



STRENGTHENING

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT

AUGUST 18 - 21, 2025
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Southern Region Program Leadership Network (SR-PLN)

Opening Statement

Blake Lanford

Associate Director- Financial
Management

Clemson Cooperative
Extension

2025 PLC Chair





What's one word you would use to define "community impact" in Extension work?

- Menti.com
- Code: 1849 1131
- <https://www.menti.com/alcm5bi62pwq>.

Dr. Michael D. Toews

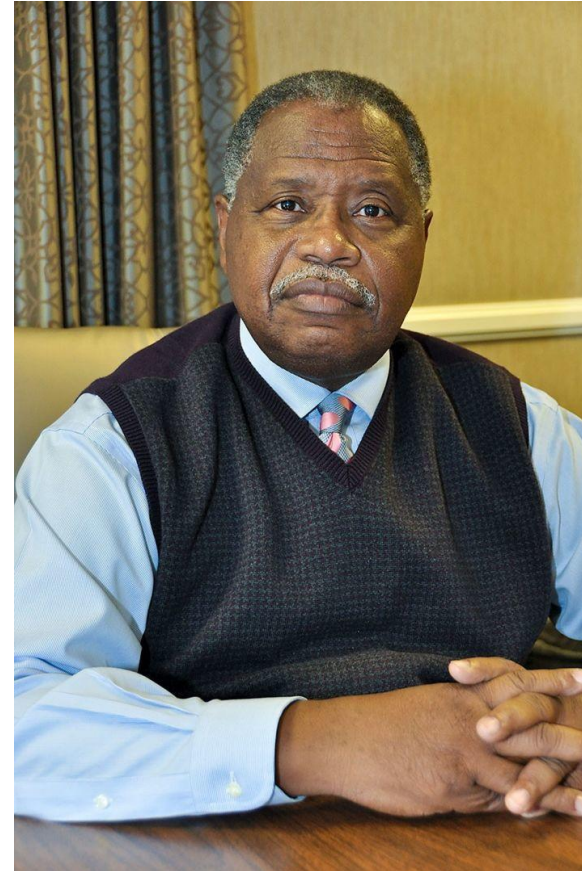
Associate Dean for Extension
University of Georgia
College of Agricultural &
Environmental Sciences



Dr. Mark Latimore, Jr.

Associate Dean

Administrator for Extension
Fort Valley State University



Dr. Damona Doye, Chair

Association of Southern
Region Extension Directors



Dr. Raymon Shange, Chair

Association of Extension Administrators



Keynote Speaker



Dr. Alison Davis

Professor of Agricultural
Economics, University of
Kentucky

Executive Director of Blueprint
Kentucky

Assistant Vice President, UK
Engage

Beyond the Box

Community Engagement & the Evolving Role of Cooperative Extension

Alison F. Davis, PhD
University of Kentucky

Blueprint Kentucky

Mission: Catalyze positive change to build engaged communities and vibrant economies.

Vision: Empowered people. Thriving communities.

Along with our partners in Kentucky Cooperative Extension, we connect the resources of our land-grant university with Kentucky communities. We do this by connecting communities to people, place and purpose.



Who am I?



Words that have been used to describe me

- Unfiltered
- Blunt
- Outspoken
- Rough around the edges
- Risky
- Creative
- Entrepreneurial
- Genuine
- Principled
- Passionate

Setting the purpose

- Agreeing to Extension's current mission and strategies
- Challenging the assumption that *engagement* and *Extension* are the same.
- Taking calculated risks to stay relevant.
- Measuring success - not just in numbers, but in trust, in shared ownership, and in long-term change.
- Celebrating examples that show what's possible.
- Determining when the best response is “outreach” or “engagement”



Cooperative Extension Mission

The mission of the Cooperative Extension System is to provide practical, research-based education and resources to help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future.

Strategies:

- **Disseminating Research-Based Knowledge**
- **Addressing Local Needs**
- **Serving Diverse Audiences**
- **Promoting Lifelong Learning**
- **Building Stronger Economies**

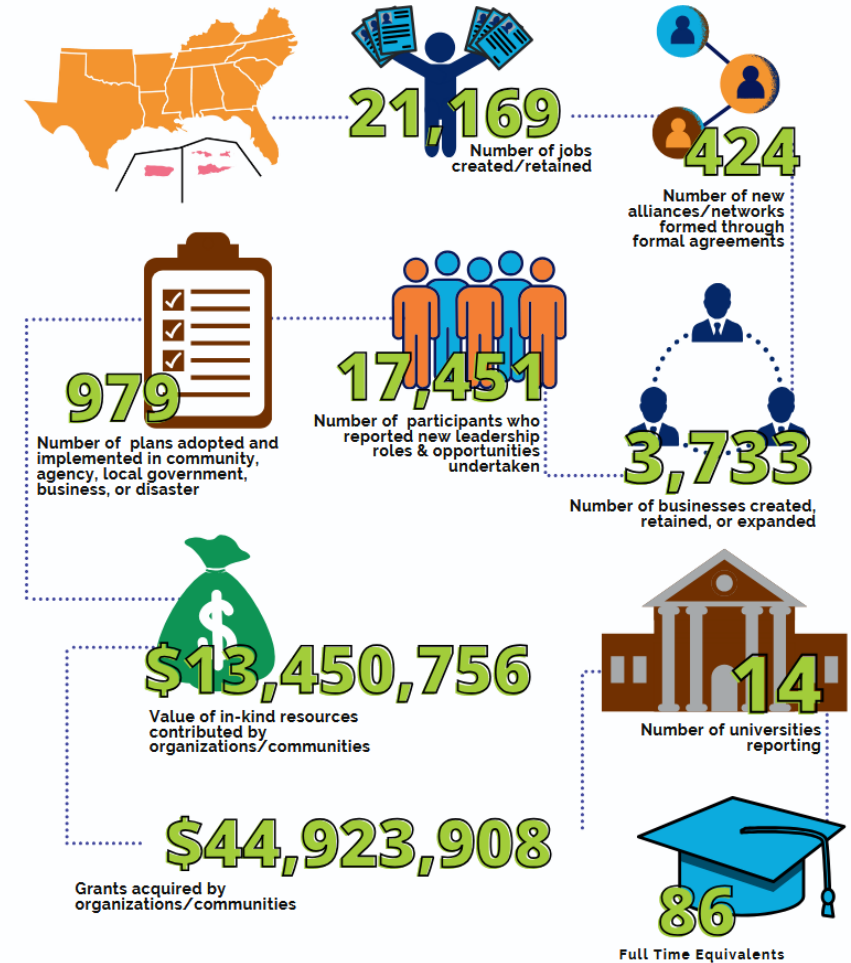


How Extension Measures Success

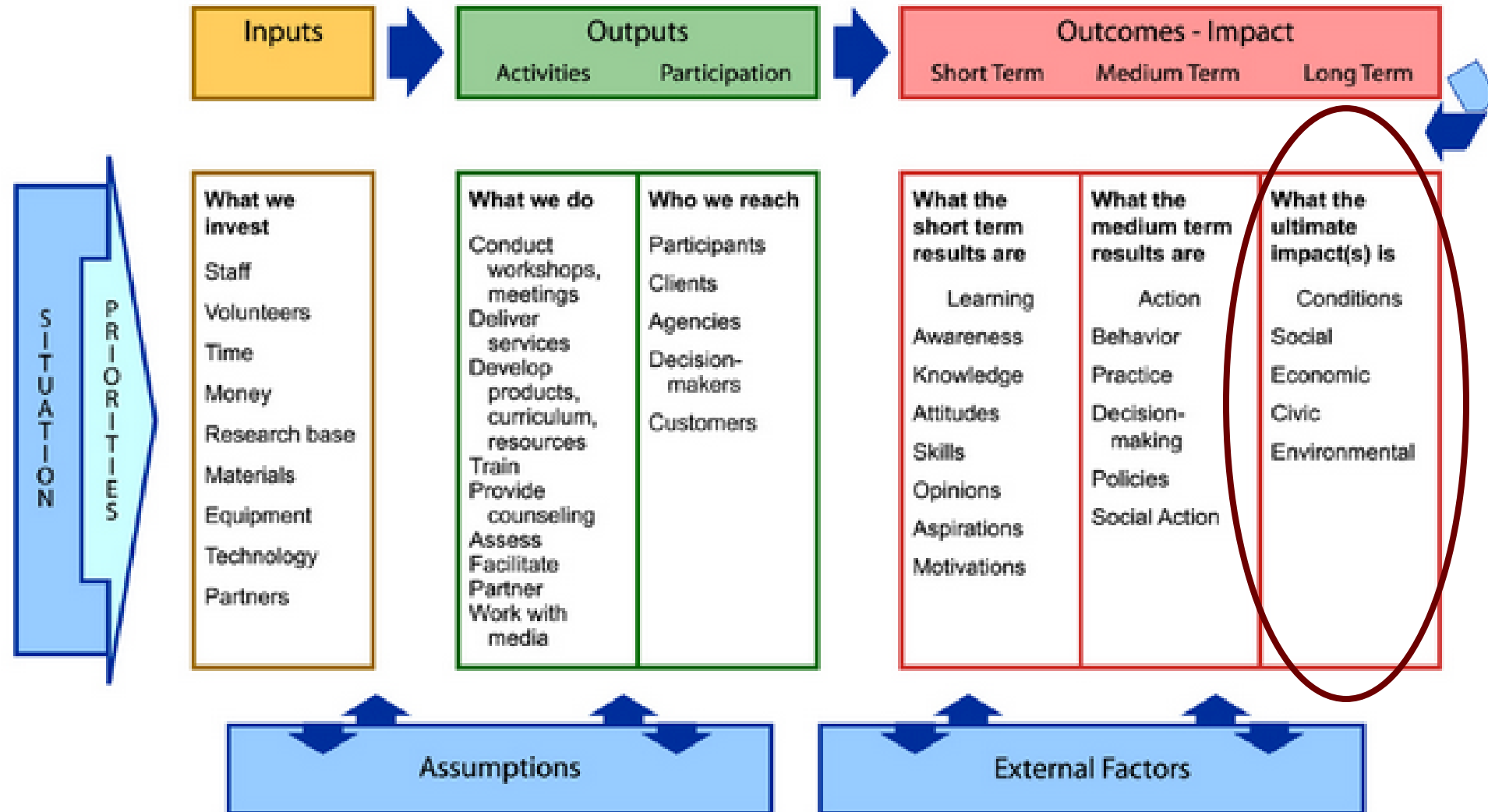
- Head counts
- Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes
- Some changes in behavior
- Some changes in short and medium-term conditions like financial improvement, jobs gained, new partnerships
- Return on Investment
- Economic Impact

Southern Region Impacts 2023

Southern Region Community Development Extension Impacts



The Loved Logic Model



The Theory of Change

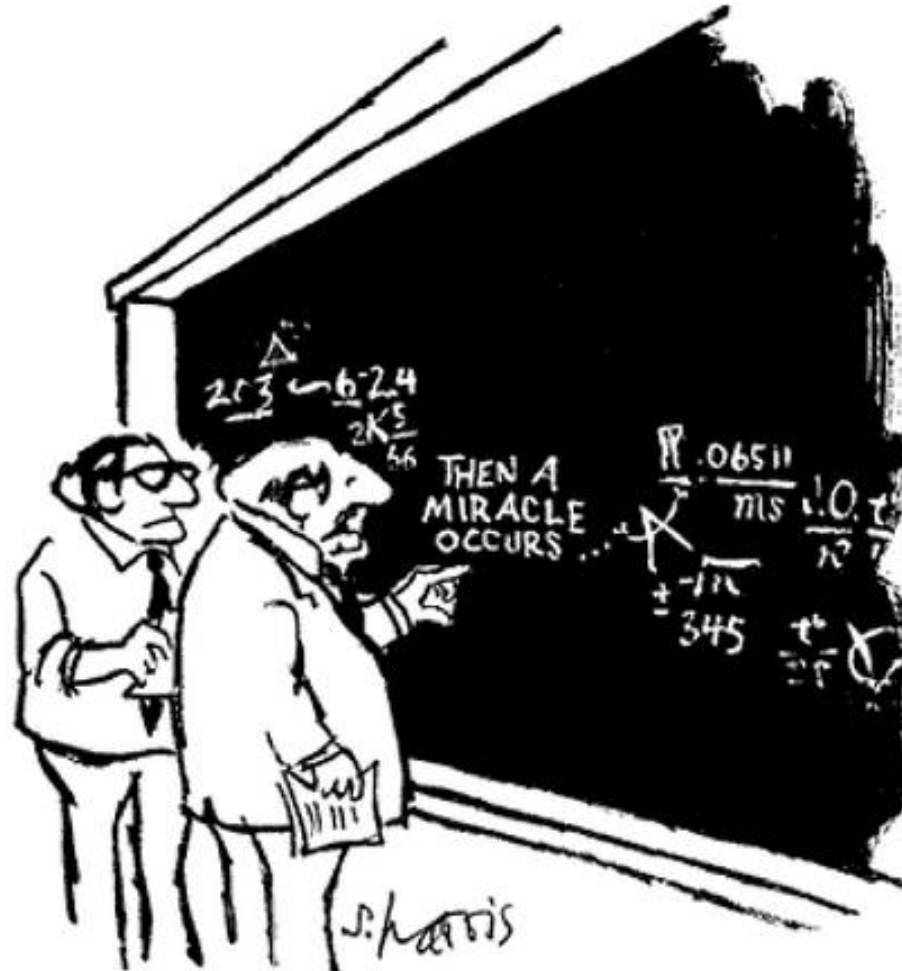


Image credit: Sidney Harris

"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

<https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

Economic Development and Workforce Preparation Logic Model - DRAFT

Inputs

All Program Areas
University of Kentucky Specialists
Other UK Experts
Kentucky Small Business Development Center
Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development
KCARD
Curriculum
Economic and workforce data

Situation

Building a diverse economy that emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship and small business development.

Creating a workforce that is prepared for and can adapt to the rapidly changing technology.

Outputs

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Participation</u>
Economic and workforce development programs	Agents
First Impressions	Youth
Business Retention & Expansion	Chambers of Commerce
Entrepreneur Training	Schools
CREATE Bridges	Farmers
Strategic planning	Families
Community Design	Elected officials
Creative Economy	Hospitals
KSBDC	Other health providers
Achievement Program	Non-profits
Resume Contest	Industry
Communications Programs	Economic Development professionals
4-H Workforce and Career Readiness Training	Small Businesses
4-H Teen conference	Entrepreneurs
Positivity Employability	
KELD	
Center for Crop Diversification	
FSIC	
<u>MarketReady</u>	
KFBM	

Outcomes – Impact

<u>Initial Outcomes (KSA)</u>	<u>Intermediate Outcomes (Behavior Change)</u>	<u>Long Term Outcomes (SEEC)</u>
Increased awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship and small business development	Increase rates of labor force participation and employment	Reduced poverty rate
Better understanding of local economy	Youth contribute to communities	Reduction of underemployment and unemployment
Businesses can identify new markets	Increased partnerships within community to address CED issues	Increase in household income
Communities can identify factors to improve their local economic condition	New businesses & jobs emerge	Improved local tax base
Individuals understand the importance of professional etiquette and communication skills	Communities implement strategies to improve downtowns and places	Improved profitability for farmers
Change in perception about moving into careers out of high school	Individuals/youth utilize enhanced communication skills	
	Individuals/youth exhibit professional etiquette standards	
	Enhanced decision-making and problem solving	
	Farmers identify new markets	
	Farmers diversify production	
	Farmers are able to find off-farm employment for themselves and family	

Assumptions

There are paid professionals in many KY communities that are tasked with addressing economic development and workforce needs. But not all. One person alone cannot create a vibrant economy or prepare a successful workforce

External Factors

Kentucky is currently a “we make things” economy, which might not be successful in some of the more rural places. Kentucky has relatively low rates of higher education and low rates of labor force participation. Many of our industries cannot find enough workers. In some places, there is still a stigma associated with not pursuing college.

The Backwards Logic Model

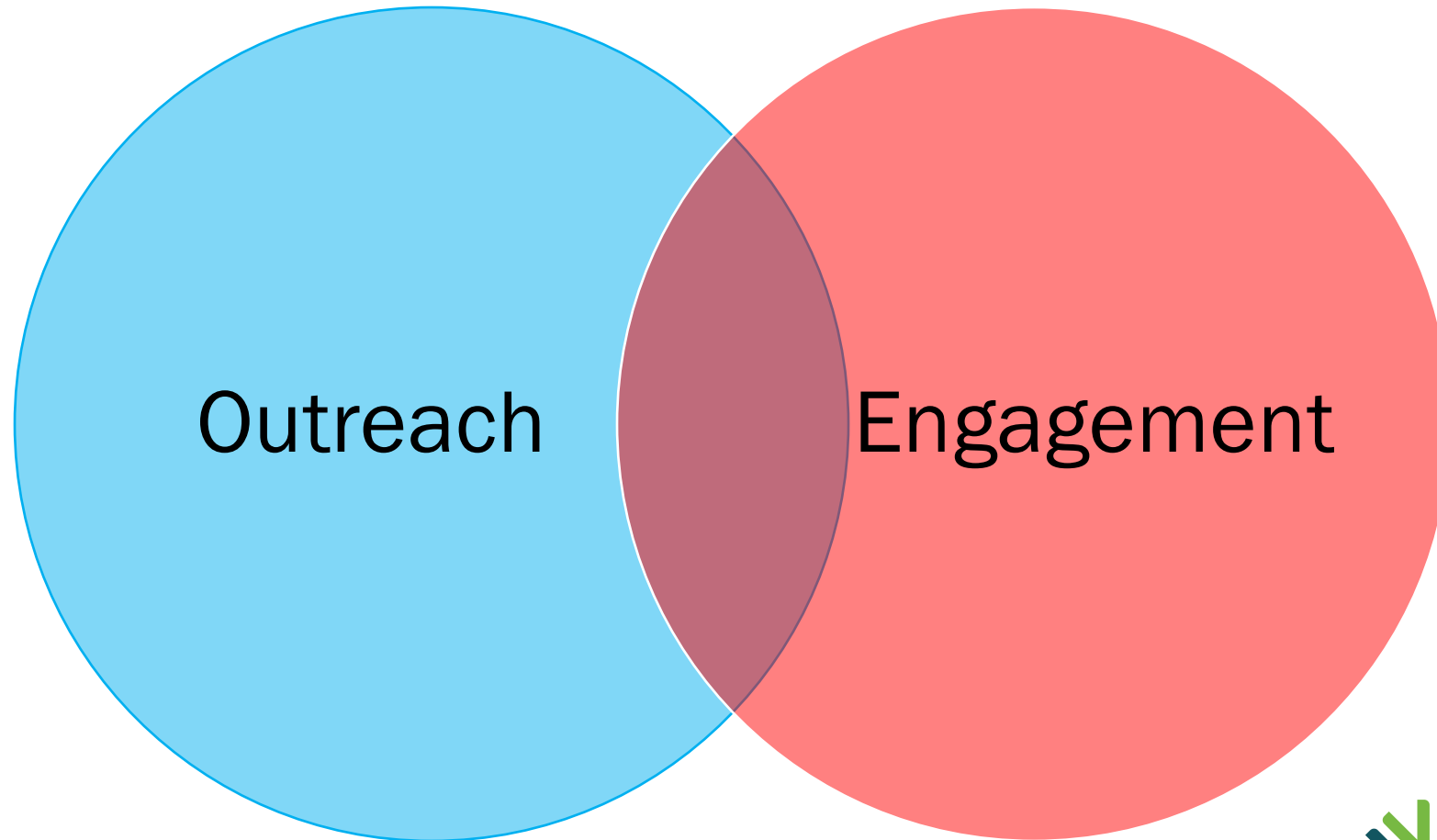
- Start with the intended outcome and work backwards
- Identify the necessary activities, attitudes, behaviors, policies, and systems that would need to be addressed.
- Try doing a logic model both ways and see what happens
- Deeper engagement is usually the key to long-term impact

Outreach vs Engagement

At your table...

- There are cards at your table, each describing real examples of Extension programming or activities.
- Grab a card and a neighbor and answer...
 - Is this engagement or outreach?
 - Which examples show community power in decision-making?
 - How would you make it more “engagement-y”?
 - How does Extension report success? But what is the true impact?

Outreach ≠ Engagement



Outreach vs Engagement

Aspect	Outreach	Engagement
Purpose	Share information, resources, or services	Build mutual relationships and work together
Flow of Communication	One-way (from you → them)	Two-way (you ↔ them)
Role of the Audience	Receivers or consumers of what you offer	Co-creators, partners, decision-makers
Example in Cooperative Extension	Holding a workshop where you present best practices for crop management	Working with farmers to design research trials based on their specific needs, then interpreting results together
Timeframe	Often short-term or event-based	Often long-term, sustained collaboration
Who Holds the Power	Organization or expert	Shared between organization and community

True engagement means stakeholders are *helping shape the agenda, not just receiving the end product.*



Community Engagement Spectrum

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1

© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1



Community-Based Participatory Research

Community Involvement					
	Low				High
	Informed	Consulted	Involved	Collaborated with	Leading
Approach	Researcher-Driven Research	Community Placed Research	Community Engaged Research	Community-Based Participatory Research	Community-Driven Research
What it Looks Like	The researcher sets the research agenda based on a topic of interest.	The researcher sets the research agenda based on a topic and community of interest.	The researcher sets the research agenda with some community input.	The researcher and the community set the research agenda based on mutual interests.	The community sets the research agenda based on their interests.
Research Outcomes	Advance the science on a topic. Peer-reviewed publications and academic presentations.				
		Community input strengthens findings and interpretations. Tailored dissemination of research findings into the community.			
			Degree of partnerships strengthens the study design, access, relevance to the community, and ability to translate findings into action.		
				Co-learning bolsters engagement, problem solving, and change.	
					Increase community capacity for research, mobilization, and change.



Measuring Success in Engagement

MAYSVILLE, Ky.— (July 30, 2025) Students from the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment have been recognized for outstanding community development work in Mason County, Kentucky. The group worked with Blueprint Kentucky that champions programming and research focusing on community and economic development.

The Kentucky Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects defines recipients of the merit award as projects that display good design and characterize environmental responsibility. The goal of the project, titled ‘Connecting Maysville,’ was to improve economic development in the town. Bringing in UK students created an opportunity for those who have never been to Maysville an opportunity to see it from a new perspective.

Blueprint Kentucky fellows, advisors recognized with merit award by Kentucky's chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

Students visited Mason County to examine what changes could be made to its downtown area to increase visitation.



By Grace Sowards
Published on July 30, 2025

Share this news: [f](#) [x](#) [in](#) [m](#) [e](#)

At your table...

- Is this successful engagement?
- What would be better gauges of success?

The Indicators of Success That Lead to Condition Changes

- Trust
- Shared ownership
- Long-term change
- Sustainability



Stories of Success

The Community Making Progress

2017

2019

- Community efforts start and stop without explanation.
- The spread of drugs takes the lives of so many individuals and undermines so many more people's lives.
- Intergenerational family breakdown leaves young people feeling abandoned.
- People see downtown as a living symbol of their frustrations—crumbling infrastructure, businesses that come and go, and repeated failed efforts.
- Deep divides keep the people and the community apart—from race and culture, to where people live, to old versus new residents, to religious factions.
- Too much negativity among residents leads to mistrust of many leaders.
- Fragmentation among leaders and organizations blocks effective action.
- A so-called "Good Ol' Boys" network runs the community.
- A lack of genuine community discussion makes residents feel they cannot freely express themselves.

- **Concrete actions, coming from different directions, focus on a variety of specific community challenges—all rooted in what matters to people.**
- **A growing network of leaders share a common purpose for working with the community and in support of one another.**
- **Downtown improves including stricter code enforcement, nuisance ordinance, infrastructure, and new small businesses.**
- **Groups and organizations form partnerships and collaborations to do work that none of them could do alone.**
- **Faith organizations cross dividing lines to work on youth and other issues and find ways to support each other.**
- **Blacks and whites come together to take courageous action on race, diversity, and inclusion.**
- **More youth become more engaged, and often lead adults in forging new connections and stories of hope.**
- **Taboo subjects are openly and productively discussed, such as drug addition, sexual orientation, homelessness, family breakdown, race, and others.**
- **A new can-do narrative starts to take hold.**

ONE STEP AT A TIME—A REPORT BY THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE

7

The Five Stages

Winchester and Clark

of Community Life

County's Moment

The Waiting Place

Impasse

Catalytic

Growth

Sustain and Renew

There is an inkling that something is off in the community, but people can't name it. There's no agreement on issues, problems, or aspirations. A disconnect exists between leaders and community.

The community is at loggerheads. There's clarity about "What's wrong," but little agreement on what to do. A lack of trust, leadership and organizational capacity block the community's ability to get things done.

There are pockets of change emerging, with new ways of working together. But a lack of trust, leadership and organizational capacity still plague the rest of the community. A new competition arises between an ingrained negative narrative and a new can-do narrative.

There is an abundance of community capacity, networks and productive norms for getting things done. Community-wide efforts are making progress.

Clear progress has been made on key issues, but questions about "What's next?" are arising. Often there are underlying tensions on unresolved systemic issues. Tensions between old and new leaders exist.

CLARK COUNTY, KY, 2017

CLARK COUNTY, KY, 2019

The Five Stages of Community Life

To learn more about the Stages of Community Life, see *Community Rhythms* by The Harwood Institute for the C. S. Mott Foundation

Network
Cooperative Education System

<https://theharwoodinstitute.org/report-c>

Stories of Success



[Home](#) [Our Services](#) [Construction](#) [Careers](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#)



Turtle Mountain Recovery Center

Our vision is to provide cost-effective, quality treatment, and cultural reclamation. Our mission is to provide comprehensive substance abuse treatment and support in celebration of recovery and healing of our community. The facility will offer both in-patient and out-patient services. The center is currently under construction and will open Fall 2024. Outpatient services are being offered in the mean-time.



Partnerships and Credit

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development State Director Erin Oban joined tribal leaders and members as well as other stakeholders. In July 2022, USDA Rural Development provided Native American Bank with a \$10 million loan guarantee to finance the construction of a facility for the Turtle Mountain Recovery Center.

Construction of the new 34,000-square-foot substance use disorder treatment center began in October 2022. The completed facility designates 16-bed residential units, counseling areas and group therapy space for culturally responsive inpatient and outpatient treatment.

The Turtle Mountain Recovery Center Land Holding Company also financed the Turtle Mountain Recovery Center through New Market Tax Credits.

<https://www.minotdailynews.com/news/local-news/2024/10/turtle-mountain-recovery-center-holds-grand-opening/>



Ready for your blood pressure to go up?



“Among public universities, many land-grant universities [...] have a secret weapon for rural engagement: extension programs that have connected campuses to farming communities since 1917. Extension programs bring research-based knowledge and practical education to communities outside traditional academic settings, often allowing people to participate in lectures and workshops even if they’re not enrolled.”

In his 2018 book “Land Grant Universities for the Future,” co-authored with West Virginia University President Gordon Gee, he called for universities to “get their acts together” and get away from this very old model of community outreach.”

And when extension programs only focus on agriculture, rural communities miss out on everything else the university offers — from business development to social work to engineering.

<https://dailyyonder.com/are-rural-extensions-being-under-utilized/2025/07/31/>

It's Okay to Be the Best Kept Secret

- We don't need constant visibility to be valuable
- Being “best kept” works if the right people know, and the work is trusted
- The danger is not obscurity, it's irrelevance



We just need to tell our story better...

- Or do we?
- Maybe our role is to empower our communities, our businesses, our families, our farmers to tell their own story.

What's better?

- Telling the story of our role in a community's "success"
- The community telling their own story and maybe Extension is mentioned, maybe not.

I know, I know...

“Have you seen the current fiscal and political environment?”

“It’s a fight out there!”

“If people aren’t acknowledging our involvement, we are at risk of losing funding.”

Brainstorm question: Are there ways of mitigating this risk?

Alison's Risks of Relevance

- **Content risk:** Tackling topics outside our historical wheelhouse.
- **Partnership risk:** Working with organizations or leaders who don't share our exact style or methods.
- **Perception risk:** Letting others lead, even if Extension doesn't get the credit.
- **Resistance Risk:** Convincing stakeholders or funders to move beyond transactional outreach
- **Political Risk:** Tackling issues of utmost priority for the community but unpopular among political leadership



1) How do we engage better?

2) Where are opportunities to use engagement for greater impact?

First Steps...

- A promise to listen as much as we teach.
- To partner with humility.
- To take risks for relevance.
- And to be okay with quiet impact, as long as the work is making a difference.



Building Internal Capacity

Community and Economic Development Extension

- The Essence of Leadership
- Effective Communication and Listening Styles
- Working with Elected Officials
- Basics of Facilitation/Becoming a Skilled Facilitator
- Community Analysis
- Community Power Dynamics
- Hosting Community Conversations
- Group Dynamics
- Approaches to Resolving Conflicts
- Asset Mapping and Leading Community Change
- Power, Influence and Ethical Challenges in Extension
- Framing Public Issues and Public Deliberation



Will AI Force Extension to Focus More on Engagement?

- How many of us have had genuine (and terrifying) conversations about the role of AI in traditional Extension programming?
- What have we concluded?
- Relationships matter more than ever



Final call to action

This week, ask yourself:

Where am I playing it safe?

Who haven't I invited to the table?

Am I truly engaging with people invited to the table?

And am I willing to risk comfort for the sake of relevance?

Because our communities are worth the risk.

Thank you!

Alison Davis

Alison.Davis@uky.edu

2025 Meeting Agenda



Meeting Locations

ANR:	220
COM:	223
CRD:	224
FCS:	212/213
4-H:	208/209

IT:	222
MM:	210/211
PSD:	218
AEA:	217
ASRED:	219



STRENGTHENING

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT

AUGUST 18 - 21, 2025
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Southern Region Program Leadership Network (SR-PLN)