

Response from Lonnie Johnson at Virginia Cooperative Extension

Provided by Cathy Smith

Mr. Johnson, thank you for taking the time to talk to me this afternoon. Below are the questions we discussed. Should you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 843-997-5786.

1. Are there legislative requirements in your state that require counties to help fund extension and/or extension programs?

There are legislative mandates for services that we will provide (ex. Agriculture damage assessment following a major weather event or drought), but there is no requirements for localities to fund extension.

2. Is there an assigned specific level of funding by each county or does it vary and depend on the county and its' needs from extension?

Each county and city are different. The minimum funding level for a county or city is 33.34% of an agents salary and fringe benefit cost, but we have agents funded locally at 100% and many different arrangements between these two. Local governments also provide office space. VCE pays for our support staff. Most localities will also contribute to some level of office support dollars for travel, postage, printing, etc.

3. Who makes that determination and how does the level of funding get determined?

The district director calculates salary and fringe needs for each office based on the agreed upon funding arrangement and provides that to the unit coordinators. The unit coordinators prepare an official request for funds to submit to the locality for approval by the board of supervisors or city council. Exceptions to the minimum funding level are negotiated by the district director and the locality. Unit coordinators will make additional requests for office support dollars to include in the budget request.

4. What are the major obstacles that you experience in securing funds at the County level?

Most obstacles occur when there is a major change in the makeup of the board of supervisors/city council or a change in the County Administrator/City Manager. When these changes take place we have to have a concerted effort to educate the new members on the benefits of the investments that they are making in extension.

5. In your jurisdiction, at the County level, who/what are the key funding sources that you pursue? County/Municipality Government? School District ? Public Utilities? Public-Private Partnerships? Associations? Grant Writing? Private Donations? Etc.?

In Virginia our County/City government are the major funding sources for extension. We do however encourage public-private partnerships, associations, grant writing and private donations. All of our offices have VT foundation accounts to handle donated money and many of our agents participate in grants that flow through the Virginia Tech Office of Sponsored Programs.

6. What accountability is required for ensuring that funds are appropriately used by the State Extension service? Do the counties hold you accountable for use of the funds? Do you provide feedback to the counties on use of the funds?

The majority of the local funds are utilized for salaries and fringe benefits of our agents. Every locality is billed quarterly for salary and fringes so they are aware of the expenditures. We do ask that all units provide quarterly updates on extension programs that have occurred in the locality to demonstrate the impact that their investment is having locally. The Universities Controllers Office also audits this once per year.

7. What happens to ensure that funding is requested/provided for the next budget cycle?

This is similar to questions number three.

8. Is there a review process at the state level to ensure that funds are being requested for appropriate activities that support extension?

This is managed at the District level. The district director is responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient local dollars to pay for salary and fringes. The unit coordinator will manage any additional local dollars that are provided to extension.

9. Annually, do you experience a shifting in funding sources based on changes in the economic, environmental and political climate? How do you stay tuned in to those shifting funding sources?

In Virginia the majority of any annual shift in funding is from the State General Assembly. Depending on the current economic situation State funding can increase or decrease on an annual basis. This can impact our staffing levels, but in general local government sources of funding are stable from year to year. In fact, we have local dollars committed every year for positions that we do not have state level funding to match.

10. Who is responsible and what resources do you use to initiate fundraising at the County level? Extension staff? Volunteers? Advisory Board members? Etc.?

This is done by staff, volunteers and to a smaller extent our local advisory boards. We generally look for partners in the delivery of programs. Most of the time there are organizations that have money, but not the educational resources to deliver programs, so we become the delivery mechanism and they are the funders. This could be local associations, civic groups, etc. We also have access to a VT development officer that will help our agents work with individuals to give to the local program or contribute at the state level.

11. Do you conduct fundraising year round or are their specific time frames in which you pursue fund raising?

Fundraising is usually program specific, but does take place year round.

12. What marketing tools/materials/techniques do you use in your fundraising initiatives? What works well for you in messaging your needs for funding support?

Most of our marketing tools are in the form of flyers and brochures that promote individual programs or extension as a whole. We have found it to be beneficial to have actual stakeholders speak on our behalf when marketing or soliciting funds.