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## **MSU EXTENSION SERVICE OFFERS PROGRAMS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

*Alvin E. House  
Michigan State University*

The Michigan State University (MSU) Extension Service offers numerous programs of value to local and county governments. We conduct general educational programs at meetings of associations of local government officials as well as regional workshops for local officials.

In a county in which an administrative change is being considered, the MSU Extension staff works with the board of commissioners, department heads, and members of the print and broadcast media. After a particular form of administration is selected, we can help design the new administrative arrangements as well as guide the board through the process of selecting an administrator. We also assist the county in executing the reorganization plan. After one year, extension can conduct an evaluation of the new administration. Similar types of programming are available for municipal governments.

Intergovernmental agreements and contracts to facilitate provision of such services as sewer and water, law enforcement, fire protection, computer services, road maintenance, and county extension service are the subject of extension workshops for local officials. Educational resources for the workshops include extension staff, law firm personnel, federal and state agency representatives, consultants, and experienced local government officials.

In situations in which intergovernmental programs are designed and executed, extension assists in marshalling the necessary resources; drafting agreements and contracts; and designing, and sometimes overseeing, execution programs and services for limited periods of time. We can also contract with other county agencies to deliver educational services.

Another area of increased involvement is the computerization of county and local governments. We offer general education programs for officials at association conferences and extension workshops and can provide in-depth assistance for a particular unit including conducting computer applications needs studies; assisting officials in investigating alternative hardware and software systems; and writing bid specifications and assisting in evaluating bids.

We can also assist in the design of accounting software; help obtain software from other units; help coordinate joint production of software; write software for accounting, payroll, cash management, and investment; train operators; and, in a few cases, install systems. We hold workshops to demonstrate the many uses of small computers and assist county boards in budgeting using spread sheets in small computers.

We also have developed a comprehensive study of budgeting, budget execution, program evaluation, and information use for the financial management of county and local government. We conduct regional extension workshops for officials, and follow up with in-depth financial studies in individual units as needed, including the review of cash flow and investment return; the review for each fund of assets, liabilities, balance, revenues, and expenditures, using charts, tables, graphs, and other aids to show trends; the review of particular programs that may be leading to financial problems; and the study of, and recommended improvements in, reporting forms and methods. Training of officers in the use of financial information in financial planning, and providing extension in-service staff training on reading and responding to the various county financial conditions are a part of this program.

In the area of governmental personnel policy and administration we can review and amend personnel policy and index that policy to union contract provisions. We occasionally conduct salary and wage market studies and provide employee classifications; analyze union contracts, identifying negotiable items; and organize personnel records. We can also outline general principles and practice of personnel management; assist in administering public employment programs; and analyze affirmative action plans.

Educational programs at association meetings, extension regional workshops for local officials, individual consultation, and in-service training for extension staffs on the subject of county personnel administration are some of the programs we offer.

We also assist with the development of governmental purchasing systems through general education programs at association meetings and direct assistance in the development of purchasing systems for individual government units.

Property tax administration — assessing, review of assessments, equalization of assessments, appeals and legislation — is another area of expertise. We assisted the state in setting up assessor training courses and a certifications program 12 years ago and currently are capable of conducting general education programs on property tax administration for all local officials, although the state associations do most of this now, we offer consultation and problem solving services, most often when there is a dispute among local and state agencies.

The State Tax Education Program (STEP) is the outgrowth of extension tax education programs dating back to the 1950s. Tradition-

ally, extension has analyzed tax proposals, in origin both legislative and initiative, and has conducted educational programs for both officials and the public. For example, in 1980, extension held more than 250 educational meetings, conducted 56 major radio and television broadcasts and passed out many thousands of pieces of educational literature on the tax issues. Almost all county officials and a high proportion of local officials were reached by the programs and literature and many meetings were held for state officials.

Following the election, extension organized a permanent tax task force made up of representatives of state government, county and local government associations, and interest groups active in tax policy making to maintain current analysis and educational materials on the Michigan tax system. Materials include a 400-page tax education book containing charts, tables, and illustrations which facilitate the development of educational program materials for particular groups.

The chairman of the Michigan House Tax Committee, where most tax legislation originates, meets regularly with the STEP tax force. Twenty-five years of steady development of tax education programs has resulted in one of the best in the nation, we believe. In fact, STEP recently conducted an all-day educational program, coordinated by extension and held in the House chamber, for members of the state House and Senate.

Extension meetings; meetings called by other institutions; in-depth training for officials; and in-depth in-service training for extension specialists, administrators, and field staff; as well as seminars for MSU faculty are included among the tax programs offered.

On the subject of planning and physical development of counties, public works, industrial development, county facilities, and borrowing, however, a highly structured workshop with simulated project development and decision making for county and local officials and consultation with units on specific programs are used to impart knowledge.

After many years of conducting educational programs on economic development jointly with state government, extension took the initiative in 1980 and organized the Michigan Economic Development Education Council (MEDEC). MEDEC, comprised of representatives from MSU, Wayne State University, the University of Michigan, Michigan Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education, organized labor, and business, is a low-profile operation which meets monthly to facilitate communication among all Michigan groups with programing in economic development.

We host an annual conference of leaders in public and private sectors active in economic development; hold small informative educational programs at monthly meetings; and conduct workshops for local officials. The 1983 annual conference addressed the role of county and local governments as facilitators of economic development.

In the area of land and water use and environmental protection, we answer calls, respond to inquiries, and hold regional workshops for local leaders, including county and local officials, regarding the roles of, and balance among, federal, state, and local governments; private rights; planning land and water use; zoning; and other regulations as well as the rules, guidelines, management practices, and role of county government in administering the state Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Program law.

We also address the policy and administration of park and recreation systems, including planning design, operation, and maintenance of parks and recreation delivery systems, by conducting skills and procedures workshops for local park and recreation system managers; workshops on employee relationships, job scheduling, work programs and budgeting; and evaluation and planning services for existing and new parks and recreational systems.

Community and organizational development, leadership development, community needs assessment, attitudinal surveys, and program evaluation are other areas of concern. In these areas we survey administrators of county government and citizens and publish and interpret survey information as well as conduct educational programs for local government officials that study the implications for the future of local governments and hold workshops for local leaders and local officials to consider the effects of changing population and changing socio-economic conditions on local government services.

Our two-year leadership development course, sponsored and coordinated by county extension offices with guidance and cooperation from campus extension staff, attracts many local government officials. Participants meet regularly for study and workshop sessions utilizing specialists from MSU and other sources. The course includes travel to study institutions relevant to the central theme of each group's training experience.

Organizational sociology, group dynamics, and inter-group relations workshops help township officials make government more effective and creditable. Workshops develop individual skills in confidence, assertiveness, stress control and listening, and group skills in managing conflict in public meetings, analyzing goals, setting objectives, and making decisions.

### **Supporting Publications and Workshop Materials**

We chose not to list publications in the section listing programs because most programs have evolved over many years whereas publications and workshop materials tend to be short lived. Also, most of the materials are adapted to Michigan laws, rules, and customary practices.

We publish a booklet on alternatives in data processing and design of the accounting system. The section on alternatives in data process-

ing has been amended in major ways four times since Jan. 1. In our in-depth work with individual units, we generate new charts, tables, graphs, and texts on each occasion.

Even our more general training materials, which we keep on a word processor, are reworked before each series of workshops. Other states can use these materials to generate ideas, but not as training materials.

Different states develop materials for different styles of work. For example, Jack Whitmer, Iowa State, has developed a very detailed form for analyzing and reporting on the financial condition of a government unit. It reflects Whitmer's style and works well for technical analysis as well as for educational purposes. We, however, tend to look over the financial components rather quickly, passing over those which are "healthy" and analyzing only those where problems exist. Then we report by exception.

That is also the way we teach budgeting. If a program area is not up for change, we follow strict incremental budgeting procedures. Where problems exist — program costs seem to be increasing too fast, laws change substantially, or a program just hasn't been "looked at" for a long time — we provide in-depth analysis and look carefully at costs, output, and impacts.

We choose to analyze and report by exception for two reasons: (1) It requires minimum staff time and (2) Local officials like it. The reports generated are usually of no general use but are filed with materials for the particular unit and reviewed when we work in that unit again.

We recommend that state extension program descriptions be published, including a note indicating that inquiries concerning publications, workshop materials, techniques and software will be answered. A special ECOP task force is, in fact, currently compiling local government educational program descriptions across all states. If a particular state Extension Service is interested in benefiting from the MSU Extension experience, a visit to Michigan would be in order.

## **Experiment Station Projects**

The MSU Experiment Station primarily funds projects of interest to private firms; however, some very useful projects related to local government have been funded during the last ten years. The following list includes enough projects to suggest themes. Some projects extend through several years.

- Government procurement — a study of local government purchasing systems. Comparisons to purchasing models were made and an analysis of factors to be overcome to achieve model purchasing performance was made.

- The impact of regional planning agencies on local and regional decision making.

- The impact of local government land use regulations on land values on the urban fringe.
- The economics of collective action by small electric utilities (public, cooperatives, and private).
- Effects of school board decision making upon the distribution of benefits to local education.
- The economics of multi-county health agencies.
- Impacts of court re-organization in Michigan on costs of using courts and access to courts.
- Economic impacts of public housing projects.
- Intergovernmental contracts for police services — costs, response time, quality of service, a study of the contracts.
- Impact of rural welfare and supplemental income payments on the local economy.
- Health care and the rural poor.
- Design and testing of alternative models for diffusing appropriate technologies to home owners.
- A spatial economic analysis of Michigan's water resources.
- Interaction and conflicts between law and government and science and technology.
- Use of remote sensing and related technologies in agricultural and natural resources management. (Counties have been using this information and technology in developing soil type maps and water resource maps.)
- Mineral land development, energy and economic impacts.
- Impacts of tourism on rural economic development.

### **Developing and Executing Research Projects**

The research project is formulated on the basis of problems and/or opportunities generally agreed upon by the research professor; graduate assistants; representatives of the several levels of government that have an interest in the subject; representatives of professional associations; and administrators of the university department and Experiment Station. Research is then carried out with the cooperation of these same parties.

When research is completed, public announcements are made of the research results. The various organizations involved usually hold educational meetings or provide time on conference agendas to discuss the research results. Bulletins and other educational materials are developed and distributed. If the researcher is also a part-time extension specialist, then the machinery of the extension organization is used to spread the information and technologies.

If extension is not involved in the formulation and execution of the project, then extension specialists examine the research results to determine either the usefulness to ongoing extension programs or the perceived need of extension clientele groups for the information.

In the Department of Agricultural Economics most of the research projects funded by the Experiment Station are jointly conceived and executed by research and extension professors. Usually, the research results become a part of the long-term development of extension programs. The graduate students working on the research usually participate in the development and execution of the accompanying educational programs, working along with extension specialists and extension field staff.

### **Applied Research Conducted Within the Extension Service**

At MSU the Extension Service sponsors more research in local government subjects than the Experiment Station. Grants from Kellogg Foundation and North Central Community Resource Development, among others; extension money; and fees from local governments have enabled us to develop educational materials and conduct pilot projects in the field in areas of public finance, computer applications, administration, and many other areas suggested in our program listing. Extension specialists tend to prefer a strong role by extension in the formulation of applied research and the execution and delivery of the educational programs. The needs of the clientele are always foremost in this arrangement. Research and educational development and delivery have their roots directly in local government.

In closing we wish to emphasize that the foundations for these programs were laid in Michigan during the 1950s and early 1960s. The Michigan Extension staff worked closely during the development stages with like-minded staffs of other North Central states. At that time the Farm Foundation was virtually the only institution which facilitated sharing of information and other assistance in this program area.

The most essential requirement for building programs in local government research and education is uninterrupted, steady development over one or more decades. Another requirement is cooperation and sharing among state staffs. Thirdly, within a state, the extension staff must learn to work in harmony with many agencies, firms, governments, associations, interest groups, officials, other university departments and staffs, and (often it seems) everybody. Cooperation and coordination are the key words. The first is necessary to the second.