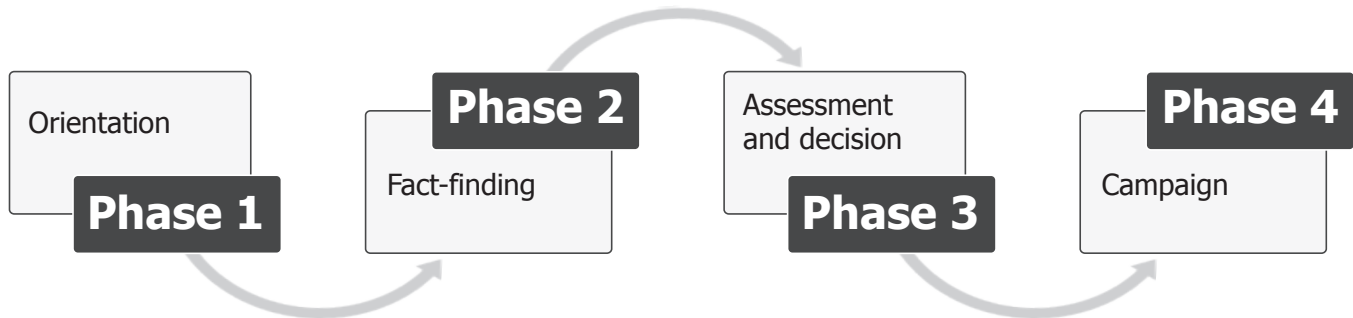


MU Extension Districts: Frequently Asked Questions



Suggested process for deciding whether to form an MU Extension district and pursue a tax levy.

Effective Aug. 28, 2013, county extension councils in Missouri have the option to form single-council districts or consolidated districts made up of two or more counties. Since this law — section 262.598 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri — went into effect, council members have been considering the implications of district formation for their councils. This publication answers many of the questions that council members have about the University of Missouri Extension district option and the processes of forming a district and levying a tax to support extension operations and programs in the district.

You may want to also refer to these MU Extension publications for more information:

- *Forming an MU Extension District* (brochure)
- *Explanation of the MU Extension District Option* (four-page guide)
- *MU Extension District Option Law Manual* (detailed manual)

Phase 1 — Orientation

1. What is the MU Extension district option?

In 2013, the Missouri Legislature passed a bill permitting county extension councils to establish a single-council district or a consolidated district of two or more county councils. Forming an MU Extension district is an option for councils that may result in more efficient and effective use of resources and personnel for county residents. It also allows the created district to seek funding

through a tax levy approved by the voters of the district.

2. Is a county council required to join or to form a district?

No, a county does not have to participate in a district. District formation is an option, not a mandate. However, councils may want to explore the districting option to find out if participating in a district might offer some benefit to county residents.

3. Whose idea was districting?

The MU Extension State Council, after much research and discussion, saw districting as an option that could help county councils be more efficient and effective in their use of resources and personnel for the benefit of Missouri residents.

4. Why is St. Louis County excluded from the legislation?

St. Louis County is not excluded by name in the law, but it is excluded because of the stipulation excluding any council located in a county with a charter form of government and with more than 950,000 inhabitants. When crafting the legislation, the legislators did not think that district formation would be beneficial for St. Louis County.

5. Whose decision is district formation?

The decision to form a district is made by the county council itself if a single-council district and the county councils collectively if a consolidated district.

6. Why would a single council form a district?

Only by becoming a district can a single council, acting as the district board, pursue a tax levy to support extension operations and programs.

7. What happens to a county council's local funding and county commission allocations if the council becomes part of a district?

If no tax is pursued and adopted, funding will remain the same as it is before the district was formed, subject to the same variations from year to year. If a tax is adopted, the statutorily required funding by the county commission will be reduced or eliminated. Other sources of funding will remain subject to the same process the funders use in determining allocations to extension. These other funding sources may take the property tax into account, but they are not required to do so.

8. Will my county benefit most from forming a single-council district or joining a consolidated district?

Each county will have to evaluate the benefits and costs of districting, which will vary from county to county depending on local budget considerations, programming plans and council goals. Drafting council and district business plans should help to define priorities and the benefits and drawbacks of a forming a single-council or consolidated district.

9. Can districts be formed across extension regions?

Yes, counties from different extension regions can form a district. As councils explore the option of forming a district, they should think about the best alignment for programming efficiency and similar characteristics. Regional lines are for administrative purposes and will not limit a council's decision about which county or counties might make the best partners for jointly creating efficiencies or gaining support for a tax levy.

10. Who is responsible for the tasks that need to be accomplished in the formation of a district?

County councils are responsible for deciding whether the district option is best for their county and, if so, whether as a single-council or consolidated district. Once a district is formed, the district board is responsible for the decision to seek a tax levy. County MU Extension staff members will continue to provide administrative support to the county councils and will perform similar roles for district boards. The manual describes potential roles of each person who might be involved in creating, conducting and support the efforts of

the council and district. (For general information on MU Extension employee roles, go to <http://extension.missouri.edu/staff/stakeholders/employeeeroles.html>.)

11. How does a council go about exploring the district option, forming a district and campaigning for a tax levy?

A suggested process and timeline for exploring the district option, forming a district and campaigning for a tax levy can be found in the manual. The process is divided into four phases: orientation, fact-finding, assessment and decision, and campaign.

12. What is the best way to engage the county engagement specialists (CESs) and regional directors (RDs) who serve counties involved in forming districts?

The first phase in the suggested process for exploring the district option suggests that the county extension council meet to discuss the district option. Engaging council employees and MU Extension employees in the process from the beginning is appropriate and encouraged.

13. How is a district board formed?

In a single-council district, the county council will be the district board. In a consolidated district, each council appoints an equal number of members to the board. The district formation documents will establish the number of representatives, which must be from three to five per council.

14. If a consolidated district is formed, will any of the county offices close?

Office operation is a local county council decision. The county councils forming the district should consider office operations during the initial discussions and business plan development as they explore the most efficient and effective use of resources and program delivery.

15. Does legal paperwork have to be filed for the creation of a district?

No legal paperwork needs to be filed for the creation of a district. However, each council that becomes part of a single-council or consolidated district should notify its county commission of the district formation.

16. How can a district provide more programs than an individual county?

Each district, like each county, is unique. But some ways districting might benefit counties include the ability to jointly acquire a grant that an individual county might not be able to acquire; the ability to provide donors who want to support multiple

counties an easy way to do so; and the ability to deliver more programming to the counties through operating efficiencies that enable reallocation of local appropriated dollars. The programming strategy and goals should be explained in the county and district business plans.

17. Will counties get more staff members if a district is formed?

District formation will not necessarily lead to a larger county staff. MU employee allocations and assignments are not determined by the presence or absence of a district. Cost-share opportunities may make hiring additional personnel possible. Numerous memorandums of agreement (MOUs) already exist between counties and MU Extension for staff positions such as youth program development assistants and associates. In some instances, local partners have contributed to salaries for faculty or specialist positions. These arrangements occur on a case-by-case basis to help counties meet program coverage goals. Districts might also consider how they can support current MU employees covering the district to enhance or increase program delivery. The county and district business plans should address the best use of all available staff members.

18. How long does it take to form a district?

Before counties form a district, they need to conduct a thorough exploration of the district option and determine whether forming a district is in the best interest of county residents. See the suggested timeline in the manual for how long these parts of the process may take. To formally form a district requires a majority vote of each participating council. A single-council district can be formed by a majority vote at a single, properly noticed county council meeting attended by the full council. Formation of a consolidated district requires that each participating council vote on the districting. The vote of each council must be taken at a properly noticed meeting attended by a quorum.

19. Where can I find information about counties that have formed districts?

Since the law became effective August 28, 2013, only Mercer County has successfully run a tax levy. Other extension councils have formed districts. We plan to provide details on the council website, <http://extension.missouri.edu/extcouncil>, about what counties have formed districts and which type of district they formed.

20. How should county extension councils respond to county officials and local residents urging them to pursue the district option and adoption of tax funding?

The council should be open and prepared to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of district formation and adoption of a property tax. When the council initially meets to begin exploring the district option, members should consider the best response to such questions. A possible response could be: “The extension council is willing to explore this new option to determine its value and the receptiveness of voters to passing a property tax to support MU Extension efforts. Can the council count on your support?” Councils should consider holding a district option orientation meeting that is open to the public, and encourage officials and other interested parties to attend.

21. What help is available for communicating the value of MU Extension to constituents?

Each county extension council is encouraged to have a county business plan that includes sections on marketing and finances. The MU Extension Donor Education office has many resources to help with communicating value (<http://extension.missouri.edu/donoreducation>), as does your county annual report.

22. When can a district tax measure appear on the ballot?

A district tax measure can appear on the ballot during the general municipal election, which is held each April. The district board should work with the county clerk to identify the date on which to submit the measure to the vote of the people. The Secretary of State publishes the official election calendar for each year, including the dates by which ballot measures must be certified (<http://www.sos.mo.gov>).

23. Can councils form a district to create efficiency without pursuing a tax levy?

Yes, councils can form a district simply to increase efficiency and program delivery. Districts are not required to pursue a tax levy.

24. Who pays for the election when the tax measure is on the ballot?

The district pays for the election in which the tax measure is presented to the voters. The cost of the election is prorated to all entities with measures on the ballot. The county clerk is the best source of information on specific costs for a ballot measure.

25. Are councils in a consolidated district required to give money to the district?

In a consolidated district, each district and each individual council should have a budget and a business plan. Programming that is offered by the district is supported by funds from the councils in the district as agreed upon when planning programming, writing the business plan and developing a budget. If a tax is levied in support of the district, funds received from the tax will be managed by the district and may reduce the need for funds from the county councils.

Phase 2 — Fact-finding

26. If voters approve a tax levy, does the county commission's current funding obligation change?

If a tax levy is adopted, the county commission's current statutory obligation will either be reduced or eliminated depending on the amount collected from the tax levy. In the first year of the levy, the funding may be reduced by 33 percent of the amount above two times the three-year-average county commission obligation. The county commission is exempt from the funding obligation if the tax produces revenue twice its statutory obligation.

27. Do counties in a consolidated district have to share a border?

No, counties in a consolidated district do not have to share a border.

28. What does the district pay for?

The district and each participating council will have its own budget. Before a tax levy is adopted, the money in the district's budget comes from the participating counties to fund district programming. Payment for the election when the tax levy is on the ballot is made by the district from its county-provided funds or funds raised during the campaign phase (see the campaign phase section of the manual). Once a tax levy is adopted, the funds from the tax will be the district's to manage to support extension operations and programming in the district, and the amount of money the district receives from the counties may change. (Also see FAQ 51.)

29. How may districts spend funds generated by a tax levy?

Money generated by the tax may be used to fund extension programs, equipment and services in the district.

30. Can a county commission cut funding to encourage a council to form a district and pursue a tax levy?

The county commission is required by section 262.597 of the Revised Missouri Statutes to provide a certain level of funding for extension. If the commission has been funding extension at a higher level than required by law, it has the option of reducing or increasing its allocation.

31. Who collects and distributes the tax-generated money for a district?

County officials in each county of the district will impose and collect the tax. The collected taxes plus interest earned must be transferred to the district monthly.

32. How should a council determine the counties to join in forming a district?

A council should communicate with counties that have similar goals for efficiencies and effectiveness of operations and programming to explore the possibility of forming a district.

33. Will county councils that want to form a district with other counties possibly join our county?

During the fact-finding phase, councils need to communicate about their goals and consider collaborating. Your regional director can provide guidance in identifying councils who may be interested in forming a district. Council business plans will be beneficial in identifying issues and discussion points.

34. How do we increase funding after forming a district?

Creation of a district has no impact on current funding revenues. The existence of a district may be beneficial with some existing revenue sources and an impediment to others. A district can pursue a tax levy to increase funding, with the levy amount capped at 30 cents per \$100 of assessed value. If a district has a current levy that is below 30 cents, it may submit a request to the voter to increase the levy.

35. Once a district is formed, if requests for programs come from a nondistrict county, can the programs be shared?

Programming is a function of job duties for specialists, each of whom is assigned specific counties for program coverage. Formation of a district does not change these assignments. If the district has an MOU with MU Extension for a specialist assigned solely for programming in the district, then whether to share programs with other counties would be a decision of the district board.

36. Why would a larger, well-funded county want to form a district with a smaller, less-funded county?

Many variables come into play when considering whether to form a consolidated district, so predicting a specific outcome is difficult. Counties of different sizes and funding levels may have goals and programming plans that match or complement each other. Councils should discuss the benefits and challenges districting presents for each county and go through the fact-finding process to determine whether districting would benefit their residents.

37. How will council business plans be used in the districting process?

Council business plans help convey the needs and plans for programming to meet the needs of the local residents. Councils can use them to compare residents' needs and programming plans across counties to help determine if districting may help them be more efficient and effective in delivering programming.

38. How much will districting cost the average taxpayer?

Unless a tax levy in support of the district is adopted, districting will not cost the taxpayers anything. If a tax levy is adopted, the cost will depend on the amount of the levy and the definition of an average taxpayer in the county. The maximum amount of the tax levy is 30 cents per \$100 dollars of assessed value. To estimate the amount a tax levy will cost the average taxpayer, you will need to find out from the county assessor the average value of personal property, such as vehicles and livestock; personal residential property; and personal agricultural property in the county. The assessment and decision phase section of the manual describes how you use these numbers to estimate the cost to the average taxpayer.

39. What is the maximum tax that can be requested?

The maximum levy for support of an extension district is 30 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

40. Can counties form a district to share resources, but not request a tax levy?

Yes, councils can form a district simply to increase efficiency and program delivery. Districts are not required to pursue a tax levy.

41. What happens if the ballot measure for a tax levy fails?

If the proposed tax levy measure fails, the district will continue to operate without that source of revenue.

42. How does a council decide what tax rate to request?

The tax may not exceed 30 cents per \$100 of assessed value. To determine at what level the levy should be set, consider the district's revenue needs and the assessed value of property in the district. The district business plan should be helpful in setting the appropriate levy.

Phase 3 — Assessment and decision

43. Can fundraising be done when a district has been formed but is not proposing to put a tax measure on the ballot?

Fundraising can always be done. The state statute that covers extension councils allows for fundraising in addition to county appropriations. Councils, through their business plan, may want to consider gifts and endowments. The MU Extension Donor Education website (<http://extension.missouri.edu/donoreducation>) provides information about these funds as well as development tips on its Gifts and Endowments page.

44. How does a district pay for the cost of the election for a tax measure?

The district will finance the cost of any elections seeking taxing authority. The funds can come from the appropriated dollars or other resources obtained by the district. (Also see FAQ 51.)

45. Can a tax levy be sought later?

Yes, a district may seek a tax levy at any time.

Phase 4 — Campaign

46. What would a campaign for a tax levy involve?

The campaign for a tax levy for the district would be a marketing and informational campaign whose aim would be to educate district residents on the benefits having a well-funded district would bring to the area.

47. Can council members lead the campaign for a district tax levy?

Individual council members may participate in the campaign, but they must not use any resources of the political subdivision.

48. How can the campaign for a tax levy be funded?

Chapter 130 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri governs campaign finance. As political subdivisions, county councils and district boards are subject to these laws. The Missouri Ethics Commission (MEC) offers campaign finance training and tutorials online at https://mec.mo.gov/mec/Educational_Resources/Home.aspx. You will also find a summary of campaign finance law and updates on changes at that site.

49. What is the CPD's role in the campaign?

The CPD can only provide educational information and support.

50. What happens if two counties form a district, but the tax measure only passes in one of the counties?

When a tax measure fails in one of the counties in a two-county consolidated district, that county may withdraw from the district. If the county withdraws, the tax goes into effect in the remaining county, which is now a single-council district. If the county in which the tax measure failed does not withdraw, the tax does not go into effect and the consolidated district stands.

51. How is the campaign to educate the citizens about the taxing authority option financed?

Public dollars cannot be used to promote a ballot measure. Therefore, the district would need to secure financing from private sources for the promotion of the ballot measure. The district and county council may provide educational materials and information.

General questions

52. What role do CPDs and other MU employees have in each phase?

MU employees can provide the council with resources and educational information so that council members can make informed decisions.

53. Does the council discuss districting in open or closed sessions?

The Sunshine Law requires the discussions to be held in open sessions.

54. What does a county do if it decides it wants to withdraw from a consolidated district?

A county that decides it wants to withdraw from a consolidated district must first have a petition signed by voters equal to 10 percent of the number of voters who voted in the last presidential election. The circuit court confirms the validity of the petition and then conducts a hearing to determine whether withdrawal is in the best interest of the county residents. If the court determines that withdrawal is in the residents' best interest, the issue of withdrawal is submitted to the voters in the withdrawing county, with the cost of the election being paid by the petitioners or the county. Withdrawal requires approval of two-thirds of the voters. If the issue fails, the county remains part of the district.