

Community Resource and Economic Development



CRED: Your Partner for a Prosperous Future

Communities across the country are facing uncertain times. Some must deal with burgeoning populations where the number of residents is outgrowing available space and new land use rules need to be developed. Others watch hopelessly as older populations die off and younger members of the community flee to greener occupational pastures. In some cases, community leaders find their regions withering on the vines in the wake of the collapse of one type or another of industry.

They need help, and they know it. But it's all new to them, and they don't know exactly where to turn. They consider searching for new industries, but they know many other regions are courting the same companies. They think of hiring some kind of guru to divine a new pathway to fortune. They apply for grants that may not be awarded and may not produce much if they do arrive. Change in the way the world operates has gone beyond the proverbial "constant." It is occurring at a rapid pace, continually creating new challenges for communities to maintain vibrant local economies and high quality of life.

Cooperative Extension, a leader for generations in research-based education, is a valuable partner for leaders and citizens dealing with such issues affecting their communities. Extension's community resource and economic development programs recognize community as the focal point where people can feel a sense of personal involvement, take pride in their actions, and together with their neighbors and other community members, position themselves for a prosperous and secure future.

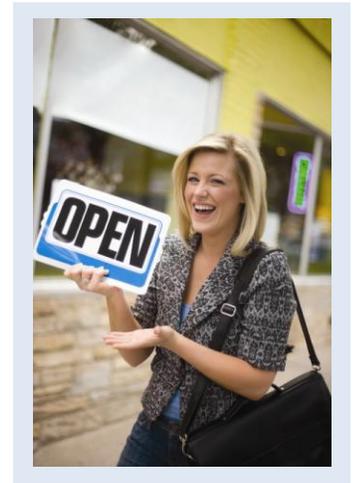
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The official name for these programs varies from state to state and even within Extension's framework. But nationally, the words that truly describe the concept have become the official name: Community Resource and Economic Development (CRED). CRED educational programs respond to local needs and opportunities, drawing upon university expertise to provide information, strategies, and relevant education to help people take control over their future. These program are developed and often delivered in partnership with local groups local government, community organizations, individuals and agencies which have a stake in the economic and social future of the community.



What is economic and community development?

CRED professionals view economic development in broad terms that include many forms of business activity such as manufacturing, retail, services, tourism, healthcare, as well as workforce development and other forms of activity that increase jobs and income in a community. Community development is viewed from a broad perspective that includes economic development as well as housing, education, recreation, civic organizations, leadership development, religious organizations and others. And community development involves attention to inclusion and who is engaged and how the community will sustain itself in all of its aspects. Community development includes quality of place aspects—education and recreation among them—that are not strictly limited to jobs and income.



Who are these programs for?

CRED programs are designed for specific types of audiences, including local government officials, economic development professionals, other public officials, a wide array of other local leaders, small businesses and industries. The programs and the professionals who administer them endeavor to foster partnerships that link universities to local stakeholders, government agencies, businesses and organizations to deliver the highest quality programs.



As with the Cooperative Extension System, Community Resource and Economic Development programs are based on values and principles that provide the foundation upon which effective programs for strategic goals and action are implemented. CRED core values include equal opportunity, self-determination, jobs and healthy economies, safe communities, fairness and the common good.

The bottom line is that in practice, CRED programs use partnerships and inclusive participation by stakeholders to address critical issues of concern to individuals, families and communities, including social, environmental, economic and other issues affecting people's lives.

Program themes and program thrusts

Community development is a process that builds the capacity of local residents to work together to improve social and economic conditions in their communities. Community development only can occur where there is community action. CRED programs propagate purposive action for developing and maintaining viable and sustainable communities through research-based information and technical assistance. They frequently include local leadership training to help community leaders understand social decision-making processes and to increase their skills in helping the community respond appropriately.



Specific types of programming vary from state to state, but all reflect a core set of three program thrusts, namely building economically viable communities, renewing civic engagement and enhancing community decision-making and governance.

1. Building economically viable communities

Creates entrepreneurs and business-friendly communities by nurturing new locally based businesses that draw on the assets, talents and needs of the community that are critical for local economic development. Just as “it takes a village to raise a child,” it takes a community to support budding entrepreneurs and businesses.

Develops e-commerce opportunities through global marketing and export of goods and services, which requires the use of the Internet. Effective non-profit and governmental operations also demand appropriate use of electronic resources

Fosters community sustainability through viable communities that can be sustained socially, environmentally and economically. This entails attention to development of green industries, local food systems, natural resource enhancement and environmental stewardship efforts in addition to working effectively with public and private entities and paying attention to issues of equity and justice.

Collaborates to build regional economies by understanding that communities do not exist in a vacuum and necessarily are part of larger regional systems. Viability has been shown to be linked to working collaboratively as a region to maximize resources and opportunities and to develop regional economies synergistically.

Nurtures community and individual assets through asset-based development by promoting opportunities on the basis of one’s strengths and potential that can provide competitive advantage as well as a foundation for success. Wealth creation and retention require attention to developing the financial assets of individuals, families, organizations, businesses, communities and regions.



2. Renewing civic engagement

Develops innovative, collaborative leadership activities and training because communities consistently deal with a host of issues that demand shared leadership skills in the midst of increasing complexity, diversity and change.

Engages new populations in community actions. An influx of new residents can create a stronger and richer local fabric of community, but also has the potential of creating harmful conflict if newcomers are not engaged or integrated into the society.

Expands civic engagement through the process of public deliberation, which requires greater skills for listening to multiple perspectives and purposefully deliberating and weighing multiple choices for managing conflict and creating effective solutions as public issues become more complex and polarized.



Develops and strengthens community organizations into effective and diverse community groups that comprise the civic infrastructure of communities, many of which rely on volunteers and require nurturing through board training, planning and other aspects to successfully contribute to the local social, economic and environmental sustainability

3. Enhancing community decision-making and governance

Facilitates community planning and the process of implementing plans through thinking and planning strategically which is critical to sustaining the community. The process of engaging residents and others affected by the plan is tantamount to building ownership and successful implementation.

Helps communities understand and deal with changes by analyzing, interpreting and sharing information and data coupled with exploration of alternatives essential to understanding and managing the various changes facing today's communities.



Determines land-use patterns and their relationships to sustainable development as a way of using limited physical space and its effects on the economy, aesthetics and environment regardless of whether the community is dealing with growth or decline. The future depends on thinking strategically.

How do I bring such programs to my community?

- Contact your state's Cooperative Extension system to learn more about the programming and resources available in your area. Call your county Cooperative Extension office.
- Consider Extension as a potential partner or resource for community and economic development activities occurring in your community.
- Let your local legislators know that you support Extension's educational programming in the area of Community Resource and Economic Development.

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