

Cooperative Extension Competencies for the Community Engagement Professional

Jorge Horacio Atilas

Abstract

The community engagement professional (CEP) plays a critical role in engaging faculty, staff, and students with communities. In order to do this in the most effective way, this essay advocates for CEPs to become familiar with the Cooperative Extension system and develop competency for engaging Extension personnel, even when those personnel are not a part of the CEP's home institution. The essay extends the work of Dostilio et al. (2017) on preliminary competencies for the community engagement professional by identifying additional competencies, organized as knowledge, skill, and dispositions, that can help CEPs work with the Cooperative Extension system to maximize engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. This essay also includes ideas for implementing competency training for CEPs. Conclusions include thoughts on preparing the community engagement professional to learn and collaborate with Cooperative Extension to enrich the academic experience and benefit the communities they serve. *Keywords:* cooperative extension, competencies, community engagement professional

Introduction

This reflective essay addresses a gap in the literature regarding competencies needed for the community engagement professional (CEP) to work with the Cooperative Extension Service system to maximize community engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. Dostilio (2017) defined the community engagement professional as one with formal administrative responsibilities who supports and fosters community engagement within higher education.

Dostilio et al. (2017) developed a preliminary competency model for CEPs. The model as presented was intended to be a dynamic model that would grow over time. In creating this model, they did not address the CEP relationship to Cooperative Extension, an important community engagement resource across many institutions of higher education in the nation. Likewise, previous research on CEP competencies (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet,

2005) did not include competencies needed to collaborate and coordinate engagement efforts with Cooperative Extension.

Many CEPs may not be located at a state land-grant university, and thus they may not be aware of Extension. In such circumstances, they may not take full advantage of Extension as a community engagement resource that could be available to them. However, this should not be an impediment to seeking collaboration with Cooperative Extension faculty, county educators, and others, as this system was created to serve all people. Further, at many universities where Extension is present, there are CEPs working in campus-based positions who rarely seek collaboration with their Extension colleagues. In this essay, the proposed new competencies should enhance the work and influence of CEPs by advancing their collaboration with the Cooperative Extension Service system, especially at a time, as suggested by Welch and Saltmarsh (2013), when CEPs are part of a second generation focused on civic engagement concerns across multiple functions of a university. As the field of engaged scholarship has evolved since the time of *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (Kellogg Commission, 1999), a contemporary and updated set of competencies would add skills and abilities to CEPs working with the Cooperative Extension system across the nation.

Cooperative Extension

Since its creation with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the Cooperative Extension Service system has been the largest arm of engagement, service, and outreach for the land-grant public university system in the United States. Cooperative Extension is a complex infrastructure that involves federal, state, and local governments in its funding and implementation. Among its unique characteristics, Cooperative Extension represents the land-grant university's presence in every county or parish in the country and its territories. Consequently, this widespread presence and influence is a critical resource for any CEP to understand in order to maximize the beneficial effects of their university's community engagement. Furthermore, mastering the complexities and modus operandi of the Cooperative Extension infrastructure will enable CEPs to better influence the university's community engagement infrastructure for engaged teaching, service, and research activities. Bridging any gaps between these infrastructures would most likely improve the work of the CEPs as well as the faculty, staff, and students they support.

Across the nation, various state-level Cooperative Extension Services have worked toward instituting competency-based education for their Extension educators, administrators, volunteers, and facilitators, among others. In fact, eXtension (the national online platform for Cooperative Extension) has done significant work with Eduworks to incorporate a competency-based framework development that aims at the pursuit of terminal learning objectives (*eXtension, 2016*). Others, such as the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension and the Texas A & M Agrilife Extension, have focused on competencies that help Extension professionals apply skills, knowledge, and attitudes in seeking excellence in the workplace (*Liles and Mustian, 2004*).

In the case of Texas A & M Agrilife Extension (*2018*), the competencies were grouped within the following categories for each of their education program areas: technical, organizational effectiveness, personal effectiveness, action-orientation, communication, and development of others. In this example, there is an opportunity to add a community-engagement competency category that focuses on how to engage in mutually beneficial collaborations and partnerships. This competency is often overlooked in Extension training, in part because in the last 100 years of Cooperative Extension work, educators have implicitly practiced community-engaged work from community-based locations throughout the counties. Articulating these competencies for the CEP and eventually for the Extension professional will ensure that a robust implementation of engagement practices is included at the university level.

Applying Extension Competencies to CEPs

The Dostilio et al. (*2017*) model identifies six major themes, which include requisite areas of knowledge, skill, ability, and dispositions. This essay suggests an additional area of competence—working with a state’s Cooperative Extension Service—and offers corresponding knowledge, skills, dispositions, and overall critical commitments for inclusion in the existing CEP model. In fact, the resources, relationships, and long history of Cooperative Extension will help further the community engagement goals of a university. Please note that this essay proposes these competencies for community engagement professionals in a university context. Therefore, it may also include CEPs employed by Cooperative Extension. It is important to note that a county Extension professional often serves in a dual role of educator or faculty and local administrator of programs focusing on how to engage with the community. Given

Extension's presence in every county in the nation and its territories and its long history in higher education, the adaptation of the Dostilio model to include Extension-related competencies will enhance the menu of skills available to CEPs, especially those who work at land-grant universities. Likewise, this competency could be helpful to CEPs working in other public and private universities that are adapting the "Extension" model to their community engagement practices and context.

In order to build Cooperative Extension competencies for CEPs, the author reviewed existing literature. Reviewing the competencies for Extension professionals served to identify those competencies that appear helpful to a campus-based community engagement professional. The goal is not to identify new competencies for Extension, although another study should look at how the current Extension competencies should promote efficient and sustainable university–community engagement.

The competencies already developed for Extension professionals uniquely address competencies needed to work effectively in off-campus contexts such as international and community or county settings. By bringing the competencies for Extension personnel into conversation with those identified for CEPs, we can enhance the existing CEP competency model in two ways: strengthening a CEP's ability to collaborate with Extension personnel and more specifically attending to the competencies necessary to work in noncampus contexts. The next two sections describe the insights gained by examining Extension competencies in (1) an international context and (2) a community-based context. Each section identifies areas of overlap and departure between the practice of Extension and what is identified in the CEP competency model (Dostilio et al., 2017).

Extension competencies in an international context. In the case of Extension competencies at the international level, Suvedi and Ghimire (2015) reviewed literature relevant to what agricultural Extension professionals are expected to do in order to ensure that their services are sustainable. In their thematic brief, the authors emphasized the need for Extension to follow a farmer-centered approach (demand driven); to encourage active participation of farmers and stakeholders (participatory); and involve nongovernmental agencies and cooperatives as Extension service providers (pluralistic). Those three approaches are clearly oriented toward a community-engaged practice. Furthermore, they recommend the following core competencies to be considered by devel-

oping nations in the training of their Extension professionals:

1. Program planning and implementation. An emphasis on learning to plan and facilitating their community partners to do the same. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) competencies model, but it could be included under Facilitating Faculty Development and Support.
2. Communication skills. Understand the process of diffusion of innovation to communicate effectively with partners. This is included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) model under Cultivating High-Quality Partnerships and is not included in the Extension competencies to avoid redundancy.
3. Leadership. Extension leaders must uphold their partners' and stakeholders' program participation and ownership. Dostilio et al. (2017) address this under Leading Change in Higher Education.
4. Education and information technology. Extension staff must be familiar with emerging information and communications technology. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) competencies model. However, because this competency is not particularly exclusive to Cooperative Extension, it would not be added as an Extension competency for CEP. Rather, it should be included under Facilitating Faculty Development and Support.
5. Diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Understand and be familiar with the diversity of a community. This is not included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) competencies model and will be added as part of the Cooperative Extension competencies for CEP.
6. Professionalism. Integrity, honesty, transparency, and inclusiveness are traits that will serve CEPs well when engaging with their communities. This is indirectly included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) model under Knowledge of Self: Self-awareness.
7. Extension and organizational management. Mobilize, manage and monitor resources and processes to ensure effective delivery and successful outcomes. Not included in the Dostilio et al. (2017) model but added as part of the proposed Extension competencies.
8. Program evaluation and research. This is accountability or the understanding of what, where, how, and when Extension programs are delivered and their impact or

success. Suvedi and Ghimire (2015) argued that program evaluation is the most studied competency for Cooperative Extension professionals. This competency is already conceptually present in the Dostilio et al. (2017) model under Administering Community Engagement Programs.

9. Technical expertise. Extension personnel must have basic knowledge on the subject matters they teach. This competency is addressed several times in the Dostilio et al. (2017) model.

Overall, the competencies proposed by Suvedi and Ghimire (2015) promote the inclusion of stakeholders so they too develop their skills and competencies. Naturally, their main message is to prepare community partners to take ownership of their future. In a way, Extension does this when it helps develop the skills of Extension 4-H volunteers, Master Gardeners, and Master Family and Consumer Sciences volunteers. This level of inclusion of stakeholders in skills development is a valuable competency for the CEP.

Competencies for community-based Extension leaders.

Another study, by Sobrero and Jayaratne (2014), offered four constructs focused on changes to the New and Aspiring County Extension Director Leadership Institute program that provided county Extension directors with the leadership skills needed to facilitate the work of county educators engaging with communities. These are the four constructs that became the Institute's core principles and practices and can become part of the CEP competencies in Cooperative Extension:

1. Collaborative learning, teamwork, and community engagement leading to practice change. This competency is already part of the Leading Change within Higher Education section of the model developed by Dostilio et al. (2017). The key component is the utilization of democratic strategies that are mutually beneficial with the goal of achieving a compromise on the design, delivery, and evaluation of an engagement activity or program. The role of a CEP is to understand and prepare those involved on how to use specific strategies, including technology.
2. Systems thinking and action. This competency would help CEPs understand the context of an issue, problem, or opportunity. It prepares them to utilize case studies, role-play, and simulations for onboarding or training programs

for faculty, staff, students, and community members alike. I propose an expanded scope of this competency by adding the knowledge and effective utilization of logic models that incorporate the systems that affect the issue, problem, or opportunity at hand. Engagement through Cooperative Extension benefits from logic modeling to determine the outcomes, outputs, and inputs that are of mutual interest to communities and universities. In this essay, this competency is added to the model of Cooperative Extension competencies for community engagement professionals.

3. Systematic evaluation. With this element (already included in the model by *Dostilio et al., 2017*), Sobrero and Jayaratne (2014) underscore the importance of outcomes. Any engagement activity should plan for these outcomes and document the changes that resulted from the activity for both the university and the community partners. This in turn informs the process and contributes to the improvement of the intervention or engaged practice.
4. Demonstrating scholarship through community engagement. This could be additional knowledge competency under the Administering Community Engagement Programs section of the *Dostilio et al. (2017)* model. Sobrero and Jayaratne (2014) argue that results of systematic evaluation, such as impacts and changes in the community and university players, may be an example of practice as a form of scholarship. A CEP would therefore need to be skilled at helping faculty, staff, and students prepare to plan and translate their work into scholarly outputs that inform the field of engagement and their disciplines. This would be an additional knowledge competency under the Administering Community Engagement Programs section of the *Dostilio et al. (2017)* model. Therefore, I will not be including this as a new CEP competency under Cooperative Extension but suggest that *Dostilio et al.* may consider expanding the knowledge and skills area of that competency in their model.

In order to minimize redundancies, only one CEP competency from the above four constructs will be added as new to the *Dostilio et al. (2017)* model: Systems Thinking, Logic Modeling, and Action. In addition to this competency, this essay includes three other Cooperative Extension competencies for CEPs:

1. Knowledge of opportunities that exist within Extension to collaborate with other faculty, staff, and students. These include, for example, access to needs assessment and knowledge for the issues that need addressing; source of internships and student experiences; and partnering for research and interventions, among others.
2. Knowledge of the relevance of diversity of partnering communities. Most Cooperative Extension Services work across a diversity of populations with various needs and aspirations. A CEP could collaborate with Extension in the implementation of intercultural competency training, development, and evaluation for staff, faculty, students, and community partners. In addition, cultural immersion programs are helpful in expanding cultural awareness and improved programming when engaging with diverse populations in the United States and abroad.
3. Understanding the Extension infrastructure and governance. This will help CEPs navigate and plan collaborations for engagement experiences.

Table 1 shows the four additional competencies proposed as a complement to those developed by Dostilio et al. (2017). The remainder of this essay will focus on describing the essence of those four competencies and how they can operationalize in a higher education engagement setting.

Cooperative Extension Competencies for CEPs

These additional competencies promote the knowledge acquisition, skills development, and disposition awareness on the subject of Cooperative Extension. They can help CEPs learn how to incorporate Cooperative Extension into community-engaged work in higher education.

It is important to understand that the competencies included in Table 1 are complementary to those already included in the Dostilio et al. model (2017), especially because several already included in the model are useful in working with the Cooperative Extension Service. The four areas of competencies in Table 1 address the gaps in Extension competencies for community-engaged professionals (CEPs).

Table I. Additional CEP Competencies Related to Cooperative Extension

Area	Competencies			Critical commitments
	Knowledge	Skills and abilities	Dispositions	
Working with a state's Cooperative Extension Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of opportunities within Cooperative Extension to collaborate • Knowledge of the relevance of diversity of partnering communities • Knowledge of Cooperative Extension's infrastructure, funding, and governance • Knowledge of systems thinking theory, logic modeling, and their application to engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to cultivate collaborative activities between faculty, staff, students with Cooperative Extension • Able to train or administer intercultural competencies training and assist with individual development plans • Able to connect with Extension leaders, collaborate in funding, and appropriately use Extension infrastructure. • Able to take a comprehensive systems view to the issue that is the subject of the engaged partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embrace the Cooperative Extension infrastructure, regardless of whether the CEP is in a land-grant university or not • Embrace difference and use it constructively to foster engagement locally and globally • Embrace Cooperative Extension in the state and its long history in community engagement • Embrace systems thinking, logic models, and the ecological model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to follow and contribute to critical discourse by enhancing the communication between Cooperative Extension and other campus units • Understand the power structures behind the diversity and implicit bias issues present in the community and the Extension system • Commit to social change and positive outcomes as part of the process and results of the engagement activity in partnership with Extension

Existing Opportunities Within Extension to Collaborate

Knowledge. Community engagement professionals can identify opportunities to collaborate with Cooperative Extension by seeking information regarding its key priorities and initiatives in the state. The best way to do this is by contacting the state's Extension director at a land-grant university in the state. Cooperative Extension utilizes various methods and processes to

gather input on the most critical needs of a state. It takes this valuable information and prepares a plan of work that proposes certain outputs and outcomes related to the needs that it has the capacity to address. This plan is often referred to as the Federal Plan of Work and is submitted to the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NIFA is the federal home of the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service. Before it becomes a plan of work, Extension specialists (i.e., faculty with Cooperative Extension appointments) work with county Extension educators and others to develop an Extension education intervention. This intervention is grounded on needs assessments, the most relevant research-based practices, and new discoveries. The Extension intervention often takes the forms of curricula, fact sheets, field demonstrations, 4-H youth development events, and other educational resources to target specific populations with information that may lead to desired outputs and outcomes. More on this process is addressed later in this essay in the Systems Thinking, Logic Modeling, and Action knowledge competency.

The main goal of understanding the priorities and programs of Cooperative Extension is for a CEP to connect faculty, staff, and students across the university with Extension faculty and educators with similar interests. In addition to connecting, the CEP may be able to identify collaborative opportunities such as needs assessments, Extension research, fact sheets, and projects. Because Cooperative Extension may be a land-grant university's largest presence across the state, the CEP should always respect and maintain that local presence and always inform, seek out, and collaborate with local Extension educators or agents.

Skills and abilities. A CEP should be able to

1. identify and study the state's Cooperative Extension plan with its priorities and initiatives;
2. extract information about the populations Extension serves, the programs it offers, and the impacts and outcomes of its programs; and
3. identify Extension faculty on campus who may be interested in collaborating with others to address issues related to communities of mutual interest.

Dispositions. It is vital that CEPs adopt a mind-set of collaboration, ensuring that they seek to avail their work with all potential resources, including those offered by partnering with Extension.

The Relevance of Diversity of Partnering Communities

Knowledge. CEPs should acquire knowledge and understanding of how cultural diversity plays an important part in any successful university–community engagement effort. Respectful relationships that bring mutual benefit to a university and a community must include a level of competency around cultural differences and similarities. Although intercultural competencies are suggested for the CEP, it is important to acknowledge that universities also have a very different culture from communities. Therefore, communities should also acquire knowledge on how to navigate differences when working with university bureaucracies.

For decades, several land-grant universities and state Cooperative Extension services have invested resources in preparing their workforce to be more interculturally competent. These efforts also recognize the need to be self-aware and sensitive to how some communities may not embrace some scientific perspectives when arriving at conclusions about issues of mutual concern. For example, when studying the connection of diversity and science through cross-cultural engagement, Hassel (2007) concluded that cultural diversity brings great value to a university beyond political correctness in that it helps build knowledge about the world.

Skills and abilities. Community engagement professionals should be able to understand their own intercultural competencies as well as be ready to provide access to intercultural training to faculty, staff, students, and community members. This is especially helpful when engaging with communities via collaborations with their state's Cooperative Extension service. The CEP should be familiar with various options for intercultural competency training. For instance, several Cooperative Extension services have developed their own cultural training, such as Washington State University Extension's Navigating Difference: Cultural Competency Training (Deen, Parker, Griner Hill, Huskey, & Whitehall, 2014). This training, also used by Kansas State Research and Extension, focuses on evaluating short-term and long-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about cultural difference. The training is based on five cultural competencies: awareness, understanding, knowledge, interaction, and sensitivity. It is important to note that the rapid influx of immigrants to the United States of America in the late 1980s and 1990s challenged the Cooperative Extension system across the nation with the need to be ready to understand and work with these new Americans in rural and urban communities across many states.

Another approach is the one used by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (*Fabregas Janeiro & Atilas, 2015; Fabregas Janeiro, Martin, & Atilas, 2015*), which implemented an intercultural competency training plan divided into the following four stages:

1. Conduct an intercultural competence assessment of personnel utilizing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) developed by Bennett (1986). The work of Hammer (2009) and Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) demonstrated that the IDI is a robust cross-cultural assessment instrument to build cultural competency. Their work effectively ties leadership excellence to the ability to be culturally competent. The IDI places respondents in one of the five stages of the intercultural development continuum: denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation.
2. Use the aggregate or group results of the IDI to develop a custom face-to-face intercultural training to offer personnel better tools and resources to engage with diverse communities.
3. Design an online training module on intercultural competencies to reinforce the face-to-face training.
4. Participate in Extension district meetings across the state to support the multicultural efforts of the county educators as they develop their own plans to move up in the intercultural development continuum.

In general, whichever training is chosen by a CEP, a training plan should be developed that involves several components of training to help the faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders grow more interculturally competent over time. A one-time intercultural training is not enough to achieve this.

Dispositions. The CEP must not shy away from diversity and difference. Through intercultural competency training, a CEP can develop a level of skills and comfort that will help in using cultural differences to foster successful domestic and international engagement.

Extension's Infrastructure, Funding, and Governance

Knowledge. The first step for a community engagement professional seeking to understand the opportunities to collaborate

with Cooperative Extension is learning about the origins and purpose of this system. A good place to start is by reviewing the history of Cooperative Extension and its relationship with land-grant universities and the people of a state (see *Atilas, Jenkins, Rayas-Duarte, Taylor, & Zhang, 2014*). Cooperative Extension is often divided into four nationally recognized program areas: agriculture and natural resources (ANR); family and consumer sciences (FCS); 4-H and youth development (4-H); and community and rural development (CRD). These program areas are supported by national program leaders housed in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA). At the state level, and in terms of governance, Cooperative Extension is managed by a state director and associate or assistant directors (who may also serve as state program leaders for ANR, FCS, 4-H, and CRD). These administrators are often located on the main campus of a land-grant university. Extension state specialists are also located on campus and in most cases are faculty in academic departments holding an Extension appointment. A state's Extension delivery infrastructure is often organized in regions or districts that oversee the administration of Extension educators or agents for each county or parish.

Cooperative Extension's funding is a true partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Each year following the passage of the bills that fund governments, USDA NIFA allocates funding for each state's Extension service. Similarly, state governments allocate funding to their state Cooperative Extension Service. Depending on the state, the funding may be allocated directly to Extension or indirectly through a board of regents for higher education or similar university governing entity. In the case of local governments, a county or parish may also allocate funding to operate the local county Extension office. These funds are normally used for maintenance and operations, travel and professional development, and some personnel costs. In some counties, a portion of the local sales tax may be dedicated to funding a local county Extension office.

Skills and abilities. The community engagement professional should be able to connect with Extension through a clear understanding of its governance, infrastructure, and funding. Know who should be contacted when a service-learning or engaged project is being proposed to take place in a county. Knowing where to start in the chain of Extension leadership will ensure a smooth collaborative effort and communication flow. Many times an engagement activity will benefit from collaboration with a local leader

or key informant. A local Extension educator will most likely be that leader or at least know whom the CEP should contact for the proposed engagement initiative.

Dispositions. Embracing Cooperative Extension as the longest tenured form of university engagement countywide, statewide, and nationwide is integral to creating successful community engagement opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. CEPs can build an engagement support system that takes advantage of this great resource in a mutually beneficial way.

Systems Thinking, Action, and Logic Modeling

Knowledge. The community engagement professional should be knowledgeable about systems theory and its application to engagement and Cooperative Extension. Briefly, systems theory or thinking refers to taking a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to understanding behaviors and problems within complex systems (*Bertalanffy, 1968*). It is about taking into account interrelated and interdependent parts of a system. When engaging with a community, university actors should think about how the community and the university are part of a larger system. It helps the CEP and/or Extension educator plan for the intended and unintended effects that one action can have on other parts of a system, and it provides a base for a problem-solving model. Weber and Soderquist (*2016*) further discuss the value of systems thinking as a competency that is critical in identifying the high-advantage or high-leverage places to intervene. The goal is to help the community identify the changes to the system that it can afford to take and that will yield the most impactful outcomes.

Perhaps one of the best applications of systems thinking into effective engagement is the work done in Australia to create an engagement-planning workbook (*State of Victoria, 2015*). The approach to creating this engagement workbook starts with an engagement-planning key. This key helps the CEP plan a strategy for individual learning during three major phases:

1. **Scope.** Determining the scope and type of engagement needed based on understanding the project's system and the people in the system.
2. **Act.** Planning the implementation of the project by describing what success will look like; determining which tools, schedules, and resources will be needed; and managing potential engagement risks.

3. Evaluate. Planning for resources and schedules required to collect the evidence that will show anticipated outcomes. This phase helps clarify what is the purpose of the evaluation and who wants to know what. This phase is particularly important, as both the community and the university must be part of the decision of what will be collected and evaluated.

At each of these three phases, the CEP is encouraged to stop and, together with the community, review, reflect, and celebrate. This is a way to refresh the engagement plan and account for emerging opportunities and risks.

Another approach that is widely used by the Cooperative Extension system is logic modeling (*McCawley, 2010; Taylor-Powell, Jones, & Henert, 2003*). A CEP should learn how to use logic models to frame the anticipated outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs of an engagement project. Extension professionals use logic models to plan, implement, and evaluate Extension education programs based on the desired outcomes for their target audiences. A CEP must understand where a proposed engagement activity fits in the relevant Extension logic model and how it can contribute to intended community outcomes. In addition, a CEP should also include desired outcomes for the students, staff, and/or faculty involved. For instance, a faculty member offering a service-learning course on a topic such as diabetes may be collaborating with a Cooperative Extension state specialist implementing the Dining with Diabetes program (*Michigan State University Extension, 2018*). This is a program of national reach used by many states. In the effort to engage with Extension's reach to people living with or at risk of diabetes, the CEP should ensure that the faculty member considers the desired outcomes for the students and the community members engaged through this class. For instance, a participant in Dining with Diabetes provided testimony that "Since December, I lost 20 pounds and my A1C dropped from 8.9 to under 7. I feel much better and my doctor is ecstatic!" (*Michigan State University Extension Catalog, 2014, p. 51*). This was clearly a desired outcome for the community participant. What, then, is the desired learning outcome for the students in the class? Among other potential student learning outcomes, the faculty member could expect that the student would reflect on the use of educational materials to promote behavioral change in diet and exercise.

Skills and abilities. The community engagement professional should be able to provide training to faculty, staff, students, and community members on logic modeling. The CEP can reach out to Extension personnel familiar with logic modeling, and they could collaborate in a systematic way to deliver training. This ability helps the CEP to assist faculty with using logic models to match research or teaching outcomes with instructional syllabi and research programs, grants, and evaluation tools. In sum, impact assessments of engaged teaching, research, and service activities are enhanced by the use of systems thinking and logic modeling.

Dispositions. Embracing systems thinking and logic modeling is essential for this competency to effect the desired results in enhancing university–community engagement. A CEP will benefit from employing systems thinking and logic modeling in the plans for the overall community engagement strategy for the campus. This will provide practice, expertise, and a larger context for desired outcomes and impacts for the campus and community.

Critical Commitments

Hernandez and Pasquesi (2017) provide an important view on critical principles versus competencies for CEPs. Briefly, they argue that the term *competency* is not adequate when used in the context of critical practice and engagement by CEPs. Their main concern is that *competency*, as a term, is not found in critical community engagement literature, and furthermore, it may imply that such universal skills are applicable to all situations or groups regardless of context. Ultimately, these authors advocate for CEPs' having a commitment to critical practice that promotes an engagement that helps faculty, students, and community members to dissect the meaning of social change, power, and authenticity.

Overall, working with a state's Cooperative Extension service is a winning competency for the community engagement professional and those he or she serves. Therefore, a CEP should be committed to a critical practice that includes the understanding of the opportunities, infrastructure, funding, governance, goals, and mission of Cooperative Extension. CEPs doing so need to be aware of acting within a context of discovery of the power structures and undue influences that a university could have when engaging with communities that may be disadvantaged or accustomed to being used by universities as "subjects" of their research. It is important to note that Cooperative Extension is a complex system with regard to its funding and the external powers that govern it. For instance,

local county or parish governments may have certain expectations of their local county Extension office, which may require Extension educators to expand their work beyond what the land-grant university expects of them. Similarly, the county educator must balance local needs, expressed by the communities they serve, with the needs of the university campus, the CEP, and the faculty involved in the community engagement activity. Therefore, a CEP should not make assumptions as to how much influence and power the university can have over the local Extension office since this is truly a collaboration between state and county partners.

Additionally, a clear understanding of the diversity of the populations and communities Extension serves will enhance the opportunities to engage together and build more meaningful engagement experiences. Without an understanding of the social identities and the asymmetrical power structures that are present in those communities, social change may not advance appropriately through the university–community engagement activity supported by the CEP. For this to happen, a CEP must believe in social change as one of the important goals of the engagement activity. Further work may be needed to tease out how social change can be measured in both the community and the university participants (critical consciousness, change advocacy, etc.). This is critical since any engagement activity should be closely tied to learning objectives that are consistent with the goals, for example, of a service-learning course or a research project.

A CEP should commit to being intentional in reaching out to Extension professionals to form a collaborative relationship that will yield better results for the community engagement activity, regardless of whether they are part of their campus or university. This takes a commitment to overcome communication barriers, whether real or perceived, between members of different groups, sometimes including competing universities. At the end, the CEP should be able to think big and aspire to help achieve long-term impactful outcomes and at the same time act small to help build long-lasting relationships with a community.

Extension Competencies Training for CEPs

The CEP competencies model by Dostilio et al. (2017) already includes Cultivating High-Quality Partnerships. Although not the goal of this essay, this competency would be a great addition for training Extension personnel. This will enhance the work done by Suedi and Kaplowitz (2016) to create a core competency toolbox

for Extension staff, which includes communication skills and inclusion of community leaders. Extension competencies training for the community engagement professional might be implemented through a variety of efforts. Among these, university-sponsored engagement academies can include content related to Cooperative Extension in face-to-face education of professionals and practitioners. In addition, online core competencies in Cooperative Extension can be created and made available not only through the engagement academies but also through key organizations dedicated to furthering engagement, such as Campus Compact, the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC), the Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and Imagining America.

Conclusion

This essay attempts to build upon a preliminary model for competencies for the community engagement professional in a university setting. After careful consideration, four new competencies were added to the Dostilio et al. (2017) model. The main takeaway of this essay is that the Dostilio model can be adapted and expanded to allow a CEP to be more competent in the opportunities provided by Cooperative Extension and for the Cooperative Extension professional to be more competent in community engagement as a whole. Not all CEPs may be interested in working with Cooperative Extension, but those who are will find the expanded Dostilio model helpful in navigating Extension's infrastructure, funding, and governance; its approach to systems thinking and logic modeling; and the intercultural and diversity aspects of the communities it serves. Moreover, these Extension-related competencies help the CEP develop a holistic approach to training on various skills and abilities for successful community engagement. In terms of critical commitments, this essay explored the complex structure behind Cooperative Extension and suggested that a CEP should commit to understating this as part of an effort to effect social change and positive outcomes for both the community and university participants.

References

- Atiles, J. H., Jenkins, C., Rayas-Duarte, P., Taylor, R. K., & Zhang, H. (2014). Service, cooperative extension and community engagement. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *The modern land-grant university* (pp. 59–81). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179–196.
- Bertalanffy, L. V. (1968). *General systems theory: Foundations, development, applications*. New York, NY: George Brazillier.
- Burkard, A. W., Cole, D. C., Ott, M., & Stoflet, T. (2005). Entry-level competencies of new student affairs professionals: A Delphi study. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 42(3), 545–571.
- Deen, M. Y., Parker, L. A., Griner Hill, L., Huskey, L., & Whitehall, A. P. (2014). Navigating difference: Development and implementation of a successful cultural competency training for Extension and outreach professionals. *Journal of Extension*, 52(1). Retrieved from <https://joe.org/joe/2014february/a2.php>
- Dostilio, L. D. (2017). Planning a path forward. In L. D. Dostilio (Ed.), *The community engagement professional in higher education: A competency model for an emerging field* (pp. 27–55). Boston, MA: Campus Compact.
- Dostilio, L. D., Beneson, J., Chamberlin, S., Crossland, S., Farmer-Hanson, A., Hernandez, K., & colleagues. (2017). Preliminary competency model for engagement professionals. In L. D. Dostilio (Ed.), *The community engagement professional in higher education: A competency model for an emerging field* (p. 46). Boston, MA: Campus Compact.
- eXtension. (2016). Competency-based education: CFD competency framework development (White paper). Retrieved from <https://www.extension.org/tools-for-extension-professionals/competency-based-education/>
- Fabregas Janeiro, M. G., & Atilas, J. H. (2015). Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service—Building an interculturally competent community: First year assessment. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 8(2), 135.
- Fabregas Janeiro, M. G., Martin, J., & Atilas, J. H. (2015). Multicultural needs assessment of extension educators—Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. *Proceedings of the 14th Annual Conference Cambio de Colores*. Kansas City, MO: Cambio Center. Retrieved from http://cambio.missouri.edu/Library/2016/2016_fabregas.pdf
- Hammer, M. R. (2009). The intercultural development inventory. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence* (pp. 203–218). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 27(4), 421–443. Retrieved from http://www.sol.lu.se/media/utbildning/dokument/kurser/ENBC11/20112/Hammer_article_Task_1.pdf
- Hassel, C. A. (2007). Can cross-cultural engagement improve the land-grant university? *Journal of Extension*, 45(5). Retrieved from <https://joe.org/joe/2007october/a7.php>
- Hernandez, K., & Pasquesi, K. (2017). Critical perspectives and commitments deserving attention from community engaged professionals. In L. D. Dostilio (Ed.), *The community engagement professional in higher edu-*

- cation: A competency model for an emerging field* (pp. 56–78). Boston, MA: Campus Compact.
- Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. (1999). *Returning to our roots: The engaged institution*. Washington, DC: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/library/returning-to-our-roots-the-engaged-institution/file>
- Liles, R. T., & Mustian, R. D. (2004). Core competencies: A systems approach for training and organizational development in extension. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 10(2), 77–82.
- McCawley, P. F. (2010). *The logic model for program planning and evaluation* (Fact sheet). University of Idaho Extension. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20101117070740/http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/extension/LogicModel.pdf>
- Michigan State University Extension. (2018). *Dining With Diabetes*. Retrieved from https://www.canr.msu.edu/dining_with_diabetes/
- Michigan State University Extension catalog of programs and services. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/234/56586/MSUE_catalog.pdf
- Sobrero, P., & Jayaratne, K. S. U. (2014). Engaging learners through collaborative learning: Leadership development of county extension directors and lessons learned. *Journal of Extension*, 52(2), 1–13.
- Suvedi, M., & Ghimire, R. (2015). *Core competencies for agricultural extension educators* (Innovate). Retrieved from <https://innovate.cired.vt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Suvedi-Thematic-Brief-.pdf>
- Suvedi, M., & Kaplowitz, M. (2016). *What every extension worker should know: Core competency handbook*. Retrieved from <https://meas.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/MEAS-2016-Extension-Handbook-Suvedi-Kaplowitz.pdf>
- State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. (2015). *Effective engagement: Building relationships with community and other stakeholders: Book 2. The engagement planning workbook* (Version 4). Victoria, Australia: Author. Retrieved from <https://sustainingcommunity.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/effective-engagement-book-2.pdf>
- Taylor-Powell, E., Jones, L., & Henert, E. (2003). *Enhancing program performance with logic models*. Retrieved from <https://fyi.uwex.edu/program-development/files/2016/03/lmcourseall.pdf>
- Texas A & M AgriLife Extension. (2018). *County operations: What are competencies?* Retrieved from <https://countyprograms.tamu.edu/what-are-competencies/>
- Weber, C., & Soderquist, C. (2016). *Adaptive learning: A pivotal competence for collective impact*. Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/ChildrensTrustofSC/adaptive-learning-for-collective-impact-and-applied-systems>
- Welch, M., & Saltmarsh, J. (2013). Current practice and infrastructure for campus centers of community engagement. *Journal of Higher Educational Outreach and Engagement*, 17(4), 25–56.

About the Author

Jorge Horacio Atilas coordinates the University Network on Community Engagement at Oklahoma State University and serves on the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Commission on Economic and Community Engagement. In addition to community engagement, his research interests focus on housing policy, energy, water, waste, and environmental health. He received his Ph.D. in housing from Virginia Tech University.