

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bringing the University to You

Fact Sheet-03-02

Lander County Needs Assessment

Part 1

Rod Davis, Extension Educator

Introduction to Lander County

Lander County is located in north central Nevada. It has two distinct population centers: Battle Mountain and the combined communities of Austin, Kingston and Gillman Springs. It encompassed 5,621 square miles. Over 85 percent of the county is public lands, managed by federal agencies. Interstate 80 transects the county, east to west on the northern end of the county as does state highway 50 in the south. State highway 305 links the towns of Battle Mountain and Austin. Thirty miles south of Austin on state highway 376 are the residential communities of Gillman Springs and Kingston.

2000 census data reports Lander County's total population to be 5,794, of which about 5300 reside in the greater Battle Mountain area and 340 in Austin. Both population centers have been mining dependent with agriculture and natural resources also supporting the local economies. Recent downturns in the mining industry have put the county in serious economic stress.

Needs Assessment

University of Nevada, Reno, Cooperative Extension policy requires that educational program and applied research efforts be focused upon local needs. The purpose of this assessment was to therefore identify issues of importance to the citizens of Lander County and provide a foundation upon which Extension could build such educational and research programs.

In the fall of 2000 Nevada Cooperative Extension administrative team, in collaboration with the local Extension staff and faculty from Lander County, conducted a "stakeholder input tour." Six major areas of potential Extension programming were identified:

- Agriculture
- Community Development
- Natural Resources

- Children, Youth and Families
- Health and Nutrition
- Horticulture

Educational and research needs/opportunities within each of these areas were identified and discussed. Specifics from this meeting as well as the results from other areas of the state may be obtained from any local Cooperative Extension office or from the Nevada Cooperative Extension web site at <http://www.unce.unr.edu>.

Prioritizing Programming Efforts

The stakeholder input meetings did not attempt to prioritize these six potential areas for local Extension programming. An advisory panel consisting of representatives from the Battle Mountain Chamber of Commerce, Lander County Government and the Lander County Sheriff's office was established. The purpose of this panel was to collaborate with Extension in the design and delivery of an assessment instrument that would assist in this prioritization. Upon their recommendation it was decided that the prioritization of these areas would be useful and for the purposes of data collection horticulture should be combined with community development.

In order to obtain this information a mail survey was designed. Recipients of the survey were asked to rank each of the identified program areas according to its relative importance in their community.

The advisory panel suggested surveying registered voters by precinct. This would assure that all geographical areas of the county would be represented. Further, demographics, geography and economic situations vary greatly between the Battle Mountain and Austin-Kinston-Gillman Springs communities. Color-coding by precinct would allow the returned surveys to

be separated by community. It was also felt that registered voters represented a portion of the population that would be likely to respond to the survey.

Surveys were sent to **16%** of the registered voters in each precinct. A total of 384 surveys were mailed. A response rate of **19%** was recorded for the Battle Mountain Community. The Austin-Kingston-Gillman Springs areas returned **34%** of the mailed surveys.

In order to increase accuracy the advisory panel recommended that the survey be confidential. No attempt was made to identify respondents. This prohibited follow up attempts to increase the response rate.

Survey Results

A ranking of “1” indicated highest priority. A “5” ranking indicated the lowest priority. All results reported in the table are mean averages.

Survey Results	Battle Mountain	Austin-Kingston Gillman Springs
Community Development	1.72	2.28
Natural Resources	3.11	2.85
Children, Youth & Families	2.42	3.57
Health & Nutrition	3.03	3.07
Agriculture	3.57	3.30

Conclusions

Community Development ranked as the highest priority in the both the Battle Mountain and Austin Communities. Other program areas are listed below in descending order of importance.

Battle Mountain	Austin-Kingston Gillman Springs
1. Community Development	1. Community Development
2. Children Youth & Families	2. Natural Resources
3. Natural Resources	3. Health & Nutrition
4. Health & Nutrition	4. Agriculture
5. Agriculture	5. Children Youth & Families

Clearly community development is a priority throughout Lander County. It is interesting to note as well the relative difference in the ranking of Children Youth & Families between these two communities. Austin is by far a more rural community, serving a higher percentage of farm/ranch families and may be perceived by its residents as “low risk” and containing a higher percentage of traditional families and associated family values. The rural nature of this community may

also account for the relatively higher ranking of Natural Resources.

The results of this needs assessment were shared with the Lander County Commissioners, county manager and the needs assessment advisory panel. Results were also published in the local newspaper, the Battle Mountain Bugle.

Educational and Research Response to the Needs Assessment

In the year following the needs assessment, Cooperative Extension has responded by:

- Initiative to increase traditional 4-H enrollment by one third
- Maintain continued support for Project Magic
- Provide leadership for the formation of the Lander Economic Development Authority
- 8 week landscape management short course for Battle Mountain residence
- Advisor to Lander County Parks Department
- Provide Grant-writing assistance to the Lander County Conservation District resulting in \$10,000 for noxious weed control
- Facilitator for the Central Area Sage Grouse Conservation Planning effort
- Provide leadership for Battle Mountain Gateway Initiative
- Sheep Graze research project targeted at the control of cheatgrass and reestablishment of native and adapted species on Lander County rangelands.

The term “Community Development” can be interpreted to encompass a variety of issues. It was the recommendation of the needs assessment advisory panel that a follow up survey be conducted to establish program priorities within the parameters of Community Development.

References

Breazeale, Don, (1999) Pershing County Needs Assessment FS#99-29, Nevada Cooperative Extension, University of Nevada, Reno

Lewis, S.R (1993) Community Needs Assessment : Douglas County, Nevada Cooperative Extension, University of Nevada, Reno

Singletery, Loretta (2000) Lyon County Needs Assessment, FS#00-33, Nevada Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nevada Reno

Editor, Lander County, Nevada, Web Page, <http://www.landercounty.com/>

Editor, 2002, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension 2000-2002 Community Meeting, unpublished