

extension staffing patterns: clientele views

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During the past decade, a major change in staffing has taken place in the Extension Service. This change has been from county-only staffing to area staffing. Since its beginning, many people have asked: "Which staffing pattern is most effective?" Several studies have been conducted on how Extension faculty feel about various staffing patterns. However, the real test of program effectiveness and the satisfaction received is determined by clientele. Do clientele view programs as being more effective in one staffing pattern than in another? Are clientele more satisfied with how Extension develops and carries out programs in one staffing pattern than another?

Clientele were very satisfied with the program development processes being used in the Extension Service. . . .

Preliminary Steps

The study summarized in this article was part of an ES-USDA funded project, begun in 1971, to determine the advantages and disadvantages of various staffing patterns. The project's first step identified staffing patterns. Though Moore found great variation and complexity when he surveyed all states in 1972, 3 staffing patterns were the most common. They were:

- *County/state (CS)*—The "traditional" staffing pattern. County agents supported by state specialists. No area staff (see Figure 1).

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Received for publication: March, 1976.

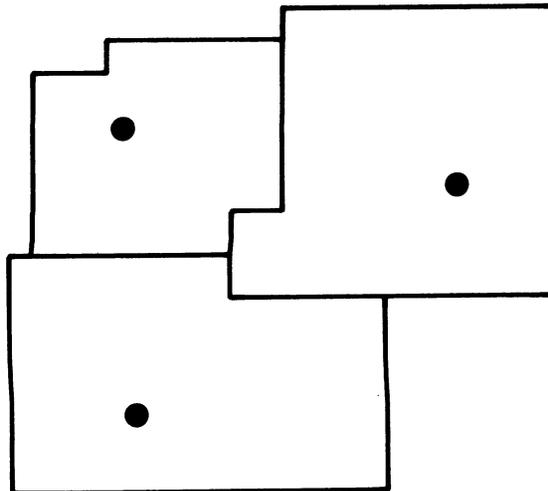


Figure 1. County/state (CS) staffing pattern.

- *Multicounty/state (MCS)*—County agents specialize in certain subject-matter fields and trade services with agents in nearby counties. Back-up support by state specialists (see Figure 2).

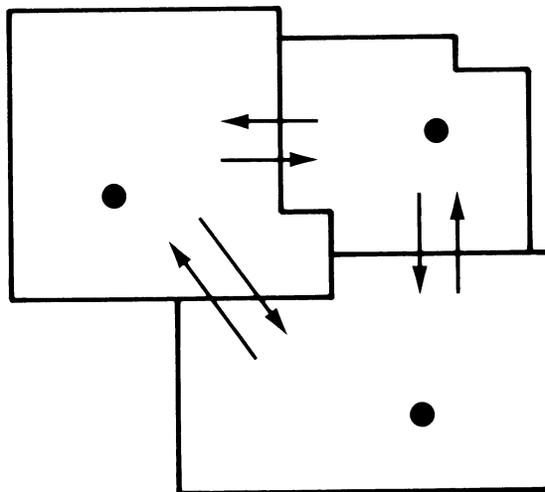


Figure 2. Multicounty/state (MCS) staffing pattern.

- *County/multicounty/state (CMCS)*—County agents work out of each county office and limit their work to that county. They're supported by a number of specialists who work throughout a multi-county area. Both county and area staff are supported by state specialists (see Figure 3).¹

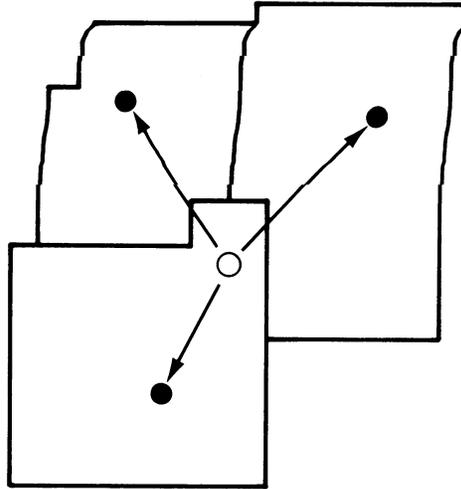


Figure 3. County/multicounty/state (CMCS) staffing pattern.

In the project's second step, Warner focused on the organizational aspects of staffing. He surveyed professional Extension workers in seven states that best represented the three most common patterns.² His study was reported in the May/June, 1975, issue of the *Journal of Extension*.

This article reports on the third major step in the project—a study designed to answer the two clientele-related questions asked earlier:

1. Do clientele view programs as being more effective in one staffing pattern than another?
2. Are clientele more satisfied with how Extension develops and carries out programs in one staffing pattern than another?

Our Study

From the seven states surveyed by Warner, three states were selected, each to be representative of one of the three most common staffing patterns. A stratified random sample of counties was drawn in each state, with 10 counties selected for each program area in each state. The four program areas were agriculture, 4-H youth, home economics, and community resource development. The appropriate agent in each of the selected counties submitted the names of 50 clientele in his program area. From this list, 15 names were drawn randomly. *This clientele sampling procedure provided a total of 1,800 persons—150 from each of the 4 program areas for each of the 3 staffing patterns.*

Questionnaires were mailed by the local county agent to the 15 clientele in his/her county, and 62% were returned.

Differences noted in the discussion below were statistically significant at the .05 level.

Findings
Program Effectiveness

Clientele evaluated Extension program effectiveness by rating the extent to which they felt Extension was attaining the national objectives appropriate to their program area. That is, agricultural clientele rated agriculturally related objectives, home economics clientele rated home economics related objectives, and so on. A procedure was used so that clientele actually responded to simplified, shortened statements, rather than to the more complex, lengthy objectives as stated in the Extension management information system in 1974.

Agriculture. In general, in the agricultural program area, clientele perception of effectiveness of programs was no different by staffing pattern. The only exception among the 12 agriculturally related objectives was with the safety objective for which the county/state staffing pattern was considered more effective than the multicounty/state pattern.

Home Economics. Differences in clientele perception of program effectiveness by staffing pattern were found for four of the eight home economics related objectives. These differences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Significantly different home economics objectives.

Objective	Staffing pattern difference(s)
Safety	CMCS > MCS
Interpersonal relationships	CMCS > CS
Health	CS > MCS; CMCS > MCS*
Community facilities and services	CS > MCS; CMCS > MCS*

*Where more than one difference is shown, the greater difference is listed first.

In general, the findings in Table 1 show the multicounty/state staffing pattern to be rated as lowest in effectiveness. Though the evidence isn't conclusive, the county/multicounty/state pattern was the most highly rated.

4-H Youth. When 4-H clientele evaluated program effectiveness in relation to four national objectives, no differences by staffing pattern were found.

Community Resource Development. The 4 of 10 community resource development objectives for which differences by staffing pattern were observed are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Significantly different community resource development objectives.

<u>Objective</u>	<u>Staffing pattern difference(s)</u>
Community facilities and services	CS > MCS
Employment skills	CMCS > MCS
Improve environment	CS > MCS
Public issues	CMCS > MCS

For each objective in Table 2, the multicounty/state pattern was the significantly lower rated staffing pattern. The findings show no general preference for either the county/state or the county/multicounty/state pattern.

Program Development Processes

To measure clientele satisfaction with program development processes, a 17-item instrument was developed. Statements were developed to measure satisfaction in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs, as well as in maintaining public image. Clientele responded to each statement on a five-point scale which indicated the extent to which each person was satisfied with it.³

Overall, clientele were very satisfied with the program development processes used by Extension. Clientele in the county/state staffing pattern were more satisfied than respondents from the other two staffing patterns. The difference in satisfaction between the county/multicounty/state pattern and the multicounty/state pattern wasn't significant.

Summary

Overall, clientele perceived little difference in program effectiveness by staffing patterns. It appears that as long as their needs were met, clientele weren't too concerned about which staffing pattern was used.

Clientele were very satisfied with the program development processes being used in the Extension Service. However, clientele in the county/state staffing pattern (the traditional, non-area one) were more satisfied than those from the area staffing patterns.

An area-type staffing pattern might well be a desirable way to meet organizationally or politically acceptable needs, *but shouldn't be relied on to increase clientele perception of greater program effectiveness or satisfaction with the program development processes.* Warner's study indicated that the professional staff's job satisfaction might be enhanced by area-type staffing. In addition, he found that professionals in area staffing patterns saw their organization as less complex than did professionals in traditional staffing patterns.

Footnotes

1. Philip B. Moore, "Staffing Patterns in the Cooperative Extension Service" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 1973).
2. Paul D. Warner, "A Comparative Study of Three Patterns of Staffing Within the Cooperative Extension Service Organization With Organizational Structure, Organization Effectiveness, Job Satisfaction and Role Conflict" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 1973).
3. When the Kuder-Richardson Formula was used to test the reliability of this instrument, the reliability coefficient was .93, indicating a high degree of reliability. When analyzed as 3 subscales—planning, implementing, evaluating—the K.R. reliability coefficient ranged from .77 to .85.