

6-19-2024

## Collaborations Across our Land Grant System: 1862 Extension Educators' Experiences Working with 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities

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### Recommended Citation

Hartmann, K. (2024). Collaborations Across our Land Grant System: 1862 Extension Educators' Experiences Working with 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities. *The Journal of Extension*, 62(1), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.62.01.13>

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### Cover Page Footnote

Katherine Hartmann is the corresponding author. She can be contacted at [kh4@iastate.edu](mailto:kh4@iastate.edu). Katherine does not have any conflicts of interest.

# Collaborations Across our Land Grant System: 1862 Extension Educators' Experiences Working with 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract.** The goal of equitable access to education was at the forefront of the Morrill Acts' mission from the beginning, yet Extension programs in Indigenous communities are underfunded and unable to provide equitable support. Educators from 1862 Land Grant Institutions can collaborate with educators from 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities to better serve them in culturally revitalizing and mutually beneficial ways. In order to support and encourage these collaborations, I investigated the Western Region of Extension to learn about the characteristics that make them successful, the barriers that they face, and recommendations for decolonizing the Land Grant System.

## INTRODUCTION

A land-grant institution (LGI) has been designated as such by its state legislature to receive benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994. In the first of these acts, the federal government gave land to each state to open a public institution of higher education. The mission of these institutions was to teach members of the working classes, allowing them to obtain a liberal, practical education. From the outset, such issues as democratization and access to education were presumably at the forefront of the Morrill Acts' mission.

The Morrill Act of 1862 gave land to LGIs, but that land was the product of Indigenous land dispossession (Stein, 2020), separating Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands and alienating them from traditional foodways (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Harris, 2004). The Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act, also known as the third Morrill Act, was signed in 1994, granting tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) land-grant status and resources to support research and education (National Institute of Food and Agriculture [NIFA], 2018). Still, these programs are underfunded and unable to provide equitable access to Extension services. Currently, Indigenous communities are not being equitably served by Extension, with Extension offices in less than 10% of Indigenous communities (Brewer et al., 2016; National Congress of American Indians, 2010). One way to approach

these inequities is for Extension educators at 1862 LGIs to collaborate with staff at 1994 TCUs to share expertise, educate students, and form strong bonds across the land-grant system.

These findings emerged from a larger project, the goal of which was to better understand whether and how 1862 Extension educators are collaborating with Indigenous communities. Educators who currently collaborate with 1994 TCUs or have in the past discussed these collaborations, the promising practices that they have learned, and the common barriers that they face. This paper aims to share those perspectives.

## EXTENSION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TODAY

Extension work in Indian Country is done through a few different arrangements: the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP); Tribal College Extension Programs, in collaboration with 1862 or 1890 LGIs; or services administered by the tribe itself. FRTEP is a "non-formal, knowledge-based educational program" in which specific outreach is done by Extension agents from 1862, 1890, and 1994 LGIs in Indigenous communities. Currently, the program is serving 122 Indigenous Nations in 19 states and funding 36 Extension offices (Benefits.gov, n.d.). Tribal College Extension

sion Programs allow 1994 TCUs to establish Extension offices on their campuses. Some of these programs are competitive, grant-funded programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), displaying a different funding model compared to the guaranteed funding of traditional Extension programs (NIFA, 2018).

Brewer et al. (2016, p. 18) have stated that Extension programs succeed because of “sustained programming efforts within communities and because issues important to the local communities are addressed. The uncertainty of funds and competition between FRTEP agents limits their ability to perform the core tasks that have made Cooperative Extension so successful.” It is only recently that statistics regarding Indigenous farms have been collected, but that data are now becoming available. To provide equitable access based on the number of Extension personnel currently working in traditional programs, FRTEP should be funded at approximately \$10 million to \$12 million per year (Brewer et al., 2016). As a reference, the USDA FY 2022 Budget Summary shows that the 2020 Actual, 2021 Enacted, and 2022 Budget for “Extension Services at 1994 Institutions” was \$8 million, \$9 million, and \$9 million, respectively (USDA, 2022).

Some researchers have brought attention to the educational inequities that Indigenous communities face, including access to Extension services (Hiller, 2005), the kinds of programs available (Emm & Breazeale, 2008; Hassel, 2004), or both (Martenson et al., 2011), and they have provided possible explanations and solutions for issues. Further, the types of programs that are successful in Indigenous communities have been examined (Hartmann, 2021), as have the characteristics of those programs (Hartmann & Martin, 2021).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the context and goals of this research, I applied a critical, decolonizing framework. Although critical theory emerged from a variety of philosophical and intellectual traditions, all share the idea that people exist within asymmetric systems of power and privilege and prioritize the goal of liberation and emancipation of oppressed populations (Darder et al., 2017). The power of critique in this framework is to reveal and analyze social inequalities and oppressive systems to transform them through action. The outcomes of this research are intended to benefit and promote the voices and self-determination of research participants by being participatory and committed to Indigenous community interests (Denzin et al., 2008).

Decolonizing research deconstructs Western research traditions by pushing researchers to evaluate ways of knowing, their legitimacy, and how our complex identities influence knowledge creation (Battiste, 2008). Although my methods of research were a survey and interviews, both of which are prevalent in colonized, Western research, the

methodology strived to be decolonizing, with an emphasis on counternarratives, the co-construction of knowledge with participants through their lived experiences (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), and the liberatory effects for Indigenous peoples. To strive for decoloniality, researchers need to work toward undoing existing practices and paradigms, while creating and rebuilding with these guiding principles.

## METHODOLOGY

I investigated the Western Region of Extension through a transformative convergent mixed methods study that included a survey and qualitative interviews. The Western Region of Extension encompasses 13 states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming) as well as American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, and the Northern Mariana Islands. I interviewed professionals from 1862 LGIs who have collaborated with Indigenous communities to better understand their lived experiences.

For the interviews, sampling was a mixture of convenience and purposive (Bazeley, 2020). I prioritized interviewing a diverse group of participants who held a variety of professional positions, were Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and were spread over the large geographic region. The survey was distributed to the region, usually with assistance from the state directors, to reach as many Extension educators as possible. The survey had 307 responses, the distribution of which can be seen in Table 1, including the responses to Question 4. All participants' universities, reservations, specific job titles, and other identifying information have been removed from their quotes to protect their identities. Each participant was also given or chose a pseudonym.

Interviews were completed virtually due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Although I did create a loosely structured interview protocol based on the research objectives, in keeping with the idea that storytelling is important in decolonized knowledge creation (Brayboy, 2005; Delgado, 1988; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the direction of the interview was allowed to evolve as the participants' experiences directed them (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). I conducted 20 interviews.

To analyze the interviews and survey responses, I used thematic analysis (Bazeley, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also kept participants' stories “intact by theorizing from the case” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53), allowing me to better understand how the participants made and applied meaning to their work. I gave the participants opportunities to provide feedback on whatever components of the process they wanted to, including reviewing transcripts, providing feedback on findings, and collaborating on conclusions from the data.

# Encouraging Collaborations

**Table 1.** Survey Responses by State

State/U.S. territory	# of Responses	Response rate	Response to Question 4		
			Current	Past	Never
Alaska	0	NA			
American Samoa	0	NA			
Arizona	13	2.56%	8	2	3
California	78	3.13%	22	18	38
Colorado	19	3.41%	4	7	8
Guam	1	1.29%	1	0	0
Hawaii	16	14.81%	13	2	1
Idaho	50	35.71%	19	8	23
Micronesia	1	3.03%	1	0	0
Montana	9	2.21%	7	1	1
Nevada	32	12.75%	9	9	14
New Mexico	10	30.30%	8	2	0
Northern Mariana Islands	0	NA			
Oregon	29	4.04%	18	5	6
Utah	42	28.00%	18	3	21
Washington	0	NA			
Wyoming	7	6.42%	3	0	4
Western Region	307	5.50%	131	57	119

*Note.* Question 4 read, “Do you currently or have you ever served Indigenous peoples or communities?” Respondents chose one of three answers: “I CURRENTLY serve Indigenous peoples or communities,” “I have in the PAST served Indigenous peoples or communities,” or “I have NEVER served Indigenous peoples or communities.”

## FINDINGS

Although the geographical area involved in this project was large, the number of educators who reported collaborations with TCUs was small. Of the 20 interview participants, only four mentioned collaborations with TCUs. In the survey, of the 188 respondents who answered the question about current or past collaborations, only nine had current collaborations, while four had past collaborations—about 7% of the survey respondents. Although this low number demonstrates the need for more collaborations in itself, these educators were also able to speak to the characteristics of successful collaborations, the barriers that they face in their work, and recommendations for supporting these collaborations.

### CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAKE COLLABORATIONS SUCCESSFUL

A few characteristics emerged that make collaborations between 1862 and 1994 Extension educators successful. First,

when collaborators and their resulting programs prioritize the goals of the TCUs and the Indigenous community, they tend to be more successful. Also, successful collaborations focus on how their overlapping contexts and interests, such as the kinds of programs they were interested in or the needs of their faculty and students, can be used to build strength together.

Three of the participants—Hannah, Danielle, and Frank—described proposed or current grant-funded programs that they were partnering on with a TCU. These educators centered the goals of the TCU and the community in various ways, displaying an important component of successful programs (Hartmann & Martin, 2021). Hannah and Danielle were from the same state and described a project to bring buffalo to the reservation. They had projects that included herd management, meat processing, and developing curricula. The idea for the projects originated with an advisory group on the reservation, and a faculty member from the TCU reached out to the 1862 educators to assist

them. Danielle described the importance of the project to the community: “There’s a lot of meaning shown in the buffalo, not only spiritual health but nutritional health, and history, and all these things.” Also, the 1862 LGI was a subcontractor on the grant, with the educators at the 1862 LGI acting as support. Lastly, they trained students from the TCU to facilitate interviews and focus groups for the project. This opportunity allowed students to engage with their community, explore job prospects, and gain professional skills.

Like Hannah and Danielle, Frank also included TCUs on some of his grant projects. On the day of his interview, he had just heard that a grant he had applied for had been rejected, but he described the details anyway; the proposal illustrated some of the positive strategies he had in mind while formulating the collaboration:

I look at trying to help tribes figure out how to provide heat at a cost-efficient basis, not only for the home but also for food growing. It was a national grant, so we tied in [tribal college in another state] because they have some of the same climatic conditions [as we do]. I was to go teach the students at the tribal college how to build thermal mass heaters, basically extending the season with heat.

Frank wasn’t afraid to include a TCU from another state, showing that this kind of collaboration is possible as long as there are overlapping contexts. He found commonalities between his context and the context of the TCU so that they could tackle similar issues together.

Kent and his university had worked with TCUs for decades, including those in his state and others across state lines. They had integrated TCUs on grants and at conferences, set up academic programs for students, and included students in their projects. They were also working on hiring faculty to be shared between the 1862 and 1994 institutions:

I’m trying to get sabbaticals so faculty down here can go up there and integrate more, as well as even some joint positions. We’re still looking at other joint things that we can do. This last year, we integrated the 1994 Extension agents into our Extension conference. While we were there, we talked about collaboration. They were able to talk with people, and with our FRTEP agents, and we talked about our partnerships and collaborations. I asked, “How’s it going? Where can we build strength?”

Integrating Extension into the larger educational and professional community takes work, but Kent’s programs and partnerships were stronger for the effort.

#### **BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS**

Although the participants described their successful collaborations, many also described the difficulties inherent to

this work. First, geographic distance can be a barrier, with LGIs spread over large distances. Also, there are differences between how various institutions operate and what they prioritize, creating difficulty in finding common goals.

Two survey respondents reported working for a TCU in the past. One of these respondents described such programs as “food preservation, cooking classes, and combining traditional and Western food practices” as well as classes on sewing, youth-based programs, and gardening. Importantly, they also described their experience collaborating with the 1862 LGI in their large state:

It was rare to collaborate with our state’s 1862 institution. I worked with one agent at [university]. . . . [H]e came up to [village] a couple of times to teach workshops. He also brought our Extension program into a grant application he was working on. However, for the most part, [university] did not collaborate. None of the other agents or specialists seemed interested in collaborating. To be fair, [state] is a large state, with a lot of underserved populations.

This experience highlights some of the issues facing these collaborations, including large land areas and many varying priorities. Further, 126 respondents said that they had not worked with a 1994 TCU, and several mentioned that the reason for not collaborating was distance. Despite this barrier, some of the current and past collaborations did cross state lines and large distances, proving that it is possible if the educator makes the collaboration a priority.

Additionally, 1862 and 1994 LGIs often have different priorities and structures. For example, Kent described how most 1994 faculty have heavy teaching loads and different promotion and tenure procedures than 1862 faculty do. This disparity creates different priorities and expectations between and across institutions. Kent worked hard to overcome these issues: “If I have a grant that’s getting started, we will say, ‘Hey, here’s an opportunity to partner. You guys interested?’ We give them, like, a year to think through it, and [we] go out there and talk with them. You have to space it and give it time.” Because of Kent’s long-term commitment and his understanding of community needs and research logistics, he was in a unique position to support collaborations and educators.

Also, 1862 LGI educators need to be mindful of how they approach these collaborations. When collaborating with TCUs, it is important to build trusting relationships (Hartmann & Martin, 2021), with the goal that these relationships should extend beyond the time frame and boundaries of a grant opportunity. This goal was expressed by a survey respondent:

1862 institutions need to *ask* what they can do to help. Tribal college Extension professionals know

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what will/won't work in their communities, and often they are short on resources. The difficulty is when you are approached by an 1862 Extension agent with a preformed program that they want to "check the Native box" on. That isn't collaboration. Instead, that adds extra burdens on the tribal college Extension professionals to help the 1862 [institution] achieve their goal.

Centering the goals of the community from the beginning, respecting TCU educators' expertise, and understanding different expectations and goals are vital and the foundation of collaboration.

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EDUCATORS

One of the implications of this work is that 1862 and 1994 institutions face barriers to making collaborations successful. One barrier is the evaluation process at 1862 LGIs, which values such deliverables as grant dollars, publication impact factors, and participation numbers. Indeed, this barrier might be enough of a deterrent for faculty to not pursue these collaborations at all. Kent summarized this feeling, including how important it is for LGIs to make it possible for 1862 educators to do this work: "Trying to get faculty where they could be recognized for engaging in those [collaborations], which is tricky. If they're trying to get tenure, they don't lend themselves very well to that. You have to have some way to integrate that. These are vital programs." For these collaborations to be successful, administrators need to better understand the benefits and constraints involved in forming and maintaining these collaborations, including the time it takes to form relationships, and find other evaluation metrics based on the impact to the communities served.

Collaborations with 1994 TCUs could be established in many ways, depending on the context and culture. For example, 1862 educators could reach out to collaborate on grants that would be mutually beneficial to all involved, making sure to center the goals of the TCU. It is also important to bring all collaborators into the project from the start and give everyone time to work together. These projects could include opportunities for students from the 1862 and 1994 institutions. Also, including TCUs at professional gatherings is important to share knowledge and assess how educators could enhance each other's efforts. Lastly, 1862 educators could become involved in regional and national organizations, including the First Americans Land Grant Consortium.

Future research needs to be done on various aspects of this work, including gaining the perspectives of all sides of the collaborations described. A parallel study should look at the same kinds of research questions, but focus on educators

who work at 1994 TCUs. Further, investigating the perspectives of Indigenous peoples who collaborate with Extension is an important next step. Also, another integral component to the land-grant system isn't included here—namely, the 1890 LGIs. This study was done in the Western Region, where there aren't any 1890 LGIs, but nurturing these collaborations is equally important to decolonize the whole land-grant system.

The land-grant mission prioritizes access and inclusion, so it is imperative that collaborations with Indigenous communities be prioritized. Kent emphasized this need: "They [1862s] should help out. It's gonna help everybody, and that's part of our duty." To fulfill this duty, it is imperative that 1862 Extension programs recognize that forming these collaborations requires more time and expertise and that each institution will have different expectations and outcomes. Indigenous communities and the personnel who serve them have been largely forgotten within Extension's work and research. These programs are underfunded and underrepresented (Brewer et al., 2016), and no system supports them. Better understanding the lived experiences of Extension personnel in the field and the Indigenous communities that they serve would inform practice and policy within Extension, aimed at providing equitable access to the benefits of this system.

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