

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION NETWORKS TO ADVANCE THE APPLICATION OF SCIENCE WITH URBAN COMMUNITIES

The following is a high-level summary of the collective aspirations, insights, and priorities expressed during our 1.5-day co-convening. The discussions that took place around the themes of urban agriculture and food systems, health and wellness, and the built environment generated many, many good ideas, including several inter-theme connections. Our next step is to present four types of roles to lead us forward and offer this group the opportunity to choose their level of involvement. Once everyone has selected their ideal level of involvement, we will set up cascading work plans for each area.

Please follow [this link](https://forms.office.com/r/dCp7dq0TMU) (<https://forms.office.com/r/dCp7dq0TMU>) to identify how you want to continue with this group (lead or co-lead an area; be a core team member, be an affiliate, or be an informational resource – all explained in the form). Feel free to share this overview with colleagues you think might be interested in connecting with this work.

Cross-Sectoral Connections

Needs and priorities that were identified across the 3 groups included opportunities and needs related to economic and workforce development; impacts of climate change; equal access to resources (health, jobs, green space, etc.); the need to identify and curate existing resources (e.g. strategic plans and best practices for urban communities and research based priorities including return on investments and benefits to people, health, economy, environment); development of metrics and aggregation of data across cities; using the [Community Capitals](#) framework to identify community assets and assess outcomes; train and educate local elected officials and staff about issues, best practices, and research for policy setting; and the impact of land use and tenure policies and practices.

Additional cross-sectoral issues included recognizing that every community has a complex and dynamic history and programs and policies need to be place-based and recognize and support the local context; and those programs, policies, and solutions need to identify and measure co-benefits e.g., co-benefits of green spaces on health, Positive Youth Development (learning), and nutrition (e.g. food production); how buildings (both new and abandoned / repurposed buildings) can contribute to urban agriculture; how urban agriculture can help with heat capture, stormwater capture, and therapeutic / social benefits; and in the coordination of food gardens in food deserts which can also act as habitat corridors to facilitate species movement.

Health & Wellness

In considering the health and wellness system, this group identified aspirations for the system to create and strengthen systems, networks, and policies that improve the health, wellness, and economic opportunities of individuals and families living in urban spaces and to innovate to bring solutions that lower costs and make basic needs (housing, food, transportation, day care, etc.) more available and more affordable to scale, which also connect to the built environment and agriculture and food system sectors.

The team identified 8 research priorities and 6 educational/Extension programs. Examples include creating a one-stop database of urban Extension programs and developing and socializing core measures and recommended success measures. They enumerated 31 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed across moon shots

(10), best bets (10) low-hanging fruit (8) and low priority (3). Projects being considered for near-term action included: creating a database of urban Extension offices and land-grant universities; expanding the Master Wellness Volunteer Program; and integrating climate into existing Extension programs (similar to Univ of Arizona and Washington State University).

Built Environment

The built environment team aspired to have the team be a welcoming space—backed by long-term commitments—for all stakeholders to learn and discuss community concerns and opportunities along with the core aspiration to balance land access with gentrification anxiety.

The team identified 30 research priorities and 35 educational/Extension programs. Examples include developing a taxonomy of the resources/assets to create a thriving community; developing a curated list of strategic/neighborhood plans and green infrastructure successes; researching what are effective, scalable, and implementable solutions to food waste in groceries and restaurants; exploring the effectiveness of land trusts to address housing affordability; examining the intersection between land use code / density / environmental outcomes; researching the efficacy of housing policies to prevent displacement and gentrification; investigating urban youth gardening and small business development; studying the impact of asset-based development strategies on urban wealth management; developing mental health first aid training for stakeholder organizations; and training city employees in equity issues. They enumerated 90 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed across moon shots (30), best bets (39), and low-hanging fruit (21).

This group saw a near-term value in building a database of best practices with partners (APLU, NLC, NUREC, ITGA, ICMA), potentially by a research fellowship to curate existing examples and shared metrics and the potential for a team to participate in the Extension Foundation's Impact Collaborative to build the database taxonomy.

Urban Agriculture & Food Systems

This group's aspirations included recognizing food systems are part of a community and are inherently place based; therefore, solutions and production need to focus on local needs and access to land (policy needs) and the need to downscale from large/rural agriculture to small/urban production systems. They also aspire to reimagine the built environment by repurposing buildings for Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA). They recognized that land access and the ability to measure things like increased food access or increased educational attainment are issues to overcome.

The team identified 21 research priorities and 9 educational/Extension programs. Examples include the need to make resources and opportunities culturally appropriate and available across the numerous spoken languages present in urban communities; identifying common metrics across differing ecosystems; what animal systems are possible; exploring way to repurpose buildings for agricultural production; delving into the potentials benefits and harm of human / wildlife interactions; better understanding the basics of urban ecology and ecosystems and the intersection of production methods and climate change; improving the ways in which land is assessed relative to human health risks; and conducting a literature review and analysis of the carbon and carbon-water-energy cycle. They enumerated 28 short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes distributed across moon shots (9), best bets (8), low-hanging fruit (9), and low priority (2).