

**Extension Management Team Meeting
June 5, 2007
Merrimack County Office, Boscawen**

Attending: Charlene Baxter, Darrel Covell, Nancy Bradford-Sisson, Claudia Boozer-Blasco, Chuck Hersey, Geoffrey Njue, Alice Mullen, Sumner Dole, Holly Young, David Foote, Deb Cheever, Wendy Brock, Dan Reidy, Ann Hamilton, Sue Buteau, Kathy Jablonski

Paul opened the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Updates - Welcome returning COAs – Sue Buteau and Kathy Jablonski newest COAs

Communications Updates

Worked on getting advisory council updates together – reminder to update yet again, biggest challenge keeping advisory council membership current; Mike Toepfer put together a “database” so COAs can enter new membership directly. Also will be able to input dates of service and “retirement.” Will probably do a “go-to” meeting with you and county administrative assistants to show how it works. Should be ready within a few weeks.

New Radio Show – Merrimack County piloted with WTPL a radio talk show program, which takes place every Monday morning. It’s almost state-wide in its listenership. Call letters 107.7 with Peter St. James.

Questions – How far booked to date? Name and topic will be listed so there won’t be duplications of topics. Wendy talked about “volunteer” button on front page and the volunteer committee wanting a link there about what’s new in that area.

Deb suggested understanding the concern about not wanting to be on if not in area, it’s a good thing to understand the “larger breadth” of the organization. There might be something going on in Coos, and it will help with the knowledge base. She didn’t want to close the doors. Talk about the issue rather than the program; talk about Extension – why is the lawn brown, or nutritional efforts. Claudia noted how broad the topics already listed are, and is wondering how the interviewer approaches it? St. James doesn’t want a lot of “write up” before the interview. It is mostly an interview, although people can call in during this time frame.

Can you email St. James with key points educators want to make?

Paul explained that this came to Extension as an offer of the radio station. Holly will become the point person. Question on holiday dates – we will need to check. When it’s ready to go up, make sure specialists also are notified. Claudia also suggested this effort gets reiterated at program meetings and through program leaders.

Charlene noted that if there are people who get uncomfortable about doing radio spots, don’t push it. Those that want to do it and see it as an opportunity; and that once you do it once or twice, there’s a better comfort level.

Please plug the Education Center’s toll-free number during these radio spots.

Holly, Paul and 2 staff members from Merrimack met with the managing editor of the Concord Monitor; getting to know us and vice versa. Newspapers are being challenged and looking for local stories. If it’s something you want to do; we can set that up for you. It was a very positive meeting.

Advisory Council trip to 4-H camp in July – Paul will be able to send an email to council members. They need to know how to sign up for the event, July 25, 10 through the afternoon birthday party for John Saturley. Deadline is a week before for the lunch count.

Holly talked about the Pub Center and ordering every 2 weeks.

Paul talked about the Communications Team meeting with advisory councils – it's a good idea so council members will know what's going on statewide. We can do an overview and follow it with a question and answer. If we know what people are interested in, and there may be some common themes that will emerge. This will get picked up in the fall.

ITDE report - David

In the next 6 months, David would like to schedule 45 minutes at each county, to do a quick needs assessment to help update the ITDE strategic plan, wants to get a sense of needs and how we're currently meeting those needs and future needs. Send David an email with available dates between now and the end of December.

Talked about grants – looking at a new partner, met with the Seacoast Science Center, very interested in partnering with us, along with UNH CIS, which also could submit the grants. This round of funding has passed, but we will be able to submit for the next round.

At the statewide conference, we had opportunities to show new technologies, WiKis, go-to meetings, Skype (sp) – when David visits the counties, and will share these new technologies and help you use them.

David handed out a Distance Learning Technology sheet and will use it to help staff understand all these.

Paul – eXtension update.

On the front page of our website; encourage staff to sign up for an eXtension id. Get an id – allows you more access and to use the tools available. For specialists mostly at this point, educators will want to get involved in topics.

Darrel – any discussion about other national web sites, one Karen worked on which has great information. David explained one of the stumbling blocks – eXtension is developed with Wikis – how do you take current sites and transfer it to eXtension.

Claudia curious about organizational structure – no connection to USDA. eXtension is made up and governed by Extension, funded at state level, and USDA does have an eXtension line item budget. Control and ownership is by eXtension. Paul represents the Northeast. eXtension itself is a non-profit – used as a convenience tool. Everything is tagged to come back to us, using the UNHCE logo and contact information. There are two levels of registration; a general user or as a contributor. As a contributor, asked to sign a contributor agreement; don't do that yet, working with UNH to work out the legal aspects.

Why not an email to staff? Holly will do up an email to staff to encourage sign up. David – if we want to put it into ITDE blog – won't see it. Blog notices – feed biz (sp) are for the blogs we have. You can sign up for it through the ITDE site. Each educator has to sign up for this.

Ann was very impressed with how you type in your zip code and come up with UNHCE web site. Topic that could be discussed with advisory councils.

Job description discussion:

Background and history: About 2003, there was a committee working on the performance appraisal forms and at some point, they put some generic job descriptions up on the web, including the COAs. We realized when we switched from previous one, we lost a lot of categories – such as time commitment, compensation and other issues such as selection process. EEC meeting, they asked questions about the job description, those topics that were eliminated. On the review sheet, up to page 2 is what you currently have; on page 3-4, those are the items that got eliminated. There is some input in draft from EEC, and then in italics, Paul's interpretation. Goal is to get a better job description up on the web. That's how we got to today. The only change on page 1-2 is a few minor words and reordering of items.

Goal – need input and reincorporate some topics into one document. On page 5, more information on selection process. Then a separate issue on this group – what it should actually be called, etc.

Alice – main thing are the additional pages helps clarify issues at EEC meetings. It provides flexibility. Another issue is new staff being placed in a COA position that might not be ready for it, so this draft, which addresses this issue of how long they should be in their current role before they become COA, is good.

COA role is really a leadership role and should get recognition as such. Added in giving “executive leadership” to the advisory council – how do you as COA support your council chair to ensure they aren't at “loose ends.” It requires leadership and the ability to know when to step in and when to back off.

Eliminated anything having to do with program development. Sumner – in Belknap, we don't keep minutes – what we do, we keep notes and share what was discussed with staff not present. Minutes can be beneficial, but we don't do that, but ensure we keep staff and Paul up to date. Claudia thinks minutes are critical, particularly if we need to go back and refer to make sure everyone's on the same page; eliminates the possibility of misunderstandings. It doesn't take long, usually have an administrative assistant sit in and type them up and it helps enhance office communication. Deb agrees with keeping minutes; it's critical issues and sometimes we've gone back three to four years to refer to something. We “role” model when we're out teaching programs, and should do it ourselves. Merrimack would be happy to share the form used for keeping minutes. Sue also noted commenting on civil rights in minutes remains important for future documentation.

Claudia – expand reference to agenda; not just the agenda, but programs or goals, working with the advisory council on the type of goals they'd like to achieve over the course of a year. Simply “develop the agenda and programs.”

Public awareness plan refers to elected officials, and to the media. In some of the bigger counties, that can be delegated. Are public awareness teams integrated into plans of work? Paul thinks it's a good idea. Develop and support a public awareness plan with staff and council, a suggestion from Wendy. Sumner noted that if evaluated on, it's important to have it in the job description for staff.

Wendy noted public awareness efforts in a county will never be a one-person job. Dan noted Jon Nute taken on that responsibility for the county; Sue noted it differs in counties with smaller staff where it becomes a responsibility everyone shares.

When you talk about a public awareness plan, for county, which provides more flexibility, or a state plan, where there would be expectations – a question by Sue. Wendy – add in “annual” public awareness plan.

Include entire office staff in securing and appropriating office locations.

Paul will do a section on effective office communication and positive public relations, external versus internal communication.

Budget section – Claudia’s suggested addition – *present the budget and represent county office at subsequent meetings and hearings.*

Budget gets sent to both the assistant director, county operations, and the assistant director, finance and human resources. Need final budget. Coos budget goes to county administrator, Merrimack’s does too, add “*or appropriate county official.*”

Number 4 – ensuring staff remain within their budgets and submit monthly travel budgets extremely challenging. Deb shared that county auditor indicated couldn’t go beyond a two-month period. Dan’s office, it proves challenging. As new staff added, this would be once piece of the training – to get their travel expenses in on time.

Is it a program concern or money concern – program leaders serve as a fall back; it is part of the job description. Only part of being a professional and good team player. Need to realize there are consequences.

There needs to be clear consequences that they will lose the ability to get reimbursed. Paul, in his role, should be the first contact. Add in something to the effort of: *Ensure they understand the ramifications and consequences to the county budget.*

Reporting and Accountability

Move number 3 to under advisory council on front page under B?

Time Commitment

When is it identified as to who will be the next COA – is it a year in advance or only a couple of months? How to determine when a staff member’s turn at COA should occur is important. Is there enough lead time? Percentages vary; should we say what is the absolute minimum – 20 percent? It’s different for each county. It has become “muddled.” With co-COAs, ensure there are clear definitions, but have the ability to back fill when needed. Kathy J. said it would be important to new-comers to realize there’s at least a 20 percent time commitment (or whatever percentage listed) to give them an idea of what the time this role takes.

Appointment and Tenure

Appointment should be for a one-year period; doesn’t mean you only serve for one year, but that an appointment letter goes out yearly. (minimum of two years?) And selection of COA will be by the assistant director, county operations, in collaboration with specific program leader. Nancy B-S noted there should be county input. Sumner advocated Paul talking it over with the county staff; then a conversation with advisory council as well as program leaders. It helps build consensus. There are a lot of variables with the role of COA and the ability to make “exceptions” to the tenure (two years.)

Chuck asked about a three-person role, which has occurred before, but it proves challenging in terms of communication efforts.

David – Wikis demonstration

Showing ITDE blog information – series of videos from YouTube – one up on blogs, Wikis. eXtension all developed on a Wiki – Wikipedia – written and edited by thousands around the world; quick explanation, structured so that it gives you quick and easy information.

Corporations have grabbed Wiki to develop training manuals, setting up tracking of tasks, set and talk about new policies; predicting most corporations will adopt this tool by 2009.

David - Wikis – in our work, we have ownership and don't want things changed. In eXtension, wikis can also be set up so group has to approve changes, or a certain number of people have those rights. There are controls in the wiki environment.

Continuation of COA description:

B. Claudia – serving a maximum number of years question come up? What is somebody has been on too long? Paul – the “annual” appointment should address that issue. Maybe reorder things, adding in that there would be a review at the end of the first year before a reappointment to a second year.

C. Performance evaluation.

Re-emphasize how well COA performs the role should be recognized during performance evaluation and an important consideration in the promotion process. Don't list things like public awareness, etc.

D. Qualification statement had been missing from original. The wording of “exceptions may be made” needs further clarification. To emphasize that it's a rare occurrence, maybe add in the word “extraordinary.” Nancy B-S – all stakeholders should have a voice, in this instance, county staff should be added as part of the decision-making process.

E. Compensation

Sumner – consider longevity pay or “re-upping” increase.

Why is there money for this role in the first place? Some places don't pay. How would the organization feel if it paid more money? Talking about “on-going” money versus a one-shot deal. What's critical – another administrative level or program efforts?

More keeps getting added to the COA “plate” such as presidential visits and public awareness efforts. What's a stipend – what's that suppose to cover? The biggest bang for the Extension dollar is the \$30,000 it pays for the COAs to get budgets passed, etc.

Also noted is that program leaders should take something off an educator's “plate” so they he/she can fulfill the COA duties. The current compensation of \$3,000 may not be enough and it should be a good incentive for someone to take on the job.

All educators should have the expectation that at some point, they will fulfill the role of COA. Councils do need a role, and in an idea role, supportive of COA. It could be an executive session with council members.

Proposal section on name change tabled.

Input on December meeting:

Do we have a meeting similar to the one held last December in Manchester that included support staff? Sue – philosophically good idea, but real problem with our counties – meetings are never near us. They can't be paid overtime and only one person works part-time. What

about video-conferencing? What about something regional? Perhaps two meetings would give you the same synergy. Topics may determine how the meeting is conducted. Sumner noted support staff liked interaction with other colleagues; they value the personal interaction as much as the training. Nancy's rated the December training – they felt they got more out of that effort than regular annual conferences. Kathy – some mini-trainings could be done with go-to-meetings; if there's a protocol, our staff needs to be trained in that protocol. We can free up their time to do this type of training. Sumner suggested an email survey of support staff with Form Builder. Suggested using support staff in a leadership role for a December-type meeting.

Suggested pins with years of service as an award recognition method.

County Conversations – nothing new. Sullivan, Belknap and Carroll three remaining counties which haven't yet done a County Conversation II. Paul gave a quick summary of possible ideas. If you have ideas, open to suggestions. Chuck said Sullivan remains ready to go. Concern with timing in the fall, due to fairs, etc.

Sue – staff would like as much advanced notice as possible and to funding, so it shouldn't impact counties. Sumner suggested joining us with UNH Alumni Association.

Round-table discussions – what builds county support and how can councils help?

Sumner – share thoughts about working with county commissioners – what works for Sumner. Sumner – “I always want to build upon a “yes” answer. Then we go to “down the hall” to the delegation or commissioners. When I meet with the county commissioners, always bring a council member with me. Doesn't matter where, delegation meetings, etc., we attend every meeting – they always know we're there. When I submit the budget, the letter is co-signed with the council chair requesting those funds. Chair sets up the conversation and then Sumner answers any questions. Important statement to make that chair is a volunteer. That person has to be extremely credible. Look at the book that talks about the legislature (blue book). Helps set the stage when there's a connection. Those little personal nuances is what you build on. I always give the commissioners' staff a heads-up about an idea, before making a formal presentation, so that when I show up, they've already seen a draft letter, they're not surprised at all. Never say in public unless you've already said it in private. Be absolutely up front – it ends up that the commissioners believe us, we can cover 2-3 things in five minutes or less. They like it that we are brief, to the point and without a whole lot of “paper.” Give them an executive summary, a one-pager. Be brief and then be gone. Be sure you're true to your word. Financial advisor said we should be cloned for other departments. Belknap's delegation doesn't change very often.

What happens when you're told budget is fine, don't need to show up or bring anybody. Sumner had that experience.

Geoffrey – Ann – commissioners didn't want to see a council member. Ann – they want to see the paid employee. Last couple of years, we've slowly brought them back (council members) and it's beginning to work; not the case five years. It's over time. Sumner – County council is legally responsible for budget. Suggestion to Geoffrey, take a council member and meet with a commissioner one-on-one, just talk to him/her about what the council does. Sumner – County administrator acting as a gate keeper; it's a tricky path because you don't want to blindside the county administrator.

Deb – need to think through who we bring to the council; there should be some previous connection to Extension, need a good mix. Not all can articulate well and you can't have leadership in only one or two people.

Wendy – what do we do to educate council members who are only representing one area of Extension? We need to move them beyond that point and educate them to all aspects of Extension. While people may sign on because of a specific interest base, we need to ensure they're fully knowledgeable about all aspects of Extension.

Hot topics – personnel issues (attitudes, etc.) Composite scenario: most of the time, county support staff person A manages workload without difficulty during slow period but stresses when there's a lot to do. Other support staff pitch in when requested, but feel it's too often. Also support person feels some of the duties are beneath her/him.

Staff should use county calendar

Reviewed job description (COA) and then with support staff to determine if he/she is willing to do the work as described.

Don't mind pitching in, but talked about "levels" of educational experience.

Question of where is the staff person – gave support staff my TERS for the last three months, showing that working more than 40 hours a week and not all of it's in the office.

Remind them educators' roles are in and out of the office; can't always be equal with support staff, it just isn't that way.

COA mapped out roles and responsibilities, talked about team work and shifting responsibilities when one person needs help.

As a supervisor, you may be able to comment on stress, is it due to the office work or something else? Don't need to go further with the discussion, but can bring out pamphlet about employee assistance and that we're here to help you. (Employee Assistance Program) What happens when educator begins doing his/her own work to avoid conflict? Not being done the way educator wants it done.

Sue – security issue in the building. Police chief came and spoke to us about how we might improve it. May be involved in some special training; in a unique situation because we're in a building that's both county and state. People from the public come to the building who may be angry, who might encounter our support staff first. Steve Turaj incidents with one individual; actually bought pepper spray. Support staff are really nervous.

How do we improve safety? What is out there financially to support us? Mirrors, video cameras, panic buttons are some ideas. We have to address the issue. Sumner suggested the possibility of talking with UNH Security or State Trooper barracks or Sheriff's office.

Dan – might be a good topic for an administrative assistants' meeting. Sumner – might be a good discussion to collaborate on with the NH Association of Counties.

Need a policy for "banning" someone from a meeting, particularly if there is a person who is unstable.

Meeting adjourned at 3 pm.