

Western Region Strategic Communications: Steering Committee Update and Playbook

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Overview

Members of the Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (WAAESD) and Western Extension Directors Association (WEDA) commissioned a Western Region Strategic Communications Steering Committee at their respective meetings in the fall of 2021.

The purpose of the steering committee is to develop a communications strategy for the Western Region Extension and Agricultural Experiment Station Joint Enterprise. The objectives of the effort are to:

- Increase visibility of Research and Extension Impacts.
- Increase awareness of the region’s collective research and Extension activities.
- Strengthen partnerships with Western Governors’ Association, Council of State Governments-West, and Western Interstate Region -National Association of Counties and other organizations.

Updated 3.17.22

The outcome is to develop a communications strategy and supporting tactics and products for use by western land-grant universities in the states, territories, and U.S. protectorates. Audiences for the effort may include, but are not limited to, national organizations such as Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Steering committee members:

- Amy Bibbey (CSU AES)
- Bret Hess (WAAESD)
- Doreen Hauser-Lindstrom (WEDA)
- Jennifer Alexander (OSU Extension)
- Jennifer Tippetts (WAAESD)
- LaRachelle Samuel-Smith (NIFA)
- LaJoy Spears (NMSU Extension)
- Leslie Edgar (NMSU AES)
- Peter Barcinas (Guam Extension)
- Pete Pinney (AK Extension)

The steering committee has met weekly since January 26, 2022, conducted an initial assessment of existing assets and efforts, and consulted with key collaborators. As a result, the steering committee proposes to move forward with development of a “Playbook,” an initial outline of which is presented here for feedback. The steering committee intends to conclude their work by June 30, 2022 concurrent with publishing a working draft Playbook for use by Western Region Directors, communicators and evaluators. The steering committee proposes the Playbook be regularly reviewed, revised, and adjusted by WAAESD and WEDA or representatives selected by the two associations to support a long-term, strategic, and systemic approach.

Summary of Existing Assets and Key Collaborator Interviews

Communication and Evaluation Resources

Given the emphasis placed on relying on institutions to engage in national efforts, the steering committee developed a survey to inventory communication and evaluation resources available throughout the western region that may contribute to a regional communications strategy.

See Appendix A for results.

Collaborator Interviews: NIFA Communications

Faith Peppers, NIFA Communications Director

LaRachelle Samuel-Smith, NIFA Internal Communications Manager and Western Region Liaison

Lori Gula, NIFA External Communications Manager

Updated 3.17.22

Peppers emphasized the importance of making information readily available for consumption by those who may amplify the land-grant message. Peppers compiles success stories and impact statements from institutions in states on the itinerary for visits by the Secretary of Agriculture and NIFA Director. These stories are then incorporated into remarks the respective dignitaries deliver during their visits. The [National Land Grant Impacts Database](#) (NIDB) is one of the first repositories Peppers reviews for information. She also reviews information posted on an institution's website to supplement NIDB content or fill gaps. If those two resources do not contain sufficient information, she and her staff contact the institutional communicator for assistance. Peppers further stressed the importance of having access to evaluators to coordinate with communicators.

Samuel-Smith and Gula reemphasized many of Peppers' points. They also elaborated on responsibilities of NIFA communications staff. NIFA has initiated a program called "Thoughtful Thankful Thursdays." The program is geared towards NIFA staff learning about the important role they play with land-grant partners. Guest speakers from the land-grant university system explain how the work they do is advanced by the communication staff at NIFA. They encouraged participation by institution communicators in NIFA's Monthly Communications Town Hall Meeting. NIFA also offers a [monthly social media toolkit](#).

Collaborator Interview: APLU Communications and Partnerships

Andrea Putman, APLU Assistant Vice President for Communications and Partnerships

Putman reviewed the resources at her disposal and efforts to include communicators throughout the land-grant system. She shared information about the monthly Office of Food, Agriculture & Natural Resources (FANR) Communications toolkit and associated campaigns. Putman also explained efforts to maintain a current list of communicators at land-grant universities. The objective is to rely on institutional communicators to utilize the toolkit (which includes messaging, editorial calendar suggestions and template social media content) to amplify the APLU messages and campaigns on social media.

Collaborator Interview: ESCOP Grand Challenges

Sara Delheimer, Program Coordinator for the Multistate Research Fund Impacts

Delheimer shared the ESCOP Grand Challenges templates as another example of an effort to utilize a standardized national template that can be customized with local or regional success stories.

National Land Grant Impacts Database

It was quite evident that the NIDB is a valuable resource for national communications efforts. It is important to note that impact statements available in NIDB have been subjected to peer review, which increases the quality of the information available to users of the database.

Updated 3.17.22

In addition to the information gleaned directly from NIDB described by NIFA, the steering committee learned that a small contingent of communicators convenes annually to produce national impact stories in which institutions contributing to NIDB are called out for their important work. The group of communicators produced 61 stories, 27 factsheets, and a video in 2021. Therefore, the steering committee summarized data from NIDB to determine how well institutions within the western region are represented in NIDB. See Appendix B for full results.

Ten of the 17 institutions within the region have published impact statements over the last 3 years. The total number of impact statements published for Extension is greater than the number published by Agricultural Experiment Stations (Research). Overall, the west contributed 10.78%, 12.3%, and 18.4% to the total number of impact statements published in 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively. Distribution of impact statements across the NIDB predefined focus areas revealed that the western region's greatest number of impacts are in agricultural systems. The results also indicate uneven contribution among impact statements published by the region's Extension and Agricultural Experiment Stations.

Remaining Questions/Pending Discussion

To be drafted...

Playbook – Draft outline

Strategic Focus

- Position the Western Region Extension and Agricultural Experiment Station Joint Enterprise as a unique, high-value resource that effectively collaborates with local, regional, and national stakeholders.
- Engage key stakeholders through strategic communications to become influential advocates of the joint enterprise.
- Empower institutional evaluators and communicators to act within the framework of this playbook—individually, collaboratively, and in coordination with regional and national networks and partners

Tactical Recommendations

The objective of the playbook is to offer recommendations on how the region may connect, coordinate, and communicate.

Connection

Create opportunities for communicators and evaluators to interact.

1. Support communicators and evaluators to be active members of ACE or other pertinent professional communities of practice.
2. Encourage communicators and evaluators to join NIFA's Monthly Communications Town Hall Meetings.
3. Provide financial support to encourage engagement among communicators and evaluators.

Coordination

Generate resources for communicators and evaluators to utilize for amplifying messages.

1. Create a resource library of "ready to use" and customizable products.
2. Articulate best practices for how institutional and regional efforts and individuals should connect and align with national efforts.
3. Develop an audience map for the local, regional, and national levels.
4. Form working groups to implement various components of the playbook.
5. Offer hybrid meetings to allow for maximum attendance.

Communication

Communicate how western region institutions and partners deliver advances in critical fields.

1. Develop modules to create awareness and help educate within WAAESD and WEDA and each association's affiliates.
2. Increase communications of impacts and multi-purposing of success stories.
3. Set expectations, accountability, and responsibility for manageable and consistent communications activity.
 - a. Produce talking points to support core messaging.
 - b. Leverage social media networks.

Appendix A: Western Communicators and Evaluators Resource Survey & Survey Results

1. Which University do you represent?

2. Which unit within your University do you represent?

Experiment Station

Extension

Both

3. Do you have access to a communicator or communications team?

Yes, and communicator/team's primary focus is my unit.

Yes, but at the college (or similar) level (unit is not a singular focus).

Yes, but at the university level (unit is not a primary focus).

No direct access to communicators.

4. How many communicators do you have access to?

0

1

2-5

5-10

More than 10

5. What expertise/services do your communicators provide?

Communications strategy

Executive/leadership communications

External relations (such as legislative or stakeholder relations communications)

Design

Marketing

Media relations

Multimedia (photo, video, audio)

Social media

Web development/design

Web strategy

Writing/editing

Other (please specify)

6. Which of the following are your communicators connected with? (check all that apply)

Association for Communication Excellence (ACE)

National Land Grant Impact Database

APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit

Unsure

Other (please specify)

Updated 3.17.22

7. Do you have access to evaluators?

Yes, at the University level

Yes, at the organizational level (such as an evaluator who serves an entire Extension Service, Agricultural Experiment Station or College).

Yes, for specific programs or projects.

No direct access to evaluators.

8. How many evaluators do you have access to?

0

1

2-5

5-10

More than 10

9. What expertise/services do your evaluators provide?

Evaluation basics training

Needs assessment assistance

Formative program evaluation

Summative program evaluation

Logic modeling

Methodology consults

Instrument design

Instrument validation

Quantitative data analysis

Qualitative data analysis

IRB proposal editing

Impact statement editing

Risk and crisis communication

Other (please specify)

10. Which of the following are your evaluators connected with? (check all that apply)

AEA Extension Education Evaluation Topical Interest Group (EEE TIG)

Association for Communication Excellence (ACE)

Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP)

Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative

National Extension Technology Community (NETC)

National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals (NAEPSDP)

National Land Grant Impact Database

Western Regional Evaluators Network (WREN)

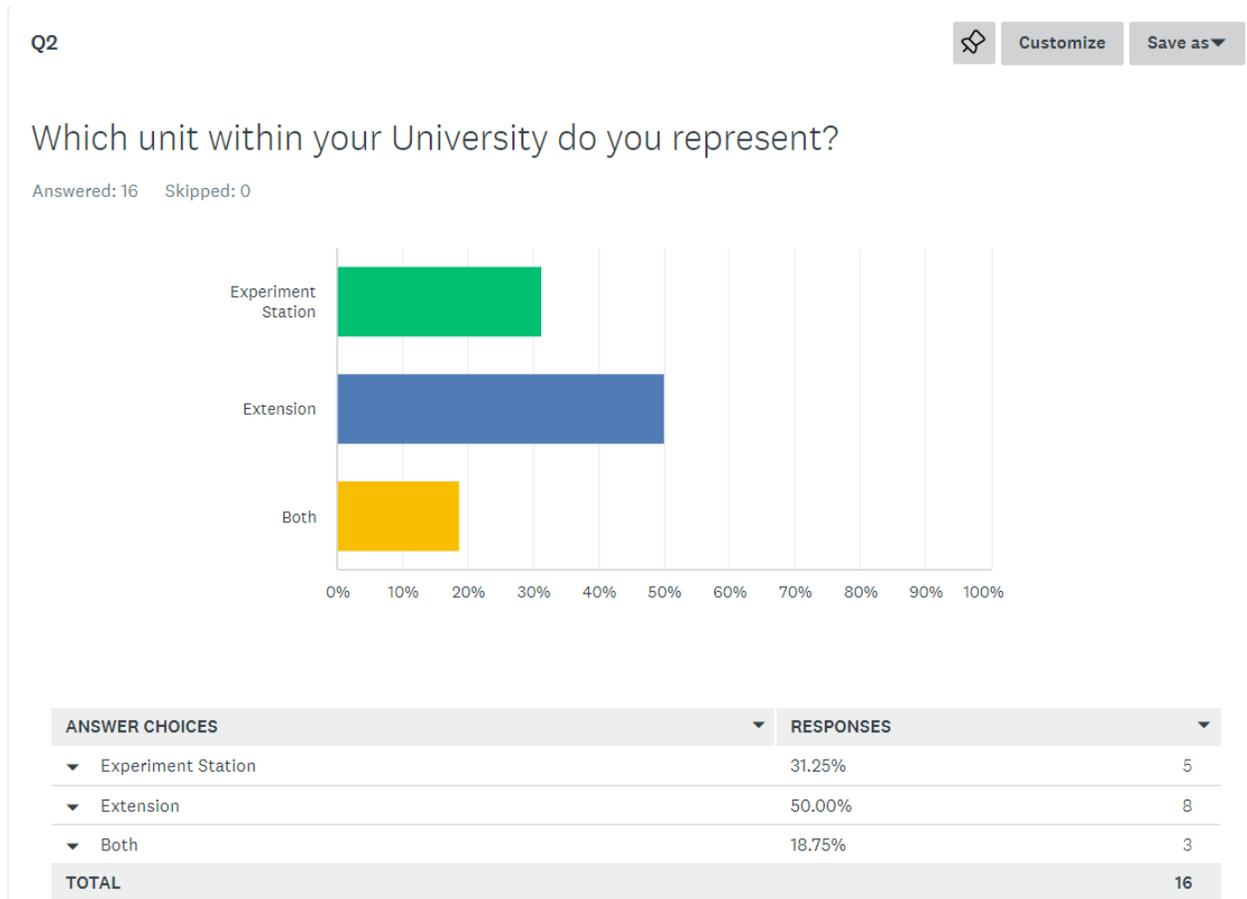
APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit

DRAFT

Q1: Participating Universities

New Mexico State University, University of Wyoming, University of Hawaii, Washington State University, Arizona State University, Utah State University, University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of California, Montana State University, University of Guam, American Samoa Community College, Oregon State University.

- Some universities completed multiple surveys.



Q3

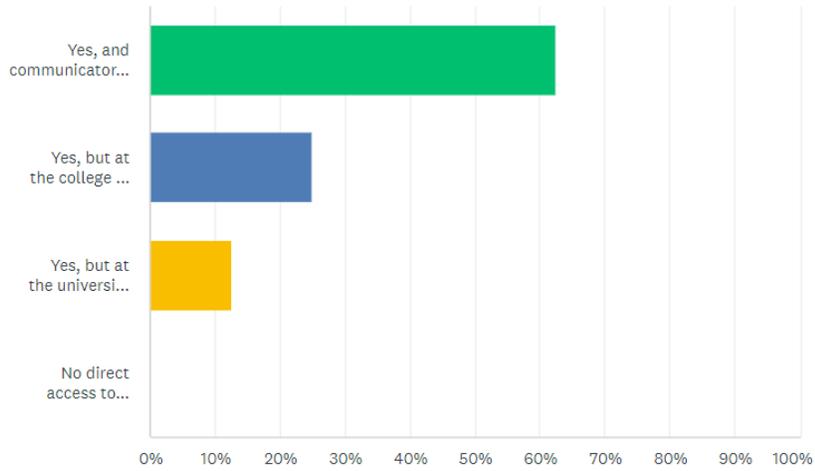


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Do you have access to a communicator or communications team?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, and communicator/team's primary focus is my unit.	62.50%	10
Yes, but at the college (or similar) level (unit is not a singular focus).	25.00%	4
Yes, but at the university level (unit is not a primary focus).	12.50%	2
No direct access to communicators.	0.00%	0
TOTAL		16



Q4

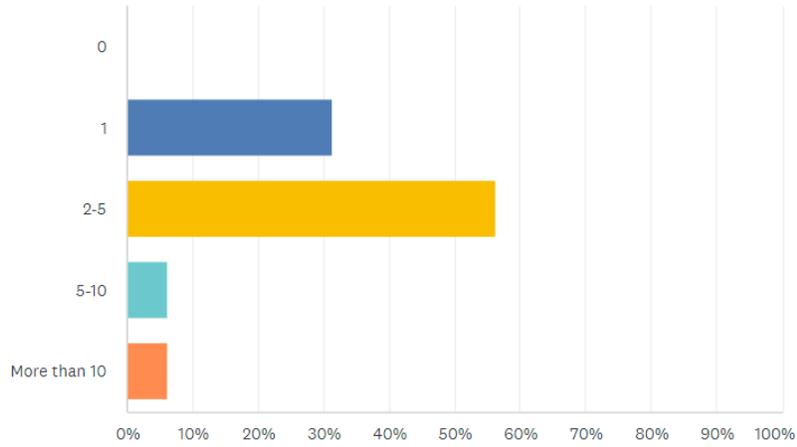


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How many communicators do you have access to?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0

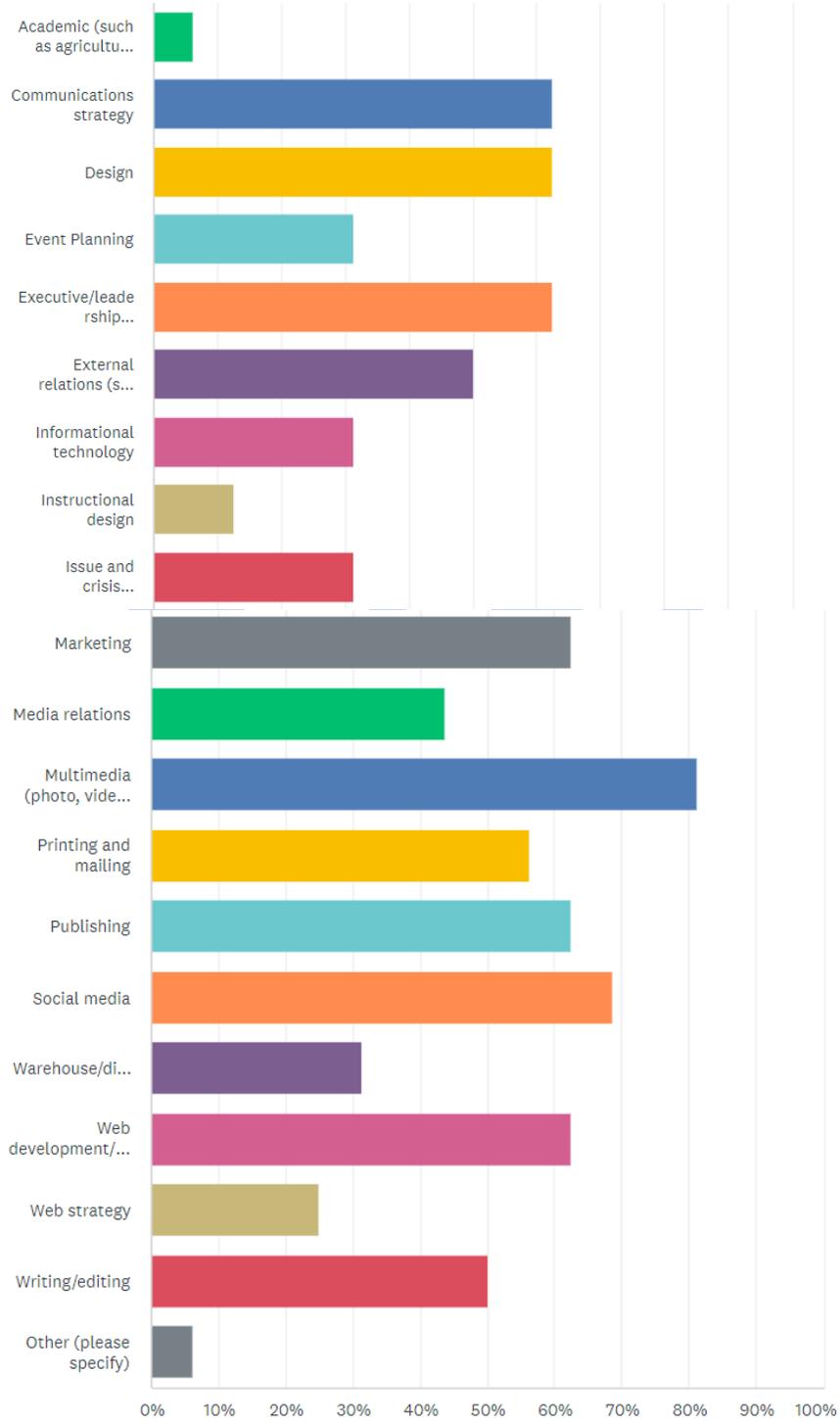


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ 0	0.00% 0
▼ 1	31.25% 5
▼ 2-5	56.25% 9
▼ 5-10	6.25% 1
▼ More than 10	6.25% 1
TOTAL	16



What expertise/services do your communicators provide?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Academic (such as agricultural communications degree programs, research faculty)	6.25%	1
Communications strategy	62.50%	10
Design	62.50%	10
Event Planning	31.25%	5
Executive/leadership communications	62.50%	10
External relations (such as legislative or stakeholder relations communications)	50.00%	8
Informational technology	31.25%	5
Instructional design	12.50%	2
Issue and crisis communication	31.25%	5
Marketing	62.50%	10
Media relations	43.75%	7
Multimedia (photo, video, audio)	81.25%	13
Printing and mailing	56.25%	9
Publishing	62.50%	10
Social media	68.75%	11
Warehouse/distribution	31.25%	5
Web development/design	62.50%	10
Web strategy	25.00%	4
Writing/editing	50.00%	8
Other (please specify)	Responses 6.25%	1
Total Respondents: 16		

Q6

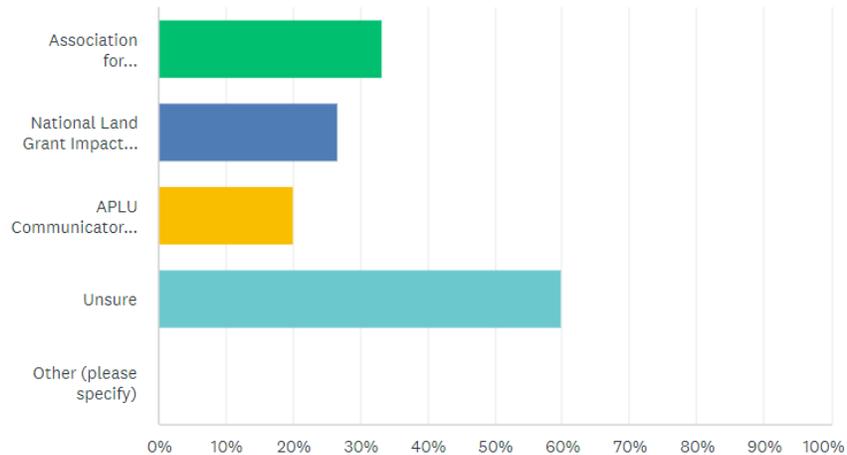


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Which of the following are your communicators connected with? (check all that apply)

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1



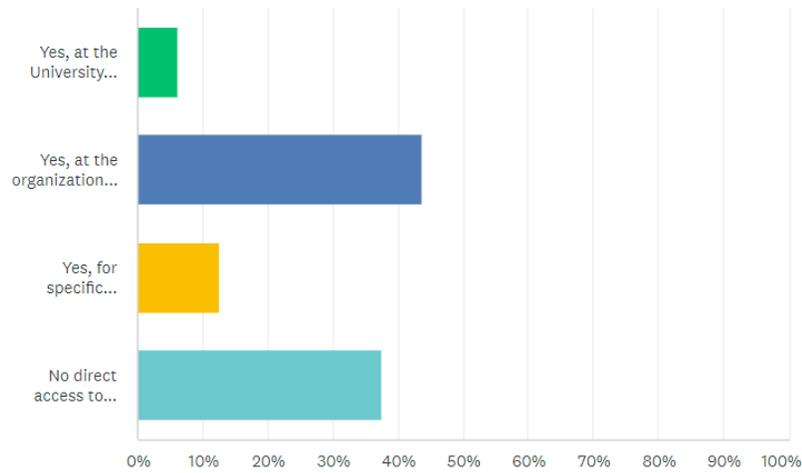
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Association for Communication Excellence (ACE)	33.33%	5
National Land Grant Impact Database	26.67%	4
APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit	20.00%	3
Unsure	60.00%	9
Other (please specify) Responses	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 15		

Q7

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Do you have access to evaluators?

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, at the University level	6.25%	1
Yes, at the organizational level (such as an evaluator who serves an entire Extension Service, Agricultural Experiment Station or College).	43.75%	7
Yes, for specific programs or projects.	12.50%	2
No direct access to evaluators.	37.50%	6
TOTAL		16

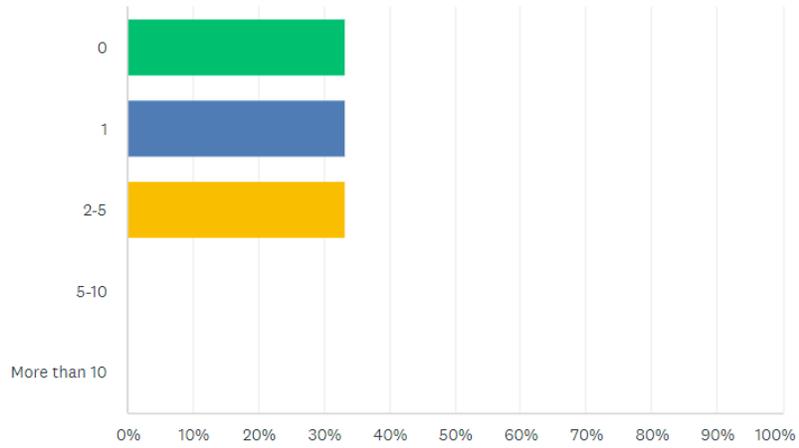


Q8

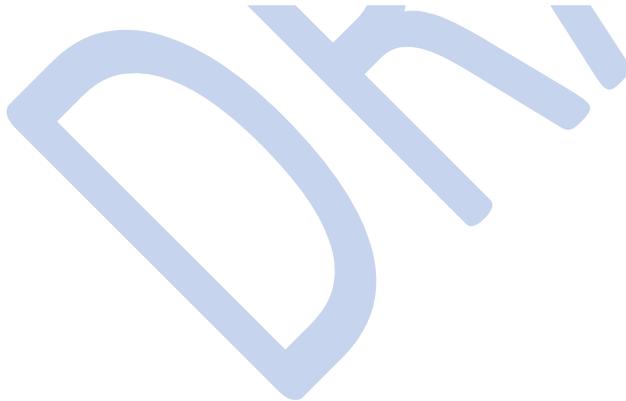
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How many evaluators do you have access to?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ 0	33.33% 5
▼ 1	33.33% 5
▼ 2-5	33.33% 5
▼ 5-10	0.00% 0
▼ More than 10	0.00% 0
TOTAL	15

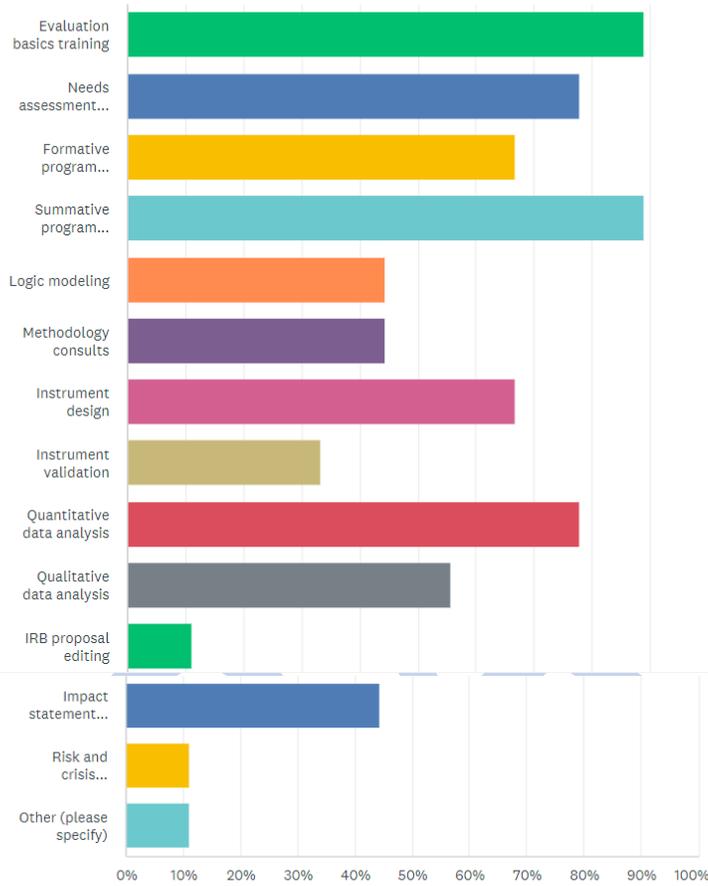


Q9

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What expertise/services do your evaluators provide?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 7



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Evaluation basics training	88.89% 8
▼ Needs assessment assistance	77.78% 7
▼ Formative program evaluation	66.67% 6
▼ Summative program evaluation	88.89% 8
▼ Logic modeling	44.44% 4
▼ Methodology consults	44.44% 4
▼ Instrument design	66.67% 6
▼ Instrument validation	33.33% 3
▼ Quantitative data analysis	77.78% 7
▼ Qualitative data analysis	55.56% 5
▼ IRB proposal editing	11.11% 1
▼ Impact statement editing	44.44% 4
▼ Risk and crisis communication	11.11% 1
▼ Other (please specify) Responses	11.11% 1
Total Respondents: 9	

Q10

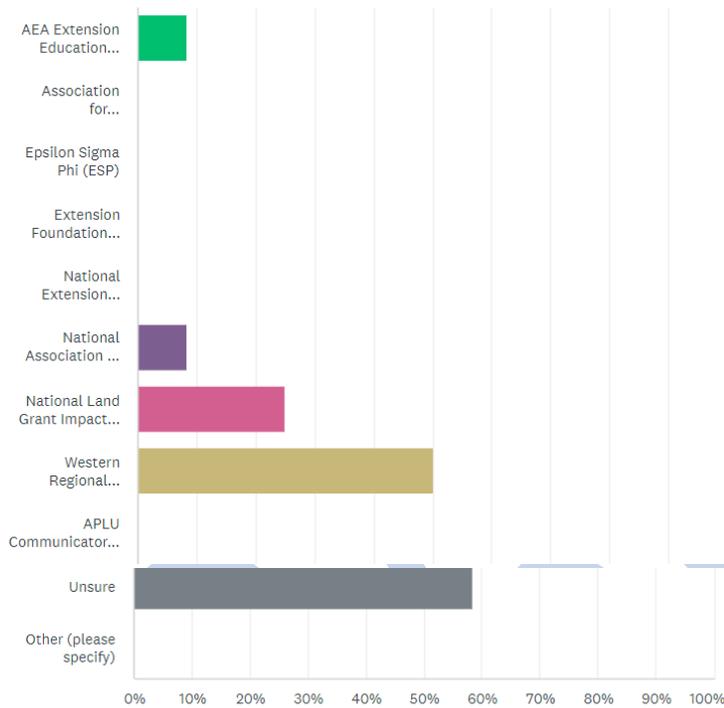


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Which of the following are your evaluators connected with? (check all that apply)

Answered: 12 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ AEA Extension Education Evaluation Topical Interest Group (EEE TIG)	8.33% 1
▼ Association for Communication Excellence (ACE)	0.00% 0
▼ Epsilon Sigma Phi (ESP)	0.00% 0
▼ Extension Foundation Impact Collaborative	0.00% 0
▼ National Extension Technology Community (NETC)	0.00% 0
▼ National Association of Extension Program and Staff Development Professionals (NAEPSDP)	8.33% 1
▼ National Land Grant Impact Database	25.00% 3
▼ Western Regional Evaluators Network (WREN)	50.00% 6
▼ APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit	0.00% 0
▼ Unsure	58.33% 7
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 12	

Appendix B. National Land Grant Impact Database – Western Region Contributions

National Impacts Entered in the Western Region by State

	2019			2020			2021	
	Extension	Research		Extension	Research		Extension	Research
Am. S.	0	0	Am. S.	0	0	Am. S.	5	0
AK	0	0	AK	3	0	AK	0	0
CA	24	0	CA	27	0	CA	16	0
CO	1	0	CO	3	0	CO	0	0
ID	5	0	ID	6	0	ID	5	0
NM	5	10	NM	1	21	NM	0	19
OR	8	2	OR	13	1	OR	13	1
UT	1	0	UT	3	0	UT	0	0
WA	0	6	WA	0	7	WA	0	0
WY	0	0	WY	2	0	WY	0	11
	44	18		58	29		39	31
	10.8% of total entries			12.3% of total entries			18.4% of total entries	

Western Land-grant Universities not included above did not submit impacts for inclusion in the national database.

National Impact Entered by Focus Areas

	2019			2020			2021	
	Extension	Research		Extension	Research		Extension	Research
<u>Agricultural Systems</u>	11	14		17	13		10	15
<u>Energy & Byproducts</u>	0	0		0	0		0	1
<u>Environmental Stewardship</u>	3	1		7	11		2	4
<u>Food Security</u>	5	1		4	2		4	6
<u>Nutrition & Health</u>	14	1		16	2		10	1
<u>Youth, Families & Communities</u>	11	1		13	1		12	4
<u>Null/ Undefined</u>	0	0		1	0		1	0
	44	18		58	29		39	31