

## The WSU Extension Climate Assessment Survey:

### Responses and Reactions

WSU Extension staff and faculty, from campus and across our seventy-two statewide locations, had an opportunity to participate in a Climate Assessment survey during our most recent All Extension Conference. The Climate Assessment is part of WSU's participation in the Change Agent States for Engagement (CASE) project, a continuation of the Change Agent States for Diversity (CASD) project, both sponsored by CSREES.<sup>1</sup> All the original 7 CASD and the 7 CASE states have undertaken this climate assessment using the same survey instrument and the same outside consulting firm for data analysis. The Climate Assessment is a proactive approach designed to enable us to review the climate in our organization and help us lay the groundwork for future initiatives. Below is a brief summary of the findings. The entire report can be viewed at <http://ext.wsu.edu/diversity/climate/case.pdf>

When the Climate Assessment was launched, all Extension employees, regardless of their location, received surveys. Of a possible 570 Extension employees, 311 (55%) completed surveys. Respondents described themselves as follows:

- 98 field faculty; 70 support staff; 52 paraprofessionals/technicians; 40 administrators; and 33 campus based faculty/specialists
- 273 whites/Caucasians, 33 people of color
- 17 persons with a disability
- 11 individuals who identified as a sexual minority
- 206 women, 99 men

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<sup>1</sup> The USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES)

The Climate Assessment spotlights both positive and challenging aspects of the organizational and working environments within WSU Extension and will serve as a baseline to evaluate the impacts of future diversity initiatives. On the positive side:

- 75% of respondents stated they were comfortable or very comfortable with the climate for diversity in the *organization*.
- 80% stated they were comfortable or very comfortable with the climate for diversity in their *work unit*.
- Over 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the organization has visible leadership from the administration who foster diversity in the workplace.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed that diversity among staff and clients creates increased benefits for the organization.
- Over 63% agree or strongly agree that they have made changes in their programming as a result the increased diversity of our state's population.

The Climate Assessment was structured into three categories: Personal Experience, Observed Behavior and the Organizational Actions. The challenges in these three categories include:

Personal Experience:

- Of the 311 respondents, 76 individuals (26%) had personally experienced offensive, hostile or intimidating conduct that interfered with their ability to work, learn or participate in the organization.
- The most common types of offensive conduct that had been experienced were: derogatory remarks (60%), being excluded from some activities (32%), and being deliberately ignored (32%).

- Of the 76 respondents who had experienced offensive conduct, 37 (49%) indicated that it had been based most often on their gender, 17 (22%) responded that it had been based on their age, 16 (21%) responded that it had been based on their race/ ethnicity.
- Fifty-one (67%) of the 76 respondents who had experienced offensive conduct indicated it had occurred while working in a local office.
- Of the 76 respondent who had experienced offensive conduct, 38% identified administrators as the source, and 34% identified supervisors as the source.
- From those 76 individuals, 35 (46%) said they had considered leaving their job as a result of the offensive behavior.

#### Observed Behavior:

- One hundred (32%) respondents reported having observed conduct that created an offensive, hostile or intimidating working or learning environment.
- The offensive, hostile, or intimidating behavior observed had related mainly to race/ ethnicity (45%), gender (40%), and ethnicity (23%)<sup>\*</sup>.
- Observed offensive, hostile or intimidating behavior had included derogatory remarks (78%), exclusion from activities (33%), and being deliberately ignored (32%)<sup>\*</sup>.
- Observed offensive, hostile or intimidating conduct had occurred most often in a local office (65%); field faculty/ agents (34%) and support staff (25%) were most frequently reported as sources of the observed offensive behavior.

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<sup>\*</sup> Categories were non-exclusive, thus totaling greater than 100%.

### Organizational Actions:

- Over one-third of staff indicated they have not made any changes in their programming in response to demographic changes in the state.
- Respondents' self-reported demographics indicate a low percentage of people of color in the WSUE organization.

The WSU Extension Diversity Catalyst Team is using the Climate Assessment data to develop a multi-layered approach to enhancing the overarching climate for diversity within our organization.

### Examples include:

- To assist faculty and staff to more fully respond and adjust programming to address demographic changes, the Accountability Workgroup is designing a model to include county demographic profiles that tie to team plans of actions.
- The Communications Workgroup develops messages and products to communicate successful diversity extension programs within and outside of Extension.
- The Latino Outreach Workgroup is focusing on the capacity of WSUE to develop and carry out programming oriented towards serving the state's increasingly diverse communities, including its rapidly growing Hispanic/ Latino(a) communities.
- To increase the diversity of Extension's workforce, the Personnel Workgroup is revising policies and procedures that will strengthen the recruitment, hiring and retention of diverse personnel.

- The Training Workgroup offers ongoing trainings for the WSUE leadership and county based faculty and staff based on five areas of cultural competency and organizational change.
- To increase programming to underserved youth audiences the Youth Engagement Workgroup works with counties to engage youth in designing and implementing relevant youth programming.
- The WSUE Catalyst and Administrative Teams are working to develop strategies to address negative workplace climate issues.