

Green Extension Office Concept: A White Paper

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Humanity, all of it, is facing two immensely challenging transitions. Both transitions are necessary because of global warming and climate change. The first is the transition to “clean energy,” that is, energy whose production does not result in emissions of greenhouse gases. It is typically called the climate change mitigation transition. The second great transition is the transition of the built environment to a much more hardened and resilient condition, able to withstand costly damage from extreme weather and environmental events brought about by climate change. It is typically called the climate change adaptation transition.

A Green Extension Office (GEO), as we conceive it, is an organization whose primary mission is to provide support services to clients in what is and will be the wrenching, uncertain, and vexing process of undertaking the two transitions. Clients include SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) in the commercial, governmental, and non-profit sectors, as well as to individuals. Support services for clients include information, education, instruction, training, decision support, and discussion forums (such as town hall meetings), green financing, assisting in finding financial support, matching clients and vendors for projects, and research. We incorporate the term extension as a tip-of-the-hat to agricultural extension offices, which have long served as institutions providing up-to-date agricultural information to farmers. The first extension services appeared about 4,000 years ago in China and have been invaluable ever since. Today in the United States, every land-grant university has been tasked since 1887 with responsibility to provide agricultural extension services. Our generalization, and to some extent appropriation, of this enduringly successful idea is hardly the first. It has been widely emulated.

We believe and hope that existing extension services will incorporate GEO concepts and ideas. Indeed many of them are already doing so (for example <https://extension.wisc.edu/>). The need for GEO services, however, is vast and far from being met at present. Universities and other institutions should enter the field with alacrity, taking up provision of GEO services. We foresee extensive networks of GEO service providers working cooperatively, sharing information and work products, and providing complementary services.

As we envision it, a GEO would be a permanent, staffed organization. Its services and activities would be normally offered for free and its information based on science and objective facts. For example, a GEO would not exhort clients to replace gas heating with electric heat pumps (let alone hector them), but would offer verifiable information about the costs, the benefits, and the

drawbacks (if any) of such a change. At the same time, for example, a GEO would not provide support for installing gas furnaces. Similarly, a GEO could connect potential customers with vendors (e.g., a homeowner with an electrical contractor), but would not endorse any individual vendor or product. Core to the mission is for GEO agents to work within a community to provide value transition-related information and other services, and in so doing to become known and trusted in the community for objectivity and reliability.

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Forthcoming GEO white papers will discuss GEO startup and funding, research opportunities, and other topics of import.

File: GEO Concept White Paper on Google Drive