



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fact Sheet-00-33

Lyon County Needs Assessment

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Introduction

Lyon County is located in northwestern Nevada. It is 2,204 square miles in area with a population estimated at 32,700 (1999). In November 1999, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension conducted a mail survey to assess needs in Lyon County. The purpose of the assessment was to identify issues of importance to citizens that Cooperative Extension could potentially address through educational programs and applied research.

The assessment was intended to examine a variety of social, economic, environmental, and physical needs. Participants were asked to indicate specific extension programs needed in Lyon County. Prior to this effort, a formal needs assessment specific to Lyon County could not be located. Thus, organization of program areas for this section was based on previous Cooperative Extension programs conducted in Lyon County and other counties in Nevada since 1980. Program areas were categorized into:

- agriculture,
- resource management,
- horticulture,
- economic development,
- community involvement,
- family,
- health and nutrition, and
- youth.

Conducting the Needs Assessment

To conserve fiscal resources in conducting the assessment, a selected sample of individuals who live and work in Lyon County was compiled. The survey sample included the Lyon County Leadership Team. The Leadership Team is comprised of all county program supervisors. These programs include: human services, law enforcement, county recorder, engineering and road maintenance, public health, mosquito and weed abatement, library, juvenile probation, district court, county treasurer, property assessment, county government management, and economic development. Additionally, county commissioners were surveyed also to represent issues countywide. To target youth issues, principals of the various elementary, middle and high schools and school district officials were surveyed as well as individuals involved with informal youth education, such as boys and girls clubs and 4-H.

A questionnaire was mailed to each recipient with instructions, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the need assessment, and a self-addressed return envelope. Of the 47 survey recipients, 44 returned completed questionnaires resulting in a 93 percent response rate.

Needs Important to Lyon County

In assessing needs in Lyon County, respondents were asked to rate needs by high importance, low importance, or not important. Respondents could also indicate that they were "not sure" about the importance of the need.

The majority (98%) indicated that effective fire protection is a need of high importance in Lyon County. Also indicated as needs of high importance are, by order of descending importance:

- affordable medical care (96%)
- honest and responsible local government (93%)
- maintain high water quality (91%)
- fiscal stability and security (87%)
- growth planning and management (82%)
- maintain small town feeling (80%)
- community support of agriculture (79%)
- emergency response plan for disaster (72%)
- open space, free and open to public (67%)
- improved roads and infrastructure (61%)
- counseling services (56%)

Issues in Lyon County

Respondents were asked to rate a variety of social issues as being a major problem, small problem or no problem in Lyon County. Issues indicated as small problems in Lyon County included fear of crime (73%) and a shortage of childcare (63%). More than half of the respondents listed the following issues as major problems:

- status of medical care (65%)
- drug and alcohol abuse (64%)
- youth are inadequately prepared to join the work force (58%)
- maintaining quality schools (57%)
- adequate water supply was also a major problem (53%)

Specific concerns about youth issues were also addressed. Youth issues indicated as a small problem included: being a victim of crime (67%), suicide and depression (64%), running away from home (64%), and gangs/gang violence (63%). Issues indicated as major problems included:

- negative peer pressure (71%)
- drug and alcohol abuse (69%)
- drinking and driving (64%)
- teen pregnancy (56%)

Quality of Life in Lyon County

To assess quality of life survey respondents were asked their reasons for living in Lyon County. The majority of respondents (89%) indicated that the lifestyle in general was the incentive for living in Lyon County. Other reasons included the county being perceived as providing a good place to raise a family (82%), open space (78%), sense of community (76%), and personal and family safety (71%). More than half of the respondents indicated environmental reasons for living in Lyon County, such as air quality (67%), weather (58%), water quality (56%), lack of noise (56%), and scenic views (51%).

To assess quality of life further, respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements about Lyon County. The majority of respondents (96%) agreed that people have pride in their communities. Additionally, the majority of respondents were optimistic about quality of life in agreeing that the future of their community looked bright (84%) and that in five years things would be better (74%). Additionally, 77% indicated that economic growth is desirable and 57% noted that strict limits on growth would be harmful.

Cooperative Extension Program Needs

To assess extension program needs, respondents were asked, given a variety of program topics, to indicate whether they would: 1) attend a class or workshop, 2) like printed information, or 3) not want any information. Responses #1 and #2, indicating a need, were collapsed into one estimate. Based on these results the top one to two program needs were identified within each category. The majority of respondents rated program needs as follows:

- Agriculture
 - Water quality (69%)
 - Noxious weeds (65%)
- Resource Management
 - Wildlife habitat creation and maintenance (70%)
 - Management of natural resource conflicts (66%)
- Community Involvement
 - Making a difference in the community (79%)
- Economic development
 - Community strategic planning (73%)
 - Sustainable community development (72%)
- Horticulture
 - Landscaping (76%)
 - Tree and shrub care (74%)
- Family
 - Real estate planning (72%)
 - Planning for retirement (70%)
- Health and Nutrition
 - Stress management (62%)
- Youth
 - Strengthen job skills (57%)

Conclusions

The use of objective surveys, using samples of persons that represent the geography of an area, can provide important insight into the views of all citizenry in that area. Survey results, however, must be viewed as one of many elements needed to make informed decisions. Knowing that a majority of respondents rate one issue as more important than another does not necessarily indicate that every effort should be made to act on this result. Although one-shot surveys can provide useful information, it is difficult to understand the results thoroughly without comparative information extracted during other time periods. For this reason, periodic surveys, taken every few years, can provide assessment of changes in perceived needs as well as evaluation of progress toward goals defined by prior surveys.

As presented in the previous section, results of a survey to assess extension program needs indicated several program topics that would be of significant value currently to citizens in Lyon County. Program needs targeting youth did not rate as high, comparatively, as did other program needs listed above. The greatest need that was indicated concerned programs to strengthen youth job skills (57%). The majority of respondents indicated that they did not want information on other youth program topics listed. The relatively low level of interest may be due to the choice of program topics presented in the survey. Alternatively, lack of interest may be due to a high level of confidence in a very large and active countywide 4-H program as well as other youth programs currently underway in Lyon County.

To ensure quality programming, additional information ideally would be extracted from other types of need assessments. These may include formally structured, facilitated discussions with citizens as well as informal citizen input. Local newspapers may illustrate issues critical to citizenry also.

Based upon each of these methods of soliciting citizen input, the survey results could be prioritized further to reveal extension program needs critical to Lyon County. Currently, extension programs have been created to address water conservation and quality, noxious weeds, and natural resource disputes.

References

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