



Situation Analysis Report



Arlington County

2013

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Introduction

The Arlington Unit of Virginia Cooperative Extension conducted its situation analysis by reviewing the unit profile generously prepared for us by VCE staff in Blacksburg and comparing it to the profile prepared each year by Arlington County. In addition, we utilized data from the Virginia.gov Workforce Connection site. We also conducted a community survey to assess what community members see as the priority issues in our county. Our Extension Leadership Council (ELC), which is always very active in advocating for us and helping us to market our programs and accomplishments, took an active role in helping to encourage people to complete the survey. As a result, we received 142 responses compared to just over 50 when we last conducted a community survey in 2008. Staff and the ELC analyzed the data from the unit profile and the community survey in order to identify priority issues.

Unit Profile

Arlington County is located in northern Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Its proximity to the nation's capital makes it a bustling and thriving area, but also one with a transient population where individuals and families who work for the military and other government agencies frequently move in and out of the county.

The population of Arlington as of January 1, 2013 is 212,900. It has been growing an average of 1% each year since 2000 and is projected to grow to 276,100 persons by 2040. At 29.2%, 25-34 year-olds make up the largest segment of the population. The percentage of school-age children has grown in recent years, from 11.3% in 2010 to 12.5% of the county's population in 2013. While a 1.2% increase may seem small, it has spurred discussions of how to accommodate increased class sizes.

Arlington has the region's lowest unemployment rate at 3.3%. In 2010 the figure was 4.4%. Not surprisingly the federal government is a prime employer with 26% of the labor force being government employees.

Arlington County is ranked as the most educated county in the nation. According to the annual profile released by the county, "in 2011 70.2% of adults aged 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher and 36.7% had a graduate or professional degree." This figure has risen slightly since 2010 when 69.6% of the population had bachelor's or higher degrees.

Arlington is one of the most densely populated counties in the country with a density of 8,252 persons per square mile as of January 1, 2013. This has increased since 2010 when the figure was 8,224 people per square mile and the density is projected to continue to increase in coming years.

The county is ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse. According to the 2010 U.S. Census approximately 36% of residents were Hispanic/Latino, African-American, Asian, or multi-racial. This marks a slight decrease from 2000 census data when 39% of residents fell into these groups. Arlington schoolchildren speak 98 languages and originate from 126 countries. VCE in Arlington is taking an active role in helping our volunteers to meet the needs of this diverse population by partnering with staff at the Northern Virginia AHEC (Area Health Education

Center) to organize a cultural competency training for Master Gardener and Master Food Volunteers.

The majority of Arlington residents earn a high income relative to the rest of Virginia and the nation. Median household income in Arlington in January 2013 was \$104,600 with per capita median income at \$85,600. Virginia median household income in 2011 was \$62,391 and nationally the figure was \$51,484. Despite these high income numbers, 9.74% of households earn less than \$25,000 per year and a total of 20.91% earn less than \$50,000. According to the Living Wage Calculator (<http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/51013>) a family of four in Arlington needs \$50,930 to cover basic living expenses, so with more than a fifth of households earning less than that the county's Department of Human Services and other service providers have seen increased demand for emergency assistance such as money for food, rent, and utilities.

Adult obesity is declining in Arlington, from 21% in 2010 to 19% in 2013. These numbers compare favorably with Virginia and national figures of 28% and 25% respectively. Extension's nutrition programs can still play an important role in further reducing rates of overweight and obesity among adults and children.

Community and Resident Perspectives

As stated in the introduction we worked with our ELC to craft and distribute a community survey that elicited 142 responses. Because our ELC is a combined Arlington and Alexandria entity and because two of our staff, our ANR agent and one of the FCS agents, do a lot of programming in Alexandria as well as Arlington, we conducted a combined Arlington and Alexandria survey. The survey was sent to current volunteers, program participants, partner organizations, county government contacts, and elected officials. All of these people were asked to send the survey to their friends who live in Arlington so that we could gain the perspective of people less familiar with Extension's programs.

Among respondents 5% said they were not familiar at all with Extension's programs, 23% were somewhat familiar, 38% were familiar, and 35% were very familiar. 21% have never participated in an Extension program before while 79% have done so.

80% of respondents were female and 20% were male. The majority of respondents were from Arlington, with 19% from Alexandria. The largest age group of respondents were those over age 65, with 26% of respondents in that category. 25% were between 50 and 59, 17% between 30 and 39, 13% between 40 and 49, 11% between 60 and 64, and 7% were 18-29. Only 5% of respondents were Hispanic or Latino. 86% were white, 6% were African American, 8% were other, and 1% were American Indians or Alaska natives.

This is the third time in the span of ten years that we have done a comprehensive situation analysis and as stated above we received the highest number of responses this year. When we issued a community survey in 2008 we received slightly more than 50 responses. In 2004 we used the strategy of key informant interviews and talked to 39 individuals to gather community perspectives.

Priority Issues

Based on the unit profile and community survey, staff have identified the following as priority issues:

ISSUE #1: Environment / Land Use / Water Quality / Natural Resources

In their comments many of our survey respondents grouped these four issues together and they all garnered very high numbers in the somewhat important and very important categories. Among the 142 respondents 98 rated the environment as very important. One respondent said: "Note the common theme of those items selected as very important--natural resources, water quality, land use, and the environment. Work that strives to solve or improve upon the region's natural resource issues will reap positive dividends in all other areas that extension is working toward--healthy ecosystems improve the health of people; healthy food comes from healthy plants and gardens cultivated locally; engaging youth in environmental restoration activities boosts their appreciation for a healthy environment and lifestyle while teaching good life lessons in the process; and an increased focus on the local landscape and environment can boost small business opportunities in the green industry by simultaneously creating an educated workforce and an educated clientele for those businesses to solicit."

Extension is responding to these issues by supporting and training Master Gardener volunteers who reported over 12,000 service hours in 2012. 240 plus Master Gardener volunteers assist the ANR agent in offering trainings to residents on how to grow food and flowers with fewer pesticides and fertilizers, providing trainings to the green industry and county employees on safe application of pesticides, helping residents to get their soil tested so that they apply only the necessary amounts of fertilizer and at the right time, and providing other public education events on sustainable growing and landscaping. We are also responding through the Arlington Energy Masters program which provides energy- and water-saving retrofits in low-income apartments. The 96 Energy Masters volunteers have completed improvements in 275 units since the program began in 2011.

Because the environment rated so high out of these four issues, it will be important as we design natural resources programs to make sure that they include environmental themes and strategies for improving the local environment. As stated in the following comment from a survey respondent, all program areas have a responsibility to consider the environment when planning programs: "Environment--I think that the topic of environment touches many other topics. For instance, health, natural resources, horticulture, land use, pest/pesticides, water quality/quantity, nutrition, housing/home, and even consumer issues would fall under the main category of environment. We should always think about the environment in all things that we do because it is so important to our well-being."

ISSUE #2: Community Services

Community services emerged as the next most important issue, with 86 people rating it very important. One respondent commented: "Community services provide the ties that can draw together our diverse communities in Arlington and Alexandria. Services provided by local

governments and volunteers, including VCE volunteers, are the main sources for public education on many of the topics identified here as issues.” Respondents reflected that many people don’t know about all of the services that are available in the county and city and noted the need for providing information in other languages about upcoming programs.

This is a broad issue and as the quote included above indicates it ties in to all of extension’s programs. We are responding by offering a variety of educational opportunities in the three program areas: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H. In terms of increasing awareness about programs, we continually strive to expand outreach efforts. We started a blog in the spring of 2013, will be using some endowment funds to hire a marketing and communications specialist in the Arlington office, and conduct many of our financial and nutrition programs in Spanish. Additionally, some of our gardening education and pest management materials are available in Spanish.

ISSUE #3: Health / Nutrition / Obesity

With 82 respondents rating health as very important in the community survey, this emerged as the next priority issue. As mentioned in the unit profile, the adult obesity rate is declining (from 21% in 2010 to 19% in 2013) but with nearly a fifth of county residents struggling with obesity it is still an issue of concern. Many people combined health, nutrition, and obesity in their comments, so that is why we have put them together here into one issue. Several compelling comments were submitted, including the following: “Nutrition/Health/Obesity -- All are linked. We believe that we need to reach out to not only adults but also children who need to learn the importance of good nutrition and exercise. We are looking for an out-of-school program to address nutrition/obesity/health for older children.” “My community is food insecure, and relies on AFAC (Arlington Food Assistance Center) distribution to get balanced meals. A cooking class that also worked on nutrition would be great for my obese and malnourished clients together. It would also be great to use the type of food my clients receive from AFAC, because they don’t know how to cook it.”

Extension is addressing this issue in Arlington through many different programs together with our Master Food Volunteers and Master Gardeners. We offer nutrition education five times per month at four AFAC food distribution sites. We have trained pre-school teachers on the Food Friends and Mighty Moves curricula and distributed kits to them so that they can implement the programs in their classrooms. We conduct Cooking Matters programs: six week courses in which participants get an hour of nutrition instruction each week, plus an hour of cooking instruction and a bag of groceries containing all of the ingredients for the recipes prepared in class so that they can replicate them at home. We also offer cooking and nutrition classes at senior centers, in schools, at affordable housing complexes, and community centers. We have partnered with Arlington County to provide mini-grants to non-traditional sites that want to start community gardens (e.g. places of worship, libraries, apartment complexes). Master Gardeners and Master Food Volunteers help the grant recipients to learn how to grow healthy vegetables and herbs and how to incorporate them into their diets. Master Gardeners partner with libraries and community gardens in Arlington and Alexandria to conduct classes on container gardening, seed starting, and vegetable garden pest management and maintain demonstration gardens for public viewing. Also, our Family Nutrition Program provides nutrition

classes for very low income individuals and families who receive food stamps or are eligible to receive them.

ISSUE #4: Child Development / Life Skills / Decision Making for Youth / Youth Activities

With 71 people rating it as very important, child development comes in as our 4th priority issue. In their comments many combined it with the other issues listed above, so that is why we have done so here. One respondent commented that “I think it's important to allow lots of opportunities for children to find support within the county to learn and give back to the community. Participation in both development and volunteer opportunities in Arlington can create a sense of pride of place and ensure a positive future for the county.”

Extension responds to this issue in Arlington through 4-H/youth development programs. We have had a lot of turnover in the 4-H agent position in recent years but a new agent will start in December 2013 and we are looking forward to rebuilding youth enrichment, life skills, character building, and other 4-H programs in the county. Both ANR and FCS programs support 4-H youth education efforts within their respective program areas with volunteer efforts in schools, and community centers.

ISSUE #5: Parenting

Among the survey respondents 60 people rated this issue as very important. Extension has elected not to take an active role in responding to this issue because Arlington County has a very strong parenting education program in which they offer many different classes. We therefore believe that our classes would be a duplication of efforts. We also don't have staff to respond to this issue, so it is fortunate that Arlington County's programs do an excellent job of bringing resources to local parents.

ISSUE #6: Aging Population

“As the population ages heading toward 2030, it is very important to plan ahead to meet the needs of that population & provide the supports & services that will allow them to age in place in a safe & healthy environment. Transportation, resource allocation, social service provision, recreation will all have to take into account the changes in population & plan accordingly, shifting resources as needed, in order to remain relevant & serve their constituents effectively.”

Extension is responding to this issue by actively recruiting older adults for our volunteer programs (Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Master Food Volunteers, Master Financial Education Volunteers, Energy Masters). We also offer many programs in senior centers, especially nutrition. Many of our financial education programs are targeted to seniors, including passing on personal possessions, controlling clutter, deciding which papers to keep and where to store important records, and planning for future life events.

ISSUE #7: Finances / Personal Financial Management

As reported in the unit profile above, despite the fact that many in Arlington are quite affluent 20.9% of residents earn less than \$50,000 annually. Given that a family of four in Arlington needs \$50,930 annually to cover basic living expenses, low-income families can benefit from financial education programs that help them prioritize and plan their spending and establish emergency funds.

“Regardless of educational level, many people simply do not have the skills to manage money or credit well. This in turn can cause stress, financial insecurity, and even insolvency that governments ultimately must deal with. To address the problem, schools and community organizations must teach and provide basic principles of finance that people of all ages can relate to and internalize. It's better to prevent financial problems than try to solve them after the fact.”

Extension responds to this issue by coordinating a team of Master Financial Education Volunteers who provide one-on-one financial counseling; money management classes in schools, libraries, community centers, homeless shelters, senior centers, and affordable housing complexes; and youth financial simulations at elementary, middle, and high schools.