

Know Your Government Bodies and How They Relate to MSU Extension



Michigan's Cooperative Extension Program (Michigan State University Extension) is funded by a partnership between governments at three levels: federal, authorized through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); state, authorized through appropriations to the state's land-grant university - Michigan State University (MSU); and county, authorized through county budgets.

Federal Government



Federal Government Sources

USA.gov. *How to contact your elected officials:* <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov>

U.S. Department of Treasury. Your guide to America's finances. <https://datalab.usaspending.gov/americas-finance-guide/>

Relationship definition: The USDA oversees national Extension programs through the National Institute for Food and Agriculture. Congress authorizes federal funding for Extension work every 5 years through passage of the Farm bill found at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/agriculture-improvement-act-of-2018-highlights-and-implications/>.

Leadership structure: Michigan voters elect 14 congressional representatives to 2-year terms. The state also has two U.S. senators who serve 6-year terms. Congress approves the federal budgets that help fund Extension work in Michigan. You can contact and learn more about Michigan's federal lawmakers and their policy positions. Find Michigan's U.S. senators by visiting <http://www.senate.gov/states/MI/intro.htm>. Locate the U.S. congressional representative for the geographic area staff serve by visiting <https://www.house.gov/>.

Funding: The federal budget is primarily funded through income taxes levied on individuals and organizations, predominantly businesses and corporations. Revenue is also generated by service fees and customs duties.



State Government

Relationship definition: The State of Michigan provides annual funding for MSU Extension through its appropriation to the state's 1862 land-grant university, MSU. MSU Extension's (and MSU AgBioResearch's) appropriation in the state higher education budget is separate from the general funding provided for the university. State power is granted by the 10th amendment of the U.S. Constitution and mirrors federal government with executive, legislative and judicial branches. The state Legislature's job is to enact the laws of Michigan, levy taxes, appropriate collected funds to deliver government services and provide oversight of the executive branch of state government.





State Government Sources

State of Michigan. *Learn about the Michigan Legislature:* <https://www.michigan.gov/som/>

The White House. *State & local government:* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/state-and-local-government>



County Government Sources

Amrhein, J., Neumann, B., Schindler, K., Schulz, M., & Walcott, E. (2019). *Guide to Michigan county government*. East Lansing: Michigan State University, MSU Extension.

National League of Cities: <https://www.nlc.org/local-us-governments>

Leadership structure: The governor, elected to a 4-year term by Michigan voters, heads the executive branch. The governor appoints directors of 16 of Michigan's 18 state departments. Michigan's attorney general and secretary of state are elected by Michigan voters. MSU Extension staff often work in partnership with staff representing the Michigan departments of Agriculture and Rural Development; Education; Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy; Health and Human Services; and Natural Resources.

The Michigan Legislature is elected by Michigan voters and consists of the state Senate, which includes 38 members elected to 4-year terms and the state House of Representatives that includes 110 members elected to 2-year terms. You can contact and learn more about Michigan's legislative members and their policy positions. Find the state representative for the geographic area served by visiting <http://www.house.mi.gov/MHRPublic/frmFindARep.aspx>. Locate the state senator for the geographic area served by visiting <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysbyaddress.html>.

Funding: State of Michigan revenue streams include a mix of income and business taxes (the dominant source of funding), sales tax, and fees for services and ordinance and law violations.

County Government

Relationship definition: County government is the primary local funding and administrative body for county MSU Extension programs. Counties are the local arm of the three-way MSU Extension core public funding partnership that includes federal, state and county government. Michigan's 83 counties are independently governed but also serve as the administrative arms of state government. County governments are charged with performing duties mandated by the state such as property records management and assessment (register of deeds) and election oversight and administration (county clerks). They are also responsible for other nonmandated provisions for resident health and safety such as law enforcement, health departments and roads.

Leadership structure: Most Michigan counties are led by a county board of commissioners. Four Michigan counties – Bay, Oakland, Macomb and Wayne – are led by a county executive who maintains executive powers over county government operations. Wayne and Macomb counties also operate under a “home rule charter,” which is defined as the right to local self-government including the powers to regulate for the protection of the public health, safety, morals and welfare; to license; to tax and to incur debt.

Funding: Most county budget revenue streams include a mix of property taxes (the dominant source of funding), state paid revenue sharing, and fees for services and ordinance and law violations.

Municipal Governments



Relationship definition: The U.S. Census Bureau defines a city or municipality as any area or territory where 2,500 or more people reside. Michigan has 1,240 townships and 533 municipalities including 280 incorporated cities and 253 incorporated villages. Although there is not general funding from townships, villages or cities for MSU Extension programming, local partnerships with cities, townships and/or other municipalities can be developed to support MSU Extension programming that meets a defined need within a municipality.

Many Michigan cities operate under home rule charters. Home rule provides authority for the city or village to draft and adopt a charter for its own government under the state's constitution. Cities provide services related to local transportation; water, sanitation and environmental services; utilities; public health; safety, law enforcement and judicial; and recreation and arts.



Michigan has two types of townships – general law and charter townships. There are 138 Michigan townships with charter township status. This status provides additional administrative and taxation powers for governing and serving larger communities.

Villages differ from cities in that they have limited home rule powers and remain within a local township.

Leadership structure: Two forms of city government are prevalent in Michigan: council-manager and mayor. One hundred and seventy-five cities use the *city council-manager* form (also known as administrator or superintendent). In this form, the elected council appoints a manager to administer day-to-day city operations.

Municipal Government Sources

Michigan Municipal League. (2016, January). *Organization of city and village government in Michigan*. <http://www.mml.org/pdf/mr/mr-organization-city-village-gvt.pdf>

Michigan Municipal League Member Resource Services. (1991). Structure of local government. In Michigan Municipal League. *Charter commissioners handbook*. https://www.mml.org/pdf/charter_revision/charter_handbook.pdf

Michigan Township Association. *Townships in Michigan*. https://www.michigantownships.org/mi_twps.asp

National League of Cities: <https://www.nlc.org/local-us-governments>

Other Michigan cities use the *mayor* form, which has two types. In the *strong mayor* form, city residents elect a mayor who has authority to appoint and remove key administrative officials and may have some veto power over council decisions. Other cities and municipalities use the *weak mayor* form, in which a mayor or “president” is chosen from the elected governing council body who is responsible for chairing city council meetings and is the chief policy and ceremonial official for the municipality.

Township government generally consists of a township board with either five or seven members that include a supervisor, clerk, treasurer and two to four trustees.

Villages are typically governed using the *weak mayor-council* form of government, where the mayor is elected by the governing council body.

Funding: Property taxes, state revenue sharing from state sales tax collections and income taxes are the predominant sources of income for cities, townships and other municipalities.

School District Sources

Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. *Value of ISDs*. <https://www.gomaisa.org/value-of-isds/>

Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency. *The basics of school funding*. https://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/departments/datacharts/dck12_schoolfundingbasics.pdf (2017-18, Bulletin 1011).

Remember to use the “[Knowing Your Policymakers and Stakeholders](#)” form to document what you learn about your local policymakers and the “[Meeting with State Legislators](#)” tool to help you plan for your visits to key lawmakers and government partners.



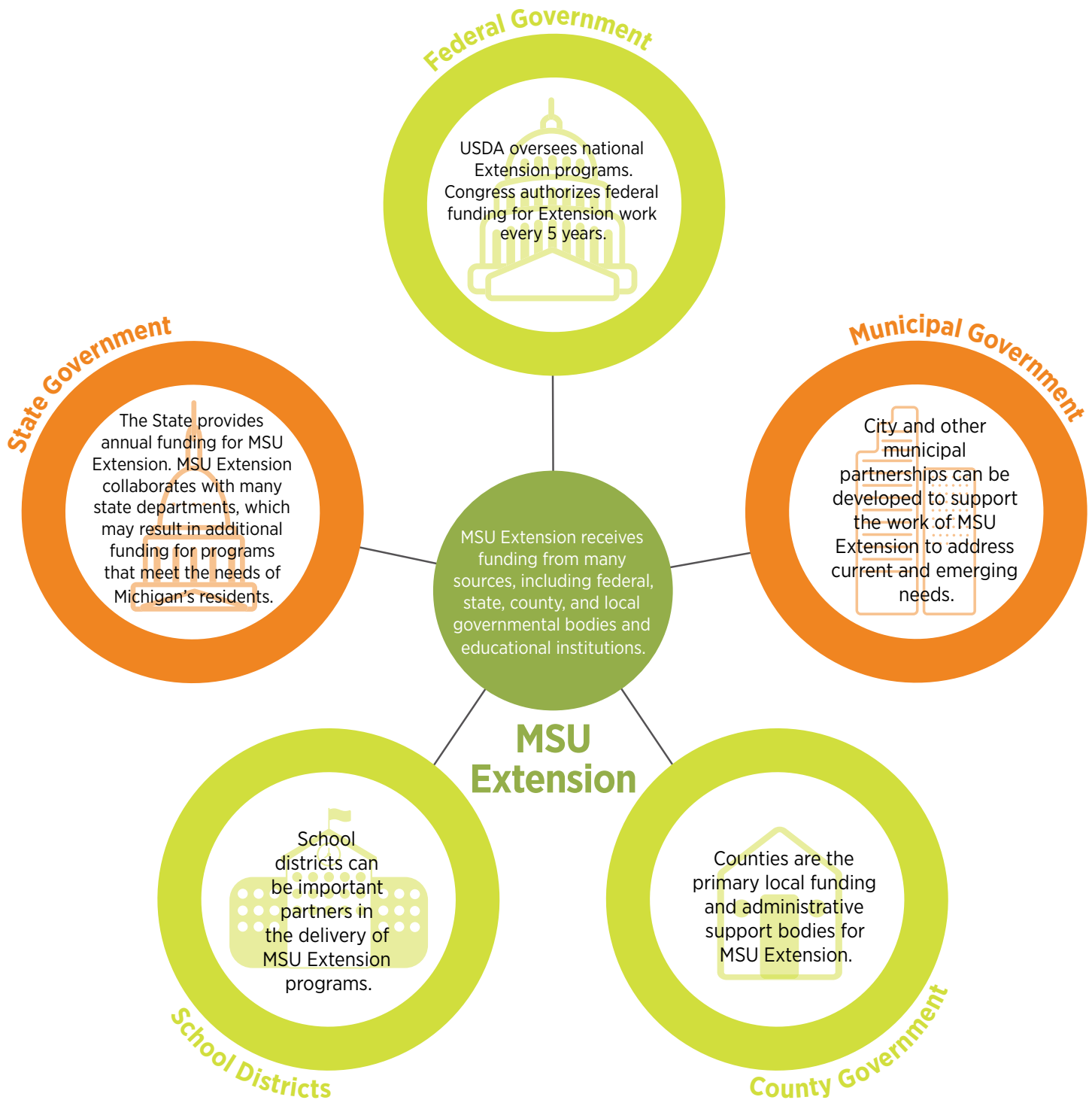
School Districts

Relationship definition: School districts can be important local partners in the delivery of MSU Extension programs, particularly in the areas of early childhood education, 4-H youth development, health and nutrition education, and caregiver and parent education. School districts can provide program audiences, space for program delivery, and funding for program delivery. There are 839 school districts operating in Michigan in concert with 56 Intermediate School Districts or Regional Educational Service Agencies that educate more than 1.5 million students.

Intermediate School Districts work with local school districts, the Michigan Department of Education, and business, industry and community groups to support educational service delivery in the areas of teaching and learning, specialized student services, shared operational services, partnership development, technology services, school improvement, and assessment and mandates. MSU Extension has often developed partnerships with intermediate school districts and regional educational service agencies to deliver programming that meets the needs of local schools and communities.

Leadership structure: In most cases, local school districts and intermediate school districts are led by a school board that is either elected or appointed by a government official or by member school districts. These boards are responsible for setting district education policy and appointing a professional superintendent to manage the day-to-day operations of the school district.

Funding: Local property tax levies and the Michigan School Aid Fund allowance generally fund school district operations. The 6% State Education Tax that residents pay on property taxes is paid to the state and then redistributed to school districts. Intermediate school districts are funded by local property taxes, a per-pupil special education foundation allowance, state categorical funds and federal grants.



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Public Policy Education Principles and Guidelines for MSU Extension



“I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion.”

- Thomas Jefferson, 1820

Jefferson’s observation, along with the words of members of Congress who supported the 1914 Smith-Lever Act that created the Cooperative Extension Service, provide the historical base for Michigan State University (MSU) Extension’s work in public policy education. Programming has focused on topics such as taxation, public finance, local government administration, agricultural policy, water quality, land use, natural resource management, food safety and human nutrition, family and youth issues, and statewide ballot proposals. MSU Extension seeks to assist public policymakers and enable each individual to participate fully in the life of our democracy.

Purpose – Public policy issues are matters of widespread public concern that grow out of accumulated daily events, marked by a feeling that there is a gap between what is and what ought to be. Public policy issues may involve disagreement and controversy that result from different roles, values, interests and ideas. Public policy education is a multidisciplinary activity in which all MSU Extension staff may be involved. The principal objective is to educate Michigan residents so they are able to influence and make better informed policy choices. Public policy education assists learners as they evaluate information, examine values, explore alternatives and consequences, and make choices. The purpose is to promote an increased understanding of public issues, the public policymaking process and strategies for effective participation.

Roles and approaches – The MSU Extension staff member’s role in public policy education is analysis, assistance and facilitation. It is not the making of policy decisions or the promotion of particular outcomes. Public policy education focuses on both content and process. Content emphasizes an awareness of public issues and promotes an exploration of the alternatives and consequences of various policy choices. Process, including leadership development and public participation skills, enables audiences to take effective action in pursuit of their policy choices.

MSU Extension staff members should make a deliberate effort to identify the array of perspectives on an issue and to ensure equitable attention to each perspective, always recognizing that additional points of view may need to be considered. This process can be





complicated because many issues may be nested within any one public policy debate. It may also be appropriate for MSU Extension policy staff members to provide special assistance to groups whose views are not likely to be reflected in the policymaking process. The goal of such assistance is to help these groups develop the skills they need to participate most effectively. This includes giving voice to issues and communities that have often lacked visibility in the decision-making and policy development processes.

Roles of MSU Extension staff members – Appropriate roles for MSU Extension staff members to play in public policy education include:

- **Information provider** – Sharing evidence-based information and other relevant information while connecting the public to the knowledge and expertise available at MSU to increase their knowledge about issues.
- **Convener** – Encouraging interaction among representatives of various interests in problem-solving ventures.
- **Facilitator** – Helping to format meetings, set ground rules, focus attention on the decision-making process and use consensus-seeking techniques.
- **Program developer** – Helping to develop a long-range plan for the educational program and establish action steps to achieve the plan.
- **Analyst** – Gathering and interpreting relevant information and participating actively in identifying the possible alternatives and consequences related to an issue.
- **Forecaster** – Analyzing emerging issues to help groups begin to address issues as early as possible.
- **Networker** – Identifying and linking people and resources to increase people’s knowledge of public issues and their ability to participate in public decision-making.
- **Diplomat** – Moving tactfully between stakeholders to encourage them to work together through an educational process.
- **Trainer** – Using formal instruction and other learning experiences to help residents acquire the knowledge and skills they need to understand public issues and to work effectively with others to resolve them.



MSU Extension staff members may play different roles at different times, depending on the issue and the phase of the discussion or decision-making process related to it. MSU Extension staff members can help move an issue through a process that includes:



- Identifying an initial concern.
- Clarifying goals and points of conflict.
- Considering alternatives and consequences.
- Implementing and evaluating the resulting decisions.



A note on partisan politics

The role of MSU Extension staff members in providing public policy education does not include involvement in partisan political activities. Such involvement is clearly an individual and personal choice. It is important always to be aware of and clear about the differences between the role of the individual and that of the public educator. When staff members are uncertain about the appropriateness of specific activities, they may find it helpful to discuss the options with colleagues.

Guiding principles for public policy education

In situations where viewpoints can become polarized and public issues have the potential to divide, MSU Extension can engage communities to help them move forward. MSU Extension staff members involved in these situations need a set of guiding principles, including:



- Scientific information cannot substitute for value choices and cannot identify the most appropriate set of values. However, scientific information can more fully inform the value choices people make.
- Public policy researchers and educators do not and should not decide what is best for the public.
- A democratic system of government places a high priority on the right of individuals or groups to choose for themselves among alternative solutions to public issues.
- The capacity of the public to make decisions about public issues is increased by education about both the issues and the decision-making process.



Guidelines on education and advocacy

As MSU Extension staff members, we strive to be neutral and objective, but we acknowledge certain biases, which include support for:



- The analysis and use of scientific information in public policymaking.
- Widespread participation in public policymaking and serious efforts to understand and take into account all sides of the issues.
- Serious attention to the issues we choose to address in our educational programs.



When a public issue arises or a community turns to MSU Extension for help working through a complex problem, it is important that the organization be prepared. Public policy education focuses as much on process as it does on content. There is no single correct way to engage in public policy education. The principles and guidelines in this document serve as a foundation for MSU Extension's engagement in this work. It is important that MSU Extension professionals be prepared to respond to complex public issues and be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to help residents make informed decisions.



For additional information, visit extension.msu.edu.

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464).

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Policy Statement of MSU Extension on Public Policy Education

Public policy education assists learners as they evaluate information, examine values, explore alternatives and consequences, and make choices. The purpose is to promote an increased understanding of public issues, the public policymaking process and strategies for effective participation. Public policy education is based on the premise that individuals are the most appropriate judges of their interests. It also recognizes the legitimate role of education in enabling individuals and groups to make better informed decisions. MSU Extension has a distinguished record of conducting public policy education programs in Michigan on topics such as ballot proposals, taxation and public finance, agricultural policy, water quality, land use, natural resource management, health, business development, food safety and human nutrition, and family and youth issues.

The mission of MSU Extension is to help people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. MSU Extension believes that public policy education is consistent with the organization's mission and supports this activity for its staff members. The organization also recognizes that public policy education may place MSU Extension staff members in controversial positions. Our administration will fully support public policy education programs that are developed and executed according to the guiding principles set forth in this document.

MSU Extension's commitment to public policy education may be seen in its support for appropriate in-service training and study leave opportunities for staff members, in the development of educational materials, in the development and fostering of partnerships and information sharing with other agencies and groups, in the acquisition and allocation of additional resources where possible, and in the recognition and rewarding of those individuals who conduct public policy education programs.

Jeffrey W. Dwyer
Director of MSU Extension

Telling Your MSU Extension Story through Public Value Statements



You are your own best storyteller.

- If you don't tell your story, who will?
- Telling your story helps build relationships with stakeholders. Most won't understand the value that Michigan State University (MSU) Extension brings to their community unless you tell them.
- No one else can tell *your* story with the same conviction. No one knows your programs and your successes like you do.

It is everyone's responsibility to share the MSU Extension message.



Use public value statements to tell your story.

- Often, you have a short window of time to tell your story. Always start using a public value statement that shows how MSU Extension addresses crucial community concerns by working through individual participants. This gives stakeholders and others insight into the overall benefit of programming.
 - Review the [public value statements for MSU Extension](#).
 - Find the statement that is most relevant to your role.
 - Add your personal public value statement. The "[Creating a Personal Public Value Statement](#)" worksheet can help you in creating your personal public value statement. Make it a statement that:
 - Is short – less than 30 seconds.
 - Is crisp and compelling.
 - Excites you.
 - Makes you smile.
 - Makes your pulse race a bit!
 - You can't wait to talk about!
 - Memorize it. Be ready to talk about it any time.
- When time allows, add personal stories about participants whose lives were made better through your work. Don't forget to tell how changes in their behavior have benefitted their communities. A good story makes the listener want to hear more.
 - Tell your personal story quickly and with enthusiasm.
 - Explain that something has happened – a positive change was made.



Tell your story often and to everyone.

- Give your testimony at county board meetings, school board meetings and other public events.
- Look for opportunities to have private conversations during public events with county commissioners, state and federal legislators, staff members for commissioners and legislators, teachers, principals, board members, administrators, community leaders, other organization and agency leaders.





- Tell your story in written form as well, through county annual reports, news releases and other written pieces.
- Although you should tell your story anytime, it may be especially crucial during budget deliberations.
- You may encounter one of your legislators at an MSU Extension or community function. Introduce yourself and tell what you do for MSU Extension. This could be your “elevator” speech. Remember that this public servant has an interest in your service to their constituents. If you see your elected official at a public event, it may be appropriate to briefly mention your concerns about a particular issue. However, it is important to be very brief. Follow up with an email or phone call.



Every conversation is an opportunity.

- Just as important as making your points is listening to the other person and finding the connections that unite you. Find the things that matter to them and connect it to how it relates to your work. That will make your conversation relevant, impactful and memorable.
- The next time someone asks, “How is it going?” use the opportunity!



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FAQs for Local Government and Media Inquiries



Michigan State University (MSU) Extension staff members can use the following language to respond to questions frequently asked by government and media representatives:

Key messages:

- MSU Extension helps people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses.
- Programs and services are grounded in evidence-based information from MSU and beyond.
- MSU Extension is the community-based educational arm of Michigan State University in partnership with county governments.
- We are uniquely positioned to forge partnerships with public and private agencies and organizations.
- We have the capacity to leverage local funds to secure additional federal, state and grant funding.
- MSU Extension programs annually leverage significant support in volunteer hours to serve local community needs.
- We represent a deliberative and historically successful public investment in transforming lives.

Q: I've never heard of MSU Extension. What is it?

A: For more than 100 years, MSU Extension has helped grow Michigan's economy by equipping Michigan residents with the information that they need to do their jobs better, raise healthy and safe families, build their communities and empower their children to dream of a successful future. MSU Extension is the community-based educational arm of Michigan State University in partnership with county governments. MSU Extension's emphasis is on providing the highest quality evidence-based educational programming focused on meeting the needs of our local communities.

Our staff members throughout the state are linked to MSU and have access to research done by MSU AgBioResearch scientists and other MSU researchers and faculty members as well as land-grant university researchers from across the nation. This unbiased research ensures the quality and integrity of MSU Extension programs. Our vast network of educational professionals offers a wide variety of programming throughout the state. Our educational focus areas include 4-H and youth development, agriculture, business and economic development, community development, family well-being, food and health, lawn and garden, and natural resources.

Q: Why is it important to have MSU Extension in my county?

A: MSU Extension is mission driven to help people improve their lives by bringing the vast knowledge resources of MSU directly to individuals, communities and businesses. We work with counties to ensure that our education matches up with community needs.

We have ready access to educational resources that address the needs of local constituents. Examples include educational resources on food and agriculture, youth development, land use and water quality issues, community development and family nutrition. In addition, we work with entrepreneurs to help them develop value-added, consumer responsive products in the agriculture and natural resources sectors that help bring jobs and profitability to communities.

(If given the opportunity, walk through program areas on the [MSU Extension website](#).)



Q: Where does the money come from for MSU Extension?

A: The core funding for MSU Extension is a three-way funding partnership between federal, state and county governments. Staff members often seek out additional funding from public or private grants, partnerships and philanthropy to target a particular community need. Federal dollars are appropriated through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. State dollars are appropriated through Michigan’s higher education budget. Locally, our county board of commissioners allocates monies to support MSU Extension programming. The funding from the county is extremely important and further ensures that our programs meet local needs.



Q: Why should MSU Extension be publicly funded? Aren’t there similar organizations that do much of the same thing with private funding?

A: As part of the nation’s land-grant university cooperative Extension program, MSU Extension represents a strategic public investment in improving people’s lives. There is no free market incentive to provide residents, families, businesses and farmers with unbiased research and educational programming to help them make decisions that will improve and enhance their life or business. *(Provide local examples as appropriate.)*



Additionally, MSU Extension leverages local funds to secure state, federal and, in many cases, private dollars. *(Provide examples of how local funds have leveraged other dollars.)*

4-H has historically represented a carefully considered public investment in our young people. Unlike most youth development programs, 4-H is available and accessible to all young people in this county aged 5 to 19. Also unlike most youth development programs, 4-H has the flexibility and nimbleness to develop activities, initiatives and programs that mirror the unique needs and interests of a particular county. *(Provide local examples as appropriate, such as life skills, civic engagement, leadership development, workforce preparation, geocaching, robotics, camp, teen leadership, etc.)*



In <name of county> County, we reach <number of 4-H members> youth in clubs and an additional <number of other youth engaged in programming> in other youth programs.

The value that 4-H brings to the community can also be measured in the value the volunteers bring. In <name of county> County, we have <number of 4-H volunteers> volunteers that provided <number of volunteer hours> volunteer hours last year. If you put a monetary value on the value of the volunteer service, the 4-H return on investment increases.



The same case could be made in some of the larger counties around Master Gardener volunteers.

Visit the Independent Sector website (<https://independentsector.org>) for the current nationally recognized dollar value of volunteer time to calculate the value of MSU Extension volunteer contributions.

Q: Does MSU Extension duplicate programs that other agencies offer?

A: MSU Extension works with state and local agencies to develop educational programs that enhance the services those agencies provide. For example, MSU Extension staff members partner with other agencies, such as the county Department of Health and Human Services, to add the all-important educational component to what these organizations offer. Some programming at the county level takes place through agreements made at the state level.

For example, in SNAP-Ed, MSU Extension staff members teach recipients how to shop for and prepare healthy meals. Another example is our first-time homebuyer program that helps people make informed decisions when choosing and financing a home.

Q: How would local budget cuts affect MSU Extension?

A: MSU Extension has a more than 100-year history of working with our historical and critical county government partners. This partnership exists due to a shared funding model that includes federal, state and local county funding that is supplemented by grants, contracts and other external sources. *(Share how this core funding helps to leverage dollars and other resources through partnerships and grants. Talk about the return on investment from state and federal dollars.)*

Should a county find itself unable to fund MSU Extension due to significant financial circumstances, we will work with that county to identify other resources. We will remain committed to the partnership until a mutually agreeable long-term funding environment is created. *(Talk about the impact our programs have on the local community.)*

This approach validates that MSU Extension is a committed partner working statewide in each of Michigan's 83 county jurisdictions. Limited or no funding will result in difficult decisions related to staffing and available programming for local residents including a reduced 4-H presence.



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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. WCAG2.0AA



Responding to Media Calls

Michigan State University (MSU) Extension staff frequently receive calls from the media on a variety of topics. Media members know MSU Extension is a source of trusted, unbiased information and that we have a wide range of expertise to offer.



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Tips to keep in mind when the media contacts you:

- **Respond in a timely manner.** Reporters often contact MSU Extension with hours left to finish and file their story. Ask them about their deadline, and do your best to accommodate the reporter's schedule. It is okay to ask a reporter if you can give them a call back. It's always good to take a little time, even if it's only five minutes to prepare yourself and write down some key messages you want to make sure you can use. You can also request time to seek additional information or anything else to ensure your success. But, please remember to get back to the reporter. Without a timely response, MSU Extension might lose an opportunity to get quality information to the public and serve as a valuable, educational resource in the eyes of the public and stakeholders.
- **Keep it simple.** When referring to your affiliation it is best to keep it as simple as possible. Don't say, "I'm Jane Smith, Community Food Systems Workgroup; Community, Food and Environment Institute; Gladwin County Extension." Say, "I'm Jane Smith with Michigan State University Extension."
- **Refer sensitive questions to those who can best respond.** If the reporter asks a question that makes you feel uncomfortable, particularly if it is about MSU Extension as an organization, the university at large, funding issues, etc., please refer the reporter to your district director or someone else at the administrative level who is best equipped to answer.
- **Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** If you don't know how to answer a specific question, it is okay to say, "I don't know." But plan to gather more information, and get back to the reporter or to let the reporter know that you're not the best person to answer a question.
- **Help the reporter find other sources.** If you are not the best source, don't be afraid to recommend other sources for the reporter to contact. If you don't know who the best contact might be, you can refer the reporter to the [MSU Extension Director's Office](#) or [MSU Extension Communications](#).
- **Ask MSU Extension Communications for help.** If you have an upcoming interview, media request or other issue, [MSU Extension Communications](#) can help. Staff can offer talking points, help refer the reporter to other contacts or data, and more.



Strategic Communication Tools: What and When to Use with Decision-Makers



For any and every communication tool used and strategic contact made, it's important to include data on the impacts made by MSU Extension work. Use the data featured in MSU Extension annual reports and impact reports to highlight the difference MSU Extension is making in communities throughout the state.

Newsletters

What: Newsletters provide opportunities to share details on program reach and impact as well as to share constituent stories that illustrate impact.

When: Send your newsletter to all key decision-makers and stakeholders to keep them abreast of Michigan State University (MSU) Extension current events and issues. Because of their public positions, you can add the public office of key stakeholders to your newsletter mailing list without an opt-in.

Social media

What: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media outlets all provide opportunities for quick and timely communications with stakeholders provided they agree to your engaging them through this form of media. In many cases, you can join the pages of key stakeholders. Unfortunately, there may be times when messages on social media overwhelm and yours may get lost in the process.

When: A good time to post on a stakeholder's social media account is when MSU Extension has a key product or service that meets the need of a hot or trending topic. If the decision-maker or stakeholder is a public official, they will have staff members monitoring their social media sites for key inputs they can use in their policy making.

Phone calls

What: Phone calls provide a direct and unfiltered method of communication with key decision-makers.

When: Pick up the phone and call a key decision-maker's office for introductory meetings or conversations. You can also call if you can provide a service or program that can help a decision-maker address or respond to a key issue.





Use the “[Knowing Your Policymakers and Stakeholders](#)” form in the *Expect to Connect Toolkit* to document key information learned in your visit with a policymaker or their staff members.

Remember to document your contact and communication with policymakers by completing the [MSU Extension policymaker contact form](#).



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Meetings

What: Meetings are the best way to get to know a key stakeholder and to provide important information to guide decision-making. You can learn much from a meeting that other forms of contact can’t provide. And likewise, the stakeholder can learn much about you in a face-to-face meeting that other forms of contact can’t or don’t provide.

When: Introductory meetings are important when you or your stakeholder are new to professional roles and positions. Meetings are the best form of communication when there is action needed on a particular issue or topic and background information needs to be shared in a manner that provides for questions and answers.

Emails

What: Use emails when information needs to be shared quickly and with some detail. But, they may only be effective if you, as emailer, are already established as a known source or contact. Otherwise, an email on an important topic may get overlooked or deleted among other messages.

When: Emails can be a timely way to contact key decision-makers on important issues and topics and to provide important details and background. They are best sent in response to a specific request for information or following a conversation where the recipient is expecting the email as follow-up to a phone or face-to-face conversation.

Reporting Impacts to County Leaders

When Michigan State University (MSU) Extension signs an agreement with a county board of commissioners or county executive, we become contractually obligated to provide them with an annual report. In addition, keeping boards informed of the good work we do is essential to the overall success of the organization.

Much of the annual report information shared with county commissioners and county executives is pulled from our reporting system. District directors need everyone's help to ensure they give an accurate, complete report of important work done in that county. Program staff *must* provide details of their work in their regular program reports, including the participants' counties of residence. This is the only way that county leaders can understand the local need for programming, our response to that need and the number of county residents who participated in the education.

In addition, talk to your district director about providing an update of your program accomplishments during a local county board of commissioners meeting or to your county executive's staff members at least once a year. If you provide programming in other counties, consider providing updates to those boards as well.

Each district director will have the schedule for all regularly posted county board of commissioners meetings throughout the year. These are also often posted on each county's website. MSU Extension staff members should coordinate with their district director to identify appropriate times for MSU Extension to be featured on a board of commissioners meeting agenda. This will ensure that MSU Extension presents at important meetings throughout the year in a strategic and coordinated fashion, not all at the same time. Speaking with the appropriate district director about your desire to present a report to your county will contribute to the success of the process. Some guidelines to help you through the process follow.

DO:

- **For counties governed solely by a board of commissioners:**
 - Speak during the public comment period at board meetings if your update is less than three minutes.
 - Ask to be added to the agenda of the board meeting if you would like several minutes of the board's time. Each county has its own calendar and process for getting on an agenda. Your district director will be familiar with the process. Be sure to ask your district director for help at least four to six weeks before the meeting.
- **If you have a county executive:**
 - Provide programmatic impact reports for a specific department head within the executive office structure and not directly to the



commissioners. Speak with your district director to determine to whom you should speak, and find out the procedures for meeting with and providing information to them.

- MSU Extension cannot make a presentation to the board of commissioners without being invited by the county executive's office. However, use other communication channels besides commission meetings to provide information to county commissioners. These channels vary by county. Talk to your district director to determine the option that best fits your situation.

- **In all counties:**

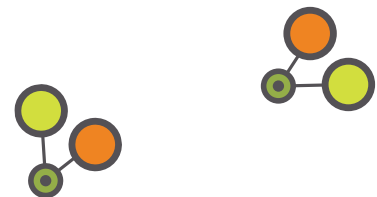
- Determine how the board of commissioners or county executive's office likes to receive information. All counties are different, so be sure to verify the appropriate format to use to deliver the information you want to share.
- Introduce yourself and your role with MSU Extension.
- Address the commissioners or county executive's office staff formally. Use appropriate titles such as "Commissioner Smith." Avoid using colloquial or informal language such as "You guys." Also avoid using first names unless instructed by the individual you are speaking with to do so.
- Keep it short. The board members and county staff want brief reports, not an educational session. Save the details for the question and answer period.
- Make your report relevant to the residents and businesses in the county. Tell them how many people you have affected, what changes you have made (or have the potential to make) based on your programming and what types of activities you engaged in. Tie your comments to statewide or regional initiatives when appropriate.
- Speak slowly, clearly and succinctly.
- Thank them for their continued support for MSU Extension.
- Smile!
- Report back to your district director with highlights if they can't attend the meeting.
- Seek input and feedback. Share that feedback with your office colleagues, district directors and institute director.
- Remind county commissioners and county executives that more information can be found on the county MSU Extension website.

DO NOT:

- Do not talk about what you are doing in other counties unless it is relevant or related to the work you are doing in their county.
- Do not use acronyms or abbreviations.
- Never make up or embellish participation or evaluation data. If you only have estimates, say so, and offer to get more exact numbers if commissioners ask for specifics.
- Do not try to answer questions that are out of your area. Let them know you'll try to find the answer if they want to know.
- Do not be afraid or nervous! County commissioners and county executive office staff members are regular people, just like you!



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Maintaining County Support for MSU Extension in 10 Basic Steps

When county governments face serious budget challenges, they often question funding partnerships for Michigan State University (MSU) Extension offices. Although taking these recommended actions will not prevent the questions, doing so will ensure a quick mobilization of support, representative of the entire county.

Need to learn more about public value statements? Read [“Telling Your MSU Extension Story through Public Value Statements,”](#) which is also part of the *Expect to Connect Toolkit*.

Educational programming designed to address current community issues is the starting point in maintaining a strong MSU Extension presence in the county. The ten steps below are dependent on the quality and breadth of MSU Extension programming.

- 1. Explain MSU Extension and what we do concisely.** This may seem very basic but it is a crucial starting point. New staff members are introduced to the concept of personal public value statements during new staff onboarding.
 - Think about your public value statement annually, and consider rewriting it as you gain more experience and learn new skills.
 - Practice your public value statement with staff members and ask for feedback from your colleagues.
 - When talking about MSU Extension, do not speak in abbreviations and acronyms or give your title without emphasizing your organization.
 - Remember to point out that MSU Extension brings research from Michigan State University to help address local issues. MSU Extension is publicly funded through a three-way partnership with county, state and federal governments. This core support is supplemented with grants, partnerships and philanthropy.
- 2. Make sure every county commissioner knows the district director, some staff members and the types of programs offered locally.** It is critical that the “knowing” be a two-way relationship. It isn’t sufficient that MSU Extension staff members know who the commissioners are. The commissioners need to know the district director and key staff members on a first-name basis. They need to know they can depend on MSU Extension as a resource.
 - Immediately following an election, work with your district director to identify the new commissioners and their interests; develop a strategy for getting to know new commissioners and for keeping the other commissioners informed.
 - After new commissioners are elected, the district director should encourage their attendance at the new county commissioner workshop; let them know about other training and other information available for public officials.



- Take every opportunity to provide them with information that will be helpful to them as commissioners. This can include the most recent county MSU Extension annual report, relevant educational information or information on how MSU Extension is making an impact on a key issue important to the county's population.
- Involve commissioners in programming and events as appropriate.
- Thank them for their support. Encourage the people who appreciate our programs to also thank the commissioners. Give the commissioners credit in every way possible.

3. Make sure the county administrator (or coordinator, controller, manager or executive) understands that MSU Extension is a resource for county government. Cultivate this crucial relationship in an astute manner.



- Learn about the nature of this position and try to understand the demands and pressures on someone in this role. Administrators usually are very appreciative of resources and information they can use in working with commissioners and other departments.

4. Maintain a strong, diverse MSU Extension district council that easily reaches into all sectors of the district. Though managing the district council is the district director's role, every staff member must help identify and recruit key community leaders to the councils. Because MSU Extension is a publicly funded organization, every county must be represented by an active, diverse MSU Extension district council with members who will step forward quickly and persuasively on behalf of the organization. Periodically review the list of friends and advocates on the council to be certain that they truly represent the various sectors of your community such as education, business, natural resources and agriculture as well as various ethnic and social sectors. Council members must:



- Help determine program priorities, identify resources to support programming and tell others about our work. The council and MSU Extension staff members should work together to determine the strategies for communicating with policymakers.
- Meet periodically and receive regular communications from the district office. Bringing the council members together on a regular basis allows for learning more fully about the diversity of MSU Extension programming.



5. Update your county presence on the MSU Extension website to reflect current programming and priorities. Look at how your county is represented from the viewpoint of someone who wants to find out about your programs. If a legislative staff member whose legislator sits on appropriations or a county commissioner looked at your web presence to see if this entity called MSU Extension was worth funding, what would they see? Make sure you:

- Use your web presence to accurately reflect your programming in the county.
- Keep staff member names, office hours, phone numbers and other relevant information up to date.
- Enter all programs and events in the MSU Extension calendar and tag them by county.

6. Create at least one attractively designed and well-written document that accurately explains current program priorities.

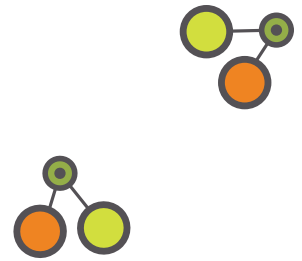
As important as it is to have a strong web presence, it is also imperative to have a written piece that highlights MSU Extension's educational programming.

- Look carefully and critically at the content. Does it make a strong case for continued public funding?
- Revise this piece periodically. Have it readily available to send out with other materials, distribute to policymakers, give out at programs and use whenever the need arises.
- Use the county annual reports to offer other important ways to tell others about MSU Extension programming in the county.

7. Work consciously and constantly to ensure that the MSU Extension wordmark is highly visible.

- Place it on signs, mailings, educational materials, presentations and more.
- Ask our partners in programming to use the MSU Extension logo on their printed pieces.
- Wear your MSU Extension logo wear when delivering programming and interfacing in the community to help people connect your good work to the MSU Extension brand.

8. Be prepared to tell at least three strong stories that explain the value that MSU Extension brings to the county. These stories should not only tell what the program is and how many people attended, but also should reflect ongoing work within the community that addresses particular issues or concerns.





They should answer questions such as:

- How did research-based information make a difference?
- What role did MSU Extension play in facilitating a process of identifying the issue, bringing people together, gathering information and encouraging action?
- What is the impact of the program?

In addition:

- Include these stories as part of the county annual report but also keep them handy as examples when talking with policymakers, the media and others.
- Make identifying such stories a regular part of staff meetings. Document the impact of your program in written form.

9. Make sure state representatives and senators know you and look to the county office as a resource for working with their constituents. Come together as a staff to develop a strategy for regular communications with state and federal legislators and their staff members.

- View building strong relationships with legislative staff members as a separate and critically important undertaking. You can't assume that a legislative aide knows about MSU Extension just because the legislator is supportive. Legislative staff members have tremendous responsibility and power to accomplish things. They also frequently stay in these roles for many years. In addition, many later run for legislative seats. They always need current, relevant, easy-to-use information to help in assisting constituents. They also frequently look for resource information and for people to serve as a sounding board on an issue.
- Use the "[Meeting with State Legislators](#)" tool to prepare for these engagements.

10. Develop a good relationship with local media outlets. The media can help you tell your story only if you tell your story to the media.

- Keep an up-to-date list of local media outlets.
- Build relationships with reporters by offering them reliable background information for new and ongoing stories.
- When appropriate, share leads for new stories.
- Share relevant news articles from the MSU Extension website.
- Encourage media to look to the county MSU Extension office as an unbiased source of information.



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Knowing Your Policymakers and Stakeholders



Michigan State University (MSU) Extension staff members can use this questionnaire to gather more information about their policymakers, including federal, state and county officials. Find much of this information about state legislators at <https://www.legislature.mi.gov>. (Click on the topic “Legislators.”)

Use social media accounts to identify recent activity and current issues important to this person.

It’s also important to gather the same information on stakeholders, such as community partners. You can use this same form for stakeholders by using only the areas pertinent to the stakeholders you work with.

Policymaker/Stakeholder name: _____

Position/Office held: _____

Legislative/Congressional district #: _____

Terms in office: _____

Political party: _____

Is it the majority party? _____

Home community (such as city, town, etc.): _____

Phone (work): _____

Email: _____

Phone (cell): _____

Personal information:

Educational background:



Occupational background:

Committee assignments:

Is this person serving in a leadership position? If so, what?

Previous political involvement:

What are the most important issues to this person?

If a policymaker, how has this person voted on particular issues important to MSU Extension work?
(see <https://www.votesmart.org>)

Are there any special interests, unique situations?

What are the major organizational affiliations?

What are the major interest groups and other political support networks for this person?

Does this person have a special relationship with:

- MSU Extension (as a former participant, council member, service recipient or staff member)? If so, explain.

- MSU Extension staff member(s)? If so, explain.

- MSU Extension council member(s) or other volunteer(s)? If so, explain.

Who are the aides and support staff members for this policymaker?

Name: _____ Position: _____

Interests: _____

Special relationship with MSU Extension staff members or volunteers? _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Interests: _____

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Name: _____ Position: _____

Interests: _____

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Completed by (your name): _____

Date updated: _____



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Name: _____ Position: _____

Interests: _____

Special relationship with MSU Extension staff members or volunteers? _____

Completed by (your name): _____

Date updated: _____



Meeting with State Legislators

Here are some suggestions for meeting with your state legislators. The same principles apply for meetings with local and federal officials. For more information on how government bodies relate to MSU Extension, see the [Expect to Connect tool “Know Your Government Bodies and How They Relate to MSU Extension.”](#)



Making the appointment

- For contact information on your state senator or representative, go to <https://www.legislature.mi.gov>.
- Make contact with the office staff person who schedules appointments. A phone call is preferable, although some offices may also schedule via email.
 - Although it is sometimes possible to make an appointment a day or two before you wish to meet with a legislator, try to schedule appointments one or two weeks in advance.
 - Legislators' schedules change often. Handle last-minute cancellations with grace, and be prepared to meet with a legislative aide instead.
- When you make the appointment, briefly and clearly state your purpose.

Example: My name is ... from ... and I work with ... in the area of ... I would like to meet briefly with Representative ... when I am in Lansing next Thursday to talk to them about
- Emphasize that you either are a constituent in the policymaker's district or calling on behalf of work being done with or for the policymaker's local constituents.
- Expect that the appointment will be 15 minutes in length, although sometimes a conversation will last longer or an appointment may be shortened because of a sudden caucus or committee meeting.
- If you are unable to schedule a meeting with the legislator at the time you are available, ask if you can speak with a staff member. If this is not possible, at least make a point of stopping by the office during your time in Lansing. This will give you an opportunity to meet someone in the office. It is also possible that schedules change and that you end up meeting with a legislator or staffer.



Preparing for the meeting

- Familiarize yourself concerning the background and interests of the policymaker. What are their interests? What are their committee assignments? What kind of contact has this person had related to your organization, business or interests? Gather more information using the Expect to Connect [“Know Your Policymakers and Stakeholders”](#) form.



The *Expect to Connect Toolkit* has a variety of tools to help you prepare and plan for your visit with legislators and other policymakers and stakeholders. Find the toolkit at https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/strategic_connections_communications/.

- If you are meeting to discuss a specific concern, try to compile a one-page or less written summary to leave with the policymaker and particularly with the legislative staff members.
- Know where your legislator stands on key issues. Use the website “Project Vote Smart” (<https://www.votesmart.org>), published by an independent, nonpartisan organization, that allows you to easily search for your legislator and their voting record by topic area.

During the meeting

- Introduce yourself using your [personal public value statement](#), briefly summarizing what you do and why this issue is important to you and the community you serve.
- Be prepared to explain your concern briefly and clearly. Don’t argue and don’t criticize opponents. Concentrate on how the issue affects you and the community you serve.



After the meeting

- Be sure to follow up after your appointment with a thank-you email and any pertinent materials. You may include a brief note with any additional information that was requested in your meeting, suggestions for further interaction or both.
- Complete the MSU Extension Strategic Connection Survey to document this meeting. This information is shared with the MSU Extension Director’s Office and used to help coordinate interactions with policymakers across the organization. The survey can be accessed online at extension.msu.edu/connections.



Additional opportunities

- Sign up to receive email newsletters and updates from your state senator and representative.
- Follow your state senator and representative on social media.
- Participate in local coffee hours, town halls or other local events.
- Stay up to date on local events by regularly reviewing their webpages and social media communications.

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