



Community Development

The Community Development Institute works with communities across the state to support individuals, groups, and organizations to enhance quality of life and improve overall well-being. The development of leaders, organizations, local governments, economies, and community food systems leads to stronger communities today and for generations to come. The Institute is focused on helping communities reach all members of society equally, incorporate research and best practices into policy, build strong social connections, and encourage participation in government and organizations. Extension faculty, researchers, staff, and educators are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways to help communities manage immediate needs of the crisis, prepare for long-term impacts, and address longstanding social and racial inequities.

Supporting communities and organizations in coordinating response efforts

Communities rely on strong collaboration and coordination between local government, organizations, and residents for emergency responses as well as longer-term coping and recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dual effect on local coordination: it intensified the need for collaboration between a variety of organizations and institutions, and at the same time it disrupted communication channels and collaborative spaces. Specifically, county-based recovery and emergency task forces sought support in coordinating response efforts with real time research-based information.

How Extension responded

The Community Development Institute served as a valuable resource to communities by providing credible, research-based information on a variety of timely and relevant topics, convening partners and coordinating action among multiple community entities, and building capacity of leaders and organizations. Our community and organizational development professionals immediately supported local organizations and county governments in planning and implementing emergency operations and services. As the crisis develops, we are actively supporting others in planning for safe reopening options and contingency plans.

Examples of this include:

- Developed policies for reopening the Lac du Flambeau community in a safe and cultural way.

Conducted multiple planning sessions with the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Incident Command Center and Tribal Emergency Management Program.

- Convened a daily meeting between county/tribal leaders/public health/hospital to share information and troubleshoot problems to ensure a more effective, regionally coordinated, COVID-19 response
- Created a webpage and newsletter with information related to COVID-19 impacts and resources to inform nonprofit organizations about response strategies in a timely manner.
- Developed culturally relevant materials related to COVID-19 messaging in tribal communities shared with the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin's Incident Command Team to increase local awareness of CDC guidelines.

Addressing new and intensified financial stresses for business, organizations, and local governments

The COVID-19 pandemic directly affects local, state, national, and international economies, putting new and intensified financial strains on households, businesses, nonprofits, and local governments. Very few nonprofits entered the COVID-19 era with fiscal reserves; with decreased ticket sales, contracts on hold, and fundraising events cancelled, they are struggling financially. Financial stress for small businesses across all sectors has increased from the outbreak, forcing

entrepreneurs, businesses owners, and nonprofit boards to search out and secure potential financial relief. They are also rethinking old strategies for delivering goods and services during a pandemic. Local governments are feeling the impact as well, through immediate revenue shortfalls that are bound to get worse. The extent of the economic strain has affected every county of the state and spared no community.

How Extension responded

Extension researchers and educators have provided the latest evidence, guidance, and direction for community groups and businesses to use in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Extension provided business owners, governments, and organizations with key information to keep operations running.

Examples of this include:

- Provided information and resources about COVID-19 funding opportunities for small businesses to support them during emerging economic challenges. This effort has reached more than 800 Chamber of Commerce members.
- Updated a financial planning and budgeting tool for restaurant and hotel owners and operators impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to estimate

the impacts on cash flow and to inform decisions on reopening dates, expected changes in volume, staffing, and cost of goods.

- Compiled resources for stakeholders in Lincoln and Marathon counties to learn about available state, federal, and nonprofit assistance programs.
- Developed and co-wrote grants for the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe community to address economic development needs related to food sovereignty of tribal communities.

Maintaining safe access to food, support in growing food, and processing food safely

The COVID-19 crisis has amplified pre-existing vulnerabilities in the food system, impacting food production, food supply chains, market access, and emergency food systems in catastrophic ways. Food producers, processors, retailers, and restaurants have had to quickly retool their operations to incorporate COVID-19 regulations and safety practices. These changes have often increased the cost of production while reducing capacity. Many farmers have also lost key markets, including restaurants, institutional food service providers, and household consumers. This has resulted in a loss of sales, wasted product, and the need to quickly

IN-DEPTH

Focus on food: Supporting mobile food operators

Unlike traditional restaurants, food cart and food truck vendors in Wisconsin do not have a statewide association to rely on for information. Street vending is a growing segment of the business community and counts as one of the highest numbers of business owners that are women and people of color. When the COVID-19 outbreak occurred, mobile food operators needed customized assistance in the rapidly changing landscape of operating a food business in which illness and new regulations were major considerations. Extension partnered with the City of Madison to produce resources for licensed food cart and food truck vendors to maintain operations during pandemic-related restrictions. This guidance covers safety, grants/loans, childcare support, and more critical topics to keep these businesses going.



Photo by Jeff Miller/UW-Madison

identify alternative customers and marketing channels. Small food businesses and restaurants have also lost business in the wake of the “Safer at Home” order and have struggled to identify and adopt new marketing and distribution strategies to stay afloat. Meanwhile, residents across Wisconsin are facing greater food security challenges in the face of the COVID-19 outbreak due to job losses. An April 2020 Hunger Free America COVID-19 National Survey shows the stark impact of this economic strain on households. For example, between mid-March and mid-April 2020, “37% of parents nationwide cut the size of meals or skipped meals for their children because they didn’t have enough money for food.” Consequently, food pantries and other emergency food operations have experienced a surge in demand. This has strained the emergency food system, which is also experiencing shortages in volunteers and a need to reconfigure its packaging and distribution systems to reduce interpersonal contact. Altogether, these challenges have highlighted a need for support, both across retail and emergency food supply chains and at the household level, to help farms, businesses, and individuals navigate the shifting regulatory environment, rapidly pivot to alternative distribution and access models, and address household and community food insecurity.

How Extension responded

Extension has worked with community organizations, residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, coalitions, and county, municipal, and tribal governments to develop web-based guidance, best practices, and policy updates. Community Development Institute members have also contributed to the development of new state, local, and cross-sector networks to advance this work and help small farms, food businesses, and emergency food providers maintain operations while adhering to new rules, regulations, and operating conditions.

Examples of this include:

- Worked with the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and the Department of Health Services to develop and disseminate unified guidelines on best practices for farmers markets and community gardens to minimize exposure to COVID-19 and comply with the “Safer at Home” order.
- Convened statewide conversation of organizations that support small and medium-sized direct-market growers to identify new marketing and technical assistance needs resulting from COVID-related

IN-DEPTH

Backing broadband: Tackling a digital divide



The “Safer at Home” restrictions put in place to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus highlighted a lingering issue: inequitable access to adequate Internet services across Wisconsin.

The pandemic restrictions forced many to work from home, students to take online classes, and for information to be shared via the Internet. Without access to adequate broadband service, employees found it difficult to work; delivering education online showed inequities as some students were not able to access materials. Inadequate broadband services have been an ongoing issue for years. Even before the COVID-19 public health emergency, rural communities have been at a comparative disadvantage due to inadequate access to broadband. Economically, a lack of broadband means lower home values, lower rates of entrepreneurship, and fewer opportunities for education. Extension produced research that clearly showed a link between access to broadband and economic performance and overall community well-being, informing local action for broadband access.

changes in community supported agriculture, farmers markets, farm stand, U-Pick and other direct-market channels.

- Convened cross-sector partners to improve emergency food distribution serving a network of pantries/meal programs.
- Fostered a collaboration of the City of La Crosse, La Crosse Neighborhood Associations, and volunteers to plant, maintain, and harvest victory gardens to provide fresh produce for community

members and to educate about gardening and food preservation to improve food security and health.

- Developed a rapid response communication for Latinx workforce members in agriculture and food industries to inform them about safely getting to work.

Supporting businesses, volunteers, community organizations, schools, and local government in maintaining their operations and in serving the people of Wisconsin

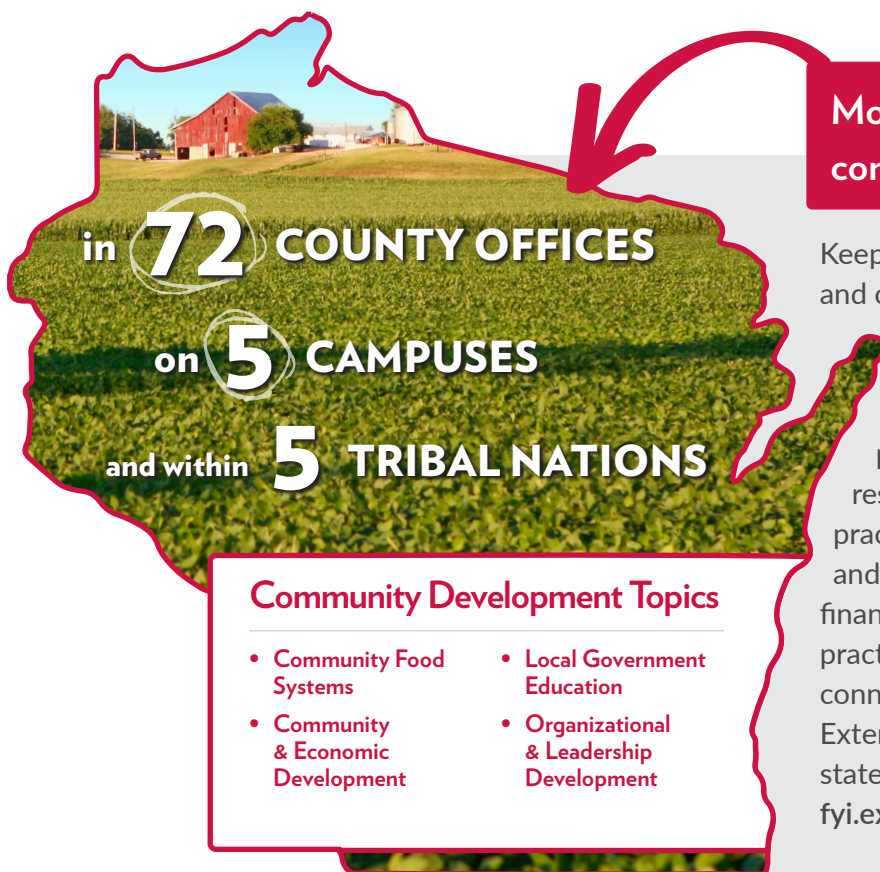
The pandemic has created new operational challenges for businesses, organizations, and governments when it comes to maintaining their daily operations. Shifting modes of collaboration, new health requirements, shortages in personal protective equipment, an overall adjustment to working from home, and limited access to public spaces converged into complex operational difficulties for Wisconsin's professionals.

How Extension responded

Educators and researchers developed new means of engagement and coaching to provide our partners with interactive learning environments. Extension staff also created unified communication strategies to expand the reach of services and messaging of our partner organizations.

Examples of this include:

- Delivered a webinar for local business owners to learn about the regulations associated with curbside pickup during the "Safer At Home" order and about new opportunities to reach customers during the COVID-19 health crisis.
- Provided an online training for county, city, town, and village boards to learn how to facilitate online board meetings while social distancing for COVID-19.
- Facilitated a collaborative planning session with the Marinette and Oconto Literacy Council to identify strategies to improve student teacher access.



More ways we're helping businesses, communities, youth, and families

Keeping a focus on our values to transform lives and communities, UW-Madison Extension is leading businesses, communities, youth, and families in the response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We are uniquely positioned across the state to link university research to those in need of guidance and practical resources. Extension staff in counties and tribal nations are making connections to financial aid and instruction, providing best practices for emerging needs, and reinforcing connections for healthy communities. To see how Extension responded to COVID-19 across the state and across program areas, visit fyi.extension.wisc.edu/covid19/impacts.