

## ***University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension***

### **Communicating Value through Relationships:**

#### **Who, what and why?**

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Communicating value through relationships has always been a part of Cooperative Extension, across all program areas and positions. Building positive relationships allows us to be effective with our partners—funding or programmatic.

Part of our effectiveness lies in how we interact personally and professionally with those who have a role to play in supporting Extension. We are also effective when the quality and impact of our work causes others to share their feedback with decision makers. In neither case is it about taking a political position, advocating a particular policy, or lobbying.

**What is Communicating Value through Relationships?** First and foremost, it is based on having strong and responsive research and programming. It means that we take the time to evaluate our programs and to tell our stories about the impact of our work. It means that we are effective in our interpersonal and professional relationships with our audiences and elected officials. It means that every Extension educator has a role and responsibility in his or her community.

**Who needs to Communicate Value through Relationships?** It may be tempting to say “Communicating value through relationships is not part of my job description.” If we look more closely at the value and impact of our roles within Cooperative Extension—particularly with the people we serve as Extension professionals—we find, however, that most of us are already doing it.

All of us—including those in leadership, programming, and support positions—have important roles to play in communicating the value of Cooperative Extension programming. This influence on Extension’s behalf is most effective when county educators and state specialists first build a foundation of responsive programming and strong relationships.

**Why do we all need to Communicate Value through Relationships?** All program areas have significant reasons to interact with elected officials, leaders of organizations, and partners on programs that have community impacts—whether it is a particular community of interest or a community of place. Much of this work communicates value because our programs have a significant impact on people dealing with challenges in their lives or communities trying to make important decisions.

The economic climate in recent years has brought into sharp focus the critical relationship of our funding partners and the dynamic interdependence of county, state, and federal contributions to the Cooperative Extension budget. Most of our budget is used to directly support people, pay salaries and provide benefits. The potential for cuts from any one of our funding partners can impact the entire organization.

Cooperative Extension has taken into consideration many dimensions of Communicating Value through Relationships in gathering resources that are intended to help colleagues navigate in today’s challenging environment. For more information, please visit our **Communicating Value through Relationships** web page, located under the “Values” tab on the “Resources for Extension Colleagues” [website](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/employeeeresources/): <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/employeeeresources/>

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