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Extension Field Specialists: Believable Label or Oxymoron

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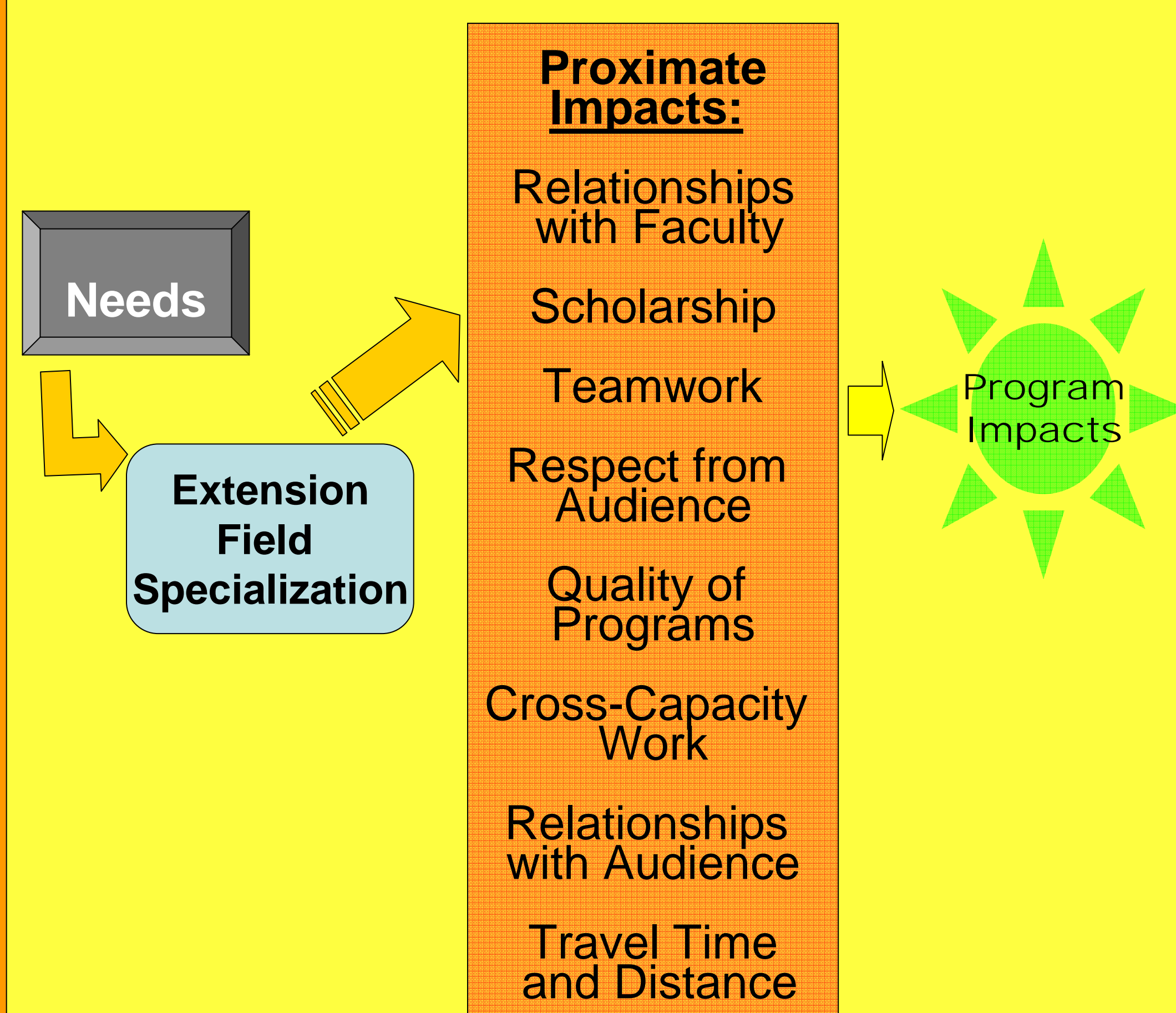
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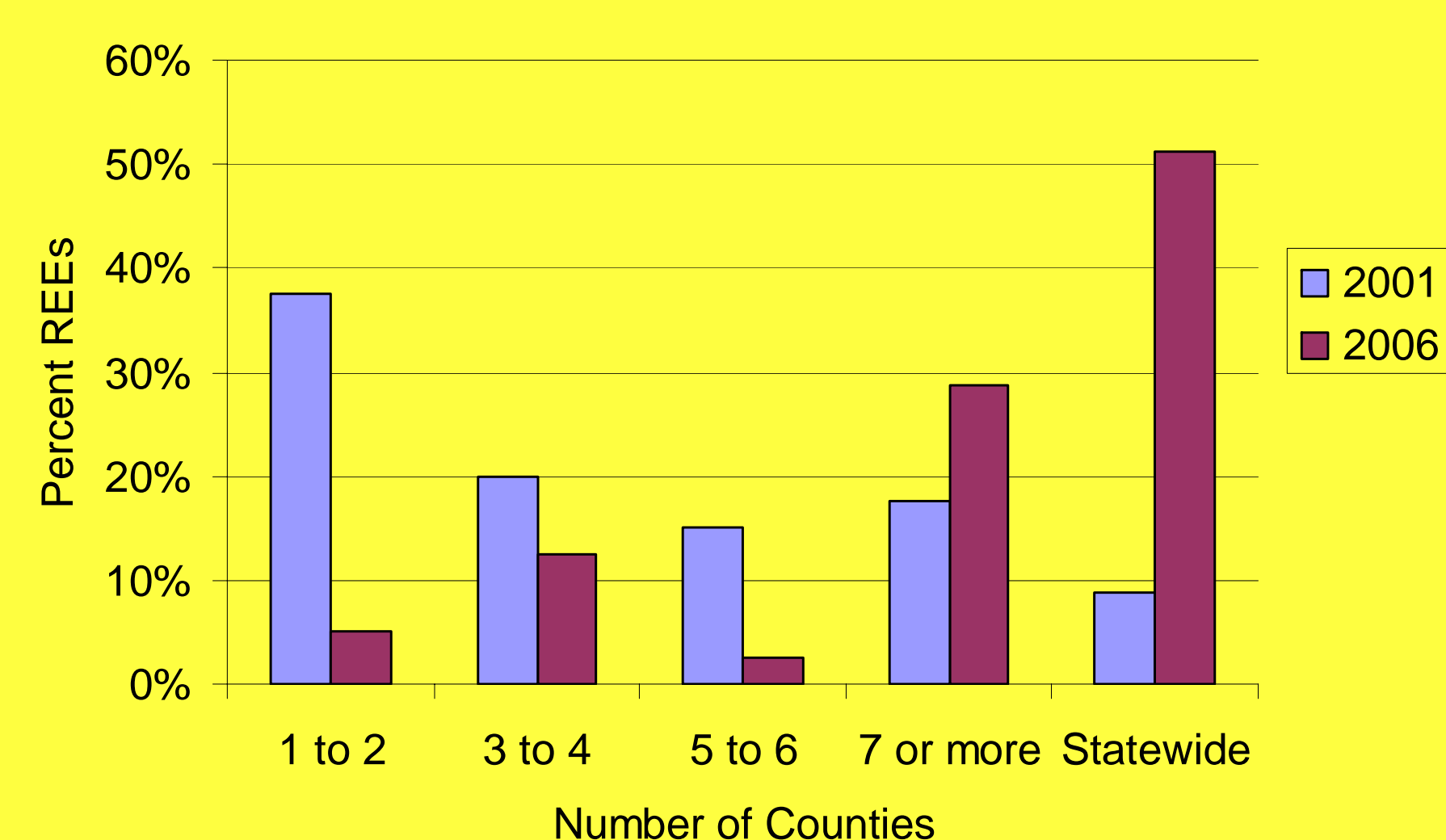
Objectives – Measure Proximate Impacts of Specialization



Policy Instruments

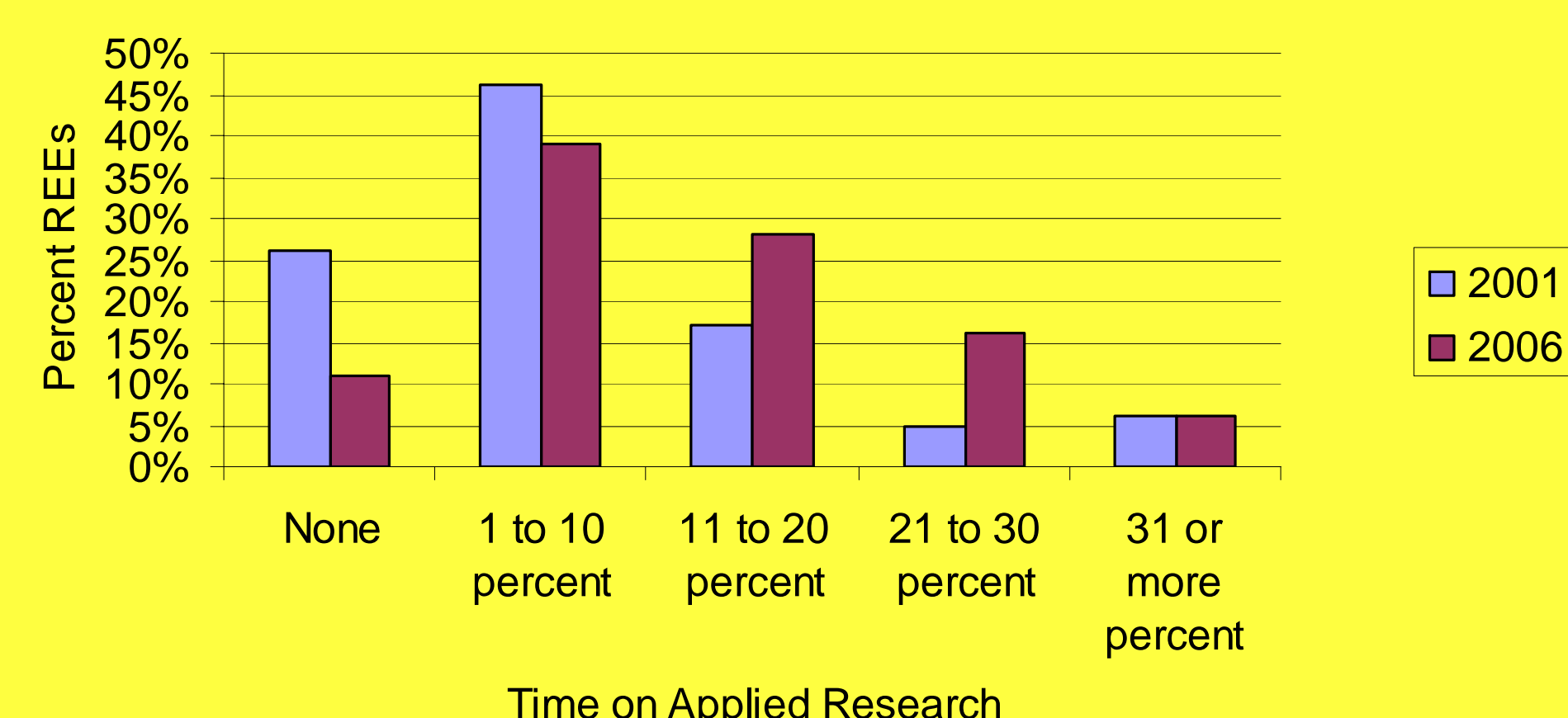
	Generalist 2001	Specialist 2006
Funding	25% County	0% County
Supervision	District Directors	Campus Faculty
Promotion	Three criteria No 'Up or Out'	Six Criteria – Up or Out
Scholarship	Low	Essential
Area of Expertise	Self-declared	Experience & Education
Geographic Territory	County Based Educators	Regional based Educators (REEs)

Larger Geographic Territory

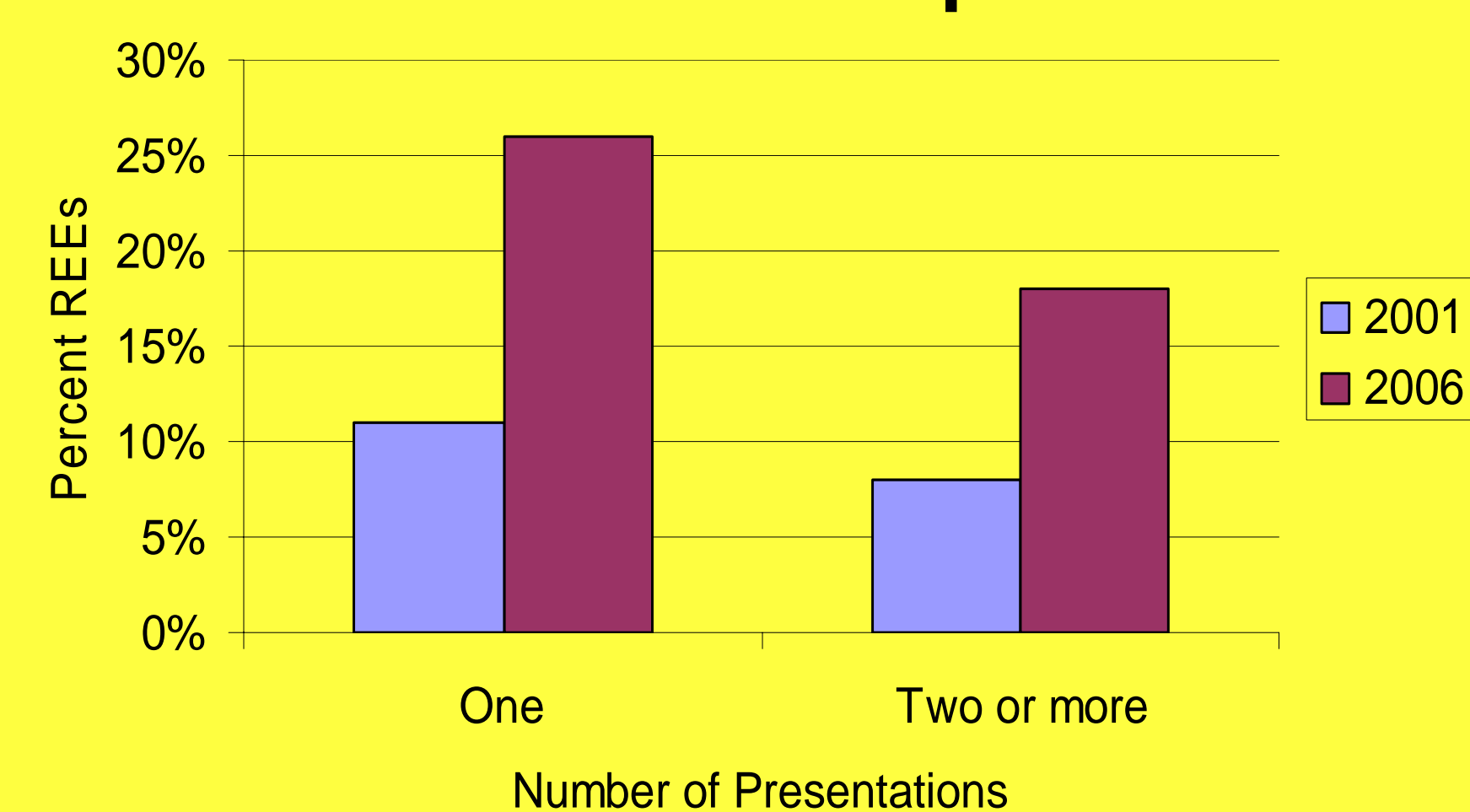


Proximate Impacts - Advantages

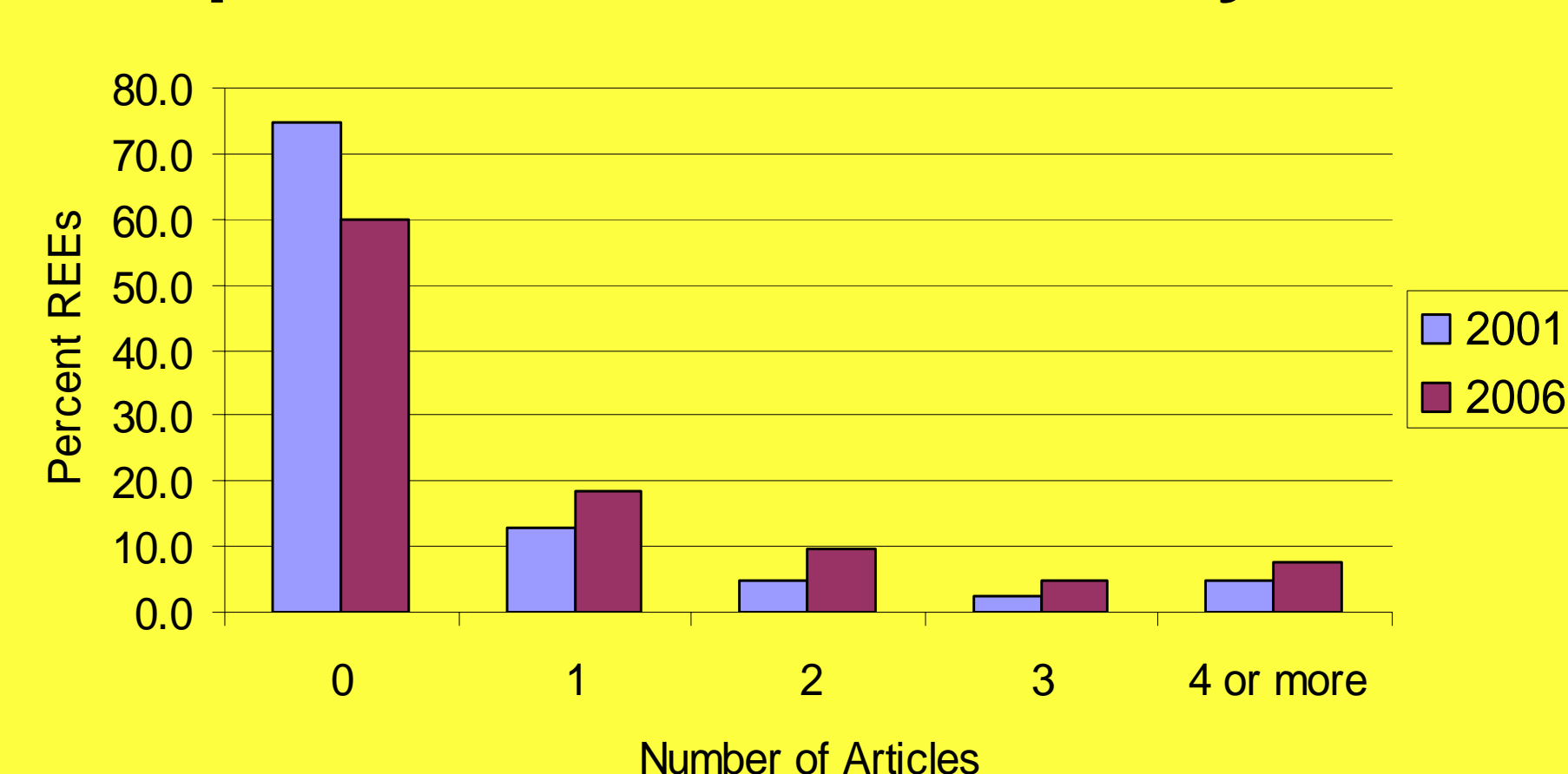
•More Time Spent on Applied Research



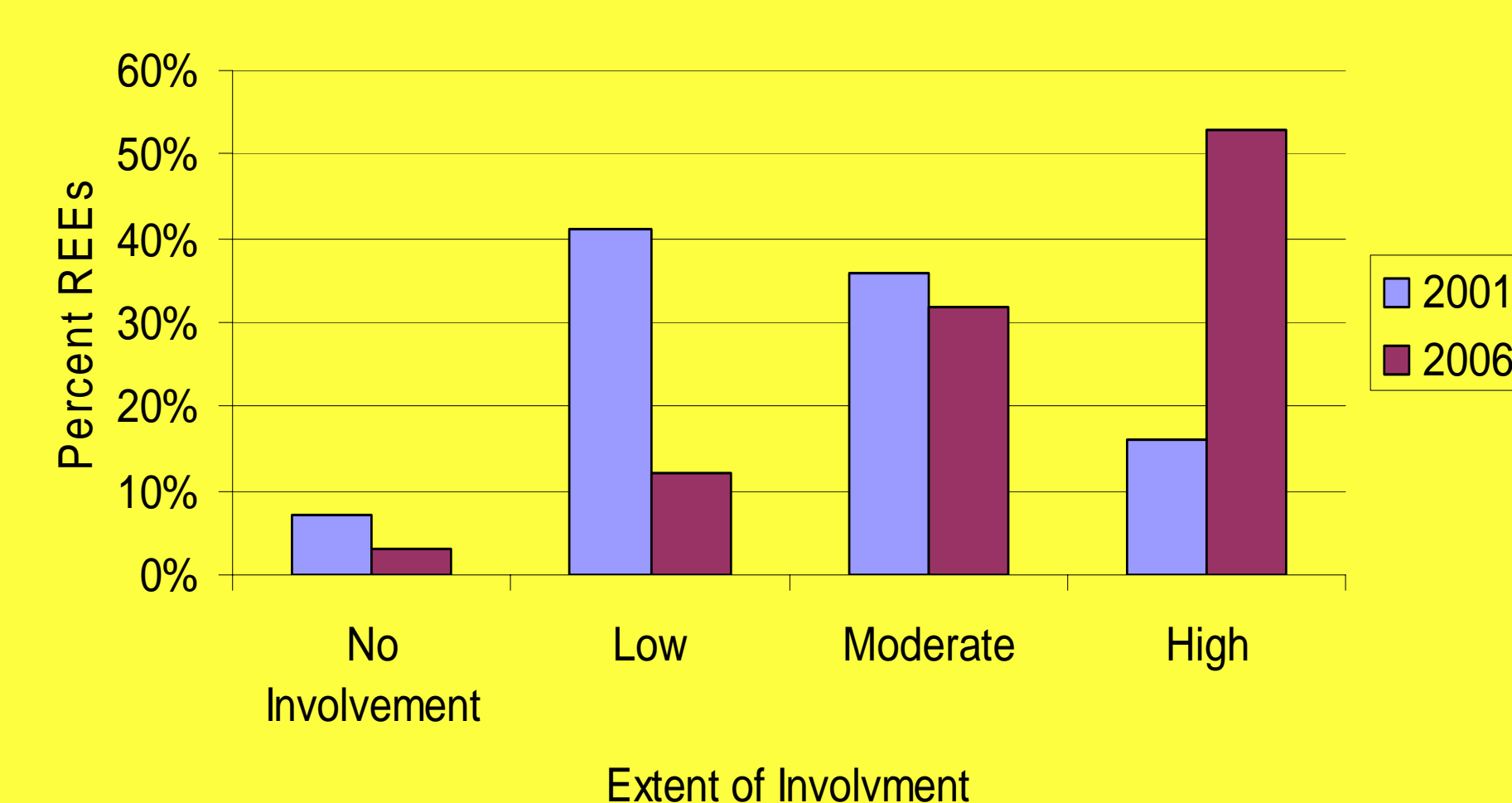
•More Jointly Prepared Regional & National Presentations by REEs with State Specialists



•More Bulletins, Fact Sheets, Staff Papers, & Journal Articles by REEs

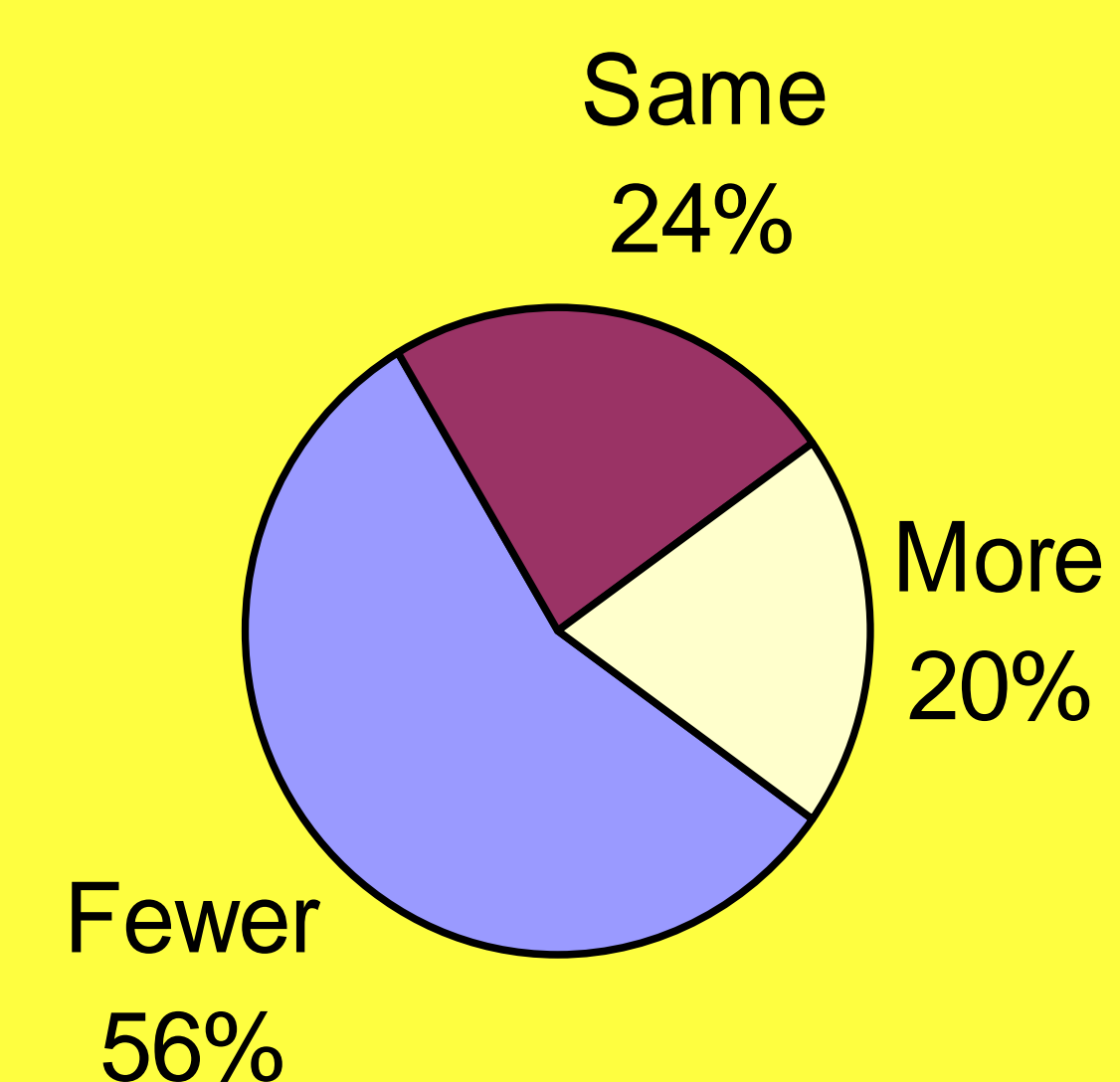


•Greater Involvement in Developing and Improving Programs

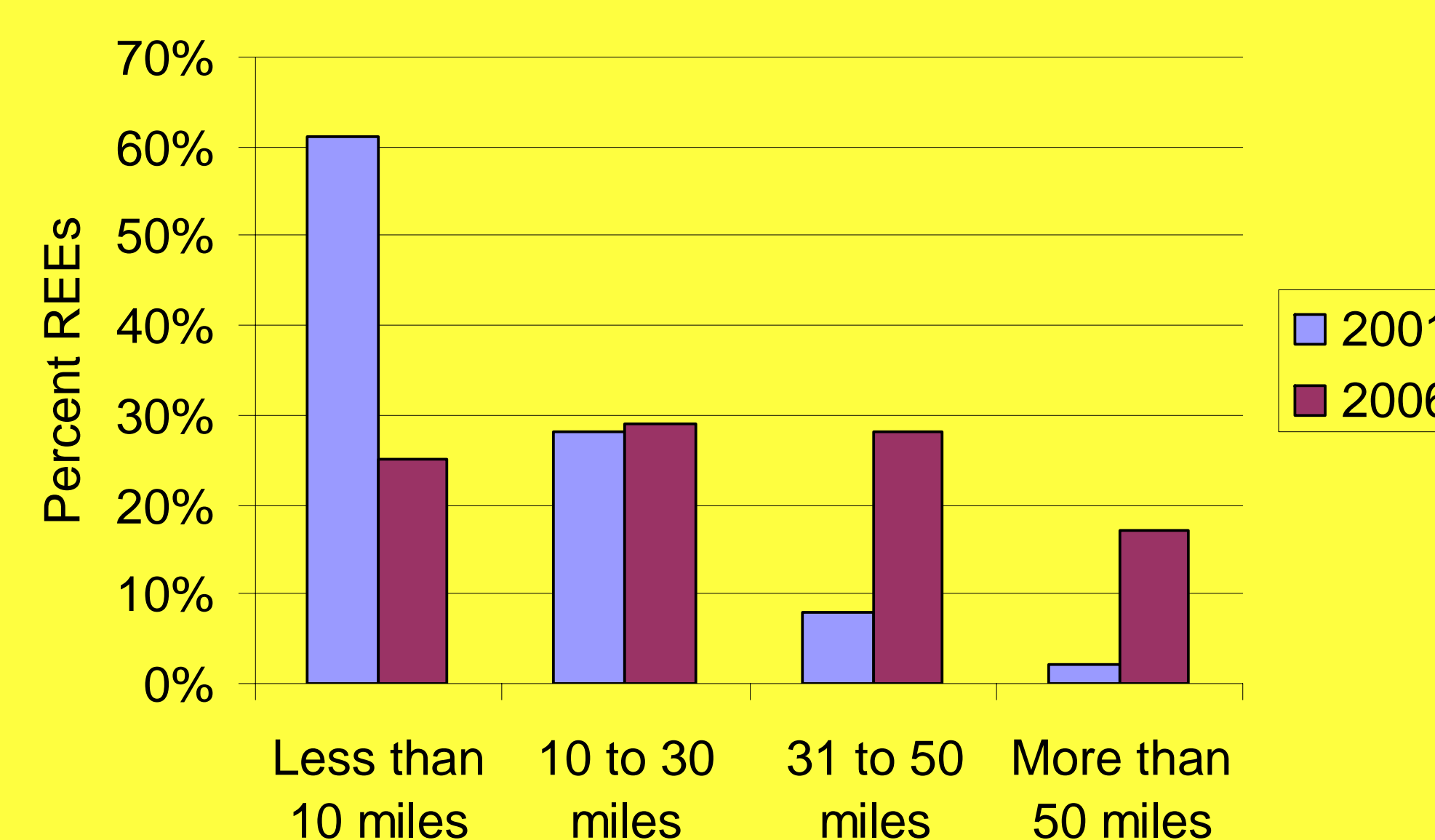


Proximate Impacts - Disadvantages

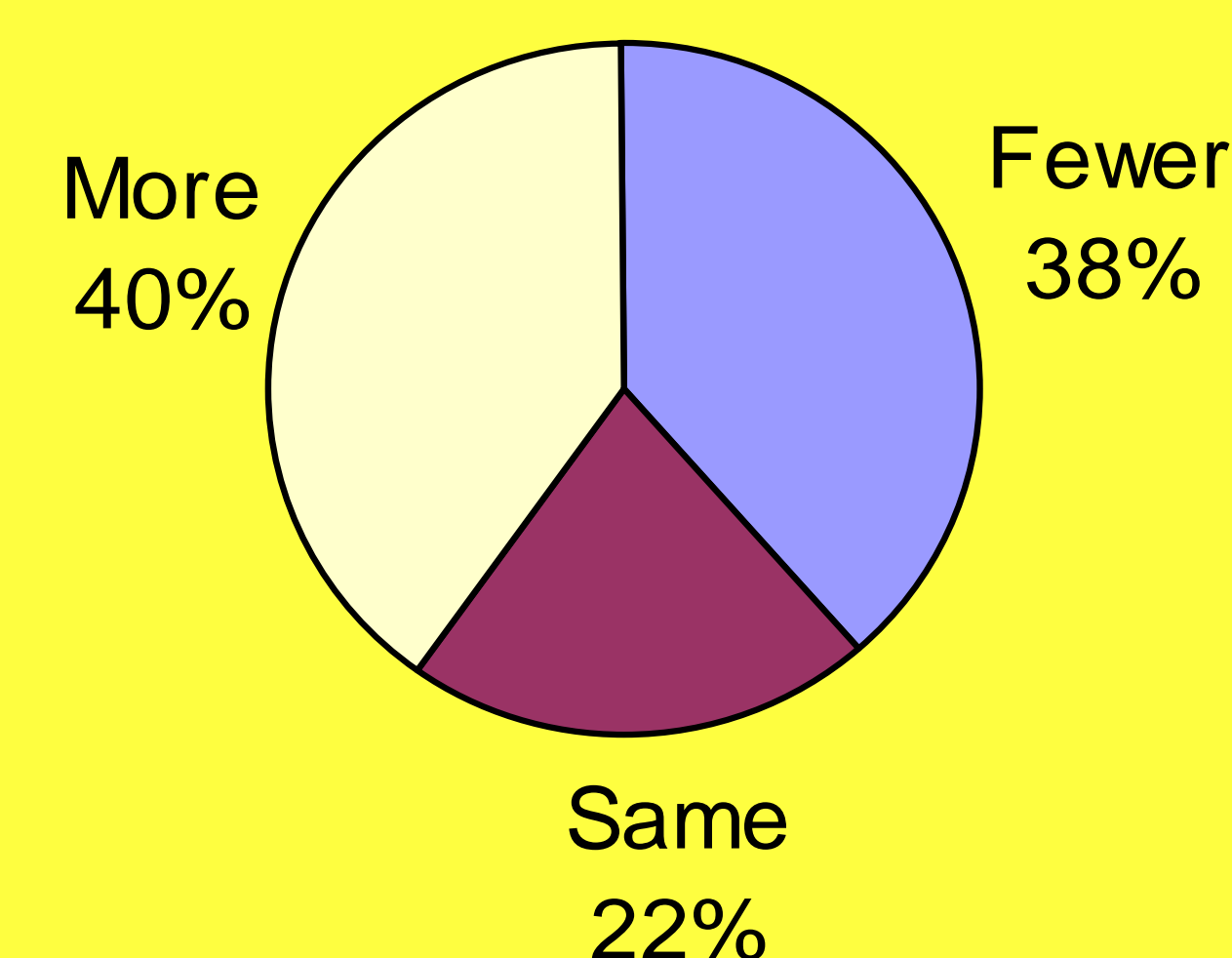
•Fewer Opportunities to Work with other Areas of Expertise



•Increased Commuting Time



•Opportunities to Strengthen Relationships with Audience – Mixed Bag?



Implications

- Distance Education
- Telecommuting for REEs
- Building Social Capital Networks
- Professional Development
- Working with REEs from other Areas of Expertise
- Joint Programming
- Scholarship

Methods

- Surveyed all 129 Regional Extension Educators
- 43 Questions with a 30 min avg. time for completion
- Online Questionnaire – Dillman Method
- Administered by a third party
- High Response Rate (79%)
- Evenly Distributed across Capacity Areas

Further Research

- Outcome impacts of programs
- Benefit-cost of individual programs to document private and public value
- Impacts of the mixed regional local model on local positions
- Nature of the public and private value of the local positions
- Training needs for REEs related to the new promotion process
- Effect of program business plans on program impacts
- Successful approaches for REE and campus specialist collaboration

Abstract:

Prior to a radical reorganization in 2004, Extension agents/educators in Minnesota engaged in their role as generalists with “specialist” titles. Their accountability was to the county and not necessarily to any area of focus or specialty. The reorganization of Extension due to a massive state budget deficit oriented 129 Extension educators to regional and statewide responsibilities in an area of expertise within a capacity area. Evaluating this change in regards to “field staff specialization” (through survey responses of 102 Extension regional educators) reveals benefits in the areas of recruitment; incentives to invest in human capital; closer working relationships with campus faculty; applied research and scholarship by field staff; program quality, development, and delivery; and credibility with the target audience. Disadvantages include: lack of cross-capacity work; more distant relationships with the target audience; and commuting time and travel.

Find the Full Paper at:

AgEcon Search

Research in Agricultural and Applied Economics

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Current research emphasizes regional economic impact analysis and the evaluation of community economic development programs. Does applied research and educational programs with community groups on economic development strategic planning and business retention and expansion strategies.

His publications include the book *The Retention and Expansion of Existing Businesses* and articles in the *Economic Development Review*, *The Journal of the Community Development Society* and the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*.

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Has taught community economic development with the Peace Corps in Tanzania. At the Humphrey Institute, conducted a feasibility study on the use of switch grass as an alternative energy source. With a Boren Fellowship, studied the status and role of madrassas (religious schools) in the Pakistani educational system. Also has several years of private sector employment in information technology at Northwest Airlines, Koch Industries and Emerson Process. Is fluent in Urdu (the primary language of 1.2 billion people in India and Pakistan), and has language competency in Swahili and Arabic.

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