NUREC National Urban Research & Extension Center

NLC 100 YEARS

1924–2024: A CENTURY OF STRENGTHENING CITIES

NUREC 2024
WASHINGTON, D.C.
CO-CONVENING SUMMARY

Building Collaborative Research and Extension Networks to Advance the Application of Science with Urban Communities

In July 2024 NUREC and the National League of Cities, co-convened a by-invitation summit with 43 individuals representing federal agencies, local governments, non-profits/membership organizations, land-grant universities, and a non-land-grant urban serving university to identify research priorities and potential educational/Extension programs in the issue areas of: 1) urban agriculture and food systems, 2) health and wellness, and 3) the built environment. The one-and-a-half-day co-convening was funded by a New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) grant from the Extension Foundation[1] designed to increase the capacity of the Cooperative Extension System to address issues of high importance to the public. The co-convening helped launch NUREC's three Knowledge and Practice Networks and formed the foundation for a $2.5 million National Research Support Program proposal.

During the co-convening, participants self-selected into one of the three issue areas teams where they developed short-, medium, and long-term outcomes. These were further classified based on importance, feasibility, impact and potential for successful program development, and identified as 'moon shots' (highest aspirations, likely long term), best bets, low hanging fruit, and low priority. Additionally, the teams recognized needs and priorities that impacted multiple issue areas. The following is a high-level summary of the collective aspirations, insights and priorities expressed during the co-convening.

Health & Wellness

The Health & Wellness team focused on creating and strengthening systems, networks, and policies that improve the health, wellness, and economic opportunities of individuals and families living in urban spaces. They also recognized the need to lower costs and make basic needs (housing, food, transportation, day care, etc.) more available and more affordable – topics which also tie into the built environment and agriculture and food system sectors.

The team identified eight research priorities and six educational/Extension programs. Examples include creating a one-stop database of urban Extension programs and developing and implementing core measures and recommended success measures. They also enumerated 31 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed between: moon shots (10),

[1] A grant program from USDA NIFA in partnership with the University of New Hampshire.

best bets (10), low-hanging fruit (8), and low priority (3). Projects being considered for near-term action included:

- creating a database of urban Extension offices and land-grant universities;
- expanding the Master Wellness Volunteer Program; and
- integrating climate awareness into existing Extension programs (similar to efforts by the University of Arizona and Washington State University).

Built Environment

The Built Environment team aspired to be a welcoming space—backed by long-term commitments—for all stakeholders to learn and discuss community concerns and opportunities along with the core goal of balancing land access with gentrification anxiety.

The team identified 30 research priorities and 35 educational/Extension programs. Examples include:

- developing a taxonomy of the resources/assets needed to create a thriving community;
- developing a curated list of strategic/neighborhood plans and green infrastructure successes;
- researching effective, scalable, and implementable solutions to food waste in grocery stores and restaurants;
- exploring the effectiveness of land trusts to address housing affordability;
- examining the intersection between land-use code/density/environmental outcomes;
- researching the efficacy of housing policies to prevent displacement and gentrification;
- investigating urban youth gardening and small business development;
- studying the impact of asset-based development strategies on urban wealth management;
- developing mental health first aid training for stakeholder organizations; and
- training city employees in equity issues.

They enumerated 90 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed between: moon shots (30), best bets (39), and low-hanging fruit (21).

The team saw near-term value in building a database of best practices with partners (e.g., APLU, National League of Cities, NUREC, International Town and Gown Association, International City/County Management Association), potentially as part of a research fellowship to curate existing examples and shared metrics. They also saw the potential to build the database taxonomy by participating in the Extension Foundation's Impact Collaborative.

Urban Agriculture & Food Systems

This team's ambitions include recognizing food systems are part of a community and are inherently place based and, therefore, solutions and production need to focus on local needs and access to land (policy needs) and the need to downscale from large/rural agriculture to small/urban production systems. They also aspired to reimagine the built environment by repurposing buildings for Controlled Environment Agriculture. They recognized that land access and the ability to measure things like increased food access or increased educational attainment are issues to overcome.

- The team identified 21 research priorities and nine educational/Extension programs. Examples include:
- the need to make resources and opportunities culturally appropriate and available across the numerous spoken languages present in urban communities;
- identifying common metrics across differing ecosystems;
- identifying viable animal systems;
- exploring ways to repurpose buildings for agricultural production;
- delving into the potential benefits and harm of human/wildlife interactions;
- developing a better understanding of the basics of urban ecology and ecosystems and the intersection of production methods and climate change;
- improving the ways in which land is assessed relative to human health risks; and
- conducting a literature review and analysis of the carbon and carbon–water–energy cycle.

They enumerated 28 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed between: moon shots (9), best bets (8), low-hanging fruit (9), and low priority (2).

Cross-Sector Connections

The teams identified needs, priorities and opportunities that crossed all three issue areas including:

- economic and workforce development;
- impacts of climate change;
- equal access to resources (health, jobs, green space, etc.);
- the need to identify and curate existing resources (e.g., strategic plans and best practices for urban communities);

Research-based priorities include:

- return on investments and benefits to people, health, economy, and environment);
- metric development and data aggregation across cities;
- identification of community assets and assessment of outcomes using the Community Capitals framework;
- training and education of local elected officials and staff about issues, best practices, and research for policy-setting; and
- the impact of land use and tenure policies and practices.

Additional cross-sector issues include

- recognizing that every community has a complex and dynamic history;
- that programs and policies need to be place based and recognize and support the local context; and
- that those programs, policies, and solutions need to identify and measure co-benefits. Co-benefits include:
  - the effects of green spaces on health,
  - Positive Youth Development (learning), and nutrition (e.g., food production);
  - the ways buildings (both new and abandoned/ repurposed buildings) contribute to urban agriculture;
  - the ways urban agriculture helps with heat capture, stormwater capture, and therapeutic/ social
  - benefits; and
  - how the coordination of food gardens in food deserts can also act as habitat corridors to facilitate species movement.

Contact

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