

Assessing Extension’s Ability to Serve Ohio Communities During Disasters

Dee Jepsen, Lee Beers, Haley Shoemaker, Jeff Hattey

INTRODUCTION

By Ohio legislative statute, Extension has a role in emergency management to connect citizens and business operations, with resources during a local emergency.

- Loss of institutional knowledge at county, district and state levels due to employee turnover can negatively affect emergency response.
- Several prominent events occurred in Ohio from 2023-25 that highlighted a need to assess Extension professionals, regarding their “emergency readiness” and capacity to serve community needs.



PURPOSE & OBJECTIVE

It was important for Extension leadership to understand the knowledge and experiences of our professionals as a measurement for organizational capacity to carry out the land grant mission during critical emergency events.

- A needs assessment was created to evaluate the preparedness of OSU Extension staff to respond to local disasters.
- The goal was to inform organizational processes to support county and state-based staff in a disaster.

METHODS

Qualtrics online questions identified:

- Familiarity of staff with emergency action planning and business continuity.
- Needed training topics to increase baseline knowledge for effective response.
- Interested personnel to coordinate state-wide efforts on specific topics.
- Capacity building efforts to strengthen community partnerships.

All OSU Extension staff and faculty invited, (n=740).

Quantitative responses analyzed with Excel® to describe the descriptive data.

RESULTS & DEMOGRAPHICS

Survey was completed by 291 OSUE faculty and staff, with a 39.0% response rate (Figure 1); representing all program areas (Table 1).

Approximately 45% had less than 5 years of professional experience with OSUE, and of those 11.7% have less than one year of experience (Figure 2).

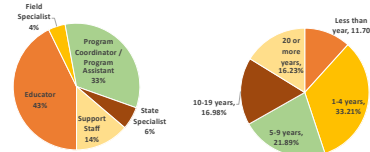


Figure 1. Professional Title of Respondents.

Figure 2. Years of Service with Ohio State University Extension

Table 1. Primary Program Area of Respondents

Program Area of Respondents	%
Family and Consumer Sciences	39.24
Agriculture and Natural Resources	30.38
4-H Youth Development	16.03
Community Development	8.02
College or Office Services	6.33

CONCLUSION

Disaster events require immediate response and decisive actions to address key needs and issues for affected populations.

- OSU Extension professionals reported knowledge and mastery in certain areas, but there is room to improve in each area.
- Of high importance is to improve business continuity operations for county offices.
- There were large deficiencies of staff to understand roles and participation expectations in local emergencies.
- A positive outcome was willingness to identify training needs for professional development.
- And teaching opportunities for clientele.

KEY RESULTS & TAKE AWAYS

- 31.9% knew OSU Extension was part of Ohio’s State Emergency Response Plan
- 29.3% knew about EDEN resources
- 27.9% had established relationships with county/state agencies for disaster response
- 14.2% involved with county/state disaster response in past 5 years
- 51 personnel identified themselves to be part of a county response team, and 28 identified themselves for a state response team.
- Over 18 training topics were identified as “needed”, where professionals could select more than one topic. Over 820 responses were received on this question. Top 3 topics identified: CERT, Environmental Compliance and Human Health programs

Extension educators were knowledgeable or highly trained in these areas:

