

Cooperative Extension Service Internship Guide

<https://extension.nmsu.edu/internships/index.html>



Introduction:

Research shows that college students involved in *meaningful* internship opportunities with Extension significantly increases the chance that they will stay in that career field after graduation. An Extension internship provides valuable learning experience for both the intern and the agent or specialist. For the student, the internship provides a setting where they can implement the philosophy and teaching methods of non-formal education as it becomes a lesson in "real-world- learning"; for many agents or specialist, supervising an intern serves as a refresher course in the theories and principles of non-formal education as well as an opportunity to update their own knowledge and skills.

A *meaningful* internship...

- ❖ **Offers relevant experience in the student's chosen field.** An internship should prepare students for a position in a particular field. Students may perform some routine or clerical duties, but their responsibilities must be largely career related. For example, if an Extension office has a position that involves nothing more than answering the phone, making copies, filing, and running errands, it does not qualify as a meaningful internship. But if students are also provided projects that involve developing educational materials, assisting with field days, camps, programs and developing educational newsletters under the supervision of the sponsoring Agents, then it becomes a learning experience related to County Extension work, and would qualify as an internship.
- ❖ **Encourages the intern to initiate projects,** ask questions, absorb information, and provide feedback as part of their learning experience.
- ❖ **Create an internship job description that is structured to simulate an actual job.** The position should include a substantial but appropriate level of responsibility with duties and requirements clearly stated and agreed upon.
- ❖ **Assigns an employee-mentor to the intern.** Rather than just handing the student a list of things to do, structure the experience so the student interacts on a regular basis with someone who has experience in the student's intended field (Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Community Health or 4-H and Youth Development). This interaction should include instruction, guidance, and advice. In addition, if the student receives academic credit, some academic departments may have specific learning objectives or other criteria that must be met.
- ❖ **Assign a project as a part of the internship experience. This will be up to the Department Heads and supervising faculty to determine.**

- ❖ **Involves the intern in meetings, committee meetings and other gatherings** to help the intern feel comfortable in the work environment and a part of the team. As appropriate, invite the intern to internal (District Trainings or Meetings) and external meetings.
- ❖ **Introduces the intern to your Extension contacts.** Help the intern begin to gain access _____ to individuals who can help the intern learn and grow, as well as to build the intern's professional network.

Department Heads of programs/County Extension Director Responsibility:

Too frequently, interns are placed in County Extension offices or Extension Departments without sufficient intern orientation, host/mentor orientation, or interaction with the Department Head/County Extension Administrators during the course of the internship. The following are some guidelines for Department Head/County Extension Directors.

- ❖ Screen and place Interns in host County or Department based on candidates' application.
- ❖ Match Intern with host/mentor agent.
- ❖ Provide orientation to host county faculty.
- ❖ Provide review mid-term in the internship to determine if intern is being provided appropriate learning experiences.
- ❖ Monitor projects, activities and learning experiences provided by host/mentor agent.
- ❖ Conduct exit interview with intern to determine if intern is a potential candidate for a County Extension Agent position.
- ❖ Solicit and document input from host/mentor agent regarding potential of intern to be a potentially successful County Extension Agent or Specialist.

Host/Mentor Responsibility:

The following are expectations for the Host/Mentor.

- ❖ Establish overall goals and specific project goals and deadlines.
- ❖ Provide Orientation to explain office protocol.
- ❖ Provide designated workspace and access to equipment.
- ❖ Assign specific and meaningful activities and responsibilities.
- ❖ Provide opportunity for interns to apply knowledge.
- ❖ Regularly review and discuss intern's work in progress.
- ❖ Discuss state and national professional organizations.
- ❖ Introduce intern to county/district faculty.
- ❖ Discuss career opportunities in Cooperative Extension Service and review the application process.
- ❖ Provide evaluation of intern to Department Head/County Extension Director (a copy of this information should be forwarded to the Associate Director for Cooperative Extension).

Suggested Learning Opportunities:

The following are some suggested learning activities that would provide interns with a meaningful learning experience with Cooperative Extension Service and enable Extension to access the strengths of future applicants for County Extension Agents and Specialist.

- ❖ **Core principles of working with Extension clientele**
 - Office visits
 - Phone calls
 - answering phone calls

- returning calls
- Site visits
 - scheduling site visits
 - preparing for effective site visits
 - Handling the upset or irate client

❖ **Roles and responsibilities of County Extension Agents**

- Job description
 - job roles and responsibilities worksheet
 - county coordinator
 - Ag/NR, FCH, and 4-H coordinator
 - County Extension agent titles

❖ **Developing programs and resources**

- Have the opportunity to make a formal educational presentation.
 - Observe Extension programs in action and a variety of program delivery methods.
 - Become more familiar with Extension-related organizations (4-H, Master Gardeners, Volunteers, etc.)
- Curriculums and program materials

❖ **Professionalism as an agent**

- Dress
- Promptness
- Office hours

❖ **Planning and conducting a program/result demonstration.**

- Planning group involvement
- Steps for planning
- Educational methods
- Program presentation tips
- Evaluation efforts
 - Individual activity evaluation (customer satisfaction survey)
 - Outcome program evaluation
 - Clientele change
 - Program impact
 - Evaluation methods
- Materials needed to conduct a program

- ❖ **Program Accountability -Contact Reporting process**
- ❖ **Marketing and interpreting Extension programs**
 - Working with the media (print and broadcast)
 - Commissioners’ Court interpretation
 - Targeted audience interpretation
 - Identifying and involving stakeholders
 - Developing effective partnerships with other groups
 - Involvement in community and county activities
- ❖ **Internal and external relationships**
 - Teamwork
 - Conducting office conferences
 - Administrator relationships
 - Co-worker relationships
 - Commissioner’s meeting
 - Working with district and county support staff
 - Specialists
- ❖ **Extension Terminology**
 - Acronyms and the “Extension” alphabet
 - Internal acronyms EDGE, SLR, YGA, etc.)
 - External acronyms (NRCS, FSA, etc.)
- ❖ **Time management strategies**
 - Effective time management
 - Developing a daily schedule
 - Managing your calendar
 - Observe the daily activities in the county office
 - Scheduling time for family and personal needs
- ❖ **Volunteer development and management**
 - Volunteer recruitment
 - Volunteer training
 - Involving volunteers in program efforts
 - Recognition of volunteers
 - Observe the program development process in action
(who, what, when, where, why, and how)

- Basics of Committee Work.
 - Leadership Advisory Boards
 - Program Area Committees
 - Task Forces/Coalitions
 - Youth Board
 - Associations
 - Extension support groups/organizations (4-H, Master Gardeners)
 - Cash management practices with support groups

❖ **Civil Right/Affirmative Action Guidelines**

- 4-H Expansion and Review
- Planning Groups
- Program participation
- Documentation
- ADA/EOE compliance

❖ **Result Demonstration/Applied Research**

- Demonstration/Research Plans
- Submitting Proposals
- Results

Activities that Would Enhance Learning Experience and Assist Cooperative Extension to Assess Intern's Skills for Future Employment:

- ❖ Have Intern write newsletter articles.
- ❖ Have Intern assist in establishing, monitoring, and evaluating result demonstration/applied research (for Interns interested in a Specialist or County Extension Agent-Agriculture and Natural Resources position).
- ❖ Have Intern participate in a Program Area Committee, Leadership Advisory Board, or Youth Board meeting.
- ❖ Have Intern prepare and present at least one presentation in relevant program area.
- ❖ Have Intern develop a Power Point presentation related to area of expertise.
- ❖ Have Intern revise existing program materials and update Power Point Presentations.

- ❖ Have Intern write media release.
- ❖ Have the Intern shadow each agent for an equal amount of time to observe how they relate to other agents and clientele.
- ❖ Have Intern participate and observe farm/home/project visits.
- ❖ Have Intern observe specialists supporting agents.
- ❖ Assign intern to keep daily log of activities and a portfolio representing activities and associates they experience during internship program.
- ❖ Provide Intern with overview of relevant resources and websites.
- ❖ Have Intern assist with livestock show validation and entry process. Provide Intern with overview of 4-H Livestock guidelines.
- ❖ Have Intern to observe program interpretation event with County Commissioners Court.
- ❖ Have Intern participate in Agent professional development workshop.

NOTE: All the above activities should be done under the careful supervision of County Extension Agents/Specialist who have the leadership and responsibility for that area.