

Great Conversation Wrap

Esther Fahm, Vice President Profession Development
Kayla Correll and Virginia (Ginny) Hall

At this year's Annual Conference, we held a Great Conversation to gather information on how WAFCS might better meet your professional development needs. The purpose of the Great Conversation was to examine the role of the WAFCS regions and other delivery formats in providing quality, easily accessible professional development opportunities at the regional level. This Conversation engaged participants in facilitated roundtable discussions on this topic. Additionally, participants were asked to respond to a multiple choice question to identify their preferred delivery format for professional development and to provide comments as desired.

This article summarizes the findings of the Great Conversation and makes recommendations for providing professional development opportunities at the regional level for today's and tomorrow's family and consumer sciences professionals.

Results of the Great Conversation

A total of 64 individuals, approximately 48 percent of WAFCS current membership, participated in the Great Conversation. Participants included college/university students in family and consumer sciences disciplines (FCS), as well as active and retired FCS professionals. They represented all six (6) WAFCS regions, and 29 of the 72 Wisconsin counties. Eighteen (18) participants were from Region 5; 17 and 11 were from Regions 5 and 3, respectively. The remaining Regions had 9 or fewer participants represented.

Multiple Choice Responses

Table 1 presents a tabulation of participants' responses to the question: "What format would best meet your professional development needs at the local/regional level?" Possible responses were: a) Fall Regional Meeting, b) Social Media/Facebook, c) Webinar/Online Session, d) Combined meeting with another professional organization, and e) Other (Specify). Participants were requested to select one response.

Sixty-two (62) participants responded to the multiple choice items. Thirty-seven participants (approximately 60 % of the respondents) selected a single delivery format, and the remaining respondents checked multiple formats (2 or more) as the best way to meet their professional development needs.

Of the 37 participants who identified one delivery format, social media/facebook was the top choice (15 participants) followed by regional meeting (11 participants). A "combined meeting with another professional organization" was the third most frequently recorded response (7 participants). Notably, a face-to-face meeting (regional meetings and combined meetings with another professional organization) was recorded by 49% of these participants.

For participants who identified a multiple delivery formats (2 or more) as the best for meeting their professional development needs, social media/facebook and webinar/online sessions were formats selected together most often, followed by regional meetings and combined meetings with another professional organization. Other combinations were less frequently selected (Table 1).

Across all delivery formats identified (single and multiple formats), results show: 32 participants chose a format that included social media/Facebook in their choice, 25 participants included regional meetings, 20 participants included a combined meeting with another professional organization, and 17 participants included webinars/online sessions in their choice.

Themes of RoundTable Discussion

Thirteen facilitators summarized ideas expressed at roundtable discussions regarding effective ways to provide quality, easily accessible professional development opportunities at the regional level. Also, participant noted numerous comments, which provided further explanation and ideas regarding for meeting their professional development needs. A review of these comments identified the following common themes/ideas:

- *Do not discourage regional meetings*—regional meeting offer vital face-to-face interactions for networking; many young professionals indicated a preference for regional meetings at the roundtables.
- *Make regions smaller*—divide the existing six WAFCS regions into smaller geographical areas to minimize time and cost for travel.
- *Connect with college students*—help keep them active, including providing financial support.
- *Use social media for program planning*—establish facebook pages and other forms of social media to use for planning programs, scheduling events, and for continuous follow-up.
- *Arrange social media and webinar/online sessions during night and tape*—schedule sessions so people can watch if they miss.
- *Combine/co-sponsor meetings with other professional groups*—invite all FCS professionals (members and non-members, extension, dietetics/nutrition, family, other); partner with business.

Finally, many comments related to strategies and program ideas for regional meetings. These include:

- Promote regional meetings all over state.
- Establish a regional Facebook page for continuous communications.
- Have a teaser at next state meeting about regional meetings.
- Make sure to organize and advertise what the meeting will provide attendees.
- Focus on emerging issues.
- Conduct a survey to determine issues and what is needed at the time.
- Select a speaker, tour or workshop; hold meeting at central location, offer food, and fun activities.
- Use email and on-line based meeting scheduling tools for planning meetings, contacting potential participants, and other purposes.

Recommendations

In view of findings from the Great Conversation, the following recommendations are made as initial steps for WAFCS to move forward with providing professional development opportunities at the regional level for its members as well as other FCS professionals:

- Review the state map and create WAFCS regions that are smaller in geographical area than the current six regions. This recommendation could be accomplished by examining the distribution of WAFCS membership in the state, and creating regions according to potentially viable geographical areas for members.
- Each WAFCS region should determine its own professional development delivery format; the format could vary from year to year.
- WAFCS should generate its directory via regional area to allow for ease in identifying members by region.
- The Vice President for Professional Development should identify a person in each area (convener) to organize a professional development activity. The convener should rotate each year unless otherwise determined by the regional group. Working with the regional group, the Vice President should ensure that a person is identified to convene a professional development activity annually. It is recommended that the convener is someone who is technologically competent or able to work with someone with this ability. Consideration of a new professional for this role is also recommended.
- The Vice President of Professional Development along with the WAFCS Executive Director should ensure that regional conveners are provided with tools for assisting them in organizing the professional development activities. These include, but are not limited to:
 - The email address for WAFCS members as well as other FCS professionals in the area, and mailing addresses for WAFCS members without email addresses.
 - Examples of electronic tools for contacting individuals, planning, and scheduling events such as doodle.com, google survey, and others.
- The WAFCS Executive Director should reach out to other executive directors to find out if reciprocal arrangements could be established for sharing email add addresses of members or publicizing professional development sessions among organizations.

Finally, it is recommended that recommendations be considered for implementation no later than Fall 2018, and be revisited in at least two years of the implementation date to assess effectiveness and continuous improvement.

The authors express appreciation to all participants and facilitators for their participation and contributions to the Great Conversation.

Should any member desire a complete, unedited copy of the comments obtained from the roundtable discussion, please contact Esther Fahm at fahme@uwstout.edu.

Table 1. Participant responses for best delivery format to meet their professional development needs

Delivery Format	Number of Responses (N=64)
One Delivery Format (n = 37)	
Regional Meetings	11
Social Media/Facebook	15
Webinar/Online Sessions	3
Combined with Another Organization	7
Specify Other ^a : Extension, Local Business Bureaus and Owners	1
Two Delivery Formats Combined (n =18)	
Regional Meeting and Social Media/Facebook	3
Regional Meeting/Combined with another Organization	4
Regional meeting, Webinar	1
Combined with another Organization, Webinar	1
Social Media, Combined with another Organization	2
Social Media, Webinar/Online	7
More than Two Delivery Formats Combined (n=7)	
Regional meeting, Combined with another Organization, Social Media (2)	2
Regional meeting, Combined with another Organization, Webinar (2)	2
Regional meeting, Social Media, Webinar	1
Social Media, Combined with another Organization, Webinar	1
All delivery formats (1)	1
No Response	2

^a“Specify Other” reflects the content specified by participants who checked “specify other” as the only response; in cases that participants checked “specify other” along with another possible response, their statements were recorded as “comments”.

