programming, OAP’s outreach has expanded into on-site consultation services and occupational therapy-related resources for a wider audience. Popular educational programs, and their link to accessibility and inclusion, are described.
**Popular Educational Programs**

Many of OAP’s urban agricultural programs focus on accessibility and inclusion for all persons. Programs include *Gardening with Arthritis*, *Ergonomic Gardening*, *Gardening Across the Lifespan*, and *Gardening–It Doesn’t Have to Hurt!* The presentations emphasize the garden infrastructure, tasks, tools, equipment, and garden beds to suit the gardener’s ability. The size and location of the garden are secondary to making it accessible.

Gardening workshops are offered throughout the year. Workshops in winter and fall add considerations for garden maintenance and physical structures that suit a gardener’s ability. Spring and summer workshops focus on being mindful of energy, fatigue, sun and heat exposure, and possible medication interactions.

Good work habits like safe lifting and techniques for reducing neck and back strain are demonstrated in the workshops. Examples of ergonomic tools designed to encourage good body mechanics are passed around, and handouts listing suggestions for tools and equipment are shared with workshop attendees and posted on the OAP website. Suggestions are offered for simple ways to modify tools the gardener already owns and low-cost ideas for growing container gardens.

The workshops also address memory or cognitive issues and ways to keep gardeners engaged and active in the garden as their abilities decline. This topic was inspired by questions from Master Gardeners who wanted to know how they could keep fellow gardeners involved as their strength, memory, or cognitive abilities diminish.

**Gardening Job Aids**

Ohio AgrAbility staff worked with Extension horticulturalists to create a collection of job aids for employers, supervisors, and job coaches who have workers or volunteers at their worksites with intellectual disabilities. The curriculum utilizes photos and videos to demonstrate a specific gardening task, with an emphasis on appropriate tools, safety, and modifications to suit different physical limitations.

**GardenAbility**

Ohio AgrAbility collaborated with OSU Extension State Master Gardener coordinators and OSU occupational therapists to develop *GardenAbility*, a continuing education program for Master Gardener Volunteers. The focus of this 3-day train-the-trainer program is to provide Master Gardeners the tools and information to teach ergonomic concepts, including gardening with arthritis and other limiting techniques and workplace modifications in their local programs.
Universal Design Workshop and Garage

Ohio AgrAbility has an on-site demonstration area at The Ohio State University’s Molly Caren Agricultural Center. The Universal Design (UD) Garage is part of a Universal Design house that annually attracts 1,400 farmers and farm families attending Farm Science Review, a large farm show in Ohio. This space is used as a learning lab in the off-season, where accessibility workshops demonstrate tools, equipment, and concepts for making the garage and farm shop a comfortable workspace for persons of all abilities.

North Carolina

North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCCE) offers programs in all 100 counties and to the Eastern Band of Cherokee, for a total of 101 Extension-based offices. According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Office of Rural Health (2019), 30 counties are considered urban. NCCE designs and implements AgrAbility, agriculture, urban agriculture, horticulture, therapeutic horticulture, food, 4-H youth development, and Master Gardening programs. In this article, programs that embrace therapeutic horticulture will be highlighted.

Therapeutic Horticulture

In North Carolina, there are two Extension-based therapeutic gardening programs in public gardens. Bullington Gardens has a mission “to connect children and adults with the natural world through science-based horticultural education, to demonstrate the beauty and value of native and ornamental plants through themed public gardens, and to enhance life skills for children and adults with physical or mental challenges through horticultural therapy.” The New Hanover County Arboretum’s Ability Garden program strives to “empower the underserved through gardening, education, inclusion, and community engagement.” In addition to these garden-based programs, 20 counties in North Carolina offer some type of therapeutic horticulture programming through Master Gardener projects. These three programs incorporate all four aspects of IDEA as they continually work to develop accessible physical garden spaces to work in and create adaptive and inclusive programming.

Therapeutic Horticulture in Public Gardens. The Ability Garden and Bullington Garden target four aspects of wellness—social, physical, emotional, and mental. Each program employs the principles of universal design to create dynamic, interactive education spaces, welcoming all members of their communities regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion, or physical limitations. Each garden has a fully accessible greenhouse space, so therapeutic programs are possible throughout the year. These two programs also have accessible outdoor workspaces and gardens with beds that accommodate work from wheelchair height. Accessible pathways, seating, hoses and watering systems, and access to shade are other important components of design in each garden. Outreach is another important aspect of these
programs, reaching underserved populations unable to visit the gardens, which promotes equity in the services offered to the communities they serve.

The Ability and Bullington Gardens work with participants of all ages, focusing on therapeutic goals that include using accessible tools, garden design, propagation, prevocational skills, life skills, rehabilitation skills, budgeting, teamwork, leadership, self-confidence, increased memory, and socialization. Both programs offer training opportunities in therapeutic horticulture, have membership in the Carolinas Horticultural Therapy Network to promote and educate the use of therapeutic horticulture, and are supported through Master Gardener Volunteers.

**Therapeutic Horticulture Through the North Carolina Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program.** North Carolina Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (EMGV) support therapeutic gardening in 20 of the 100 counties in the state. The most developed of these programs is the Wake County Therapeutic Horticulture Committee which was created to “support social development, psychological well-being and physical rehabilitation for those who are physically and mentally challenged” (Bradley, 2020). The founding group wanted to make gardening more accessible to disabled members of their community. In 2019, the group served 12 sites in the county, which included assisted living facilities, a community rehabilitation program, residential addiction recovery programs, and a day program for women experiencing homelessness. The programs occur at the facilities being served and, when possible, create garden spaces that follow universal design principles. Scheduling is based on the needs of the facility and the capacity of the volunteers. Each site is assigned a team of EMGVs with co-leads. The team works with the facility to set the schedule and develop activities appropriate to the participants’ abilities. The EMGVs who join the committee are encouraged to take advantage of educational opportunities through NC Cooperative Extension and NC State University, including two online courses—Introduction to Therapeutic Horticulture and Therapeutic Horticulture Program Development—created in partnership with the North Carolina Botanical Garden.

Therapeutic horticulture in North Carolina is growing through the state’s Extension service. A clear model is beginning to develop that includes the creation of accessible spaces in public gardens and outreach sites with gardens, advanced training for Master Gardener Volunteers on adaptive accommodations for gardening, working with special populations and the healing benefits of nature, and collaboration with community-based organizations to promote inclusiveness and equity in our services. In the future, therapeutic horticulture can be used to engage all persons in gardening and create truly inclusive spaces that focus on people-plant connections to support overall wellness.

**Discussion**

Extension welcomes all people to discover programs, access resources, and build new skills. In addition to sharing the knowledge of the university with the citizens of the state, Extension also has an obligation to welcome all people of all abilities, to participate, learn, and engage. The
obligation comes from Extension’s mission and federal laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Extension professionals can work within their communities to improve the health of people living with disabilities. “Inclusion is improved, and health disparities are reduced when people with disabilities are no longer viewed solely as recipients of need, but rather, by their assets and ability to design solutions that benefit their own health (Gherman, 2018).

Persons with disabilities have the same expectations and interests as non-disabled community members. It is important for them to access public spaces when they are by themselves, accompanied by a care provider, or spending time with friends and families. Knowing they can easily and safely access a space, event, or educational program is vital to their independence and ability to engage within their community. Examining the facilities used to offer Extension programming for accessibility requirements is an intentional action that requires forethought on behalf of the program coordinators.

Lessons learned from the examples stated in this article highlight several key concepts and best management practices for accommodating persons with disabilities. Urban agricultural teams can utilize these practices to create a more inclusive environment as they create accessible spaces in their communities.

Best Management Practices for Creating Accessible Spaces

The best way to create accessible spaces is to be proactive when planning, building, or renovating. A public space can become a welcoming and accessible location by using accessibility principles and universal design standards. Common practices for modifying physical spaces include the following recommendations.

Walkways and Accessible Routes

- Walkways must have a minimum clear width of 36” for wheelchairs and scooters used by individuals with disabilities. Wider walkways allow people with mobility devices to travel next to pedestrians and turn around easily.
- The minimum space needed for a turnaround is 60” x 60” (to make a “T” or 3-point turn)
  - If a walkway, aisle, and row dead-ends and requires people to turn around and travel back on the path to exit, there should be room for a wheelchair also to turn around.
- Walkways must have firm, smooth surfaces to minimize the risk of trips, slips, or falls. Avoid loose materials like sand, gravel, and mulch.
However, a smooth surface of firmly packed crusher-run 75 3/8-inch and under gravel (includes particles 3/8-inch diameter down to fines) can accommodate wheelchairs and scooters.

- Walkways must have adequate drainage and be free of puddles and mud.
- Remove or barricade all overhangs, obstructions, sharp objects, or other hazards that could cause injury if customers bumped against them.
- Objects placed on or next to a walkway should be detectable by a person using a cane.

**Public Gardens or Spaces**

- Make the access and use of the space the same for everyone.
- If there are buildings, arbors, or other shade structures in the space, be sure they are accessible to all persons. Besides having benches beneath the shaded areas, make sure there is room for a few wheelchairs or other mobility devices to park between/beside the benches (under the shade).
- Consider providing grab bars and other unobtrusive tools for moving from sitting to standing as well as providing physical cues to those with low or no vision.
- Don’t fill all the empty spaces with trash cans or other objects. Leave space for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- Walkways should be 3-4 feet wide with no barriers (trash cans, planters, hanging baskets). Wider walkways allow people with mobility devices to turn around easily and travel next to a pedestrian.

**Conclusion**

The urban settings of our communities are fertile ground for programs that use gardens and nature-based activities to improve personal and community well-being. Extension professionals can enhance inclusiveness by uniquely tailoring their programs to address the needs of individuals living with disabilities to participate in urban agricultural activities.

Extension professionals are encouraged to build relationships with disabled participants, professionals, and farmers. These voices on advisory committees and as volunteer staff will strengthen their program team. Community members who offer their lived experiences often have far greater expertise, creative problem-solving skills, and ideas for more inclusive programming.

Additionally, modifications to physical spaces can enhance access to local programs, gardens, and growing spaces. Applying best management practices to these locations increases accommodation capacity even without the presence of an Extension educator.
In urban settings, horticulture programs can be a focal point for activities that engage the community. Within the context of accessible agriculture, there are opportunities to grow the IDEA approach for better inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. Enhancing accessibility to agricultural experiences is a critical step that can lead to overall wellness and increased quality of life for the participants. Creating and prioritizing accessible programs for the Extension professional allows their programming to stand out and be more inclusive for all clientele.

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Resources

Ability Garden. https://abilitygarden.org
Bullington Gardens. https://bullingtongardens.org/


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Reconceptualizing Youth Sparks: A Sociocultural Approach to Co-Designing Programs for Somali Youth

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The 4-H Youth Development Program has a long history of fostering positive youth outcomes. Recently, attention and resources have been invested in the development of a program model (i.e., the 4-H Thriving Model) that theorizes the program elements that lead to positive outcomes (Arnold, 2018). Less attention, however, has been given to the program design process by which and with whom 4-H programs are designed and implemented. This matters because a lack of a community-engaged design process may lead to outcomes disconnected from community self-interests or to the exclusion of youth who might view the program as irrelevant to their lives (Simpkins et al., 2017). Drawing from examples of a collaboration between Minnesota 4-H and a Somali youth-serving organization located in central Minnesota, this article discusses how a sociocultural perspective can be used to critique youth programs around the inclusion/exclusion of youths’ broader social, cultural, and political contexts of development and socialization. Particular attention is given to the reconceptualization of sparks as socially situated, collective, and relational. The article concludes with a discussion of practical implications and future directions for Extension/4-H’s community-engaged and ongoing program design processes.

Keywords: community engagement, program design, youth development, Somali youth

The field of youth development has given increasingly more attention to the processes and conditions that foster youth thriving. This growing body of research steers the field away from a deficit-oriented approach to youth development and instead investigates the social conditions youth need for optimal development (e.g., Arnold, 2015, 2018; Balsano et al., 2009; Scales et al., 2011). Foundational to this asset-based approach (i.e., positive youth development) is the notion that young people thrive when they interact in social contexts that nurture their sparks—which refers to their interests and passions that inspire joy and intrinsic motivation to pursue meaningful futures (Scales et al., 2011). This body of literature argues that when youth sparks are nurtured and reflected in their social contexts by means of positive relationships and opportunities, youth feel empowered to pursue their own interests and act on their passions to contribute to the social good (Scales et al., 2011).

4-H, the largest youth-serving organization in the nation, has drawn on this body of research to develop the “4-H Thriving Model” (Arnold, 2018). This model theorizes how and why youth
who participate in 4-H consistently achieve positive developmental outcomes. Focusing on the 4-H program context, the model identifies elements that should be included in program design to support youth thriving, with the aim of nurturing youth sparks lying at the heart of the model. This model offers 4-H a consistent, research-based framework that has served as an impetus for 4-H professionals nationwide to use more intentional and uniformed program design strategies to optimize youths’ opportunities to thrive through participation in 4-H. Yet the uniformity of this model can implicate its effectiveness if it does not consider “broader ecological conditions” influencing youths’ development and socialization (Lerner, 2020, p. 150).

Arnold and Gagnon (2020) are leading a task force to “update” the model examining with specificity around what program activities are effective “for whom and under what conditions” (p. 14). This step of “testing” the model’s effectiveness for youth of diverse backgrounds is an important step in refining the model with equity in mind. Still absent from the conversations, however, is the process by which and with whom these high-quality 4-H programs are designed and implemented. This matters because a design process void of community collaboration and engagement may lead to outcomes disconnected from community self-interests or to the exclusion of youth and families who view the program as irrelevant to their lives (Simpkins et al., 2017). This article argues that the 4-H Thriving Model would benefit from the inclusion of a program design process that enables 4-H educators to consider and engage with youths’ myriad contexts of development and socialization to ensure youth have equitable opportunities to thrive and live a life of value.

To support this argument, in this article, I examine youth programs designed with and for Somali youth in urban areas in central Minnesota. I use a sociocultural lens to reconceptualize 4-H program elements as situated within relationships with others and the broader social, cultural, and political systems in which they live (DeJaeghere, 2022). Particular attention is given to the model’s most central concept, “sparks.” The dominant narrative and conceptualization of sparks within the 4-H Thriving Model have been individualistic in nature. For instance, the 4-H thriving model webpage describes sparks as being “deep within” an individual, implying youth arrive at a youth program in possession of a latent spark that needs to be “discovered” (Extension Foundation, n.d.). This paper offers an alternative and sociocultural conceptualization of sparks as socially situated, collective, and relational. This conceptualization does not necessarily refer to youth relationships with trusting and caring adults in their program context (see Balsano et al., 2009). Instead, this conceptualization is an analytical frame for examining how youths’ lives are interconnected with others and broader social worlds within which (and across which) they live, interact, and strive to live a life they consider good and valuable (DeJaeghere, 2022).

This article has two aims. The first aim is to identify and operationalize a community-engaged program design process that facilitates the development of high-quality 4-H youth programs inclusive of and responsive to youths’ broader social contexts. The second aim is to empirically examine the social and cultural complexities and contradictions inherent in building and
implementing a youth program centered around youths’ sparks. This article draws on a developmental evaluation process that was used to contribute to the ongoing development of youth programs designed with and for Somali youth living in urban areas of central Minnesota. It explicates, drawing on engagement strategies identified by Timmons and Dworkin (2020), how Extension and 4-H professionals can recognize and engage with the underlying social, cultural, and political conditions influencing youths’ development when designing youth programs.

**Literature Review**

**Rethinking 4-H Program Design Processes**

4-H, like all Extension programs, consists of research-based, nonformal educational activities conducted in partnership between communities and universities (Peterson, 2015). While initially a rural program designed to prepare youth for future careers in agriculture, 4-H currently serves nearly six million youth in every geographic pocket of the national landscape and focuses on fostering youth learning and leadership outcomes around current issues such as climate change, food security, and civic engagement (4-H, 2021). And yet, while 4-H’s project areas and geographic locations have evolved through time, until the introduction of Arnold’s (2018) 4-H Thriving Model, its program model has remained relatively unchanged and unexamined since its rural origin (Arnold, 2015).

Although the program model has remained relatively unchanged, it does not mean program design has been neglected throughout Extension and 4-H’s over 100-year history. Seevers et al. (1997) highlighted the interconnectedness of planning, implementation, and evaluation and encouraged the use of logic models to help Extension professionals adapt programs to changing contexts. This improved staff’s conceptual knowledge of how a program works toward its intended outcomes, but there was little evidence that Extension professionals used this knowledge to improve practice, nor if it had the intended community impact (Arnold, 2015). Further, Donaldson and Franck (2021) highlight the limitations of logic models in Extension, noting how they do not account for context and do not allow for program adaptability and innovation. Further, Arnold and Gagnon (2020) clarify the difference between a logic model which describes program activities and a theory of change, which explains “how a program works, for whom, and under what conditions” (p. 14).

Arnold’s work (2015, 2018) has most significantly advanced 4-H’s program design efforts by translating current research in youth development to program practice. Specifically, Arnold (2018) developed the 4-H Thriving Model, which identifies four elements that comprise a high-quality program:

- Youth sparks, the concept developed by Benson and Scales (2011), which refers to the interests and passions young people have within them, cultivate joy and prompt action for their own well-being and larger society;
- Developmental relationships with peers and adults that encourage growth, express care, expand possibilities, offer support, and share power and respect the young people (Search Institute, 2014);
- the quality (rather than quantity or dosage) of youths’ engagement; and
- a sense of belonging.

The model’s theory of change suggests that if youth engage with a high-quality programmatic context, within which their sparks will be nurtured, they will develop a thriving orientation that leads to positive developmental outcomes, and eventually, longer-term outcomes around their overall well-being and happiness (Arnold, 2018).

This model offers a robust framework for building program elements that nurture youths’ sparks, thus positively influencing their developmental outcomes. Still, the Thriving Model’s starting point is the program context, implying that all youth arrive at and experience programs in universal ways (Fields, 2020). Yet, research on culturally responsive youth programs demonstrates the differential effects programs have on youth, arguing that youth only experience the positive outcomes when the programming structure is relevant and responsive to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which youth live (Ngo, 2017; Simpkins et al., 2017; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2018). Moreover, Geldhof et al. (2013) conceptualize youth thriving as a “mutually influential relationship” (p. 1) between the individual and context. This conceptualization suggests that assets youth gain from a diversity of ecological contexts may be “integrated within and across contexts” (p. 4) to facilitate youth thriving and improve the likelihood that young people will, in turn, be positive contributors to their various social ecologies. These social ecologies, or social contexts in which young people live, interact, develop, and contribute include but are not limited to program contexts. This suggests that for youth programs to maximize impact on youths’ positive development, the social situatedness of youths’ sparks (i.e., the myriad social contexts that might eclipse or nurture their passions) ought to be considered and included in program design to align with and validate youths’ assets across contexts (Scales et al., 2011). This requires programmers to have a broader understanding of young people’s social arrangements and to design concordant youth programs. Lerner (2020) argues from the opposite perspective asserting that any “standard implementation” of a youth program “would be doomed to fail” because it does not consider or honor the myriad contexts in which youth live and interact (p. 152).

Case in point, DeJaeghere (2022) demonstrates with evidence from programs in India, Tanzania, and Uganda, that out-of-school time youth programming that disproportionately focused on individual life skills to promote individuals’ social behavior or to increase youths’ productivity in society did not achieve desired youth outcomes because the program insufficiently considered the “value orientations and social relations of power that might be implicated in the use of these skills in different settings” (p. 77). This evidence suggests that additional social conditions,
values, and perspectives can constrain or support youths’ abilities to enact the skills they gained in a youth program, and these conditions should be identified and addressed in program design.

Similarly, Baldridge’s (2014, 2020) case study of youth programs designed for Black youth in U.S. urban areas demonstrates how the “social and political complexity” in youths’ lives “is often overlooked” when designing these youth programs (2020, p. 618). Different and more deleterious than assuming a universal youth program experience, this research found that staff supporting community-based programs in urban areas felt pressure (namely by funders) to identify false deficits tied to tropes characterizing Black youth as “at-risk” to themselves and society (Baldridge, 2014). Rather than recognizing and cultivating youth assets, programs were designed to help youth acquire what they were unjustly characterized as lacking, such as certain life skills and/or empowerment needed to overcome deficits to achieve a specifically neoliberal conceptualization of success (i.e., academic or economic success). Baldridge (2014) argues that “broader that systems of oppression,” such as racism, affect youths’ abilities to use their skills and act on their passion (p. 621). Like DeJaeghere, Baldridge argues that for Black youth living in urban areas to develop a thriving orientation in their youth programs, these systems should be addressed and interrogated in youth program design.

These studies reveal that when youth programs fail to consider and engage with the myriad sociocultural conditions that influence young people, they are unlikely to achieve desired youth outcomes. On the level of theory, the 4-H Thriving Model is positioned to do this effectively because youth passions and interests are at the model’s center. Yet, the framing of youth sparks as individually possessed, awaiting discovery and exploration, obscures the roles of broader contexts (e.g., geographic, cultural, racial, socioeconomic, familial) influencing youths’ development and socialization. Conceptualizing sparks are as socially situated, collective, and relational, as I propose in this article, would oblige 4-H and Extension professionals to understand youth sparks within the diverse, complex, sometimes oppressive contexts that influence them. This would require that 4-H professionals engage in a process to understand and then include this knowledge in program design. In the next section, I draw on bodies of literature from institutional community engagement and culturally responsive youth programs to propose a process for Extension and 4-H professionals to understand youth in their broader social ecologies.

Understanding Youth Sparks Through Community-Engaged Program Design

In this section, I draw on institutional community engagement and culturally responsive youth program literature to operationalize an engagement process for building youth programs responsive to and inclusive of the myriad contexts influencing youths’ development and socialization—and ultimately their sparks. These bodies of literature support the argument that community engagement is a critical process for designing high-quality youth programs with youths’ sparks at the center.
Community engagement refers to a process of working collaboratively in a way that is mutually beneficial and that integrates the knowledge and skills of the community and the institution to effect positive social change (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Cook & Nation, 2016). Unlike a structured program model with a clear theory of change, community engagement consists of processes, strategies, and a set of principles around a partnership with trust and reciprocity (PennState College of Agricultural Sciences, 2021). It is flexibility carried out based on the nature of the collaboration, the purpose for engagement, and the sensibility to collaborators to adapt said framework with changing circumstances (PennState College of Agricultural Sciences, 2021).

For most public institutions, community engagement is part of their mission (Cook & Nation, 2016). Universities’ community engagement strategies include community-university research projects, student service-learning projects, and Extension programs. (Cook & Nation, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2012). Universities irrefutably have resources and knowledge to address social issues with local communities. However, they often fall short in the development of community trust (Barajas & Martin, 2016; Cook & Nation, 2016). Semesters or grant funds ending can prompt a university to exit from its community partnership, even though the social issues that affect communities persist and evolve. Because of the distrust that results from the temporal nature of many university-community partnerships, public engagement scholars (e.g., Cook & Nation, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2012) recommend that university administrators look to Extension as a primary unit through which they can live out their Land Grant mission because of its embeddedness in local communities (Franz, 2014). However, Extension is also equally criticized for retrofitting programs designed for rural audiences in non-rural settings, limiting a program’s capacity to affect individual and community change in urban areas (Goalach et al., 2017).

Given the rapidly diversifying and shifting demographics and the blurring boundaries of urban, suburban, and rural areas, there is a need for Extension to employ innovative, community-engaged strategies to ensure 4-H and all Extension programs are relevant and responsive to changing demographics and diverse societal structures in which people live and interact. The young population is especially rapidly diversifying and shifting to new geographic locations (Frey, 2018). This places a great responsibility on 4-H, the largest youth-serving organization in the nation, to find new and meaningful ways to engage young people in 4-H programs.

Research on culturally responsive youth program design identifies ways programs can ensure youths’ cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives are represented and included in program structure and staffing. For example, structuring “downtime” helps youth connect with peers and adults and allows freedom to talk about what’s important in their lives (Simpkins et al., 2017; Wong, 2010). Similarly, Ngo’s (2017) study of an afterschool program for Hmong youth suggests that staff who function as “cultural brokers” can support ethnically and racially minoritized youth to navigate the contradictions of belonging in both dominant cultures and their
families’ cultural or origin (Ngo, 2017). This points to the need to understand and include family knowledge in program activities (Bryan, 2005). A strategy to gain this community knowledge might require staff to visit homes and community gathering sites. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) recommend engaging immigrant-oriented youth workers who youth and families alike can trust. Notably, these strategies identified in culturally responsive youth work literature represent a tacit acknowledgment of a cultural and racial divide (and power differential) between youth development professionals and the youth and families they serve.

Engaging Somali Youth, Families, and Communities Around Shared Passion for Education

The aforementioned strategies are helpful for creating an inclusive program for immigrant or racially and ethnically minoritized youth. Still, these strategies assume young people and families have already committed to participate in a program and do not explicitly address the process that must occur to ensure youth and families trust and choose 4-H as an opportunity-making space for young people. This is especially important in urban areas, where Extension/4-H is broadly perceived as a rural program and is less trusted in urban areas (National Urban Extension Leaders, 2015). Arnold (2015) explains that the “success of 4-H programs is contingent upon the specific interest and engagement that brings youth to the program” [my emphasis] (p. 57). Much attention has been given to the role of youths’ interests, seemingly guided by the assumption that youths’ individual interest/spark, which in 4-H is often characterized as and conflated with youths’ project area, will be sufficient motivation to join a program. This individualist perspective leaves social structures and power unexamined.

To this end, this next part of the review examines effective strategies for engaging Somali families from the perspective of Extension professionals with a different cultural background. These strategies lay the foundation of and framing for my findings and analysis of youth and family engagement around a shared, collective passion and interest. I specifically examine how I relied on engagement strategies outlined by Timmons and Dworkin (2020).

Timmons and Dworkin (2020) recognized the need to engage African families in Extension programs but noted there was little guidance on how to do it. They identified promising strategies for African family engagement in Extension programs. A primary recommendation was to collaborate with the community around the shared value of education. As shared in previous publications of this research (see Tzenis, 2018, 2019), for Somali families, education is a highly esteemed cultural value that tends to belong in the parenting domain of mothers (Hassan, 2018). Somali mothers view being educated not as an end goal to be achieved but as a cultural value to be embodied. Somali mothers tend to believe an educated person represents a cultural ideal of what it means to be both Somali and Muslim (Tzenis, 2019). Many Somali young people share this value orientation toward education. For Somali youth, education is perceived as a means to securing valued futures such as earning a livelihood that enables them to reciprocate the care they received from their parents, to contribute to the greater well-being of
their community, and to negate anti-Muslim and anti-Black racism stereotypes they experience in school that attempts denigrate their intelligence and self-worth (Tzenis, 2018, 2019). Education for Somali families is a value and passion shared and nurtured by family, community, and faith—serving as motivation to pursue a valued life (Tzenis, 2019). Education is also viewed as a source of empowerment and transformation in response to unequitable social structures and systems constraining their opportunities to thrive (Tzenis, 2018). From this sociocultural perspective, education can be viewed as Somali youths’ spark that is situated and related to broader diverse, complex, and sometimes contradictory contexts.

Education is thus an asset for engaging Somali youth in programs designed to nurture these sparks (Skuza, 2019; Timmons & Dworkin, 2020). But this engagement in nonformal educational settings is complicated by the cultural perspective of Somali families in that educational settings ought to be rigorous and highly academic. Out-of-school time activities are viewed as disconnected and even at odds with their families’ cultural ideals (Tzenis, 2018). To address issues of disconnect or diverse perspectives such as this, Timmons and Dworkin (2020), like Ngo (2017), recommend that Extension staff connect and collaborate with “cultural brokers” (p. 193), referring to people who can help break down cultural barriers of misunderstanding and mismatched worldviews between Extension professionals and families. Finally, Timmons and Dworkin (2020) identify personalized communication with families to facilitate trust and mutual support as a likely effective strategy. Communication is especially critical for Somali families as Somali people have a strong oral history; the Somali language was not written down until the early 1970s (TPT Twin Cities PBS, 2017).

These engagement strategies offer promising and involved ways in which to engage Somali youth in Extension/4-H programs by appealing to their shared spark (i.e., education) and taking time to understand diverse social contexts that shape this spark. Still, without a clear operationalization of these strategies in practice—and the challenges and opportunities they present—these suggestions risk remaining a programmatic ideal never reified in practice. The following sections demonstrate how these strategies played out in a community-engaged program design and delivery process between Minnesota 4-H and a Somali youth-serving organization.

**Methodology**

**Program Context**

The process of community-engaged program design featured in this article focuses on a partnership between the University of Minnesota Extension 4-H youth development program and a Somali youth-serving organization in central Minnesota. These two organizations came together to combine resources and develop a sustainable program model that prepares Somali adolescents (ages 11-15) for futures in education in a way that nurtures and develops their and their families’ cultural values (see Skuza, 2019). This partnership yielded three youth programs
focused on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and was supported by various funding sources, including from an intermediary youth funding foundation and a five-year National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant facilitated by the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program.

Minnesota 4-H’s community partner, Somali Youth Strength (SYS; pseudonym), is a nonprofit organization started by a small group of Somali millennials as a response to issues they identified in their community, such as high school dropouts, a growing rift between youth and elders, and a small group Somali youth in the Twin Cities community being recruited by terrorist groups. The executive director named education as “the answer” to promoting Somali youths’ capacities to thrive because of the hope and motivation for an alternative future it instills in youth and families (SYS, personal communication, August, 2015). SYS’s main office is located on the edge of the University of Minnesota campus and a block away from an urban neighborhood that is home to the largest immigrant population. More broadly, Minneapolis is home to the largest Somali population in North America. The Twin Cities (i.e., Minneapolis/St. Paul and surrounding areas) was a key place for resettlement for Somali families who had been displaced from their home country following the Somali Civil war, based primarily on word of mouth that described Minnesota as a place of good employment with good schools and excellent refugee services (Omar, 2011). This partnership co-created youth programs in Minneapolis, St. Paul (second highest Somali population in the state) and a Minneapolis suburb with a rapidly growing Somali population.

CYFAR funding for this collaborative work began in 2013 and lasted through 2018. The first year was dedicated to program planning. A new program was implemented each year through 2016. Sponsored funds paid for SYS personnel, program supplies, youth field experiences, Extension professionals’ effort on the project, and evaluation resources. Within these five years, 101 Minnesota youth of Somali heritage participated in 4-H. The project’s evaluation findings on youth outcomes suggested this program made an impact. The youth felt more prepared for their educational futures, became skilled problem-solvers, and learned to more deeply value making positive choices (Skuza, 2019). Table 1 lists pseudonyms used for youth, SYS staff, and mothers.

**Table 1. Participant Pseudonyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Location</th>
<th>Start Year</th>
<th>Pseudonyms: Program Leaders</th>
<th>Pseudonyms: Youth</th>
<th>Pseudonyms: Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Hassan</td>
<td>Fardowsa, Noura,</td>
<td>Naima, Asma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abdirahman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Anwar, Ali</td>
<td>Abdikadir, Ibrahim</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Ruquia, Abdifitah</td>
<td>Aisha, Sadiiq,</td>
<td>Hamdi, Fartun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamdi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positionality

As an Extension professional providing leadership to this work at each local program site, my charge was to learn about the community with whom I would be working and reflect on myself in relation to the community. On one of my first days at the Minneapolis-based program site, Hamdi, mother to two youth participants, handed me two books on Islam. She instructed that I read these books because “You work with us now. You must learn. When you hear Muslim, you think of Hamdi.” She wanted to ensure I knew that she, her children, and her community were good people. In this interaction, Hamdi directly identified these “broader political structures and systems of oppression” (Baldridge, 2014, p. 621), namely, anti-Muslim racism, that needed to be “interrogated,” not just in the youth programs themselves, but in the interactions between me, a white woman representing an institution, and the youth and families with whom I build relationships. This required personal reflection and reflexivity, whereby I interrogated the cultural, political, and social origins of my own perspective, how I perceived people different from me, and how they perceived me.

Because of this positionality, I recognized a strategic need to continually learn about the different values, relationships, and broader social contexts that shaped the youth and family’s passion and commitment to education. To this end, I led an additional study to accompany and enrich our impact data. I carried out a developmental evaluation to gain a deeper understanding of youth and families’ lives to continually adjust and adapt program design to be inclusive of broader social ecologies shaping youths’ sparks. I came to this work with three years of experience as a community organizer. Through this professional experience, I have been trained and have a breadth of experience in the art of conducting one-to-ones: an organizing technique that facilitates public relationship building around people’s values, passions, and self-interests (WestSouthwestIAF, 2014). This skillset supported my ability to understand youth and families’ sparks as related to education. The next section describes my methodological approach.

Developmental Evaluation

I drew on ethnographic methods and techniques, relying on myself as the primary instrument (Wolcott, 2008) for developmental evaluation. I blended program design with data to guide collaborative decision-making around programming (Patton, 2011). These methods allowed me to gain an in-depth perspective of the youth, families’, and programming staff’s cultural values and perspectives through my natural interactions with them as part of our collaborative process and to include these perspectives in program design (Fetterman, 2010). Specifically, my process involved participant observations of youth, families, and community leaders at program sites, SYS’s office, local shopping centers, and community parks. When at the program sites located in community settings, I frequently helped youth with homework, occasionally led 4-H programmatic activities, and joined in youth conversations around YouTube or Netflix shows. I had frequent conversations with the mothers who came to the program (often over “Somali tea”),
sharing stories of motherhood and learning about the values that guide their parenting choices.

Finally, I participated in frequent program planning meetings with Zakariya, executive director of SYS, and the SYS staff (see Table 1), who facilitated the youth programs on-site and worked most directly with the youth and families. I attended organizational meetings, community events, and celebrations when invited. I wrote field notes which included participants’ behaviors, my recollection of conversations, and descriptions of the site and activities. Secondary data included collected artifacts such as youth-produced program documents, my own programming notes, newspapers, and other media. Pseudonyms are used for youth, family members, and SYS staff. Notably, these ethnographic techniques also positioned me well for effective community engagement, as the natural and relationship-focused interactions allowed me to foster trust and understanding with the families and communities with whom I was collaborating.

The analysis of these data was ongoing and inductive; I interpreted what I was seeing in [brackets] and memoing (Patton, 2015). To assess the trustworthiness of my early analyses, I would discuss what I observed and interpreted from a site visit (e.g., nonformal learning does not align with parents’ beliefs of educational success) with SYS staff. These community partners would offer a cultural context of what I observed (e.g., parents viewed activities as not serious enough). In the second wave of analysis, I reviewed my field notes to identify emerging themes and developed codes that focused on two dimensions of this work—program quality and engagement strategies.

Recognizing the Complexities that Shape Youth Sparks

In this section, I examine one activity structured into this collaboratively designed 4-H program—homework help—to elucidate the diverse cultural perspectives of a shared passion for and commitment to education. I examine how community-engaged processes, namely strategies laid out by Timmons and Dworkin (2020) and the ethnographic techniques I previously described, created the conditions for a dynamic (while still seemingly slow-moving at times), pluralistic, and ongoing program design process that led to high-quality youth programs (centered on youth sparks) for Somali youth living in urban and suburban communities in Minnesota.

No Time for 4-H Today

Early in the partnership, SYS staff expressed to the Extension 4-H team that homework help would be an integral part of the youth program because it was important to the families that their children received academic support. We structured the program in two one-hour blocks—one hour would “provide tutoring and peer mentoring” (SYS public communication), and the other hour would include 4-H programming, i.e., hands-on STEM activities. While seemingly straightforward, it was not easily implemented. Within the first months of programming, Hassan relayed to me at an SYS monthly meeting that they were frequently unable to make time for “4-H activities” because “parents do not think the 4-H activities are as valuable to their kids” as
homework completion, identifying early on the cultural mismatch that would continue to complicate and ultimately enrich the quality of these youth programs.

Field notes from an early site visit to the suburban site illustrate this programming dilemma:

The young people were sitting around their horseshoe-shaped table set-up when I entered the room for their 4-H meeting. … Three youth were in the “middle” of the horseshoe: Noura, Fardowsa, and Abdirahman.

Most of the youth were smiling and laughing with one another, looking over each other’s shoulders at each other’s iPads. Most textbooks were packed away, and the young people were talking comfortably with those around them. Only two young people were without smiles on their faces. Fardowsa leaned intently over her iPad, swiping, typing, and then writing on her worksheet. [She seemed rushed.] She kept looking up at the club leader [seemingly worried he would tell her homework time was done]. Abdirahman sat in the chair closest to her on the right. He had a worksheet in front of him at which he would just stare [seemingly trying to come up with the answer to the math questions]. Hassan, their club leader, went up to them multiple times and asked, “do you need more time?” They both looked up from their iPad/paper to nod affirmatively and then resumed their work. At one point, Abdirahman walked up to Hassan in the front of the room and sat with him up front while Hassan explained math concepts to him. Meanwhile, the remaining eight youth … continued to talk among themselves lightheartedly and play with their iPads.

Hassan told me … that he did not think they would be able to get to the 4-H programming because of “that thing we had talked about.”

These field notes illustrate how “homework help” usually dominated the two-hour program session, and consequently, youth rarely engaged with the engineering activities the club leaders were prepared to facilitate. In the memo I wrote following that visit to the suburban site, I interpreted/judged this approach to education and program structure as illogical and invaluable use of program time:

There seems to be a lot of value placed on homework completion, which seems to be stemming from parent expectations of their children and the program. I personally found it strange that the program couldn’t engage the youth who were done with their homework in some activities.

My memo identifies a collision of two views of education – Somali parents considered nonformal activities “not valuable”; I felt that youth were missing out on an opportunity to do something fun and meaningful. When I asked Hassan why youth could not take a break to do something hands-on, he responded, “Parents would not be happy” if they dropped their kids off
at a program and their homework was not completed. This memo-check and exchange with Hassan encouraged me to seek a further and deeper understanding of why and to what extent parents would be upset around incomplete homework.

While visiting the Minneapolis site one day, I found myself interacting with an unhappy mother. I was standing near the entryway to the program room with club leader Abdifitah and Sadiq’s mother, Fartun, who was loudly expressing discontent with Abdifitah that Sadiq completed his homework at home (rather than at the program) and late into the night:

Sadiq’s mom was mad that he didn’t get his homework done yesterday at the program. Or rather that she was upset that he was up using their computer until 9:30 at night. She says, “it’s too late for him. He has to get up at 5:30 to go to a school in St. Paul.” Abdifitah was telling her that Sadiq said he was done with homework at the program. Later, Sadiq came in, and his mother confronted him harshly. She said to Sadiq, “They said that you said you didn’t have homework; why were you up till 9:30?”

Sadiq told his mom that he had to write an essay, and he wanted to think free from your distraction. Most of what she was saying was Somali, so I didn’t understand, but she kept saying, “Why stay up till 9:30? I need you to get your work done.” Abdifitah was trying to defend him and say he needed to focus: “Here it’s too crazy – there are a lot of distractions.” When Abdifitah would defend him, Fartun would look at him jokingly and salute him.

This field notes excerpt illustrates the pertinacious actions Somali mothers take to ensure their children complete homework at the youth program. This exchange also offers insight into the important role of the youth worker, Abdifitah, as someone who would stand up for the youth in his program while also demonstrating that being in this role might position him at odds with parents. Case in point, when Abdifitah tried to buffer Sadiq from his mother’s indignation, Fartun dismissed him, suggesting that any worldview on how and when to do homework that differed from her own was unimportant.

The next section more deeply examines the tension and dilemmas youth workers, mothers, youth, and I faced as we collaborated to implement these 4-H youth programs that nurtured youths’ passion and commitment to education.

**Making Sense of our Roles in the Program**

My findings suggest that the tenacity of the families’ commitment to homework presented dilemmas to the community leaders who had close ties to the parents and who had also committed to work alongside 4-H to deliver a youth development program. Ruqia told me the mothers only brought their children to the program “because of me,” which obliged her to honor families’ wishes for frequent homework to help to preserve relationships. But she felt her
obligations to the mothers concurrently prevented her from fulfilling her commitment to 4-H and our partnership. These fieldnotes showcase the interplay of these dueling obligations:

[Hamdi] and Ruqia talked to me about a budget to pay for a tutor or a “teacher.” [Hamdi] said, if there is no teacher, “maybe I only come here one day a week. I will look for my kids to get help elsewhere.” [It was hard to explain that my role in the program was not to help with homework, but to support the afterschool programming.] I later told Ruqia we could work something out. She said, mothers “don’t care about the projects. They just want homework done.” [Ruqia seems like she wants to quit.]

There are a couple of pieces worthy of analysis here. First, Hamdi revealed the reality that if academic tutoring was not prioritized to the satisfaction of the parents (preserving fidelity to the model as initially imagined), the program would risk being without participants. This reality bluntly underscores the critical need to consider families’ perspectives and value systems for the mere survival of the program (Simpkins et al., 2017). It also reveals a burden carried by “cultural brokers.” Ruqia understood both worldviews around education and learning and knew it was her role to bridge them, but in this instance, the disconnect seemed too vast and distressed her.

Secondly, note that I showed little flexibility with “my role in the program” and failed to validate the mother’s advocacy to support her children’s education, showing a lack of responsiveness to community concerns (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). I was frequently asked by parents to find tutors on account of my affiliation with the university, an issue on which I reflected one day: “[I feel guilty and worried about the expectations they have of me as a representative from the university.]” I also worried about how this focus on homework help would affect the timeliness of achieving our desired program outcomes and how this dilemma reflects on my own job performance. These concerns underscore the contradictory practices of community engagement in more task and outcome-oriented institutions and organizations (Heel et al., 2006). And yet, despite my concern and growing anxiety, I did not push for program fidelity (as outlined in our team logic model) and instead continued engaging with and learning from the community. In time, benefits (unforeseen to me) emerged in the youth programs.

**Homework Help as an Opportunity for Relationships and Sociocultural Understanding**

Homework help time afforded me natural opportunities to connect with the mothers. We engaged in conversations about their children and their well-being while they focused on their homework. These conversations aided my own understanding of these participants’ experiences in school. For example, Naima came to pick Fardowsa up from the program early; she was taking her to a tutor to “see where her skills are at.” While waiting for Fardowsa to gather her things, she explained to me, “I don’t want them to be behind” (referring to Fardowsa and all her children). At this point, I knew Fardowsa was an A student, and I was perplexed by this concern. Yet in time, I learned from a conversation with the suburban mothers at “family night” that teachers often placed their children in ESL classes, despite speaking English as a first language. Asma
expressed anger that her daughter, Noura, was missing out on science and math coursework to take a remedial language course unnecessarily. Mothers explained to me they prioritized homework help and academic tutoring because, as Asma put it, “We don’t want kids [to] feel like low.” For the mothers, a rigorous approach to education, like frequent homework help and academic tutoring, was a way to counter the deficit lens through which teachers and peers saw their children and a way to validate their children’s intelligence.

Youth valued homework time as well. Ibrahim was asked in an SYS promotional video what he liked about the program, and he highlighted homework help explaining:

Sometimes at home, I don’t have someone my age or someone that knows math to help me, like when I need help. But when I went to SYS 4-H, they would help me. … That’s why I like them because they help me!

Ibrahim draws subtle attention to the ways homework is related to Somali families’ histories as refugees. Each of the mothers I spoke with through the five years of work on this project had experienced disrupted education on account of the Somali Civil War and are unfamiliar with U.S. educational systems. Ruqia and Hassan often explained to me that homework help is disproportionately important for these youth as it is a way to receive guidance on an institution unfamiliar to their mothers. For example, Ruqia would frequently attend school conferences with or on behalf of mothers because of the language barrier and because the overall U.S. educational system was confusing to them. Also, in his explanation, Ibrahim identifies the community leaders in his 4-H program as people on whom he can depend for help, suggesting that homework help set the conditions for him and all youth participants to have developmental relationships with adults who express care by being dependable and who provide support by helping them navigate the educational system (Search Institute, 2014).

Had I viewed youth sparks as individually held and not explored these broader systems and structures that nurture, temper, and constrains youths’ passion and commitment to education, I likely would have continued to resist the large role of homework help in the program and maintained my view that homework help impeded our program goals. Resultantly, I might have deprived youth of these developmental relationships with the youth workers who promoted belonging and the development of a positive Somali cultural identity (Arnold, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), and possibly interfered with youths’ relationships with their mothers as sources of support. Both are critical developmental relationships that support youths’ thriving orientations (Search Institute, 2014).

Finally, homework created a space of belonging for youth that counters the marginalizing school structures that make youth “feel low” outside of the program. While many of the youth in the program said they were quiet at school, during homework help at their 4-H program, youth frequently talked with each other about their grades or the classes they wanted to take. One interpretation of this is that in their program space, they could speak free of the burden
countering other’s view of themselves, whether it was claiming educational successes: “All As! Boom!” (Fardowsa) or sharing disappointments: “My grades are like suck.” (Aisha). While not exactly “downtime” as a suggested programming structure of racially and ethnically minoritized youth by Simpkins et al. (2017), structuring in homework help created space for young people to talk about what was important in their lives (education and the opportunities it presents).

**Broadening Perspectives: “I Was Not Picturing This”**

Slowly, through time, the “4-H activities” occurred at each of the three program sites. While my data did not suggest any clear impetus to account for this shift, one interpretation is that the prioritization of building strong relationships over program fidelity helped families begin to trust me, and by proxy, 4-H. Many learned to trust 4-H (with reassurance from our community partners) enough to allow their children to attend an overnight experience at the University of Minnesota, even though one mother once told (on behalf of all Somali mothers), “We don’t leave our children without us!”

Allowing children to attend an overnight experience suggests that community-engaged practices can, in time, lead to high-quality youth development programs centered on shared sparks in unforeseen ways. Kadar describes his program experience in an SYS promotional video:

> In Somali Youth Strength, like the first hour that we come, we do our homework, and they like help us with the stuff we need help with, and then we do our 4-H activity, and you get to become your own leader, helping each other out with teamwork and helping each other do the program or the thing we are supposed to be doing. We get to do field trips, and we get to set up a lot of things we can be doing that other people aren’t able to be doing.

Kadar identified program elements of homework help, “4-H activities,” and field experiences as program design elements that helped him become a leader and expand his future possibilities. He also noted the importance of helping each other, suggesting that the expressed value of service to others has been incorporated into his program experience.

Even with an increased presence of nonformal STEM learning, youth still suggested homework help remained a priority. For example, when visiting the suburban site during its third year of programming, I observed an exchange between Hassan and Noura, the newly elected 4-H club president:

> Hassan went to ask Noura a question about the upcoming learning activity. She responded, “this is not 4-H time; this is homework time.” He said something else [can’t remember], and she said, “I would answer, but I’m too busy getting As over here!”
Noura’s quip suggests that homework help enables her to explore (and get excited about) her passion and commitment to education.

Also, during the third year of implementation of the suburban club, mother and new 4-H volunteer Naima shares, during the discussion I facilitated at “family night,” how her children’s homework help and leadership experiences are sparking her own excitement for her children’s educational futures:

Before 4-H, I was not motivated as I am today. … Before, we think they can get everything from just schooling, but not the leadership. I was not picturing this. … They are going to the U of M, meeting with the leaders. They tell them who they can be, and they’re telling them they can be everything they want to be. There’s no limit. They feel so hopeful, and before 4-H or Somali Youth Strength, I don’t think I would know this.

Naima went on to describe that her daughter, Fardowsa, had hung up on her bedroom wall the “Pathways to Higher Education Map” that she had completed as part of her participation in 4-H. She relayed that it served as a daily reminder of how she can reach her aspirations for and through higher education. Naima illustrates how, through seeing her children’s passions nurtured through programming structures like interacting with university faculty and students, her own spark, as a mother, was flamed. Her insight shows the relational and collective aspects of youth sparks. When youth become inspired and motivated through youth programs, this, in turn, inspires and motivates their family members, which arguably strengthens the systems of relational support within the family structure. In this case, Naima came to understand the value of nonformal learning and how it fits with her broader aspirations for her children’s future well-being. This mother was not “picturing” the importance of building leadership skills, but through time and trust with the program, she broadened her perspective. Concurrently, I, as the Extension professional, was not “picturing” homework help creating conditions for thriving—as I noted in my early program notes and observation memos. Still, community-engaged strategies, like relying on community partners and communicating with families in person, broadened my own worldview, thus enhancing my professional expertise and ability to make a positive difference in the lives of young people, their families, and their communities. However, we did, along with the SYS staff, all share imaginations for youths’ thriving future through education, which was the collective spark that fueled this beautifully complicated and enriching, community-engaged program design process.

Reflection and Conclusion

This article proposes that 4-H and Extension professionals approach program design through a sociocultural lens using community engagement strategies to understand and validate the broader systems that shape and influence youths’ sparks. The findings I presented and analyzed showed how enacting the recommended engagement strategies identified by Timmons and Dworkin (2020) facilitated an ongoing and community-engaged program design process that led to the co-
creation of three SYS 4-H clubs uniquely designed for Somali youth living in the Twin Cities metro area.

Founding the collaboration on the shared value of education (Timmons & Dworkin, 2020) and recognizing education as a collective spark among all stakeholders helped the team stay committed to the wayward course of co-creating a program that honors and includes diverse perspectives and approaches to education (e.g., homework help and hands-on engineering activities). The strategy of prioritizing relationships with youth and families through personalized communication, such as one-to-one conversations and natural interactions, enabled me, a professional representing Extension/4-H, to understand that homework was related to youths’ broader contexts of development and socialization (e.g., family histories as refugees, or experiences with anti-Muslim racism at school) and to ensure this activity was structured into the youth program. The SYS staff, who acted as cultural brokers, facilitated the exchange of cultural knowledge between the families and me, which was sometimes an onerous task but led to a programming structure that strengthened Extension/4-H’s relationship with the Somali community in the Twin Cities.

On the level of theory, these findings offer an alternative conceptualization of youth sparks as it relates to youths’ thriving orientations. Different than engaging youth by appealing to their individually held and intrinsically motivating interest or passion, I argue for an approach to understanding youth sparks as socially situated, collective, and relational (DeJaeghere, 2022). My findings revealed how education was an embodied cultural ideal that inspired youth to act (through homework help and experiential learning) toward valued and thriving futures. They shared a value with their families and the broader Minnesota Somali community (as indicated by how SYS’s foundation viewed education as “key” to youth Somali youth thriving). Youths’ passion and commitment to education were shaped by contexts of support, constraints, and contradictions in multiple social ecologies. Understanding youths’ sparks as related to these broader contexts create the conditions for youth belonging as they can be included in the structure of the youth program, which in this case, occurred via homework (Simpkins et al., 2017). On the program level, and from my positionality, homework help seemed antithetical to experiential learning principles upheld in 4-H. But these findings suggest that homework help created programmatic opportunities for youth to build developmental relationships with adults who share cultural identities and could help them grow, learn, and belong (Search Institute, 2014). It also helped redress the effects of marginalizing school contexts that viewed Somali youth through a deficit lens and placed them unnecessarily in remedial courses by providing opportunities for youth to discuss and pursue their education in a safe and supportive environment.
Implications for 4-H and Extension

These findings have important implications for 4-H’s nationwide program design efforts and the utility of the 4-H Thriving Model. I argue this model is of critical importance to ensure 4-H programs are designed in ways that inspire joy, motivation, and empowerment for youth to contribute to their own and their community’s well-being. Community engagement processes must be employed to ensure 4-H programs are equally informed by research-based and community-based knowledge to create equitable opportunities for youth thriving through participation in 4-H. Through such a process, 4-H is better equipped to co-create high-quality youth programs that are responsive to and inclusive of youths’ broader social ecologies.

To this end, I recommend Extension and 4-H consider the arguments of Donaldson and Frack (2021) and make developmental evaluation approaches more prominent in program design efforts. This would support Extension and 4-H professionals to approach program design as ongoing, adaptable, innovative, and open to including community knowledge and expertise.

This approach to evaluation complements the community engagement strategies I outlined. Still, the community-engaged strategies explored in this paper required a robust partnership with substantial reliance on community leaders who acted as a cultural bridge to 4-H and Somali families. This cultural bridge appeared to be onerous for cultural brokers. They tried to bring together seemingly oppositional ways of knowing and seeing the world and generously share cultural knowledge with me. With the support of grant funding, we had funds to compensate community partners for their contributions, which implicates Extension and 4-H in a power dynamic as these institutions are better resourced to compensate employees than a smaller organization whose contributions are of equal value to building strong communities. This also suggests that future Extension research should more deeply explore how cultural brokers experience and navigate challenging situations that emerge from their collaboration with Extension. Additional research can contribute to the existing literature on youth workers’ dilemmas (Larson & Walker, 2010). This knowledge could be applied to explore Extension can equitably support and value the contributions cultural brokers make to strengthening communities in partnership with Extension.

Baldridge’s (2014) and DeJaeghere’s (2022) charge to create spaces to interrogate and prepare for systems of oppression occurred somewhat incidentally through homework help. The pedagogical ways in which 4-H programs can be a space of belonging to specifically redress and interrogate the systems that implicate youths’ thriving orientation is worthy of future Extension research. Further, the strategies I explored are complex, labor-intensive, and required resources such as time, funding, and staff with the community engagement skills (Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium & Community Engagement Key Function Committee, 2011). Grant reporting and performance reviews that focus on short-term outcomes or the number of participants reached impede opportunities to assign value to Extension professionals’
time building relationships of trust and reciprocity—resources that are foundational to sustained community impact and collaboration (Fitzgerald et al., 2012).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my positionality in the community as a white woman representing the institution and the privilege it entails required a personal process of interrogating issues of power and understanding cultural knowledge that is different than my own. This calls to the urgency for Extension to incorporate diverse value systems and ways of knowing within its organizational structures and staffing. Such an organizational and systems change can strengthen Extension and 4-H’s relationships with communities, enhance expertise (Fitzgerald et al., 2012), and enrich Extension’s abilities to co-create solutions to issues that affect communities’ collective ability to thrive.

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Acknowledgments

The programs in this study were supported by the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program with a 5-year grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) led by Principal Investigator Dr. Jennifer Skuza.

I would like to thank Dr. Dorothy McCargo Freeman and Dr. Jennifer Skuza for their vision and leadership of this partnership. Thank you to my SYS colleagues for their partnership, commitment to make a difference, and for their trust in me to share their stories.
Extension and Faith-Based Organizations – Understanding Past and Present Linkages and Future Opportunities for Urban Communities

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This examination of the literature explored the limited empirical data available regarding the networks formed between Cooperative Extension (Extension), local partners, and faith-based organizations (FBOs) within metropolitan areas. With FBOs being central to rural towns, as well as urban neighborhoods, Extension must consider engaging with these essential community resources as a means to broaden its reach and serve a wider audience. Not only are these entities underutilized, despite the abundance of human and social capital they provide, but they too are often in need of what Extension has to offer. This article will examine the history of collaborations between urban FBOs and Extension. In addition, the authors will look at how applying the principles of past successes to current problems could potentially enrich urban societies. The authors suggest meaningful ways in which Extension can serve in a capacity that is beneficial but not imposing on moral and/or spiritual beliefs and serve as allies with faith-based organizations to reach and aid new and/or underserved clientele.

Keywords: Extension, faith-based, religion, community engagement, urban, metropolitan

Since its creation through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the Cooperative Extension Service (Extension; U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, n.d.) has worked closely with faith leaders to positively impact the social and economic development of rural localities (Prins & Ewert, 2002). As a result, communities have experienced the positive impacts of past collaborations between Extension and faith communities. Strong social capital among faith-based organizations (FBOs) has complimented Extension’s work, while Extension has also benefited from the historical integration of these community organizations. In addition, given their high motivation to help solve community challenges, FBOs can serve as a key partner for community impact when paired with Extension’s resources to impede local challenges.

However, limited empirical data is available that highlights the successful efforts between Extension and urban faith-based organizations (including churches, mosques, and temples). The role that government (public) agencies play in partnership with FBOs seems overlooked and undervalued. These partnerships can provide a tremendous asset to the communities they serve. Despite what can be a worthy contribution, many nonprofit organizations tend to steer clear of faith-based organizations to minimize the assumption of partiality to one religion or faith. When
Extension professionals yield to such inhibitions due to familiarity or comfort in working with only one group, these actions can severely detract from the ability to serve all communities in need. This article aims to identify how Extension currently works with and through religious organizations in urban communities to reach underserved audiences and the associated positive outcomes. The authors offer insight by

- providing descriptions used to define FBOs;
- offering some historical perspective on the role government has played in building collaborations with these organizations;
- acknowledging the contributions universities have made in forming community coalitions, and
- noting implications and recommendations for forming partnerships.

**Methods**

The authors reviewed articles that examine the connection between faith-based organizations and Extension, with an intentional focus on urban communities. This search was expanded to include faith-based organizational partnerships with Extension in rural communities and partnerships with non-Extension community groups. However, there was minimal data on the subject even with the expansion and use of additional keywords. Hence, the authors’ justification for inculcating this discussion on how Extension can form partnerships to plan and execute programs that speak to the needs of local audiences in metropolitan areas.

All identified resources were examined to demote relevant articles for the review. Pertinent abstracts of interest were considered to determine if the article connected with the objectives. For articles retained through abstract review, the full-length versions were also reviewed, using the same process to identify articles that met the specified criteria. Lastly, the reference sections of articles were explored to determine if additional articles needed to be considered.

Materials were reviewed during the fall and winter of 2021. The authors performed a systematic search of all articles published in journals that target Extension audiences and engagement scholars by utilizing keyword search functions. For example, a search with the keyword “religion” yielded only one example of an Extension partnership with a faith-based organization. A search with the keyword “faith-based” yielded three examples: one urban, one rural, and one not specified. A similar search of keywords “Cooperative” and “Extension” and “faith-based” and “urban” yielded 20 articles, which resulted in no new concrete examples of urban FBO partnerships with Extension. This further raises the argument for the need to investigate this outreach area.
Faith-Based Defined

The Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (2003) defined a religious organization as “any entity that is self-identified as motivated by or founded on religious conviction.” Monsma (2002) further divided religious organizations into two groups: faith-integrated organizations, defined as those that integrated religious elements into the social services they supplied, and faith-segmented organizations, those that kept their religious elements largely separate from the social services they provided. Sider and Unruh (2004) developed a comprehensive typology of “Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs.” The authors refined religious organizations into six specific groups (see Table 1).

Table 1. Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs (Sider and Unruh, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Religious Organizations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Permeated</td>
<td>Faith is integrated at all levels within the organization and the programs delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Centered</td>
<td>Organizations that have structures focused on faith as well as programs that contain a component that has its basis in their faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Affiliated</td>
<td>Organizations that were established by people sharing faith and possibly displaying religious symbols; organizations do not necessarily have staff that share the same commitment to the faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Background</td>
<td>The organization’s structure and programs appear secular; the organization itself has some sort of background connection to faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Secular Partnership</td>
<td>Secular organizations but the faith of those delivering the programs are expected to make positive contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Organizations with no religious or faith aspect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the descriptions above attempt to describe and categorize social service organizations with a faith foundation and may differ from the federal government’s definition of faith-based organizations (The White House, 2021).

Despite these descriptions, the meaning that undergirds the approach of many FBOs is the call to serve. Campbell et al. (2007, p. 1) notes that “From a socioecological perspective, churches and other religious organizations can influence members’ behaviors at multiple levels of change.” That service is duly and intentionally aimed at the communities in which they exist. In times of need, these religious institutions are key in providing access to life’s necessities (i.e., food,
clothing, and shelter). More recently, they have broadened their capacity to develop programs that provide training and development of critical life skills, healthy living, and social justice. All of these, in turn, have become areas emphasized within the mission of Extension.

**Federal Emphasis on Faith-Based Initiatives**

The role of faith-based institutions has been at the center of many debates over the years. It is indeed a relevant discourse, given that FBOs contribute over $1 billion annually to the economy (Haakenstad et al., 2015). In fact, the past few presidential administrations have emphasized the need to support these entities. In 2001, the Bush administration established, by executive order, the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood partnerships (The White House: George W. Bush, 2001). It was an effort to form partnerships that would offer much-needed social services to underserved audiences. In turn, faith-based groups would have the opportunity to seek funding through contracts and grants that had not been as readily available to them in previous years. As a result, FBOs would gain easier access to federal grants that would aim to benefit those in most need of assistance (whitehouse.gov).

Such efforts have received bipartisan support, with the Obama administration adopting several principles related to the preceding initiative (Executive Order No. 13,498, 2009). The name was changed to the President’s Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. However, the emphasis on addressing the needs of limited resource communities has remained a primary focus (Marsden, 2012). There was an expectation to determine best practices for delivery methods, as well as an evaluation of the implementation and coordination processes related to these organizations.

In May of 2018, the Trump administration passed an executive order to establish a White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative (Executive Order No. 13,831, 2018). Then in February 2021, the Biden administration instituted an executive order to reestablish the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to stimulate partnerships between FBOs and community groups to serve those in need (The White House, 2021). This effort was even more comprehensive by noting goals that target economic recovery amid the COVID-19 pandemic, combating systemic racism, and advancing global humanitarianism. In addition, since the early 2000s, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has housed the Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) to provide a means for FBOs to gain further access to federal funds (Marsden, 2012; also see https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1875/200sbp.pdf). With such consistent emphasis on FBOs forging federal partnerships, states can have similar success. The Land-Grant University system is a premiere vessel to foster such relationships that aim to address local needs at the core of the community.
Land-Grant University Networks

The early 20th century saw numerous Land-Grant University/FBO partnerships, with church leaders and Extension connecting to pursue the perils associated with many community development issues. From providing education on topics of leadership, economics, inter-church cooperation, and women’s contribution (Landis & Willard, 1933) to Cornell University’s “summer schools for sociology and modern life” (Earp, 1914) to providing networking opportunities among rural churches and Extension professionals (Landis & Willard, 1933), all helped to foster what has become known as one of Extension’s premiere strengths—building relationships.

Government agencies in partnership with faith-based organizations is often underrated. However, these partnerships can be a tremendous asset to the communities they serve. Despite what can be a worthy contribution, many public and private nonprofit organizations tend to steer clear of faith-based collaborations (Prins & Ewert, 2002).

Faith-Based Institutions as Partners with Extension

Prins and Ewert (2002), in their study on FBOs and Extension, examined relationships using historical texts that revealed work with church congregations since Extension’s founding in 1914. There is a discussion of how the church was central to rural life in the 1800s and 1900s, even as there was a shift in its desire to take up social causes. This was done in partnership with community organizations. However, as the debate over the separation of church and state prevails, many would-be FBO partners have become more cautious in their approach (Prins & Ewert, 2002).

Nonetheless, the authors concluded that by remembering history and the benefits of the social ties that bind, Extension should focus on improving the communities served through the help of these collaborations. There are indeed commonalities that prevail. Both FBOs and Extension have strong social networks, and both offer time-honored, well-established relationships within communities that lend credibility to the work they aim to pursue.

One example of a recent Extension and FBO partnership is found in programming highlighted by Zapata et al. (2021). In this example, Extension educators and specialists working in Tulsa, Oklahoma, partnered with church leaders to implement an early literacy initiative. Here the authors credit the partnership with training community leaders who educated peers and modeled trustworthy behaviors resulting in an FBO taking ownership of the initiative.

An early study by King and Hustedde (1993) revealed how Extension professionals should consider tapping into FBOs to access a variety of free spaces. This setting offers a forum for dialogue to move toward problem-solving. The authors further offered the Black church as an example—an institution that helped give birth to the civil rights movement. Not only did
churches provide a “free space” of solace and reverence, but also a place to strategize and further capitalize on a grassroots approach to developing the skills of local leadership.

Ligrani and Niewolny (2017) identified FBOs’ role in the ever-evolving urban food systems movement. Their study examined the issue of food insecurity and its impact on the state of Virginia. These authors noted three reasons FBOs should be considered essential partners: historical connections between faith and food; the moral and philosophical obligations for FBOs to care for the poor; and the social and cultural capital they possess, which contributes to successful collaborations.

The Decline in Interaction

Prins and Ewert (2002) give probable causes for the decline in partnerships between Extension and FBOs. These include a decline in democratic vision, a rise in political correctness, and apprehension of violating the separation of church and state. However, many would argue that this third concept is not constitutionally based, that public partnerships with FBOs are not precluded, and that partnerships do not violate the “establishment clause” if no preference is given (see U.S. Const. Art. VII, Amend. I).

Laborde (2013, p. 68) gives four model environments regarding religious separations and the state:

A. Militant Separation: Inadequate protection of religious freedoms; official support and promotion of skepticism or atheism by the state; secularist anti-religious state
B. Modest Separation: Adequate protection of religious freedoms; no official support of religion(s) by the state; no public funding of religious education and no state aid to religious groups
C. Modest Establishment: Adequate protection of religious freedoms; official support of religion(s) by the state; public funding of religious education and state aid to religious groups
D. Full Establishment: Inadequate protection of religious freedoms; official support and promotion of religious orthodoxy by the state; theocratic anti-secular state

Models A and D are not compatible with the U.S. Constitution since they fail to offer adequate religious protections. The debate continues around models B and C. The authors of this article contend that the societal benefits of model C, when offered freely and without religious preference, are the preferred method of public interaction with FBOs. This perspective is consistent with others in the literature (Prins & Ewert, 2002), who conclude that by remembering history and the benefit of the social ties that bind, Extension should focus on improving the communities we serve through the help of these collaborations.
In a more recent article, Campbell (2016) reported the challenges of partnering with FBOs, particularly smaller-scale organizations with limited access to necessary resources. He focused on community social service networks and explored the variables that enhance and impede collaborations among these organizations and other local services. Several longitudinal case studies were used, including FBOs that had received government contracts as part of a California faith-based initiative. Comparative analyses were conducted over 10 years to examine the partnerships formed. Four primary factors identified were organizational niche within the local network, leadership connections and network legitimacy, faith-inspired commitments and persistence, and core organizational competencies and capacities. As a result, the author emphasized a need to support local planning and network development within community contexts. A major argument raised was a need for a shift from operating in silos to partnering with organizations or programs in pursuit of improving lives through collective impact.

**Faith-Based Institutions as Pillars in Urban Communities**

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) have been central to the development of local communities around the world. In rural communities, a church is often located in the heart of town; in metropolitan areas, there is a church, mosque, or synagogue on nearly every corner. In addition to providing opportunities for spiritual development, FBOs are critical in meeting the community’s needs in various ways. They undoubtedly have a solid comprehension of the local issues and deliver services to meet specific needs through feeding programs, childcare services, health care, as well as workforce preparation initiatives.

The health community has often seen the need to partner with FBOs to promote specific endeavors (Morabia, 2019). Churches are prime locations for serving medically underserved communities. Tagai et al. (2018) used a Faith-Based Organization Capacity Inventory to examine three structural areas of capacity: staffing and space, health promotion experience, and external collaboration using a convenience sample of 34 churches. Through this project, the authors revealed that most churches had health ministries or some focus on health awareness and could serve as an adequate partner in communicating messages about best health management practices. This strategy could similarly serve Extension. As Extension assesses the needs of communities, it may be evident that FBOs can provide assistance and possible solutions to the social ills that challenge urban centers.

Cutts and Gunderson (2019) examined a particular faith-based initiative’s impact on underserved patient medical costs. Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center (WFBMC) leadership formed FaithHealth, whose goal is to help patients better understand and maneuver through the often-complex health care system. By committing to outreach and community engagement, FaithHealth, in partnership with other agencies, has expanded its existing work with the underserved. Cutts and Gunderson (2019) noted that from 2015 to 2019, FaithHealth volunteers
provided more than 48,000 contacts with patients, ranging from providing food, transportation, social support, medication assistance, and other services.

The Johns Hopkins Community Health Partnership (J-ChiP) was formed to address the health care issues that plague residents in East Baltimore (Berkowitz et al., 2016). J-ChiP partners with community and faith-based nonprofits have worked consistently to improve the lives of these residents whose lifespan can be 20 years less than residents in other adjoining neighborhoods. The ability to form local partnerships has strengthened the ability to engage community members to take a proactive stance toward health.

The Bronx Health-sponsored Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program set goals to reduce morbidity and mortality from diabetes and cardiovascular disease in southwest Bronx churches (Kaplan et al., 2009). Other programs have focused on addressing lifestyle changes among African American church members through sessions that highlight addressing weight loss; increasing physical activity; fruit, vegetable, and low-fat dairy intake; and monitoring fat and sodium intake using community-based participatory interventions (Kim et al., 2008; Lancaster et al., 2014). Since religion is core to the values of many Americans, programs like REACH have relied on trusted institutions like FBOs as partners. Because their missions include the moral need to help improve the lives of those around them, this aligns easily with secular or nonprofit organizations with similar values.

When looking abroad, FBOs can also be seen operating as healthcare providers. In parts of Africa, FBOs provide nearly 40 percent of healthcare services (Olivier & Wodon, 2012). These institutions’ gained respect is partly due to their organized social capital and longevity within communities. Their solid networks may be quintessential partners that can help build strong collaborations that have a lasting impact.

In a study conducted by McLeigh (2011), 428 international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) were examined to answer the question “Does Faith Matter?” McLeigh compared INGOs based upon having a religious or secular perspective as to whether they were recipients of government funding. In addition, the author was able to utilize variables from previous studies to measure “organizational religiosity” to compare two groups of religious organizations, Faith-Integrated and Faith-Segmented, with secular groups and found (among other things) that international FBOs were more likely to be “results” oriented and less likely to benefit from governmental funding.

Generating Program Collaborations

Recognizing the Faith-Based Organization’s Assets

Faith-based organizations are often at the cusp of the critical issues that affect urban communities. In many resource-poor neighborhoods, they are often the only support for residents
in dire need of assistance (Campbell, 2016; Gunderson et al., 2018). FBOs are also seen as authentic sources, understand the plight of the people, and are willing to meet them where they are in life. Moreover, they quite naturally offer cultural competency when designing and implementing programs. While some may refer to their approach as too fluid, those accessing their services may see this as a relief from the often-bureaucratic procedures that can accompany government-regulated programs.

Today, there is often a debate on whether it is worthwhile to pursue a partnership with FBOs, given that many of them appear to have lesser interest in collaborations. Fu et al. (2021) conducted a recent study to assess whether religiosity and operational capacity influence an FBOs desire to form partnerships. Nearly 200 U.S. FBOs participated by completing a survey. Results revealed that FBOs with high levels of operational capacity were more likely to form partnerships across various sectors (nonprofit, business, public). The findings suggest the intentions of many FBOs may be misunderstood; their lack of capacity may be the contributing factor preventing their eagerness to collaborate. This misunderstanding affords Extension a prime opportunity to offer resources while providing service to a potential partner.

**Extension Assets**

Just as FBOs bring a distinct set of assets to community partnerships, so does Extension. With over a century of experience in community education and development, Extension interprets and shares unbiased, evidence-based information through the Land-Grant University System. This system represents 112 Land-Grant institutions, of which 19 are historically black universities (HBCUs), and 33 are tribal colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2019). In addition, there are county Extension offices in or near each of the country’s 3,000 counties and parishes. These local offices host at least one and usually multiple county Extension agents/educators.

**Implications for Practice**

As we examine the faith landscape in the United States, we can see many opportunities for collaborations with Cooperative Extension. Although no official directory exists for all the congregations in the country, the Hartford Institute (2021) estimates that there are between 350,000 and 375,000 religious congregations in the United States. Of this number, 58% are located in urban and suburban communities (Thumma, 2020). In some communities, these FBOs have generations of social capital and trust that would aid Extension in sharing practical, applied research that would positively impact the lives of congregation members.

Consider FBO opportunities for 4-H Youth Development programming. According to the U.S. Department of Education website, over 33,000 private K-12 schools in the United States educate more than 4.5 million students. Of this total, 68.7% are faith-based (3.09 million students). In addition, the number of homeschooled students has increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 1.8
million in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The majority of parents are motivated by a desire for additional religious, moral, and academically-rigorous instruction. These faith-based schools and families could benefit from Extension’s expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), public speaking, and leadership development programming, among others.

According to a survey by Faith Communities Today titled *Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview* (Thumma, 2020), it was found that 33% of participants are seniors (65 or older) whereas, in the general population, just 17% are affiliated with faith or religion. This distribution is similar for congregational leadership. When considered through a national health issues perspective for seniors, it could indicate vast audiences in need of Extension nutrition, health, and financial literacy programming.

The *Faith Communities Today* survey also identified characteristics associated with the rate at which congregations are flourishing; one of these indicators involved community and civic engagement (Thumma, 2020). This observation could translate into FBOs being good partners in educating their members about personal food production and urban food systems.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This literature review identifies faith-based organizations as a potentially new, yet largely underserved target audience, particularly in the nation’s cities. The authors recommend three areas for future research.

- There are significant gaps in the research base regarding partnerships between Extension and urban faith-based organizations. While anecdotal evidence may exist that Extension is collaborating at some level, more research is necessary to understand better current programming. For example, we know that 4-H Youth Development programming is utilized in faith-based schools. However, the number of schools and students being reached and related impacts are not thoroughly documented.

- We can only speculate on congregational needs and how Extension could engage based on demographic survey data (Thumma, 2020). A comprehensive needs assessment that identifies common problems and how Extension could impact those issues is essential.

- Extension must identify any organizational barriers that may be discouraging urban FBO collaborations. Possible areas of research include resource barriers, prejudices, developing cultural competency, and identifying knowledge gaps regarding how to engage with FBOs respectively. By reflecting on the past, assessing the present, and planning for the future, Extension can grow to be a valued community partner with Urban FBOs.
References


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### Appendix

**Faith-Based Organization Typology (Sider & Unruh, 2004)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Organization</th>
<th>Faith-Permeated</th>
<th>Faith-Centered</th>
<th>Faith-Affiliated</th>
<th>Faith-Background</th>
<th>Faith-Secular Partnership</th>
<th>Secular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mission statement and other self-descriptive text</td>
<td>Includes explicitly religious references</td>
<td>Includes explicitly religious references</td>
<td>Religious references may be either explicit or implicit</td>
<td>May have implicit references to religion (e.g., reference to values)</td>
<td>No explicit reference to religion in the mission statement of the partnership or the secular partner, but religion may be explicit in the mission of faith partners</td>
<td>No religious content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Founding</td>
<td>By religious group or for religious purpose</td>
<td>By religious group or for religious purpose</td>
<td>By religious group or for religious purpose</td>
<td>May have historical tie to a religious group, but connection no longer exists</td>
<td>Faith partners founded by a religious group or for religious purpose; No reference to religious identity or founders of the secular partner; Founders of the partnership may or may not be religious</td>
<td>No reference to the religious identity of founders of the secular partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If affiliated with an external entity, is that entity religious? (e.g., a denomination)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>May have dual religious/secular affiliation</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Characteristics of Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Faith-Secular Partnership</th>
<th>Secular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Selection of controlling board</td>
<td>Explicitly religious; may be a) self-perpetuating board with explicit religious criteria or b) board elected by a religious body</td>
<td>Explicitly or implicitly religious; may be a) self-perpetuating board with explicit or implicit religious criteria for all or most members or b) board elected by a religious body</td>
<td>Some, but not all, board members may be required or expected to have a particular faith or ecclesiastical commitment</td>
<td>Board might have been explicitly religious at one time but is now selected with little or no consideration of members’ faith commitment</td>
<td>Board selection is typically controlled by a secular partner with little or no consideration of the commitment of board members; input from faith partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Book Review – *The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done*

Eric Killian  
*University of Nevada Reno*

*With new technology, constant change, uncertainty, and virtual teams, getting things done at work is tougher and more complex than ever. Finding your place amid the collaboration revolution working with everyone across silos and various platforms can feel like we are in a no-win cycle in urban Extension environments. However, there is always the indispensable go-to person, or in our case organization—urban Extension, that thrives on many working relationships, maintains a positive attitude of service, demonstrates creativity and tenacity, and strives to get the right things done. This review will share information on how urban Extension professionals can continue to behave differently, building up influence with others by not trying to do everything for everybody but by doing the right things at the right times for the right reasons.*

*Keywords: indispensable, urban, focus, work, Extension*

*The Art of Being Indispensable at Work: Win Influence, Beat Overcommitment, and Get the Right Things Done* was written by Bruce Tulgan to help you succeed in today’s increasingly demanding and uncertain world of work (Tulgan, 2019). It is a practical guide for navigating through constantly shifting priorities and unclear lines of authority. It is about how to think and conduct yourself when so many factors are outside your control. It is simple and provides practical tips and strategies that can be used by Extension and other professionals, especially in urban environments.

As the world of work continues to change and evolve, finding your place in an organization and achieving success has become more blurred and less defined. Traditional structures have been broken down or removed, hierarchies have flattened, and personal leadership is needed more than ever. Having an entrepreneurial approach to your job appears to be vital for success but comes with a less-traveled path and direction. However, getting the right things done lends itself to being indispensable at work, which has become even more accelerated in Extension, especially in urban environments. In this book review, I will share insights to help navigate the path to being indispensable at work and application to Extension as an indispensable go-to organization.

**Fighting Overcommitment Syndrome**

Nobody can do everything for everybody without succumbing to overcommitment. Stretching oneself beyond capacity is where priorities get muddled, and important things are left undone or
done ineffectively. Navigating these relationships to avoid over-commitment is now our job. In urban Extension, this applies as we are forced to manage directly many more working relationships than before. The relationships are with a much wider range of colleagues and a greater diversity of positions, many without clear lines of authority—up, down, sideways, and diagonal. All of these relationships have the intent to support each other better to produce a more fluid and flexible program in a faster, more untraditional method.

Tulgan shares a few ways we all can handle and manage overcommitment:

- You can NOT ever do everything for everybody.
- You must make choices about what you are NOT going to do so you get the right things done.
- You can’t be great at everything, so you need to build a repertoire of specialties you are known for consistently doing very well and very fast.

**Having Real Influence**

The long game of real influence is a generous, other-centered focus based on adding value in every single interaction. This is hard to do, but in turn, the value you add can make the other person more valuable; contributes to more successful and fruitful interactions and outcomes; and builds your reputation as a true servant to others. Serving others is the essence or heart of Extension work. In urban environments, because of sheer size and numbers, this is often difficult but can be achievable and adds value to others in every interaction. However, this doesn’t mean doing whatever our colleagues or others want at the moment; it does mean trying to do what we think will ultimately make everything go better for everybody. Real influence is incredibly valuable, but it must be earned.

**Leading From Where You Are**

With the rise of self-managed teams and the thinning of management ranks, going in the right direction is to lead up, down, sideways, and diagonally—from wherever you are right now. Whether or not you are in command, take charge. In Extension, this is so true. While there are many missions to lead or follow, Extension professionals take charge both personally and organizationally, even without a title for that leadership. This leadership is often referred to as having an entrepreneurial mindset that aligns locally with state, regional, and national priorities.

**Master the “No”**

Saying “No” at work is a way to prevent you and your colleagues from wasting time, attention, money, and other resources. “No” is how we try to protect ourselves from making bad commitments that are not allowed (against the rules), should not be done (not a priority), or cannot be done (not possible). Saying “Yes” is often seen as the easier thing to do but should be
limited to those items that can be done within a person’s time allotment. In Extension, saying “Yes” is a common practice because we like to be all things to all people. There are so many good things to do that saying “No” doesn’t seem like a viable option. However, saying “No” can help balance and focus our Extension work.

**Finish What You Start**

In a collaboration revolution workplace, where authority and priorities are often unclear, people often manage multiple responsibilities. We all say this as if it is a badge of honor or that we are proud of being very busy with lots of important work. However, the busier you are and the heavier your workload, the less you can afford to manage multiple responsibilities. It will usually be a matter of time before deadlines get missed. The reality is you can only finish one thing at a time. Extension work, especially in an urban environment, often appears as a juggling act or a normal way of doing business. However, our goal is not to juggle until somehow, eventually, we complete a task or project. The goal is to finish what you start. Remember to accomplish this by creating a “DO” list, not a “TO-DO” list.

**Go-to-ism … The Art of Being Indispensable at Work**

Go-to-ism is “the way of the go-to person.” It is both a philosophy of work and a way of conducting yourself at work. It is how you think and what you do. It is the long game of serving others and making yourself valuable to the people around you by building goodwill and a positive reputation. Go-to people don’t do everything for everybody or one person. They approach every relationship determined to add value to every interaction and every other person. Extension professionals excel at being the go-to person or the go-to organization. However, in the new world of work, Extension can look at new ways of doing their work, especially in urban environments, and truly become or master the art of being indispensable at work individually and overall an indispensable organization.

**Conclusion**

This game-changing yet practical book reveals the secrets of the go-to person in our new world of work. Based on an intensive study of people at all levels in all kinds of organizations, Tulgan shows how go-to people think and behave differently. They build up their influence with others—not by trying to do everything for everybody but by doing the right things at the right times for the right reasons, regardless of whether they have the formal authority. Extension professionals can directly apply this information both personally and organizationally to ensure continued success and relevance in the future as urban environments continue to grow and get more complex.
References


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Resources


Documentary Review – Two Roles in Urban Community Revitalization: Julian Price the Philanthropist and Cooperative Extension

Susan A. Kelly
North Carolina State University

Julian Price used his inherited wealth to revitalize downtown Asheville, North Carolina. This documentary review reflects on his passion for community, and the concepts he believed would bring the city back from decay. Some of those same community development practices are successfully used across the country by Extension professionals to assist urban communities in revitalization. Examples of Extension programs and techniques are provided throughout this review about an inspiring documentary about a man looking for purpose and finding it by transforming a troubled downtown with his generosity.

Keywords: revitalization, philanthropy, Extension, urban


Julian Price is an oral history project (documentary) detailing the many ways a special philanthropist changed downtown Asheville, North Carolina forever. The documentary features inspiring commentary from people who were family, investors, partners, beneficiaries, and admirers of the man they describe as quiet, funny, clever, and smart. The 33-minute documentary was directed by Erin Denham and enhanced by original music performed by the Asheville Symphony Sessions. The 2016 documentary is an insight into favorite places for those who have visited downtown Asheville, and the story is very compelling for anyone who views a vibrant downtown as an important piece of urban development and community life.

1970s Asheville Settles into Urban Blight

The documentary tells the story of Julian Price, the heir to the Jefferson Pilot fortune, who was searching for his purpose in life when he landed in beautiful but disheveled Asheville. Walking through the boarded-up downtown past the pawn shops and pornography theater, Price found a crippled town full of empty buildings and few pedestrians. Nonetheless, he fell in love with this community nestled between the mountains and decided to invest his wealth in the city.

According to the film, the City of Asheville coffers became empty in 1929 at the start of the Depression, and that shameful memory lingered with the locals. By the time the Asheville Mall opened in 1973, little attention was given to the crime-ridden, empty buildings in the center of
the city. The story of commerce and people moving away from a downtown area to the malls in the suburbs is very commonplace in the United States during this period.

**Extension and Urban Community Development Work**

Extension has provided educational resources and extended the research of Land-Grant Universities for more than 150 years, mostly in rural communities. Tackling issue-oriented needs in urban areas is the greatest opportunity for Extension (Warner et al., 2017). Extension, when viewed as an impartial, objective resource, is uniquely positioned to help communities, organizations, and volunteer committees through the most difficult stages of large-scale community development projects (Davis, 1999). Price made a huge impact in Asheville using his fortune, but Extension also can play an important role in downtown revitalization, business retention and expansion, strategic planning, retail market analysis, entrepreneur support, and more.

For example, a Downtown and Business Market Analysis Toolbox was developed by three midwestern university Extension teams to provide a community education approach to conducting a market analysis, extending beyond retail to focus on the downtown assets, history, and quirkiness (University of Minnesota Extension et al., 2011). One of the strategies included in the toolbox resource is First Impressions, a method to collect data based on aesthetics and community assets. This method has been widely used since its development in the early 1990s by Extension professionals and communities to identify assets and challenges and raise local awareness and guide public action (Nix et al., 2013). Many more examples of Extension working to revitalize downtowns and communities can be found across the United States.

**Philanthropy and Investment in Community**

As portrayed in the documentary, Price appeared to be so much more than his wealth. He cultivated the dreams of the people he met, sprinkling investments strategically in the various segments of small business, residential, art, and media. He asked entrepreneurs, “What is your dream?” and engaged a small group of investors to make donations to support these businesses, which are all still thriving pillars of the downtown community nearly 30 years later.

The entrepreneurs who were Price’s benefactors were surprised by the unexpected windfalls. Price invested in restaurants because he liked their food and in other businesses because they were important to the community, in his opinion. Price and his fellow investors made it possible for a Self-Help Credit Union to be established downtown with a $1 million deposit to make loans to start-ups and underserved populations who were not eligible through traditional lending institutions.
Extension as Economic Development Partner

Practitioners in the new era of economic development are recognizing the potential of philanthropy in revitalizing downtowns during urban sprawl (Rowan, 2019). Gathering data to be used by investors and economic developers through business retention and expansion strategies could be an option for Extension professionals. The University of Minnesota is one of the leaders of business retention and expansion programs and has completed more than 75 initiatives using community engagement, education, and volunteer data collection (Darger et al., 2017).

Creating Livable Downtowns and Preserving the Soul of the City

Through the documentary’s narrative, we learn that the concept of livable downtowns supporting business and community was part of Price’s dream for Asheville. He worked to provide housing and everything one would need without leaving the downtown area. He was interested in beauty, safety, cleanliness, and access. One of the interviewees in the film was a city official at the time and tells of Price renting wheelchairs for the city commissioners and taking them on an excursion through the sidewalks and streets to demonstrate the problems of accessibility to disabled people in the downtown, which led to sidewalk improvements. We learn in the film that Price said cities should preserve the past because tourists do not go to a city that has lost its soul.

Art and Culture Creating Place: A New Extension Initiative

Extension professionals working in economic development utilize creative placemaking through arts, multi-cultural festivals, and activities of interest to community partners. The University of Kentucky’s Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky recently completed a creative placemaking toolkit for use as an emerging community and economic development process (Koo & Bond, 2021).

Conclusion

From a boarded-up, vacant town to a top-rated tourist destination in the country is the way the transformation of Asheville was described in the documentary. Price, who sadly passed away in 2001 of cancer at age 60, felt his wealth gave him the responsibility of using it to do “the right thing” and used it to save an urban area from extinction. While wealthy individuals who are willing to give all with such personal commitment are rare, many communities benefit from philanthropy and community foundations that provide grants and funds to aid downtown and economic development. In urban areas and rural areas, Extension professionals are also actively engaged in supporting economic development through resources from the Land-Grant Universities and partnerships with community members and organizations.
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Susan A. Kelly is an Extension professional with North Carolina State University who has worked in Community Development Extension as well as Extension Administration in both North Carolina and Florida since 2004. She served as the 15th president of the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) during 2019-2020, an organization providing professional development and scholarship opportunities to Extension Professionals in the areas of Community and Economic Development. Please direct correspondence to Susan A. Kelly at susan_kelly@ncsu.edu.

Acknowledgments

The documentary *Julian Price – Envisioning Community. Investing in People*. was viewed during the 2019 National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Annual Conference Opening Session in Asheville, North Carolina, with commentary from one of his business partners, Karen Ramshaw. She is vice president of Public Interest Projects. Much appreciation is extended to Ms. Ramshaw for her generosity and for sharing her personal insights into the fascinating story of Julian Price. The film is available for purchase on
Amazon Prime and retail video outlets and free viewing from public libraries through Hoopla. For more information about the Julian Price Project, visit https://julianpriceproject.com/documentary.

M.C. “Molly” Immendorf  
*Extension Foundation*

The book “*Lean Impact: How to Innovate for Radically Greater Social Good*” outlines ways to infuse innovation techniques learned from the private start-up sector into sectors traditionally working to make a societal change that may be funded through governmental agencies and grants. These techniques are also applicable to the Land-Grant Cooperative Extension System (CES) through combining them with engaged programming practices and CES best practices and the tools and methods of the Extension Foundation’s Impact Collaborative in urban programs and beyond.

*Keywords:* innovation, impact, Impact Collaborative

Lean experimentation and design thinking were born from the need to innovate rapidly with a focus on empathy for customers and clientele. Most lean experimentation books and resources focus on the business and/or tech entrepreneur to create a better widget, tool, experience, etc. *Lean Impact: How to Innovate for Radically Greater Social Good* by Ann Mei Chang (2018) is different. Like Cooperative Extension, Chang focuses on making a local, meaningful impact. Drawing upon her experiences in Silicon Valley, government, and non-profits, she leads the reader through the why, what, and how to use lean experimentation and design thinking as well as the implications of changing the status quo through setting audacious goals, piloting, validating, and iterating to a better future, and working differently. Chang’s understanding of the not-for-profit, governmental, and non-governmental sectors’ work to improve lives, systems, and policies makes transferring the principles of “lean impact” to local urban Extension programs much easier.

**Lean Impact Principles**

When looking to make positive long-term impact in local communities, Chang suggests one should “fall in love with the problem, not your solution” and “combine scientific rigor with entrepreneurial agility” through the use of the three lean impact principles below:

1. **Think big:** Propose a vision not of incremental change but of big, bold social change with at least a 10-year horizon.
2. **Start small:** Design small pilots to test ways to achieve the big audacious goal, experiment, learn, and pivot if needed. Use validation techniques to test assumptions and ideas.
3. Relentlessly seek impact: Use metrics to make social change visible and measurable, not numbers of activities or activity participants.

**Innovation Is the Path; Impact Is the Destination**

Chang reminds us that “innovation is the path; impact is the destination” to the change we seek. Extension also places focus on the public value through measuring short-, medium-, and long-term impacts of projects and programs. Often logic models are used for program planning and evaluation purposes by identifying program “outcomes” before the implementation stages. These outcomes or impact indicators show attitudinal, behavioral, and policy changes in clientele and their communities. Many think that innovation is the invention of a breakthrough or disruptive product, service, or tool. When thinking broadly, there are at least ten types of innovation and can also be incremental as well as “breakthrough” (Geith et al., 2018). Chang describes “social innovation [which] involves iterative testing and improvement, refining business models, influencing partners and policies, fine-tuning logistics, and many other practicalities.” In other words, she is describing the pond that Extension swims in. Chang shares the three pillars of social innovation: value, growth, and impact. Potential solutions should be valued by the beneficiaries and their community, have the potential for growth and scale, and include the measurable impact of positive change in behaviors, attitudes, and more. This aligns with Extension’s mission and goals of public value and transformational change to improve lives.

**Experimental Mindset**

Drawing upon lean principles and design thinking, Chang recommends the adoption of an experimental mindset, including questioning, testing, learning, and pivoting. Like Silicon Valley start-ups, the testing begins with pilots of the minimum viable product (MVP). Testing also includes being transparent about assumptions being made and testing to see if they are correct or need an iteration or a pivot to another idea. It’s the validation of ideas, pilots, and programs that help determine whether there is public value, growth potential, and impact.

**Challenges to Using Lean Principles**

Grant funder expectations don’t always align with dreaming big but starting small, according to Chang. She calls for new funding models that encourage experimentation, rapid learning, and pivots. Supporting measured risk-taking is also sometimes elusive to the traditional Extension models, including the “expert model,” which puts a high value on the Extension professional’s academic expertise being shared with the community. There is a growing understanding of the learning gained through failure or, less dramatically, from planned outcomes not being realized. A change to the experimental mindset with the support of community and institutions is needed to “fail fast” and learn for improvement. In other words, learning from failures should be celebrated as much as successes.
Embracing innovation has been identified as crucial to the future of Extension (Franz & Cox, 2012), and the Extension Committee on Policy’s Innovation Taskforce asked the Extension Foundation to respond to help spur on innovative practices through professional development. (Smith et al., 2016) which led to the creation of the Extension Foundation’s Impact Collaborative (https://extension.org/ic/). Through the Impact Collaborative, Extension-led teams use the Impact Collaborative’s Innovation Skill-Building Experience (ISBE) curriculum and tools to co-innovate and co-create projects and programs with community members and partners to make visible, measurable local impact. The ISBE curriculum combines creative entrepreneurial methodologies, including design thinking and Chang’s lean impact principles with Extension best practices in a toolkit. The toolkit was created to encourage working differently, which includes adopting an experimental innovative mindset. The toolkit is a manual for Extension-led teams that include community members, stakeholders, and partners. The manual leads teams to rapidly identify their big audacious goal, ideate potential solutions, and document the impact they plan to measure and achieve while making assumptions and learning more rapidly visible. The Extension Foundation’s Impact Collaborative is more than a toolkit and curriculum. During Impact Collaborative events, teams are paired with a trained impact facilitator who coaches teams to identify their stage in planning as well as facilitating the use of the ISBE tools to focus teams to identify and achieve their goals and next steps. Another unique opportunity for teams is on-the-spot advice from a national network of key informants during Extension Foundation’s Impact Collaborative Summits. The informants have the experience, knowledge, and network connections to help teams identify and fill gaps in their planning.

The Impact Collaborative encourages the Extension-led teams to adopt a hybrid or engaged program or project planning and delivery model (Vines, 2018; Vines & Stiegler, 2018). Teams that embrace a hybrid or engaged model include community members who are stakeholders and partners. This leads to a shared vision and better sustainability since the leadership can be more fluid and sustainable in the long run. This is a step up from simply having empathy for and feedback from clientele. By purposely including them as partners in the beginning stages, there is shared ownership in solving the issue and finding potential solutions. In Lean Impact, Chang shares many examples, and one is an innovator who sees an injustice, societal issue, or big problem that is ready for a change from status quo. The next level goal of Impact Collaborative teams is to move from designing with users (beneficiaries) to users designing innovative change for themselves and their communities.

Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative Summit Urban Teams

More than 250 Extension-led teams from across the United States and its territories have participated in Impact Collaborative Summits and its predecessor events since 2016. Notable teams that have participated with urban-focused programs include
Although many of these teams were in different formative stages, the Impact Collaborative Summit experience accelerated their planning for implementation by providing personalized facilitated coaching using the ISBE workbook and just-in-time advice from a national network of key informants. This process allows teams to make decisions quickly, move forward, and identify the first pilot experiments to launch their initiative. (Forde-Stiegler, 2019).

**Innovation, Impact, and Moving Forward**

If innovation is a path and impact is the destination for significant positive social change, then Extension is perfectly poised to engage with communities to make that change. Extension’s model of positioning Extension professionals in local communities serves as the impetus for co-innovation and co-creation with community members and partners because they are also members of the communities. By adopting the principles of Chang’s *Lean Impact* and the Extension Foundation’s Impact Collaborative methodology and tools, Extension-led community teams can go further faster to make the change they seek.
References


M.C. “Molly” Immendorf, MS, Curriculum and Instruction, is the Extension Foundation Design Strategist who has led the design and implementation of the Impact Collaborative since 2017. Prior to joining the Extension Foundation, Molly was the Instructional Design and Technology Specialist for the University of Wisconsin – Extension, Cooperative Extension for almost 19 years. Please direct correspondence to Molly Immendorf at mollyimmendorf@extension.org.

Acknowledgments

The Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative was created and continues to be iterated and improved with the help of Extension Foundation colleagues, over 190 (and growing) trained Impact Facilitators, all the past team participants, and Key Informants of the Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative (and its predecessor) events since 2016. Their insights, feedback, and contributions are invaluable. The Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative was made possible through the support and funding of Extension Foundation member institutions.
In urban areas, the communities are as diverse as the issues, and different educational and engagement strategies must be deployed to support urban Extension clientele. Urban communities must connect with and feel a sense of “belonging” with Extension—this connection can strengthen Extension’s presence and value proposition to urban constituents. This study found that although Extension was engaged in efforts to support belonging, its efforts were hampered by a lack of collaboration and commitment to supporting a system-wide effort to change the culture. Intentionality, emotional intelligence, and dialogue were presented as strategies to foster a sense of belonging for Extension personnel and clientele. If the tools provided are used to implement strategies leading to belonging, Extension may evolve further as a high-performing, inclusive, accountable, and equitable workplace that is responsive, representative, and relevant to an urban clientele.

Keywords: belonging, urban, Extension, stakeholders, relationships, diversity
inward on its systems and policies to ensure programs, partnerships, personnel, and delivery methods are relatable and accessible to its diverse clientele. Thus far, through its Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), Extension has identified diversity, equity, and inclusion as a priority issue with a commitment to close the gap through new and existing programs and resources (Extension Foundation, 2022). Land-Grant Universities are committed to research, teaching, and outreach, and many are already promoting cultural awareness training for Extension professionals (Whitehall et al., 2021). Many universities, however, have not addressed belonging in the context of communities. Chazdon et al. (2021, p. 2) identify six dimensions of inclusion which include “leadership energy to promote inclusion,” “resources to address inclusion,” and “policies and practices that promote inclusion,” which may be used to foster a sense of belonging.

**Theoretical Framework**

The complexity and diversity of urban communities make it difficult for individuals and families to “belong.” Belonging involves an emotional attachment, and people belong to “collectivities and states, as well as on the social, economic, and political effects of moments when such belongings are displaced as a result of industrialization and/or migration” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198) as would be applicable with refugees or disaster displaced individuals. Yuval-Davis (2006) and Chin (2019) argue that belonging is connected to social and political theory, and Chin (2019) connects belonging to the concept of social cohesion. Walton and Cohen (2007) echo Baumeister and Leary (1995) that belonging has a social component and “social connectedness predicts favorable outcomes” (p. 82), which aligns with Chin’s (2019) concept of social cohesion. Malone et al. (2012, p. 311) claim that it is “evolutionary” to belong, an important part of “human existence and culture,” and “personality traits” influence individuals to seek “acceptance and avoid rejection.” Chin (2019, p. 716) claims that “belonging surrounds the ideal model of political membership; how political community should be constructed in light of contemporary diversity, the stress that diversity places on citizenship and the forms of rights and accommodation sought. In critical social theory, belonging concerns how the political community is constructed and lived; how power, agency, and “the politics of belonging” affect group belonging, inclusion, and exclusion.” Baumeister and Leary (1995) cite the fundamental nature of belonging as reflected in Maslow’s (1968) hierarchy which places “belonging and love needs” on the third tier, above physiological and safety needs.

It is possible for people to “belong” with varying levels of attachment in “concrete or abstract” terms based on three analytical levels related to “social locations,” “individuals’ identifications,” and “ethical and political value systems” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). These analytical levels are interrelated, reinforcing the notion that belonging is a “dynamic process,” and social and economic locations vary based on age group, profession, or kinship. Belonging can also be aligned with positions of power, especially in the context of socioeconomic locations, which might be heavily influenced by historical context, and Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights that
intersectionality is important when reviewing social divisions given that individual identities are complex. The experience of a Caucasian woman under 25 years of age living in the city or countryside would be different from that of a woman of color. Experience would also vary based on socioeconomic status (middle or low income), sexuality, and ability. In short, the ability to review the contexts of belonging is based on an individuals’ familiarity, a process Yuval-Davis (2006) likens to a rainbow wherein the “colors we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu” (p. 201).

A further examination of the concept of belonging and its connections to social cohesion, Chin (2019) reports on “groupness,” which goes beyond a collection of individuals. It examines “why and how we belong to any group,” which in turn is connected to “inclusion and relations,” which leads to belonging and can be “described in terms of safety and familiarity” (p. 717). Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 204) raises the issue of “boundary maintenance,” an imaginary line that reflects the “us” versus “them” approach in the “politics of belonging,” which aligns with Chin’s (2019) idea of membership or “groupness.” Belonging is also a value judgment that is aligned with individual and collective identities, which are influenced by social locations and politics of belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 205) discusses that belonging is comprised of roles and narratives relative to social locations and identity and contends that belonging has a “participatory dimension of citizenship as well as in relation to issues of status and entitlements such membership entails.” Some researchers have identified “cultural citizenship” and connected it with community activism as an important “signifier” of belonging (Rosaldo, 1997, as cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006). The emphasis here is on recognizing differences among citizens rather than ignoring them and identifying ways to support the different social needs of citizens. Belonging, therefore, is “both a status, something held, and a practice, the ability to navigate symbols, ideas, and institutions of a group (Ignatieff, 1993, as cited in Chin, 2019).

The “politics of belonging” can also extend to the “requisites of belonging,” which would include social locations, identities, ethical, and political values. Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that race, national origin, and place of birth are boundaries that are not permeable, and it is easier to use a “common set of values, such as ‘democracy’ … as the signifiers of belonging” since it offers “permeable boundaries” (p. 209). Extending the concept of “politics of belonging,” Randel et al. (2018) highlight that “inclusion” is a strategy in the workplace to ensure diverse members of a “work group or organization” feel a sense of “belonging” given “uniqueness of needs” and are motivated to “reach their full potential” (p. 191). These researchers (Randel et al., 2018) couple the concept of individuality (uniqueness) with belonging and determine that inclusive leadership will emphasize “groupness” (Chin, 2019) while promoting “effective functioning of diverse work groups” and “contributing to group processes and outcomes” (p. 191). Chin (2019) suggests that belonging must be associated with recognition. Individuals in the group recognize you, and you identify as belonging to that group; it is coupled with “identity.” Belonging can also have directionality and depth, and Chin (2019) describes it as “extent and strength” (p. 717);
for some individuals belonging is “central to identity,” and the type of group (community, global society, workgroup) may influence belonging and member roles in that group.

In some studies, measures of belonging include items where individuals “report a sense of belonging” and others claim a sense of belonging “because they do not feel excluded” (Malone et al., 2012). Walton and Cohen (2007, p. 82) suggest that in academic and professional settings, “socially stigmatized groups” are “more sensitive to issues of social belonging,” a concept termed “belonging uncertainty,” which can impact the “intellectual achievement” of excluded minority groups. “Belonging uncertainty” may also be reinforced by lack of representation within the workforce, promoting the hypothesis that “people like me do not belong here” (Walton & Cohen, 2007, p. 83). Shore et al. (2011, p. 1264) suggest a “tension between belongingness and uniqueness” and identify that some demographic groups (women, minorities) have limited opportunities to belong given their uniqueness. This uniqueness, in turn, limits their promotion potential within the organization. Diversity scholars advocate for a work environment in which “diversity is pervasive and part of an overall perspective and strategy inclusive of all employee differences” (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002, p. 324, as cited in Shore et al., 2011).

Organizations and individuals must demonstrate a readiness to engage with the subject of diversity, equity, inclusion, access (DEIA), and many researchers (Chung, 2013; Chung et al., 2017; Moncloa et al., 2019; Whitehall et al., 2021) have connected diversity readiness with diversity effectiveness and training outcomes. Chung (2013) has underscored that diversity trainings assume that “trainees attend … under similar conditions” but “if trainees believe that a diversity training program will not be useful, they are not motivated to learn, and/or are ill-prepared, the success of the program is likely to be reduced” (p. 77). The effectiveness of diversity training depends on “trainees’ attitudes and reactions,” which Chung (2013, p. 77) frames as “motivational, behavioral, and cognitive” readiness. Readiness at the organizational level must also assess and reflect “demographic dissimilarity and diversity climate” with the knowledge that “training alone cannot improve diversity climate” (Chung, 2013, p. 82). Although Chung (2013) supports voluntary engagement with DEIA training as it reduces resistance and improves readiness, organizations often proceed with this work on a system-wide level. Without strong organizational support, employees are unlikely to undertake DEIA training and dedicate the time to improving knowledge and skillset. Chung et al. (2017) highlight the “cynicism” that exists toward diversity training programs which could be “rooted in employees’ low pretraining interests in diversity training” (Kulik et al., 2007, as cited in Chung et al., 2017). Research on training readiness addresses motivations to “learn … intention to use, and perceived utility,” which can be used to “improve diversity training outcomes and strengthen the connection between workplace diversity and improved company products and services” (Chung et al., 2017, p. 26). Moncloa et al. (2019) advocate for recruiting individuals with high levels of intercultural competence given the intensive organizational effort needed to undertake successful DEIA efforts, while Whitehall et al. (2021) confirm that while training efforts improve knowledge and skills, “professional behaviors” are not impacted (p. 31).

Journal of Human Sciences and Extension
Volume 10, Number 2, 2022
Data Collection and Methodology

We used purposive sampling to identify urban Extension professionals who were working on issues of DEIA and belonging and relied on groups such as the Epsilon Sigma Phi Urban and Culturally Diverse Affinity Group, Coming Together for Racial Understanding (CTRU, 2020), and the NUEL Professional Development Action Team. Maxwell (1997) defines purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). Selection criteria focused on participants who were active members of groups engaged in activities pertaining to the topic with an eye toward gathering geographically diverse individuals. This approach also mirrored elements of phenomenological research as outlined by Moustakas (1994), wherein the research question explored “grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic” and “personal history brings the core of the problem into focus” (p. 104).

A total of 10 individuals were identified, and eight participated in informal, structured interviews with equal representation (50% male, 50% female). Participants were aware their contributions would be reported in the aggregate without any personal identifiers. The states of New York, Oregon, Oklahoma, Idaho, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri were represented with one participant from a Historically Black College and University. Of the participants, 75% lived in and/or worked with urban Extension clientele in their home state and had professional alignments with Extension groups focused on urban activities.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with each interview lasting no longer than 30 minutes. The interview notes were transcribed while reviewing the audio recording and data captured in an Excel spreadsheet organized by question. The Excel spreadsheet utilized participant codes and tracked the location of participants by state without any additional identifiers. In one instance, the participant responded via email, and that information was also captured in the Excel spreadsheet. Three questions were used to capture participants’ level of awareness with current activities relating to DEIA on a personal or institutional level, future activities proposed for DEIA, and strategies that could be employed to foster a sense of belonging for Extension. Data analysis was facilitated through multiple steps, including data familiarization, data categorization for themes, and identification of themes and quotes that best represented the overall findings.

Findings

The study’s findings will be highlighted in two ways. First, participant responses will be grouped into three overarching categories of information: (a) current activities that foster DEIA, (b) challenges that limit activities to foster DEIA, and (c) opportunities to align DEIA within Extension. Second, the authors will present common characteristics identified by participants that could contribute to and improve Extension’s ability to foster a sense of belonging and
combine that with strategies, tools, and outcomes that would support a change in culture and lead to a greater sense of belonging.

**Current Activities**

Study participants highlighted positive efforts to address organizational culture and improve DEIA. These included the following positive efforts.

**Existing Programs**

DEIA work has gained national visibility in recent years given high-profile events highlighted in the media, leading to a renewed interest in social justice and equity work. Extension already had existing programs to support and encourage cultural awareness. Programs such as Coming Together for Racial Understanding, Juntos, and Navigating Differences were already underway to engage Extension personnel and support Extension clientele. Research shows that belonging in youth increases when they experience positive social interactions, so developing programs that focus on social interactions could help 4-H participants feel like they belong (Crouch et al., 2014).

**DEIA Committees**

All respondents indicated their respective universities had established a working group to address DEIA issues, including formal committees, task forces, ad-hoc groups, and work teams. The activities of these committees and teams varied from issue identification to professional development activities to strategic plan preparation. In general, these committees had the charge of coordinating and/or managing DEIA efforts organizationally at all scales (university, Extension, regionally, or locally).

**Professional Development**

All universities included in the study sample had offered or were offering trainings, workshops, and webinars for Extension faculty and staff. Participants reported that webinars or workshops were offered to staff and volunteers. Some were modified from large-scale trainings such as CTRU. In some instances, tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer et al., 2003) were utilized. New efforts such as learning circles, Race Matters webinars, and train-the-trainer for racial understanding were offered to encourage dialogue in other situations. Unique programs included photography and technology to support learning about social justice and equity and, in one instance, a new on-campus center to foster continued engagement on DEIA.

Coupled with increased professional development opportunities, 25% of respondents shared that professional development evaluations would now include DEIA metrics to help individuals engage more fully with the concept, support accountability, and lead to a system-wide change.
Additionally, position descriptions would be reviewed to remove potential entry barriers and shared on diverse hiring platforms to increase visibility and promote diversity in the Extension workforce.

**Motivation**

Before participants are ready to engage, they must have a desire to learn and intend to use the knowledge and skills learned. Also, participants who already possess some knowledge, skills, and abilities will be more ready to engage in DEIA training (Chung, 2013). Across universities and Extension clientele groups, there is increased visibility and motivation for DEIA work to be meaningfully undertaken. Participants said that groups such as Master Gardener Volunteers, 4-H volunteers, 4-H staff, and Master Food Safety Advisors are encouraged and supported in the process of improving DEIA knowledge. There is a willingness to engage that is palpable, and although every stakeholder might not be “ready,” continuing to provide opportunities to learn and dialogue supports engagement and action on the issue.

**Challenges**

All the study participants, regardless of geographic location and position within the Extension system, indicated there were challenges with aspiring toward and fostering a sense of belonging. A total of five major challenges were identified by participants.

**Lack of System-Wide Effort**

Except for one participant, many of the Land-Grant Universities represented in this study did not have an Extension-wide or university-wide effort to support DEIA activities. In many instances, only parts of the organization were addressing DEIA issues. Additionally, in instances where DEIA efforts were initiated, the level of engagement focused on issue identification versus strategies and implementable actions.

**Lack of Time**

In cases where Extension systems were actively engaged in DEIA activities, instructors and/or participants lacked time to fully “do, reflect, and apply” information from DEIA sessions. Lack of time contributed to further disengagement with the topic as trainings were not tailored for attendees’ knowledge and skill level and did not demonstrate connections with programs and Extension clientele.

**Lack of Commitment**

Many interviewees noted genuine disengagement on an individual level with DEIA, which, when coupled with organizational lack of commitment, limited the extent of DEIA activities. Workshops and trainings were sporadic and lacked continuity to support sustained DEIA
engagement. At the organizational level, DEIA is viewed as “voluntary” versus “mandatory,” which further de-emphasizes the value of the topic. Often DEIA trainings that employees or volunteers are “strongly encouraged” to attend lack time for personal reflection that fully engages participants, which fails to overcome some participants’ strongly held biases.

**Lack of Collaboration**

In instances where DEIA work was ongoing, there was limited collaboration with other on-campus units and offices. Many on-campus university departments did not want to partner with Extension, or Extension was excluded from planning and engagement efforts to further DEIA work. In some situations, DEIA efforts were only approved from on-campus offices, and Extension efforts were considered less meaningful.

**Lack of Designated Position**

Across all interviewees, it was clear that many of the challenges could be addressed if there was a designated Extension position or office directing DEIA activities. In cases where there was a college or university designated position, the collaborative element was lacking. This showed there was an opportunity for university administrators to demonstrate a strong commitment by reframing the narrative for DEIA work that would lead to belonging.

**Opportunities**

Study participants also provided information on how Extension could respond to and take advantage of opportunities to promote and align DEIA. These opportunities could lead to individual and organizational belonging.

**Hold Administration Accountable**

Participants underscored the need to work with administrators while also engaging in actions that would hold administrators accountable for supporting DEIA activities that lead to belonging.

**Reassure Extension Stakeholders and Clientele**

Participants shared that the importance of DEIA work must be communicated to Extension stakeholders and clientele. Extension has a responsibility to engage in this work, to reflect the diversity of communities, and to avoid penalties or repercussions for DEIA work in the areas of stakeholder support or funding.

**Fully Engage with Community Partners**

Extension has many program partners, and the potential to gain new partners with a renewed emphasis on diversity could be beneficial and rewarding. Supporting and working with existing
and new partners increases the stakeholder base and builds new community support for Extension.

**Energize DEIA Commitment**

Extension personnel are more likely to be committed to DEIA work if they “see” their institutions are committed to the work. Institutions can demonstrate a strong commitment to DEIA by clearly communicating their expectations and allocating time and resources to do the work necessary to foster a sense of belonging.

Finally, we present a set of common values that participants indicated were fundamental to creating and sustaining a culture of DEIA that leads to belonging. These include trust, transparency, intentionality, reliability, inclusivity, representational, conversational, empathic, integrative, and collaborative. These values will be explored in the discussion.

**Discussion**

Increased population growth in urban areas presents challenges and opportunities for Extension. As urban populations become more diverse, Extension professionals need to learn new skills and improve current skills to deliver impactful educational programs to diverse audiences (NUEL, 2019; Whitehall et al., 2021). Before they can effectively work with diverse audiences, Extension professionals must increase their personal cultural competency. Institutionally, barriers to creating a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment for staff, faculty, volunteers, clientele, stakeholders, and partners should be addressed.

Across the board, interviewees agreed that there are many challenges facing Extension when investing in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, which ultimately leads to a sense of belonging. Many universities have implemented DEIA programs, but implementation is often slow, and there are few metrics in place to assess the success of these programs. Extension is often excluded from institution-wide efforts to address DEIA, and those efforts often focus on identifying programs instead of developing strategies for action. As Randel et al. (2018) noted, contributing to group processes and outcomes leads to belonging, so excluding others in the development of DEIA programs is a barrier to belonging. In some cases, professional development programs were created using a top-down method which further alienated Extension professionals and devalued the importance of the work. DEIA initiatives are often an add-on task for Extension professionals, so there is little time to engage and reflect on growth and learning. Extension administration may not be fully committed to DEIA initiatives, and that lack of commitment trickles down to staff and leads to a lack of commitment institutionally. To enhance belonging, administrators should demonstrate inclusivity through a unified commitment to DEIA (Randel et al., 2018). Professional development is often looked upon as voluntary, which further diminishes the value and need for the work. All interviewees stated that an Extension position solely dedicated to DEIA would help address many of these challenges.
While there are many challenges to effectively address diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in Extension, interviewees shared many successes. Existing programs such as Navigating Difference, Juntos, and Coming Together for Racial Understanding are making a difference. According to Whitehall et al. (2021, p. 31), “participants in Navigating Difference not only show increases in awareness, knowledge, and skills but also achieve changes in professional behaviors.” Many institutions have implemented DEIA committees and workgroups to address institutional challenges and barriers. Some metrics such as the Intercultural Development Inventory, which measures cultural competency, are being utilized more broadly by Extension in many states (Moncloa et al., 2019), but more metrics need to be developed to assess the effectiveness of training and professional development. Most institutions have evaluated their position descriptions and hiring practices to attract and hire diverse applicants. More than ever before, Extension professionals are motivated to address DEIA issues in their institutions, educational programs, and communities.

With challenges come opportunities, and Extension has many opportunities to help staff, volunteers, clientele, stakeholders, and partners feel like they belong. Interviewees underscored the importance of holding administrators accountable for addressing DEIA. Administrators can help by delivering consistent messages emphasizing the importance of this work, setting expectations for Extension professionals to engage in personal and professional growth, and providing funding for DEIA trainings and positions. Administrators are needed to help communicate to stakeholders and clientele that our institutions are dedicated to increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and stand firm if there is pushback from those groups. Extension can expand its stakeholder base in urban areas by increasing its capacity to partner with diverse organizations. If Extension professionals can recognize a strong commitment to DEIA by their institution, they too will be committed to addressing these issues. A commitment to inclusive leadership (Shore et al., 2011; Walton & Cohen, 2007) will support DEIA in Extension and ensures that team members are heard, respected, valued, retained, and feel a sense of belonging to the organization.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of moving from values to belonging. The outermost circle lists the values expressed by the interviewees as integral to Extension’s DEIA work. Extension is poised to build capacity and create an environment of belonging by holding to these values. The next circle identifies the strategies Extension can use to achieve belonging: dialogue, intentionality, professional development, emotional intelligence, and relationship building. Relationship building is a strategy that will help Extension professionals build trust within the organization and with those we serve. Extension has many tools at its disposal to support DEIA work, and more effective use of these tools could yield organizational dividends with DEIA impacts. Navigating Difference, Coming Together for Racial Understanding, and the Intercultural Development Inventory are formal programs that educate participants; self-directed learning through webinars or book clubs can also lead to personal growth.
The tools to employ the strategies will result in the outcomes listed in the next circle, i.e., culturally competent, high-performing, inclusive, accountable, resilient, and equitable (equitable workplace and equitable educational programs). The outcomes will ultimately lead to belonging and a deeper connection with urban constituents and position Extension as a reliable, representative, and desirable entity to work with and work for to solve community issues.

**Conclusion**

This study highlighted the challenges, successes, and opportunities facing Extension as it strives to achieve belonging. Interviewees expressed a need to move from identifying the value of DEIA to using the tools we have available to implement strategies that lead to belonging. Ultimately, the intention is to instill a strong sense of belonging in our staff, volunteers, stakeholders, clientele, and partners. Extension professionals who demonstrate a high degree of intercultural competence feel a greater sense of belonging to the organization and can build authentic relationships with the communities served.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the experiences of urban Extension professionals who are viewing DEIA work through the lens of personal and professional experiences. DEIA activities, which lead to belonging, continue to evolve. As such, the
perspectives provided are associated with a specific time period leading up to publication and do not reflect activities that may have occurred since interviews were conducted.

The sample size was small and did not reflect the entire Extension system or all experiences with DEIA across the Extension system. We relied heavily on known groups engaged in this work to recruit participants, and it is highly likely that perspectives and activities were omitted due to sample size and recruitment strategy. Although the sample size was small, interviewees shared openly and honestly because of their relationships with the interviewers through professional associations and committees.

**Implications and Recommendations**

This study’s findings have significant implications for Extension research and practice. It is apparent that support for and engagement with DEIA activities is still in its infancy. To achieve a strong sense of belonging, Extension training in DEIA needs to become more robust and widely supported. Although there are workgroups (i.e., committees, ad hoc teams) that support DEIA, evaluation and impact data are limited. Improving evaluation by using tools such as the Intercultural Development Inventory could be extended to hold Extension accountable.

This study could be expanded by including the perspectives of Extension stakeholders, partners, volunteers, and clientele to gather data on the techniques and impact of trainings. This input could inform future DEIA activities that lead to belonging in settings such as the urban-rural continuum and political landscapes.

There is a huge gap in scholarship on belonging across the Extension system. More focused effort on this subject could provide strategies and techniques to support long-term engagement and demonstrate measurable impact.

**References**


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**Acknowledgments**

We are deeply grateful to the individuals who contributed their time and thoughts to this paper.
Futuring Perspectives and Practices for Urban Extension

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Extension is well-positioned to engage strategically with urban communities now and in the future. A century of collaboration and proven impact provides Extension with a valuable foundation focused on relevant service accessible to all people; applied science and co-discovery; respectful and inclusive engagement; and commitment to community well-being. An exploration of the literature on the future, from the Extension perspective and from external viewpoints, informs a contemporary approach to focus on the future of urban Extension. An interplay of Extension professionals with diverse community stakeholders and dynamic technologies bridges past perspective and current context with practical methods to address the future. Essential practices for urban Extension professionals include developing futuring literacy, experimenting with innovative futuring approaches, managing decision making as Extension creates the future, and entrepreneurially addressing change throughout the futuring process. Increasing growth and diversity in metropolitan areas present an opportunity to blend familiar planning paradigms with a more emergent model for urban Extension in which change is continuous, and leadership is agile (Doyle & Brady, 2018).

Keywords: futuring literacy, entrepreneurial, organizational development, change

Throughout Extension’s history, leadership explored various ways of addressing an increasing urban influence. The establishment of the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL) and other collective efforts created momentum and stability as a foundation for Extension’s future in urban communities. Addressing the future of urban Extension is more important than ever as Extension leadership progresses beyond COVID-19. The worldwide pandemic provoked unprecedented change, with immediate and long-lasting impacts in all aspects of Extension. With assumptions disrupted, Extension personnel quickly navigated through risks, opportunities, and decision-making during tentative times. In the past century, university leaders have explored the future of Extension but never has the degree of uncertainty, urgency, and complexity so profoundly challenged current plans and future forecasts. While much attention has been invested in considering Extension’s future, conducting strategic planning processes, and managing essential short-term priorities during the pandemic, Extension can benefit from better understanding a futurist perspective, further exploring diverse urban contexts, and intentionally improving futuring practices for urban Extension. The following exploration of literature on the future provides options to bridge past perspective and current context with practical methods to address the future of Extension in urban communities.
Past Perspective and Current Context

University leaders have explored the future of Extension for decades (Geasler, 1988). In 1983, the U.S. Department of Agriculture published *Challenge and Change: A Blueprint for the Future* (1983), portraying Extension as a dynamic, innovative, and productive organization ready to change as new opportunities emerged. That same year, a Joint USDA-NASULGC Committee on the Future of Cooperative Extension focused on *Extension in the '80s* (VanderBerg, 1983). This was followed by a number of other efforts such as a Futures Task Force to the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, which was appointed in 1986, a national Framing the Future project in the mid-90s (Anderson & Bloome, 1995), the Kellogg Commission (1999) *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* on the Future of State, Land-Grant Universities, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges report, and the book *Land-Grant Universities and Extension into the 21st Century* (McDowell, 2001).

The turn of the century prompted reflection on the past and speculation about the future for Extension and the Land-Grant University, with calls to reinvigorate and renew for distinctive relevance, accessibility, and active collaboration with communities to enhance the quality of life (Bull et al., 2004; Martin, 2001; McDowell, 2003; Spanier, 1999). Extension leaders explored the future of program development (Gagnon et al., 2015), personnel (Argabright et al., 2019; Harriman & Daugherty 1992), partnerships (Harder, 2019), and Extension’s positioning and relevance in urban communities (Christenson & Warner, 1985; Fox et al., 2017; Peters, 2014; Ruemenapp, 2017; Young & Jones, 2017). Other themes reflected in the literature on the future of Extension include the influence of disruptive technologies (Astroth, 1990; King, 2018; King & Boehlje, 2000), the need for creativity and innovation (Franz & Cox, 2012; Warnock, 1985), and the evidence of trends (Caillouet & Harder, 2021). Rasmussen (1989) noted that Extension’s future relies on the ability to adjust effectively to ensure programmatic relevancy and effective delivery.

In a more current context, Henning et al. (2014) stressed that Extension’s future depends on following guiding principles of continued reliance on research and application to address the grand societal challenges that impact the nation’s future, continued relevance and connection with the local community, and Extension’s commitment to innovative educational approaches in communication and program delivery. At the 2021 National Extension Directors and Administrators Annual Meeting (2021), a series of sessions envisioning the future as a system without borders included topics about urban programs as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. A 2021 review of state Extension websites revealed a variety of approaches to planning for the future without evidence of purposeful consistency across the United States. As the world experiences unprecedented change, Extension joins other university and community leaders in navigating through uncertainty and shaping the desired future.
What Can Extension Learn from the Literature on Futuring?

Futuring is an essential competency that empowers the imagination and enhances peoples’ ability to prepare, recover, and invent as changes occur (Miller, 2018). A brief historical perspective on the evolution of futuring provides a foundation to explore what’s ahead with Extension in the urban context. This external perspective provides useful insights when blended with Extension’s internal viewpoints.

The Evolution of Futuring

Futurist manifestos began in the early 1900s with poet Marinetti calling for courage and audacity as he spoke of the future and encouraged others to stop emphasizing the past (Apollonio, 1973; Schnapp, 2009). In a review of the past 50 years of futures scholarship, Fergnani (2019) identified themes such as organizational foresight, past and futures, humanity, environmental futures, complexity, and technological trends. In Futuring, Cornish (2004) shared lessons of the great explorers that include preparing for what will be faced, anticipating future needs, using imperfect information, expecting the unexpected, thinking long- and short-term, dreaming productively, and learning from predecessors. The World Futures Studies Federation, a global network of leading futurists founded in 1973, has moved from predicting or forecasting the future based on trends to mapping alternative futures, shaping desired futures, embracing novelty, uncertainty, complexity, and emergence. In the “Evolution of Futures Studies” article in the Futures journal, Kuosa (2011) described the initial prediction and deterministic paradigm with mystic explanations, a second paradigm based on military indeterministic futures full of probabilities aims to control and plan, and modeling and systems thinking. Kuosa then introduced new emerging paradigms based on disconnecting from the Western control-based technical thinking and accepting internal dynamic fluctuations, paradoxes, and dialectic thinking. Futuring research and practice continue to emerge, with new possibilities blending competencies and tools relevant in university and urban community contexts.

Futuring Practices

Strategic efforts to imagine and shape the future include game theory (De Mesquita, 2011), drama theory (Bryant, 2015; Oomen et al., 2021), the Delphi model (Mullner, 2019), the ERRC (Eliminate, Reduce, Raise, Create) as used in the book Blue Ocean Shift (Kim & Mauborgne, 2017), and other analytical, generative, and group decision-making approaches (Eden & Ackermann, 2021; Mullner, 2019). Analytical methods explore what is likely to happen in probable futures by identifying patterns through trend analysis based on current and past developments, as well as forecasting, which includes extrapolating from available data to see what the evidence suggests for the future (Makridakis et al., 2020). Generative approaches engage diverse stakeholders in scenarios of possible futures to construct shared visions of possible and preferred futures, as well as foresight which uses multiple methods to imagine shared futures. Backcasting begins with a desirable future endpoint and then works backward to
determine a systemic framework for change with a chain of actions that lead from the present to the future (Bibri, 2018). Bouncecasting takes the forward and backward explorations a step further through scenario game iterations to make the promising aspects of the scenarios more likely and to avert or mitigate the negative aspects of the scenarios (Kahan, 2021; Pruyt et al., 2011). With a shared future vision to guide next steps, everyone sees the connections, alignment, pace, and momentum. Gorbis (2019), Executive Director of the Institute for the Future (IFTF), suggested engaging diverse groups of people in thinking deeply about complex issues, imagining new possibilities, connecting signals into larger patterns, connecting the past with the present and the future, and making better choices. With widespread uncertainty about the future combined with the scale, diversity, and complexity in metropolitan areas, an intentional approach to futuring is valuable.

**Emerging Urban Perspective on the Future**

- Extension has a long history of exploring the urban context, including early 4-H programming in cities, to an inner city article in the *Journal of Extension* (Jones, 1968), the Big City Extension Conferences that began in the 1980s, an Urban Extension National Agenda (Urban Task Force, 1996), and a strategic framework developed by the National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL, 2015). Extension must continue to enhance its response to the demographic trend of urbanization (Frey, 2021; Fry, 2020). As Extension considers the future of linking Land-Grant Universities with communities, the urban perspective remains essential. To explore diverse urban perspectives, Extension leaders can tap into sources such as The United Nations Habitat’s Urban Agenda for a better quality of life for all.
- The National Association of Counties Large Urban County Caucus (LUUC)
- The National League of Cities, Urban Innovation
- The City Leadership Initiative from Harvard and Bloomberg
- The Future of Cities Conversations YouTube series presented by the Norman Foster Foundation and supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies
- The Urban Complex podcast or Forbes Insights Futures in Focus podcast series

Common themes from these sources include addressing complex challenges, improving quality of life, understanding diversity, innovating for social equity and environmental sustainability, and fostering conditions for a healthy community. In addition to these global and national resources, Extension personnel benefit from connecting with local organizations that are also exploring the future of their urban communities.

**Futuring Practices for Urban Extension**

A futurist approach moves beyond traditional predictive intentions to developing futuring literacy and capacity; experimenting with contemporary futuring methods; managing decision-
making as Extension creates the future; and entrepreneurially addressing change throughout the futuring process (Bell, 1996; Inayatullah, 2013).

**Develop Futuring Literacy and Capacity**

In the book *Future Shock*, Toffler (1970) noted that overwhelming complexity, speed, and content of change require learning, unlearning, and relearning. How does Extension develop futuring literacy and capacity? In the book *Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century*, Miller (2018) provides a framework with attributes of futures literacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has demonstrated that people and communities everywhere can become more futures literate (see Figure 1). According to UNESCO, being futures literate empowers the imagination and enhances peoples’ ability to prepare, recover, and invent as changes occur. Additional perspective was added by Häggström and Schmidt (2021), who advocated for empowering youth through futuring literacy, Kazemier et al. (2021), who addressed futuring literacy in the context of higher education, and Mangnus et al. (2021), who connected wicked problems and futuring.

**Figure 1. Futures Literacy** (UNESCO, n.d.)

Futures consciousness recognizes the capacity an organization or an individual has in five dimensions: time perspective, agency beliefs, openness to alternatives, a holistic systems point of view, and striving for a better future not only for self but for others (Ahvenharju et al., 2018). Futuring capacity to imagine, use, and act upon the future can be developed through cognitive, motivational, and active dimensions (Pouru-Mikkola & Wilenius, 2021). The complexity, reality, and value of diverse stakeholder engagement acknowledged by these authors offer urban Extension professionals an opportunity to learn from and advance future literacy and capacity.
Experiment with Contemporary Futuring Approaches

Before experimenting with futuring approaches, Extension can assess current futuring and strategic planning practices to inform local and state teams on what is working and what improvements could be made for a more agile and inclusive process. Some practices, such as needs (and asset) assessments, advisory councils, and strategic planning may remain, but the methods of engaging stakeholders in the process may change given new technologies and futuring competencies. Rather than planning cycles prompted by anniversaries, funding crises, or leadership changes, urban Extension should engage in ongoing developments. Other improvements could focus on how Extension actively engages diverse groups of internal and external people collectively, such as

- scanning to connect signals into larger patterns,
- imagining and assessing new possibilities that create value,
- connecting the past with the present and the future,
- thinking deeply about complex issues,
- addressing the urban context and urban-rural interface, and
- using a flow of data and stakeholder engagement insights in decision making.

In the urban context, the number of people and signals, the diversity of perspective, and the complexity of scenarios present challenges to engagement in the futuring process. Cities seek to engage citizens as active agents of urban transformation (Caprotti et al., 2017). Futuring should include gathering multiple perspectives about possible diverse futures relevant in the context of cities and moving to pluralistic composites (Pollastri et al., 2017). The World Commission on Environment and Development recognizes the value of people in building a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure (Imperatives, 1987). Preparing for and creating the future of engagement with urban communities requires enhanced awareness, agility, and inclusive collaborative strategy.

The development of smarter and more resilient urban futures relies on the intersection of data analytics and collaborative urban science (Geertman et al., 2017). For a flourishing future, urban Extension professionals can create a sensing and signaling process and community that intentionally draws upon diverse experiences, values, and conflicts to inform research and strategies (Forlano & Mathew, 2014). This is not a process that occurs in silos or is conducted annually or every 3-10 years as part of strategic planning, but an ongoing and collaborative endeavor.

Signals related to elements in *A National Framework for Urban Extension* (NUEL, 2015) can reveal patterns and opportunities relevant to positioning, programs, personnel, and partnerships.
Positioning

The framework called for a significant presence in metropolitan areas to ensure the future of Extension. Sources to inform positioning include the Pew Research Report on Social Media Use (Auxier & Anderson, 2021) and the American Marketing Association 2021 Future of Marketing Survey (Charney & Kawles, 2021), which emphasized the value of respecting privacy and recognized growing consumer acceptance of new marketing technology. According to Forrester Research (Quantcast, 2021), marketers and publishers remain in an adaptive mode as they navigate pandemic recovery and ongoing fluctuations in consumer behavior. In a review of the literature, Bhimani et al. (2019) reinforced how organizations strategically use and leverage social media marketing strategy for connection, interaction, and innovation to achieve competitive advantage (Li et al., 2021). As Extension professionals aim to increase awareness, relevance, and connection in urban communities, it is important to recognize there are many different ways to tell the story of Extension and the Land-Grant mission, but it is only through getting people to see themselves as part of the story that it will be possible to imagine a different future (Ostrom, 2020).

Programs

For shifts related to programming in urban communities, begin by accepting that the term programs in the urban context may not always focus on educational events but can encompass facilitation, project management, advocacy, and relationship building (Ruemenapp, 2018). The people Extension engages with in urban communities are increasingly diverse, and programming incorporates equitable community engagement and culturally responsive education. Due to the scale in metropolitan areas, programs for the public good may focus on bite-sized experiences with Extension, which are delivered through trusted partners, as well as more in-depth ongoing, meaningful interactions with faculty, staff, and students. Education technology, hybrid learning, open educational resources, and micro-credentials are just a few of the current trends (Pelletier et al., 2021). Emerging trends include the Internet of Things, augmented reality, and virtual reality (Mobo, 2021). Urban Extension professionals can explore new ways to engage with community, understanding that some may be consumers, others will be contributors blending local knowledge with the latest research, and others are influencers amplifying unique innovations. Over the next decade, products will yield a full spectrum of services, experiences, and personal transformations (Johansen, 2020).

Personnel

In urban communities, Extension personnel includes a variety of faculty, staff, students, and volunteers working in full-time, part-time, and temporary project-based positions. Prior to the pandemic, Pew Research (Desilver, 2017) reported on the changing workforce, and the National League of Cities published The Future of Work in Cities report (DuPuls et al., 2016), noting the influence of technology, pathways for a diverse workforce, new workplace models, and other
factors related to cities as the economic epicenters. Since the pandemic, numerous reports have delved into the hybrid work environment, work-life balance, and employee engagement. Korn Ferry, a global consulting firm, identified the need to reinvent during disruptive change, survive the talent shortage, and be intentional about employee well-being (Korn Ferry, 2022). The Gartner research group encouraged a human-centric design, featuring flexibility and empathy to drive productivity and engagement, along with hybrid workforce models that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (Gartner, n.d.). With a focus on building a better working world, Ernst and Young developed a Future Workplace Index, revealing opportunities to improve hybrid collaboration across the organization. Literature reviews on the workforce reveal the impacts of technology (Singh et al., 2021) and diversity (Seliverstova, 2021).

Volunteers are an essential element of Extension engagement to meet the public need in large metropolitan areas. Volunteering in urban communities is beneficial for multiple aspects of well-being and urban landscapes (Asah et al., 2014; Moskell et al., 2010; Prince et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2005; Yamashita et al., 2017). Volunteer engagement will continue to be influenced by the type and motivation of the volunteer, from students to neighborhood organizers, workplace volunteers, faith-based community leaders, and retirees. Extension can intentionally engage diverse volunteers, understanding their public service motivation, paying attention to shifts in volunteerism (Raposa et al., 2017; Siodia, 2020; Sterling Volunteers, 2021), and incorporating person-organization fit (Costello et al., 2017). As a publicly engaged workforce, urban Extension professionals can learn from emerging trends to create hybrid solutions that fit engagement with diverse communities, volunteers, and partners.

**Partnerships**

The future of urban Extension focuses on building trust with diverse university and community stakeholders as a foundation for innovative engagement and collaborative action for the future. Partnerships are critical to Extension’s success when missions are aligned, roles are distinct, reciprocal resources are leveraged, and impacts are shared. Trusted relationships are especially important in urban areas due to complex networks of stakeholder interactions (Le Feuvre et al., 2016). The number, size, and scope of the partnerships amplify both opportunities and challenges in urban communities. Rather than competing for the same funds or audiences, collaborative efforts can make real impact in metropolitan communities. In urban counties, strategies to support city partnerships add value to county, state, and national networks in addressing the urban context and urban-rural interface.

Urban Extension partnerships shared through national urban Extension conference presentations include multiple governmental jurisdictions, metroparks, science museums, traditional and new media, Urban League, philanthropic foundations, corporations, urban serving universities, immigrant and refugee organizations, neighborhood groups, and other community organizations that reflect the mixture of cultures that are woven together to create a distinctive context for each
metropolitan area. Looking to the future, urban Extension professionals can engage with local urban leader networks, partner through processes such as the Equitable Futures Toolkit, and learn from partner perspectives such as the National Association of Counties Large Urban County Caucus (LUUC) and National League of Cities Urban Innovation. There is no plausible future scenario in which Extension will be successful without fostering partnerships because the needs are too great, the problems too complex, and Extension’s resources are too few to go it alone (Harder, 2019).

**Manage Decision-Making as Extension Creates the Future**

Futures studies and capacity building are intended to assist decision-making during uncertainty (Dreborg, 1996). The Millennium Project identified decision-making as one of the top 15 global challenges facing humanity (The Millennium Project, 2017). With unrelenting uncertainty and complexities of decisions in the urban context, Extension professionals can sharpen their situational awareness, acknowledge decision influencers, recognize decision biases, question assumptions, and learn from decision-making tools such as those offered through the Knowledge Compass. Futuring resources such as the Handbook of Anticipation (Poli, 2019) provide insight into how to make decisions in the present according to anticipations about something that may eventually happen in the future. Informed by complexity science, the Cynefin framework (see Figure 2) has been used as a sense-making tool in strategy management, research, policymaking, health promotion, and leadership training (Fierro et al., 2018; Snowden & Boone, 2007; Van Beurden et al., 2013).

*Figure 2. Cynefin Framework for Situational Awareness and Decision Making*  
*(Snowden, 2021)*
The framework makes the distinction between simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic situations. This clarity makes it easier to be intentional when deciding to apply a best practice as a simple solution, when to gather data for a more informed approach to exploring complicated conditions and options, when to address complexity by engaging diverse stakeholders in scenarios to understand common ground, and when chaos requires immediate action for stability. The Cynefin framework can help guide urban Extension professionals as they create the future. For example, a food system situation may be

- simple and a guide to food programs could help educate and connect people to nutritious food;
- complicated and require more information to understand food system challenges;
- complex and better understood through diverse stakeholder engagement; or
- urgent situations that require providing food immediately, communicating clearly, and addressing the complicated or complex later.

The quality of decision-making is influenced by the number of people involved, the amount of time available, and the quality of information accessible. Accept that much information will be imperfect (Cornish, 2004) and avoid misinformation or disinformation. According to a November 2021 report from the Aspen Institute’s Commission (Aspen Digital, 2021), information disorder is a crisis that exacerbates all other crises. Avoid information overload, which does not enrich but impoverishes the decision-making process (Drucker, 2012). All decisions are made with some level of uncertainty. The speed of decision-making needs to exceed the speed of events, wrote General Joe Dunford, then Joint Chiefs of Staff (Garamone, 2017). The future of sense-making and decision-making in urban environments will involve an interplay of multiple stakeholder perspectives and information streams through emerging technologies.

**Entrepreneurially Address Change Throughout the Futuring Process**

As individuals and groups look to the future, the pace of change can leave people wondering how much flux a person can take and how they can slow down disruptive changes, as expressed by Alvin Pitcher of the University of Chicago (Ways, 1964). The difference between embracing and resisting change is rooted in our brain-body hardwiring, with an instinct to survive when perceiving threats and a need to thrive when sensing opportunities (Kotter et al., 2021). Organizations that can adapt quickly to change involve leaders who can both calm those in the survival mode by minimizing fear, anxiety, and stress and develop others’ ability to thrive, reducing the noise of unnecessary information, removing uncertainty through transparency, celebrating progress, and giving people agency in decision making during the change process (Kotter et al., 2021). According to Ouedraogo and Ouakouak (2020), leaders need to address
• change uncertainty, a sense of confusion caused by a lack of information or guidance;
• change resistance (Burnes, 2015);
• change fatigue which can intensify with too frequent, too substantial, or poorly managed change initiatives; and
• change cynicism can be detrimental as it links a pessimistic outlook on the success of the change with frustration and blame on those responsible for the change, questioning their motives and abilities to implement change successfully.

Drawing upon social innovation, Extension can help everyone see new realities and grasp how they all can be contributors to creating the future (De Pieri & Teasdale, 2021; Prabhakar & Drayton 2018). Entrepreneurial characteristics that can be applied to addressing change include recognizing opportunities through formal and informal scanning (Morris & Kuratko, 2002), imagining alternative futures (Jungk, 1969), inclusive innovation (Kanter, 1983), and proactively creating value by identifying market opportunities and creating unique combinations of public and private resources to pursue those opportunities that create value (Jacobson, 1992). According to a network of innovators at Ashoka U, changemakers see patterns around them, identify opportunities in any situation, figure out ways to solve problems, imagine new realities, organize fluid teams, lead collective action, and continually adapt as situations change for the good of others. These are many of the same literacies for futuring as identified by UNESCO.

There are a variety of theories and models for change, many that reflect similarities to equilibrium models, such as Lewin’s (1958) model of unfreezing, moving, and freezing and Gersick’s (1991) conceptualization of change as an altering state between stability and upheaval. More dynamic models of organizational change integrate concepts such as innovations as catalysts for change and continuous learning that addresses the interaction of the organization and its environment (Greve & Taylor, 2000). Popular models include Hiatt’s (2006) ADKAR model with an individual perspective for change in business, government, and community; Bridge’s (1991) transition model, which acknowledges endings, a neutral zone, and new beginnings; Kotter’s (2016) 8-step process that begins with creating a sense of urgency and focuses on the importance of gaining buy-in; the change process designed by the Association of Change Management Professionals (ACMP); and many other models, tools, and techniques (Cameron & Green, 2019; Stouten et al., 2018).

Regardless of the model, process, or characteristics, there is value in approaching change intentionally and respecting that people experience futuring and change differently. Change readiness is multi-dimensional and influenced by several factors such as past experiences, current context, cultural influence, and organizational context (Armenakis et al., 1993; Gigliotti et al., 2019; Kirsch et al., 2012). The Change Style Indicator (Musselwhite & Ingram, 2003) helps individuals and teams better understand preferred styles and navigate change along a continuum of
• conservers who value clarity, predictability, and incremental change;
• pragmatists who honor the past while analyzing and adapting to new circumstances; and
• originator change agents who are comfortable with fast expansive change for greater effectiveness.

Navigating change flows from cognitively anticipating and acknowledging opportunities for change; addressing emotions related to change; exploring stakeholder complexities and options to support change; implementing the learning, support, and other actions to support change; and evaluating change as part of the process of emergent continuous organizational change.

Context factors into the change experience. One instrument used to assess the context for change is the Situational Outlook Questionnaire (Isaksen, 2007). The well-tested Situational Outlook Questionnaire measures people’s perceptions of the climate for creativity, innovation, and change. The single biggest challenge is to adapt fast enough to match increasing uncertainty and complexity (Kotter et al., 2021). With the increasing complexity and volatility of the future, navigating both forced change and chosen transitions is a competency needed by all Extension professionals, especially during the stress and disorientation of change.

Conclusion and Discussion

Becoming more future-ready, Extension can facilitate multi-stakeholder foresight processes, engage in excellent customer and employee experiences, and move from transactional to more strategic marketing and operations with intelligent technology, talent, processes, and data (Sharma & Mody, 2021). While certainty or stability may seem elusive, urban Extension professionals can build trust and engage with other equity-minded change leaders as advocates for addressing inequities in the access to and experiences with Extension (Costino, 2018; Hakkola, 2021).

The future well-being of people living and working in urban communities and the future of urban Extension improve through the development of futuring literacy and inclusive capacity building. To continue building on Extension’s understanding of and approach to the future, a more thorough literature review and applied research could be coordinated through national networks. Looking to the future, questions facing Extension include

• how to continuously co-align University Extension with the dynamic urban environment using A National Framework for Urban Extension (NUEL, 2015);
• how to invest financial, social, and political capital in urban communities to fulfill the Extension mission;
• how to integrate urban context into the fabric of Extension using futuring approaches in support of rural, suburban, and urban residents and workforce; and
• how to blend familiar planning paradigms with a more emergent model in which distributed leadership is agile and change is continuous (Doyle & Brady, 2018).

Extension can lead the way in moving beyond discussions of urban problems and solutions and toward a more generative future-oriented space of speculation informed by a holistic understanding of the everyday lives of citizens, including their neighborhoods, memories, hopes, dreams, and aspirations (Forlano & Mathew, 2014). Extension is well-positioned to respectfully explore alternative futures with non-linear combinations of social and technological processes (Urry, 2016). Looking ahead as futurologists, urban Extension professionals can honor the aspirations and traditions established by Extension’s founders while building authentic, reciprocal relationships with urban communities and implementing novel approaches that integrate technology and human interaction (Balestrini et al., 2017) for value creation. The future of urban Extension depends on consistent commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion that creates a sense of belonging with clients, faculty, staff, students, volunteers, advisors, and partners. University leaders play a significant role in addressing urban issues through strategic approaches that address immediate priorities while systematically futuring to continuously co-align University Extension with the dynamic urban environment.

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**Acknowledgment**

The authors acknowledge Michelle Gaston, Ohio State University Extension, for her assistance in editing and formatting this article.

**Resources**

**Futuring**

*Aspen Institute Commission on Information Disorder.*

[https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs%E2%80%8C/com%E2%80%8C%E2%80%8C%E2%80%8C/mission-on-information-disorder/](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/mission-on-information-disorder/)

Bob Johansen Trilogy of books

- *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World*
- *The New Leadership Literacies: Thriving in a Future of Extreme Disruption and Distributed Everything*
- *Full-Spectrum Thinking: How to Escape Boxes in a Post-Categorical Future* features a new mindset to consider


[https://www.iftf.org/file%E2%80%8Cadmin/user_upload/images/people/f4g/IFTF_equitable_futures_toolkit_031219.pdf](https://www.iftf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/images/people/f4g/IFTF_equitable_futures_toolkit_031219.pdf)

*The Millennium Project.* [https://www.millennium-project.org/](https://www.millennium-project.org/)

The Millennium Project is a global participatory think tank established in 1996 under the American Council for the United Nations University. The group published 19 editions of *The State of Future*, established a Global Futures Intelligence System, and created tools for exploring multiple futures.

UNESCO. *Futures Literacy*. [https://en.unesco.org/futuresliteracy/about](https://en.unesco.org/futuresliteracy/about)

VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity)

VUCA was introduced by the U.S. Army War College (Gerras et al., 2010; Magee, 1998) to describe a turbulent environment. The VUCA model has been applied and adapted by businesses and academia (Baran & Woznyj, 2021). It has even been flipped when Johansen (2012) proposed that the best VUCA leaders are characterized by vision, understanding, clarity, and agility.

**Urban Context**

*City Leadership Initiative.* Harvard and Bloomberg. [https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/](https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/)


*National Association of Counties Large Urban County Caucus.* [https://www.naco.org/advocacy/large-urban-county-caucus](https://www.naco.org/advocacy/large-urban-county-caucus)


**Urban Extension**


*National Urban Extension Leaders*. [https://nuel.extension.org/](https://nuel.extension.org/)

*Urban Extension Library* (including conference proceedings). [https://urban-extension.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/library](https://urban-extension.cfaes.ohio-state.edu/library)
The Future of Work


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ISSN

ISSN 2325-5226

Publication Agreement

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Acknowledgements

This themed issue of the JHSE was made possible through the vision and contributions of the authors, reviewers, JHSE editorial team, and National Urban Extension Leaders (NUEL). In addition to the electronic version, a limited quantity of this special issue was printed with support from The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Washington State University Extension, the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research, and Mississippi State University. Copies were distributed at the 2022 National Urban Extension Conference.