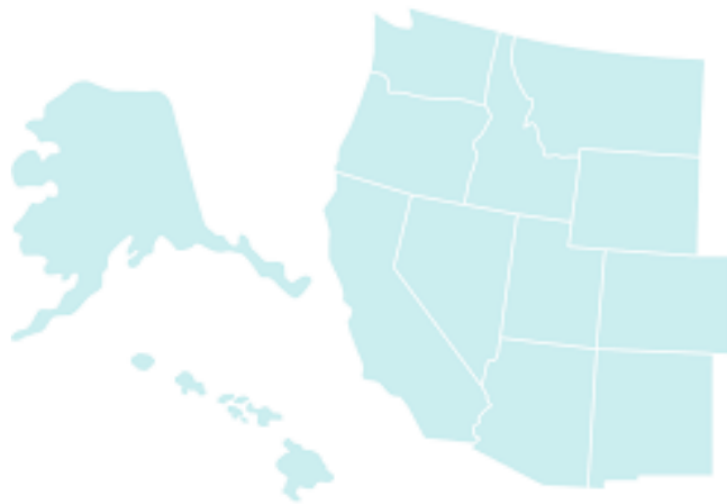


Updated 06.24.22

# **Western Region Strategic Communications: Steering Committee Update and Playbook**



# 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.

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- Strengthen partnerships with Western Governors’ Association, Council of State Governments-West, and Western Interstate Region -National Association of Counties and other organizations.

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 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.

## 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.

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- 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

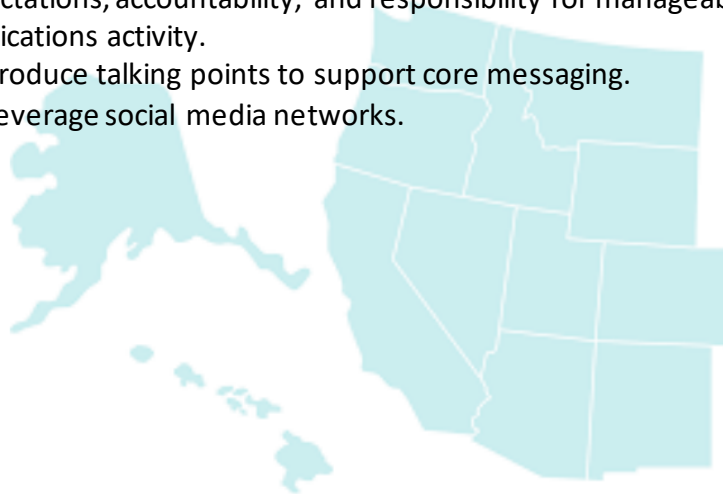
Generate resources for communicators and evaluators to utilize for amplifying messages.

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)

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**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

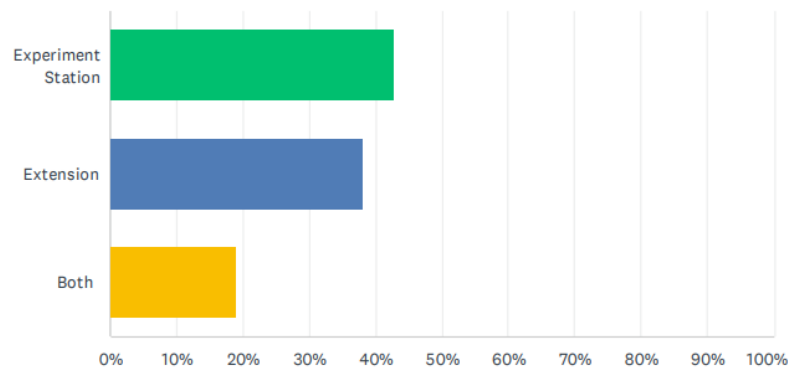
### Q1: Participating Universities

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.

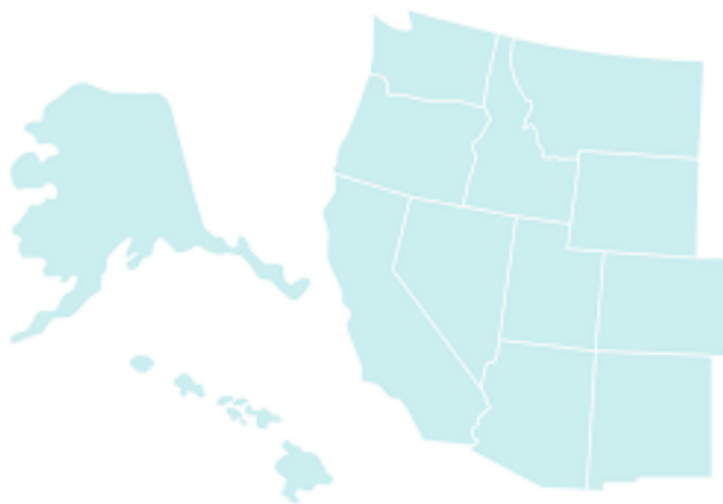
- Some universities completed multiple surveys.

### Q2 Which unit within your University do you represent?

Answered: 21 Skipped: 0

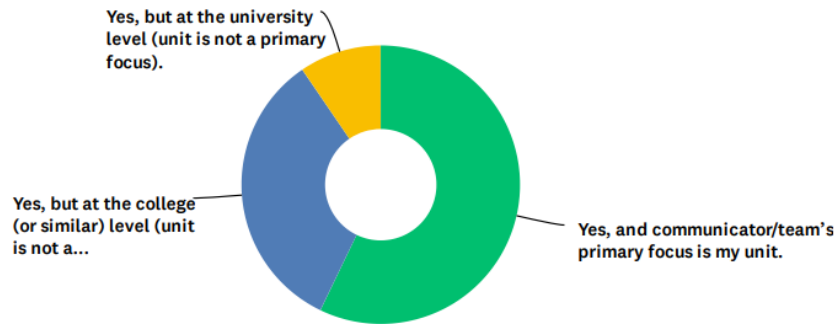


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Experiment Station	42.86%	9
Extension	38.10%	8
Both	19.05%	4
TOTAL		21



### Q3 Do you have access to a communicator or communications team?

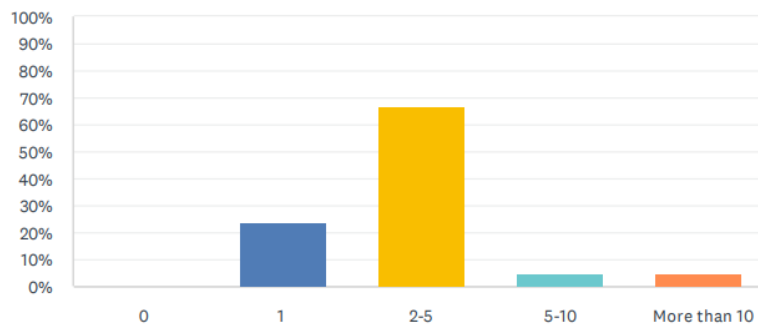
Answered: 21 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, and communicator/team's primary focus is my unit.	57.14%	12
Yes, but at the college (or similar) level (unit is not a singular focus).	33.33%	7
Yes, but at the university level (unit is not a primary focus).	9.52%	2
No direct access to communicators.	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>21</b>

### Q4 How many communicators do you have access to?

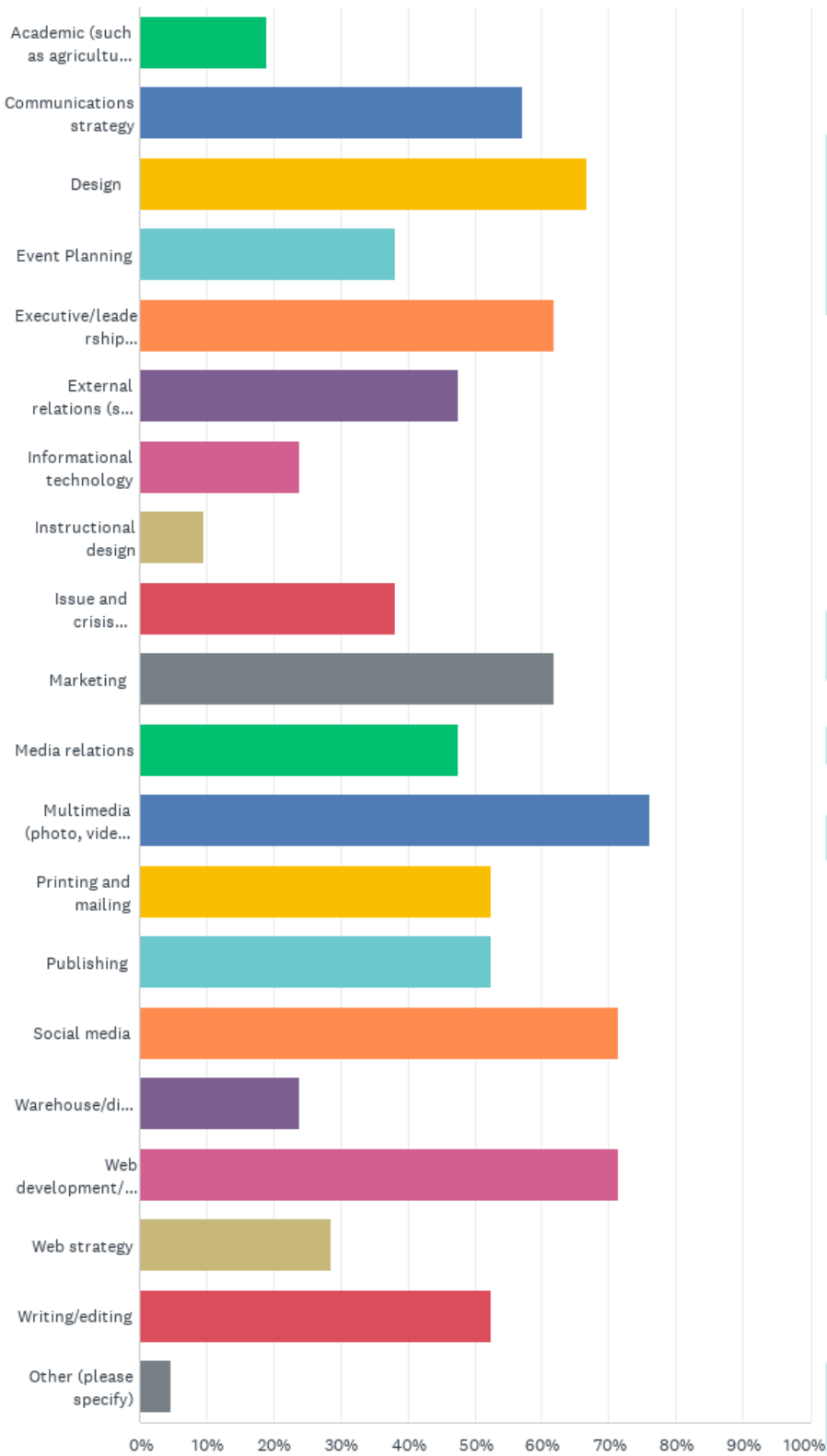
Answered: 21 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0	0.00%	0
1	23.81%	5
2-5	66.67%	14
5-10	4.76%	1
More than 10	4.76%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>21</b>



### Q5: What expertise/services do your communicators provide?



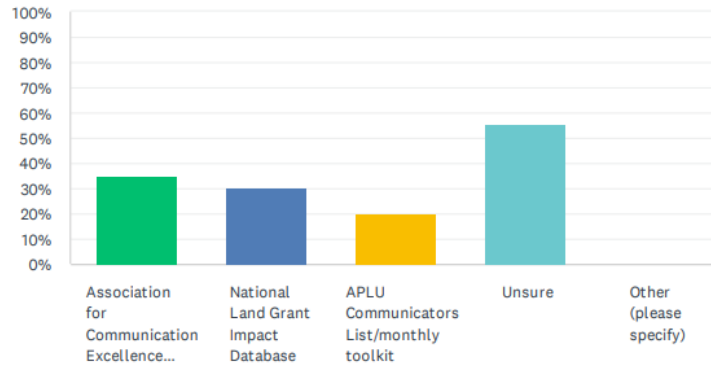
**Q5: What expertise/services do your communicators provide?**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Academic (such as agricultural communications degree programs, research faculty)	19.05%	4
Communications strategy	57.14%	12
Design	66.67%	14
Event Planning	38.10%	8
Executive/leadership communications	61.90%	13
External relations (such as legislative or stakeholder relations communications)	47.62%	10
Informational technology	23.81%	5
Instructional design	9.52%	2
Issue and crisis communication	38.10%	8
Marketing	61.90%	13
Media relations	47.62%	10
Multimedia (photo, video, audio)	76.19%	16
Printing and mailing	52.38%	11
Publishing	52.38%	11
Social media	71.43%	15
Warehouse/distribution	23.81%	5
Web development/design	71.43%	15
Web strategy	28.57%	6
Writing/editing	52.38%	11
Other (please specify)	4.76%	1
Total Respondents: 21		



### Q6 Which of the following are your communicators connected with? (check all that apply)

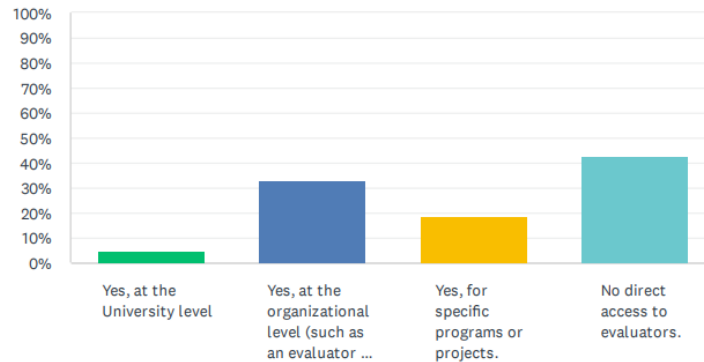
Answered: 20 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Association for Communication Excellence (ACE)	35.00%	7
National Land Grant Impact Database	30.00%	6
APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit	20.00%	4
Unsure	55.00%	11
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 20		

### Q7 Do you have access to evaluators?

Answered: 21 Skipped: 0

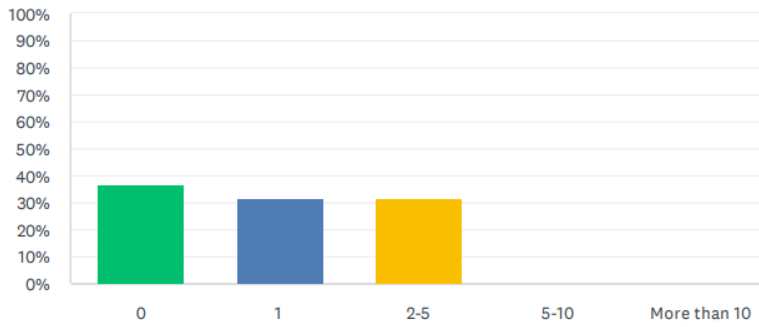


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, at the University level	4.76%	1
Yes, at the organizational level (such as an evaluator who serves an entire Extension Service, Agricultural Experiment Station or College).	33.33%	7
Yes, for specific programs or projects.	19.05%	4
No direct access to evaluators.	42.86%	9
TOTAL		21

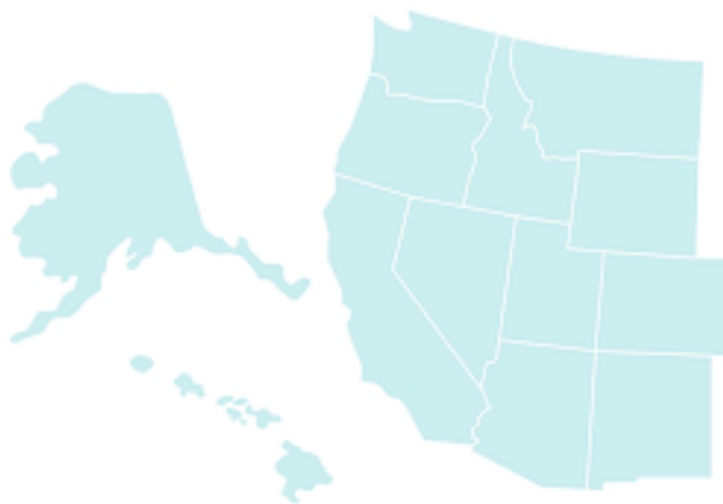


### Q8 How many evaluators do you have access to?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 2

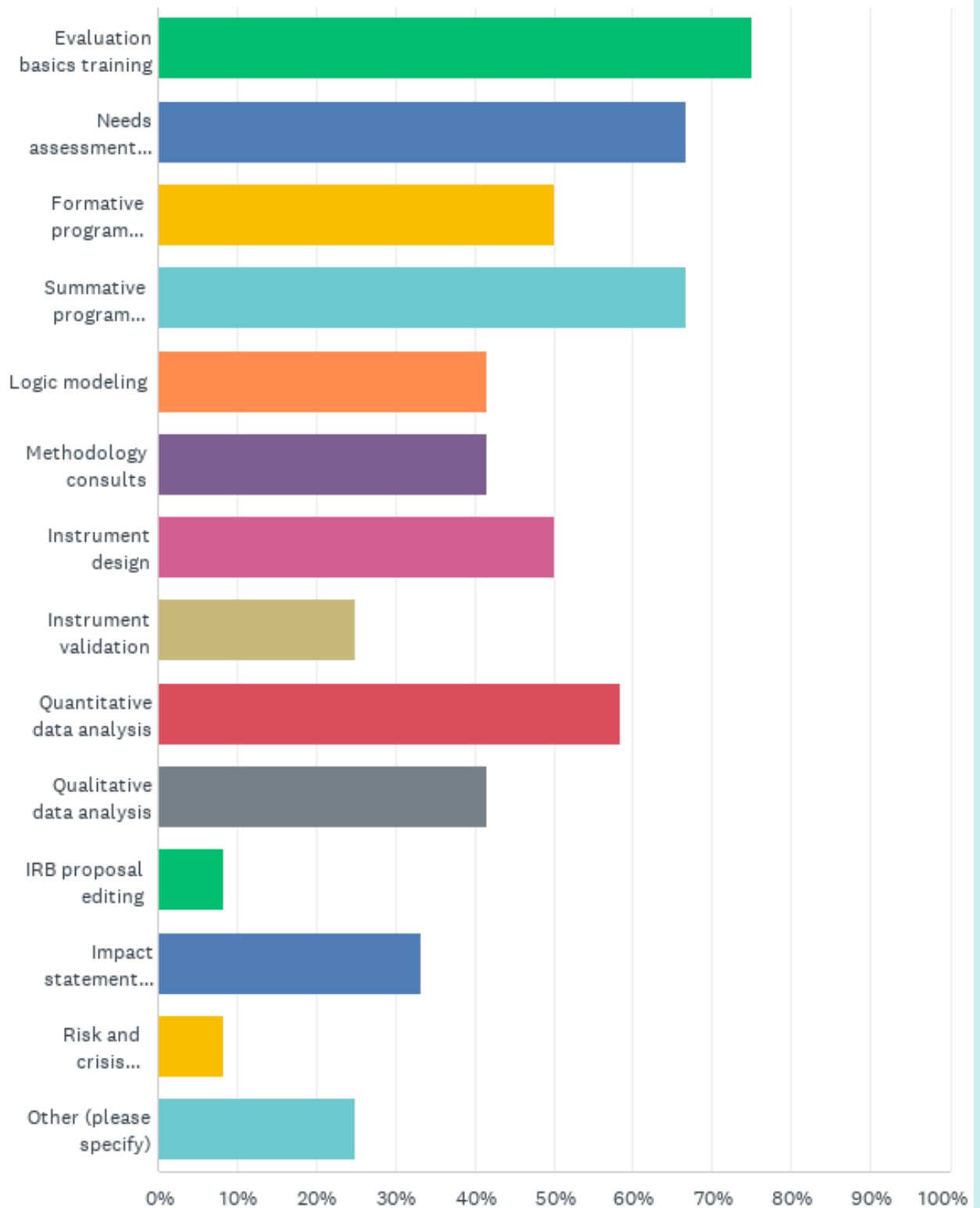


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0	36.84%	7
1	31.58%	6
2-5	31.58%	6
5-10	0.00%	0
More than 10	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>19</b>



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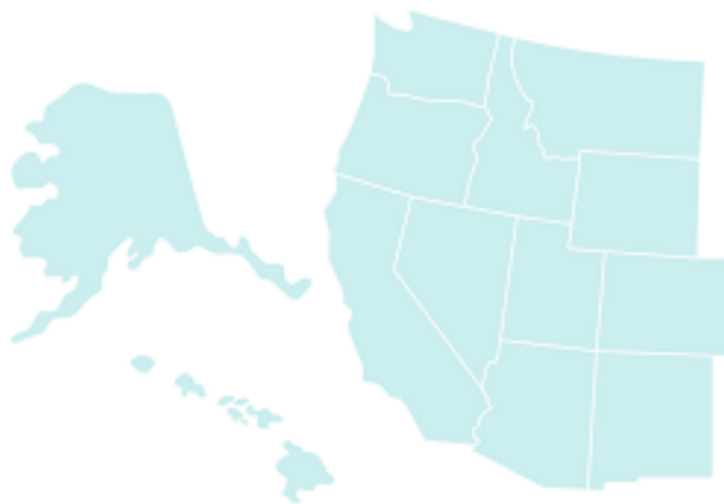
### Q9: What expertise/services do your evaluators provide?



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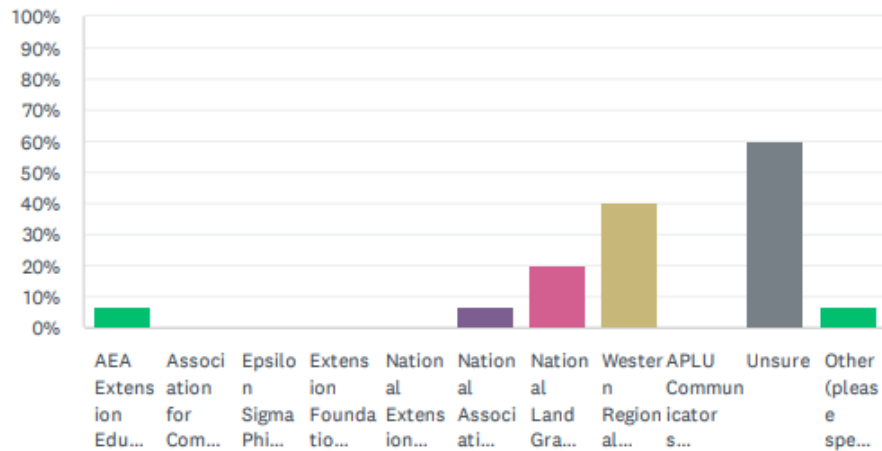
**Q9: What expertise/services do your evaluators provide?**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Evaluation basics training	75.00%	9
Needs assessment assistance	66.67%	8
Formative program evaluation	50.00%	6
Summative program evaluation	66.67%	8
Logic modeling	41.67%	5
Methodology consults	41.67%	5
Instrument design	50.00%	6
Instrument validation	25.00%	3
Quantitative data analysis	58.33%	7
Qualitative data analysis	41.67%	5
IRB proposal editing	8.33%	1
Impact statement editing	33.33%	4
Risk and crisis communication	8.33%	1
Other (please specify)	25.00%	3
Total Respondents: 12		



### Q10 Which of the following are your evaluators connected with? (check all that apply)

Answered: 15 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
AEA Extension Education Evaluation Topical Interest Group (EEE TIG)	6.67%	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)	6.67%	1
National Land Grant Impact Database	20.00%	3
Western Regional Evaluators Network (WREN)	40.00%	6
APLU Communicators List/monthly toolkit	0.00%	0
Unsure	60.00%	9
Other (please specify)	6.67%	1
<b>Total Respondents: 15</b>		



## 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 &amp; 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 &amp; Health</u>	14	1	16	2	10	1
<u>Youth, Families &amp; Communities</u>	11	1	13	1	12	4
<u>Null/ Undefined</u>	0	0	1	0	1	0
	44	18	58	29	39	31





## Appendix C. 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*

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

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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.

### **Collaborator Interview: Southern Research Communicators Consortium**

*Frankie Gould, Chair of the Southern Research Communicators Consortium*

Frankie shared the strategic roadmap for the Southern Research Communicators Consortium, including showcasing member successes, steps to achieve goals, and challenges.

[View complete presentation](#)

### **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.

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.

## Appendix D. Remaining Questions/Pending Discussion

### Feedback from Directors

- a) Stay broad with tactics at this point so work can be utilized by a broader audience.
- b) Institutional reporting systems: who is using what, and how are we using those to support collecting and systemizing? Can we help minimize the duplication of reporting?
- c) Directory with current communicators or evaluators. Director's names are easy to find, but a directory of peers would be helpful.
- d) Highlight the importance of the close relationship with communications and government relations.
- e) Leveraging social media and streamline communications on a regional level.
- f) Generate this playbook as a beginning step and then form working groups that could identify what message we want to communicate on behalf of the region and then we could begin to share a unified message.
- g) Highlight the importance of reporting in the national impact database. We know there is not consistent reporting. Some institutions report every year, others only report occasionally. The national impact database is becoming more and more of a data mining resource for many national partners, not just NIFA.
- h) Currently there is a group of communicators that come together annually to report impact statements on the national level, we hope to duplicate on a regional level.
- i) Identify how many colleges have a local or state level database reporting system that in theory reports into the national reporting system.
  - Many people noted they use digital measures. Digital measures does not capture the positive impact statements that can be used for general public information.

### Feedback from 2022 ACE Conference Attendees

#### Respondent #1

Resource library/toolkit seems like a good way to share content.

How do the directors engage with these stakeholder groups currently?

Things I can do to continue this:

- Continue to engage in the Townhalls
- Send our products and materials to someone that others could use.

#### Respondent #2

Connect with other regions at scheduled times.

Loop these efforts into AHS/CARET

Need to closely link the effort with the CARET program and include briefings led by communications.

Never hurts to also inform a regional taxpayer about regional work that align with priorities driving funding.

Do make one of your success measures include appropriations or increased funding.

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- You can be successful in your efforts but run up against competing priorities or economic condition that blocks funding.
  - It doesn't mean you were not successful.

### **Respondent #3**

The tactical recommendations of connecting, coordinating, and communicating may need to be translated into a strategic communication plan given that the title of the document is a strategic communication "playbook." This can be done when all of the questions raised have been addressed:

- Agenda
- Leverage resource
- Matrix
- Access
- Communicators/evaluators
- Priority areas
- Best practices
- Partners

I may commit to being part of the drafting of the playbook/strategic communications plan.

### **Respondent #4**

What are the program priorities?

What are the metrics that you have to evaluate success?

Keeping reviewing other websites.

Reach out to Sara Delheimer.

### **Respondent #5**

Join/assist working group

Provide updates to admin

Continue NIFA Townhalls

### **Respondent #6**

Great to hear about financial support but building comms efforts into evaluators/annual reviews and rewards also seems important for incentivizing and sustaining these efforts.

How are tribal colleges and territories- and their specific concerns, needs, etc- included in creation and implementation of the playbook?

Would love to hear feedback from directors and communicators about how MRF Impacts can create materials that function better at state/regional levels.

### **Respondent #7**

What's working already?

Regional Townhalls with the communicators and directors?

What are the success metrics?

What examples exist or who is already doing pieces that are aspirational?