

# Extension Organizational Strengths: A Delphi Analysis

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## Abstract

*Sharing the importance of agriculture, agricultural education, and programmatic efforts through Extension is vital to ensuring policy makers and the general public understand the need for supporting the overall agricultural industry. However, communicating such importance can be challenging without accurate, evidence-based language to describe what makes agricultural initiatives unique and effective. Furthermore, having knowledge of the unique strengths of Extension builds a foundation of resources agricultural staff can use in problem-solving, communication, and education techniques. A Delphi study was conducted to research the unique strengths of University of Georgia Extension in an effort to better educate and communicate with local and state stakeholders. Findings resulted in 11 strengths that gained 100% agreement from research respondents. Six thematic categories covering all agreed-upon strengths document strengths in an explicit way that can also help with internal communication and education efforts within the Extension organization.*

**Keywords:** extension; organizational strengths; Delphi, appreciative inquiry

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## Introduction

“Strengths are the qualities that enable us to accomplish the organization’s mission” (Sreeramana, 2015, p. 233; “Benefits of SWOT Analysis,” 2016). Therefore, to have an abstract understanding of why individual and collective strengths are important, but not intentionally identify those strengths may result in missed opportunities where strengths can be connected to meaningful organizational initiatives. Whether tangible or intangible (“Benefits of SWOT Analysis,” 2016), strengths are organizational qualities that can include “human competencies, process capabilities, financial resources, products and services, customer goodwill and brand loyalty” (Sreeramana, 2015, p. 233). They are related to competence and “an organization with strong competency also has a solid brand identity built upon expertise, capabilities and resources within the organization” (Williams, 2019, para 2).

Organizational strengths and brand identity link to a national conversation that should be revisited in Extension. In 2005 (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2005) and 2007 (Peutz & Kroth, 2009), the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP)

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Leadership Advisory Council shared information about a report that used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to explore Extension's structural and personnel strengths. In 2009, Peutz and Kroth (2009) called for more strengths-based studies and interventions to aid Extension in problem-solving and responding effectively to change. This study aligns with that sentiment and furthers the conversation, acknowledging that strengths can create positive change in the way Extension approaches the work we do (Peutz & Kroth, 2009) and the stakeholders with whom we communicate. Stakeholders include the general public and policy makers; therefore, the idea of communicating effectively with others about what Extension is and what it offers, directly aligns with the first research priority of the 2016-2020 American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) National Research Agenda (Roberts et al., 2016). Research priority one focuses on "public and policy maker understanding of agriculture and natural resources" (Roberts et al., 2016, p. 9). As research agenda authors Enns, Martin, and Spielmaker (2016) expressed, "Agricultural educators, communicators and extension personnel will need to continue to seek methods, models, and programs which best educate the public and policy makers about the important and vital work occurring in the agricultural industry" (p. 16). Being intentional about making Extension's state dynamics, local connections, and needed expertise explicitly known is a beneficial step in exploring how to promote education in a way that aligns with organizational resources and strengths.

### **Benefits of Analyzing Organizational Strengths**

Strengths are important to the sustainability of any organization (Sreeramana, 2015) and, therefore, focusing on an organization's strengths coincides with focusing on its success ("Benefits of SWOT Analysis," 2016). Direction for this type of focus can come from an organizational internal analysis. Organizational successes are generally not anomalies separate from layers of decisions and intentional effort toward specific and well-explained goals. Thus, an internal analysis can be used to "look at your strengths as a vehicle for reviewing the quality of your decisions" (Johnston, n.d., para 4), which, for an organization, can have far-reaching effects on individuals and communities. When an organization prioritizes an internal analysis, there is an indication the organization seeks to improve its influence and remain relevant in its respective field.

Strength identification engages organizational members in necessary discussions, provides insight, promotes collaboration, synthesizes information, gives a foundation upon which to build, and establishes an opportunistic basis for everyone to be on the same page about an organization's standing ("Benefits of SWOT Analysis," 2016). Intentionally seeking out what is going well within an organization illuminates resources an organization already has that may have been previously ignored or not fully developed ("Benefits of SWOT Analysis," 2016). Additionally, acknowledging what an organization does well and to what extent it is successful can complement reasons why the organization is in existence and needs to continue being sustained (Johnston, n.d.). This not only confirms the necessity of an organization, but gives internal members and external supporters language to articulate what sets an organization apart from similar initiatives (Williams, 2019). Having evidence-based and agreed-upon language about why an organization is important in the grand scheme of a community, an industry, or a society, can be critical to organizations such as Extension that rely on government funds to provide what it promises to stakeholders (Steede et al., 2018).

Additionally, looking at both the strengths and weaknesses of an organization can guide its members on how the organization should position itself for future growth and success (Johnston, n.d.). However, when attempting to improve in one or more areas, it is suggested to focus on improving strengths rather than weaknesses (Pillay, 2014). It is possible that improving upon weaknesses can be much more difficult and confusing when an organization does not know its strengths; knowing where and how an organization excels opens doors to possibilities and problem-solving methods that may not be realized otherwise. Viewing an organization from a positive, strengths-based approach, rather than

from a deficit-approach can limit generative conversations, reduce new ways of looking at the current reality in order to change it, and drain individual and collective energy (Bushe, 1999; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; “Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry”, n.d.). Conversely, a strengths-based approach, assumes that every social system “works” to some degree – that it is not in a complete state of entropy – and that a primary task of research is to discover, describe, and explain those social innovations, however small, which serve to give “life” to the system and activate members’ competencies and energies as more fully functioning participants in the formation and transformation of organizational realities. (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 154)

### **Conceptual Framework**

The underpinnings of appreciative inquiry (AI) are an appropriate lens through which to look at the study theoretically because it leads us to ask: “What if, instead of seeing organizations as problems to be solved, we saw them as miracles to be appreciated? How would our methods of inquiry and our theories of organizing be different?” (Bushe, 1999, p. 62). Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) are credited with creating and formalizing the concept of AI, an action-research (Bushe, 1995), strengths-based way of thinking and asking questions to help individuals and organizations problem-solve and strategize. It is an example of applied theory and an iterative research process that bases individual and organizational change on data. The illumination of an organization’s strengths affirms the organization and its members while highlighting factors that help an organization reach its potential. These factors are not only celebrated, but they are further developed to propel an organization to its next level (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

In their challenge to Extension professionals to familiarize themselves with AI for the purposes of using it more often, Peutz and Kroth (2009) expounded upon the principles and application of AI. The AI philosophy is based on five principles (Peutz & Kroth, 2009) that recognize: (1) humans’ roles in creating social reality through conversation (the constructionist principle), (2) “seeds of change” (Peutz & Kroth, 2009, para 3) being rooted in the first question of an inquiry and an organization putting its energy in the direction of that question (the simultaneity principle), (3) the value of gathering information and letting people express feelings through storytelling (the poetic principle), (4) the impact of individuals’ thoughts and imagination on their future (the anticipatory principle), and (5) the power of positivity for learning and contagious energy (the positive principle). Furthermore, Paranjpey (2017) contended that AI is about more than positivity; it is about changing individuals’ mindset and behaviors. Some would say AI also is not about being unrealistic or too optimistic, but that it involves rationality, emotions, intellect, and insight to create new ideas about a situation (Peutz & Kroth, 2009).

The benefits of AI are that, by valuing strengths over weaknesses, it uses collaboration and intentional, strengths-based questioning to energize people to brainstorm new possibilities (Paranjpey, 2017). This process can be applied to how organizations use strengths-based data to communicate, equipping them with the tools and language needed to broadly educate and engage with employees, external stakeholders, other organizations, the general public, and society at large. Benefits of the AI philosophy (Peutz and Kroth, 2009) are also associated with how it fosters humility, brings diverse groups together, promotes the equal treatment of people, and is a means of creating a better future through positive change (Whitney, 2014). AI is one way to get an organization to communicate more openly about change and internal analysis processes, build empathy, and boost morale in environments where distrust and uncertainty affect employees’ experiences (Paranjpey, 2017). Overall, AI juxtaposes an appreciation for the past and a look into what the future could become.

### **Purpose and Research Objectives**

The purpose of this study, informed by the following research objectives, was to identify core strengths of the University of Georgia Extension organization in an effort to enhance the external education and communication strategy of the overall organization. The research objectives were:

1. Generate a comprehensive list of University of Georgia Extension strengths.
2. Arrive at a consensus, based on agreement levels of study participants, on the communicated strengths that are most prevalent to the mission and program implementation of University of Georgia Extension.

### **Methods**

Dalkey and Helmer's (1963) Delphi technique was used to explore the research objectives of this study. The Delphi method is based on a group communication (Terry & Osborne, 2015) and consensus-building process (Ludwig, 1997) that facilitates the research of a "phenomenon that cannot be directly tested or observed" (Costello & Rutherford, 2019, p. 1). Usually beginning with open-ended questions (Terry & Osborne, 2015), the Delphi technique involves a panel of experts who participate in repeated questioning (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963) for the purposes of gathering useful (Costello & Rutherford, 2019, p. 1), agreed-upon information. Despite variations of the technique existing, experts are one of the main components of the technique (Gamon, 1991) and include people who are connected to the study because of their background and expertise related to the topic at hand (Costello & Rutherford, 2019, p.1). "Strengths of the Delphi are its combination of qualitative (written) and quantitative (numerical) data and its ability to form a consensus of expert opinion" (Gamon, 1991, para 6).

For-profit businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and governmental agencies are among the entities that have used the Delphi method to gather information, forecast future issues and opportunities, and make change (Ludwig, 1997). In Extension and agriculture specifically, the Delphi technique has been used to study topics such as turf grass instruction modules (Mayfield et al., 2005), farmer-centered research (Polush et al., 2016), workplace issues related to Extension educator recruitment and retention (Kroth & Peutz, 2011), leadership (Nistler et al., 2011), international agricultural journalism (Kubitz et al., 2013), and agricultural literacy (Frick et al., 1991).

This particular study focused on explicitly identifying the strengths of the University of Georgia Extension organization. Nineteen panel experts participated in a three-round Delphi process and were identified as experts because of their role in the organization as representatives from the organization's state Extension Leadership Team. Specifically, there were experts representing the administrative, Agricultural and Natural Resources, 4-H and Youth Development, and Family and Consumer Sciences programmatic areas. Furthermore, the individuals represented all four districts within the state. The panel of experts, seven of which were male and 12 of which were female, held role titles such as State Program Director, District Extension Director, and Program Development Coordinator. All three rounds of the Delphi were administered using the Qualtrics online survey tool. Questionnaires were administered according to the recommendations of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman et al., 2008). In particular, a pre-notice message was sent to participants prior to the survey invitation. The survey invitation was sent approximately three-days later. Reminder messages were sent approximately every three-days following the invitation. The surveys remained open for approximately two-weeks. Response rates for round one, round two, and round three were all 100%.

During the first round of the study, experts were asked to respond to the prompt: "In your opinion, what are the top strengths of the Georgia Extension System?" Individuals were asked to

provide a word or short descriptions to describe up to five strengths. Responses from round one were analyzed using the Dedoose qualitative analysis software (Version 7.0.23; Dedoose, 2016) with minor editorial intervention including grammar, spelling, and removal of duplicate items. Responses generated from round one were used to develop the questionnaire used in round two.

The questionnaire used in round two was administered to hone in on the initial strengths provided in round one. Experts were presented the list of strengths and were asked to the level of importance they associate with the strengths identified in the first round using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all important*, 2 = *Somewhat important*, 3 = *Important*, 4 = *Very important*, 5 = *Extremely important*). Responses from round two were downloaded and analyzed in the SPSS version 25 statistical software package. Average scores for each item were calculated and those receiving a mean score higher than 3.55 were retained for the next round (Garson, 2014).

Items that were retained from round two were used to construct round three of the process. Round three was administered to gain a level of consensus from the experts and to establish a final list of strengths that reflected the most collaborative thought-process of the group. Experts were presented the list of strengths and were asked whether each of the strengths should be retained using a binary response scale, *Yes* or *No*. Responses from round three were downloaded and analyzed in the SPSS version 25 statistical software package. Each item that had greater than 80% of collective agreement was retained (Garson, 2014).

## Results

The first round of the study produced 50 unique responses following item consolidation (Table 1). The list of 50 items was then presented to the panel in round two of the process. The means for the strengths provided in round two ranged from 3.16 to 4.79. The organizational strength gaining the highest level of agreement and the lowest deviation related to the strong impact of Extension's local programs. The remaining top 10 strengths related to Extension's presence in and support from local counties, state-wide influence and support, and personnel who are not only skilled, but are invested in the services they provide. There were 44 items (88%) retained for round three after six were below the 3.55 mean cutoff point.

**Table 1**

*Delphi Round One and Two Results: Level of Importance for University of Georgia Extension Strengths (50 items)*

Strength	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strong impactful programs locally	4.79	0.42
Strong local support	4.74	0.45
County delivery model and faculty across all counties in Georgia	4.63	0.68
Strong impactful programs across the state	4.58	0.61
4-H Program	4.58	0.69
Strong state support	4.58	0.61
Local connections to communities and stakeholders	4.58	0.51
Responsiveness	4.58	0.61
Connection to the Land-Grant University	4.53	0.77
Dedicated, motivated, passionate workforce of highly trained employees	4.53	0.70
Vision and leadership	4.47	0.84
Statewide network of well educated University of Georgia faculty and staff	4.47	0.70

**Table 1**

*Delphi Round One and Two Results: Level of Importance for University of Georgia Extension Strengths (50 items), Continued...*

Connection to Youth in both Rural and Urban Georgia	4.42	0.69
Partnerships with local groups	4.42	0.69
Strong local community connections/collaborations	4.42	0.61
Being tied directly to the people in a given county	4.42	0.77
Ability to build and sustain relationships	4.32	0.75
Employees who care about people in their communities	4.32	0.67
Access to up-to-date, science and research based, unbiased, valid data	4.32	0.89
Access to the expertise needed to work with communities and citizens to solve problems	4.26	0.73
Respected as source of knowledge	4.21	0.85
A sustained and efficient organization with a long record of success	4.21	0.79
Targeted education to address Georgia's leading concerns	4.21	0.85
4-H is a partner in public education with school delivery model	4.21	0.92
Resources from the University	4.16	0.76
Ability to collaborate with other agencies and government entities	4.16	0.76
Local needs being met daily	4.16	0.90
Strong administrative infrastructure supporting county operations	4.11	1.05
Strong educators	4.11	0.81
Needs based	4.11	0.94
Ability to address a multitude of relevant issues with resources and knowledge	4.11	0.88
Excellent strength of specialists	4.11	1.05
Access to specialists	4.11	1.05
Ability to convey knowledge	4.05	1.03
Partnerships with state groups	4.05	0.85
Available to everyone	4.00	1.00
Great collaborators	4.00	0.88
4-H Program's ability to reach so many kids	4.00	1.05
Commitment to training up experts	4.00	1.00
Many Ext ANR specialists/researches are top in their field	3.89	0.81
Specialist funded to work directly with county faculty	3.89	1.20
Program planning to address needs	3.84	1.07
Faculty strengths based on local needs	3.84	0.83
FACS is equipped to address many educational needs around issue based areas -- we just need more agents	3.79	1.13
Ability to attract external grants and dollars in ways no other network can that can bring resources to communities	3.53	0.96
Applied research	3.53	1.07
Partnerships with national groups	3.53	0.84
Family programs	3.53	0.90
Offering assistance	3.37	1.07
Low cost	3.16	1.26

In the third and final round, participants were given the opportunity to share their level of agreement about the remaining 44 items. Levels of agreement ranged from 70.59% to 100%. Six strengths fell below the 80% cutoff point, while 38 strengths were retained (Table 2). An agreement of 100% was reached for 11 strengths. These top strengths revolved around resources gained from

University of Georgia, having highly skilled and motivated educators, and being able to partner with school districts to deliver 4-H curriculum. Additional strengths agreed upon by all research participants included strong local partnerships, access to research-based information, and programs that are recognized as being impactful for local communities and the state of Georgia, as a whole. Fifteen strengths achieved levels of 94.12 - 94.44% agreement, while 12 strengths achieved levels of 82.35% to 88.89% agreement.

**Table 2**

*Delphi Round Three Results: Level of Consensus with University of Georgia Extension Strengths (44 items)*

Strengths	Consensus %
Resources from the University	100.00
Strong educators	100.00
Dedicated, motivated, passionate workforce of highly trained employees	100.00
4-H is a partner in public education with school delivery model	100.00
Strong local community connections/collaborations	100.00
Partnerships with local groups	100.00
Statewide network of well-educated University of Georgia faculty and staff	100.00
Access to up-to-date, science and research based, unbiased, valid data	100.00
Strong impactful programs locally	100.00
Strong impactful programs across the state	100.00
Responsiveness	100.00
Connection to the Land-Grant University	94.44
Employees who care about people in their communities	94.44
Ability to collaborate with other agencies and government entities	94.44
Ability to build and sustain relationships	94.12
Strong administrative infrastructure supporting county operations	94.12
Strong state support	94.12
Strong local support	94.12
4-H Program	94.12
Partnerships with state groups	94.12
Many Ext ANR specialists/researches are top in their field	94.12
Access to the expertise needed to work with communities and citizens to solve problems	94.12
Program planning to address needs	94.12
Needs based	94.12
Ability to convey knowledge	94.12
Ability to address a multitude of relevant issues with resources and knowledge	94.12
Vision and leadership	88.89
Local connections to communities and stakeholders	88.89
Excellent strength of specialists	88.89
Access to specialists	88.89
Available to everyone	88.89
Commitment to training up experts	88.24
4-H Program's ability to reach so many kids	88.24
County delivery model and faculty across all counties in Georgia	88.24
Connection to Youth in both Rural and Urban Georgia	83.33
Respected as source of knowledge	82.35
Local needs being met daily	82.35

**Table 2**

*Delphi Round Three Results: Level of Consensus with University of Georgia Extension Strengths (44 items), Continued...*

Faculty strengths based on local needs	82.35
Being tied directly to the people in a given county	77.78
A sustained and efficient organization with a long record of success	76.47
Great collaborators	76.47
Specialist funded to work directly with county faculty	76.47
Targeted education to address Georgia's leading concerns	76.47
FACS is equipped to address many educational needs around issue based areas - - we just need more agents	70.59

### Conclusions

Based on the results of this state-wide study, it can be concluded that the 11 strengths with 100% consensus are University of Georgia Extension's top organizational assets. It can also be concluded that the overall list of strengths can be grouped into six core categories: (1) infrastructure, (2) personnel, (3) needs-based focus, (4) institutional resources, (5) collaborations, and (6) longevity. These core categories are interrelated and, even though the infrastructure category is affiliated with the most strengths, all strengths are distributed consistently among the 70-100% consensus spectrum shown in Table 2. Also, these six core categories and their corresponding strengths (Table 3) highlight various aspects that are foundational to University of Georgia Extension's structure and identity. Elements of the organization's infrastructure such as the 4-H delivery model and the combined top-down (state) and bottom-up (local) approach allows the organization to be unique and effective. It can be argued that this core category, along with the remaining five, distinguish University of Georgia Extension from other organizations and community-based programmatic efforts (Williams, 2019). Its infrastructure also makes programmatic efforts possible; such efforts cater to both youth and adults and have no limit to the type of community served. Personnel who implement these efforts are a part of the organization's strong workforce. Quality personnel comprised of employees who are committed, caring, well-educated, and well-trained. Not only is the organization's infrastructure unique, but the type of initiatives implemented by personnel are also unique due to programs and services based on the needs of each respective community. A needs-based focus guides the organization in consistently targeting and assisting with a variety of issues in relevant and responsive ways. A main component of addressing needs is the use of institutional resources garnered from the land-grant university system. This core category, which could be considered a sub-category of the infrastructure category, also involves the expertise of Extension faculty and staff. Such expertise is applied in tandem with the knowledge and experience of local community members to resolve local issues. Other University of Georgia Extension-based collaborations include partnerships on the local and state level for all three programming areas. Lastly, University of Georgia Extension benefits from continued success and longevity, perhaps because of the aforementioned five core categories. The organization has used the aspects of every category to adapt, adjust, and meet community needs over the last century.

**Table 3**

*Core Categories and Corresponding University of Georgia Extension Strengths*

Strengths	Number of Strengths
<i>Infrastructure</i>	14
4-H is a partner in public education with school delivery model	
Strong impactful programs locally	

**Table 3***Core Categories and Corresponding University of Georgia Extension Strengths, Continued...*

Strong impactful programs across the state	
Strong administrative infrastructure supporting county operations	
Strong state support	
Strong local support	
4-H Program	
Local connections to communities and stakeholders	
Available to everyone	
4-H Program's ability to reach so many kids	
County delivery model and faculty across all counties in Georgia	
Connection to Youth in both Rural and Urban Georgia	
Being tied directly to the people in a given county	
Specialist funded to work directly with county faculty	
<i>Personnel</i>	8
Strong educators	
Dedicated, motivated, passionate workforce of highly trained employees	
Statewide network of well-educated University of Georgia faculty and staff	
Employees who care about people in their communities	
Many Ext ANR specialists/researchers are top in their field	
Vision and leadership	
Excellent strength of specialists	
Commitment to training up experts	
<i>Needs-based Focus</i>	8
Responsiveness	
Program planning to address needs	
Needs based	
Ability to address a multitude of relevant issues with resources and knowledge	
Local needs being met daily	
Faculty strengths based on local needs	
Targeted education to address Georgia's leading concerns	
FACS is equipped to address many educational needs around issue based areas -- we just need more agents	
<i>Institutional Resources</i>	7
Resources from the University	
Access to up-to-date, science and research based, unbiased, valid data	
Connection to the Land-Grant University	
Access to the expertise needed to work with communities and citizens to solve problems	
Ability to convey knowledge	
Access to specialists	
Respected as source of knowledge	
<i>Collaborations</i>	6

**Table 3***Core Categories and Corresponding University of Georgia Extension Strengths, Continued...*

Strong local community connections/collaborations	
Partnerships with local groups	
Ability to collaborate with other agencies and government entities	
Ability to build and sustain relationships	
Partnerships with state groups	
Great collaborators	
<i>Longevity</i>	1
A sustained and efficient organization with a long record of success	

In accordance with AI procedures (Paranjpey, 2017), the process of gathering data from leaders and analyzing organizational strengths was generative in nature and provided a lot of information in a short time span. Moreover, the joint nature of involving all Extension programs and all state districts in the study aligned with the “collaborative interpretation” (Whitney, 2014, p. 27) components of the AI and Delphi processes. This type of collective inquiry cut through silos and gave employees more understanding about other programmatic components of the large organization with which they may be less familiar. Due to the methods used and the detailed-results, study findings not only support national strengths-based Extension research from 16 years ago (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2005), but expands it and reiterates that Extension’s organizational strengths make a positive difference. Though these findings are not completely novel, it is worth empirically documenting what this organization does well and exploring exactly which strengths are prioritized and elevated. Due to the purpose of the study revolving around enhanced external education and communication, results provide evidence-based, agreed-upon language about what is most prevalent to the mission and program implementation of University of Georgia Extension. Furthermore, it is important that the organization not only be known by the specific educational programs and services it provides, but also by the impact it makes; communicating *how* that impact is made differentiates the organization as a valuable, consistent, and relevant resource in an ever-changing world.

While the results of the research are encouraging and provide a foundation upon which to build future applied and theoretical endeavors, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations associated with the study. First, the results of the study are limited to the insights of the 19 leaders invited to participate in the expert panel. Participants work closely with Extension employees on a daily basis and have a pulse on how the organization is doing on micro- and macro-levels. However, although care was taken to ensure knowledgeable and diverse programmatic viewpoints were represented on the panel, the use of internal personnel (specifically those with more administrative responsibilities) limits the potential for external perspectives and views from those not in leadership positions within the organization. Additionally, organizations exist within larger contexts and are malleable depending on external factors (Lamm et al., 2016). For example, political or institutional priorities may cause rapid changes that are external to the organization, yet fundamentally alter the scope and priorities of the organization. Therefore, the results should be considered as accurate at the point of collection; however, it would be expected that these observations may change in the future. Nevertheless, the results of the study provide rigorous insight into the organizational strengths of an Extension system that may also provide insights and a starting point for similar organizations.

### **Implications**

Though conducted for the context of University of Georgia Extension, the study's findings and implications relate to the context and purpose of the overall Extension organization. It can also be implied that the study's six core categories can be used as a framework for Extension to not only acknowledge areas of organizational vitality, but also of opportunistic growth. Thus, while these overarching categories represent macro-level strengths, they can also be applied to micro-level decision-making aspects of each respective state Extension organization. For example, because an organizational strength relates to programmatic efforts being available for everyone, are there more intentional ways to involve youth and families from urban settings in a certain county or region? What new community-based needs has the COVID-19 era posed and in what creative ways can those needs be met? Do newly hired personnel within a particular programming area feel well-trained and if not, what can be done to improve in that area? What new and innovative collaborations can be created that can be beneficial to a county's local staff, youth, families, and/or farmers? The overarching core categories and the corresponding strengths can be used as gauges to celebrate strengths, recognize opportunities, generate new ideas, and respond to change (Peutz & Kroth, 2009) on macro- and micro-levels.

By conducting an internal audit, this study made implicit strengths more explicit in a way that documents and clearly articulates Extension's importance and influence. For University of Georgia Extension, documenting and prioritizing organizational strengths was foundational to the process of creating a brief, simple, and accurate way to convey everything the organization stands for and does. Other Extension programs can now use this information to assist in communication efforts that capture the essence of why the organization's educational programs and services are effective. A consistent communication strategy is vital as organizations communicate internally among organizational members and externally with stakeholders and the general public (Frost, n.d.). Thus, using language offered by this study, Extension employees can more easily provide information about the organization to employees and community members who are new to Extension and to policy makers who seek strengths-based empirical work to express why agricultural initiatives are worth investing in now and in the future (Enns et al., 2016; Johnston, n.d.). Current employees also benefit from the articulation of these strengths; the more they know they are one of the core reasons for Extension's effectiveness and sustainability, the more they "understand their unique contribution and how it fits in the overall success of the organization" (Paranjpey, 2017, p. 120). Viewing Extension through a strengths-based perspective offers the organization information that highlights the unique skills and characteristics its employees bring to the table, which can lead to boosting morale and motivation on an organization-wide scale. Informing staff of how their roles impact the organization's success, sharing success stories, and ensuring the value-added proposition of the organization to the larger society can help employees feel more engaged and satisfied (Kohll, 2018).

### **Recommendations**

Currently, few articles merge AI and Delphi techniques. With this study as a foundation, future research could involve conducting a Delphi with external stakeholders on various levels (community members, industry leaders, legislators, and so forth) to see what University of Georgia Extension's strengths are from an external perspective. Juxtaposing stakeholder responses with the results of this study could be of interest, especially if external stakeholders' feedback aligns with internal employee feedback or if new themes emerge. Furthermore, much research and popular press information exists about the importance of individual strengths. However, there is an opportunity for more research to be done on organizational strengths, especially as it relates to exploring more strengths-based, AI-type studies. In addition to strengthening multi-disciplinary research, more intentional information about strengths-based organizations can not only help entities explain what they offer internally and to the

greater good, but it can also assist in other initiatives such as hiring practices based on aligning individual strengths with the organization's collective strengths to help fill gaps where the organization can improve. Overall, the AI philosophy and the Delphi technique are action-research tools that can assist agricultural organizations, with educating and communicating internally with leaders and employees and externally with stakeholders and the general public.

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