Creating Our Future

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Summary of Committee Procedures

The Creating Our Future committee was appointed by Dr. Jimmy Henning, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky, in June 2011. The charge to the committee included a process of re-examining the core values of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. Also included was to conduct a broad based conversation with internal and external audiences to assess our current performance and identify the characteristics that our clientele value. Further, the committee was asked to define the goals for performance, staffing, communication, and programming, and implementing a process to achieve and exceed these goals. State and federal budget uncertainties were related to the timing of the committee procedures, but were not the only consideration for committee deliberations. While we began our committee work in anticipation of future budget impacts, the impacts began to be real with the state budget that was passed this spring. This changed the direction of some of the committee discussions because the real impacts of the budget situation began to occur during this year.

The committee met monthly, either face-to-face or by electronic meeting, from June 2011 through May 2012. Discussion centered around both the issues that must be addressed by the organization, and gathering input and information from the organization and its clientele.

Three major information gathering efforts were conducted by the committee. The first was a survey for clientele and other Extension participants and non-participants, regarding what is most important about programs of Cooperative Extension. This survey was primarily used with County Extension Councils, although it was also administered in some other settings with different audiences. The second effort was directed discussion conducted at Extension District Forums. These meetings of Extension leaders in each Extension district are held every year, and the Creating Our Future discussion questions were added to the agendas of these forums this year. The third effort was a survey of Extension employees at the state, county, and staff levels. Details of these input procedures and results are included in the appendices.

Core Values

Results of the input procedures and discussions of the committee indicated three main core values of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. These three core values are:

- Research based information

Cooperative Extension provides information that is based on research from the land grant research system. This allows clients, citizens, and other organizations to make decisions based
on the best information that is available. This value was identified both by Extension employees and those from outside the organization.

• County based programs, county councils, and leadership involvement

Kentucky Cooperative Extension has emphasized the principle that local programs are the heart of the organization. This value was confirmed by all of the input information and committee discussion as well. This is particularly illustrated by the increasing budget commitment that local funds contribute to the organization. Regular program input by the county council system are one of the most important ways that Extension knows the type of programs that meet local needs. Leadership involvement in many various roles is also a key to this local program connection.

• Marketing and reaching new audiences

The need for a consistent and persistent marketing effort is a recurring theme from all of the input procedures. We need to end the situation that causes Extension to be considered as a “best kept secret.” Extension needs especially to reach out to new audiences that do not currently participate in Extension programs or receive the benefit of Extension educational information.

**Topics for recommendations**

Based on the initial charges to the committee, the input gathered from the various sources, and the discussion that came from the committee deliberations, the following topics were identified for further consideration. For each of these topics, a situational statement, decision points for the Extension organization to consider, and recommendations are included in the rest of this report. The topic areas are:

• Marketing of Extension and reaching out to new audiences
• Technology and the use of technology
• Collaboration between University of Kentucky and Kentucky State University
• Guidelines for county staffing
• Guidelines for state staffing
• Guidelines for transitioning to a county program with fewer agents
• Guidelines for developing a proposal for sharing positions between counties or with other local agencies
• Information and guidelines in costs, liabilities, and expectations for programs served by program assistants versus programs served by county agents
• County involvement in staffing decisions
Marketing and Extension

Current Situation:

Based on results from the input survey conducted by the COF committee, this subcommittee report focuses specifically on marketing needs within the Cooperative Extension Service. Currently, there is little organized ‘branding’ within the CES network. There are several logos, varying from program area to county. As such, there is little unified front represented to the general public. Furthermore, to our knowledge, there has not yet been a state-wide organized approach to extension marketing. This report specifically addresses Staff Survey Question number 27, which revealed that the majority of people do not know what Extension is.

Considerations and Suggestions:

Ultimately, the committee suggests that a marketing consultant be hired to assist CES in developing a complete, presentable, and marketable brand name. Extension users often describe us as “the best kept secret in the county.” With budget cuts and an increased age of accountability, we need to ensure that we are reaching new and current audiences, while retaining our traditional ones. While employees work hard to develop logos and slogans for individual counties, we would benefit greatly from a professional outside specialist to direct us and support using our efforts. By making the investment to market ourselves properly, we can ensure that we will be prepared to remain relevant and accessible in the coming years.

This Marketing Consultant will specifically:

Develop a consistent logo that tells exactly who we are and what we do, including looking at the possibility of developing a shorter, straightforward name and logo that defines the unique partnership between KSU and UK. Currently, the official Extension logo is cumbersome and inconvenient for marketing purposes.

Develop concise, attractive templates and video products that county agents and program areas can easily access and adapt for themselves, with little to no difficulty-while still maintaining a unified look.

Present a clear and total picture of the services extension provides, to provide clientele with the full extent of what Extension offers in their community.

Highlight our core values, the strength of our research-based information, and the county/university connection that we are proud to rely on in Kentucky.
Look To Other Extension Services:

Other universities have also researched into marketing practices in the ever-changing culture of Extension. The University of California has developed a publication entitled "Marketing Cooperative Extension at the Local Level". This could be a valuable resource in the process of developing our "brand". North Carolina has combined their two land grant universities under the umbrella title of "North Carolina Extension." Perhaps by looking toward these examples, we can learn from other universities who have already begun the process of a state-wide marketing campaign.
Creating Our Future Committee: Technology

Survey results of CES staff showed that CES personnel feel that technology should be better utilized in delivering programming to CES clientele in Kentucky. Face to face interaction with clientele will always be important for CES, but the ability to reach new and diverse clientele can be enhanced through the use of technology. By leveraging new and existing technologies, Extension personnel can reach new audiences, expand existing audiences, and more effectively perform their jobs.

The following are technology related areas that CES should examine as potential methods of improving program delivery, enhancing communications with new and existing clientele, and to improve work-flow efficiencies.

- Ensure agents and specialists have the most appropriate technologies and training on these technologies to do their jobs effectively. Use both onsite (face to face) and online (LYNC, Adobe Connect) methods to deliver training to CES personnel located across the state.

- Expand and encourage the use of mobile technologies such as tablets and smartphones for Agents and Specialists. Make sure College publications, newsletters, fact sheets, reporting systems, etc. can be accessed in formats that are useful on mobile devices. This is important not only for CES Staff, but critical for reaching clientele that depend on mobile devices for timely and accurate information.

- Increase online program delivery using technologies such as LYNC, Adobe Connect, Video Streaming (College LifeSize Video Center, Ustream.com), and iTunesU.

- Use Social Media to target new Extension Clientele and keep existing clientele engaged. Keep up with trends in social media so that Extension is focusing on using the most successful social media delivery platforms to reach new and existing clientele.

- Train CES personnel on how to use Social Media to enhance their Extension programs. Identify the Agents and Specialists who are successfully using Social Media in their programs and share their success stories with other CES personnel.

- Improve CES and County websites by making them more interactive and informative by adding features such as online registrations, videos. Etc. Ensure that information on CES websites is timely, useful and appropriately markets CES programs.

- Encourage the use of cloud applications such as Google Apps for Education for more effective collaboration among CES employees (UK now licenses for all Faculty and Staff--Summer 2012).
• Use technology to enhance the delivery of research based information created in the COA to reach clientele via outlets like YouTube, Google, interactive video (Lync, Adobe Connect). Make sure College research based information is easily found via search engines and College/University search tools. Explore ways to use technology tools and resources provided by eXtension to enhance Extension programs.

• Media distribution: Maximize current methods of delivery and look for new channels of media distribution for CES (YouTube, Google, Blogs, Wikis, local access cable/local TV, etc.).

• Look at new methods of communications delivery internally and with external clientele. Use more interactive technologies such as Jive SBS (Social Communities), text messaging, RSS feeds, email marketing solutions, etc. Use these technologies to help market Kentucky CES to new and existing clientele.

• Look for ways to streamline information shared in face to face meetings into a format that can be shared online, real time, or for consumption at a later time (Use streaming video for trainings/seminars/workshops). Work to ensure CES content is easily found and centrally located in locations such as the College YouTube site and College Video Site.
Creating Our Future – Collaboration between KSU and UK

KCES’s mission is fulfilled by two land grant universities in Kentucky: Kentucky State University and University of Kentucky. It is known as the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service (KCES). Kentucky CES is recognized by its peers in other states as having a very positive and productive relationship between its 1862 and 1890 partners. This is due to the commitment of administrators to lead on this front. This partnership can grow with ongoing support from UK leaders and new leadership coming on board for KSU.

Listed below are the first priorities for enhancing the collaboration between these two institutions and Extension programs.

**Staffing**

With declining resources available to fill or refill specialists’ positions, UK and KSU need to expand opportunities to coordinate on areas of program areas and clarify lead institution roles and responsibilities. This would allow for greater coverage of all program areas and highlight goals and expertise of both institutions.

With KSU increasing staff at the local level, there is increased opportunity to serve local needs without duplication of effort. It is imperative that both institutions strive for full communication to achieve program success. Opportunities for co-location of staff will facilitate improved communication.

**New Employee Orientation and Core Training**

UK and KSU can collaborate on needs of new agents and specialists to meet Extension programming needs. Build on increased participation by KSU as participants and also as presenters of professional development topics that are covered in orientation and core training.

County Agents and Program Assistants want to know more about the resources and expertise available from KSU. An increase number of in-service trainings from KSU specialists is desired, too.

**Public Relations & Promotion of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service**

Highlight program achievements and accomplishments of both programs in Reports to the People and other media outlets.
It is important that local staff acknowledge that the resources, expertise, and specialists of both institutions are contributing local programming.

Recommendations from the recent NIFA Civil Rights Review Report can serve as a guide for efforts to recognize the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Now is a good time to explain to our publics how the KCES is served by two land grant universities in Kentucky. How do we develop this message to take to Frankfort? How do we help legislators and other decision makers understand both programs are important to and valued by Kentuckians?
Guidelines For County Staffing

As local funding continues to be a challenge for county Extension office, different funding approaches need to be considered. These challenges can be viewed in two different ways; one where a local tax is the financial support vehicle and the other is a local appropriation.

The short and quick response is “whatever the county can afford”. However the structure is not that simple. In most counties for instance, local funding is used for both office operations (rent) and support staff salaries. Some local funding is also supporting, in part, Ag, FCS and 4-H agents while other FCS (1), 4-H (4) are supported by state/federal funds.

If local funds are diminished to a level that office operations or support staff funding is impacted, the logical “target” becomes staff.

- Eliminate county funded position (support staff)
- Allocate additional responsibilities to remaining staff
- Agents take on more of their own support staff responsibilities
- Reduce program load and administrative duties

The Creating Our Future Extension Staff Survey results give some direction in the guidelines for County Staffing. There were a total of 301 responses to the questions asked of County Extension Agents, County Program Assistants, County Support Staff, Campus Support Staff, Extension Associates, Extension Specialist/Faculty, Extension Specialist/Non-Faculty, and Administrators.

Recommendations due to survey responses are the following:

- The Cooperative Extension Service should staff county offices due to budget cuts with responsibilities of serving a single county. However, multiple county program collaboration would be encouraged and perhaps necessary while staffing/funding issues are being resolved. This would be “short-term” and not a permanent solution.
- Agents will serve single counties. Where necessary to keep a program in a county, agents may have multiple program responsibilities.
- Fee-based agent/program assistant visits were not recommended at this time.
- Continue to maintain an Extension office in every county, serving only one county
Guidelines for State Staffing

Summary of Extension Personnel Survey

A total of 301 agents, support staff, associates, specialists, and Extension administrators completed a survey designed to gather feedback from Extension employees. The majority of the respondents were neutral on whether there should be an emphasis placed on the availability of faculty/tenure track appointments in academic departments. This may be attributed to the fact that most of our staff are unaware of the difference between tenure/non-tenured positions and the process thereof. A total of 293 of the total respondents did strongly agree/agree that it is critical to have access to research-based information. A total of 280 either agreed or strongly agreed that agents need access to specialists (most of the survey responses came from county level staff; only 30 specialists responded).

Although many respondents were neutral on the classification of specialists (most likely due to uncertainty), a vast majority agreed that specialists are valuable to the Extension System. Our staff also understands that the research-based information that we provide sets us apart from many other organizations and private entities. Extension programs are based on research as well as evidence-based information, generated through the work of specialists and Extension faculty. Although our land-grant mission is built on collaborative efforts between Extension, research and teaching, it is evident that state positions with majority-Extension appointments are crucial in making a difference in the lives of all Kentuckians. Based on survey responses, we must keep in mind that state staff are valuable sources that should not be taken for granted. We must consider the following when prioritizing state staff positions.

Current Kentucky Extension situation

Currently, a total of 129 specialists and 34 Extension associates are employed in the Kentucky Cooperative Extension system (UK & KSU). All are working on projects, many of which are addressing county specific issues. We have also been very intentional of engaging state staff in the local Plan of Work Process. Committees identified state issues that are presently or soon will be on the horizon to affect the state in various ways. State teams are also working to develop resources that will address those issues that were identified as state-defined goals. These were identified at the county level by our volunteer leaders and prioritized by county representatives at District forums (Fall 2011). State defined goals then emerged from the efforts of members of the state Extension Council in the Winter of 2012, who further prioritized the issues coming from counties and districts.
Points to Consider

(1) Forming more agent-specialist collaborations is critical if we are to produce programs that achieve more meaningful results. Specialists can work to provide counties with resources that measure impact at the county level. This, in turn, supports the state level programs designed by specialists.

(2) Keeping specialists in tune with agent county needs was indicated by a few responses: 237 noted that more/stronger curriculum is necessary; 249 indicated (strongly agreed/agreed) that more up to date research publications are needed; 218 indicated that specialists should visit counties

(3) Recruitment of high quality state-level staff; those with a solid understanding of Extension is essential; Adequate training for those without an Extension background is also very important (Our system must also provide more opportunities to enhance the skills of specialists working in Extension. A thorough orientation, follow-ups and mentoring all are key components that can contribute to their success.)

(4) The efforts of state staff create state-level programs that serve in attracting new audiences/clientele, as well as recruiting students to the UK College of Agriculture

(5) State staff offer a specific set of skills that are clearly defined, thus supporting Extension and the college as a whole:
   a. Research that is in tune with what is going on nationally (across programs); our clientele want credible information that is current and relevant; therefore, agents are in need of what specialists can potentially provide as resources
   b. Teaching (for class and via in-service trainings)
   c. Grant-writing (many fund associate positions, students, state programs)
   d. Statewide programming (planning & implementation)
   e. Identifying the gaps (many areas are not being served; state staff are needed to fill in and address the untapped issues, underserved audiences, etc.)

Recommendations

- More expectations of grant funded positions at state level in order to address more issues affecting the state
- Prioritizing subject areas and emphasize hiring of state staff that address those issues that have not been addressed in the past
- Higher priority of specialists positions due to their critical contributions toward our research-based mission (our system have already lost numerous specialist positions that were beneficial to all program areas; we have suffered the loss due to positions that were vacated and never filled; the funds were immediately used elsewhere or for other purposes).
- Specialists focus on multiple areas of expertise to help agents serve a broader audience
- Educating university, state and local leaders on the importance of all Extension positions
- Need for academic departments to support Extension faculty and staff
- Department chairs should be informed of the roles and responsibilities of Extension faculty
- Departmental Extension coordinators should be appointed in each department to actively engage all faculty/staff in Extension efforts (collaborative programming, reporting impact/success stories, etc.)
  Extension orientation should be a requirement for all new state staff (Faculty/specialists, Associates); Extension administration will need to work with department chairs to enforce this
Guidelines for transitioning to a county program with fewer agents
(such as 3 agents to 2 agents)

Background

As early as the 1970s, thought has been given nationally to the type of staffing pattern that is most effective for Cooperative Extension as well as clientele satisfaction with various staffing and program delivery models (Agnew & Foster, 1991).

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension identified four key components to guide staffing decisions:

• Work with Extension’s current staff wherever possible to match people with appropriate positions; provide retraining and opportunities to recognize and develop expertise.
• Engage stakeholders in the decision making, planning, and transition process.
• Provide balanced and focused programming state-wide.
• Recognize that one size or one system may not fit every situation.

In the Stewards of Progress SDSU Extension document (2011), Dean Barry H. Dunn noted that an important lesson learned from other Cooperative Extension Services restructuring efforts was that reorganizations of this magnitude will, initially, be difficult. These difficulties range from the personal impact on current Extension staff, to the way clients have previously expected to do business with Extension. Long-standing partnerships must be redesigned and strengthened.

Literature reveals that organizational changes create an uncertainty and anxiety among employees. Changes in an organization can be turbulent. Unless change is properly managed, the quality and the quantity of extension service can be affected. Therefore, it is important to identify ways to help people learn about the proposed changes of the extension organization in order to resolve employee concerns and issues (Jayaratne, 2003). Involving leadership in such change discussions warrants attention as well. Iowa’s restructuring plan involved greater collaboration between County Extension Councils and the University through increased local control of county property tax funds to invest in program staff and county programs (2009 Iowa Extension Restructuring Plan).

The Cooperative Extension Service Futures Task Force Report (COP, 1987) outlined the need for a more adaptive and flexible Extension staff. According to Agnew and Foster (1991) county level staff will be required to undergo retooling to meet the expectations of local and state programming. They also noted that pre-service education programs should promote the development of human relations skills, as well as, technical skills for field-based faculty. Skill-building should be consistent with trends in programming, such as team or multi-discipline and multi-county planning and administration, high-tech communications and information delivery systems, and quality programming with limited resources.
The critical problems of clientele will require specialized knowledge and collaboration among experts in various disciplines. The information explosion suggests more specialization will be required of field staff to provide the latest education (Harriman & Daugherty, 1992). Furthermore, state and field staff must be adept at using communication technology both to access and disseminate current information.

Alan Grant, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, noted in Virginia Cooperative Extension’s “blueprint” for the future (2010), the plan is only the first step. Over a number of months, implementation teams worked with localities, stakeholders, and employees to implement the plan.

**Implications for Kentucky**

The literature supports the need to be proactive rather than reactive as Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service faces restructured county staffing patterns in some communities due to limited economic resources. Key areas that should be discussed with local staff and leadership include:

- Focus on prioritizing program commitments and directions with the underlying goal of being true to local needs.
- Recognize that the programming and types of services will look different and/or be reduced in two agent counties compared to three and three+ counties. Specifically, local leadership needs to realize that neighboring counties programs with multiple agents will not be possible.
- Identify expectations for local programming that result in buy-in and commitment from leaders and staff.

**Before decision to reorganize is made:**

1. District Board and UK administration will review and prioritize county needs/potential to maximize funding for program outreach goals based upon local CES Plan of Work.
2. County leadership and UK administration review the long term budgetary and programmatic costs to downsizing and possible future reinstatement of the position.
3. Leadership/agents review the potential for other funding options that could supplement the three agent model and keep current program intact. (Can leaders/agents from other counties who have successfully supplemented their budget with other funding sources be brought in to share their experiences/discuss options?)
4. Leadership/agents review other funding models that could provide supplemental support for county-based programming.
5. If reorganization is requested a formal process and request for reorganization is submitted by the County Extension Council leadership.
Reorganization Planning

Recommend that there are three phases of transition planning:

1. Pre-planning phase – Develop a protocol that will result in a facilitated discussion with leaders, agents and CES administration:
   a. Regarding guidelines that govern UK CES (KRS statutes) relative to the decision.
   b. Of the underlying and mission and core values as identified through the COF process.
   c. Of current CES programs/activities that are “must haves” in the community that will remain as priorities for staff support.
   d. Of current CES programs/activities that will have to be modified or will cease due to lack of staff support.
   e. Of current best practice models in the state that work effectively in a 2 agent model.
2. Develop an implementation plan based on the pre-planning discussion that includes:
   a. Program priorities defined through the process.
   b. Retraining opportunities for agents and leaders to prepare.
3. Post plan evaluation
   a. Follow-up with staff – are the priorities being implemented? Is the community supporting the programs that they set as priorities?
   b. Follow-up with leaders – Are the priorities they perceived being addressed? Are they engaged and active in support of the total program?

Questions to Consider

Who is at the table when these discussions are taking place?
Who is absent from the table – does an effort need to be made to make sure that their needs are included?

Recommendations of Committee for consideration by CES Administration

1. A reorganization planning process be developed and implemented to provide support for county leadership, agents, and administration to explore all alternatives BEFORE positions are eliminated.
2. Explore options for cross-training agents in areas appropriate to programmatic outreach with the knowledge that this is a short-term/band-aid remedy. Consider the need for content integrity.
3. Each program area explores a definition of core programming expectations to be shared within the reorganization planning process to meet county needs.
4. Explore the short, mid and long-term CES organizational support needed for expansion and broader involvement of volunteers to support the reorganization models that emerge.
5. Programs, information, and base services will be reduced in two agent counties.
6. The CES organization will be responsible to support the essential elements of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, 4H/Youth Development and Community Economic Development programming (as defined by program areas) upon reorganization.
Costs to Counties for one of the base agent positions:

According to the Fair Labor Standard Act, which governs most jobs, employees are either “exempt” or “non-exempt.” Non-exempt employees are typically paid by the hour and are entitled to overtime pay if they work more than 40 hours per week. Exempt employees, on the other hand, do not get overtime pay. For example, a 4-H program assistant is non-exempt and a 4-H agent is exempt.

Non-exempt employees are guaranteed a certain dollar amount for every hour they work. Positions have a predetermined number of hours to work each week (37.5). If asked to work more than 40 hours per week, their pay would be 1.5 times the rate of the dollar amount. Exempt employees are paid a set salary and are guaranteed a certain dollar amount per pay check. They usually have a more flexible schedule. For example, if they finish their work early, they may be able to take the afternoon off. Exempt employees who work more than 40 hours per week or on holidays do not get paid extra for their work.

Cost of an Agent compared to a Program Assistant
(Salary versus hourly)

Costs to Counties for one of the base agent positions:

Counties contribute toward cost of 3 base agents per county based on a factor of county assessments and budgets. Counties are ranked according to categories and assessed amounts for first three agents. Counties are in fact contributing 1/3 of 3 base agent salaries or the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Agent Salary</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Program Cost</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Total/Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>$19,962</td>
<td>$625</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>$17,860</td>
<td>$625</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$18,485</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
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<td>$625</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$16,385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
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<td>$625</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$14,283</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 5</td>
<td>$11,557</td>
<td>$625</td>
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<td>$12,182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

County Cost estimate for 4th agent and above
Actual salary (example $40,000) | Base* $500 | Benefits (36%) $14,400 | Total $54,900

County cost estimates for 37.5 hour assistant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated pay ($12.00 per hour)</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Benefit (50%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$12.00 x 1950 hours per year = $23,400</td>
<td>$625</td>
<td>$10,700</td>
<td>$34,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Base program cost is a per person charge from UK to pay for IT support, software, and connection fees.
- Because of federal wage and hour laws, Program Assistants are limited in the amount of flexibility in their work schedule. Adjustments in hours worked per day are limited.
Because of this, program assistants would not be available to conduct all aspects of the Extension program especially overnight or weekend programs.

- Program Assistants are paraprofessionals, require high school diplomas. They do not supervise others, manage programs or have input into personnel matters. Usually someone else develops the programs and program assistants carry them out. Program Assistants are non-exempt employees and would be eligible for overtime pay.

- Agents are professionals with advanced degrees within a specific area. Their job descriptions include the development of programs on a local basis. They are required to fulfill management duties which would include supervision of staff, budget development and management of a volunteer program. Agents are exempt employees and do not qualify for overtime pay.
Assumptions used in this report

The ideal Kentucky Extension staffing situation is for each county to have its own agents dedicated to working primarily in their home county (which is our current Kentucky county staffing model). As long as adequate funds are available for agent staffing, this traditional county staffing pattern should be maintained. But with budget shortfalls at the College level and in some cases, at the county level; counties may be faced with financial limitations that force them to operate with reduced agent staff, either on a short-term or a long-term basis. Because every county situation is unique, it would be a good thing if counties facing a reduction in staff had some alternatives in dealing with the situation. Agent-sharing is one possible alternative.

This COF subcommittee report discusses guidelines and considerations for sharing an Extension agent between counties. Agent-sharing is a tool that might benefit some counties as they try to find ways to maintain county Extension programs with a smaller staff. In this discussion of agent-sharing, the report assumes that each county involved in an agent-sharing agreement will have its own Extension Office and support staff, with at least one Extension agent (more likely 2 agents) permanently located in the county, who is (are) devoted to working in the “home” county.

Sharing Extension agents between Kentucky counties could occur under four scenarios

1. Two counties could share an agent on a temporary basis when one of the counties is on a long waiting list for a position to be filled by the College.
2. Two counties that cannot afford a “full” staffing arrangement with the University could share an agent with another county on a long-term (semi-permanent) basis. (This assumes that both counties have funding limitations that make full staffing difficult or impossible.)
3. A county that has limited Extension funding might partner with a well-funded county to share an agent.
4. A county that has limited Extension funding might partner with Kentucky State University to fund an agent position in the county. Please refer to the report section “Collaboration between KSU and UK” for additional information.

Current Kentucky Extension situation

There is currently in existence one example of a temporary agent-sharing agreement in the Kentucky Cooperative Extension system. It was initiated in July of 2011 and involves sharing an FCS agent between Hickman and Fulton Counties in far Western Kentucky. The two Extension Districts entered into an agreement (drafted by the District Director and approved by the agent
involved) that outlined the work and reporting expectations for the agent, and also how salary
would be financed and how work expenses (travel, program support, professional
improvement, cell phone reimbursement, etc.) would be paid.

This existing Hickman Co./Fulton Co./UK/agent agreement provides a good starting point
for what other multi-county agent-sharing agreements would need to incorporate.

**Considerations and suggestions for possible Extension agent-sharing arrangements**

Extension agent-sharing could work in a variety of scenarios. Consideration of the
following factors should help counties increase the chances of developing a successful agent-
sharing arrangement:

1. Counties sharing an agent should be geographically contiguous (they should “join” and have
a common border).
2. Chances of a successful sharing arrangement would likely be greater if the counties are
demographically and geographically similar (they should have somewhat similar populations
and geographic areas). Agent-sharing would probably be best suited where the partner
counties have relatively small populations and relatively small geographic sizes.
3. In order to minimize scheduling conflicts and to provide consistent administrative oversight
of a shared agent, counties sharing an agent should ideally reside in the same Extension
administrative district.
4. Agents involved in sharing arrangements should be good, experienced agents with a strong
work ethic.
5. Extension leadership (Extension Councils and District Boards) and county leaders (County
Judge/Executives and Fiscal Courts) in sharing counties must be in favor of the agent-
sharing concept, and agreeable to the terms of the specific arrangement. Extension agents
and support staff in both counties must also be committed to making the sharing
arrangement work.
6. Initial sharing agreements (for either temporary or long-term sharing) should be for a fixed,
short-term (example: one year) with a provision for renewing the agreement if all parties
are agreeable. The fixed, short-term would allow the University, the agent, or the counties
to easily end the arrangement if it was unsatisfactory for some reason.
7. Sharing agreements should contain language that defines the agent’s work status should
the agreement not be renewed (or if it were dissolved in the case of a long-term
agreement)
8. Sharing agreements should outline the work and reporting expectations for the agent
(including office coordinator responsibilities), the details of the agent’s salary sharing, and
how work expenses (travel, program support, professional improvement, cell phone
reimbursement, etc.) would be paid.
9. District directors should be involved in helping a shared agent prioritize work
responsibilities and to maintain balance between counties.
10. Counties in long-term sharing arrangements should work to combine some planning and programming activities to minimize duplication. In some situations, it may be appropriate to combine program councils.

11. A 50/50 sharing arrangement between two counties would typically be envisioned, but agent-sharing based on other percentages could be possible.

12. Additional financial compensation would be appropriate for an agent working in two counties.

13. Both counties in long-term sharing arrangements should come to believe that the shared agent is “their agent.”

14. Due to county population, Extension District income, agricultural income and enterprises, general county workload, local culture and attitudes, etc.; some counties may not be good candidates for agent-sharing with another county.

15. Scheduling is critical for counties sharing an agent. Staff assistants in both counties must have constant access the shared agent’s schedule (such as with Google Calendar), and the agent will have to do a good job of planning and managing his/her time in order to adequately and fairly serve both counties.

16. A shared agent would probably need a laptop computer with a docking station in each county. That way, all work files would be available to the agent regardless of which county he or she was working in. Shared agents may make use of “cloud computing,” but that technology will not take care of all of their mobile computing needs.

17. County coordinator responsibilities for the sharing counties would probably need to be reworked so that the shared agent is not burdened with extra office coordinator work. It’s possible that a reduced level of coordinator responsibilities might be appropriate for some shared agent situations. The shared agent’s responsibilities should also make sense in view of their work situation. For example, it might not make sense to have a shared agent serve as a support staff supervisor because the agent would generally be spending half of his/her time away from the staff being supervised.

18. A county that has multiple school districts could provide increased difficulties for sharing an agent doing 4-H or other youth-oriented educational work.

19. Time for planning and preparation is likely an area where a shared agent will sacrifice the most in their work.

20. In counties where agents are shared, clients and leaders will miss having relatively unlimited access to an agent. Shared agents will have to exert extraordinary efforts to have good communications with clients and leaders in both counties.

**Sharing an agent with another local agency**

Because the unique job requirements of Extension Agents, and because of Kentucky Revised Statues describing Kentucky Cooperative Extension organization, work, and activities; the development of guidelines for sharing an Extension Agent with another agency would be best undertaken by the Director of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service and the Assistant Director for County Operations, in conjunction with the College of Agriculture’s legal counsel.
County Involvement in Staffing Decisions

The “Creating Our Future” sub-committee presents input on county involvement in staffing decisions. The members of the committee have reviewed and discussed ideas of involving county leadership in staffing of positions.

**Historically** – Potential agents were accompanied by area or district directors to visit with county extension councils and other CES leaders for an informal interview process. County leaders were able to ask questions of potential agents and make recommendations to directors before the final hiring process was complete. The major funding for county extension agents was through federal and state funding at that time.

**Currently** – Funding for extension agents today is quite different. Counties are now contributing a portion of the agents’ salaries and up to the full cost of 4th or more agents. As the percentage of funding increases for agent salaries compared to past funding practices, local stakeholder involvement in the hiring process should be considered.

**Considerations for involving local leadership (stakeholders) in the process of staffing decisions:**

It is the recommendation of the committee to explore ways in which county leadership (stakeholders) might become involved in the decision making process for hiring county extension agents. It would be necessary to identify stakeholder roles and provide training for these individuals. Leaders (stakeholders) may be engaged in the staffing process through participatory evaluation of current programs, in an advisory capacity as to staffing needs in the county or, as a participant in the interview process.

Appropriate local leadership (stakeholder) involvement might include one or more of the following:

A. The review and/or screening of applications prior to the interview process.

B. The indirect or direct involvement in the interview process utilizing technology. This would remove transportation barriers.

With the recommendation that local stakeholder involvement in the hiring process be considered, the University of KY would remain the employer of staff members as established through the KRS Statutes.