

Members Evaluate their Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (ANREP)

By

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Abstract

Conducting a membership survey can provide valuable guidance to the organization in determining its future directions. Timing such a survey prior to a strategic planning effort can give all members input into determining priorities for the organization and increase the chances that their input is valued and acted upon. This survey information was a cornerstone of information used for the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals's (ANREP) strategic planning conducted six months following the survey.

The survey results of this relatively new organization, Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (ANREP) indicated that most of the members responding to the survey (38% of the total membership) had about 13 years of experience with Extension. Eighty seven percent of the respondents had state, multi-county or county responsibilities. Their primary reasons for joining this new professional association were that they wanted to belong to a professional Extension association that focused on natural resources issues and they wanted an opportunity to network and connect with other professionals in this issue area.

Most of the members (96%) had attended either regional or national events sponsored by the association with 27% saying there is no need to improve upon what is being offered by these events. The balance felt there was a need to improve these events by examining the cost, location, timing, amount of opportunity for informal gatherings, subject matter and format of the conferences and other events. However networking, meetings, and conferences were the primary benefits that members said they received from ANREP.

The three primary issues that members wanted ANREP to address were first to provide training and professional development opportunities followed by identifying the national natural resource issues along with strategies to address them and finally to assist with interstate collaboration. Some specific training opportunities members desired were natural resource issues education, evaluation techniques, and educational techniques for various audiences.

The survey was also designed to help build membership on existing or form new committees for ANREP. Fifty-one percent of the respondents for this question said that they would be willing to serve or may be willing to serve on a committee. There were two recommendations for new committees to be formed

Overall 82 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the work that ANREP has done since they became members.

The compiled results of this survey were shared with the full membership and utilized during the strategic planning for ANREP. Specific information such as training content needs and increased time for informal networking were directly addressed at the subsequent national conference. As the strategic plan moves towards implementation, additional survey insights will be utilized to strengthen ANREP's effectiveness in meeting its membership needs.

Introduction

The Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals or ANREP is a national organization for Cooperative Extension Service (CES) professionals working in environmental education, fisheries, forestry, wood sciences, range, recreation, waste management, water, wildlife, and many other related disciplines. As a member of the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP), ANREP promotes communication, cooperation and professionalism among Extension professional organizations, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), and the USDA-CSREES in general. Specifically, ANREP is a participating member of ECOP's Personnel and Organizational Development Committee.. The association's objectives are to:

- bring Extension professionals together to discuss mutual natural resource issues, needs, and opportunities
- advance natural resource Extension through continuing education for Extension professionals
- promote cooperation among states and regions, agencies, associations, and businesses on natural resource education programs
- develop, sponsor, and promote education and training that advance natural resource management
- strengthen communication with Extension administrators

Started in 1994 and still relatively new, ANREP is in the midst of rapid growth and officers are trying to determine how best to meet the needs of its members. ANREP was also planning to undertake strategic planning to help chart its future direction and this survey input was designed to provide membership input for that process. When the surveys were sent out, members were told of this future planning process and that their survey input would help determine the organization's direction. An *ad hoc* Survey Committee developed and issued a mail-out and electronic opinion survey to all members. Returned surveys were collected and results compiled. Summary information from the returned surveys is presented here.

Procedure

A 19-question survey was mailed and e-mailed to all 220 ANREP members in May 2001. The survey was later resent electronically along with electronic reminders. Answers to questions that could be summarized numerically were subjected to simple statistical analysis. For questions where respondents were asked to provide textual statements were more difficult to analyze.

In an effort to group responses, keywords that represented common responses were chosen and used for the grouping of comments. After grouping, the percentage of total responses per keyword for each question was determined. Finally, the general summarization of the comments by keywords formed the foundations for conclusions reached for each question. Results were grouped and analyzed into seven different categories. This procedure allowed for interpretations of the findings where overlap on common issues were addressed by different questions.

Results

Demographics

Eighty-four respondents or 38 percent of the total membership completed and returned the surveys. All respondents answered the question about the state where they were employed. The 28 states represented were spread over all four geographic regions in which ANREP is organized. Thirty-two percent of the respondents came from the Western and North Central regions, respectively. The Southern region accounted for 23 percent of the Northeast contributed 13 percent.

When asked about program emphasis, everyone responded, with the single largest group (39%) saying they were in forestry or had some forestry components in their program. Twenty-three percent listed natural resources as their emphasis. Water resources was the next highest at 14 percent but when combined with water quality and watershed management the number rose to 21 percent. Environmental education represented 13 percent followed by wildlife and range/livestock at eight percent each and community development/growth management at five percent. Fisheries, 4H and youth, renewable resources, agriculture, bioenergy, public issues and sustainability, invasive plants, program development and evaluation, land use, leadership development, soil quality, Christmas trees, economics/marketing, nutrient management, wood products, pesticide management, woodland prairie and farmland, urban forestry, outdoor education, solid and hazardous waste, public policy, and agroforestry all received at least one response.

Forty-three percent of the respondents had statewide Extension programming responsibility. Twenty-five percent were county-based and another 19 percent had multi-county duties. Four percent were involved in regional or multi-state activities while six percent had state or federal administrative assignments. As for time in Extension, the range was 0 to 30 years with the mean being 12.6 years. The most frequent response (mode) was 7 years. Concerning respondents' appointment, 76 percent had all their time in Extension and the average was 90.7 percent. ANREP membership ranged from less than one year to eight years with the mean being 2.7 years.

Reasons for Joining ANREP

Since ANREP is new and there are many other organizations that an Extension professional might join, it was valuable to determine why individuals would join ANREP. One of the most frequent answers was that there was a need for such an organization (see Table 1) since ANREP is the only national professional organization that focuses completely on natural resource issues. The other top response centered on the need to network or connect with others in the natural resources programming area.

Table 1. Reasons for joining ANREP.

Responses	Number	Percent
Need for such an organization within Extension	19	25
Network/Connect	19	25
Common interest	9	12
Conferences	7	9
Learn	7	9
Professional development	4	5
Similar programming	4	5
Better recognition within Extension	3	4
Stay current	2	3
Recognition for work	1	1
Total	75	100

Conferences and Workshops

One question concerned respondents' attendance at any ANREP regional events or national conferences? Sixty-four percent of the 81 responding said yes and 96 percent of them said they would like to attend more of these events in the future. Respondents also were given an opportunity to identify ways these events could be improved to meet their needs? Table 2 contains the grouped responses. Over one-fourth were satisfied with the events as they were. Cost, location and timing was the primary issues of concern while the other suggestions for improvement focused on subject matter content and relevance to the respondent's particular interest.

Table 2. Ways to improve national ANREP events to meet member needs.

Responses	Number	Percent
No improvement needed	15	27
Cost, location and timing	10	18
Opportunity for informal gatherings	7	13
Subject matter	7	13
Format	6	11
Others	6	11
Program relevance	2	4
More discipline-based	2	4
Total	55	100

Benefits Derived from ANREP

When asked to identify the benefits respondents liked best about being a member of ANREP, they selected the opportunity for networking most often. Attending meetings and conferences and greater awareness of new developments scored highly also. Of the responses offered, professional development and the opportunity to present papers at meetings ranked as least important.

Table 3. Benefits from ANREP membership.

Responses	Number	Percent
Networking	15	22
Nothing to offer	14	21
Meetings and conferences	11	16
Awareness of new developments	8	12
Communications	8	12
Awards program	3	4
Newsletter	3	4
Lobby	3	4
Professional development	2	3
Present papers	1	1
Total	68	100

Not many responses were forthcoming for the question about what benefits do respondents receive from ANREP that they may not receive elsewhere. Networking and information sharing again were at the top of the list. Several respondents felt that it was still too early for them to determine a unique benefit they had received from ANREP.

Table 4. Benefits received from ANREP not received elsewhere.

Responses	Number	Percent
Sharing information	9	22
Networking	7	17
Focus on natural resources	7	17
Similar interest	6	15
Too early to tell or none	5	12
National home for natural resources specialists	4	10
Lobby and representation	3	7
Total	41	100

Participants were asked to rate the importance five specific ANREP functions. The scale was 1 to 5 (highest). “Informal opportunity to network and connect with natural resource colleagues regionally & nationally” scored highest with a mean of 4.31 followed closely by “Professional development opportunities and opportunities to share work at national conferences” at 4.10. “Communications (listservs, newsletter, webpage)” rated a 3.83. “Opportunity to nominate and receive national awards and recognition” and “Political action activities like JCEP and PILD (Public Policy Leadership Development)” were valued at 3.14 and 3.12, respectively.

Issues ANREP Might Address

Respondents were asked to rate the importance 14 specific Issues that ANREP might consider addressing. A rating of “1” was the highest rank per issue. They ranked training and professional improvement opportunities first followed by identification of national level natural resource issues and strategies to address them and assist with interstate. Pay scale and job security were rated as low priorities along with write-in issues like international opportunities and the creation of state-level natural resources program leadership positions.

Table 5. Mean value of ranked issues ANREP might consider addressing.

Category	Rating	Rank
Increased training opportunities	3.36	1
Professional improvement opportunities	3.41	2
National/Regional NR issues identification and strategies to address them	4.38	3
Interstate collaboration	4.45	4
Global natural resource issues identification and strategies to address them	6.08	5
Intrastate collaboration	6.53	6
Closer ties with research projects	6.77	7
Increased professional recognition	6.98	8
Professional advancement	7.24	9
Sabbatical/other professional development opportunities	7.64	10
Natural resource position postings	7.92	11
Improved pay scale	9.76	12
Improved job security	10.04	13
Others (International opportunities and create state-level NR Prog. Ldr Pos)	13.42	14

Under “Increased training opportunities” issue respondents were able to check eight specific opportunities that they felt applied to them. They could check more than one opportunity. Natural resources issues education ranked first with 58 respondents.

Table 6. Respondents ranking of Increased training opportunities they feel are important.

Category	Responses	Rank
Natural resources issues education	58	1
Evaluation techniques	48	2
Educational techniques for various audiences	44	3
Targeting specific audiences	39	4
People/communication skills training	35	5
Grant writing and specific grant opportunities	31	6
Technical skills ie computer and distance learning,etc	24	7
Others (conflict resolution and CSREES funding support)	3	8

For the “National/Regional NR” issues there were 27 write-in responses. Water issues alone made up 41 percent of total. The others were: land use planning, urban interface, fragmentation, invasive species, minority ownership, certification, over-consumption, youth environmental education, and wildlife habitat. Under “Global Natural Resource” issues there were 24 responses equally distributed among: water, global warming, sustainability, population growth, environmental, and others

One open-ended question asked what else can ANREP do to better meet a member’s needs as natural resource Extension Professionals. There were few responses but posting new programs and awareness of funding opportunities and political strength had a slight edge over the other responses.

Table 7. Other things ANREP can do to meet the needs of members.

Responses	Number	Percent
Posting new programs	4	24
Funding and political strength	4	24
Doing great	3	18
Communications	3	18
Web page	2	12
Professional development	1	6
Total	17	100

Committees

When asked if you would like to serve on ANREP Committee or serve on the ANREP board in the future, 80 percent (67) responded. Forty-nine percent said yes, 39 percent said no and 12 percent said maybe. When asked about adding or deleting committees, the response rate was low (35 percent). Eighty-six percent of these recommended no changes. One recommendation for a new committee was an Issues Committee. Here members could submit issues for review and research and recommend action to the Executive Committee. A second recommended addition was to have a committee on relationships with other organizations/agencies outside Extension (e.g. state foresters, USFS, fish & game).

Satisfaction with ANREP

On a scale of 1 through 5 (most satisfied), members were asked to rate their satisfaction with the work that ANREP has done since they became a member. Sixty-nine respondents or 82 percent answered this question. The range was from 1 to 5 with the mean of 3.9.

Conclusions

The results show an organization that is generally meeting the needs of its membership. Individuals joined ANREP because they personally deal with natural resource issues and there was no organization within Extension to satisfy their networking and professional development needs. ANREP's biennial conferences, communication tools, awards programs and political/legislative are among the activities and programs highlighted by members as being useful. More effort by the leadership to communicate new programs and encourage committee involvement was suggested as opportunities for improvement.

The survey was a valuable tool for engaging the membership in the leadership of the organization. It served the purpose of letting members know that the Executive Board was interested in their thoughts and opinions. It gives the current and upcoming leadership of the organization an idea of how well they are meeting the needs of its members. It also served the purpose of laying the foundations for a strategic planning committee that was formed in 2002. ANREP's membership and scope continues to increase rapidly. Membership as of November 2002 was approaching 400. These results and the results of the strategic planning effort will be used to guide the Association for the next 3 – 5 years.

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that being a member of ANREP was important because it provided an avenue to network with other Extension natural resource professionals on a

national level. Respondents stated that ANREP is the only national natural resource Extension professional association in the United States with an exclusive focus on natural resource issues. The association provides an avenue to learn from others in a similar field. The respondents felt like there is a national Extension 'home' for their natural resource programmatic emphasis where they may not have felt that there was such an opportunity in the past.

Overall, the respondents were quite pleased with the association as a whole and expressed interest in attending more national and regional workshops and programs. Natural resources issues education, evaluation and educational techniques, targeting specific audiences, people/communication skills and grant writing ranked high for future training opportunities. Water issues made up 41 percent of the national issues identified as priorities. Also listed were land use planning, urban interface, fragmentation, invasive species, minority ownership, certification, over-consumption, environmental education and wildlife habitat. Water, global warming, sustainability, population growth and environmental were listed as Global natural resource Issues of concern.