



Contact: Scott Peters
607-239-9998 / sjpeters@syr.edu
www.extensionreconsidered.org

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AT CENTENNIAL, CITIZENS TO IMAGINE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION'S FUTURE Events in Dozen States Will Feature Creative Public Engagement

Syracuse, New York (February 11, 2014) – [Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life](#) announces a new initiative in partnership with the [Charles F. Kettering Foundation](#), the [Engagement Scholarship Consortium](#), [Community-Campus Partnerships for Health](#), and the [Art of the Rural](#) organization. The initiative, titled “[Extension Reconsidered](#)”, is engaging teams from a dozen states in organizing a series of events that invite citizens to imagine and consider new ways for Cooperative Extension to serve as a vital resource for communities in the 21st century. The initiative is timed to mark the centennial of the [Smith-Lever Act](#) that established the [Cooperative Extension System](#) in May 1914.

Over the spring and summer of 2014, participating teams will design forums and events in Alabama, California, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin. State teams are tasked with inviting diverse voices to both plan and participate in the events, including leaders from community arts, public humanities, and design fields. Teams will document their events and ideas through video interviews, written stories, and other creative mediums that can be shared and archived online.

A century after it was established Cooperative Extension continues to be a significant resource for people, businesses, and communities. It has a budget of almost \$2 billion, a staff of over 10,000 educators connecting land-grant college campuses with offices located in nearly every county of the nation, and more than 6 million youth enrolled in 4-H clubs. Extension's contributions to agriculture, natural resource management, family and consumer sciences, and youth development are widely valued. As it enters its second century, the Extension Reconsidered initiative will provide opportunities for people to explore how Extension professionals and volunteer leaders might improve the ways they engage people in addressing the new social, technological, and economic conditions of the 21st century.

“By inviting people with whom we work to imagine and consider creative ways for Extension to make a bigger impact and difference,” says Thomas Coon, Director of Extension at Michigan State University, “the Extension Reconsidered initiative will help us recommit to the bold idea of engagement between land-grant universities and the people of our states through off-campus work that takes place in communities, homes, farms, and businesses.”





At Extension Reconsidered events, participants will discuss a number of key questions from multiple points of view about Extension’s future and its roles in civic life. For example: What can and should Extension do to address the critical economic, ecological, and social problems that citizens are facing in the 21st century? How might Extension realize its larger potential as a force for renewing and strengthening our communities, our democracy, and our civic culture? How might it help people claim their places in public life by coming together to consider and act on the things that matter to them and their families?

“Extension Reconsidered provides the time and space needed to reflect on the community-university relationships cultivated by Extension over the years, and to consider ways to deepen and leverage them for even greater impact in the future,” says Sarena D. Seifer, Executive Director of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. “It will contribute to the revitalization of Extension’s important community development and organizing roles, and its effectiveness in bringing people together to address our country’s most pressing social issues.”

People often overlook Extension’s history of community development and organizing work. Yet, as Imagining America’s Co-Director Scott Peters has discovered in his research, “Organizing opportunities for people to come together to address public problems and express and pursue their hopes and ideals has been a central part of what Extension has done throughout its first century. As it begins its second century, we should take time to work through different views about how this legacy can best be carried forward.” In response to this need, Extension Reconsidered events will include discussion of the roles Extension can play in supporting public problem solving at the community level, with a special focus on how leaders from arts, humanities, and design fields can contribute.

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For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Scott Peters at 607-239-9998/sjpeters@syr.edu or Jennifer Jensen at 607-255-3083/jennifer.jensen@cornell.edu. Also see the website at www.extensionreconsidered.org.

