

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

What are the modern needs of Extension educators? Multitudes of program offerings, increasing populations in local communities, and trying to remain motivated and competitive professionals are all tensions that must be navigated in today's Extension work. While the methods of program delivery have seen evolved practice since Extension began in 1914, the framework and structure of defining the profession of an Extension educator have remained somewhat idle.

The Extension Elevated project sought to provide a response to the calls for more training in educational practice in Extension and a reimagining of how Extension educators can be proactive in their work. Through established educational and professional development programs, this project was able to shape guided pathways for Extension professionals' advancement.

To prepare a vision for the future of the Extension educator community, frameworks from numerous Land Grant University Extension systems and the Extension Foundation were contrasted to determine the best practices. Before final project deliverables were able even to be considered, it was necessary to thoroughly understand how to best meet the needs of contemporary Extension educators while remaining rooted in both foundational principles and emerging research.

INTERSHIP GOALS

- Create a better understanding of how the contemporary Extension educator is defined and what core competencies they are to be measured against
- Explore professional development pathways with CSU Extension
- Create an accessible resource collection for students to use who go through and/or graduate from the CSU Masters of Extension Education program
- Map out the needs and desires of Extension professionals to pursue growth and advancement in their Extension careers

APPLICATION TO MY EDUCATION

In my educational journey at CSU, I have sought numerous opportunities such as this project to inform my career goal of resource consulting and management for rural communities. By deeply exploring the capacity and growth mindset of Extension educators in both Colorado and beyond, I was equipped with a more explicit idea of how I can grow and mature myself into a community educator—Extension or otherwise. Topics which came up in this project repeatedly included time, resource, and partnership management. Without proper plans set in place, these consistent “jobs” of Extension educators will fall apart and what is left is highly subjective workplace goals and engagement with the community. If my career/educational aim is to better serve communities, success starts with consistently doing the little things like scheduling and recording observations.

EXPLORING EXTENSION COMPETENCIES

The first phase of the project began with numerous discussions and resource discovery about the standards to which Extension Educators are held—both in Colorado and other Land Grant Universities across the United States. By sorting through various structures and frameworks for Extension professionals' core competencies, the team created a table of competencies. This table includes 46 unique competencies which, when collectively reviewed, can begin to paint a cohesive picture of how the future of how Extension professionals set, maintain, and achieve standards of performance. Using an organizing framework from The Ohio State University, each competency was compiled under the headings of Self/Personal Development, People/Interpersonal, Business of Extension and Foundations of Extension (see Table 1.).

Comp Cat	Self/Personal Development	Source	Comp Cat	People (Interpersonal)	Source	Comp Cat	Business	Source	Comp Cat	Foundations	Source
CEP.1	Adaptability	CSU	CEP.1	Communication	CSU, Ohio State, IINE	CEB.1	Change Management	IINE (Adapted)	CEC.1	Careers in Extension/CSU	
CEP.2	Continuous Learning	Ohio State	CEP.2	Conflict Management	CSU	CEB.2	County Government and Public Policy	CSU	CEC.2	Educational and Developmental Psychology	CSU
CEP.3	Flexibility and Change	Ohio State	CEP.3	Customer Service	Ohio State	CEB.3	Entrepreneurship	IINE (Adapted)	CEC.3	Knowledge of Extension Organizational Structure	Ohio State (Adapted)
CEP.4	Inclusivity	IINE (Adapted)	CEP.4	Diversity	Ohio State	CEB.4	Evaluation Management	CSU	CEC.4	Knowledge of Land Grant Extension and Experiment Station Purpose and History	CSU
CEP.5	Initiative	CSU	CEP.5	Education of Diverse Audiences	CSU	CEB.5	Event Planning	CSU	CEC.5	Program Development and Delivery	CSU
CEP.6	Leadership	IINE (Adapted)	CEP.6	Interpersonal Relationships	Ohio State	CEB.6	Extension Programs	Ohio State	CEC.6	Subject Matter Competency	IINE (Adapted)
CEP.7	Professionalism	CSU, Ohio State	CEP.7	Technical Communication and Public Writing	CSU Proposed	CEB.7	Fundraising and Budgets	CSU	CEC.7	Understanding Stakeholders and Communities	Ohio State
CEP.8	Time Management	CSU Proposed	CEP.8	Collaboration as a Team Player	IINE (Adapted)	CEB.8	Marketing	CSU			
CEP.9	Self-Direction	Ohio State	CEP.9	Successful Teaching	IINE (Adapted)	CEB.9	Research/Dispersion	CSU			
CEP.10	Self-Awareness	CSU	CEP.10	Resource Management	Ohio State	CEB.10	Resource Management	Ohio State			
CEP.11	Service-Minded	CSU	CEP.11	Volunteer Management	CSU	CEB.11	Strategic Planning	CSU			
CEP.12	Thinking and Problem-Solving Competency	Ohio State	CEP.12	Community Engagement + Resourcefulness	CSU Proposed	CEB.12	Technology Adoption and Adaptation	Ohio State			
CEP.13	Competency Development	CSU	CEP.13	Membership	CSU Proposed	CEB.13	Research Management	CSU Proposed			

Table 1. Compilation of Core Competencies of Extension Educators

In this project, the question was posed of how Extension educators—and all Extension professionals, might navigate their development and serve their communities in a consistent manner while clearly pursuing advancement in their education and leadership. Meetings with CSU Extension led to the design of an Extension professionals pathway for Emerging, Developing, and Elevating (see Figure 1). Completion of this phase led to the creation of a handbook for educators who are considering the elevating step of pursuing CSU's Masters of Extension Education (M. Ex. Ed.) and graduates of the M. Ex. Ed. program (see Figure 2)

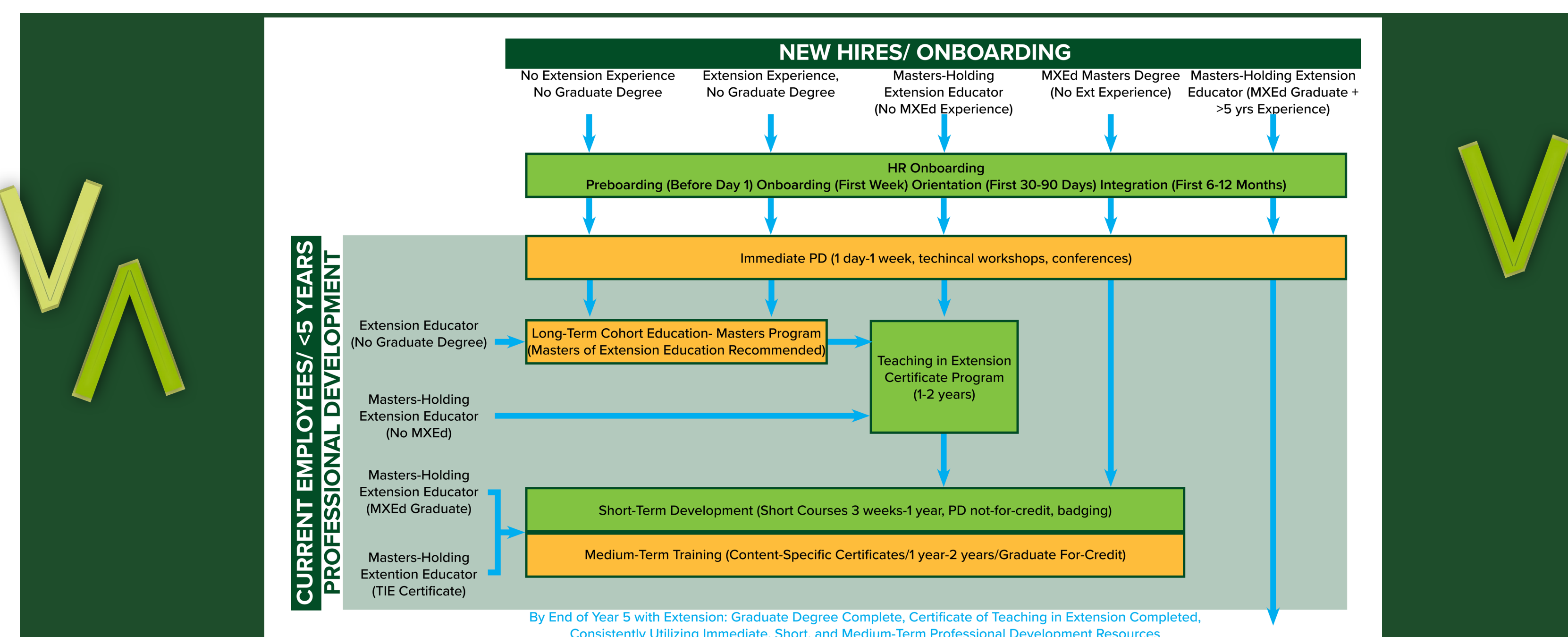


Figure 1. Flowchart of Extension Professional Initial 5 Years

WHAT WAS LEARNED

A central learning outcome of this project came from the pursuit of understanding core competencies and the necessary tools to bring them about in Extension education. Extension professionals each bring their own personalities and skills to their work for communities—making each engagement and county office unique. In evaluating the core competencies which have the capabilities to educate, create, and connect communities in more consistent and effective ways, the value of providing consistent and accessible educational and professional development tools.

As noted in Argabright, K., et. al, (2019), there is a modern challenge for Extension professionals, systems, and partners to “cultivate,” emerging core competencies, “within an Extension organization very different from the one we have come to know.” Having the opportunity to observe, evaluate, and reimagine the future of Extension education, provided me with lessons in organizational management, leadership, adaptation, and strategic planning.

One of my Clifton Strengths is “strategic.” Often times, I get distracted by the big-picture ideas of change and planning without making the effort to effect small change in more doable actions. The act of envisioning the future of Extension education and core competencies of Extension work can be daunting. But what became more obvious about this issue as the project progressed, is that the community of Extension is full of hard workers and those who desire to affect both collaborative and independent change for the sustainable future of communities. Practical skills like editing a book and collaborative planning around abstract activities helped me understand the value of teamwork and looking at issues from an objective, multi-faceted perspective.

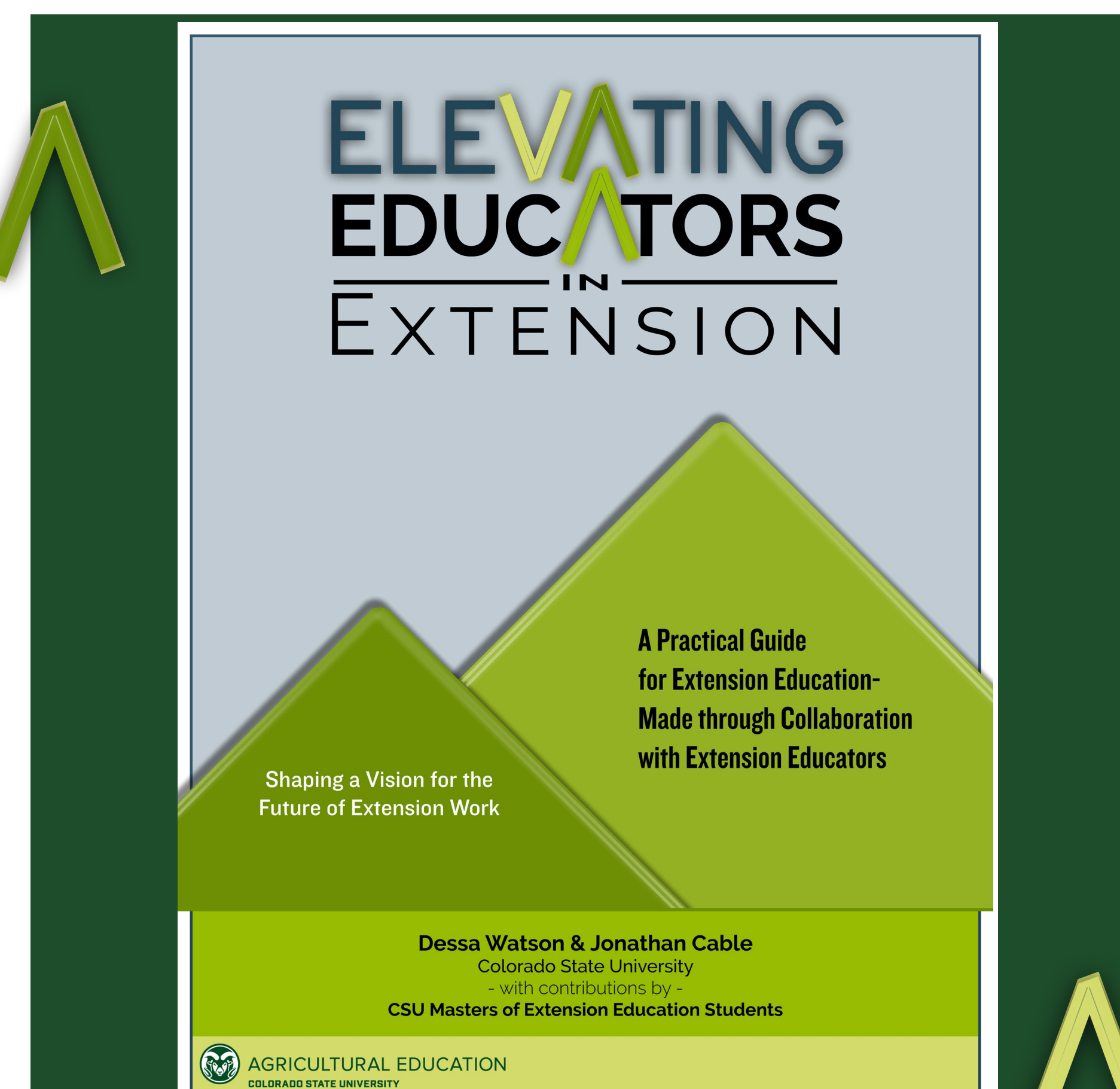


Figure 2. Elevating Educators in Extension Handbook Cover

ELEVATING- NEXT STEPS

- Introducing a Leadership in Extension Certificate Program—providing opportunities in advancement and recognition for developing and elevating Extension professionals
- Continued build-out of the Elevating Educators in Extension handbook- asking for graduates of the M. Ex. Ed. program to contribute their learning artifacts
- Creating Standards for Content Collaboration for the EEinE Handbook