

NORTH CENTRAL REGION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report showcases remarkable impacts achieved through Extension programming across the North Central Region, with institutions generating over \$190 million in grants and resources, reaching more than 469,000 individuals through educational contacts, and supporting the development of over 1,400 plans and policies that strengthen our regional fabric.

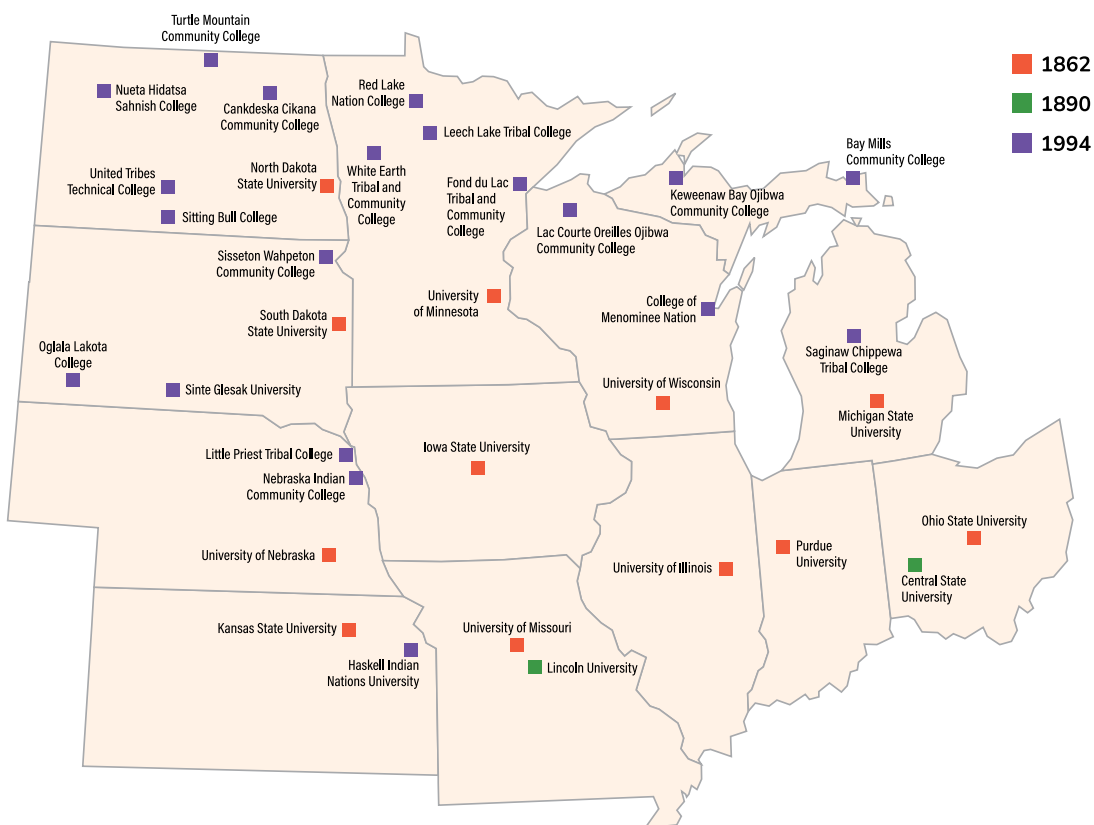
The strength of these efforts continues to be anchored in the exceptional contributions of our 1890 and 1994 land-grant institutions. Our 1890 institutions have been actively sharing their success stories through the [AEA Annual Impact Report](#) and the [AEA Newsletter](#), both of which highlight how Extension programs bring research-based knowledge to areas nationwide, helping address local challenges and improve quality of life through workshops, training sessions, and direct consultation.

Meanwhile, our 1994 institutions recently celebrated three decades of transformative impact through their [Standing on Tradition Report](#), demonstrating how these twenty tribal colleges in our North Central Region — a remarkable increase from the eight that existed when NCRCRD was founded — continue to provide vital research, education, and extension programs.

Extension impact measurement extends beyond our region, with our sister centers across the nation also documenting their transformative work. For example, the [Southern Rural Development Center compiles and publishes regional impact statistics](#), adding to the national picture of Extension's reach and effectiveness.

Together, these partnerships demonstrate how effective Extension work brings lasting change by creating resilient communities and economies, developing leadership and civic engagement, and promoting community health and wellness which continues to inform and enhance the broader Extension system's capacity to serve all areas with excellence.

North Central Region Land Grant Colleges and Universities



NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CENTER
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Report compiled by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

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National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



NORTH CENTRAL REGION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025

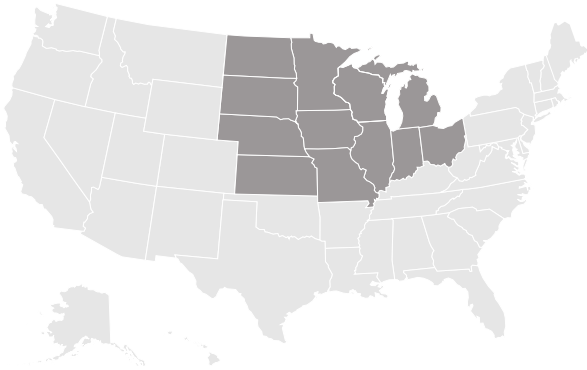
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NORTH CENTRAL REGION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION

The National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) defines community development as “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, equality, economic opportunity, and social justice, through the organization, education, and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings.”

Community Development Extension programs can be found in all twelve states in the North Central Region. Given the breadth of community development as a field, Community Development Extension programs are implemented in a variety of ways.



2025 North Central Program Leaders and Liaisons

David Civittolo, The Ohio State University
Lindsey Day Farnsworth, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Josh Gunn, Michigan State University
Brandi Hilton-Hagemann, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Imani Holland, Central State University
Dave Ivan, Michigan State University
Steve Jeanetta, University of Minnesota
Carrie Johnson, North Dakota State University
Deborah Kohl, Kansas State University
Joseph Lucente, The Ohio State University
Maria Marshall, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development

Yvonne Matthews, Lincoln University
Erin Olson-Douglas, Iowa State University
Jordan Rasmussen, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Mark Rendleman, Central State University
Kristen Runge, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Rob Russell, University of Missouri
Peggy Schlechter, South Dakota State University
Mark White, University of Illinois
Michael Wilcox, Purdue University
Claire Wolff, University of Missouri

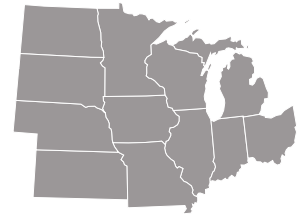
NCRCRD Thematic Area Color Coding

The impact statements in the report are color coded to recognize their connection to the thematic areas of NCRCRD’s mission. The color of the line above the impact statement title indicates the thematic area.

- Creating Resilient Communities & Economies
- Developing Leadership & Civic Engagement
- Promoting Community Health & Wellness

2025 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

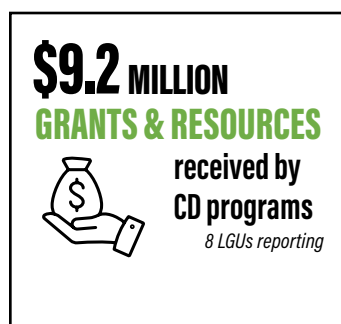
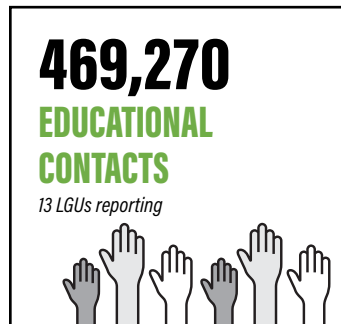
of North Central Region Community Development Extension Impacts



North Central Region
 Illinois, Indiana, Iowa,
 Kansas, Michigan,
 Minnesota, Missouri,
 Nebraska, North Dakota,
 Ohio, South Dakota,
 Wisconsin

In 2009, University Extension leaders from the twelve North Central 1862 land-grant universities (LGUs) originally developed common indicators for reporting the impacts of community and economic development educational programs. In 2024, the North Central Region led an effort to revise these impact indicators with the support of the [North Central Cooperative Extension Association](#) (NCCEA), the [Southern Rural Development Center](#) (SRDC), and the [North Central Regional Center for Rural Development](#) (NCRCRD).

For this report, thirteen North Central program leaders reported their program's outcomes utilizing both sets of impact indicators. Below are the region's cumulative impacts for the top nine indicators reported. *Note not all programs collect all the indicators listed which is reflected in the LGU reporting number.*



ILLINOIS



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Location: Urbana, IL

<https://extension.illinois.edu/>



9,650



EDUCATIONAL CONTACTS



\$141 MILLION

GRANTS & RESOURCES

generated by
communities

4,122



Participants completed SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	9,650
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	35
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	29
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	65
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	2,811
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$97,795
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$140,748,456*
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	4,122
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$891,706
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	17

** Much of this is driven by Broadband dollars that communities secured, in part with plan/proposal support provided by UI Extension.*

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Supporting the Delta Regional Authority's Propel Program

In 2025, University of Illinois Extension actively supported the Delta Regional Authority's (DRA) Propel Program, by providing structured programming and direct technical assistance for three communities within the DRA service area — Eldorado, Mounds, and Murphysboro. Among other efforts, Susan Odum — a State Specialist serving Southern Illinois — helped leaders in these participating communities to pursue external grant funding. For example, Odum worked with the City of Eldorado to prepare grant applications that addressed critical infrastructure needs. As a result of this assistance, the City of Eldorado was awarded \$795,290 in 2025 from the Delta Regional Authority for a flood control infrastructure project which the city used to repair and upgrade the flood infrastructure around Ferrell Hospital — the city's critical access hospital. In 2024, severe flooding forced that hospital to close for several months. Susan Odum provided additional technical assistance that helped the City of Eldorado put together a successful Delta Catalyst Fund application, resulting in a \$75,000 grant to purchase equipment for the sewer department.



Mark White, University of Illinois delivering data training in Harrisburg, IL

In addition to the direct technical assistance, University of Illinois' Community and Economic Development (CED) program also organized and delivered a Data Training for Local Government Workshop for regional stakeholders. Delivered by Mark White and Zach Kennedy, this day-long, hands-on workshop brought together leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build practical skills in locating, interpreting, and applying public data.

■ Illinois Grocers Summit

In 2025, the Community and Economic Development (CED) team advanced its work in strengthening rural food access through the launch of the [Southern Illinois Food Access Independent Grocer Summit](#), held at John A. Logan College. The inaugural gathering brought together independent grocery store owners, managers, and food system partners from across the lower 22 counties of Illinois. Thirty participants attended, including representatives from nine grocery stores and a range of sponsors, speakers, and exhibitors. The Summit was designed to connect rural grocers with practical resources and peer expertise to help them remain competitive in a challenging retail environment.

Throughout the half-day program, presenters shared information on grant and loan opportunities, digital marketing and emerging AI tools, energy-efficiency strategies, business transition planning, and new refrigerant regulations. Sessions also highlighted opportunities for collaboration with local farmers and featured a panel discussion on adaptability and resiliency led by three long-standing store owners with more than a century of combined experience. Participant feedback reflected strong satisfaction with the event and interest in continued collaboration on topics such as energy efficiency, local food sourcing, and workforce development, including meat-cutter recruitment and training.



Summit presenter, Carly Whorton, Kansas State University and Rural Grocer Initiative addressed planning for transition at the inaugural event.

The Summit was part of the broader [Southern Illinois Food Access initiative](#), a program led by CED Educator John Shadowens, that addresses food insecurity and prevents the spread of rural food deserts. Based out of Unit 27, the Illinois Extension team works closely with more than forty independent grocery stores and over a dozen food system partners to strengthen retail food access and ensure that healthy, nutrient-dense foods remain available in areas at risk of losing their local grocers.

INDIANA



Extension

Location: West Lafayette, IN
<https://extension.purdue.edu/cdext/>



6,857



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

166



**community
or organizational
PLANS / POLICIES
DEVELOPED**



**\$1.08
MILLION**

**GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by
communities**

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	6,857
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	166
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	39
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$1,357
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$1,082,671
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	214
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	14.6

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ **Beginner's Guide to Grant Writing Helps Indiana Communities Access Funding**

For 20 years, Purdue Extension's award-winning [Beginner's Guide to Grant Writing \(BGGW\) program](#) has helped residents turn community-led ideas into funded realities. Recognized nationally and adopted in several North Central states, BGGW equips individuals from nonprofits and local governments with the skills and confidence to pursue grant funding for vital community projects.

The two-day in-person workshop walks participants through the grant-writing process, from crafting a compelling proposal to identifying funding sources. By the end of Day 1, each participant leaves with a draft outline of a proposal. Day 2 brings hands-on practice in reviewing grants and engaging with a panel of local experts. The program also includes limited free access to a national funder database and review of proposal drafts.

In 2024-25, 18 Purdue Extension Educators delivered 16 programs across 13 Indiana counties. Post-program surveys showed compelling results: 98% of respondents learned more about the basic components of a grant proposal, 97% improved their grant writing skills, and 95% gained greater confidence. The program earned a Net Promoter Score of +82, a world-class rating.

The longer-term impact is equally strong. A one-year follow-up of 2023-24 participants found that 74% had submitted a grant proposal since completing the program. 83% of submitters received funding, generating at least \$1,082,671 for community projects. Alumni also reported 111 new partnerships and 11 jobs created. Grants awarded supported community playgrounds, food access, substance abuse prevention programs, and the renovation of historical buildings.



Purdue's Beginner's Guide to Grant Writing two-day workshop in Porter County, Indiana.

■ **Indiana R-STEP: Supporting Informed Reliable Energy Planning**

Indiana is experiencing an energy transition, with an increasingly diverse mix of electricity generation fuels and new technologies. The Department of Energy (DOE) released funding to support communities through this transition. This requires a network of stakeholders to collaboratively develop resources about how utility-scale wind and solar energy may fit into the local landscape and to support local decision-making.

[Indiana R-STEP](#) was selected as a 2024 recipient of that funding. Purdue Extension Community Development leads the Indiana Renewable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement and Planning (IN R-STEP) collaborative, serving as a technical resource and community engagement hub, providing Indiana communities with data, tools, and educational resources to support informed, utility-scale reliable energy planning. Indiana partners include the American Planning Association-Indiana, Ball State University, Center for Energy Education, CN Consulting, Farm-to-Power, Indiana University Public Policy Institute, and The Nature Conservancy.

In 2025, the Indiana R-STEP collaborative delivered 19 educational events, including in-person and online opportunities through webinars, tours, conferences, and workshops, as well as peer-to-peer networking events in six counties plus statewide, reaching 788 participants.

The evaluation sought to understand the knowledge participants gained, their confidence in decision-making, and their aspirations to use that knowledge. Of those who responded, 91% reported knowledge gained, 95 individuals felt more confident in their decision-making, and 88% plan to utilize new information. Participants noted they would use what they learned to inform ordinance updates, support their work on the plan commission, better understand how the grid works, and initiate conversations about agrivoltaics.

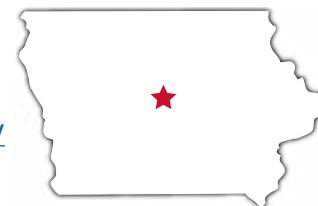


A wind farm educational tour in White County, Indiana hosted by Purdue Extension's Indiana R-STEP in 2025.

IOWA

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

Location: Ames, Iowa
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/>



67,150



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

11,200



**Participants completed
SKILL DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING**



**\$27.5
MILLION**

**GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities**

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	67,150
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	65
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	67
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	3,100
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$107,849
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$27,500,000
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	11,200
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$776,000
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	30

* for Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA) program only.

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Iowa's Municipal Professionals Institute: Bridging the Knowledge Gap in Rural Iowa

The role of a city clerk or municipal professional is a crucial position in local government, yet it is increasingly demanding. In many of Iowa's rural communities, high staff turnover is a persistent challenge. When a seasoned clerk leaves, they often take decades of institutional knowledge with them.

The [Iowa Municipal Professionals Institute](#) (MPI) serves as an essential onboarding training for these local leaders. Designed to be accessible and comprehensive, the MPI offers approximately 30 unique courses annually through a hybrid model — utilizing two virtual sessions (February and October) and one intensive in-person session in Ames, Iowa each summer. The curriculum is meticulously designed to cover the full spectrum of municipal duty, from mastering the general ledger and auditing to understanding parliamentary procedures and risk management.

In 2025, the program demonstrated its immense reach by training 260 individuals, representing 98 out of Iowa's 99 counties. This near-total state coverage ensures that whether a community is a large metro or a small rural town, its leaders have access to the same high-quality, expert instruction.

The results from the 2025 cycle underscore the program's effectiveness:

- **Concept Mastery:** Participants achieved a 95% pass rate on all end-of-course assessments
- **Knowledge Shift:** The data shows a dramatic shift in confidence; on average, 62% of attendees transitioned from having "no knowledge" to feeling fully "knowledgeable" about their specific course subjects.
- **Professional Advancement:** 24% of attendees (61 participants) successfully earned their Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) designation through the Iowa Municipal Finance Officers Association (IMFOA). And roughly 50% of those became certified reported receiving a salary increase or a contract extension.*

By investing in these professionals, Iowa communities are improving the delivery of government services and enhancing the way local governments assist local residents.

* Note: certification requires multiple criteria over a period of time; it is not expected that all participants become certified in a single year.



■ 2025 Planning & Zoning Program

Local land use decisions shape the future of every Iowa community — determining where homes are built, how businesses grow, and which natural resources are protected. Yet most local officials step into their roles with little or no formal education or training in the fundamentals of planning or zoning.

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach [Planning & Zoning \(P&Z\) program](#) is designed and implemented to respond directly to this gap. This program provides a low cost, objective, and accessible introduction to the principles and practices of land use planning, zoning, and subdivision regulation. Participants learn the fundamentals of comprehensive planning, the structure and purpose of zoning ordinances, and the roles and responsibilities of local officials, including planning commissions, zoning boards of adjustment, zoning administrators, and elected representatives.



In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025, the P&Z program was offered ten times across ten Iowa counties, reaching 397 local officials. Participants represented communities of all sizes — rural towns, growing suburbs, and regional hubs — all seeking clarity, consistency, and confidence in their land use decision making.

Evaluation results of FFY 2025 participants demonstrate the program's strong impact:

- 89% of FFY 2025 participants improved their knowledge by at least one full point on a scale of 1-5 on average across all 14 P&Z concepts surveyed.
- Every topic area showed significant gains, with the largest improvements in:
 - Conflict of interest scenarios
 - Special/conditional use permits
 - Zoning amendments
- 60 participants reported having taken the P&Z training previously, returned to learn something new or reinforce their understanding.
 - Surveys indicated that over half of participants who had taken the training before could identify a specific change or action they had taken in their community or in their role because of the previous training session.

KANSAS



Extension

Location: Manhattan, KS
<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/>



IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	196,011
Number of community or organziational plans/policies developed	83
Number of community or organziational plans/policies adopted or implemented	80
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	26
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	22,235
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$773,556
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$2,001,337
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	307
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$449,918
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	4.2

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Kansas Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities

Kansas' inaugural [Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities \(CEC\) Conference](#) was held June 26-27, 2025 with a pre-conference event on June 24. This immersive conference supports rural entrepreneurship across the state in communities with populations of fewer than 10,000 people. CEC focuses on engaging with small communities and highlighting businesses and the people who live and work there. The conference also supports the host town and local economy. The event includes designated activities for participants to explore the host community and shop locally.

The Kingman community (pop. 3,105) and others, saw concrete results from the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference. Some of those results include:

- A business owner sold a building to a conference participant.
- A downtown shop reported its best sales day ever because of the conference.
- One conference participant returned to Kingman and is now considering relocating there to start a new business.
- The Kansas Micro-Internship program, an event sponsor, connected several conference participants and local business owners with student interns to help with projects.
- A couple who attended the conference met a K-State Food Systems Navigator who worked with them to receive a \$50,000 USDA grant to start an incubator kitchen in Sharon Springs.

Nancy Daniels, Conference Chair, credits the success of the conference with state partnerships: Kansas State University and K-State Extension; Network Kansas; the Kansas Department of Commerce Quality Places Division, including the Office of Rural Prosperity and Kansas Main Street; and Thrive Kansas.



■ Kansas Food Business Start-up Summit

In September 2025, the K-State Extension Community Food Systems Team launched the inaugural [Kansas Food Business Start-up Summit](#) in Lawrence, creating a first-of-its-kind working retreat designed to support emerging food and farm entrepreneurs across the state.

Developed in response to more than 250 technical assistance interactions with Kansas food businesses, the Summit addressed recurring challenges entrepreneurs face, including navigating food safety and licensing requirements, accessing financing, developing effective branding and marketing strategies, and identifying reliable distribution channels.

The two-day Summit convened 27 entrepreneurs representing 15 businesses from diverse sectors of Kansas's food economy. Participants worked in small teams alongside experienced entrepreneur-facilitators who guided goal-setting, strategic planning, and problem-solving exercises.

A hallmark of the event was its "speed-dating" technical assistance model, which connected attendees directly with 16 Key Informants from organizations including the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Network Kansas, the Kansas Small Business Development Center, and the Kansas Value-Added Foods Lab. These sessions provided tailored guidance on finance, legal structure, regulatory compliance, branding, co-packing, and market development.

The Summit also featured keynote presentations, facilitated reflection sessions, and a visit to the Douglas County Culinary Commons Incubator Kitchen. Participants reported increased confidence, stronger business readiness, and meaningful new relationships with peers, advisors, and support organizations. Many described the experience as "demystifying" complex regulatory and business systems while helping them gain renewed focus, momentum, and a stronger sense of community within Kansas's growing local food ecosystem.

MICHIGAN



Location: East Lansing, MI
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>



768

community
or organizational
**PLANS / POLICIES
DEVELOPED**



31,953

**VOLUNTEER
HOURS**
for community
generated work



 **\$7.8
MILLION**

GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by
communities

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	82,379
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	768
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	148
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	208
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	31,953
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$1,078,094
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$7,793,983
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	714
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	50

IMPACT STATEMENTS

Short-Term Rental Options for Local Communities

Strengthening local capacity to navigate short-term rental policy and housing goals in Michigan

Short-term rentals (STRs) have expanded rapidly nationwide, moving beyond major tourist destinations into communities of all sizes. In Michigan, many [local governments are also facing housing shortages and affordability challenges](#). STRs can present both opportunities and concerns for communities, requiring efforts that support tourism and local economies to be balanced with potential impacts on housing availability, neighborhood character, and public health and safety.

In 2025, Michigan State University Extension delivered eight 1.5-hour programs to share current research on the STR industry, Michigan's legal framework for STR regulation, and more than a dozen policy examples from communities of varying sizes and contexts. Participants also received [an in-depth report on STRs from the MSU Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy](#) to strengthen their STR policy toolkits.

In all, the "Short-Term Rental Options for Local Communities" programs engaged 116 local leaders, including elected and appointed officials, planners, and administrators from across Michigan. Post-event evaluations demonstrated strong learning and confidence gains. Of the 84 participants who completed the evaluation, more than 96% reported increased knowledge of the topic, and nearly 91% indicated they could now suggest ways to regulate or enforce STRs in their communities.

Participants also reported enhanced skills and confidence to fulfill their local leadership roles, with many indicating plans to apply what they learned during the program. These outcomes indicate participants are better prepared to lead informed, constructive discussions and pursue STR policy actions aligned with their community goals.

Michigan Emerging Leader Program

Michigan Emerging Leader Program inspires personal growth and thoughtful leadership across sectors

Leaders across business, education, nonprofit and government sectors face increasingly complex challenges that require more than technical expertise. Effective leadership today depends on self-awareness, emotional intelligence, empathy, and the ability to navigate relationships and systems thoughtfully. Many professionals lack impactful opportunities to pause, reflect and intentionally develop these foundational leadership capacities. Creating space for personal growth and relational skill-building is essential to cultivating leaders who can foster inclusive workplaces, strengthen organizations and serve their communities.

Michigan State University Extension's [Great Lakes Leadership Academy](#) addresses this need through its annual [Emerging Leader Program](#) (ELP). In 2025, 29 leaders from across Michigan participated in the program, engaging in three immersive, three-day sessions that combined facilitated dialogue, coaching, experiential learning, and reflective practice.

Participants explore core leadership capacities including systems thinking, vulnerability, humility, continuous learning, and empathy. The program emphasizes authentic connection, understanding how individual actions affect broader systems, and translating personal insight into effective leadership across sectors.

Post-program evaluation responses demonstrated significant growth across all 30 leadership development competencies



The 2025 Cohort of the Great Lakes Leadership Academy's Emerging Leader Program.

measured. Respondents averaged an 18.4% increase in their leadership capacity, with the greatest growth seen in developing written plans for professional growth (47% increase) and applying systems thinking when addressing complex situations (35.5% increase). Respondents also rated the program's structure and content highly, indicating the sessions were worth the time invested (4.89/5.00), meaningful (4.86/5.00), and aligned to their learning style (4.68/5.00).

By cultivating leaders who value empathy, connection, and continuous learning, the Emerging Leader Program strengthens organizations and communities while empowering leaders to serve everyone.

"These are incredibly powerful sessions! They literally changed my life."

- Michigan Emerging Leader Program participant

MINNESOTA



Location: St. Paul, MN
<https://extension.umn.edu/>



17,900



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

12,100



**Participants completed
SKILL DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING**

\$2.2
MILLION

**GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities**

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	17,900
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	39
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	27
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	11
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	1,540
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$58,766
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$2,215,135
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	12,100
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$621,350
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	36.3

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Blandin Community Learning Network's Focus: Minnesota's Smallest Towns

Minnesota's smallest towns — communities of 3,000 or fewer residents — face challenges such as limited staff capacity, isolation, and few opportunities for shared learning leading to burnout and scarcity. In 2024, the Blandin Foundation offered one-time funding for small rural communities' priorities, but leaders also needed long-term capacity-building opportunities to sustain their efforts. University of Minnesota Extension developed the Blandin Community Learning Network to equip, engage, and connect leaders from eight small rural communities using an asset-based approach grounded in the Community Capital Framework.

The year-long program unfolded in three phases: identifying community assets and exploring possibilities, participating in five months of online learning focused on cultural, human, political, and social capitals, and applying



Strategic Doing™ to collaborate strategically and take action. Participants strengthened their leadership capacity, confidence, and cross-community connections.

The evaluation showed a 105% increase in participants' ability to forge partnerships, an 81% gain in identifying actionable opportunities, a 76% boost in project leadership confidence, and a 67% increase in the belief that positive change is possible. Leaders noted the following:

- "It has opened many doors on how to get things done within our community using our best resource — the people."
- "I've learned some of our community assets and strengths and how we can collaborate and lean on/look to each other for assistance."
- "Better understanding of why projects may have failed."

Leaders reported applying their learning through monthly collaboration, downtown business expansion, pollinator garden initiatives, and increased civic engagement. By strengthening leadership skills, capacity and fostering regional networks, the Blandin Community Learning Network enables rural leaders to move beyond deficit-based recovery toward sustained, asset-driven community and economic development. The program contributes to stronger civic engagement, resilient communities, and long-term vitality.

In the article, [Leading the way: six tips for energizing your small community](#), the Blandin Community Learning Network shares insights from their work.

■ Transfer of Wealth, Minnesota

Minnesota households collectively held \$3.1 trillion in net worth in 2025, with \$105 billion projected to be transferred during the next decade as baby boomers sell homes, farms, and other assets. Without localized wealth transfer data, community members and nonprofit leaders lack the tools to plan charitable giving and grow community foundations, risking resources that support economic development, civic engagement, and long-term prosperity.

University of Minnesota Extension's Department of Community Development addressed this challenge using a two-pronged approach. First, Extension conducted county-level analysis to quantify local wealth and project the timing and scale of upcoming transfers. The analysis also highlighted the risk that wealth built by, with, and in rural communities could leave without intentional planning. Second, Extension educated the public through community foundations and nonprofits, providing localized data and practical guidance to set realistic giving goals and foster meaningful conversations among donors, advisors, and community leaders about retaining wealth locally.

In 2025, workshops and presentations reached 1,303 participants, providing county-specific estimates and tools showing that retaining only 5–10% of transferred wealth could significantly strengthen nonprofit services, fund community

projects, and support local economic vitality. A special analysis comparing wealth changes from 2021 to 2024 highlighted growth in rural communities and the role of assets, such as retirement accounts and land. Extension launched a [public website featuring Transfer of Wealth studies](#) for all Minnesota counties, a statewide report, and six custom regional reports, all of which are free to the public.

Nonprofit leaders and foundations use the data to improve their strategic planning, board engagement, and fundraising goals. Regional development commissions and initiative foundation systems incorporated the findings into annual planning, while organizations such as the West Central Initiative hosted giving events to help donors, advisors, and families explore how capturing even a small percentage of local wealth can build lasting community assets.

Broader public benefits were strengthened by a \$50,000 grant from the Minnesota Council on Foundations, which supported the "Minnesota State Share: 5% Does a Whole Lotta Good" campaign. By helping communities capture and put transferred wealth to work, these efforts ensure that investments made by today's generation build lasting assets that benefit current and future residents of the community.

MISSOURI



Location; Columbia, MO
<https://extension.missouri.edu/>



82,655



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

22,780



**VOLUNTEER
HOURS**

for community
generated work



**\$700
THOUSAND**

GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	82,665
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	39
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	26
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	90
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	22,780
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$492,406
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$713,785

IMPACT STATEMENTS

Missouri Good Neighbor Week 2025

Created by MU Extension Community Development Field Specialist David Burton and officially recognized by the Missouri Legislature in 2022, [Missouri Good Neighbor Week](#) celebrates acts of kindness and connection that strengthen local neighborhoods.

In 2025, Missourians once again demonstrated the power of neighborliness during Missouri Good Neighbor Week (Sept. 28–Oct. 4, 2025), an annual statewide celebration of everyday kindness and connection coordinated by University of Missouri Extension and supported by The Hopeful Neighborhood Project.



According to the official report, 42,134 acts of neighborliness were documented this week through 433 different neighboring actions, pledges, campaigns, and proclamations — making this Missouri's largest civic engagement event focused on building stronger communities.

Reports were submitted from 110 cities and 86 counties across both urban and rural Missouri. Participants ranged from large cities like Springfield, Kansas City, and Manchester to smaller communities like Cardwell, Hume and Fremont Hills.

In addition to acts of kindness and block gatherings, more than 100 Missourians took the Engaged Neighbor Pledge, committing to ongoing efforts to get to know their immediate neighbors and care for their local communities year-round.

County Extension Councils and 4-H clubs across the state also participated at a high level this year, accounting for over 19,000 of the reported acts of neighboring. County Extension Council volunteers hosted movie screenings about neighbors, hosted meal events and community socials, funded and packed various items for food pantries and made a positive impact in their respective communities during the week.

Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference: Excelsior Springs, Missouri

The 2025 [Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities \(CEC\) Conference](#) held in Excelsior Springs, Missouri demonstrated significant reach and influence across Missouri and neighboring states, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone convening for entrepreneurial ecosystem builders. Preconference registration data reflects participation from 46 unique Missouri counties, with strong representation from Clay, Boone, and Jackson counties, underscoring both geographic diversity and concentrated engagement in key regions. Attendees represented 94 unique ZIP codes, with 86% based in Missouri and 14% from out of state, illustrating the conference's expanding regional pull.



or independent practitioners (10). This diverse mix strengthened opportunities for cross sector collaboration, peer learning, and alignment among organizations working to support entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Attendance data highlights strong loyalty and sustained value. Forty attendees were repeat participants, many of whom have attended multiple CEC conferences over several years, signaling continued relevance and impact. The top drivers of attendance — MU Extension communication channels, repeat participation, and social media promotion — reflect effective outreach strategies and a trusted reputation within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

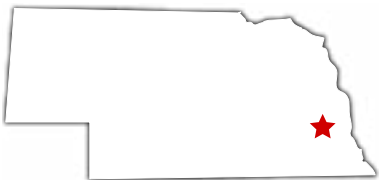
The CEC Conference successfully convened a broad cross section of organizations essential to entrepreneurial development. Participants included educational institutions (26), associations and networks (25), nonprofits (18), chambers of commerce (15), and consultants

Overall, the [2025 CEC Conference](#) reinforced a robust statewide network of ecosystem leaders, expanded regional connectivity, and deepened collaboration across sectors, contributing to stronger, more coordinated entrepreneurial communities throughout Missouri and beyond.

NEBRASKA



Location: Lincoln, NE
<https://extension.unl.edu/>



IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	9,522
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	26
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	7
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	44
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	302
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$10,507
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$843,000
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	2,161
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$980,248
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	14.0

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Small Business Program Helps 1,000th Business Open Its Doors

A year ago, Joel Yera was working the night shift as a sanitation worker in Grand Island. Today, he owns and operates Yera Transportation, a growing business that hauls everything from furniture to farm and construction equipment across the Midwest.

Yera is one of more than [1,000 Nebraska entrepreneurs](#) who have launched or expanded a business with support from Rural Prosperity Nebraska's [Small Business Program](#). Guided by Rural Prosperity Nebraska Extension Educator Sandra Barrera, the program helps entrepreneurs move from idea to action through one-on-one coaching, technical assistance, and trusted connections.

For Yera, that meant building a business plan, securing financing, and purchasing two trucks and flatbed trailers. Just weeks after opening, he was already planning for growth.

"It feels good to be your own boss," Yera said.

Since launching the Small Business Program in 2015, Barrera has helped entrepreneurs across Nebraska navigate the stages of business development — from permits and financing to site selection and expansion. Her work begins with a simple but important question: What is your passion?

That question has helped turn ideas into action for more than 1,000 Nebraska entrepreneurs — business owners who are creating jobs and strengthening local economies in communities across the state.

These businesses do more than create income for their owners. They fill storefronts, strengthen local supply chains, and keep dollars circulating in Nebraska communities. Through the Small Business Program, Rural Prosperity Nebraska is helping entrepreneurs turn local passion into lasting economic opportunity.



Joel Yera, owner, Yera Transportation, who received support from the Rural Prosperity Nebraska's Small Business Program. Photo credit: Russell Shaffer.

■ Community Leaders Complete County Official Online Learning Network Course

In partnership with the Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO), Nebraska Extension's [County Official Online Learning Network](#) (COOL Network) is strengthening local government leadership across Nebraska by equipping county officials with practical knowledge, stronger peer networks, and greater confidence to serve effectively.

Now entering its fifth year, the COOL Network has supported more than 150 county officials from 66 of Nebraska's 93 counties through accessible, applied leadership education designed specifically for local government. Designed for newer county officials, the program combines three weeks of online learning with an in-person session focused on the core functions of county government and public leadership.

Participants build practical knowledge in county governance, finance, human resources, leadership, and public service responsibilities — developing a stronger foundation for informed decision-making and effective local governance. The program draws on expertise from Nebraska Extension, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska Omaha, connecting county officials with university faculty, government practitioners, and subject-matter experts from across the state.

Just as important, the program creates space for county officials to connect with peers across Nebraska and strengthen collaboration beyond the course.

The COOL Network addresses a critical need in Nebraska: preparing county officials to navigate increasingly complex local challenges with greater confidence, competence, and clarity. By investing in the knowledge and leadership capacity of county officials, the program is helping build stronger counties, more effective local governance, and more responsive public leadership across the state.



Rural Prosperity Nebraska Extension Educator Jordan Rasmussen (far left) celebrates the completion of the 2025 COOL Network course with graduates from across the state.

NORTH DAKOTA



Location: Fargo, ND
<https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension>



 **\$593**
THOUSAND

GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities

999 

Participants completed
SKILL DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING

\$1.35 MILLION

GRANTS & RESOURCES
received by
CD programs 

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	2,598
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	19
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	19
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	27
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$939
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$592,588
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	999
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$1,346,568
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	3.0

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Aging in Community Facilitated Stakeholder Meetings

NDSU Extension's Aging in Community stakeholder meetings are strengthening the capacity of North Dakota communities to support older adults through locally driven, collaborative solutions. As the program expands statewide, these facilitated meetings bring together diverse stakeholders — including public health, local leaders, service providers, and residents — to identify priority needs and align community resources. In rural areas where older adults face increased risks of isolation, limited transportation, and barriers to health care access, this coordinated approach is critical to improving quality of life and enabling individuals to age safely and independently in their communities.

Through structured facilitation, communities are not only identifying their most pressing needs but also mobilizing action. In participating counties, stakeholders have prioritized key areas such as socialization, volunteer engagement, care coordination, and transportation. These discussions have led to the formation of local steering committees, development of program coordinator positions, and identification of physical spaces to support programming — demonstrating a clear transition from conversation to implementation.

The impact extends beyond immediate program development. These meetings build local ownership, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and increase community readiness to address aging-related challenges.



One of the Aging in Community Steering Committees formed in a county that participated in the NDSU Extension program.

Early feedback highlights strong community demand and perceived value, with stakeholders noting the program's potential to improve service navigation, reduce isolation, and enhance overall well-being.

By fostering collaboration and empowering communities to design solutions that reflect local needs, Aging in Community is creating more connected, resilient systems of support — ensuring older North Dakotans can remain engaged, supported, and thriving in the places they call home.

■ Community Workforce Development: Integrating Precision Agriculture into Secondary Education

NDSU Extension is strengthening North Dakota's community workforce by aligning education, industry, and local needs through Community Workforce Partnership meetings and targeted training in Precision Agriculture. By convening educators, industry representatives, and workforce professionals statewide, Extension ensured workforce development efforts reflect real-world demands. These collaborations identified a critical need to expand AgTech education, access to equipment, and career and technical education opportunities — laying the foundation for a more skilled, future-ready workforce.

In response, Extension implemented a credit-bearing teacher training program focused on integrating Precision Agriculture into secondary education. This approach builds workforce capacity at its source — equipping educators with the skills, tools, and confidence to prepare students for high-demand careers in agricultural technology. The program's emphasis on hands-on, industry-connected

learning ensures students gain relevant, applied skills aligned with employer needs.

The impact is immediate and scalable. Teacher understanding of Precision Agriculture increased from 27% to 73%, and confidence in teaching the content rose from 18% to 73%. Within three months, 100% of participants implemented Precision Ag lessons in their classrooms and contributed additional lessons, expanding shared curriculum resources statewide. These outcomes demonstrate rapid adoption and readiness to grow AgTech instruction across North Dakota schools.

By strengthening educator capacity and embedding workforce-relevant skills into classrooms, NDSU Extension is building a sustainable talent pipeline. This work positions North Dakota as a leader in AgTech innovation — attracting investment, supporting industry growth, and creating long-term career opportunities in rural communities.

OHIO



CENTRAL
STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension

Location: Wilberforce, Ohio
<https://www.centralstate.edu/academics/science/extension>



5,069



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

359 ACTIVITIES

**offered
through
CD Extension**

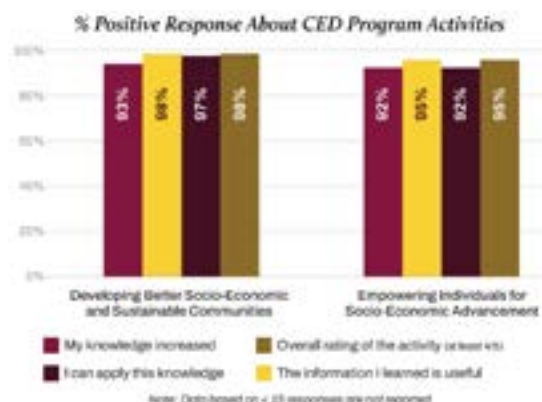


IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	5,069
Number of activities offered through Community Development Extension	359

The Central State University (CSU) Extension Community and Economic Development (CED) team creates pathways to success by providing education and technical assistance to communities, organizations, and individuals. CED focuses on workforce development by connecting people with resources to build skills and prepare for employment.

In 2025, CED educators offered 359 activities and engaged 5,069 participants across 13 counties. Programs supported small business and agribusiness owners and community members, covering entrepreneurship, farm financial management, community development, money management, and workforce development.



IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ GodRich Farms – Central State Extension Growing Equity Workshop

The Central State University Extension Community and Economic Development's Growing Equity Grant Program was conducted in Akron Ohio in partnership with GodRich Farms.

The six-part workshop covered agribusiness topics including business startup, business planning, marketing, and financial statement record keeping. Fifteen participants who complete the program consisted of community members as well as current Ag-entrepreneurs. CED Akron will host its third quarter Growing Equity Workshop Series in August.

The 2025 Growing Equity Workshop participants (left to right): Jennifer Hall, Michelle Cobbin, Kisha Parker, Louise Johnson, Ronald Blackmon, Cheryl Clements, Vernon Clements, Richard Jones, and Lucille Johnson



■ Collaboration Brings Financial Literacy Workshop to Veterans in Northwest Ohio

Central State University and Owens Community College TRIO Veterans Upward Bound Department joined together to provide a 4-week financial literacy workshop to Veterans. Lisa Lawrence, CSU's Community Economic Development Extension Educator, Northwest Ohio and Heather Vincil, Project Specialist, collaborated and offered an engaging, impactful workshop to Veterans.

Lawrence said, "It was a privilege and an honor to work with those who have faithfully served our country. The classes were filled with conversation and great ideas. We learned from each other!"

But the workshop was more than just learning about financial literacy. Education was the first step and assistance with applying what was learned was the next step. Central State University has another partnership with Neighbor Works Toledo. This partnership allowed Neighbor Works Toledo to come to the last session to share all their resources and programs, such as credit counseling, home ownership program, free taxes, and much more. Veterans were given contact information to sign up. Teamwork really does make the dream work!



CSU Extension Educator Lisa Lawrence (standing) listens to a Northwest Ohio Veterans during one of the financial literacy workshop sessions.

OHIO



Location: Columbus, Ohio
<https://extension.osu.edu/>



51,268



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**

30,715

**VOLUNTEER
HOURS**

for community
generated work



\$4.15 MILLION

GRANTS & RESOURCES



received by
CD programs

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	51,268
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	67
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	59
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	477
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	30,715
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$1,062,312
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$2,211,544
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	12,155
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$4,151,545
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	32.0

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Multi-Agency Partnership Assists Ohio Marinas in Job Retention and Expansion

Relevance: The Ohio Marine Trades Association (OMTA), the Ohio Clean Marinas Program (OCMP), and Ohio Department of Natural Resources Office of Coastal Management (ODNR) are concerned about business operations, attitudes, and opinions of marina owners and operators in Ohio. The agencies wanted to identify statewide marina concerns and perceptions to form an economic development strategy, helping to retain and expand current business operations.

Response: In 2025, Ohio Sea Grant and Ohio State University Extension led a [Business Retention and Expansion program](#) in partnership with OMTA, OCMP and ODNR to survey Ohio marina businesses across the state to assess plans and concerns regarding job retention, creation, and business expansion activities.

Results: Ohio Sea Grant provided targeted business information, training, and outreach that enhanced business operations and supported 1,051 jobs in the Ohio marina industry in 2025, according to surveys. Salary data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported by participating coastal business showed a \$42,785 mean wage for all reporting business sectors. Based on the National Sea Grant Office

Primer on Job and Business Support and Creation, this program supported \$44,967,035 worth of jobs in 2025. OMTA and OCMP reported developing resilient strategies, proactively helping employers and framing targeted response strategies because of the Business Retention and Expansion program.

Recap: Ohio Sea Grant's Business Retention and Expansion program identified needs and concerns of coastal marina businesses with partners from three state agencies. Targeted business information, training tools, and outreach led to resilient, proactive strategies that supported 1,051 jobs valued at \$44,967,035 in 2025.



■ Fayette County, Ohio Strategic Growth and Community Alignment

Relevance: The Noble County Health Care Complex is a Primary Care Plus health facility designed to bring expanded healthcare services to a region that is a healthcare desert with no in-county hospital or care available beyond Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4 p.m. The facility will be uniquely located on the campus of Caldwell Elementary School and will operate as a school-based health center, student workforce development center, and a community Jobs Ohio One Stop.

Response: Extension assisted with engaging and bringing key partners to the planning of a health care resource for Noble County as well as with project management and grant writing. This Caldwell Exempted School District school-based clinic project received an Appalachian Community Innovation Center Grant request through the Ohio Department of Development for \$8,358,966 and was fully funded.

Results: The Health Clinic will include the construction of a single-story 16,183 square foot medical office complex with a dental clinic, on-site lab, x-ray, ultrasound, mammography and mobile CT scan services, telehealth for specialty services, and a School-Based and adult workforce training component on the Caldwell Elementary School Campus.



The Primary Care Plus facility will house 6 exam rooms, 4 telehealth treatment rooms, 4 dental operatories with 4 exam rooms, laboratory space, and specialty treatment areas for mammography, x-ray, (mobile CT scan) and 4 classroom spaces with 4 meeting rooms to accommodate up to 30 students for the Medical Pathways and Workforce Programs operated by Caldwell Schools (in partnership with regional colleges). The project is underway and will be completed by mid-2026.

SOUTH DAKOTA



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**

Location: Brookings, SD
[https://extension.sdstate.edu/
community](https://extension.sdstate.edu/community)



3,528



**EDUCATIONAL
CONTACTS**



**\$130
THOUSAND**

**GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities**

526



**Participants completed
SKILL DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING**

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	3,528
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	6
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	3
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	10
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	350
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$12,177
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$130,000
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	526
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$16,000
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	4.0

IMPACT STATEMENTS

2025 Energize! Exploring Innovative Rural Communities Conference – South Dakota

The 2025 [Energize! Exploring Innovative Rural Communities Conference](#) reaffirmed its role as a powerful driver of rural vitality South Dakota. Hosted May 6–7 in Platte, South Dakota, the seventh annual event convened 150 community leaders, volunteers, and local champions to exchange ideas, strengthen networks, and gain practical tools for advancing local development efforts.

Keynote speaker Rebecca Udem, founder of Growing Small Towns, alongside South Dakota-based presenters, delivered sessions grounded in real community experience. Breakouts highlighted actionable strategies in areas such as rural tourism, fundraising, volunteer engagement, and leadership development. Survey responses — 66 total, with 54 fully

completed — showed strong appreciation for the conference's practical, energizing content. Participants emphasized the value of peer learning, noting that the opportunity to share successes and challenges sparked new ideas and renewed motivation.

The conference also generated measurable benefits for the host community. Attendee spending contributed an estimated \$56,916–\$68,850 to the local economy, supporting hotels, restaurants, retailers, and service businesses.

Energize! continues to demonstrate lasting impact. Forty-five percent of attendees had participated in previous years, and many credited past conferences with helping them launch arts initiatives, support youth entrepreneurship, secure grants, and organize community events. Nearly two-thirds of returning participants reported that insights gained from Energize! directly contributed to bringing new funding into their communities.

The 2025 conference strengthened this momentum. As participants return home equipped with new ideas, connections, and resources, the ripple effects of Energize! continue to expand — building local leadership, enhancing community capacity, and fueling rural innovation across South Dakota.



2025 Energize! attendees

Growing Local Opportunities Through Grant Writing – South Dakota

Community grant writing workshops held in Arlington and Rapid City equipped 30 participants with practical skills to pursue competitive funding and strengthen local initiatives.

The [Beginner's Guide to Grant Writing workshops](#) covered the fundamentals of strong grant proposals, including narrative development, SMART goals, scope-of-work planning, use of data and community evidence, and strategies for identifying appropriate funding opportunities. Participants also heard directly from funders, gaining insight into how applications are reviewed and what makes proposals stand out.

Of the 30 attendees, 25 completed a post session survey. Respondents reported significant gains in their ability to locate grants, navigate databases, and apply core writing techniques. One participant noted learning “how to write SMART goals, identify a team, define a scope of work, write narratives, and research grants,” while a community organizer described the workshop as “very informative” and valuable for their organization. More than two-thirds of participants rated each topic as very informative, and all others indicated they learned something new. Nearly all respondents (95%) planned to apply the skills in future proposals, and 90% said they would recommend the workshop to others.

A follow up survey conducted several months later demonstrated early, measurable impact. All respondents had actively searched for grants since the workshop; six had submitted applications, and four had successfully secured funding. These awards totaled \$120,000, with individual grants ranging from \$8,000 to \$65,000. These outcomes show that the workshops not only increased knowledge and confidence but also directly contributed to new funding for community projects, strengthening organizational capacity and expanding local opportunities.



Participants attending a South Dakota State University Extension's Grant Writing Workshop.

WISCONSIN



Location: Madison, WI
<https://extension.wisc.edu/>



IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	17,052
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	183
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	145
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	247
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	2,470
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$89,266
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$4,586,950
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	85.0

IMPACT STATEMENTS

Strengthening Civic Health Through Civic Assemblies

Communities across Wisconsin are seeking effective ways to rebuild trust, deepen civil dialogue, and address complex public challenges. As concerns about civic health grow, the [Organizational and Leadership Development program](#) at UW-Madison's Division of Extension offers programming and research to foster civic dialogue and engagement in Wisconsin.

One approach is [civic assemblies](#), in which a representative group comes together to learn, deliberate, and develop informed recommendations on a specific public challenge. Participants are randomly selected to reflect a cross-section of the community. Skilled facilitators guide the process to ensure productive dialogue. While civic assemblies are often conducted over multiple sessions, Extension is exploring ways to adapt the model to meet local needs.

This innovation was piloted in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In response to increasing concern about homelessness, local partners worked with the Organizational and Leadership Development Program to test a shorter-format civic assembly that retained the core elements of deliberative engagement while fitting within a more limited timeframe. The pilot assembly brought residents together to examine the issue and produced ten recommendations that now inform the county's comprehensive community plan.

Building on lessons learned from the Eau Claire pilot, Extension is planning additional civic assemblies across the state, along with training opportunities to expand the pool of skilled facilitators. Through this work, UW-Madison's Division of Extension continues to support communities in engaging residents, improving civic health, and generating actionable insights on pressing public issues.

Entrepreneurship Programs Bolster Economic Development Across Wisconsin Communities

From early-stage food businesses seeking support to build and grow, to established businesses looking to transition into the cooperative model, and rural communities creating an entrepreneur-friendly ecosystems, the UW-Madison Division of Extension provides guidance and evidence-based resources to support entrepreneurial efforts across Wisconsin.

- The [Community Food System's FEED Summit](#) covers key aspects of starting and sustaining a food-based business, providing attendees with clarity on how to navigate food safety and licensing requirements, access capital and financial services, and communicate their businesses' story.
- The [UW Center for Cooperatives](#) (UWCC) supports both start-up and established businesses interested in the cooperative model. As Wisconsin faces a "silver tsunami" of retiring business owners, many are turning to UWCC to hand their business to employees, rather than close or sell to private equity. UWCC helps take the guesswork out of

converting to a cooperative and provides assistance throughout the lifespan of a cooperative.

- In addition to working with individual businesses, UW-Madison Division of Extension also takes a community-focused approach to entrepreneurial development. Through the [Rural Entrepreneurial Venture \(REV\) program](#), communities with a population ranging from 1,500 - 10,000 residents work with a trained Extension coach for up to three years, gaining tools to identify and expand entrepreneurial activity. With more than 10 Wisconsin communities participating, and a growing interest list, these communities are well positioned to develop entrepreneurial ecosystems, and in turn, support their small town economies.

With Extension's guidance and support, the complexities of economic development become easier to navigate, allowing entrepreneurs and communities alike a pathway to more effectively move forward.



UWCC guided the Spring Green Animal Hospital through the transition into a cooperative.



**NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CENTER
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

403 Mitch Daniels Blvd.
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

Email: ncrcrd@purdue.edu
Phone: (765) 494-8541

<https://ncrcrd.org>

It is the NCRCRD's mission to build rural communities through cutting-edge research, Extension programs, and innovative partnerships. To achieve this mission, we seek to engage research and Extension at all of the land-grant institutions across the North Central Region.

The NCRCRD facilitates partnerships among Extension program leaders and community development programs at land-grant institutions in the North Central Region, including those established by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, and the Tribal Land Grant colleges funded in 1994. Led by many of our land-grant institution partners, Community Development Extension programs can be found in all twelve states of the North Central Region.

We approach our endeavors from three thematic areas:



NCRCRD is honored to support the valuable work of the North Central Region's Community Development Extension programs by publishing the annual [Impact Report](#) on their behalf.

This work is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) which provides core budget and logistical support for coordination across the four regional centers. The North Central AgInnovation, an Ag Experiment Station Network of state agricultural Experiment Station Directors is composed of key land grant university research administrators from the twelve-state region, and provides operating support for the NCRCRD. The North Central Cooperative Extension Association (NCCEA) is composed of Extension Directors from the twelve-state region, and provides operating support for the NCRCRD.



RRDC North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) is one of four Regional Rural Development Centers in the United States. To learn more, visit <https://rrdc.info/>

Purdue University is an Equal Opportunity/Equal Access University.