



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Fact Sheet 99-29

Pershing County Needs Assessment

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University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) has been operating in rural communities such as Pershing County since its inception in 1914. The mission of UNCE is “to discover, develop, disseminate, preserve, and use knowledge to strengthen the social, economic, and environmental well-being of people.” This is accomplished through educational programming which utilizes scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the most important needs and / or issues facing the residents of Pershing County. The results will be used along with other information and data to develop, implement, and evaluate future educational programming efforts by UNCE in Pershing County.

Purpose And Methodology of The Needs Assessment

After meeting with the County Commissioners, other county and city agencies, public and private organizations, and several individuals it was decided to stratify the county into four focus groups, agriculture, business and industry, education and human services. Ten to twelve people representing leadership positions within each of the focus groups were contacted and asked if they would serve as participants in a modified-delphi assessment of needs. The delphi is one method of obtaining input for ideas and problem solving. It utilizes a series of questionnaires based upon feed back from previous responses and can be modified in many ways. While not a forecasting tool, the delphi technique is appropriate for determining and prioritizing community problems, assessing community needs, and setting goals.

The process followed in Pershing County included two rounds of questions. In the first round participants were asked to list the five most important needs facing their respective groups. The number of items submitted included 18 from agriculture, 21 from business / industry, and 37 each from human services and education. The response rates for the first round ranged from 64% to 100% with an overall average of 83%. After compiling the lists for each group, a second mailing requested that the participants rank each of the needs for importance. A nine-point Likert scale was used with 1 being most important and 9 being least important. The response rate for the second round ranged from a low of 91% to a high of 100% with the overall average being 96%.

Results Of The Assessment

For the purposes of brevity only the top ten needs have been listed. The complete list is available for anyone wishing to view all of the rankings. Needs considered most important have low means

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(1=most important, 9=least important). If two means were ranked the same, the item with the lower SD (standard deviation) was considered more important. Group members were given the opportunity to submit additional need statements at the end of round two. All four groups submitted at least one additional statement.

Agriculture

The ratings for the top ten agricultural needs ranged from a low of 2.9 for the most important to 3.6 for the least important. The average group ranking for all of the top ten needs was 3.2 and the average for the standard deviation was 2.2. This group offered two additional statements: (1) too many anti-agricultural regulations by government agencies, and (2) not getting paid for the full value of products.

Agriculture: Top Ten Needs			
Rank	Description	Mean	SD
1	Future claims by State and environmental groups that PCWCD contaminates Humboldt and Toulon Sinks	2.9	1.3
2	Guidance in ag for 4-H/FFA students interested in farming / ranching careers	2.9	2.3
3	Marketing of local products	2.9	2.4
4	Marketing information	3.2	2.2
5	Noxious weeds	3.2	2.4
6	More control of water	3.3	1.9
7	Soil fertility trails and analysis	3.3	2.1
8	Better management of local weed district	3.4	2.2
9	Environmental regulations	3.5	2.5
10	Re-zoning without landowner consent	3.6	2.6

Buisness / Industry

The most important need statement in this group had a group rating of 1.4 while the least important had a group rating of 2.7. The average group rating for the top ten needs was 2.2 with a standard deviation of 1.5. Additional statements submitted by the group addressed (1) importance of grazing to the community, (2) access to public lands for recreational purposes, and (3) looking into the county building and planning department.

Business / Industry: Top Ten Needs			
Rank	Description	Mean	SD
1	Reliable employees with strong work ethic	1.4	0.9
2	More industry opportunity for 2 income families	2.0	0.8
3	Aggressive promotion of business development	2.1	0.9
4	Tourism-need to bring in I-80 traffic	2.1	1.2
5	Industry specific training for employees to attract business	2.2	1.1
6	More people working here should live here	2.2	2.6
7	Diverse business community to promote local shopping	2.4	1.3
8	Stability of mining industry	2.5	1.5
9	Continued Chamber of Commerce growth	2.5	2.5
10	More recreation / activities to keep employees	2.7	2.5

Education:

The average group rating for the top ten needs in education was 2.2 with a standard deviation of 1.8. The most important needs statement had a group rating of 1.8 and the least important a group rating of 2.4. One additional statement was submitted and that concerned the community's image.

Education: Top Ten Needs			
Rank	Description	Mean	SD
1	Alternative Education Programs work ethic	1.8	1.5
	Math, Reading, and Writing skills	1.8	1.5
2	Facilities commensurate with educational needs	2.1	1.3
3	Technology training	2.3	1.5
	Adequate financial resources	2.3	1.5
4	Awareness of need for graduating with good grades	2.3	1.6
5	Summer school program for math and English	2.3	1.7
6	Update technology in vocational areas	2.3	2.3
7	Full-time technology staff member	2.4	2.2
8	Improve student proficiency test pass rate	2.4	2.4

Human Services

The most important need statement in this group had a rating of 2.0 while the least important was 3.0. The average rating for the top ten items was 2.6 and the standard deviation was 1.6. This group submitted additional statements concerning (1) early childhood programs and (2) higher pay for law enforcement officers.

Human Services: Top Ten Needs			
Rank	Description	Mean	SD
1	Parenting classes	2.0	1.5
2	New industry with higher paying jobs	2.1	1.2
3	Emergency counseling	2.4	1.1
4	Adult education	2.6	1.2
5	Teen pregnancy	2.7	1.2
6	Juvenile programs	2.8	1.6
7	Child welfare	2.8	2.0
8	Substance abuse prevention and intervention	2.9	2.0
9	Full-time mental health care	2.9	2.3
10	Safe house for domestic violence	3.0	2.3

Summary and Conclusions

Agriculture with an overall average of 3.2, coupled with a relatively high average standard deviation of 2.2 suggests there may be greater differences of opinion within this group compared to the other three groups. This may be explained by the fact that the top ten items covered a wide range of topics including legal claims, property and water rights, 4-H and FFA youth programming, as well as more traditional production and marketing needs.

Business / industry had the lowest overall group average of 2.2, coupled with the lowest overall standard deviation at 1.5 for the top ten items. In fact their first three items all had standard deviation below 1.0. The top ten items for business / industry all centered on employment and economic development issues. This suggests a higher level of consensus among the group members

compared to the other groups. Education, however, also had the same overall group average of 2.2 but with a slightly higher overall standard deviation of 1.8. Their need statements centered on programming, student skill, and technology.

The human services group also had need statements covering a wide number of different issues. The need statements ranged from such topics as parenting and adult education, counseling, higher paying jobs, mental health and substance abuse, to teen pregnancy and child welfare. Despite this divergent group of issues, the overall standard deviation for the group was still only 1.6 with an average group rating of 2.6.

There are presently many private groups, federal, state, and locally funded agencies attempting to address most if not all of the areas covered by the need statements expressed in this assessment. However, because the particular needs were still expressed by the group participants, suggests there is still much work to be done in these areas.

The results of this assessment should not be viewed as the final word on assessing needs in Pershing County. However, it is hoped that the information will be useful to those groups and individuals providing programming related to the identified needs.

References:

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