



# Impact Statement: Dave Ivan, MI State University Extension

**Project Title:** Strengthening MSU Extension's Urban Presence

**Issue:**

Like most Extension services, whose programmatic footprint serves largely rural audiences, MSU Extension recognized that continued state funding support will require greater commitment to serving urban audiences. This project focused on developing a proactive and systematic approach to developing an 'urban agenda' for Michigan State University Extension.

**What has been done:**

A number of steps have been pursued to address this issue, including:

- Assembling a committee consisting of MSU Extension programmatic (both Educator and Program Instructor-level) and administrative staff currently working in urban settings to review this issue more deeply with a charge to recommend specific actions to the MSU Extension administrative team;
- Review current urban Extension programming efforts within Michigan;
- Identify current best-practices in urban programming efforts nationwide. This includes examining positioning, programs, personnel, partnerships and internal support and resources.
- Identify emerging urban issues within Michigan and the intersection of these issues with MSU Extension's programmatic expertise and current outreach efforts;
- Determine future urban programming priorities within Michigan, the staffing required to address these priorities, and office space and external partnership considerations that can enhance our urban programmatic impact;
- Identify pilot locations for demonstration projects to test committee recommendations and advance an urban agenda.

**Impacts/New Partnerships:**

The "MSU Extension Urban Agenda" developed by the review committee has officially been adopted by MSU Extension leadership. In cooperation with the city of Detroit, which provided a vacant parcel to MSU Extension on a long-term lease, a new urban extension and research center has emerged. Entitled the 'Partnership for Food Learning and Innovation', the new center will focus on urban agriculture research and outreach activities while providing new space for additional educational programming in the economically struggling neighborhood.

A second partnership is in the works with the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan (Michigan's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city) which involves triaging MSU Extension expertise in the city's most economically and socially challenged zip code within the city.

Both partnerships represent demonstration projects proposed in the urban agenda adopted by the organization.

## **Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)**

The long-term impact of the 'urban agenda' remains to be assessed (given the short tenure of the project). Despite being in the infancy of the effort we've observed new energy in urban areas for our planned efforts. For example, after conducting a series of neighborhood town hall meetings to discuss our new Partnership for Food Learning and Innovation, neighborhood residents have been extremely supportive through their presence and public comments at various zoning hearings. Their enthusiastic support has helped to speed-up a lengthy approval process. Concomitantly, the city of Grand Rapids has reached out to MSU Extension to explore a new programmatic model with Extension to help address some of their neighborhoods' most pressing challenges.

The ability for MSU Extension to reposition its urban programming will take time given current staffing commitments. The two pilot projects, however, provide an opportunity to learn how a new collective approach to staffing, programming, and collaborating in an urban setting can address local needs.

## **How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?**

A key message through FSLI has been the importance of a mentor. In my case two mentors, one from another university conducting urban extension programming and the president of a Canadian community development non-profit has helped to shape our urban agenda and overall project design.

Secondly, words of wisdom from FSLI speakers, such as having a 'commitment to your north star' (Bruce McPherson, Ohio State Provost) have provided important reflections in both the project and my overall leadership thinking. Additionally, FSLI deepened my appreciation for working with different learning and managerial styles – both critical to this project.

Finally, FSLI reinforced a recognition that change takes time, and often requires the ability to adapt and be flexible. This project has certainly encountered speed bumps and I have had to pivot my thinking on numerous occasions. The results, however, have provided a better product.

## **Contact information:**

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