

Awards of Excellence Inspire and Motivate Extension Professionals

Abstract

Extension awards recognize programs that have achieved outstanding accomplishments, results, and impacts in addressing contemporary issues. Whether an individual or a team is recognized, the awardees gain inspiration and motivation and may attain promotion and/or tenure. The Western Region Program Leadership Committee oversees a special award process that recognizes individuals and teams whose program outcomes result in regional and multistate impacts that benefit communities across the West. We describe a rubric that allows for equitable scoring across Extension content areas. Additionally, we recommend that Extension awards programs be expanded and encouraged to promote personal and professional growth.

Keywords: [awards criteria](#), [program innovation](#), [stakeholder involvement](#), [Extension impacts](#), [scholarship of Extension](#)

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Introduction

The Western Extension Directors Association (WEDA) Awards of Excellence program was created in 2005, with the first awards presented at the joint summer meeting that year. The purpose of the WEDA Awards of Excellence is to recognize Extension programming that has achieved outstanding accomplishments, results, and impacts in addressing contemporary issues in one or more of the states or Pacific Islands U.S. Territories that comprise Extension's Western Region. The processes used in the WEDA Awards of Excellence program can be adapted or replicated for use elsewhere within Extension.

Many Extension institutions in the Western Region provide faculty status to field- and campus-based Extension professionals. Promotion and tenure (P&T) is integral to employees' status and success within the university. Awards constitute one measure that can contribute to a successful P&T dossier. According to O'Neill (2008), "Extension personnel are periodically evaluated against performance and productivity

measures for promotion and merit-based pay" (para. 1). In essence, awards provide powerful proof of program success. O'Neill (2008) further emphasized that "the more refereed publications, professional conference presentations, grants, and awards [one has], the better" ("6. Document Scholarship/Extension Practice" section), as these provide more evidence that a candidate for P&T has attained distinction and excellence.

Beyond their contribution to successful P&T dossiers or promotion packets, awards can contribute to collegial recognition (Carleo & Kluchinski, 2016) and personal satisfaction and professional respect (Shinn & Smith, 1999). Even awards without monetary incentives can motivate educators to acquire additional competencies (Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore, & Kistler, 2012). Nonmonetary awards may include certificates, plaques, pins, or commendations.

WEDA Awards of Excellence are conferred annually at the joint summer meetings to individuals or multidisciplinary teams, for single-state or multistate programs. The Western Region Program Leadership Committee (WRPLC), appointed by WEDA, administers the awards program as outlined at <https://weda.extension.oregonstate.edu/weda-awards-excellence>.

The WRPLC, of which we are members, developed an extensive rubric to guide applicants on how scoring is conducted on the basis of needs assessments, outcomes, and long-term impacts. In this article, we examine the criteria and scoring used in the rubric and offer recommendations on how to stimulate productivity through awards.

The Scoring Rubric

The WEDA Awards of Excellence scoring rubric is organized in seven sections. Each section has a set of criteria and scoring that helps applicants communicate how their programs address critical issues important to WEDA.

Issue and Situation (10 Points)

Applicants must clearly define the needs as well as the issues or problems that were or are being addressed. Needs assessments in Extension provide a basis for gauging an existing situation as compared to desired outcomes or conditions (Angima, Etuk, & King, 2014). Issues must be directly associated with community problems, and the processes of engagement with those communities must be clearly identified and articulated.

Stakeholders and Input (10 Points)

Top scores are awarded for clearly identified audiences, customers, or stakeholders. Applicants must clearly state the processes used to obtain audience input for development, implementation, and dissemination of information or research results from the Extension program.

Extension Focus and Research Base (10 Points)

This requirement emphasizes the outreach education focus of Extension. Applicants must identify the key research and/or experiential learning foundation on which the program is based and the details of what was

done. In addition, a brief bibliography citing key references used to guide the program or project must be included. This information directly contributes to the scholarly outcomes requirement of the award program.

Multidisciplinary and Collaborative Components (10 Points)

Most successful Extension programs are multidisciplinary and/or collaborative in nature (Jayaratne, Bradley, & Driscoll, 2009). Proposals should clearly present key multidisciplinary components, collaborations, and the nature of partnerships developed, including the role of each discipline within the program. Successful applicants showcase why or how each of the collaborations and multidisciplinary approaches helped strengthen the outcomes of the program.

Innovative Approaches (15 Points)

Applicants must be able to describe innovative approaches used to effectively address the issues identified. They must clearly explain and provide evidence on why the approach, method, or program is viewed as innovative.

Impacts Achieved (30 Points)

Documented impacts in Extension form the foundation of what sets Extension apart in terms of accountability to stakeholders and funders (Dietz, Clausen, Warner, & Filchak, 2002; Hachfeld, Bau, Holcomb, & Craig, 2013). Impacts are critical for advancing an award recommendation. Applicants must identify the evaluation methods used and clearly present the significant impacts, outcomes, and results achieved by the program in addressing the identified issues.

Scholarly Products (15 Points)

Programs that do not result in scholarly outputs usually do not have sustained impacts (Culp, 2009). Programs with strong scholarly outcomes are impactful and visible beyond local boundaries. Scholarly products may include, but are not limited to, journal articles, magazine articles, education manuals, fact sheets, new curricula, new websites, news articles, digital technology (including social media), and other methods of disseminating outputs and outcomes.

Implications for Extension

Significant effort is devoted to the award process, including application development, review, and recognition. So it is important to answer this question: Do awards make a difference? We asked WEDA Awards of Excellence recipients from 2014 to 2017 whether the awards enhanced program success at the individual or team level. Results are shown in Figure 1. Prominent observations (in order of level of importance indicated by awardees) suggested that the awards contributed to

1. recognition for performance reviews, merit-based pay, and P&T considerations;
2. sustainability of the program beyond the award recognition period;
3. gain of professional respect in the educator's discipline; and

4. colleague and peer recognition.

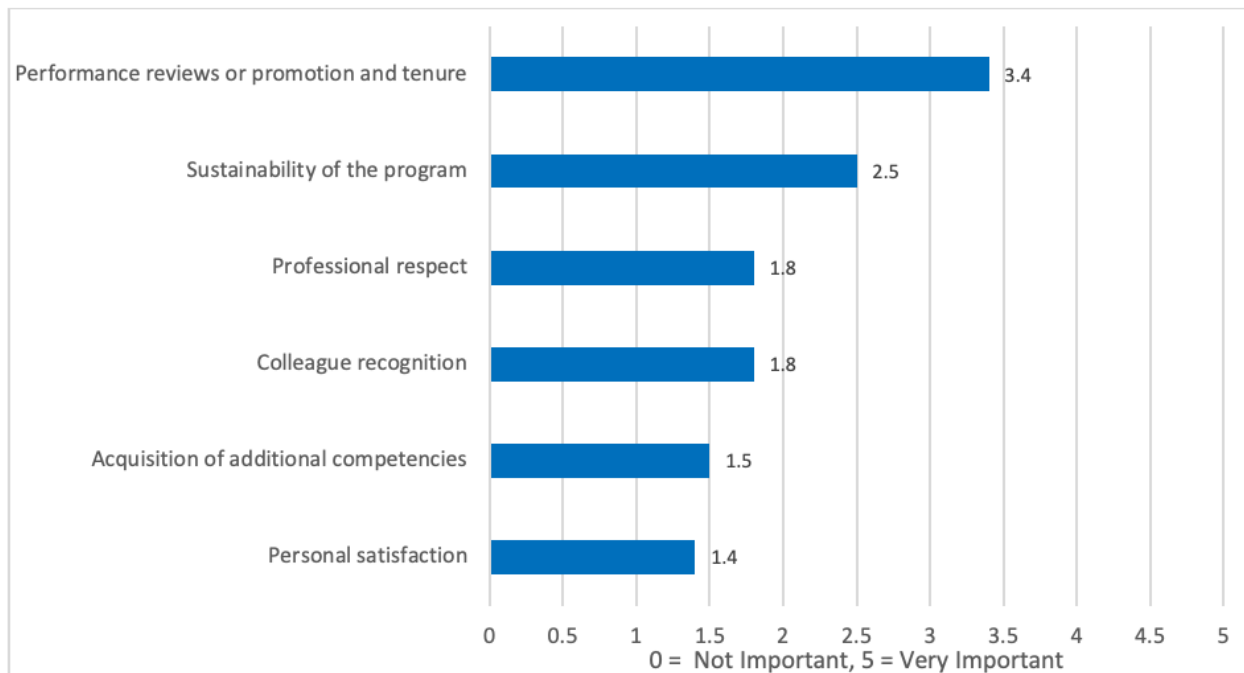
To a lesser extent, other benefits included acquisition of additional competencies and personal satisfaction.

Abstracts of WEDA Awards of Excellence winners are available at

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/weda/award-winners-and-project-abstracts>.

Figure 1.

Importance of Influences of Western Extension Directors Association Award on Personal and Team Success



Looking Forward

Extension must heed the call to transform from individual expertise and knowledge transfer to a more collaborative approach in which educators work together, and with communities, to generate new knowledge, collectively known as engagement (Holland, 2016). With regard to future evolution of Extension award programs, we recommend the following approaches:

- Consider community engagement (that is, involvement of cooperators or community members) as an award criterion.
- Insist on innovation. Innovation is the cornerstone of Extension programming (McGrath, Conway, & Johnson, 2007); therefore, innovation must be a criterion considered in any Extension award program.
- Maintain a suitable number of awards to guard against real or perceived loss of value as stipulated in the law of diminishing marginal utility (Beattie & LaFrance, 2005).
- Recognize and market winning programs to enhance the reputation of the respective university and Extension service.

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2017, Jeanne Gleason, New Mexico State University

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2014, Kelly Kopp, Utah State University

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