FAQs: 2018 Staffing Plan

We have put together a list of Frequently Asked Questions to clarify the staffing plan for 2018. This plan was vetted during visits to each of Missouri’s 114 counties and the city of St. Louis. Visits consisted of conversations with county commissioners, county councils and faculty and staff in those counties. Partners, stakeholders and employees all shared suggestions that helped shape this final version of the plan.

Q: Where did this proposal come from?
A: After completing the data analysis from the Building Our Future Together needs assessment in June 2017, University of Missouri Extension leadership, including the regional directors and program leaders, started working with different ideas that might increase our impact across Missouri. We discussed various approaches with faculty and stakeholders over the summer and formulated a draft proposal we shared in September.

On Sept. 15, 2017, a draft proposal was distributed for review by MU Extension faculty: http://tinyurl.com/ExtStaffProposal

On Oct. 20, 2017, we distributed a draft nominations list for regional specialists roles in the proposed plan: http://tinyurl.com/MUExt-RegSpec-NominatedRoles

We invited feedback on this plan from our faculty, staff, council members and other stakeholders: http://tinyurl.com/ExtStaffProposalSurvey

Q: Is this proposal now complete?
A: Yes. We visited and listened to feedback and ideas from our faculty, counties and stakeholders with individual visits for more than four months. Feedback included a strong consensus that MU Extension would get better in our balance of highly engaged and high-tech staffing.

Q: Is a county engagement specialist the same as a county program director? I’m a CPD, and this CES role seems similar to what I already do.
A: Many of our CPDs go above and beyond their job descriptions and engage with their communities in many ways. Many others see the CPD job as an add-on — an administrative distraction from their real work. We do not currently consistently evaluate or reward CPD work.

In contrast, the proposed CES role would be a distinct position, where engagement with communities and stakeholders is central. The engagement work of bringing the university across the state would be about half of the job. The other half would be in the programming areas of nutrition, youth, or business and community.

Q: What is this engagement role?
A: The engagement role shifts the paradigm of the 20th century extension agent pushing university knowledge out to the citizens (who did not have many other means, such as the internet, to get

FAQs: MU Extension 2018 Staffing Plan (March 2018)
it), to that of the 21st century extension specialist curating university knowledge with the citizens, who now have access to an overwhelming amount of knowledge online. This requires the specialist to have a better understanding of clients’ needs and of the educational interventions and services that could help address them. It is also reciprocal, in that the specialist is constantly learning about the conditions of the population and community and about the application and efficacy of knowledge in varying contexts, advancing research and its application.

Most MU Extension specialists already engage in these ways; however, we want to highlight engagement as an essential part of the job and provide better support and expectations around the role. County engagement specialists will be expected to be involved in ongoing needs assessment, intervention planning and inquiry into the impact of their work.

Each CES would represent his or her county, MU Extension and the resources of the University of Missouri, as well as other partners. The CES will broker connections, information and resources to the betterment of the community.

Q: Are those in the CES role generalists rather than specialists?
A: They are still specialists. This model requires county engagement specialists to have deep knowledge in their disciplines and to continue to contribute to the overall education and service plans of their program areas. They are the experts in their three-county region. In addition, they may deliver well-developed curriculum within their broader impact areas as part of the plan of work they develop for their program areas. A CES job description with these qualifications has been written with input from current faculty.

Q: Are the county engagement specialists new people or the current specialists in the county?
A: Current people. We want to build on the great work our regional specialists do every day and continue to strengthen those local relationships. As we move forward with this model, we will ensure our current regional specialists have a place first either as a county engagement specialist or field specialist. That said, we do have about 30 vacancies in our regional specialist pool, so we will do some hiring.

Q: Why were some specialists, for instance agriculture, not chosen as CES?
A: We looked at the nature of program delivery. CES positions represent highly engaged, high-volume programming better suited to some specialty areas. Other areas of specialization, like agriculture, serve a narrower audience, providing highly specialized consultation and applied research.

It is certainly not that one is more important or more scientifically-based than the other; it is just that the types of programming, methods of delivery and target audiences differ enough that different models of delivery might be more effective.

Q: How was it decided who will be a county engagement specialist and who will be a field specialist?
A: Several factors went into these decisions, including specialization, geographic location, county support/needs, individual specialists’ skill sets and interests. In this model, the driving characteristics were specialization and location. We talked to all specialists about their assignments and took into consideration home location, commute time and traffic patterns, as well as skill sets.

Q: Will county engagement specialists be paid the same as field specialists? What are the education requirements?
A: Yes. We are not proposing any pay differential as we move regional specialists into one of these two positions. The CES requires a master’s degree and will be ranked non-tenure track faculty, just like the field specialist.

Q: What program specialty backgrounds are required for CES positions?
A: There is some flexibility. In meeting the need for local engagement in the three grand challenge
areas of health, education and economic growth, these backgrounds will have priority: nutrition, youth, community and business development and ag business.

Q: Who will determine what programming the FS and CES deliver?
A: The program area faculty themselves will develop and implement programming. With state, field and county specialists, as well as educators and others, the faculty will identify needed impacts and the best methods and means of program delivery. The answers may not be the same across the state, allowing for regional differences and local needs. Program area faculty will need to determine when uniform availability and coverage of education and services is warranted and when strategically targeted delivery would be more effective.

Q: How are you going to fund offices that close because the county won’t support a county extension office?
A: We have budgeted for faculty and travel to reopen closed offices, at least for a few years. Our hope is that as we reconnect with these counties and demonstrate our impact over time, they will invest in extension (possibly from a district option for a tax assessment). In future, we will also be much clearer in communicating that an investment of $X gets a county XYZ level of services.

Q: How will the campus support those counties that have been providing support from their own appropriations for other counties with closed or part-time offices?
A: We have discussed this in each individual case, meeting with each county’s commissioners, county councils and other stakeholders.

Q: Will field faculty be supported in seeking grant funding and serving as co-principal investigators on grants?
A: Absolutely. There are many untapped opportunities to partner with local agencies, nonprofits, businesses, foundations, and national funders to support the great work we do. Program area plans of work should allow time for individual and collective faculty efforts to seek new funds. Both county engagement specialists and field specialists are encouraged to lead the way.

Q: Will the CES oversee the office staff?
A: Yes.

Q: Will there be opportunities for staff to move or be reclassified into faculty, including CES positions, if qualified?
A: We want good opportunities for our own workforce. We are committed to first finding a place for each of our regional specialists. We will also be hiring more specialists, so if you are in a staff position and are interested, we would be happy to discuss that.

Q: The plan implies our county coverage areas will change. Is this true?
A: For those in CES titles, the coverage area would typically be no more than three counties (or one to two counties if in larger counties with a couple of quads based on population). The faculty and program leaders will decide coverage areas for field specialists in their plans of work as they determine the best ways to deliver their programming. Field faculty will cover the appropriate area based on needs and could cross regional lines.

Q: Is the non-tenure track (NTT) process going away or will all be required to go through it?
A: The elected NTT faculty committee is drafting policies to move all regional specialists to ranked NTT titles, and new employees will be hired at a minimum rank of assistant extension professional. Current NTT faculty will be voting on the recommendations of the committee in the near future.

Current faculty also have a choice under the collected rules to go for promotion or not. More discussion on NTT policies, years of service requirements, criteria, etc. will come as the committee sends out the new policy recommendations for a vote.
Q: What training will there be for the new CES role?

A: We are looking at many topics to include in training. It will cover techniques for effective community engagement, possibly a Community Development Academy training and additional training as specified by the faculty. We solicited topics, programs and content from faculty as we met with them during the county visits and asked the University of Missouri Extension Association (UMEA) board for suggestions.

Q: How should the CESs communicate that they will be less involved in program areas due to CES responsibilities? If 50 percent of our time will be devoted to the CES role, then we will no longer be able to spend 75 percent of our time on programming.

A: Most CES specialists will be even more involved in their counties, because they will be covering fewer of them.

Q: When will these changes roll out?

A: After months of feedback, we are beginning the communication and implementation as counties and employees are ready. Some configurations will be a quick start while others may take some time. The goal is full implementation by Jan. 1, 2019.

Q: What academic theory is this new organizational structure based on?

A: Underpinnings include managing for impact and emerging research in improvement science and strategic management. Some of our thinking is also informed by organizational, leadership and institutional theories. Much of our evaluation work, logic models and systems theory point to the way we are changing human behavior by differentiating highly engaged/high-tech programming. There is no playbook for this model: We are putting together the best parts and applicable learning from many perspectives.

Q: Will youth program assistants (YPAs) be paid by campus? How many hours per week?

A: We currently fund the equivalent of about 40 full-time YPAs, although this allocation is spread across many more people. With funds from counties and grants, we currently have more than 70 in the field. We will continue to fund YPAs with funds from counties and grants.

During our county visits, many discussions surfaced related to YPAs and the mix of positions that cover our youth programming. In the near future, we will be discussing with our faculty, staff and stakeholders the optimal role and placement of YPAs, educators and specialists.

Q: Can an ag specialist opt to be a CES? Many of us are now county program directors with good local relationships; why change that?

A: Local relationships and engagement are critical to every position. Based on feedback from regional and state faculty and program leadership, typically only ag business specialists will be considered for CES roles. Other ag field specialists will continue to focus on local and regional engagement and relationships in their current role.

Q: How will a policy to work with other knowledge sources beyond the University of Missouri be formalized? How will partnering with MU faculty outside of extension be facilitated? How will the policy be instituted?

A: We currently have projects with other partners, such as colleges and universities throughout the state. We want more of those collaborations. The main way to facilitate partnering with non-extension MU faculty will be a process to join our program area faculties — this is undergoing discussion.

Q: How will grant effort and offsets work in this model?

A: Particularly for CESs, there may be some shifting of time to reduce grant requirements and attend to other duties. PIs and program faculty would need to consider grant deliverables in these allocations and in the plans of work for their program areas.
Q: Models are available that distribute positions according to populations and travel time. Will these be used?

A: Yes. Some ag specializations ran some of those models last year. We will continue to expect program faculties to take many factors into account when determining where to distribute specialties.

Q: What happens when the ag specialist/CPD is the only one currently based in the county office: Will a CES be hired and added to the county? What if there is only space for one person?

A: In that case a new person would be added to the county — either a new hire or perhaps a current specialist who wants to be based there. Space decisions are unique to each county and were discussed with county leadership during county visits.

Q: How does the new staffing plan help us to deal with potential upcoming cuts that could affect positions? Who goes first?

A: In this model, the faculty will own their own practice. They will identify the impacts they have and the plans for achieving those impacts. If we have more cuts, these plans and impacts would be taken into account.

More important, we believe a model that achieves a stronger local connection and measurable impacts in our communities will help us to gain more credibility and, ultimately, more resources.

Q: How are the ag community and county commissioners going to perceive and work with new CESs from different disciplines?

A: We have heard from commissioners and community partners that they value their ag specialists. We are not moving away from that relationship but looking to increase the scope of that position. By relieving them of administrative duties, ag specialists will have more time to do programming in their assigned areas.

Q: How will this model work in the Urban Region counties? What will the numbers of specialists, educators, YPAs and NPAs in the Urban Regions be and when will we know details?

A: Urban county numbers are flexible, as long as coverage is assured. We have placed CES positions in urban counties that service that single county, and include our current full-time CPDs in St. Louis and Jackson County. Additional field specialist positions headquartered in the urban regions serve one or more counties. We have not yet had many discussions about educators, YPAs and NPAs.

Q: Most questions that come into the extension offices are ag/horticulture related. How will these questions be addressed in this new model?

A: Our ag/hort specialists will continue to receive and answer the public’s questions.

Q: Who will supervise the county engagement and field specialists?

A: Regional directors will supervise the county engagement specialists with a dotted line to the program leaders. Field specialists will report to the program leaders, with a dotted line to regional directors. Field specialists are expected to take part in regional meetings.

Q: Can the CES role be shared?

A: We have determined the best model is to assign one person in the CES role to each county. This addresses the need for greater engagement to better serve Missourians.
Q: Are region compositions and functions going to change? Are we going to add counties to the Urban Regions?

A: At this time we have only shifted one county on a pilot basis to a new region. We had many discussions about this. Ultimately, it worked out with just this one modification, but regional configurations may be revisited in the future.