

Structure & Function OF THE Cooperative Extension Service

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Sponsorship

The need to examine the structure and function of 1862 and 1890 institutions in the Cooperative Extension System was identified by the ECOP Committee on Personnel and Organization Development (PODC). The idea was then endorsed by ECOP. PODC sponsored the project and provided oversight throughout its implementation. The project was staffed by Paul D. Warner, Roger Rennekamp and Martha Nall, from Program and Staff Development at the University of Kentucky. Monetary support was provided by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Kentucky, Cooperative Extension Service.

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STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

This effort focuses on how Extension is organized at the state and local levels and how structural arrangements impact the operations of the organization. The purpose is to determine what structural arrangements exist at 1862s, 1890s and territories, to share that information throughout the system, and to stimulate discussion of alternative approaches. The goal is not to recommend a single or best approach, rather it is to identify alternatives and suggest their implications.

Information was collected by means of a questionnaire that was sent to the directors and administrators of all 74 land-grant institutions. Responses were received from 71. Followup telephone interviews were then conducted with 19 institutions in order to provide a qualitative assessment of the implications of the different structural arrangements. Particular attention was given to the implications for programming, clientele involvement and budgetary support.

THE FINDINGS

1. The Positioning of Extension within the Land-Grant University

There has been substantial discussion concerning the movement of Extension out of colleges of agriculture* to more university-wide outreach units. That is a documentable trend, but maybe not to the extent as generally thought. Almost four out of five (71%) Cooperative Extension Services remain in agriculture, while 13% are positioned within an outreach unit. Another 13% are in free-standing units that report directly to the university president (or whatever the university CEO is called) and 40% report to an administrator, or administrators, who have dual responsibility for both agriculture and university-wide outreach.

Twenty-eight percent have had changes in that arrangement in the past five years or are anticipating one in the near future. Three-fourths of those making changes were 1862 institutions. However, one should not conclude that all changes were away always from agriculture. In fact, they were in both directions. More of the changes were toward a universitywide outreach unit (sometimes in combination with agriculture) but two 1862s and two 1890s moved from university-wide positions to colleges of agriculture.

(Figure 1 and 2)

*Refers to colleges, institutes or other units that are predominantly agriculture. May also include involvement of colleges of Human Environmental Sciences (or whatever Home Economics is called).

The perceived advantages of being associated with agriculture draw from a successful history of commitment to outreach, strong ties between research and Extension, established relationships with agricultural client groups, and success in securing budgetary support.

Agriculture has been and continues to be a vital part of Extension's agenda no matter how Extension is positioned within the university structure. Those located in agriculture generally feel they have the flexibility to reallocate resources and redirect programs as needed. But some concede that supporting positions and projects outside of the college of agriculture would be discouraged by their dean. Therefore being positioned within agriculture may limit the extent of movement into non-agriculture areas. Furthermore, there is even disagreement over how broadly agriculture should be defined, whether Extension's role should be limited to only agricultural production or whether it should also include such areas as environmental protection, public policy and agricultural labor issues.

The perceived limitations of being positioned in agriculture are that Extension is often viewed as *only* agriculture, that Extension programs need the breadth of expertise and subject matter credibility that other parts of the university can offer, that it discourages non-agricultural groups from identifying with Extension at a time when agricultural and rural interests have declining influence.

The disparity between the needs of the field program and the nature of the support available at the state level is cited as the reason why at least some states have shifted from a college of agriculture to a university-wide outreach unit. They are attempting to gain access to a wider range of subject matter disciplines to more adequately support the breadth of the program. In other cases, the shift from agriculture to university outreach was not initiated by Extension. For some it was an initiative of university administration to increase the university's commitment to outreach and to consolidate outreach functions under one unit. For still others, Extension may have been responding to a opportunity to be elevated one step on the university administrative hierarchy. No matter what the reason, the effort to increase university-wide commitment to outreach is a worthy goal.

There is general agreement among Extension directors and administrators that Extension must respond to a broader spectrum of issues than it has in the past. If so, programs will require research and technical support beyond agriculture. Regardless of the structural arrangement, Extension programs need to be able to draw upon the total university's expertise. In addition, linkages to other universities, as well as to non-academic sources of information, are essential.

2. Securing Program Expertise

If Extension programs require a broader expertise than available from faculty of colleges of agriculture, how accessible is the rest of the university in providing that support?

In 44% of the institutions, outreach is viewed as a university-wide expectation such that support of Extension programs is expected. That leaves a majority (56%) where support for Extension is not seen as a university expectation. That expectation is greater at those institutions where Extension is in a university outreach unit (89% vs 33% for those institutions located in agriculture). However the differences may not be as dramatic as they appear. A number of institutions where Extension is located in agriculture indicated they are moving in the direction of an expectation of university-wide support for Extension programs, while some positioned in outreach units suggested that the university-wide expectation is sometimes more in theory and structure than in reality.

The question of whether a change in the positioning of Extension in the university structure has led to greater access to the rest of the land grant university campus remains unanswered. Some states definitely say their programs are broader because of the change. In others, things do not appear to have changed that much. Extension is expected to buy expertise from colleges and there continues to be a lack of real commitment to outreach unless it is purchased. For both those positioned in agriculture and those in university outreach units, the predominant method for securing extra-agriculture expertise is through informal relationships among faculty and staff.

The second most used method is to buy expertise from other parts of the university. Extension is seen as the “cash cow” and is expected to buy expertise from other units. Without these resources, there is a lack of real commitment to outreach. So the question remains, has moving from agriculture to the university level provided the Extension program with the additional expertise and support it needs?

Concern over the needed expertise for the program is not solely directed toward the state level. There is also concern that the training and experiences of field staff are not sufficient to satisfy program needs. When asked to indicate the type of training they desire in the new staff they hire, directors and administrators said they expect a strong technical background in state-level staff and a fairly strong subject matter expertise in staff with multi-county assignments, but they want an equal balance of subject matter expertise and process skills at the county level.

One concern expressed about the expertise of field staff is that they lack training in more contemporary problems such as health care, the needs of at-risk youth and families, and public issues education. There is evidence that some changes are being made in hiring practices and that training programs are providing a broader range of offerings. From a staffing standpoint, more cross-county staffing arrangements are being utilized to fill subject matter gaps and staff are being encouraged to work more as teams in order to strengthen programming capabilities.

The second dilemma is what is described in the “Strategic Framework” document as the tension between Extension as an educator and as an information provider. The survey response suggests that county staff should be competent in technical subject matter and qualified to conduct life-long education programs. While these two skill areas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they do require quite different training and experiences. With the movement toward more multi-county assignments and more designated specialties among field staff the risk is

that the role of educator, community facilitator, human resource developer, and counselor will be lost and that no one will be there to continue to foster the involvement of clientele in the colearning process.

(Figures 3, 4, and 5)

3. Influence of the Partners

Directors and administrators were asked their perception of the current and ideal levels of influence of the local, state and federal partners in both program and policy decisions. They are generally satisfied with the balance between state and county influence on programming, but would like to see more influence of the local partner in such policy areas as salary, accountability and hiring decisions.

In the relationship between state and federal partners, overall, directors and administrators would like to see more state and less federal influence in programming and are satisfied with the balance in policy decisions. However when examined separately, 1862 and 1890 perceptions differ. Directors (1862) feel there is currently less federal influence on programming than do 1890 administrators. In the policy arena, 1862 directors desire less federal influence, whereas 1890 administrators want more.

(Figure 6 and 7)

4. Managers of the Field Program

Most institutions (71%) utilize middle level managers. The number of area or district directors ranges from one at two 1890s to as many as 28 at one 1862 institution. More than three-fourths (78%) of the institutions have six or fewer, with the median being four. Only five institutions (all 1862s) have ten or more.

The tendency is for middle level managers to have both supervisory and program responsibilities. In fact, only five institutions reported that their mid-managers spent all of their time on supervision. On the average, middle level managers spend 60% of their time supervising and 40% on programming

Three-fourths (74%) of the institutions utilize county directors or chairs with administrative responsibilities. The amount of time devoted to administrative functions varies greatly, from 3% to 100%, but the median amount is one-quarter of their time (25%).

(Figure 8 and 9)

5. Field Program

Staffing

The single county staffing pattern remains the most prevalent. Forty-two percent of institutions report that their predominant staffing pattern (75% or more of their staff in that pattern) is the placement of professional field staff in a single county. Seventeen percent indicate a predominant pattern where field staff primarily serve the county in which they are housed but also have some multi-county responsibilities. Eleven percent report utilizing multicounty clusters (where staff are not officed in a county) as their predominant pattern.

Noteworthy is the fact that 30% do not have a predominant pattern. In other words, no single pattern describes at least 75% of their field staff. It is not unusual for an institution to utilize two or even three different staffing patterns depending upon the needs of different parts of the state.

With a reduction in staff numbers in some states and/or increased specialization among staff, multi-county assignments are increasingly being utilized. However so that local ownership and support for the program will not be jeopardized, directors and administrators have been careful to maintain a county program identity. They report a desire to continue the movement toward more staff with multi-county assignments, but plan to allow that trend to evolve locally rather than impose it from the state level.

At the local level, there is a strong relationship between a sense of program ownership and monetary support. One state director flatly stated that the last thing they would give up would be a county presence. Most states have figured out ways of maintaining a county staff presence even with specialization and cross-county work. Since the county is the political unit from which most local funds originate, it is necessary to be programmatically responsive at that same level. In cases where staff expertise is shared with other counties, it must be demonstrated that counties will benefit at least as much as they contribute to the cooperative venture.

States that move to cluster staffing without a county assignment ought to be prepared to support the full cost of those multi-county staff with state and federal monies. It is unlikely that counties will be receptive to contributing to staff costs if those persons are not officed in their counties.

County Offices

With recent discussion of collocating USDA offices at the local level, it is useful to see just where county Extension offices are located. Forty-four percent report a majority of their offices collocated with county government, 38% indicate a majority have their own separate offices, 10% say a majority are collocated with USDA agencies, and 8% report a majority are located with other groups such as community colleges. One has to conclude that most county Extension offices are either located jointly with county government or have their own offices. A very small proportion is collocated with other USDA agencies.

(Figure 10 and 11)

6. Specialist Positions

Faculty tenure is often cited as a barrier to program flexibility, but how prevalent is tenure among Extension specialists? What is striking is how differently institutions handle the tenure issue. At the two extremes, 14 institutions have all of their specialists in tenure-track positions, while 16 do not offer tenure to specialists at all. There is a pronounced difference among 1862 and 1890 institutions. All of the 14 Mere specialists are on tenure tracks are 1862 institutions. Twelve of the 16 without tenure are either 1890s or territories.

The predominant pattern is to offer tenure to some specialists (Ph.D.s in academic departments), but not to all. The concern over the tenure issue is tied to the decrease in flexibility when Extension's resources are tied up in tenured positions. To avoid such long term commitments, some institutions have gone to shorter term performance contracts rather than offering tenure. Therefore when change is called for, resources can be reallocated to another area.

Other concerns expressed about the faculty role of specialists are that Extension time and resources get diverted to teaching and research activities or that it is difficult to carry out an Extension program along with a teaching schedule or research commitments. So how extensive are joint appointments? The pattern is very mixed. Thirty-five institutions have a majority of their specialists with joint appointments. However an equal number (35 institutions) also have a majority of their specialists with full-time Extension appointments. There is a difference by type of institutions. The 1862s tend to have more joint appointments, while 1890s have more full-time Extension appointments.

In examining the office location of specialists, it was found that the most frequent arrangement is to place specialists in academic departments with research and teaching faculty. Forty-eight institutions have the majority of specialists in academic departments, 17 have a majority in Extension units, and 5 have a majority off campus.

(Figures 12, 13, 14)

7. Clientele Involvement

Extension has a long tradition of involving clientele in providing advice and council on the nature of the program both at the state and local levels. Extension's "Strategic Framework" (1995) cites the involvement of volunteers as one of the organization's proud successes. When asked if they have "a statewide advisory group that provides input into determining the nature of the **overall** Extension program," two-thirds (67%) said they do. That percentage is higher for 1862s than for 1890s, however as one would expect, in some states the same advisory council was reported by both institutions.

The composition of these statewide groups and procedures for providing input vary considerable, but to be truly useful to the program they must involve more than just representatives of traditional supporters. They must take on their own identity, and to a great extent, be independent and self directed. From time-to-time, they ought to make directors and administrators uncomfortable. At a minimum, such groups should make recommendations concerning program priorities. However, these clientele groups can also serve an important advocacy role on behalf of Extension budget support. These lay citizens can be much more influential than the paid staff in dealing with elected officials and university administrators.

Most states have a number of farm organizations and agricultural commodity groups that represent agricultural interests. Since many represent only a single commodity or program area, they often are familiar with only a narrow spectrum of the total program. These groups have been strong supporters in the budget process and have worked the halls of congress and the state houses, and they have expressed their wishes to university administration. They also have looked to the dean of the college of agriculture as their voice, their advocate for agriculture. In turn, they have expected the college and Extension to satisfy their needs when it comes to decisions on specialist positions, program priorities, etc. As programs emphasize non-agricultural issues and as some states position Extension in an outreach unit, some of these traditional groups have felt abandoned. They feel they are losing their influence.

In contrast, with Extension positioned in agriculture, nonagricultural individuals and groups feel uncomfortable associating with an organization that has its identity in agriculture. Extension directors and administrators in institutions located in outreach units feel that they have been successful in attracting a broader base of support. Broadening the base of support is seen as necessary and desirable. The challenge is to bring in new supporters without alienating the current ones.

Now shifting to the local level, 41 institutions report that all of their counties have overall advisory groups, 15 institutions indicate that more than half of their counties have councils, and 14 said that less than half of their counties have advisory councils. In states that have counties without advisory councils, directors and administrators expressed a need to establish or reactivate such groups. Active local Extension advisory groups are seen as critical to the success of the program.

(Figures 15 and 16)

8. Budget Process

The state budget process varies from state-to-state and institution-to-institution. State monies appropriated for the Extension program tend to be designated by the state and either directly appropriated to Extension (16) or handled as part of the university budget (24). In another 22 institutions, the amount of state money Extension receives is determined by the university administration. It must be kept in mind that some 1890 institutions do not receive state money.

Extension directors and administrators see themselves as the primary players in representing the needs of Extension in the state budget process. University administration is seen as next most important, followed by Extension staff. However, 1890 administrators view the role of university administration as less important and the role of Extension staff as more important than do 1862 directors. Advisory councils are considered least important in representing Extension's needs in the budget process. Although there could be different interpretations as to what constitutes "representing Extension's needs in the state budget process," it is clear that directors and administrators place most of the responsibility on administrators and staff and envision only a minor role for advisory councils.

The perception is that state support for Extension programs has not been appreciable influenced by how the institution is organized. There may be greater potential for future increases in a more broadly based university-wide outreach unit, but to date, there is no real evidence of that occurring. In fact, in the short run, the opposite could occur. Some traditional supporters may abandon their efforts before the base can be broadened. Again, the key is to bring more supporters in without disrupting the current ones.

There are some who feel that Extension is in danger of spreading itself and its resources too thin when it commits to a university-wide Extension unit. It is one thing to want to attract additional expertise in order to be able to broaden the program, it is quite another to live up to those enhanced expectations with the reality of level or declining resources.

At the local level, budgets are generally prepared by Extension staff with limited or no input from advisory councils. Seventy percent of directors and administrators indicate that staff alone prepare county budgets and in only 30% of the cases did advisory councils play a role.

The limited role of Extension leaders in the budget process appears to be consistent with what directors and administrators describe as the current level of influence of the local partner. But if an increase in influence of local leaders is what directors and administrators truly desire in the ideal balance between the partners, then state and county advisory councils need to play a greater role in interpreting the needs of the program and in preparing the actual budget.

(Figures 17, 18 and 19)

9. Capacity to Support Initiatives

Directors and administrators rated the capacity of their institution to support programming on the six national initiatives. The responses fell into three groups. The greatest perceived capacity is for Children, Youth, and Families at Risk and Water Quality. Moderate capacity is registered for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Quality and Safety. The lowest level of capacity is for Communities in Economic Transition and Decisions for Health. It is reassuring that Extension is

perceived to have the greatest capacity in areas that are viewed as important issues nationally -- youth and families and natural resources.

(Figure 20)

10. Most Important Trends Affecting Structure and Function of Extension

Directors and administrators were asked to identify the most important trends affecting future changes in Extension's structure and function. As an open-ended question, the inquiry generated a wide variety of responses. However, a number of common themes emerged. The following is a summary of the responses.

- Funding - state, federal, local, extramural funds, user fees, revenue from natural resources, increased competition, block grants, anti-tax sentiment, increasing labor costs
- Clientele Needs - changing demographics, economy, continuing to be locally responsive, need to be flexible, more mandated programs, more state and county influence
- Organizational Influences - becoming part of university outreach, multi-county programming, restructuring university, mandated downsizing, combining CES with Agricultural Experiment Station, increased use of consultants, temporary workers and Extension associates, rigidity of tenure system, decreasing percentage of faculty FTEs devoted to Extension
- Delivery Methods - increased use of electronic delivery methods such as computers, satellite, compressed video, and other telecommunication methods, fees for service
- Support for CES and Higher Education - lack of public support for higher education, level of knowledge and support within the land-grant university, declining support of traditional groups, shift of political power from rural to urban, lack of credibility, emphasis on primary and secondary education at the expense of higher education, a need to broaden the base of support
- Mission - a shift from agriculture and rural to urban and broader mission, expanding role of Extension, need for higher impact and more highly visible programs
- Partnerships/Competition - more local involvement in programming and budgeting, uncertainty about role of CSREES, role of other educational institutions and community colleges, need to collaborate with other agencies

Figure 1. Position of CES within the University

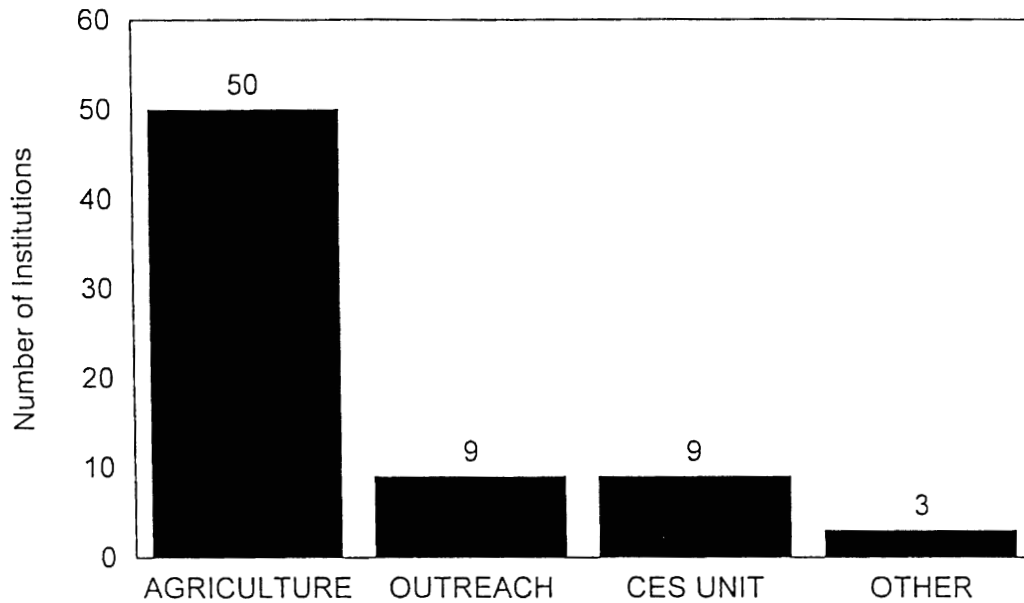


Figure 2. Changes in the Position of CES in the Last Five Years

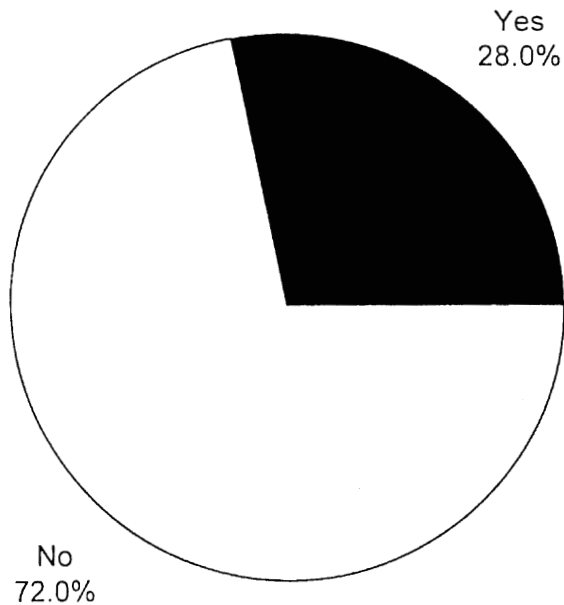


Figure 3. Outreach as a University-Wide Expectation

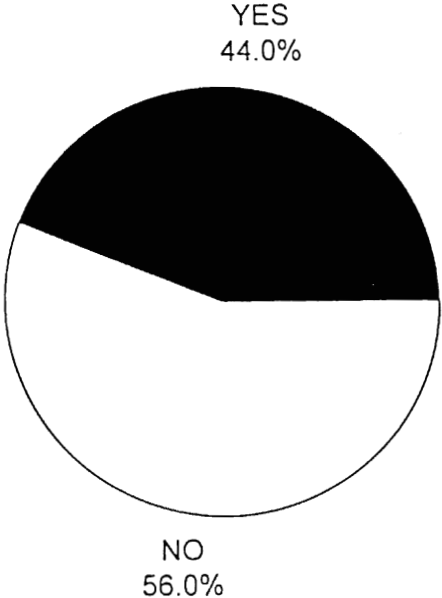


Figure 4. Method of Securing Needed Expertise

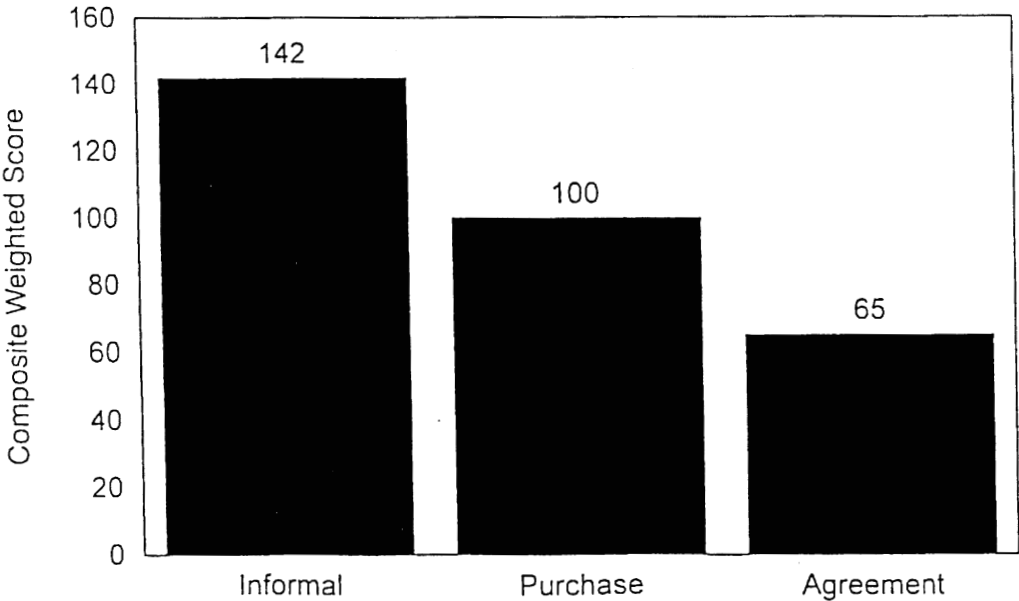


Figure 5. Skills Sought when Hiring Staff

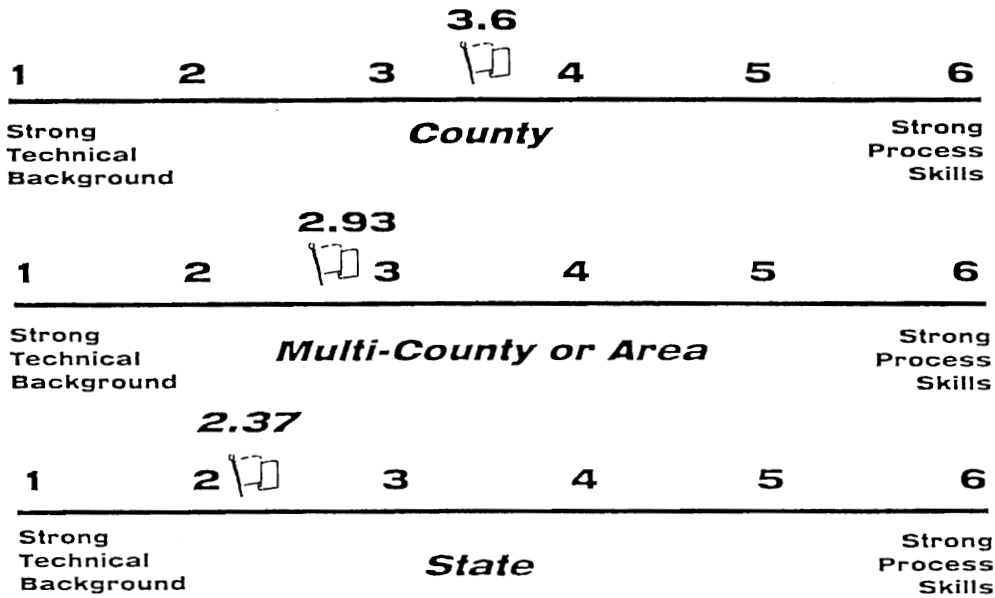


Figure 6. Influence of Partners on Programs

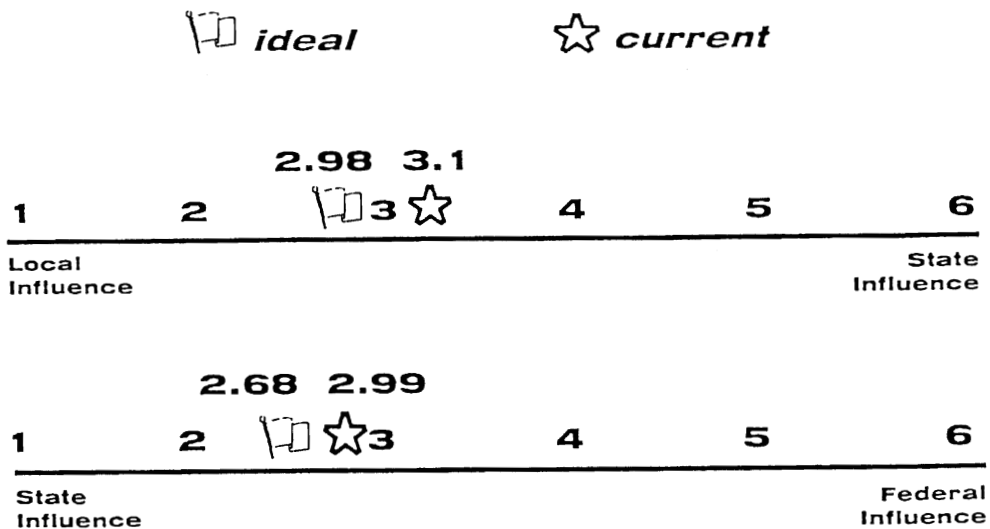


Figure 7. Influence of Partners on Policy

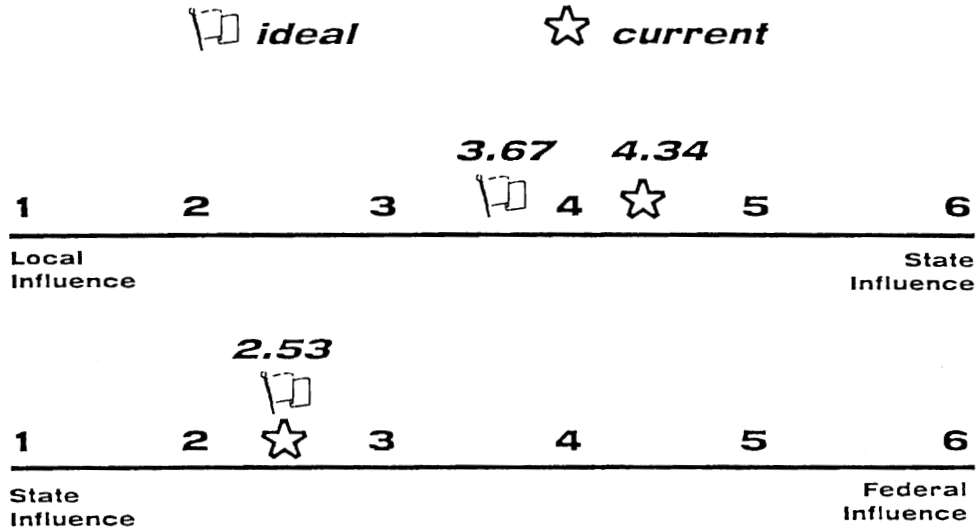
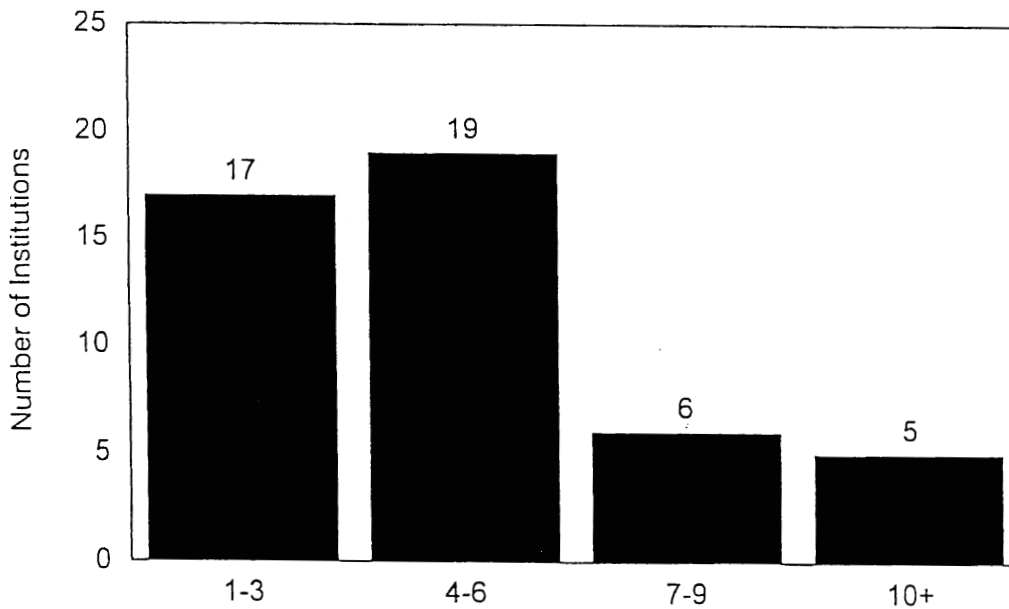


Figure 8. Number of Middle-Level Managers*



*District or Area Directors

Figure 9. Institutions which Utilize County Directors

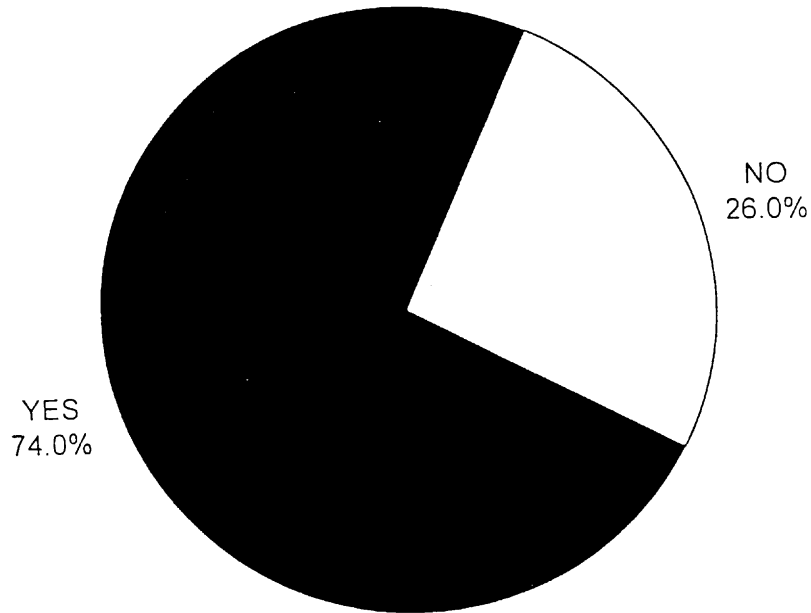


Figure 10. Predominant Staffing Pattern (>75%)

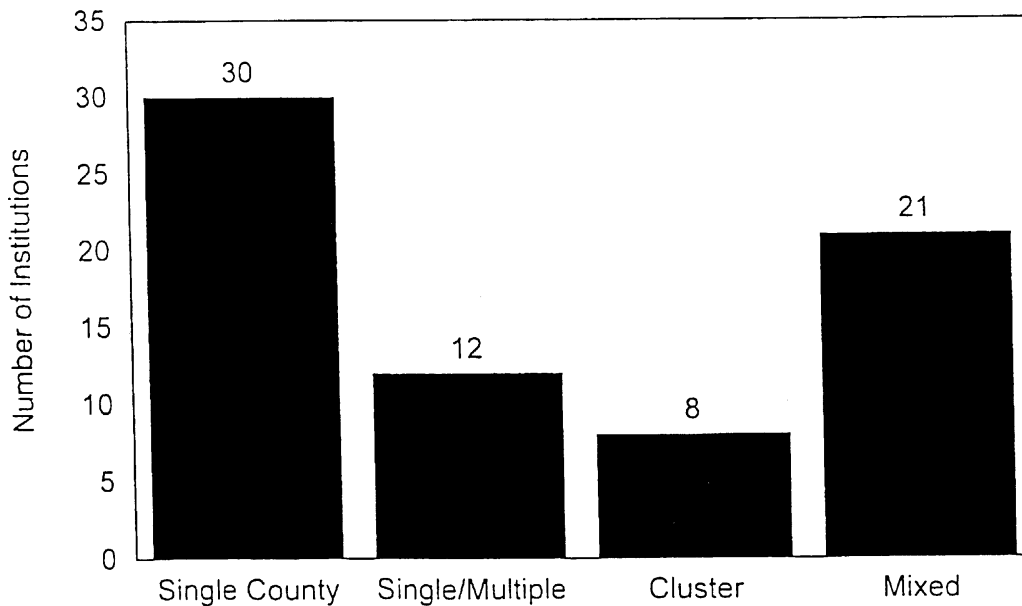
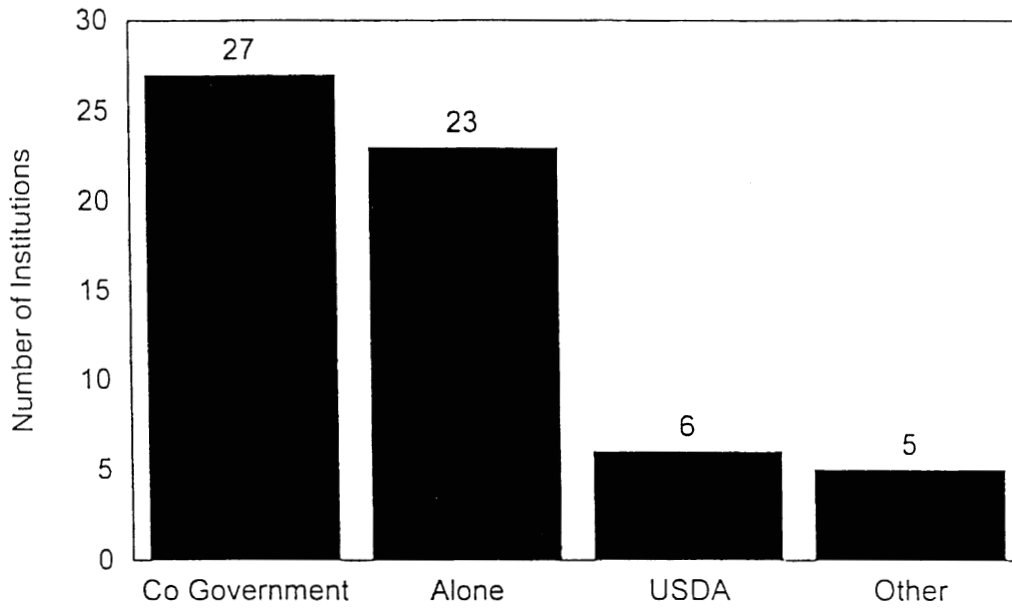


Figure 11. Location of County Offices*



*majority of offices in these locations

Figure 12. Specialists with Tenure-Track Appointments

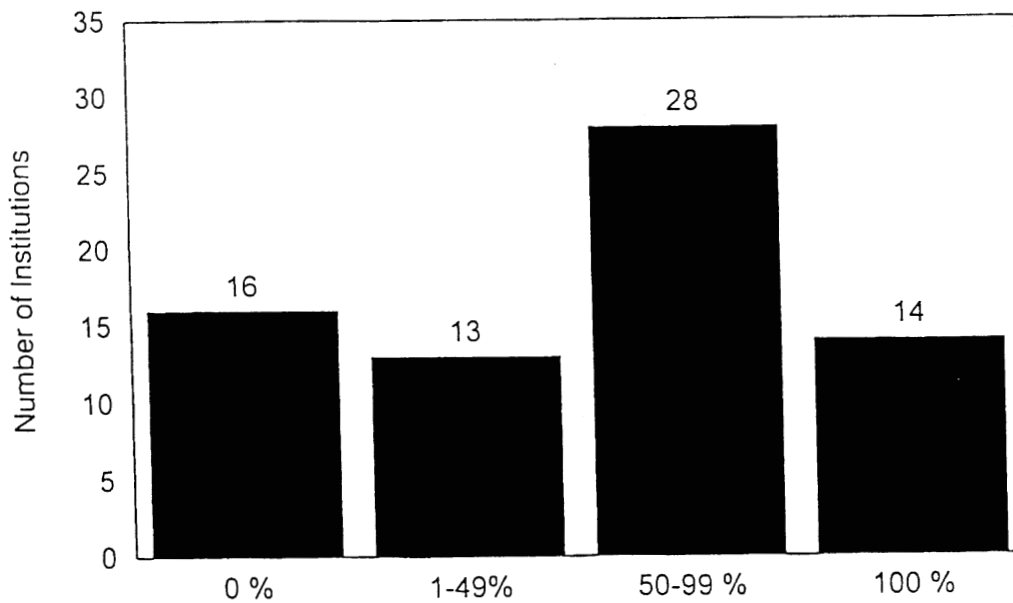
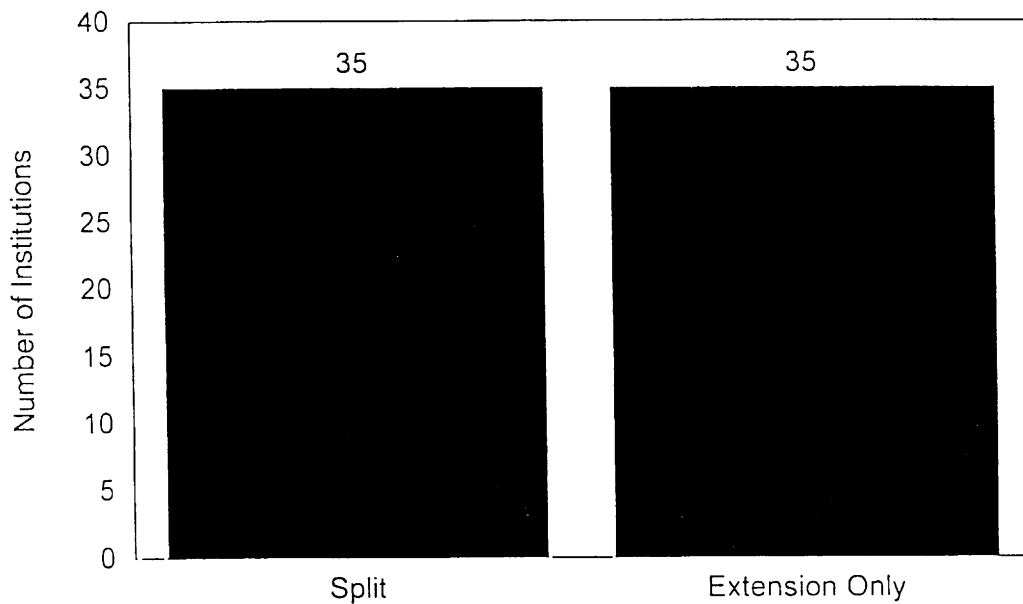
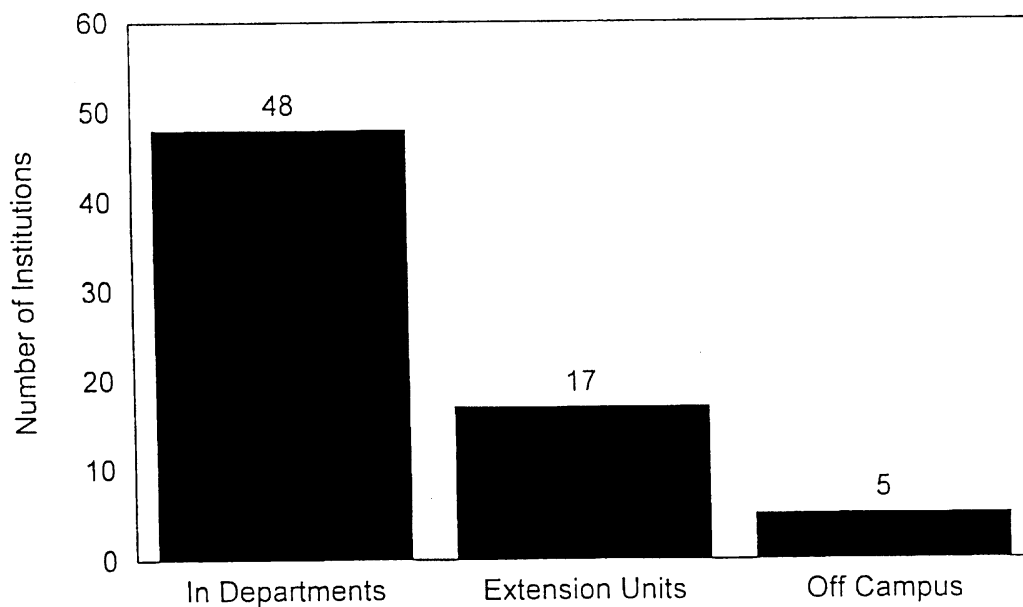


Figure 13. Appointment of Specialists*



*majority of specialists with this type of appointment

Figure 14. Office Location of Specialists*



*majority of specialists in these locations

Figure 15. Institutions with Statewide Advisory Group

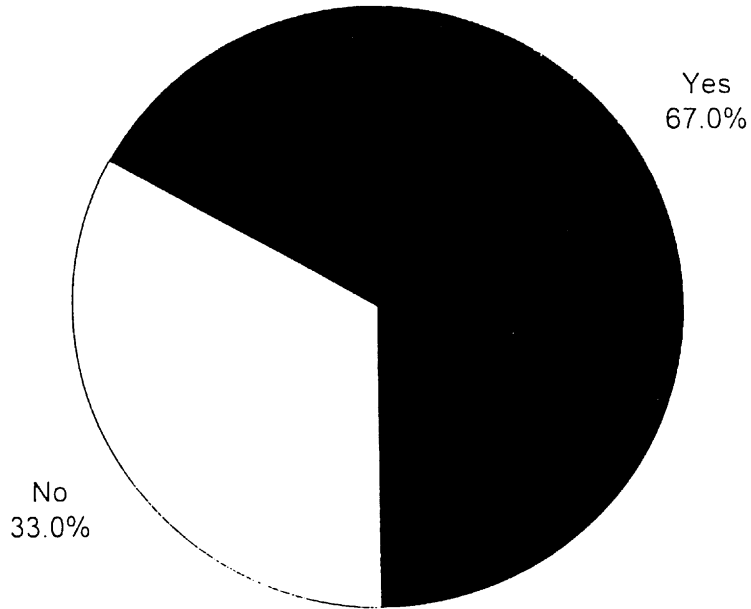


Figure 16. Counties with an Overall Advisory Group

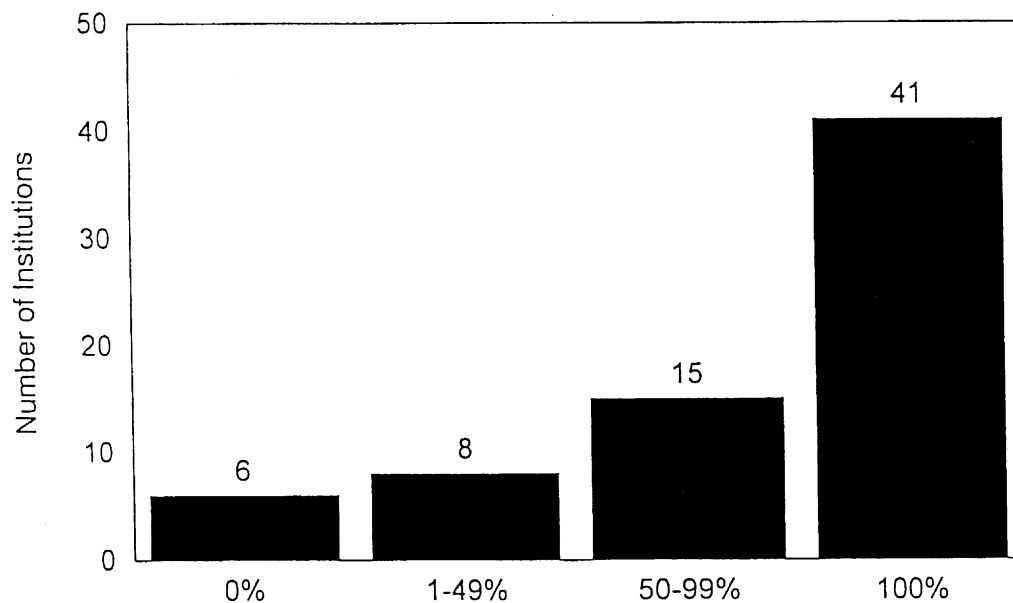


Figure 17. How is the State Budget Handled?

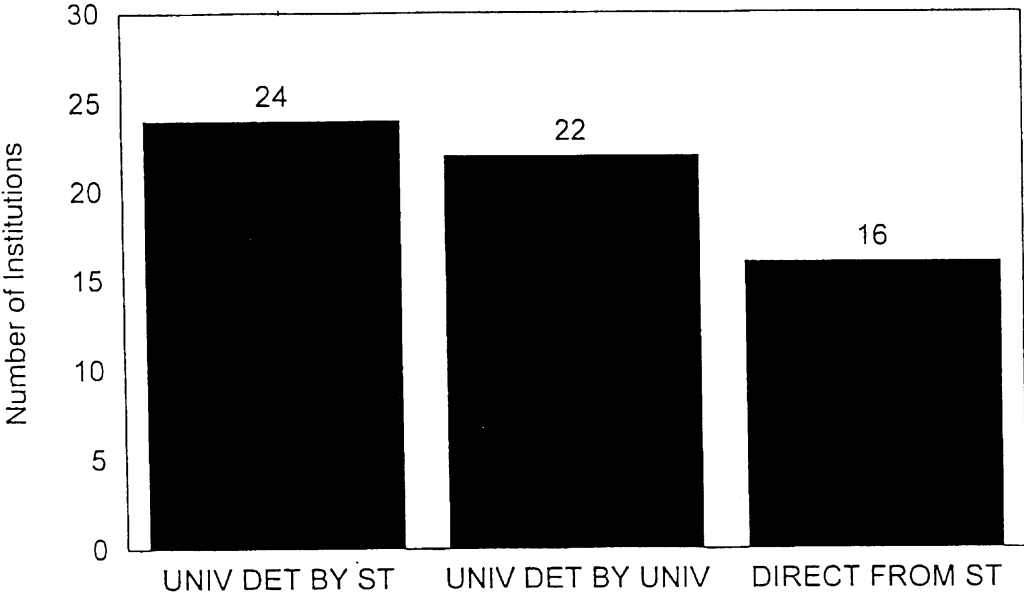


Figure 18. Relative Role in the State Budget Process

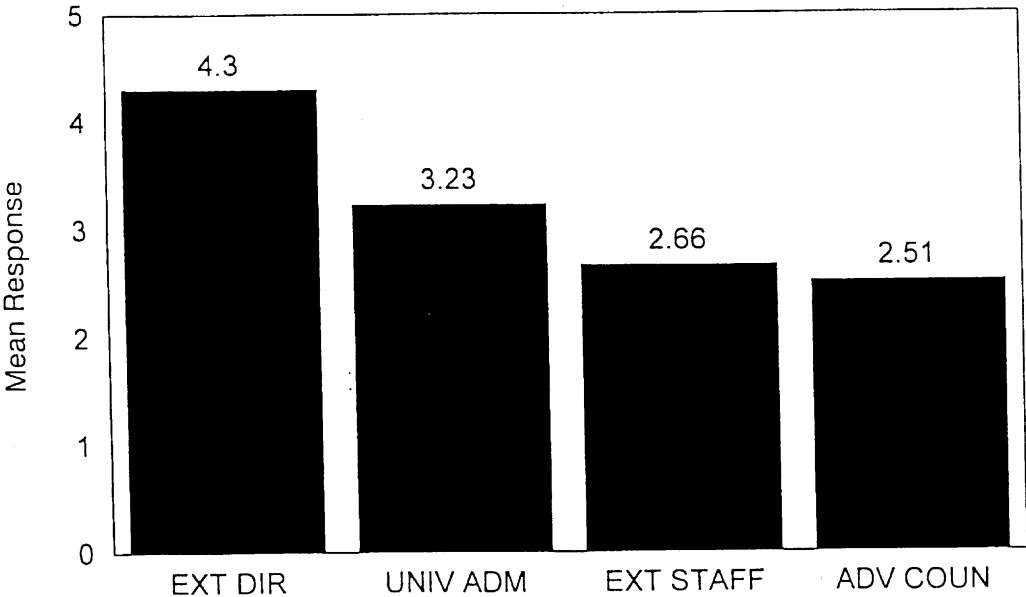


Figure 19. Who Prepares the County Budget?

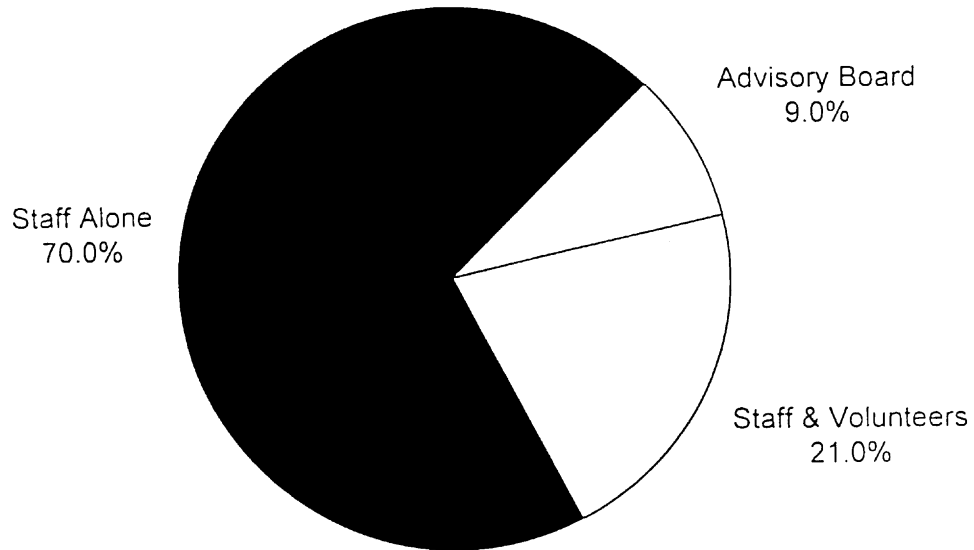


Figure 20. Capacity to Support Initiatives

