

## New Agent Expectations Guide

Congratulations! You've hired a new member of your local unit team. Extension agents are jointly employed by K-State Research and Extension and the local extension unit, and are jointly supervised by the local extension board, the regional director, and in the case of larger counties and districts, the local unit director.

An important part of the onboarding process for any new professional is having a clear set of job expectations. The purpose of this document is to outline K-State Research and Extension's basic expectations of new agents and provide supervisors with context around the following expectations.

- Attend and participate in new agent professional development.
- Become familiar with K-State Research and Extension policies and procedures.
- Get to know the community.
- Interact with the K-State Research and Extension Coaching Team.
- Meet with the Program Development Committee (PDC).
- Select a Program Focus Team.
- Review existing educational action plans.
- Conduct educational programs.
- Report educational contacts and impacts in PEARS.
- Attend K-State Research and Extension Annual Conference.

### **Attend and Participate in New Agent Professional Development**

K-State Research and Extension has a robust onboarding program aimed at helping new agents successfully meet their expectations. New agents should be expected to spend 6-8 hours per week learning about their new position and completing online coursework during their first two months on the job. The online course is designed to guide new agents in learning about our organization, the local community and some of the basic core competencies necessary to be a successful extension professional. Local unit directors and board members should help the new agent block off time on their calendar to complete these important tasks. Additionally, they will be expected to participate in virtual and face-to-face professional development sessions as follows.

- **Welcome to KSRE Zoom**—conducted on the first day of work. During this session, new agents will be welcomed to the organization, begin to network with colleagues, learn about expectations, complete new employee paperwork, and learn about their benefits.
- **Virtual Orientation Zoom**—conducted within the first six weeks on the job. During this session, agents learn about the role of an extension professional, discuss professional expectations, and review basic history and structure of extension. This session is from 9 am to 4 pm, and new agents are encouraged to join from a location that is free from distractions.
- **New Extension Professional Orientation**—a five-day training conducted within the first four months on the job. New agents will engage in hands-on learning activities to help them learn more about K-State Research and Extension programming, practice interpersonal and communication skills, and develop relationships with specialists and fellow agents.
- **Foundations of Youth Development**—a three-day training which is held in the spring and fall. New agents will attend the next available session following their on-campus orientation session. This session covers the fundamentals of youth work and experiential learning as well as management specific to Kansas 4-H. All agents are expected to attend Foundations of Youth Development, although the Kansas 4-H management portion is optional for those who do not have specific 4-H or supervisory responsibilities.
- **Navigating Difference**—a two-day hands-on training which is held in the spring and the fall. This hands-on training helps staff to enhance their cultural competence and learn skills necessary to work with people who have different cultures, backgrounds communication and conflict styles.
- **Programming with a Purpose**—conducted using a hybrid approach with two half-day Zoom sessions followed by a two-day on-campus session. Agents will attend when they have been on the job approximately 12-15 months. This session serves as the capstone to new agent onboarding. Participants learn about the program planning process, how to identify and reach intended and underserved audiences, and the importance of communicating impact. New agents will write their first action plan during this session.

Supervisors and board members are expected to allow the new agent time and help them to protect the time necessary to participate fully in their onboarding work. Allowing new agents to work in a remote, distraction free environment while completing the coursework is helpful. We also encourage board members to take an interest and discuss with new agents what they are learning.

## **Become Familiar with K-State Research and Extension Policies and Procedures**

Extension professionals are expected to know and follow Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas State University, K-State Research and Extension and local unit policies. Onboarding course work and

sessions will help familiarize new agents with state-level policies and procedures. Local unit directors, colleagues and boards should help new agents learn about local policies and procedures. The local unit director is expected to assist the new agent in completing the Local Unit Discovery tool which is designed to help new agents and their local partners learn about local policies, procedures, norms, and culture. This should be completed during the agent's first two weeks.

## **Get to Know the Community**

Getting to know the communities and people they will serve is key to an agent's success in connecting with their audience and providing high quality educational opportunities. Initial assignments in the Canvas course will walk new agents through reviewing census data from the local unit and interviewing key stakeholders to discover strengths, issues, and opportunities within the community. New agents may benefit from suggestions from colleagues and board members about possible stakeholders to interview. Following, their on-campus orientation, new agents are expected to familiarize themselves with program area-related data and conduct key-informant interviews with stakeholders related to their specific program area. They are also expected to meet with their program development committee to review their findings and identify a specific situation to target with their first action plan.

## **Interact with New Agent Coaching Team**

The K-State Research and Extension Coaching Team is responsible for advising, coaching, and facilitating the mentoring of new agents during their first year of employment. A member of the coaching team will make personal contact with the new agent within their first two weeks of employment. Coaches will interact with and support new agents in a variety of ways including one-on-one visits, Microsoft Teams chats, monthly new agent Zoom sessions and other group meetings. Coaches will also help new agents network with other agents and professionals in the organization who can provide additional support. Local unit directors and colleagues can also help new agents network within the organization and help them find informal mentors.

## **Meet with the Program Development Committee**

Strong local extension programs are the outcome of a partnership between extension agents and members of the local Program Development Committee (PDC). Within the first three weeks on the job, new agents are tasked with introducing themselves to their PDC members and learning more about each member, including their meeting preferences. Prior to attending Programming with a Purpose, agents are expected to meet with their PDC to review program-related data and get feedback on the issue(s) they intend to focus on when writing their action plan. Local unit directors and/or colleagues should assist the new agent by providing a list of PDC members. Arranging a meet and greet with PDC members is also encouraged.

## **Select a Program Focus Team**

New agents hired with a specific program specialty such as 4-H Youth Development, Horticulture, or Nutrition, Food Safety and Health, are automatically assigned to the Program Focus Team related to that specialty. Agents that are hired into generalist positions such as agriculture and natural resources or family and consumer sciences will need to select a PFT prior to attending Programming with a Purpose. The selection should be based on local unit needs and the new agent's interests. Once an agent has made their selection, they should email that information to Laurie Chandler, associate program leader, and copy their local unit director and regional director. Once they have approved, the new agent will be added to the PFT.

## **Review Existing Educational Action Plans**

Educational action plans provide a roadmap for an agent's programming efforts. New agents will not develop their own action plan until they attend Programming with a Purpose, 12-15 months from their start date. To familiarize themselves with the action planning process, previous work done in the local unit and state level initiatives, and to have an action plan to report impacts to prior to writing their first action plan, new agents are tasked to search in PEARS for their predecessor or another agent's action plan and a state action plan. New agents should adopt an existing state level plan for reporting purposes prior to completing their first performance review. New agents are not required to adopt a Signature Program action plan until after they have attended Programming with a Purpose.

## **Conduct Educational Programs**

One of the main professional responsibilities of all extension agents is to conduct and evaluate educational programs. However, new agents should not feel pressured to conduct educational programs during their first couple of months on the job. During this time, they should be familiarizing themselves with their position responsibilities, getting to know key stakeholders and the community. It is unreasonable to expect a new agent to pick up where their predecessor left off with programming. Consider that it may have taken the former agent years to develop the skills necessary to develop and present some of the programs they were delivering. New agents are encouraged to partner with other agents within the local unit or surrounding counties to conduct their first programs. An important role for local unit directors and colleagues is to help new agents network with agents in surrounding counties and existing teaching blocks. Local unit and regional directors should work with board members to regulate expectations around programming while the new agent is learning their job responsibilities.

## **Report Educational Contacts and Impacts in PEARS**

All agents, including new agents, are required to collect demographic data from program participants and utilize PEARS for reporting. Modules within the new agent Canvas course educate new agents about the basics of the PEARS system. New agents are required to submit a Quarterly Effort Report (QER) at the end of their first quarter, regardless of how long they've

been employed or the number of educational contacts they have made. A Canvas assignment will walk them through completing this first QER. New agents will learn more about PEARS and creating Program Activity Reports during their on-campus new agent orientation session. New agents are not required to complete Program Activity Reports until after this training. New agents hired prior to July 1 will be required to complete Action Plan Outcome Reports at the end of the program year. New agents will have slightly different performance review requirements, and these will be outlined for them in a special training session held in August. Local unit directors will also receive information regarding a new agent's performance review.

### **Attend K-State Research and Extension Annual Conference**

All agents are required per their employment contract to participate in annual conference. This is an excellent opportunity for new agents to network and meet colleagues from across the state. Local unit directors and colleagues can assist the new agent by helping them register and secure a hotel room, telling them what to expect from conference, and helping them navigate their first conference. Any absences from conference should be discussed with the regional director.

### **Conclusion**

The success of new extension professionals is intricately tied to the support and guidance they receive from various key stakeholders within the organization. Colleagues, local unit directors, regional directors and board members all play vital roles in ensuring their growth and achievement. All are encouraged to work together to welcome and outline expectations for new agents. By following the guidance outlined in this document, we can all help new agents achieve success.