



EmpowerU!

ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAM

**Energizing volunteers
to be change-makers and leaders
in their communities**

Anne Pearce (UW-Madison, IPAW)
Gail Epping Overholt (UW-Madison Arboretum)



Supported by a Renewable Resources Extension Act grant from USDA NIFA to the University of Minnesota

Why EmpowerU?

Need for content focused on “soft skills”



Request
from
Minnesota
Master Naturalists



Focus on invasive
species, but widely
applicable

A group of people are standing in a wetland field with yellow flowers. In the foreground, a man with a beard and a baseball cap is looking towards the left. Behind him, several other people are standing, some with their arms raised. The background is a line of trees under a clear sky.

How we* did it!

*Our colleagues in MN



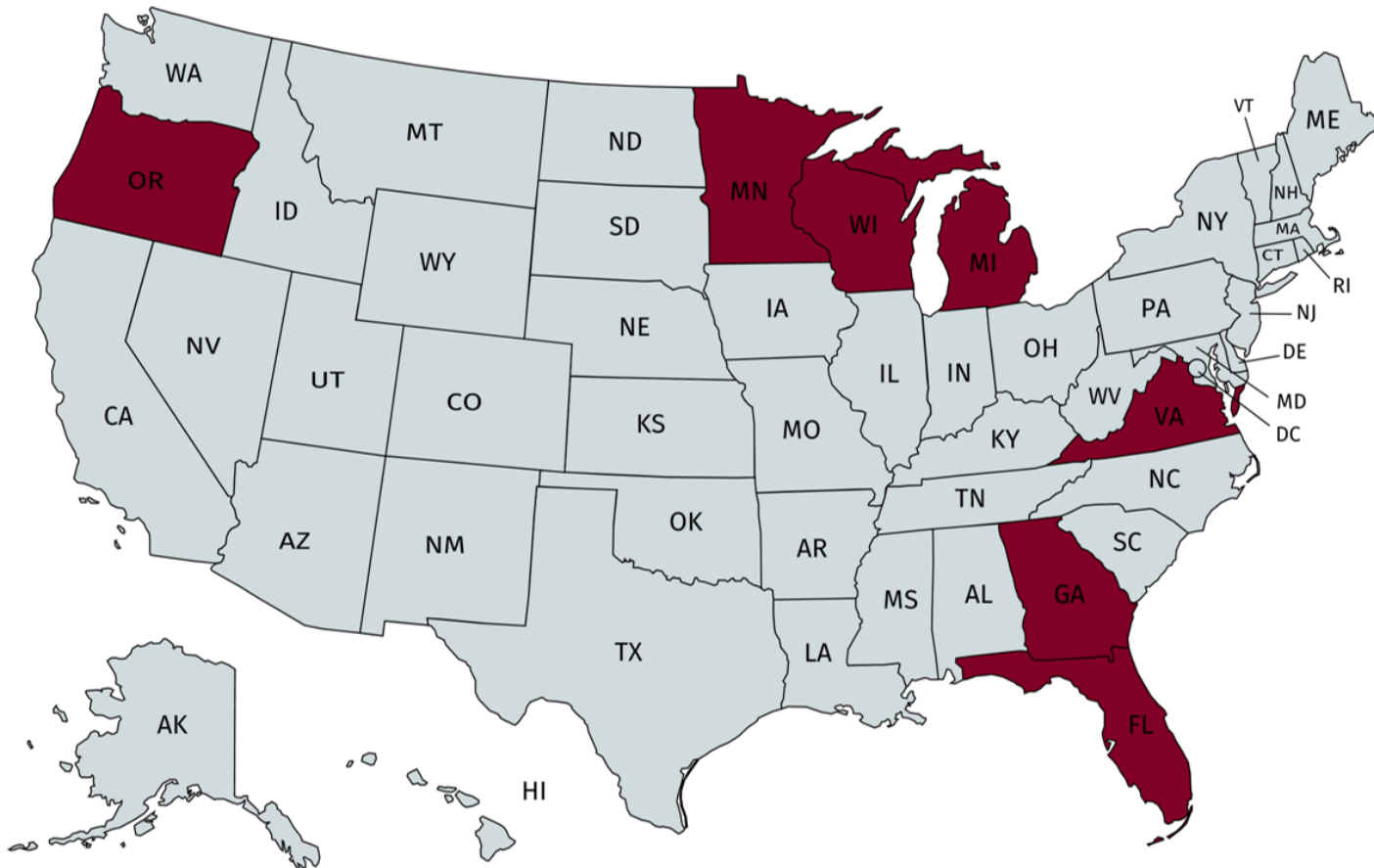
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

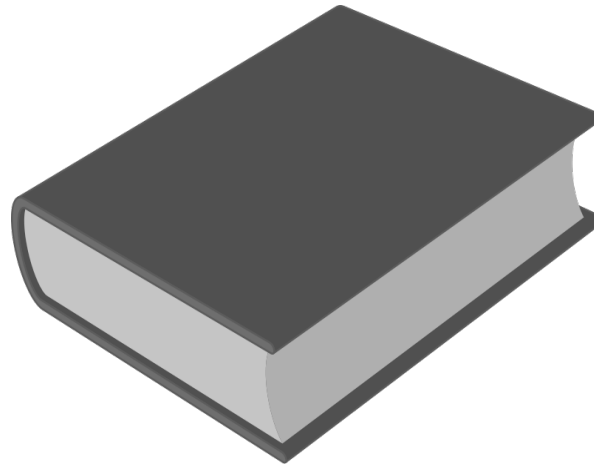
University of Minnesota received
USDA-NIFA Renewable Resources Extension Act
National Focus Fund Project (RREA-NFF) grant

Recruited and trained facilitators from 7 states (GA, FL, MI, MN, OR, VA, WI)



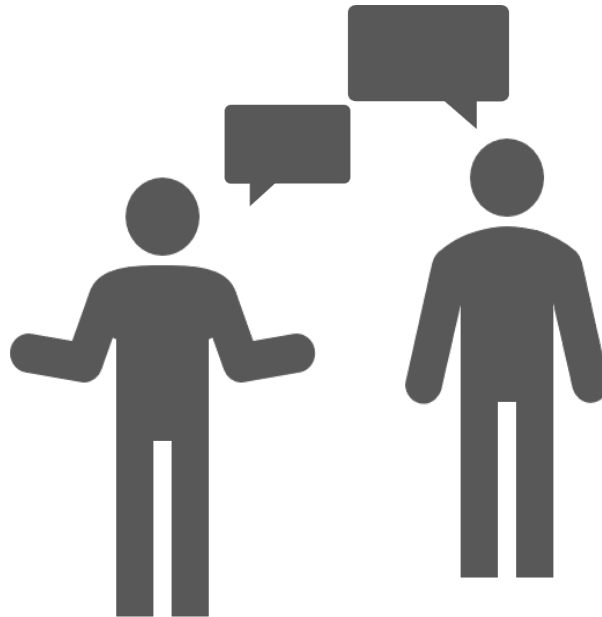
Curriculum

- Developed by University of Minnesota Extension
- Flipped classroom
 - 8-10 hours online learning (self-paced)
 - 1-day in-person workshop



Curriculum

Communication skills & Engagement



Curriculum – Engagement Plan

1. Identify your issue
2. Gather data
3. Find your decision-maker
4. Using influence, power, and persuasion
5. Write your questions
6. Frame your issue
7. Write a commitment statement



Curriculum – in-person workshop

- Reflective Listening
- Probing Questions
- Framing an Issue
- Peer Review Engagement Plans
- Practice Engagement
 - One-on-one conversations
 - Public meeting



Outcomes & Next Steps for Wisconsin

Data from Nate Meyer, University of Minnesota Extension

Wisconsin

- 5 Wisconsin partners, 3 facilitators
- Audience: *Master Naturalists + Gardeners, WIFDN participants, IPAW members, CISMA representatives*
- 2 workshops, 80 registered (filled with waitlist)





Wisconsin

Canvas (online course):

- 71% accessed
- 10% “almost” accessed Canvas
- 14% never got close to accessing online resources

In-person Workshop

- Madison – 55% participation
- Oshkosh – 63% participation

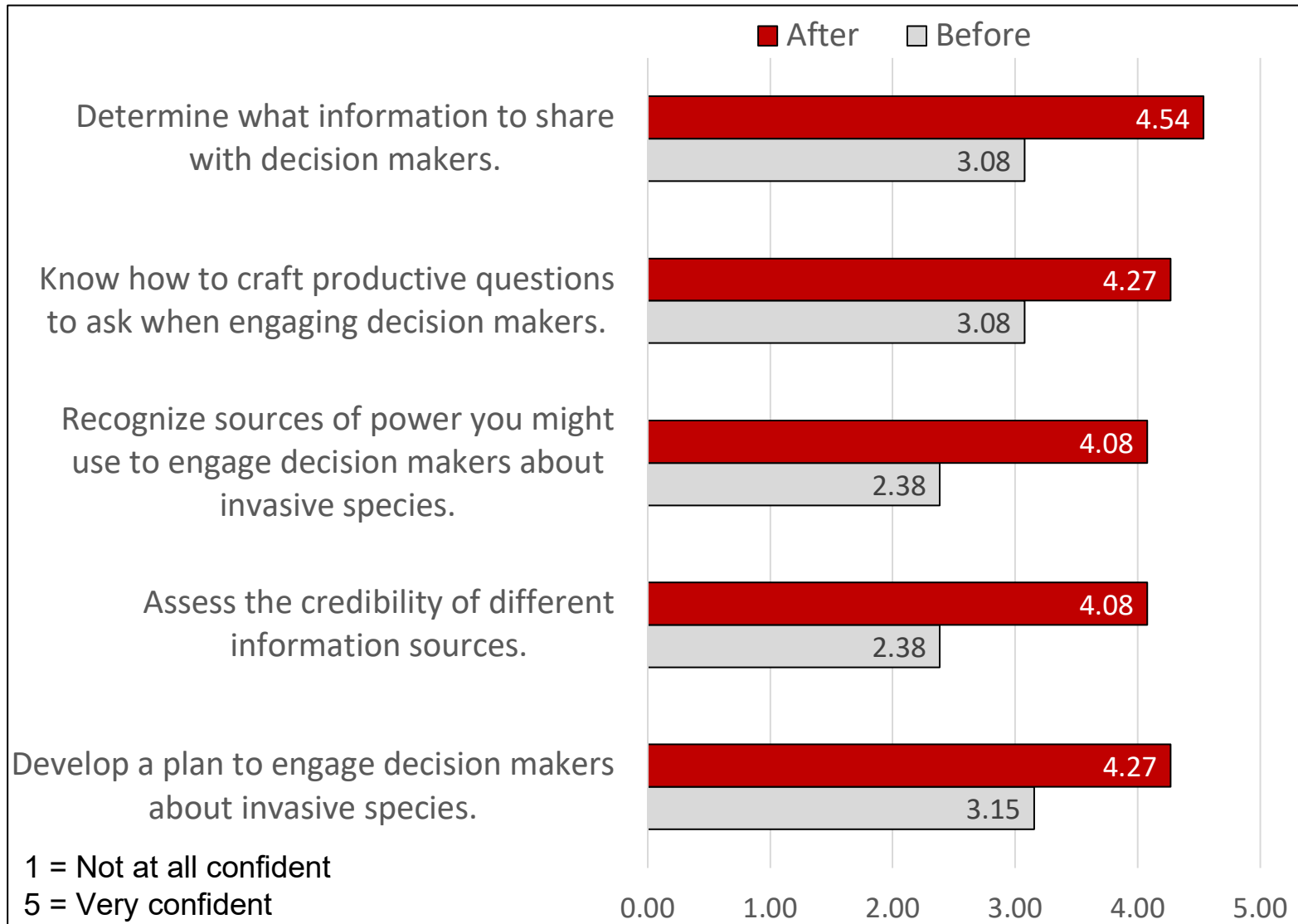


Participants said.....

"EmpowerU is about a different kind of advocacy – engaging the right decision-maker for the change you hope to make. It emphasizes collaborative relationships rather than adversarial ones."

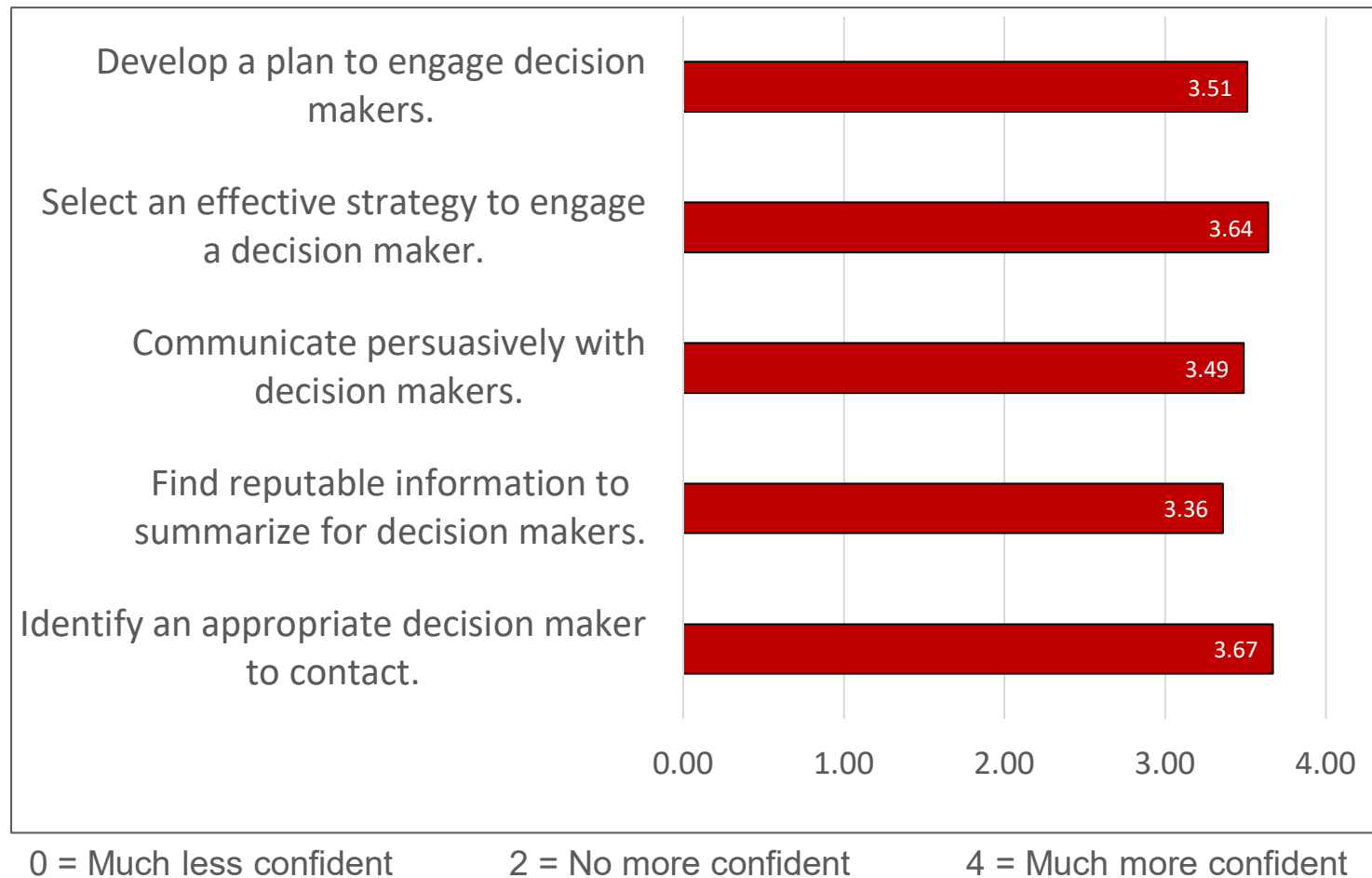
"It created a sense of community and the shared learning environment with role playing helped me rethink and reorganize my presentation materials."

Wisconsin participants perceived gains for all online session outcomes (n=129)



Data from Nate Meyer, University of Minnesota Extension

Wisconsin participants reported increased confidence after in-person session (n=42)



Evaluation data show

- Participants are **extremely satisfied** with both elements of EmpowerU
- The length of both course elements was **just about right**
- The **information** in the online element and **practice & networking** in the face-to-face session are valuable

Engagement in Action

“A large patch of crown vetch was growing around and in a detention pond adjacent to 19 acres of recently restored prairie that is part of the City’s conservancy lands.

At the beginning, I envisioned the solution as persuading the landowner to remove the crown vetch from his property. The result was much different ...we built relationships at the same time!” Janet Kane, Wisconsin Participant



Wisconsin

Lessons Learned

- Access to Canvas is a barrier
- Registration fee may be needed
- Success stories - valuable content



Next Steps

- Use for other natural resource issues like stormwater
- Expand partnerships
- Train more statewide facilitators



How to Get Involved

- EmpowerU curriculum available from University of Minnesota Extension
- Original state partners may offer additional courses

*Contact Angela Gupta, Forestry Extension Educator,
University of Minnesota Extension: agupta@umn.edu*

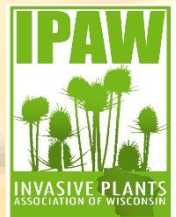


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