



# Southern Region Middle Managers News

## NATIONAL URBAN LEADERS NETWORK

### PITTSBURGH, PA

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Twenty-one individuals from 14 states gathered in Pittsburgh on December 2 - 4, 2013 to discuss opportunities for Urban Extension and to formalize a network of Urban Extension leaders. Penn State hosted the meeting at their Penn State Center in downtown Pittsburgh. The group identified its purpose; assessed its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and worked on an action plan to implement this effort designed to elevate the visibility of Urban

***"The purpose of the National Urban Leaders Network is to advocate and advance the strategic importance and long term value of urban extension by being:***

- ***locally relevant***
- ***responsive statewide and***
- ***recognized nationally***

Extension on three fronts: locally, institutionally and nationally. The consensus of opinion of those assembled was that land-grant Universities have only just begun to scratch the surface in our urban communities which now house > 80% of the population in the U.S. Our extension model is uniquely qualified to assess *issues oriented* urban needs, develop science-based programs to address those needs, and provide meaningful delivery that will have demonstrated impact. A focused Urban Extension delivery would greatly complement our rural/agricultural efforts while providing new audiences, increased funding opportunities and offering a greater diversity of collaborations for our universities.

Of the 14 states represented in Pittsburgh, most were from the northeast, north central and southern region as you might imagine. One representative spoke for the western region.



## The Attendees

Betty	Blasé	District Coordinator (Grand Rapids)	Michigan State University
Kim	Boyce	Regional Director (Minneapolis)	University of Minnesota
Manami	Brown	Extension Director Baltimore City	University of Maryland
Travis	Burke	District Director (Raleigh/Durham)	North Carolina State University
John	Byrnes	Extension Director Philadelphia	Pennsylvania State University
Deno	De Ciantis	Director, The Penn State Center	Pennsylvania State University
LaDonna	Dunlop	Director Oklahoma County	Oklahoma State University
Karol	Dyson	Extension Director, Capital Area	University of Maryland
Bobby	Fletcher	Assistant Director LSU Ag Center	Louisiana State University
Brad	Gaolach	Community Sustainability Specialist & <u>Western Region Urban Rep.</u>	Washington State University
Eloisa	Gomez	Milwaukee County Director	University of Wisconsin
Shad	Henderson	4-H Educator, Alleghany Co.	Pennsylvania State University
Maureen	Hogan	Ass't Dir., The Penn State Center	Pennsylvania State University
Joan	Jacobsen	Urban Program Director	Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Guadalupe	Landeros	Bexar County Dir. (San Antonio)	Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Christopher	Obropta	Water Resources Specialist	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Marie	Ruemenapp	District Coordinator (Detroit)	Michigan State University
Jody	Squires	Urban Associate Regional Director	University of Missouri
Charlie	Vavrina	District Director (Tampa/St. Pete)	University of Florida
Jeffrey	Young	District Director (Louisville)	University of Kentucky
Jan	Zientek	Essex County Dept Head (Newark)	Rutgers, State University of New Jersey

## Organizational Structure

The attendees decided that a Steering Committee should be formed with membership from all regions of the country and that this committee would be responsible for convening meetings, being a conduit for shared information and monitoring actions as the Network moves forward. The inaugural Steering Committee includes Deno De Ciantis (gray sport coat, back row), Marie Ruemenapp (front row, center), Joan Jacobsen (brown scarf, back row) and Brad Gaolach (back row, left end). It was also decided that consensus would be the process by which decisions are made.



## Opening Remarks & Conversation

After a welcome and some stage setting successful urban ventures across the country were highlighted including achievements in the west by **Western Extension Directors Association** (WEDA) who tasked the Western Regional Program Leadership Committee (WRPLC) to explore conceptual models for Urban Extension <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/weda/reports-publications>; the growing success of the **Southern Region Urban Network** conference call (email [j-jacobsen@tamu.edu](mailto:j-jacobsen@tamu.edu) for inclusion) and MN's **Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center** <http://www.uroc.umn.edu/programs/index.html> Discussion lead to the realization that the time is right for redoubling efforts to raise the visibility of Urban Extension and so began the work of the National Urban Leaders Network. Time was then spent on brainstorming issues in Urban Extension, which included but were not limited to the following:

- Messaging is important in Urban Extension (UE).
- UE on the ground locally should be driven by local practice and knowledge.
- Are we having the necessary, in depth institutional conversations about UE at our land-grants?
- UE needs to be proactive, forward thinking, issues based and not reactionary to the budget.
- There are huge resource and research opportunities for UE.
- We need to bring the whole university into UE practice, not just the agriculture colleges.
- Engagement in issues based programming will show we can be relevant practitioners and participants in the urban landscape.
- We must actively pursue relationships with nat'l organizations like NACo & National League of Cities.
- We need a common, consistent elevator speech on UE and its value.
- Existing Extension administrative burdens (reporting?) complicate responsiveness and innovation in urban settings.
- Do our land-grants know our urban stakeholders?
- An intentional Urban Extension protocol should include: a benefit message supported by the unique association with Land-grants; national stakeholder relationships with Congress, Federal agencies, NACo, Nat'l League of Cities, PILD; more and new resources with HUD, EPA and foundations; access to a national network; access to a portfolio of successes and local relationship building supported by branding, benefit and value.

## Work Group Discussions

General discussion resulted in the formulation of a purpose statement. ***The purpose of the National Urban Leaders Network is to advocate and advance the strategic importance and long term value of Urban Extension by being locally relevant, responsive statewide and recognized nationally.*** Implicit in the "responsive statewide" piece is reference to the institution itself (land-grant) as it is assumed a culture change is necessary within to achieve statewide responsiveness to its fullest extent.

The attendees then formed three committees representing the focus areas of local, state (institutional) and national to begin dialog on the necessary components of each. Each committee discussed where we want to

go and the strategies, tactics and actions of getting there. Through this process, **five common touchstones** were determined: **communication, resources, stakeholders, professional development and policy.**

## **Work Group Action Plans (tentative)**

Once the touchstones were discussed within the context of the larger group, the smaller breakouts reconvened to determine some rudimentary short, medium and long term actions.

### **Communications**

1. Stakeholders will recognize Urban Extension as a research based best practice asset to address urban issues.
2. NULN will establish an effective and efficient communication network.

### **Resources**

1. Expand and focus resources to increase impact of Urban Extension.
  - Attain multi-state and city grants
  - Receive foundation funding

### **Stakeholders**

1. Create and expand new funding relationships at the federal level.
  - Identify key Program Officers
  - Identify members of the Office of Urban Affairs for the network
2. Strengthen relationships with county officials and government.
  - Demonstrate value
  - Share past successes
  - Provide in service training
3. Develop relationships with high profile civic groups.
  - Inventory
  - Develop best practices

### **Professional Development**

1. Develop a successful system for recruiting and retaining professional Urban Extension staff.
2. Develop successful systems for training existing staff, both informal and formal.
3. Examine and establish urban research development centers with a goal of delivering professional development.
4. Leverage research by Urban Extension staff as they pursue advanced degrees to document best practice for urban.
5. Develop strategies/systems to identify opportunities for collaboration with specialists, staff & faculty.
6. Examine and identify unique skill sets that lead to success in Urban Extension positions. (Per the wests urban skills protocol: project management and program development, multi-cultural abilities, cross generational abilities, ability to work with intermediaries and show impacts with multi-partners.)
7. Develop online inventory of research publications on Urban Extension.

## Policy

1. Develop regional position papers and plans.
2. Build national support for Urban Extension to lead to alternate funding.
3. Develop virtual research centers.
4. Develop and promote urban experiment stations.

While initial work by the National Urban Leaders Network group assembled defined some clear directions, further work is being crafted in preparation for our second meeting in Florida (see below). Immediate plans include the following:

- Strengthening a communication network among Urban Extension professionals throughout the nation to share ideas and create new partnerships around common issues
- Uniting the four Extension regions in the development of regional urban position papers that foster collaboration of Urban Extension activities among land-grant universities within and between regions
- Assembling examples of successful Urban Extension programs that can be used to promote funding at the national, state and local level
- Active engagement of university faculty and students in urban research and extension programming
- Provide meaningful professional development of Urban Extension staff

## Tours

The Pittsburgh meeting concluded with tours of three sites that included a green roof installation, a faith based community garden, a green infrastructure and storm water mitigation site implemented following Hurricane Ivan, and a youth development center. Handouts of tour highlights were distributed to all attendees prior to the end of the meeting.

## Save the Date

The 2<sup>nd</sup> installment of the National Urban Leaders Network is slated for St. Petersburg, FL on Sunday, June 22 through Tuesday, June 24 at the Sirata on St. Pete beach <http://www.sirata.com/>. Plan to arrive on Sat. June 21<sup>st</sup> by flying into Tampa. Unfortunately weekend rentals are the mainstay for beach hotels so Sat. room rates will be \$129 but all succeeding nights will be \$99. We will wind up the National Urban Leaders Network meeting at noon on Tues and begin Florida's 1<sup>st</sup> Urban Extension Conference an hour later! The Nat'l group is invited to stay for the FL meeting or some much needed vacation time at the \$99 rate!

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlie Vavrina