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Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals Membership Survey: Results and Implications

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Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals Membership Survey: Results and Implications

Abstract

A survey of the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professional (ANREP) members indicated two primary reasons for joining: the need to belong to a professional Extension association focusing on natural resources and the opportunity to network with other professionals in this issue area. Three issues members wanted addressed were: training and professional development opportunities, identification of national natural resource issues and strategies to address them, and interstate collaboration. Most respondents were satisfied with what ANREP had done since they became members. Other Extension organizations could adopt this survey methodology as a means to involve their members in their strategic planning process.

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Introduction

The Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (ANREP) is a national organization for Cooperative Extension Service (CES) professionals working in environmental education, fisheries, forestry, wood sciences, range, recreation, waste management, water, wildlife, and related disciplines. As a member of the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP), ANREP promotes communication, cooperation, and professionalism among Extension professional organizations, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy's (ECOP) Personnel and Organizational Development Committee, and the United States Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (USDA-CSREES) in general. The association's objectives are to:

- Bring Extension professionals together to discuss mutual natural resource issues, needs, and opportunities;
- Advance natural resource Extension through continuing education for Extension professionals;
- Promote cooperation among states and regions, agencies, associations, and businesses on natural resource education programs;
- Develop, sponsor, and promote education and training that advance natural resource management; and
- Strengthen communication with Extension administrators.

Since the organization's establishment in 1994, ANREP's officers had been concerned with determining how best to meet member needs. A survey was designed to provide for membership input into the strategic planning process. When the surveys were sent out, members were told of this planning process and that their survey input would help determine the organization's future direction. An ad hoc Survey Committee developed and issued a mail-out and follow-up electronic opinion survey to all members. Returned surveys were collected and results compiled. Summary information from the returned surveys is presented here.

The approach used in the survey may prove beneficial to other Extension organizations and associations as they attempt to involve their members in their strategic planning process. The specific questions asked also could have relevance to other Extension groups because much of what was asked represents issues common to all Extension organizations.

Procedure

A 19-question survey was mailed and later e-mailed to all ANREP members in May and August, 2001, respectively. Members were urged in the August e-mail correspondence not to complete and return the electronic form if they had already submitted the mail-out form. Completed survey information was entered into and analyzed using Microsoft Access and Excel. Answers to questions that could be summarized numerically were subjected to simple statistical analyses, i.e., percent of total response and ranking and ordering.

Questions where respondents were asked to provide textual statements were more difficult to analyze. In an effort to group responses, keywords that represented common responses were chosen and used for the grouping of comments. After grouping, the percentage of total responses per keyword for each question was determined. Finally, the general summarization of the comments by keywords formed the foundations for conclusions reached for each question. Results were grouped and analyzed into seven different categories. This procedure allowed for interpretations of the findings where overlap on common issues were addressed by different questions. (Jackson, Greene, & Baxter, 1993)

Results

Eighty-four respondents or 38% of the total membership completed and returned the surveys. The majority of the completed returned surveys came from the May mail-out effort. Respondents were not asked to provide their name so there was no absolute assurance that members did not submit two surveys. However, with this possibility in mind, all of the surveys were examined question-by-question for duplication. There were none.

Demographics

All respondents answered the question about the state where they were employed. The 28 states represented were spread over all four geographic regions in which ANREP is organized. The Western and North Central regions each had 32% of the respondents, while the Southern region accounted for 23%, and the Northeast contributed 13%.

When asked about program emphasis, all responded, with the single largest group (39%)

indicating they were in forestry or had some forestry components in their program. Twenty-three percent listed natural resources as their emphasis. Water resources was the next highest at 14%, but when combined with water quality and watershed management, the number rose to 21% . Environmental education represented 13%, followed by wildlife and range/livestock at 8% each and community development/growth management at 5% . Fisheries, 4H and youth, renewable resources, agriculture, bioenergy, public issues and sustainability, invasive plants, program development and evaluation, land use, leadership development, soil quality, Christmas trees, economics/marketing, nutrient management, wood products, pesticide management, woodland prairie and farmland, urban forestry, outdoor education, solid and hazardous waste, public policy, and agroforestry all received at least one response.

Forty-three percent of the respondents had statewide Extension programming responsibility. Twenty-five percent were county-based, and another 19% had multi-county duties. Four percent were involved in regional or multi-state activities, while 6% had state or federal administrative assignments. As for time in Extension, the range was zero to 30 years, with the mean being 12.6 years. The most frequent response (mode) was 7 years. Concerning respondents' appointment, 76% full-time Extension, but the average was 90.7%. ANREP membership ranged from less than 1 year to 8 years, with the mean being 2.7 years. The results demonstrate a broad range of Extension experience and programming responsibility. Therefore, the data was subdivided and analyzed by specific programming, tenure or appointment groups.

Reasons for Joining ANREP

Because ANREP is new and there are other organizations that an Extension professional might join, it was valuable to determine why individuals would join ANREP. One of the most frequent answers was that there was a need for such an organization (Table 1) because ANREP is the only national professional organization that focuses completely on natural resource issues. The other top response centered on the need to network or connect with others in the natural resources programming area.

Table 1.
Reasons for Joining ANREP

Responses	Number	Percent
Need for such an organization within Extension	19	25
Network/Connect	19	25
Common interest	9	12
Conferences	7	9
Learn	7	9
Professional development	4	5
Similar programming	4	5
Better recognition within Extension	3	4
Stay current	2	3
Recognition for work	1	1
Total	75	100

Conferences and Workshops

One question concerned respondents' attendance at any ANREP regional events or national conferences. Sixty-four percent of the 81 responding said yes, and 96% of them said they would like to attend more of these events in the future. Respondents also were given an opportunity to identify ways these events could be improved to meet their needs. Table 2 contains the grouped responses. Over one-fourth were satisfied with the events as they were. Cost, location, and timing were the primary issues of concern, while the other suggestions for improvement focused on subject matter content and relevance to the respondent's particular interest.

Table 2.
Ways to Improve National ANREP Events to Meet Member Needs

Responses	Number	Percent
No improvement needed	15	27
Cost, location and timing	10	18
Opportunity for informal gatherings	7	13
Subject matter	7	13
Format	6	11
Others	6	11
Program relevance	2	4
More discipline-based	2	4
Total	55	100

Benefits Derived from ANREP

When asked to identify the benefits respondents liked best about being a member of ANREP, they selected the opportunity for networking most often. Almost as many said they had nothing offer primarily because they were not sure yet of the benefits they would derive. Attending meetings and conferences and greater awareness of new developments scored highly also. Of the responses offered, professional development and the opportunity to present papers at meetings ranked least often.

Table 3.
Benefits from ANREP Membership

Responses	Number	Percent
Networking	15	22
Nothing to offer (not yet sure)	14	21
Meetings and conferences	11	16
Awareness of new developments	8	12
Communications	8	12

Awards program	3	4
Newsletter	3	4
Lobby	3	4
Professional development	2	3
Present papers	1	1
Total	68	100

Overall, fewer responses were forthcoming for the question about what benefits do respondents receive from ANREP that they may not receive elsewhere. Networking and information sharing again were at the top of the list. Several respondents felt that it was still too early for them to determine a unique benefit they had received from ANREP.

Table 4.
Benefits Received from ANREP Not Received Elsewhere

Responses	Number	Percent
Sharing information	9	22
Networking	7	17
Focus on natural resources	7	17
Similar interest	6	15
Too early to tell or none	5	12
National home for natural resources specialists	4	10
Lobby and representation	3	7
Total	41	100

Participants were asked to rate the importance of five specific ANREP functions as determined by the ANREP Board. The scale was 1 to 5 (highest). "Informal opportunity to network and connect with natural resource colleagues regionally & nationally" scored highest, with a mean of 4.31, followed closely by "Professional development opportunities and opportunities to share work at national conferences" at 4.10. "Communications (listservs, newsletter, webpage)" rated a 3.83. "Opportunity to nominate and receive national awards and recognition" and "Political action activities like JCEP and PILD (Public Policy Leadership Development)" were valued at 3.14 and 3.12, respectively.

Issues ANREP Might Address

Respondents were asked to rate the importance 14 specific issues that ANREP might consider addressing. These issues were determined by the ANREP Board members from their experiential knowledge about topics of concern to Extension professionals. A rating of "1" was the highest rank per issue. They ranked training and professional improvement opportunities first, followed by identification of national level natural resource issues and strategies to address them and assist

with interstate. Pay scale and job security were rated as low priorities, along with write-in issues like international opportunities and the creation of state-level natural resources program leadership positions.

Table 5.
Mean Value of Ranked Issues ANREP Might Consider Addressing

Category	Rating	Rank
Increased training opportunities	3.36	1
Professional improvement opportunities	3.41	2
National/Regional NR issues identification and strategies to address them	4.38	3
Interstate collaboration	4.45	4
Global natural resource issues identification and strategies to address them	6.08	5
Intrastate collaboration	6.53	6
Closer ties with research projects	6.77	7
Increased professional recognition	6.98	8
Professional advancement	7.24	9
Sabbatical/other professional development opportunities	7.64	10
Natural resource position postings	7.92	11
Improved pay scale	9.76	12
Improved job security	10.04	13
Others (International opportunities and create state-level NR Prog. Ldr Pos)	13.42	14

Under the "Increased training opportunities" issue, respondents were able to check eight specific opportunities, determined by the ANREP Board, that they felt applied to them. They could check more than one opportunity. Natural resources issues education ranked first with 58 respondents.

Table 6.
Respondents Ranking of Increased Training Opportunities They Feel Are important

Category	Responses	Rank
Natural resources issues education	58	1

Evaluation techniques	48	2
Educational techniques for various audiences	44	3
Targeting specific audiences	39	4
People/communication skills training	35	5
Grant writing and specific grant opportunities	31	6
Technical skills, i.e., computer and distance learning, etc.	24	7
Others (conflict resolution and CSREES funding support)	3	8

For the "National/Regional NR" issues, there were 27 write-in responses. Water issues alone made up 41% of the total. The others were: land use planning, urban interface, fragmentation, invasive species, minority ownership, certification, over-consumption, youth environmental education, and wildlife habitat. Under "Global Natural Resource" issues there were 24 responses equally distributed among: water, global warming, sustainability, population growth, environmental, and others

One open-ended question asked what ANREP can do to better meet members needs as natural resource Extension Professionals. There were few responses, but posting new programs and awareness of funding opportunities and political strength had a slight edge over the other responses.

Table 7.
Other Things ANREP Can Do to Meet the Needs of Members

Responses	Number	Percent
Posting new programs	4	24
Funding and political strength	4	24
Doing great	3	18
Communications	3	18
Web page	2	12
Professional development	1	6
Total	17	100

Committees

When asked to serve on an ANREP committee or serve on the ANREP board in the future, 80% (67) responded. Forty-nine percent said yes, 39% said no, and 12% said maybe. When asked about adding or deleting committees, the response rate was low (35%). Eighty-six percent of those responding recommended no changes. One recommendation for a new committee was an Issues Committee whose purpose would allow members to submit issues for review, research, and recommend action to the Executive Committee. A second recommended addition was to have a committee on relationships with other organizations/agencies outside Extension (e.g., state

foresters, USFS, fish & game).

Satisfaction with ANREP

On a scale of "1" through "5" (most satisfied), members were asked to rate their satisfaction with the work that ANREP has done since they became a member. Sixty-nine respondents or 82% answered this question. The range was from "1" (lowest level of satisfaction) to "5" (highest), with the mean of 3.9. No one rated the organization below a "3," meaning that none of the respondents were completely dissatisfied with ANREP.

Conclusions

The results show an organization that is generally meeting the needs of its membership. Individuals joined ANREP because they personally deal with natural resource issues and there was no organization within Extension to satisfy their networking and professional development needs. ANREP's biannual conferences, communication tools, awards programs, and political/legislative opportunities were among the activities and programs highlighted by members as being useful. More effort by the leadership to communicate new programs and encourage committee involvement was suggested as an opportunity for improvement.

The survey was a valuable tool for engaging the membership in the leadership of the organization. It served the purpose of letting members know that the Executive Board was interested in their thoughts and opinions. It gave the current and upcoming leadership of the organization an idea of how well they are meeting the needs of members. It also aided the foundation for a strategic planning committee that was formed in 2003.

ANREP's membership and scope continues to increase rapidly. Membership as of November 2002 was approaching 400. These survey results and the results of the strategic planning effort will be used to guide the Association for the next 3 to 5 years.

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that being a member of ANREP was important because it provided an avenue to network with other Extension natural resource professionals on a national level. Respondents stated that ANREP is the only national natural resource Extension professional association in the United States with an exclusive focus on natural resource issues. The association provided an avenue to learn from others in a similar field. The respondents felt that there is a national Extension "home" for their natural resource programmatic emphasis, whereas they may not have felt that there was such an opportunity in the past.

Overall, the respondents were pleased with the association as a whole and expressed interest in attending more national and regional workshops and programs. Natural resources issues education, evaluation and educational techniques, targeting specific audiences, people/communication skills, and grant writing ranked high for future training opportunities. Water issues made up 41% of the national issues identified as priorities. Also listed were land use planning, urban interface, fragmentation, invasive species, minority ownership, certification, over-consumption, environmental education, and wildlife habitat. Water, global warming, sustainability, population growth, and environmental were listed as global natural resource Issues of concern.

The specific questions asked in this survey could have relevance to other Extension groups because much of what was asked represents issues common to all Extension organizations. The methodology may prove beneficial to other Extension organizations and associations as they attempt to involve their members in their future strategic planning.

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Jackson, B. D., Greene, W. D., & Baxter, M. L. 1993. Local regulation of timber harvesting and trucking in Georgia. *So. J. Appl. For.* 17(4):200-206.

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