

County Office Leadership

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance document is to clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the county office coordinator (formerly called the county office chair), along with expectations for all Extension agents, nutrition education assistants, and parent educators in county offices.

North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension is the link between the public and our land-grant university, NDSU. We extend education to North Dakota residents of all ages and walks of life, and we are committed to creating learning partnerships that help adults and youth enhance their lives and communities.

Extension agents and nutrition education assistants are county-based staff and the local face of Extension. Parent educators have regional responsibilities, but some may also have county responsibilities. In each county office, there are one or more Extension agents, nutrition education assistants, and parent educators who are NDSU employees and report to an Extension district director. In this document, these Extension employees are collectively defined as Extension field staff. County offices also have one or more support staff who are county employees, but who normally report to a local Extension agent.

NDSU Extension values the state/county partnership that allows us to deliver educational programming to meet local needs. These partnerships are reflected in the base policy established among NDSU Extension, the ND Association of Counties, and the ND County Commissioners Association that establishes guidelines for funding county Extension offices. The financial commitment includes having the county pay 50% of the salary costs for the Extension agents and all the operating expenses. Operating expenses include office space, travel, telephone, secretarial support and other costs relating to running an office such as paper, copying, mail, office supplies, etc. Computer equipment and other technology costs may be covered through a combination of state and county funds as determined by both parties. NDSU pays the other 50% of the salaries and all fringe benefits. NDSU provides sick and annual leave payout, most training programs, access to specialists, curricula, educational materials, email and website service, payroll processing, supervision (in collaboration with the county commission), hiring and coaching/mentoring. Annual county budget requests, initiated by the county Extension coordinator in consultation with NDSU Extension administration, are acted upon by the Board of County Commissioners. NDSU Extension pays the full salary and invoices the county for half. By doing this, the county and NDSU equally share the salary paid to Extension agents and educators. NDSU is the employer of record.

County support staff are county employees; hence their salaries are paid by the county, along with benefits if offered. Salaries, benefits, and operating costs for agents and nutrition education assistants providing the Family Nutrition Program (FNP) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) are covered by Extension because FNP and EFNEP are funded by federal grants. Parent educators normally have a main office location at a designated county Extension office but offer programming to a multi-county region. Therefore, the county and Extension each contribute to the budget for county Extension programming, and this creates a need for accountability and reporting at the county level.

Although county Extension offices vary relative to their level of staffing and the local programming that they deliver, there are consistent needs that exist for all county offices, including:

- A. Having a designated point of contact between Extension and the county commission,
- B. Tracking and managing the county office budget,
- C. Supervising support staff,
- D. Coordinating work schedules and programming of staff in the county office,
- E. Reporting to the county commission and district director on personnel, program, and budget matters, and
- F. Ensuring that NDSU records are managed according to the NDSU and NDUS records retention schedules.

In consultation with the county commission, the Extension district director designates a county coordinator for each county Extension office to address these needs.

Expectations for All Extension Field Staff (Agents, Nutrition Education Assistants, and Parent Educators)

All Extension field staff are expected to:

- A. Conduct themselves professionally and contribute toward positive work environment that projects a favorable image to clients
- B. Encourage a climate of trust and cooperation among all staff in the office
- C. Be responsible stewards of the county budget
- D. Be responsible for complying with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and assuring nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in light of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Ensure that all programs and activities are conducted in a manner which does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (gender), disability, age, Vietnam Era Veterans status, sexual orientation, status with regard to marriage or public assistance, or participation in lawful activity off the employer's premises during nonworking hours which is not in direct conflict with the essential business-related interests of the employer.
- E. Be responsible for promoting the importance and value of diversity as it relates to the NDSU Extension mission. This includes working toward the goal to create and maintain an organizational climate that respects diversity among staff, volunteers and audiences. Additionally, it includes providing programs that lead to increased diversity in Extension audiences in North Dakota. Field staff need to contribute to the completion of the County Civil Rights Annual Audit each September.

F. Youth Protection Policy responsibilities

- a. The county coordinator is responsible for coordinating the implementation and maintenance of the Youth Protection Policy as it relates to support staff. This is to ensure that all staff follow the written policy, which clearly defines management practices to prevent child abuse in North Dakota.
 - b. The county 4-H contact is responsible for implementation and maintenance of the policy relating to 4-H volunteers.
 - c. The county Master Gardener program manager is responsible for implementation and maintenance of the policy relating to Master Gardener volunteers.
- G. Personally, follow and encourage other staff members to follow the guidelines of safety and risk management policies established by NDSU and county or tribal government, which places a high priority on the prevention of accidents and injuries, quality health care for injured employees and a return-to-work assistance program.
- H. At least quarterly, provide documentation through a narrative of program activities to local decision makers and the respective Extension district director.

Roles and Responsibilities of the County Office Coordinator

In addition to the baseline expectations above, the designated county office coordinator has the following roles and responsibilities. These responsibilities may be achieved through shared leadership within a multi-agent office.

A. Administration

- a. Ensure that communication exists between the county office and county commission and/or tribal council on a timely basis.
- b. Consult with district director, as necessary, to reach acceptable solutions on programming and staffing issues.
- c. Consult with district director and other office staff when developing position descriptions, conducting screening, and in the selection process of filling vacant paraprofessional and secretarial positions.
- d. Serve as the Unit Record Coordinator (URC) for the office to ensure that Extension records are managed appropriately, staff comply with records retention schedules, and records disposal information is provided to NDSU's Records Management office by established deadlines.

B. Office Communications

- a. Initiate regular staff meetings to discuss program, personnel, and budget matters, as well as work schedules, to ensure that the office is staffed as needed during each work week.
- b. Facilitate a favorable work environment, which includes fostering a climate of trust and cooperation among all staff in the office.

- c. Provide leadership for appropriate orientation of new personnel, and complete existing checklists for those retiring or resigning.
- d. Ensure and encourage communication with the district director on personnel, program, and budget matters.

C. Office Management

- a. The county office coordinator normally serves as the supervisor for support staff in the office. They should work closely with other Extension field staff on the orientation and supervision of support staff. However, the county coordinator is not the supervisor of other Extension field staff. All Extension field staff report to and are supervised by the Extension district director.
- b. Cooperate with the other Extension field staff in the office to coordinate the workload of support staff to ensure equitable support service for all staff in the office.
- c. Assist the designated office 4-H contact with conducting the county 4-H youth development program consistent with federal and state laws, and, federal, state, University, and Extension policies under the authority of NDSU Extension. This includes effective management of youth protection, membership, participation, safety, and financial policies.

D. Resource Procurement and Accountability

- a. Consult with the district director and other staff in the office to develop an adequate annual office budget.
- b. Present the proposed budget to the county commission, and share the final budget with the district director and other staff in the office.
- c. Be responsible for the administration and management of the county Extension budget in accordance with the county and/or tribe and NDSU Extension guidelines and policy. Keep an accurate accounting of county expenditures and the status of the county budget, grants, and other funds with professional and support staff via monthly tracking. Regularly update other Extension field staff on the budget, and ensure equitable use of budget resources by all team members.

E. Program Coordination

- a. Facilitate procedures for development, implementation, and evaluation of an integrated Extension program through regular staff meetings and program planning meetings.
- b. Provide coordination and integration of the total Extension program utilizing local work groups (focus groups) and advisory council.
- c. At least quarterly, report the effectiveness of the total Extension effort in the county with decision makers via narratives.

Rotating the County Office Coordinator Role

NDSU Extension is committed to the professional development of all staff and recognizes that Extension field staff have limited opportunities to gain experience in managing budgets and supervising support staff, volunteers, or interns. In addition, the organization sees value in county commissions having a close working relationship with all Extension field staff in the county office. Therefore, it is recommended that the county coordinator role be rotated among benefited Extension field staff (with 50% or greater county program responsibilities) in an office every three to five years, if applicable. Field staff are not eligible to serve as the county coordinator if they are funded at 50% or greater on grant funds (i.e. FNP, EFNEP, and parent educators). As a general rule, agents with a multi-county appointment are not eligible to serve as county coordinator.

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