



An Exploratory Study of Funding for Agricultural Communications Offices

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Introduction

The Department of Information and Publications at the University of Maryland serves the Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station, and the College of Agriculture. When I became chairperson in June 1981, the Extension Service also acquired a new director. A few months later, Maryland also had a new Dean of Agriculture. A change in department chairs often opens up opportunities for modifications in departmental programs, but these other administrative changes were added catalysts for possible "new directions" in the communications activities for teaching, research, and Extension at Maryland.

In May 1982 the department underwent a 3-day review by an invited panel of four external agricultural communicators. The team's analysis was thorough and actually added a certain amount of credibility to departmental requests for additional space, new equipment, and new positions. But despite the review process, some kinds of information were still lacking, particularly data with regard to funding and budgeting. In today's climate of tight resources, an informal assembly of figures that lack formal justification is not enough to plan for any department. Therefore, it was thought that, if the department could obtain information about funding of other departments our knowledge base for decisionmaking could be considerably enhanced. Data from sources comparable to

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Maryland's agricultural information operation were perceived as potentially useful in assessing current resources and long-term needs.

A very simple, one-page, nine-question survey form was mailed to all land-grant agricultural information offices in late 1982. Twenty-nine states responded, or just under 60 percent.

In general, the nine questions were an attempt to get comparative data to help address some Maryland concerns.

What is the funding level of other information departments and how does Maryland compare? Our hunch was that we were "underfunded" compared to other states.

How much of the communications budget is funded by resident instruction, research, and Extension? Our feeling was that Maryland Extension was carrying a proportionately larger part of our funding, in comparison with other states.

How do Maryland's travel funds compare with other states? We had the feeling that our travel allocations were low.

Communicators at Maryland have a dual system, with some faculty members on tenure track with academic rank and others with associate staff classification. We were curious about staffing patterns in other states.

Another concern we had was the level of our operating budget as compared with salary allocations. Salaries make up 78 percent of our total budget. Our hunch was that this is considerably higher than other states.

Another prospect Maryland faces is charging for Extension publications. Our interest was finding out how many states are charging for publications and how much revenue is generated.

Findings

The results of the survey encompass 29 states (28 responses plus Maryland data) and will be reported by question asked. The range of responses will be given and an average when it is appropriate. For comparison purposes, specific Maryland data will be listed.

1. What is the total amount of the budget for your communications/information department for the 1982-1983 fiscal year? Please include revolving and restricted accounts.

The range of responses was \$50,000 to \$2.4 million. The average was \$800,368. One state did not respond to the question and indicated that only administration knew the total amount budgeted for communication efforts.

Maryland's 1982-1983 fiscal year budget was \$600,000.

2. What is the total number of professional staff in your department (total FTE's filled or vacant)?

The range was 4 to 47. The average was 17.5.

Maryland has 14 professional FTE positions. Support staff number 30.

3. Do your personnel have faculty status or rank; in other words, do they have an opportunity to seek tenure?

Four states indicated all staff are on tenure track. Eight states said faculty do not have this opportunity. Seventeen states reported a combination, with mainly senior faculty members and the department chairperson (or agricultural editor) with academic rank and other staff classified as associate staff.

At Maryland two faculty members have tenure, eight are on tenure track, and three positions are "associate staff" status. New hirings will all be associate staff positions.

4. Of the total departmental budget, what percentage comes from Extension, resident instruction, the experiment station, and other sources?

This question was asked under the assumption that agricultural communication offices on most campuses serve all three components of a land grant system: teaching, research, and Extension. On some campuses, however, research and Extension communication efforts are independent. Of the 30 states responding, nine reported separate research and Extension communication components, and information provided was only for the Extension side. Of the 17 states reporting funding from both Extension and research or from Extension, research, and teaching, the average support was 70 percent from Extension and 25 percent from research. Resident instruction generally accounted for 5 percent or less. Two states had departments with major teaching responsibilities. Consequently, budget contributions from resident instruction were much higher (15 percent) in both cases. Three states did not respond to this question.

At Maryland, Extension contributes 85 percent of the department budget, research 14 percent, and resident instruction, 1 percent.

5. In your departmental budget, what amounts are earmarked for salaries and wages, labor and assistants, and other operating purposes?

My interest in this question was to find out the proportion of funds allocated for salaries of both professional and support staff compared to "operating" allocations. The feeling at

Maryland is that funds allocated for operating are low in relation to wages and salary. In other words, having adequate staff is one thing but adequate funding to support their activities is also crucial.

Results indicated that, indeed, this is the situation at Maryland. Twenty-three states responded to the question with the range of 33 percent to 92 percent. The average was 71 percent. Maryland's percentage is 78, definitely at the high end of the scale.

6. Within your budget, how much is earmarked for travel and new equipment?

Travel: Four states did not provide dollar figures; one of these states indicated that because of severe state restrictions and a call-back of funds, no travel money existed during that budget year. The other three states indicated that there are no travel allocations in their budgets but funds were provided by the administration if travel requests were approved.

To provide a more meaningful comparison, travel funds were divided by the number of FTE's in the department. The range of travel allocations per FTE was \$8 to \$2,529. Most responses hovered around \$1,000 per FTE. The average was \$1,044.

Maryland's allocation (\$970 per FTE) seems to be a reasonable allocation relative to other state practices.

New Equipment: Responses were a mixed bag. Fourteen states indicated their budgets had funds specifically designated for new equipment. Figures ranged from \$500 to \$68,000. The average was \$24,000. The balance of the states indicated one of three situations: money was usually earmarked for new equipment but none was allocated for 1982-83; no money is allocated in the budget for new equipment but new equipment can be obtained by requesting funds from the administration; new equipment is generally purchased with year-end surplus funds when available.

7. Within your operating budget, how much is allocated for Extension publication production and printing?

Eight states could not respond to this question, indicating that publication monies were allocated to departments or program areas and not directly to the communications department.

The range in responses was \$18,000 to \$566,000. Average was \$180,056.

The Extension publications budget at Maryland is \$73,000. Some departments and program areas, however, often locate money to fund additional publications. It would appear that Maryland may not be budgeting enough for publications relative to other states.

8. At present, do you charge for publications?

Three states make all publications available free of charge. Maryland is one of those states. Two states charge for all publications. Twenty-four states charge for some publications.

9. If you charge for publications, how much revenue was generated in 1981-82?

Of the 27 states reporting that they charged for all or some of their publications, the range in revenues generated was \$100 to \$276,000. Average was \$46,672. Six states had little idea as to how much money was taken in from publications sales, indicating that they had no control over the account to which the money was being credited.

Maryland is scheduled to begin charging for Extension publications in July 1984. No decision has been made as to whether this policy will be for some or all publications.

Conclusions

Although this was an informal study, it provided some quick and reliable information. The data at least were one step better than relying on hunches about how funding is formulated in other information offices and departments.

I learned several things from this exercise. In some areas, Maryland's Department of Information and Publications has a reasonable level of funding. Money for travel seems to be in line with the national average, for example. The total budget for the department (1982-83 at \$600,000) seems comparable with other departments of our size and scope as well as with the average of the states responding to the survey. Maryland is a bit low with its publications funding, but a cost recovery program scheduled to begin in a year should help. Furthermore, as we catch up in our equipment needs, some of those operating funds can be diverted to our publications effort. Yearly allocations for new equipment (\$10,000) seem small, yet we have been able to purchase \$160,000 in new equipment during the past two years by using year-end surplus funds and by getting special request money from the administration. The majority of our purchases, however, were made with funds generated by job printing that was done for other state agencies. On paper, our equipment budget is

small but our mode of operation is allowing us to build up funds for considerable production and office equipment purchases. We have found that replacing antiquated, worn-out, and inefficient equipment is much easier than we thought it would be. We are finding that much of this new equipment is paying for itself in a few months and its greater efficiency leads to more "outside" work that provides even more dollars. We can do more work, do it much better, get it done faster than before. This makes for good customer relations and, consequently, more job opportunities.

With regard to the academic appointment and tenure issue, Maryland is moving away from faculty appointments and toward associate staff appointments. This was the case prior to 1979. At that time all staff (except for an Experiment Station science writer) were given academic rank and placed on tenure track. Now the administration believes communication positions (with the possible exception of the department chairperson) should be associate staff appointments. This mode seems to be in line with most states. However, a department with a mix of faculty and associate staff appointments can lead to problems when there are differences in salary scales and benefits between the two types of appointments.

Overall, this survey has given me a greater appreciation for the way Maryland's Department of Information and Publications is structured, funded, and budgeted. Much can be said for having research and Extension communicators within the same department, all trying to work for the same communication objectives of the institution's agricultural divisions. In half of the departments responding to the survey, administrators have no or little access to budget information such as: travel money, publications budget, money generated from publication sales, salary budget, cost of publications, allocations for new equipment and other factors. One would think it almost impossible to manage well if the department chair has little knowledge of, and control over, funds allocated to the operation. Perhaps land-grant administrators need to devote some attention to a model for improved communication offices (departments) in their institutions. At Maryland, the decision has been to let the communications operation function the same way as an academic department, trusting it to manage its budget, personnel, and plan for the future. At Maryland, this seems to be a viable model.