



Southern Region Middle Managers News

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Comments from the Editor

As part of our 2014 – 2015 Middle Managers Plan of Work, we decided to explore four areas of mutual interest in 2015. This issue focuses on **innovative uses for program assistants and staff** across our region. Many of us saw our staff and program assistants “go away” during the downturn in the economy, but as budgets begin to rebound it will behoove us to be more inventive and focused. Only six states contributed, but hopefully there are some ideas in here that we can all pursue. Frankly several contacts admitted “we aren’t very creative in X state” but perhaps it’s just how we view innovation. Several of my FL colleagues said “I’m not sure if this is innovative, but ...” So, taken as is, here are our southern region ideas on how to creatively use program assistants and staff.

Creative Utilization of County Programming Assistants – Kentucky

Paraprofessionals are an important component of Extension program in Kentucky and are utilized in Agriculture, Horticulture, FCS and 4-H program areas. In many cases our assistants partner across program areas to address local needs. The vast majority of these positions are funded at the local level or through the federal Nutrition Education and Supplemental Nutrition Education Programs.

Agriculture/Horticulture

Horticulture technicians help prepare class materials and PowerPoints, teach, promote Extension through booths at libraries, county fair and farmers markets, assist with volunteer training and recognition, take “home” horticulture phone calls, work with walk-in clients, process soil samples and help diagnose plant problems and identify plants.

Agriculture assistants serve many different functions including managing of local farmers markets, recruiting and maintaining farmer vendors, recruiting and coordinating educational activities, maintaining Farmers Market website and Facebook page and assisting agents with home and farm visits.



FCS

Family Consumer Science assistants support their supervising Extension agents in a variety of ways: including teaching nutrition classes to Senior Citizens, teaching parenting classes, relatives raising children classes, attending health fairs, supporting county fairs, supporting the County Homemaker organization, maintaining local social media sites, and working with a local food banks to promote commodity preparation ideas



Nutrition Education Program/ Supplemental Nutrition Education Program

NEP/SNAP Assistants teach limited resource audiences skills to improve the nutritional quality of meals, how to safely prepare meals and to maximize food related resources to better feed their families. Assistants must maintain a case load of adults and youth and successfully graduate adults with documented outcomes. Some Kentucky counties have been able to recruit and hire bi-lingual assistants to work with limited resource audiences

4-H

Many 4-H assistants spend a good portion of their time conducting 4-H School Clubs. These clubs touch on many traditional topics including: communications, SET, agriculture, cooking, babysitting, and health.

Some 4-H Assistants also coordinate the county 4-H Clover Bud and 4-H Teen Clubs. During the summer they assist with 4-H Summer Camps, Day Camps, County and State Fair, project days and plans for the upcoming school year. Jeff Young: Jeffery.young@uky.edu

Admin Professional Support of Agents: Innovative Example from North Carolina

1. County: Currituck
2. Contact sherry_lynn@ncsu.edu phone: 252-232-2261
3. Innovative Idea: Coordinated County Program Marketing Plan
 - a. Systematized External Communications and Use of Website
 - b. Developed a coordinated email newsletter published twice monthly
 - c. Developed video based impact report published and delivered monthly

- d. Developed system for data collection and reporting monthly from county staff

4. Successes since Implementation:
 - a. Lower overhead costs (postage, rented equipment)
 - b. Greater brand recognition
 - c. Increased enrollment in educational programs
 - d. More effective and legitimate documentation of program impact
 - e. Greater overall program impacts
5. Lessons Learned:
 - a. Develop systems with the end in mind.
 - b. Don't wait for it to be perfect, just do something.
 - c. Recognize that not everyone adapts quickly to change -- be forgiving and allow time for adaptation to new systems.
 - d. Be inclusive
 - e. Coordinate expectations and initiatives to evaluation measures -- if you want staff to increase press releases, set the expectation and develop innovative ways to ensure they meet the mark
 - f. Expect success and work to ensure success



Link to our bi monthly enews

<http://conta.cc/1waJaBB>

Link to our monthly impact report

<http://currituck.ces.ncsu.edu/spotlight/2-minutes-of-impact-february-2015/>
<https://sites.google.com/a/ncsu.edu/currituck-extension-handbook/reporting>

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Innovative Approaches to Utilizing Program Assistants and Support Staff

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Lonnie Johnson, Cyndi Marston, Dan Goerlich

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) utilizes different types of program assistants across the state and across the program areas. The majority of program assistants in Virginia are part of the Family Nutrition Program (FNP) and support nutrition education to both youth

and adults. These program assistants work very closely with our agents, particularly Family and Consumer Science (FCS) agents and 4-H Agents. There are also locally funded 4-H program assistants in some units that directly support the efforts of the 4-H Agent in that office. In a small number of offices locally funded program assistants manage the entire 4-H program under the guidance of the Unit Coordinator. In general,



the partnerships and collaborations that occur between program assistants and agents have resulted in excellent program impacts and have expanded the reach of the extension office as a whole.

Examples of these partnerships are bulleted below:

- 4-H program assistants have partnered with FNP youth program assistants to deliver in-school 4-H programs and this has created a broader experience for the youth as well as expanded the programming for the agent.
- FCS Agents and adult program assistants have partnered to deliver after school youth and adult programming. The parents are taught nutrition, food preparation, budgeting and actually prepare a meal; youth are enrolled in 4-H and participate in nutrition education, physical activity, and food preparation. Parents and youth all eat a family meal together.
- Summer FNP interns have worked with agriculture agents at farmer's markets. The agents identify in-season, but often uncommon vegetables and the summer interns provide recipes and demonstrations for adults with tastings. Youth were also taught about vegetables in a fun venue call Veggigation Station.
- An FNP program assistant partnered with an FCS agent and an FCS Snap-Ed agent to deliver a televised cooking show entitled Crazy Delicious. One episode featured the District Director as a celebrity guest; ratings skyrocketed 😊.
- Agents from all program areas, along with FNP program assistants, are collaborating on an Eat Smart, Move More social marketing campaign. One goal of the project is to encourage SNAP eligible clientele to utilize the local farmers' markets. An agent is the principle investigator on the grant.
- There are a couple of situations where state and local dollars have been paired to create hybrid program assistant/support staff positions that provide clerical support in the office and programmatic support in the field.

- Unit Administrative Assistants are often called upon to be out of the office at large educational events for things like registration, set up and take down, etc.
- There are a couple of situations in smaller rural communities where the county funds a 4-H program assistant who manages the entire 4-H program. These program assistants are supervised by the Unit Coordinator in that office regardless of their program area. Lonnie Johnson: lojohns2@vt.edu

Creative Ways to Use Program Assistants- Oklahoma

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) has different types of program assistants as described below:

Traditional Program Assistants provide support to educators by helping before, during, and after events. Many of them provide school enrichment programming



along with summer workshops at day and overnight camps. Some counties use Traditional Program Assistants in a similar fashion for other program areas such as Agriculture and Family and

Consumer Sciences; however, the primary focus of Traditional Program Assistants is typically in the area of 4-H Youth Development.

Non-traditional Program Assistants come in different forms and fashions, including the Tribal Mentoring Grant Program Assistants and JUNTOS Grant Program Assistants focusing on the Hispanic population and Tribally Funded Program Assistants that target audiences of specific tribes.

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation has 2 part-time and 1 full-time program assistants in the Northeast District of OCES. Their roles are to conduct programming that is written in a FRTEP (Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program) grant. Oklahoma is the only state that has this grant run through a tribe that is not located on a reservation. These program assistants work to provide programming to Muscogee (Creek) Nation youth throughout the 8 counties within their boundaries. They work by providing school enrichment programs, events/activities and coordinate with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation to help reach even more tribal youth. This program has focused on shooting sports (archery), outdoor camping and leadership. Each year the program assistants, with the help from county Extension educators, conduct a district wide archery

camp. By working with the tribe's leadership they are able to provide 4-H members with needed paperwork to take advantage of a livestock, small animal, and archery grant program. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation allocates over \$177,000 each year to help with programs for their tribal youth.

The tribal mentoring program assistants have provided much needed help in counties with a high American Indian population. The roles of the Tribal Mentoring Program Assistants have been to provide support for the traditional 4-H program along with establishing events, activities and 4-H clubs around American Indian cultures. This has led to 4-H clubs with traditional Cherokee names such as Ga du gi (working together) and U-na-li (friend). The program assistants have been able to focus on providing research based information to 4-H members and their families while preserving the heritage they so richly enjoy.

The JUNTOS program is a brand new program to Oklahoma and is focused in Tulsa County because of the growing Hispanic population. The grant provides funding for two program assistants that work directly with Hispanic youth. The program assistants provide family activities for Hispanic youth throughout the year. Many of the targeted youth become 4-H members and attend district and state 4-H events and activities.

Claude Bess: claud.bess@okstate.edu

Innovation at Alcorn State

The Alcorn State University Extension Program (ASUEP) and the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSUES) work collaboratively in teams in the Southwest District. This location is where the majority of Alcorn's extension support is staffed. In addition to performing routine clerical duties, support staff are often engaged in planning with county agents they are equipped with the tools to execute their job successfully. The support staff at Alcorn is assigned to teams (Reporting & Accountability, Staff Development, Environmental Scanning, Awards & Recognition, etc.) to provide overall support in regards to functionality and to assist in all facets which include day to day operations of the team. Since Alcorn began engaging the support staff members in the various activities (state fair, inventory, field days, county programs, etc); other than just sitting at a desk, we have observed an increase in productivity due to the fact the support staff members feel valued as a part of the



overall Extension Program. What's more, the communication among the ASUEP county staff and the MSUES county staff has greatly strengthened because of the congenial relationship of our support staff from both institutions. Gerald Jones: gwjones@alcorn.edu

More from Mississippi ...

Stone County, Mississippi

Judith Breland judithb@ext.msstate.edu

Innovative Idea: Our office Associate, began working with our robotics group when it was formed a year ago. She locates the activities for the group to work on during their program portion of the meeting. This gives the youth a challenging activity twice a month.

Successes Since Implementation: The Robotics 4-H club is very active because they know they will have an activity at each meeting.

Lessons Learned: The office Associate utilizes the computer frequently hence it gives her the opportunity to use her skills to find adaptable, acceptable activities appropriate to the age and skills of the 4-H robotics club members.

Jefferson Davis County

Thomas Brewer: teb17@msstate.edu

Innovative Idea: Developing an e-newsletter that would include information for forestry, horticulture, beef, and forages.

Successes Since Implementation: Greatly decreased postage costs

Lessons Learned: Clientele appreciate a variety of information.

Compiled by Patricia Knight: tricia@ra.msstate.edu



activities for the kids. The success of the event saw the collaboration of four county 4H programs Okeechobee, Martin, St Lucie and Indian River all advertising and sending youth to the event.

Lessons Learned: Do not schedule the day late in August as it is extremely hot! Engage your advisory board, ask them to work on projects and to actively participate ... they loved the event and have become more proactive since!

County: Marion

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Innovative Idea: Marion County has two 4-H Agents and two Program Assistants. We utilize one PA to keep all of the financial records for our 40 local clubs. She has a BS in accounting from UF. The other PA is assigned to work the 4-H Foundation – fund raisers, send meeting reminders, work with the Foundation President to be sure the organization is solvent – tax reports, audits, etc. She also has responsibility for grants and is to spend a large percentage of her time identifying, applying for and doing the follow-up reporting for grants. She has an MS from UF in Library Science and is retired from the public school system.

Successes since Implementation: The need to take on all club bank accounts in 2011 necessitated hiring a PA with accounting skills. We have been able to work this into the County 4-H Association under the State 4-H umbrella, while separating out the 4-H Foundation to manage only charitable monies. We have implemented a silent auction at the Farm City Week Banquet which raised \$2,500 the first year. We conducted a “color me green” fun run to benefit 4-H for the first time last August, which raised \$700.

Lessons Learned: Keep a good audit trail to satisfy the needs of maintaining a 501c-3 organization. PA’s need some program responsibility to help them feel ownership of the 4-H Program.

County: Flagler/Putnam

Sharon Treen, streen@ufl.edu

Innovative Idea: Our Ag Agent is multi-county for Flagler and Putnam Counties. So we hired an agriculture assistant in Putnam County to do the "ground work" necessary in working with producers, such as gathering soil samples and plant materials for diagnostics. The ass’t also helps with installation of on-farm demos, etc...

Successes Since Implementation: The ag ass’t is a new position and was just hired in December 2014. The

benefits are that the ag agent can increase focus on program planning and implementation.

Lessons Learned: It is necessary for a significant amount of time to be spent training the ag assistant so they can become knowledgeable about their job.

County: Pinellas

Theresa Badurek, tbadurek@pinellascounty.org

Innovative Idea: As school garden increase in popularity our objective was to increase Extension education in at least ten school gardens each year, while also increasing the quality of learning opportunities in those gardens. We transitioned 50% of one of our hort staff to provide information and guidance to new and expanding school gardens. Then reaching out to every public school in the county we provided site visits, fact sheets, grant funding info, links to the Farm to School program, curriculum material information, and a 1-day school garden summer camp for teachers.

Successes since Implementation: The results have been successful; we aided in the establishment, expansion, or rejuvenation of eleven school gardens in the first year. We also linked Master Gardener volunteers to several of the new school gardens for ongoing education.

Lessons Learned: Along the way we have learned many lessons about the logistics of how Extension can support school gardens. Some of those lessons include how to communicate with school board employees, visiting schools under increased school security measures, aligning our outreach with school and test scheduling, and coaching school staff on the time and resource requirements for a successful school garden. Most importantly we have learned to manage the schools’ expectation of what Extension can and cannot provide.

County: Sarasota

Bryan Dailey bdailey@ufl.edu

Innovative Idea: Transitioned two PA’s away from subject area and towards audiences allowed us to cut across multiple programs and present our offerings in a more coordinated and efficient way. It also allowed the PA to get more exposure to other programs and thus become a more valuable resource to the organization.

Successes since Implementation: The freedom enabled by the shift has motivated staff members and increased motivation, internal collaboration, quality programming, and camaraderie.

Lessons Learned: Present the opportunity and move slowly, allowing the staff to move forward with it. It may be surprising which staff engage, and that in itself is valuable.