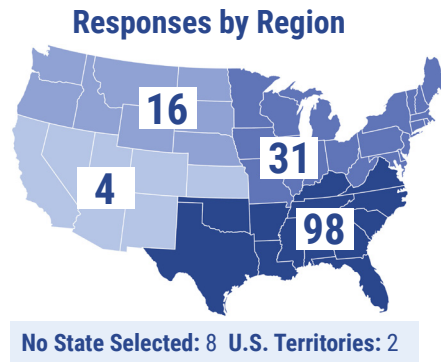


# Extension, Education and Outreach Forestry and/or Natural Resource Programming Delivery Mode & Fees Survey Report

In November 2020, Southern Regional Extension Forestry conducted a survey to better understand the modes of delivery and fees charged for forestry and natural resources Extension and outreach programs, as well as program fees charged. The survey was divided into two categories for program audiences: professionals and non-professionals. The survey was distributed via newsletters, personal contacts and social media. It was targeted to Cooperative Extension professionals working in forestry and natural resources (FNR) across the country as well as outreach professionals from other organizations such as state agencies or non-profit organizations. While there were 190 survey responses overall, there were 158 respondents who offer/deliver FNR programming (figure 1). The majority of the respondents worked in the southern United States (figure 1) and two thirds of all respondents (66%) belonged to a Cooperative Extension organization (table 1).

**158/190**  
Total Survey Respondents  
**Offer Forestry &/or  
Natural Resources  
Programs**



**Figure 1.** Reported regional location of respondents.

## Responses by Organization

Organization Type	Number
Cooperative Extension	67%
No Organization Selected	22%
University (not Cooperative Extension)	8%
State Agency (forestry, natural resources, etc.)	3%
Nonprofits	<1%

**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents from each type of organization.

## Respondents Shared Information about 343 Total Forestry & Natural Resource Programs\*

\*Multiple programs could be entered by each respondent

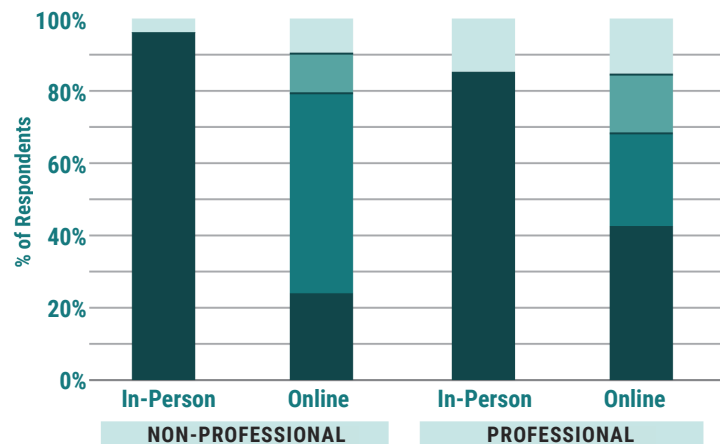
**Non-Professional audiences (n=199)** include the general public & may include targeted audiences such as forest landowners, youth, gardeners, etc.

**Professional audiences (n=144)** include natural resource managers, foresters, resource specialists, Extension educators, environmental educators, scientists, & loggers that may attend programs for professional development and/or continuing education credits (CEU).

More than 80% of respondents offer in-person programming for both professionals and non-professionals (figure 2). However, fewer than half of the respondents offered online programming for both audiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 restrictions prevented respondents from conducting in-person programming, the number of respondents offering online programming to both audiences jumped to 85%.

Prior to the pandemic, only 25% and 40% of all programming for non-professionals and professionals respectively were online. The percentage of programming offered online to both audiences increased to nearly 90%, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Some respondents commented that offering programs online was not a priority for them (pre-pandemic), but more of a necessity during COVID-19 restrictions. Moving forward, many respondents indicated that they are likely to maintain and improve their online programming so that they may reach a broader audience.

## Percentage of Respondents Offering FNR Programs by Audience and Delivery Mode



Legend for Figure 2:

- Dark teal: Yes, offers FNR programs
- Medium teal: Yes, offers online FNR programs due to COVID-19 restrictions
- Light teal: Not offering at this time, but we are strongly considering it
- Very light teal: Not offering FNR programs

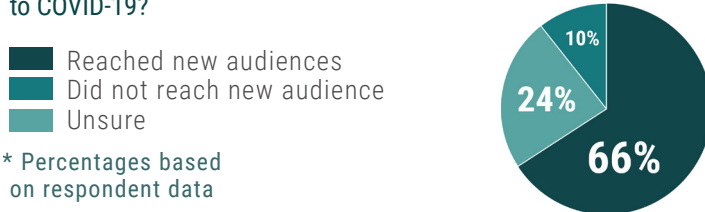
**Figure 2.** The percentage of respondents who offer in-person and online programming for professional and non-professional audiences. Respondents could indicate that they offered online programs due to COVID-19 restrictions and/or if they are considering providing online programming in the future.

*"We began (online programming) because of COVID but will explore continued use in future."*

## Thoughts on Extension Pivot to Online Programming Due to the Pandemic

The figures below summarize survey participants' perspectives on audience responses to the change from in-person to online program delivery from COVID-19 restrictions. The majority of survey respondents (66%) thought they had reached new audiences (figure 3). Slightly fewer respondents selected that the switch to online programming was favorable to the audiences (60%) or neutral (33%) (figure 4). As for audience size, about 60% of survey respondents indicated that their program audiences had increased, but the other 40% were split between no change or decreased (figure 5). There were many comments from survey respondents which provided more nuanced information about their selections.

**Figure 3.** Do you think that you have reached new audiences in response to the switch from in-person to online programming due to COVID-19?



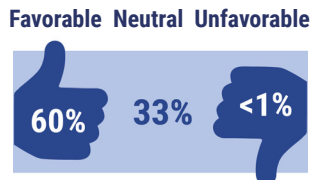
**Reached New Audiences:** "50-75% of our participants report that it is their first Extension event."

"Foresters and absentee landowners from all across the country attended."

"Our generation next webinar series allowed participation of whole family units - something we haven't been able to achieve in person. Thrilled!"

**Unsure:** "Not sure how many are new or just that a larger portion of our audience has the opportunity to watch instead of traveling to a site."

**Figure 4.** How have your audiences responded to the switch from in-person to online programming due to COVID-19?

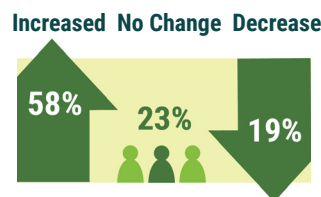


**Neutral:** "Not optimal and we miss a lot by not having face to face experience."

**Favorable:** "Everyone prefers in-person, but participants appreciate quality on-line training."

"While I prefer in-person, online allows participants, especially those seeking professional development credits, the opportunity to attend without having to travel."

**Figure 5.** Have the size of your program audiences changed since the switch from in-person to online due to COVID-19?



**Increase:** "Can reach a wider geographical area, therefore more people."

"increased at the beginning, has dwindled recently (online fatigue)"

**No Change:** "it seems in some cases attendance has gone down, in some it has remained fairly steady."

## Fees Charged for Forestry & Natural Resource Programs

About two-thirds of respondents charge fees for in-person programs for both audiences while only 30% of online programs include fees (figure 6). However, around 20% of respondents are strongly considering charging fees for online programs for both audiences, while only 7% are considering fees for in-person programs. Several respondents noted within comment boxes that they expect an increase in the number of online programs that incur a participant fee. The percentage of respondents that charge fees did not differ much between the two audience types for in-person or online programs.

"Having program fees seems to make people perceive our programs as valuable and reduces the no show rate!"

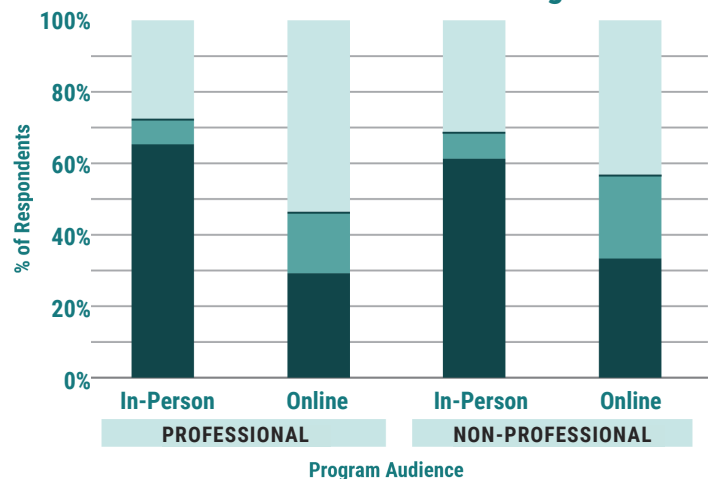
"We're allowed to charge only cost recovery for materials."

"Typically, we do not charge for these programs. We receive Extension funding from the state from sale taxes and the thought is that we should not charge for educational services"

"My university expects our programs to generate revenue. We couldn't cover the costs of materials, facilities, and instructor travel without charging fees."

"Often programs are sponsored or paid for by a grant, resulting in reduced or zero fees."

### Percentage of Respondents Charging Fees for Natural Resources Programs



Legend:  
 ■ Yes, charging fees  
 ■ Not charging fees at this time, but we are strongly considering it  
 ■ Not charging fees

**Figure 6.** Percentage of respondents charging fees for professional & non-professional audiences divided by in-person or online delivery mode.

## Programming for Non-Professionals: Fees Charged and Reported Expenses

**199** Programs Reported for Non-Professionals    **143** Delivered In-Person (77%)    **56** Delivered Online (28%)

Programming for non-professionals is tailored towards individuals who have minimal experience in natural resources or who do not work as natural resource professionals. Program fees charged, length of programming and expenses that were included in the program fees varied considerably. 76% of these programs (in-person and online) were priced less than \$50, and the majority (54%) were less than \$25 (figure 7). Program length was also highly variable in comparison to price. For example, in the less than \$25 fee range, program length ranged from 1-2 hours (40%), 3-4 hours (30%) to 5-8 hours (30%). The proportion of programs offered in each price range did not differ much between in-person to online programs. Survey participants reported information on expenses covered by fees for 109 in-person programs and 34 online programs (figure 8). 75% of in-person programs in the <\$25 fee range covered food costs, meeting facilities and printed materials, and an additional 20% of programs also covered speaker fees. Since programs are delivered to both non-professionals and professionals, about 10% of all programs' fees included continuing education units (CEU). About 40% of online programs were used to cover the cost of printed materials, an additional 30% covered speaker fees, and 27% covered CEU's.

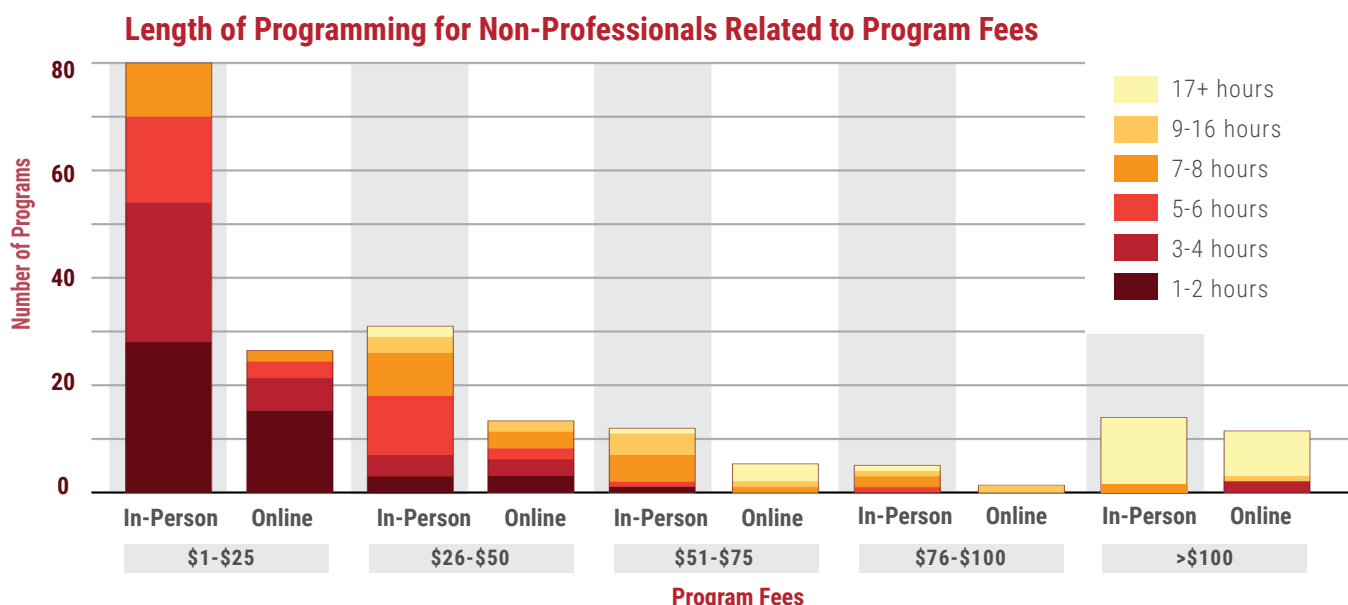


Figure 7. The number of non-professional programs delivered, method of delivery, cost and length of program, in hours.

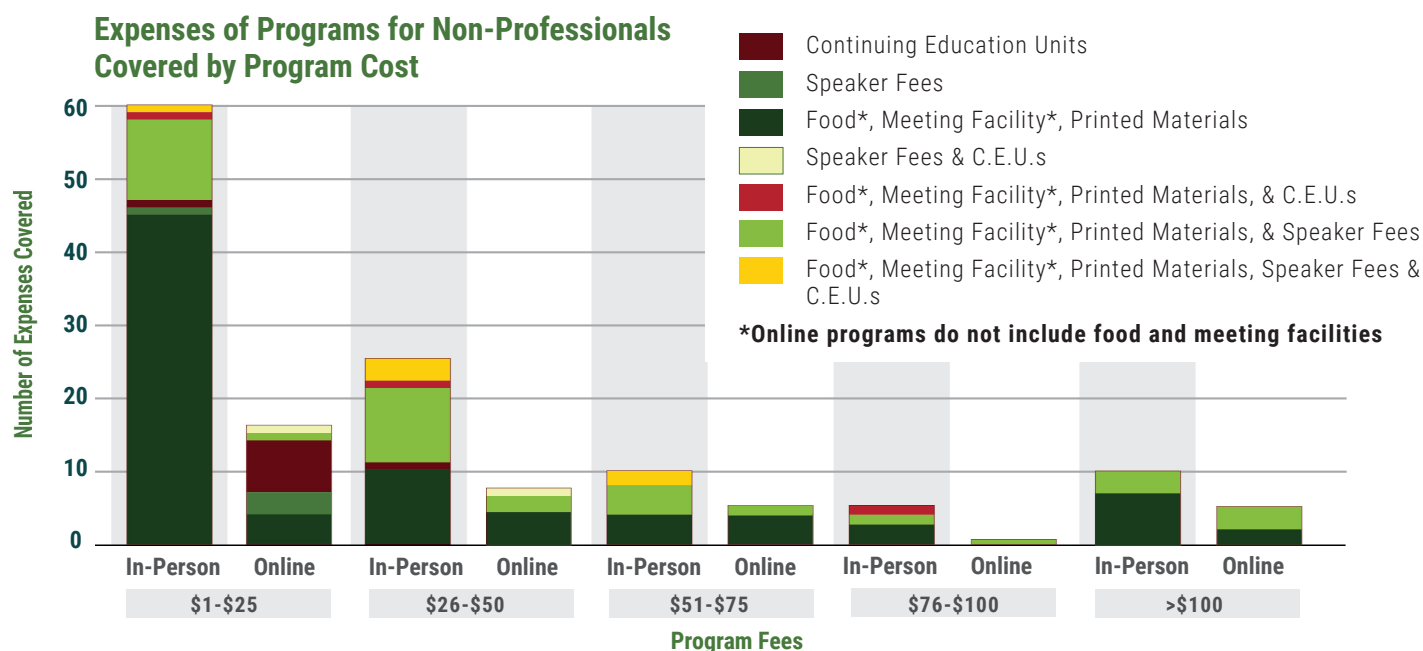
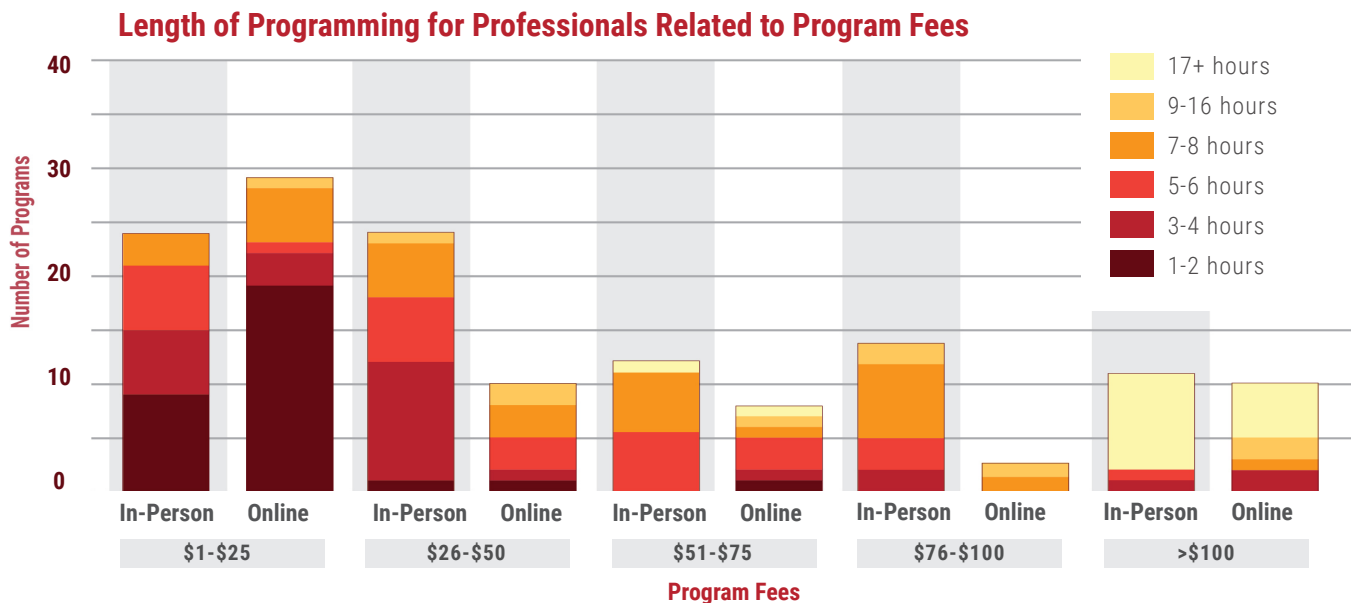


Figure 8. The comparison between the number of programs within allotted fee ranges and the associated expenses reportedly covered by those fees for non-professional programming.

## Programming for Professionals: Fees Charged and Reported Expenses

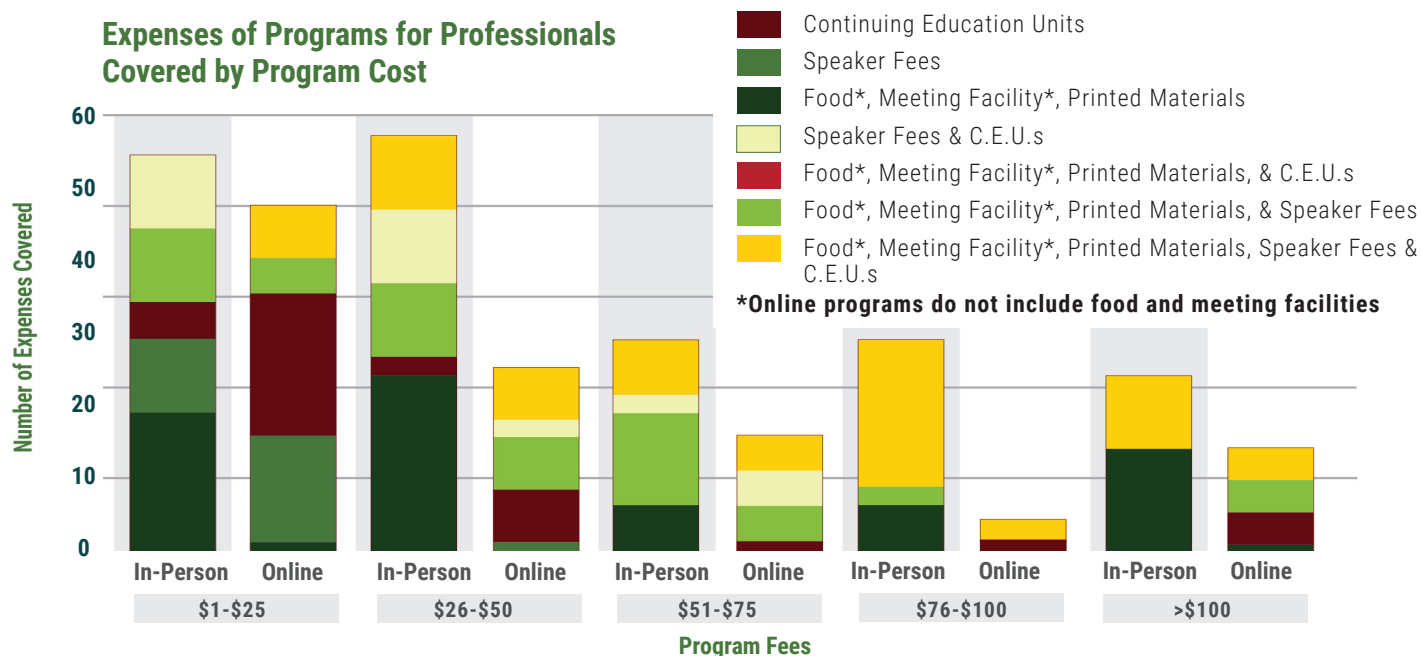
**144** Programs Reported for Professionals    **85** Delivered In-Person (59%)    **59** Delivered Online (41%)

Programs that are tailored towards a professional audience are focused on individuals who work in natural resources, and who attend programs for professional development purposes and/or certification credits. Three-quarters of all professional programming, regardless of delivery method, included fees that were less than \$75, (about 40% of the programs were <\$25) (figure 9.). There were more online programs offered for professionals that were less than 2 hours in length versus in-person programs, though there were more in-person programs overall. Survey respondents shared information about expenses covered by programs fees for 79 in-person and 50 online programs for professionals (figure 10). Program fees for in-person programming primarily cover food, meeting facility, printed materials, etc. Online program fees are focused on either speaker fees, continuing education units (CEU), or some mix of all these expenses. About 30% of fees for online programs were used to cover continuing CEUs only, though another 30% of online program fees covered CEUs in addition to speaker fees and/or materials.



**Figure 9.** The number of professional programs delivered, method of delivery, cost and length of program, in hours.

*" Because we provide materials along with the short course or workshops, we would certainly charge a fee. The amount of the fee depends upon the course, the amount of time, invited speakers, etc."*



**Figure 10.** The comparison between the number of programs within allotted fee ranges and the associated expenses reportedly covered by those fees for professional programming.

## Responses to Open-Ended Questions

### Evaluation of Programs Delivered Via Social Media

**Survey respondents were invited to share the approach that they used to measure impacts if they had delivered programs via social media. Below are their comments:**

- » Anecdotal feedback
- » Click throughs to publications or other resources on the Extension pages. Views of videos, engagement with material.
- » Facebook Live - check the Facebook views
- » Facebook statistics: Reach, Engagements, Views, and Shares
- » Zoom polls
- » Link to online evaluation posted during the meeting and/or at the end of the session
- » Provide a link/QR code for some live and recorded programs. Response rates have been low, but favorable feedback.

### Shared Insights for Online Programming

**Survey respondents were invited to share any tips or tricks that they discovered as they pivoted to online programming during COVID-19 restrictions. Below are comments from survey respondents:**

#### Advertising Online Programs

- » Program descriptions should be thorough and accurate.
- » Information announcing on-line programs needs to be delivered to the target audience by a trusted entity. A new or unknown outreach tool makes some audiences wary, and they may not participate.
- » Promote programs on social media.

#### Registration

- » Require pre-registration.
- » In registration, ask survey questions about demographics, property ownership, whether it is their first extension event, and if they would like to receive newsletter.
- » Use eventbrite registration, new list-serves.

#### Evaluations

- » Use "auto-launch" evaluation.
- » Send follow-up email with evaluation and online materials.
- » Collect similar online impact metrics as in-person programming metrics for reporting consistency.

#### Continuing Education Units (CEUs)

- » Collect SAF/CF numbers in registration if CEUs offered.
- » Develop a program survey anyone who wants CFE/CEU.

#### Include interactive elements in the program

- » Open the chat early, and ask the audience fun questions.
- » Use polls and frequent Q&A sessions to engage the audience.
- » Use interaction tools during programs such as google Jamboard or zoom polls.
- » Use Zoom breakout rooms for facilitating small group discussions.

#### Improve quality of Online Programs

##### Presenter Delivery Tips:

- » Invest in a quality camera and microphone.
- » Try to create a well-lit and situated "studio".
- » Use multiple screens for your presentation computer. It is easier for you to move between multiple presentations seamlessly and better monitor it.
- » Use headset mic.

- » Use the "Ninja" powerpoint style with lots of imagery and not text heavy.

#### Program Organization/Facilitation is important!

- » Practice and rehearse so meetings flow smoothly.
- » Have a facilitation team - multiple folks helping so presenters can focus on presenting.
- » Ask colleagues to attend the webinars as panelists to assist with Q&A.
- » Have a dedicated tech support person, at least at the beginning of the program, to help people having difficulty connecting.

#### Program Length

- » Keep online programs at 2 hours or less to prevent Zoom fatigue
- » Time of day - noon programming was way more successful than evening.

#### Provide additional resources and access to recorded webinar

- » Include key references and other resources.
- » Build a webpage for each series to share information and resources easily online.
- » Record and post the webinar recordings.
- » Consider requesting participants to download worksheets/resources in advance as quick references during the webinars.
- » Provide your email so participants can share comments and seek feedback.

#### Thoughts about audiences' responses to online programs overall:

*"...not hands-on, and there is already too much Zoom or Teams, it is difficult to answer individual questions."*

*"Participants like that we can spend more time per topic. The program is spread out over 9 weeks instead of crammed into 3 days."*

*"There is a dichotomy of audience responses. Primarily older individuals (>60 years old) are no longer participating in programming, though they are online and communicate frequently by email. In general, they do not like to learn this way,*

*but hold no ill sentiments for not conducting programs face-to-face. Some program audience segments (45-60 year olds), are ambivalent about online programs- they understand and participate, but don't get the interaction and peer-to-peer benefits from being in an in-person program with older audience members sharing lifetime experience. There is a landslide of new participants that love the accessibility to the program content and have never really experienced face-to-face programming. By the numbers, there is greater participation than ever, but I feel they are the wrong participants, uncommitted."*

*"Very favorable, people appreciate the opportunities"*

*"In the beginning it was favorable, but landowners are getting tired of virtual stuff. But it does allow to have speakers that would not have been able to come to an in-person workshop."*

*"Our monthly free webinar series had been going on since 2014, but 2020 saw a big jump in participation."*

## Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus for major transitions and innovation in the delivery of natural resource Extension and outreach programs. Organizations that predominately plan hands-on learning programs had to rapidly adjust, as did audiences. While these program changes were challenging to implement, there were also opportunities to engage new audiences and to explore new modes of digital delivery. COVID-19 restrictions lead to widespread use of digital meeting software by most people in the country, which in turn has increased the public's ability to join online programs- if they have sufficient internet access. Only a quarter of survey respondents delivered online programs for a non-professional audience prior to the pandemic, but more than 90% had done so after pandemic restrictions started. The flexibility of online programs and the ability to access them without travel means that the dramatic increase in this program delivery mode over the past two years will be sustained to some degree.

*"Already offered online programs pre-COVID and increased the number due to COVID"*

*"We plan to keep online training after COVID"*

*"We may continue with blended learning even when in person events are again allowed."*

Program fees are highly variable across organizations, departments and locations. However, survey data and comments suggest that more programming in the future will be likely to include at least nominal fees to ensure attendance and make up for lost costs. In addition, many respondents shared information about their department or organizations' policies on fees. For some respondents, fees may only be sufficient for cost-recovery, whereas other programs' fees are used to pay for personnel positions. Some program fees

differed based on audience type, as programs that were designed for professionals were slightly likelier to have fees higher than \$200. Overall, program fees were mostly less than \$75.

*"Charging something for a program, illustrates value and people are more inclined to attend something they paid for. Even a small fee to cover some costs is good. Free programs sometimes are not valued, and people will not register, or they will register and not show up."*

*"Some online programming (webinars) are free but as we put online classes together there will be fees."*

This survey was designed to capture the range of forestry and natural resource Extension and outreach program delivery modes, fees charged, and expenses covered by fees from across the country. There were some limitations to this survey. While there was information collected based on the respondents' overall work or personal perspectives, more in-depth information was collected on each program. Respondents could share information about multiple programs, which took more time to answer, as many Extension and outreach personnel deliver a variety of programs. Although, in this survey we distinguished between programs for professionals and non-professionals, many people offer programs that include both audiences. The survey was distributed widely and was targeted towards a nationwide audience, however there were states that did not include any respondents and other states had greater representation. Overall, data from this survey provides valuable information on Extension and outreach professionals' perspectives on program delivery, the pivot to online programs due to COVID-19, program fees and more. This information may be helpful for personnel as they consider future program delivery modes and/or assess charging program fees, as well as adjusting that fee.

## Report Authors



This survey was created by Leslie Boby and Kris Irwin  
Survey data analysis and report was prepared by: Leslie Boby, Madeline Wiley, and Sarah McNair  
Report Design created by Jessica Shaklee