

ENHANCING SPECIALIST/AGENT RELATIONSHIPS

The ability of USU Extension to serve our clientele successfully depends on positive specialist/agent interactions.

Agents and specialists share the responsibility for meeting the needs of clients throughout the state by “Extending the University” in a team effort. Therefore, it is critical that positive relationships be established and sustained. Maintaining effective teams and relationships requires on-going efforts of both new and experienced agents & specialists. Open communication and education are necessary at all levels of involvement.

The following guidelines provide a starting point for enhancing specialist/agent relationships. To be effective, these guidelines should be combined with common sense, good communication and mutual respect.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AGENTS:

The agents’ role in the education of clientele goes beyond merely facilitating the educational process. On a day-to-day basis, they are the most visible face of the University and Extension. To be a successful agent, you should:

1. Spend time getting acquainted with local clientele, community leaders, specialists and other University personnel.
2. When requesting support from a specialist, let the specialist know the information that you need in a particular area, what format would be the most useful, and in what time frame it is needed.
3. When requesting the assistance of a specialist on an educational program, make sure the specialist knows exactly what you want discussed. The more specific you can be in your request (content, length, technical detail, etc.), the higher the likelihood that the specialist will be able to meet your needs.
4. Provide specialists with information on what you have to offer to a particular area and be responsive to the specialists’ requests.
5. Be involved in at least one professional society related to your work.
6. If your office receives a call needing an immediate response and you are not available by email or cell, staff should take a message. If the need is urgent, have the staff forward the call to an agent in another county rather than a specialist. You should be the one to forward calls onto specialists, not the staff in your office. (Be sure support staff are aware of these procedures).
7. You should be sensitive to the specialists’ departmental responsibilities, including teaching schedules.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIALISTS:

Specialists serve a critical communication and liaison role between county-based faculty and the academic departments. They are a major source of technical support for county-based faculty, and they help on-campus research faculty understand the information needs in the state. To be a successful specialist, you should:

1. Make a reasonable effort to support all counties.
2. Spend time getting acquainted with agents. You should provide information or updates on what you have to offer to agents, especially new agents.
3. Notify agents as far in advance as possible when you are going to be in their county and when you expect to be working with local clientele. Notify agents in neighboring counties of your visits, if possible, so that the needs and efforts of both you and the agents can be efficiently coordinated.
4. Use agent input when developing in-service and updates, and avoid pre-committing agents to participate in programs without their prior approval. In-service training should use a planning committee, which includes agents.
5. Respond within 48 hours of a request from an agent. Your first response may not be the answer to the question, but rather a status report letting the agent know that you are working on the answer, and when the agent can expect the answer.
6. Be a research partner by assisting agents with their local research efforts and involving agents as research collaborators and co-authors. Inform agents of grants and funding opportunities.
7. Be a source of information by passing on relevant applied research and research results. Provide training to agents on new methods and technologies in a timely manner.
8. Provide relevant and appropriate presentations that are tailored to specific audiences. Due to geographic, demographic and economic differences between counties, what is relevant for one county may not be relevant in another county.
9. Inform agents of local requests that have gone directly to you.
10. Help project a positive image of local agents in the eyes of their clientele.
11. When on extended absences such as sabbatical leave, arrange for someone to cover for you and inform agents who that will be.
12. Communicate your teaching schedule, when appropriate, so agents can plan accordingly.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BOTH AGENTS AND SPECIALISTS:

1. Not all training programs need to be done in all counties.
2. Working together is important so local clients remain the agent's clients.

3. Both agents and specialists are responsible for initiating contact and communicating needs or opportunities to each other.
4. Regional meetings can afford an opportunity for specialist/agent interaction.
5. Have reasonable and clear expectations of each other.
6. Team-teach when possible and as appropriate.
7. Presentations should be targeted to the level of the clientele.
8. Agents are the point of contact for meetings held in the counties.
9. Keep each other informed of client requests for information.

Guidelines adopted in 1998 and revised in 2008.