

Executive Summary

UT Extension, Strategic Plan Implementation Team for Gifts, Grants and Fees

Foreword

The Gifts, Grants and Fees Team has experienced an interesting path of progression. We tackled a topic that was deemed to be among the highest priority in the strategic planning process yet one that hardly anyone thought was their responsibility. As one person put it, “Everybody thought it was important, but someone else should do something about it.”

As we see it, our work was not as much about developing standards, forms and protocol as it was about helping to prepare for ourselves, and thus our colleagues, for change. While our work was difficult to grasp at times, we are pleased to provide this summary.

As individuals and as a group, UT Extension employees have a responsibility to seek external funding which supports programs that are within our mission and meets local needs. Funding should not be seen as an *us against them* situation. We have the opportunity to work together to make a difference in the lives of Tennesseans and to develop funding streams which support the entire system. We can all contribute in a variety of ways to a successful future for Extension programs – this includes the attitude we carry, the programs we implement, the success we report and the funding we generate.

As a state agency, funding issues can be slow and complicated. But money for the public good deserves to be handled systematically and transparently. Seeking external funds to support our efforts puts us in the very best position to advocate, communicate and perpetuate the impactful programs we deliver. While some of the steps and processes we go through as we deal with external funds can be frustrating, it is important to stay focused on the ultimate benefit – impacting the lives of people we serve.

We hope that the results of our work, the recommendations we make and the related steps that will be taken in the future will lead to a better understanding of the importance and responsibility surrounding external funding, a positive culture regarding external funding and a sustainable path increased external funding.

Conclusions

We expected our work on this initiative to be a challenge – most assignments involving money are. Since our work began in April 2013, we have learned a lot and we heard a lot about funding. There is no shortage of perspectives when it comes to the subject of funding Extension programs in the future.

During our information gathering, we encountered a great deal of support for our effort. We were also exposed to some concerns and negative sentiments about the evils of fundraising. While funding is considered by many to be the life-blood of our organization and the programs we conduct, it is also a term that can divide and stress us. While a majority of Extension stakeholders, including employees, recognize that increased funding is critical to the continuation of Extension programs, we uncovered an underlying tone that the responsibility of obtaining and increasing funding belongs to “someone else.”

Despite the many negative concerns regarding external funding, most folks seem to understand the need for increased funds to support Extension programs and address local needs. In order to prepare a foundation that is conducive to greater external funding achievement at the county and regional level, we recognize that the following primary goals should be achieved:

- Clear coordination, direction and communication -- There should be a coordinator for Extension gifts, grants and fees, who would be knowledgeable about Extension and serve as someone to answer questions, navigate through the system and liaison with OSP, Advancement and budget office.
- Clear expectations – Expectations should be clear, reasonable and doable.
- Recognition and incentives – Employees should be recognized for their accomplishments with incentives. Examples could include identifying more friends of Extension and stewards of Extension.
- Training -- Employees should be trained, and expectations/information should be consistent.
- Paradigm shift -- Employees should be encouraged to think outside the box: the focus should be on programs and funding to support those programs, rather than on raising money.
- Learn from others -- Successes should be shared for adoption/implementation by others.
- Remove barriers -- Potential donors should have multiple ways and easy paths to give, and UTIA Advancement should continue to be visible. The paths to process and approve funding and projects should be streamlined, and any communication disconnections between “Knoxville” and regional/county/departmental offices should be fixed.
- Reasonable reporting and timely approvals – Record keeping and reporting should be reasonable, clear and consistent.
- Flexibility -- Development of fee-based programs should be flexible, since “one size does not fit all.”
- Distribute the load - All levels of the organization should be pushed to raise funds for programs (County, Region and State).

Summary

Funding is important to the future of Extension programs and each employee can contribute to an environment which helps obtain external funds. Policies and procedures for external funds are not always simple. Experience and understanding tend to be the most helpful ways to streamline the complexities that come with funding and accounting. It is easy to become negative when it comes to taking on complex and seemingly frustrating responsibilities. It often helps to focus on funding as an opportunity to advocate, communicate and perpetuate our programs rather than as an additional frustrating responsibility. Understanding some of the key terms involved with external funding is an important and critical part of overcoming barriers and adopting responsibilities.

Additional keys to overcoming barriers include an improved understanding of individual responsibility for external funding and an understanding the roles of OSP and UTIA Advancement. Also, understanding the reporting procedures for external funds is important, as is having a contact person for questions regarding grants, contracts, gifts and other external funding.

Each Extension Employee is responsible for contributing to an environment which supports the pursuit of external funds. Efforts and accomplishments for securing external funds should be reported at least annually as part of the employee performance review. OSP and UTIA Advancement should be able to

summarize respective individual accomplishments, and fee-based program success should be summarized at the local/departmental level.

As focus and priority is placed on securing external funds, so should the spotlight for related successful accomplishments. External funding reporting and tracking procedures should support the identification of various accomplishments – such accomplishments should be recognized.

The faculty incentive program should be updated to specifically include Extension agents and area specialists. It should also be revised for consistency across all UTIA units. The incentive program should be better explained to potential participants regarding the requirements which are incentivized.

Various program fees can be a major source of external funds for future Extension programs. This may be especially the case at the county level. A clear understanding of fee-based program parameters, requirements and reporting is essential. An accurate, consistent, efficient and understandable reporting system must be developed for all external funding.

Extension employees should be knowledgeable of the potential of endowments to fund positions and support future programs. Training is an important part of transitioning to new expectations and creating a paradigm shift. A general, basic training to scratch the surface on most topics is suggested first, followed by advanced training from the Office of Sponsored Programs, from the UTIA Office of Advancement and on fee-based programs. An introductory session on grant writing should also be offered for county and regional Extension staff.

Recommendations

In order to develop a better understanding of the importance and responsibility surrounding external funding, a positive culture regarding external funding and a sustainable path to increased external funding, the following recommendations are made:

1. Recommendation to Performance Appraisal Team that External Funding be included as a reportable and measurable expectation of performance for each Extension employee.
2. Recommendation to County Director Training Team that leadership in External Funding be included as a primary objective and expectation of county directors.
3. Recommendation to Competencies Team that External Funding be included as a necessary competency for Extension agents.
4. Recommendation to Dr. Cross that certain revisions be made to the Faculty Incentive Program (FIP) and the FIP form, including consideration of renaming the program the Salary Incentive Program (SIP).
5. Recommendation to Dr. Cross for the development of a Coordinator or External Funding Position. Responsibilities of this position would include coordinating, directing and answering questions about securing, handling and reporting external funding. The coordinator should have a strong understanding and working relationship directly with county Extension staff. They should also work as a liaison with the UTIA Budget Director, UTIA Office of Advancement and the Office of Sponsored Programs. The coordinator should

also be intimately familiar with UT policies and procedures applicable to external funding, especially those applicable at the county level. They should also be responsible for reporting all Extension funding activity and implementing procedures to accommodate such reporting. The coordinator should also prepare and conduct training in external funding policies and procedures.

6. Recommendation to Dr. Cross for the creation of various recognition and awards for external funding accomplishments.
7. Recommendation to Dr. Cross that each region and department be challenged to develop teams (including agents, area specialists and specialists) to plan, implement and evaluate fee-based, high-impact and high-visibility multi-county programs.
8. Recommendation to Dr. Cross that training related to External Funding be offered to all Extension employees each year and that each employee complete the training over a three-year period. The six sessions would consist of: 1. Basic Introduction to Enhancing External Funding; 2. Advanced Training from OSP; 3. Advanced Training from UTIA Office of Advancement; 4. Advanced Training from UT Extension's Chief Business Office; 5. General Updates and Q&A; and 6. Introduction to Grant Writing). Sessions one and six are proposed for face to face training and sessions two through five via Zoom.
9. Recommendation to Dr. Cross that small-level funding projects (less than \$500) be streamlined for approval at the county/regional level.
10. Recommendation to Dr. Cross that specific guidelines for fee-based programs be developed and used in training.

Respectfully submitted October 2015 by the UT Extension, Strategic Plan Implementation Team for *Gifts, Grants and Fees*.

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