

Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) New Agent and Specialist Onboarding and Mentoring Program

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Introduction – Program Overview

The purpose of this project, as identified in the VCE Organizational Effectiveness Plan (2021), is to “develop onboarding and training programs using appropriate pedagogy, to ensure new employees understand their job expectations and are supported through their transition to their new careers” (p. 3). This work was carried out by a committee, appointed by the VCE Director of Extension (VT) and the VCE Extension Administrator (VSU), comprised of six specialists, one human resources specialist, five agents, four district directors, and co-led by the VCE Associate Director for Field Operations and Administration, and VCE Specialist for Continuing Professional Development. VCE Locations represented include the VT Campus, VSU Campus, Community-based offices, Agriculture Research and Extension Centers (AREC), and District Offices.

We, the co-chairs have worked to incorporate existing early career training into our work. Specific examples include the 4-H Early Career Professional Development Training, Program Development Institute, and new faculty orientations held for Virginia Tech and Virginia State Universities. A primary way this has been done is through inclusion of representatives of these trainings as part of the VCE Onboarding Committee (Appendix A). How and when these are provided should be reconsidered within the perspective of the survey findings and discussions associated with this project as well as other internal professional development needs assessments. In order to have initial connection to new faculty orientation in which Extension Specialists housed at Virginia Tech participate addition we met prior to the development of the committees with Sue Duncan who oversees these. Janine Parker-Woods, who oversees these at Virginia State University served on the committee as well.

Work to date is based on findings from a system-wide survey, a facilitated visioning process in fall of 2021, and a study of VCE employees in years four through seven of their careers. Across the three data sources there is a strong theme that says improving our onboarding process is important to VCE and that our current process is not enough to address this need. This cuts across roles in the organization, including both agents and specialists. There is a need for a new onboarding program. There is also concern that, in the past, the on-boarding program has been an add-on to someone’s job description rather than being a part of a full position. Onboarding is extremely important to reduce lost time, financial resources, and relevance associated with high levels of turnover and long vacancies in positions.

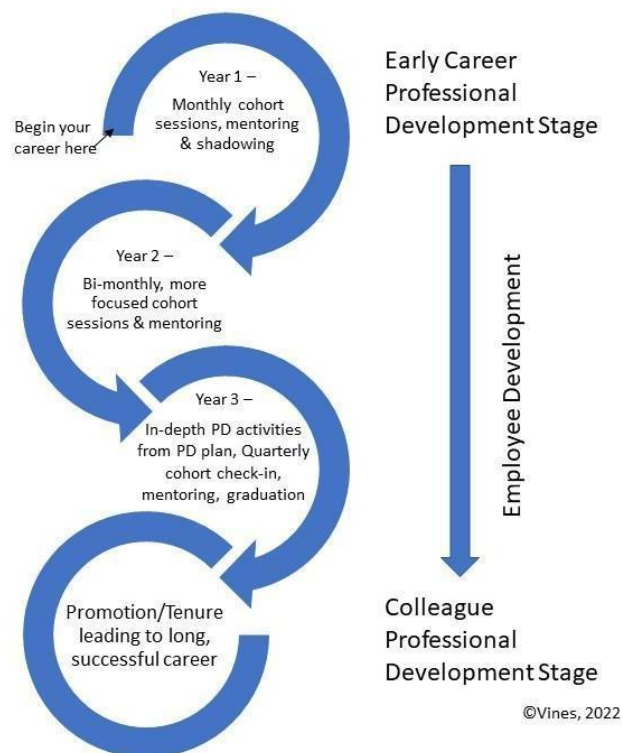
One area of discussion is around leadership of the program. The committee suggests that a full-time Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator be hired to fill this role rather than having this be a portion of an existing job description. This will give the program the attention it deserves to strengthen the organization. The program focuses on agents and specialists, but the committee suggested it should eventually extend to all roles within VCE. The expanded program would remain the job responsibility of the Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator. In addition, this person can also help coordinate subject matter and other training within the system. In order to keep

the program connected to the end users, it is recommended that advisory groups be developed to provide program guidance.

This work is based on the career stages as defined by Rennekamp and Nall (1994) and Bengtson et al. (2011) rather than looking at years of service. This allows the program more flexibility in accommodating the needs of employees who may enter the system with prior Extension experience. The onboarding program is intended for professionals in the early entry stage. These sessions will be supported with appropriate materials and refresher opportunities to be provided throughout the professional's career. In addition, more advanced sessions will be developed or used to allow participants to gain more in-depth knowledge in specific areas as they move into colleague, counselor, and mentor roles. This has implications for how we might approach VCE winter in-service and other in-service training as well as understanding of competencies of VCE professionals.

One new aspect of the program is that onboarding is provided to agents and specialists, VT and VSU faculty, collectively as a cohort to increase cohesion and consistency across the system. At the time of hiring, the new employee and their supervisor will reflect on the employee's past experiences to determine which parts of the onboarding program will be beneficial to them. Resources will be developed to support program participants after program completion. Multiple data points recommend that use of Canvas or other online course delivery mechanisms be minimized and used only for follow-up or refresher content rather than being the source of onboarding training. Beyond this, people expressed interest in both virtual and face-to-face modalities, emphasizing appropriate learning methodologies incorporating active-learning, participant-centric, andragogical approaches. People recommended that lessons be broken down rather than following the current Program Development Institute (PDI) model, and that scaffolding be emphasized so that lessons build on one another from session to session.

Figure 1. Diagram showing the flow of the proposed VCE Onboarding-Mentoring plan.



Cohorts will be developed as agents and specialists enter VCE. Cohorts will meet monthly in year one, and bi-monthly in year two. During an optional year three, cohorts will have three check-ins as they begin to participate in more in-depth, professional development sessions related to specific competencies or subject matter and eventually celebrate their success through program graduation (Figure 1). As new employees enter the proposed program they will enter at the next available cohort session and complete a year cycle before entering years two and three. As the new employee completes their first year of employment, they will complete the first year of the program, and move to year two and then eventually to year three.

Place-based and virtual meetings throughout the program will be interspersed. Locations for the place-based sessions will rotate around the state geographically to include 4-H Centers, AREC's, Local Extension or District Offices, Virginia State University, and Virginia Tech. For each session, where appropriate, break-out sessions will be provided to increase applicability for specific roles, while also allowing increased understanding of those roles, and opportunities for collaboration across roles and programs.

Face-to-face cohort sessions are proposed as three-day workshops with general onboarding content being covered beginning after lunch of day one and concluding at the end of day two. Day three is reserved for subject-matter based training, in keeping with concerns that in some cases subject-matter based training is overwhelming to new employees and is lacking in other cases. The cohort approach will allow new employees a safe space to explore and learn apart from their more experienced colleagues – again, being responsive to expressed needs of new employees. Virtual sessions will feature general onboarding content from 1:00 to 4:00 PM on days one and two of the cohort sessions, followed by subject matter specific content during the same time frame on day three. The Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator will coordinate these training sessions with the appropriate state program leaders and subject matter specialists.

Through the committee discussions and focus groups with mid-career agents it became evident that mentoring and onboarding need to be connected. This program will work to address mentor training and capacity. To assist in providing a quality mentoring experience the program utilizes mentor teams. Teams will be made up of mentors that have met specific criteria indicating their potential to excel as mentors. They will be selected through a selection process and receive training on a regular basis to fulfill their roles. A new mentor team will be assigned to each group of new employees entering the onboarding training within their first month on the position. Mentor teams will include faculty from different roles, program areas or specialization, and where possible, universities to help expand the diversity of the new employees' network and their understanding of the broader purpose of Cooperative Extension. Mentor teams and new faculty will develop mentoring plans to spread mentoring responsibility across the mentor team while providing monthly check-ins with new employees during year one, bi-monthly check-ins during year two, and as-needed access to mentors during year three. Mentoring teams will work with the new employees and their supervisors to develop job shadowing experiences during the first year. Mentoring teams and mentees will meet prior to the first cohort session to get acquainted and develop the mentoring plan. Training for mentors is yet to be developed.

Recommended program content has been identified through the channels previously identified. This has been categorized into five categories. These include Extension Organization, Employee Expectations, Networking Relationships, Professionalism, and the Programming Process. There is overlap among these and they are intermingled in the proposed program during sessions in year one. Moving into year two content is more focused for the cohort sessions. Finally, in year three, the employee works with mentors and their supervisor to identify specific competencies in which they will concentrate their efforts. In discussion of this project it was recognized that competencies adopted by the VCE system in 2008 need to be updated for current situations and can then be used in evaluating content provided in onboarding and extended professional development and evaluation processes.

Program Justification

The development of a new onboarding program and supporting the program with resources is critically important to Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). The top priority identified in the 2021 VCE Organizational Plan

(<https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/organizational-effectiveness>) is Employee Development. This is defined as “investing in our most valuable asset, our employees” (p. 4). The aspiration associated with this item is for VCE to be “an organization where employees feel valued and appreciated and are committed to an inclusive environment” (p. 4). In addition, “VCE evaluates and improves practices that positively impact employee recruitment, retention, and development” (p. 4). Specific goals identified in the document are:

1. Strengthen organizational relationships
2. Attract, retain, and develop the talents of a diverse faculty and staff (p. 4)

Within this second goal, related to workforce preparation was a specific recommendation to “develop on-boarding and training programs using appropriate pedagogy, to ensure new employees understand their job expectations and are supported through their transition to their new careers

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CWZAOW2yTVnNNutT83HTCVZVBXykoXeA/view>, p. 3). This new plan is a direct result of that recommendation, as the leadership and members of the short and long-term onboarding teams set out to develop an onboarding program that not only uses appropriate pedagogy, but also focuses on helping early career employees obtain the necessary skills and competencies to be successful in their work, setting the stage for job success and career advancement. The manner in which this has been addressed also seeks to strengthen organizational relationships by providing onboarding and creating cohorts across the organization that include individuals beginning careers in VCE both at VT and VSU and in roles of agents and specialists.

There is evidence to support this program based on exit interviews that have been conducted with Extension agents. Open-ended comments in a survey of Extension agents leaving VCE during a four-and-a-half-year period between 2017 and 2021 (n=40) included:

The first few months of employment were really rough and took a lot of adjustment.

Onboarding could be more effective. Hiring agents immediately before camp can be extremely overwhelming for some personality types.

More professional development opportunities needed for younger agents. Must continue to be challenged to stay. (Woods, 2021)

Johnson and Senges found that 90% of employees determined whether or not they would stay in an organization within their first six months of employment (as cited in Harder et al., 2015). This emphasizes the need to provide support for professionals that is intentional and impactful as soon as possible when they enter the organization. This program is intended to positively influence the new employees’ decision regarding a career in Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Career stage work for Cooperative Extension describes employees in the entry stage as those entering the profession, attaining foundational skills, and learning about the organization (Benge et al., 2011, Rennekamp & Nall, 1994). Employees transition from this stage to a colleague stage where they are accepted as a member of the professional community and are able to independently contribute expertise to problem-solving and program development (Benge et al., 2011, Rennekamp & Nall, 1994). A 2021 survey of the VCE organization (n=127) indicates that the average tenure of VCE professionals seeing themselves in an early career stage was 9.88 years, comprising 18% of respondents (Vines, 2021). While employees will move through the career stages at different paces, nearly ten years is a long time for someone to go from learning the basics of VCE so they can begin to make independent contributions in addressing issues and developing programs. This suggests that the current model of professional development being used for employees is broken, and that we can improve the strength of the organization by providing support that allows these employees to contribute more fully earlier in their career. Returning to the VCE exit surveys, the top reason agents gave for leaving VCE was because they secured a better job (Woods, 2021). It appears reasonable to expect that employees entering this profession may begin looking for

other opportunities if they feel they are unable to make a shift from dependence to independence in a reasonable time.

This program seeks to clearly define a process that will give VCE professionals the necessary foundational skills and organizational background within their first three years of employment, setting the stage for them to enter a colleague stage where they can contribute independently to the organization much earlier in their career. Future attention to specific professional development needs at the following career stages will promote personal and professional development of the employee throughout their career as well. The long-term goal of a professional development program that focuses resources on employees based on their career stage will increase employee retention, ownership, and leadership. This will provide a stronger Extension organization that can more effectively partner with communities in Virginia to support their sustainability and resilience.

Project and Committee Development

This draft structure for a proposed VCE onboarding structure is the work of a short and long-term onboarding committee convened as a result of a discussion in May 2021 between the VCE leadership team and Karen Vines, Assistant Professor in Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education and VCE Continuing and Professional Education Specialist. Dr. Vines was appointed as academic co-chair and Lonnie Johnson, VCE Associate Director for Field Operations was assigned as the VCE Leadership co-chair to oversee the development of a new VCE onboarding program. The co-chairs developed a list of individuals representing different parts of the VCE organization with interest in or work around onboarding as potential members of the two committees. These committees were then appointed by Dr. Ed Jones, VT Extension Director, and Dr. Ray McKinnie, VSU Extension Administrator.

Short-Term Committee Overview

The short-term committee was assigned with addressing challenges with the current onboarding process which was overwhelming, confusing, and unsupportive of new employees. The team eliminated multiple platforms used to support onboarding, focusing on the Canvas site. They then simplified the Canvas site by reducing the number of assignments presented to the new employee. The assignments were revised so that the work was submitted within the Canvas platform. Headings were used to define the timeline for the new employee based on their start date. The site was released and is currently being used by new employees.

The short-term onboarding committee also initiated and carried out a system-wide onboarding survey. Findings from that survey were converted into [VCE Publication \(ALCE-278\)](#).

On completion of this work by the short-term onboarding committee, members were invited to join the long-term onboarding committee with approval of VCE leadership. All accepted.

Review of the onboarding documents within the Canvas site is ongoing to be sure they are up to date and ADA compliant. Once revisions are complete, the documents will be entered into the VCE publication system to make them more accessible throughout the VCE community, and provide a mechanism for regular review and revision as required by the VCE system.

Long-Term Committee Overview

A charge meeting was held for the Long-Term Onboarding Committee on August 12, 2021. A shared google drive was established containing onboarding resources, finding from studies of VCE employees including the onboarding survey, and team members were encouraged to share resources they found. This was followed by a facilitated visioning session on October 29 which provided insight from the committee into the structure and content of the plan. Work groups were developed to consider topics and timelines for content related to Professionalism, Employee Expectations, Networking Relationships, Extension Organization, and Programming Process. The committee met again on December 13 and the working groups provided their reports.

Data from these meetings was collected through notes and use of Google jam boards. This data was then compiled first to determine the proposed structure and secondly to further define the contents of the onboarding program. A summary of this data was developed as a draft document. A condensed overview of the draft document was shared with members of the Employee Development Committee from the 2021 VCE Organizational Effectiveness Plan, VCE District Program Leadership Team members, Extension Department Leaders, and VCE Program Leaders from April through June 2022. Feedback from that review has been added to this document.

Program Oversight

VCE Onboarding Leader:

A proposed structure is provided in Figure 1. A VCE Onboarding Leader is named in the VCE Organizational Effectiveness Plan released in 2021

(<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CWZAOW2yTVnNNutT83HTCVZVBXykoXeA/view&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1645644237923896&usg=AOvVaw2FPqt6xmb2A7IziCREUw0f>). There is discrepancy among the committee regarding whether this is a new person or someone on staff who will be assigned a percentage of time. For the purposes of this plan, we recommend the ideal of making this a separate and permanent position. There is value in having one person charged with directing professional development programs and being held accountable for their success. This position will be evaluable as part of the employee's job description. This person will also oversee development, implementation, and evaluation of the mentoring program.

VCE Onboarding Advisory Team:

This team will be led by the VCE Onboarding Leader. The purpose will be to oversee ongoing short- and long-term program evaluation, content to be included in the plan, development of support resources, and connections between onboarding and other VCE training activities. In addition, this team will provide oversight to the onboarding program planning team and the mentoring teams which are addressed in greater detail below. This team will likely meet 1-2 hours each month.

This team will also oversee the mentoring and shadowing components of the VCE onboarding program. In this role, the team will oversee the mentoring application, qualifications for mentors, mentor expectation, the selection of the mentors, and annual mentoring training. The Onboarding Advisory Team, through the Onboarding Coordinator, will work with the district director or departmental representative to provide a list of potential mentors to development mentoring teams for new hires with greater than a 20% Extension appointment. They will also work with supervisors to identify replacements if needed. Mentor positions will be advertised on a regular basis with supervisors and other members of the system encouraged to recruit candidates that have the qualities that are desired in a good mentor.

Membership of the VCE Onboarding Advisory team, beyond the VCE Onboarding Leader, will include the associate director for field operations, an associate director for programs, one district director, one department head or departmental extension program leader, one specialist each from VT and VSU, and one agent each from VT and VSU. The team will work with subject matter or organizational professional development faculty on a regular basis to support emphasis on contemporary research and practice in the relevant fields. Ideally, membership of the initial team will include carryover from the VCE Onboarding Planning Committee which is developing this plan. Representative membership on the team will be set in a rotation of three-year terms defined initially to allow equal rotation among members to provide continuity from year to year.

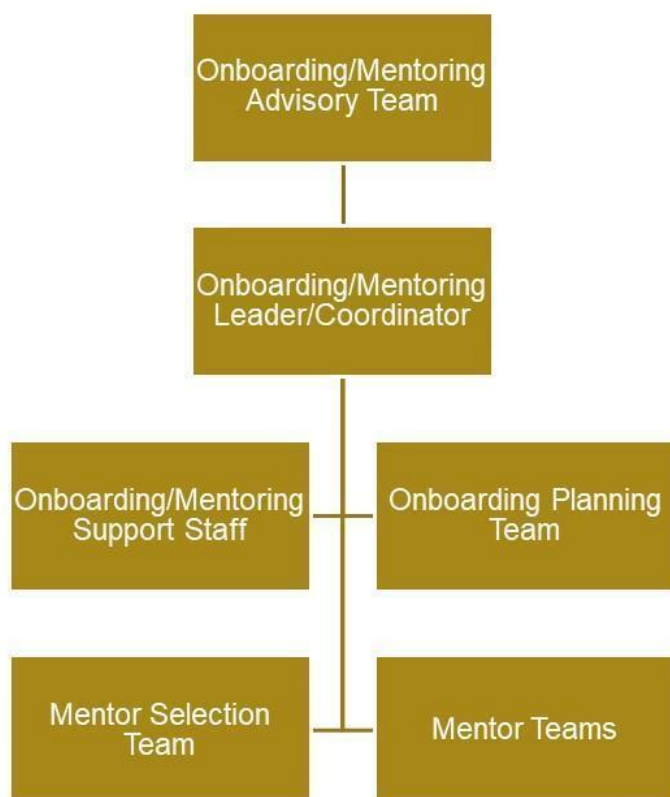
Serving on this team will be considered a leadership role similar to those played by VCE program team leadership. Employees will be evaluated based on their performance in this role. Ideally, individuals serving in this role will be promoted at a minimum college stage of their career as defined by Benge et al., (2011).

Onboarding Program Planning Team:

This team will manage the face-to-face logistics for cohort meetings included in the VCE Onboarding program. They will arrange agendas, presenters, locations, meals, travel, and communication about these with the participants. This team will be led by the Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator and will be made up of other VCE professional development personnel, an agent and specialist mentor, and agent and specialist graduates from a recent cohort and support staff. Representative membership on the team will be set in a rotation of three-year terms defined initially to allow equal rotation among members to provide continuity from year to year. Initially, cohort representation will come from a recently promoted agent and specialist. This team will meet on a regular basis with ongoing work conducted to manage the programs as afforded by job descriptions and assignments.

Serving on this team will be considered a role, similar to serving on a program team and will be evaluated accordingly. Individuals serving in this role will range in career stage from counselor through advisor.

Figure 1. Potential Structure showing relationship between onboarding and mentoring personnel and teams.



The Onboarding Program

This section has been developed based on the work of the short- and long-term onboarding committees.

Participants:

The aspirational goal for the VCE Onboarding program is to provide onboarding for all incoming personnel, including office-level staff, program assistants, agents, and specialists. Our work at this time focuses on agents

and specialists. Shifting to include specialists is a change. Previous VCE onboarding focused on agents and specialists received a daylong session of Cooperative Extension as a part of their onboarding program. In addition, the program shifts to be cross-institutional, including Extension faculty at both Virginia Tech (VT) and Virginia State University (VSU).

The program must be flexible in order to account for faculty needs. This means considering the different needs of faculty within the VCE organization. In addition, faculty experience should be considered when offering onboarding programming for VCE Faculty who transfer from other state Extension organizations, and those who move to different roles or from one department to another.

Extension Professionals Transferring from Other Organizations and Extension Professionals Returning to Positions:

District Directors and Department Heads will work with the new employee to determine the extent to which a new employee should participate in the onboarding program based on their previous experience and competencies. Incoming faculty with experience may participate 1) the mentoring experience, 2) the shadowing experience, 3) full cohort experience, 4) VCE only cohort experience, or 5) program only cohort experience or some combination of these. This will be communicated to the onboarding Leader and reflected in the professional development plan for the individual.

Structure

Approach – Onboarding programs should be stand-alone events and not connected to other Extension activities. Likewise, onboarding sessions should be scheduled so they do not conflict with other statewide Extension training.

Clearly Defined – The expectations and timeline for the onboarding program should be clearly defined so they can be presented to incoming faculty as they develop their professional calendars.

Cohort-based – Cohorts should include VCE faculty from across the state, in agent and specialist roles, and from VT and VSU. Cohort meetings should occur over a period of time. Faculty join the existing cohort during the first or second full month of employment and continue on until they complete the cycle. Based on content team recommendations, this time frame is set at three years, with the number of cohort sessions being cut in half each year.

Shadowing – Shadowing is a short-term activity where the new employee visits an experienced employee and observes them in their work. Activities to observe may include program planning, reporting, conducting programs, visiting with clientele, advisory group meetings, etc. The person being observed does not have to be a mentor of the new employee.

Mentoring – Mentoring is the establishment of a long-term relationship between the new employee and experienced employees. In this plan, a mentor team is provided that represent different parts of the organization to aid the employee in gaining a better understanding of how the parts of the organization work together. More details associated with the mentoring program are included in a later section of this document. As this program develops, the DPLT program will be subsumed into this mentoring approach as relates to agents, but expanding to include specialists as mentors and program recipients.

General Timeline and Proposed Session Structure

The general timeline and expectations for participants at different stages of the new VCE Onboarding program are shown in Appendix B. This includes clear expectations and serves as a pacing guide, as well as a library of resources the faculty member can use for support and as refreshers. The starting point reflects when the program is first implemented. The program will repeat at the end of the year. Participants may choose to remain for longer

than a year or come back for refreshers in specific areas. The proposed structure of face-to-face cohort sessions and virtual cohort sessions are shown in Appendix C.

Content

The Long-Term Onboarding Committee identified five broad topic areas for content. These are professionalism, employee expectations, networking relationship, extension organization, and programming process. Workgroups considered what needed to be included in each of these and developed timelines for their inclusion in the program. A broad assessment of these timelines is the basis for the three-year duration of the program as reflected in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Timeline for inclusion of broad topic areas into the new VCE Onboarding program.

Topic Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Professionalism	→		
Employee Expectations	→	→	
Networking Relationships	→	→	→
Extension Organization	→	→	→
Programming Process	→	→	→

There is a lot of overlap between content and the more specific topics identified by the committee and specific workgroups as indicated in figure 3.

Figure 3. Connection between samples of specific content and broad topics.

Recommended Content	Programming Process	Networking Relationships	Employee Expectations	Professionalism	Extension Organization
Communications (inter-office)	X	X	X	X	
Intergenerational Differences Training	X	X	X	X	
Strengthening Your Facilitation Skills	X	X	X	X	
Technical Subject Matter	X	X	X		X
Personnel and Administration			X		X
Situation analysis process and activities	X	X			
Big and little p programming	X				
Evaluation	X	X	X		X
What other agents/specialists are doing	X	X	X		X
VCE Structure and roles					X
Other areas and programs across the state		X			X

Helping new professionals learn the educational programming process was identified as one of the most important pieces of the onboarding plan. Program planning must emphasize development of an impactful program and work with the new employee to develop program evaluation methodology that will provide them with appropriate data

that indicates their employee performance. However, members of the committee are supported by the career stages approach in suggesting that this needs to take place after faculty have greater understanding of the organization and how it functions. A sample schedule for providing content to be provided by the onboarding program is included as an Appendix C to this document.

Methodologies

The following recommendations connected to methodology came out of the VCE Onboarding committee work on October 29, 2021.

Onboarding should take a holistic (Big-P program) approach. There should be stated learning objectives. Also, the program should include informal, non-formal, and formal methods as they relate to the content. Experiential or application-based learning should be used when appropriate.

Cohort sessions should be set up for onboarding. Sessions may revolve around themes. Canvas can be used for follow-up.

Shadowing should be a planned component of Onboarding. Shadowing should occur across disciplines. In addition, the new agent should shadow other agents in the process of record-keeping and in program planning and delivery.

Mentoring is critical to the onboarding process. Mentors and mentees should meet at least over a full year. The mentor should be there to guide the mentee as they go through their first program planning process.

Success of the new employee should be evaluated based on locality and position.

Modalities

The team recommended monthly meetings, involving a cohort, and using both in-person and virtual modalities. Meetings should allow new employees to see what other agents and specialists are doing across the organization. In-person locations should rotate across the state to share VT, VSU, ARECS, Extension offices, and 4-H Centers. Office level training should also be included that emphasizes teamwork, collaboration, and contributing to a positive work environment. Canvas or other online delivery use should be limited to mandatory initial training, follow-up and providing access to resources for review.

Training Personnel

A long list of potential trainers was developed. These include agents, specialists, mentors and mentoring teams, district directors, external and private sector partners, DPL teams, early career “just graduated” agents with less than ten years of service, administrators, and VCE Associate Directors.

Support Resources

One virtual site should be provided for those in the program to access all resources. Canvas use should be limited to what has to be done in a particular area or for follow-up. Resources to be included are:

- Onboarding guideline to help pace the first year
- Back-up or refresher videos
- Guides on what it means to be successful in VCE and skills needed to be successful
- VCE specialist video (like VSU video) – maybe by content area
- “Hotline” for quick responses to questions by type/category

- Periodic refresher course for critical areas such as risk management (self-identified)
- A collection of Frequently Asked Questions
- Check-ins should continue even after the process is “done”, and we should be more strategic in assigning mentors.

The Mentoring & Shadowing Program

The mentoring and shadowing program are intended to be an integral part of the onboarding process. Mentors will meet with the new employees at different times over their first three years on the job, individually or as a team, and use both in-person and virtual modalities as determined by mentors and mentees in their mentoring plan.

Mentoring purpose: The purpose of mentoring for new VCE employees is to provide new employees with a support team that can advise them and answer questions as they go through their transition into their VCE role. For purposes of this program, mentoring is conducted through a team. The mentoring team will also guide the new employee to develop personal mentoring and shadowing experiences, while also preparing them to enter the full evaluation and promotion or tenure system.

Mentor Training: Initial mentor training will precede the roll out of onboarding. Mentor teams will identify a lead mentor who will initiate contact with the new hire and facilitate the mentoring process throughout the new hires onboarding process. The mentor team will meet with the mentee at the beginning of the initial onboarding training session for the new hire to become acquainted and develop a mentoring plan that includes communication and other expectations for interaction. Mentor teams will alternate regular contact with new hires in addition to team meetings where they can work with the new hire to celebrate successes and solve problems. A draft schedule follows in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Mentoring Timeline

Activity	Timing
Advertisement for potential mentors among VCE faculty who have been promoted and are in at least the colleague career stages	Prior to beginning of program
Selection of mentors for mentoring pool for first six months	Prior to beginning of program
Initial training for selected mentors	Prior to beginning of program
Selection of mentoring team from mentor pool	Within one month of hire by team of District Directors/Department Heads having new hires- overseen by Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator
Mentoring team interaction with mentees and development of Mentoring Plan	Begins at the first cohort session for new hires
Monthly mentor check-ins	Alternated among mentors, based on needs and availability

Team meeting with new hire in year 1	Immediately prior to the first cohort meeting of new hires and at months 4, 7 and 10 of the process.
Team meetings with new hire in year 2	Months 13 and 19
Team meetings with new hire in year 3	Month 25 and 36

Mentor Teams

District directors (agent) or department heads (specialist) having new employees entering a cohort will participate in the selection of the mentor team for that specific cohort. The list of potential mentors will be provided to this group of supervisors. The mentor team will be made up of four members to represent the following experiences associated with the position. Mentor teams should contain mentors from both VT and VSU, and both agents and specialists. It is likely members of the existing DPL Teams will choose to apply to become mentors. Recommended make-up of the mentor team is identified in figure 5.

Figure 5. Suggested membership of a mentoring team for a new employee.

Experiences	Agent Hire	Specialist Hire
Similar position - A person in the similar position will lead support in promotion and tenure	Other agents in similar positions.	A Departmental Extension Program Leader
Content area	Other agent with programming in area of similar or adjacent expertise from another district in Virginia	Other specialist with programming in area of similar or adjacent expertise from another academic department in Virginia
Alternate location or university	Agent housed in different office situation or from alternate university of new hire	Specialist housed in different offices situation (AREC, campus, district office) from new hire
Alternate role	VCE Specialist with expertise in area of similar or adjacent expertise in Virginia	VCE Agent with expertise in area of similar or adjacent expertise in Virginia

The mentor team will meet collectively with the new employee quarterly during their first year of hire and semi-annually in years two and three. The mentor team will work with the mentee to develop a mentoring plan in which members of the team will take turns checking in and answering questions of the new employee on a monthly basis. Each mentor will also provide a shadowing experience for the mentee during their first five months on the job. They will also assist the mentor in identifying a fifth, self-selected shadowing experience. A draft mentoring plan is provided in Appendix E.

Outputs of the mentoring and shadowing experience developed by the new employee and their mentoring team at the end of the third year are a long-term professional development plan and a draft promotion packet. If at any

time during the mentoring process either the mentee or a mentor finds the relationship challenging, they must notify the supervisor so a replacement mentor can be appointed.

Mentors are selected based on their qualifications and their status in either the counselor or advisory stages of their career. This role is considered an evaluable part of their jobs, similar to leadership on state level committees.

Program Evaluation

Time for ongoing evaluation of short- and medium-term outcomes is included in the sample schedule that includes content (Appendix D). Long term measures associated with evaluation should include the following:

Decrease loss of employees in early career stage

- Obtain baseline data from Human Resources to map the number of Extension professionals in agent and specialist roles leaving the organization by number of years in VCE as well as their career stage. Identify Extension appointments for specialists as well.
- Continue exit interviews or surveys with agents and begin these with specialists to understand why employees leave to aid in shaping ongoing onboarding program improvement.
- Consider interviews with employees in the colleague stage to identify what supported their transition out of the early career stage and why they remain within the organization.

Decrease time to transition from early to colleague career stage

- Follow-up with a brief survey on a regular basis to look for shifts in the number of years, on average, people are remaining in the early career stage.
- The data suggests that Extension employees are achieving promotion while still in the entry stage. Conduct interviews or focus groups with supervisors to get their insight into why people are remaining in this stage beyond the time in which they receive promotions in the organization. Consider how this might be addressed to strengthen VCE and the employees.

References

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2022

ALCE-302NP

Appendix A: Committee Members

Committee co-chairs:

Academic chair: Karen Vines, Assistant Professor and Specialist for Continuing Professional Development, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech

Extension Leadership Chair: Lonnie Johnson, Associate Director for Field Operations and Administration, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Committee members:

Sarah Baughman, Research Associate Professor, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Erika Bonnett, 4-H Organizational Specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension

C. Taylor Clarke, Extension Agent, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Mecklenburg County Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Erica Feuerbacher, Associate Professor, School of Animal Sciences, Virginia Tech

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Sonya Furgurson, District Director, Central District, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Kathy Hosig, Associate Professor, Population Health Sciences Department, Virginia Tech

Jonette Mungo, Extension Agent, City of Virginia Beach Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Janine Parker-Woods, Associate Administrator, Virginia State University

Morgan Paulette, Extension Agent, Pulaski County Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Jocelyn Dailey-Pearson, Extension Agent, City of Chesapeake Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Danny Peek, District Director, Southwest District, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Reza Rafie, Extension Professor and Specialist, Virginia State University

Sarah Sharpe, Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Green County Extension Office, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Janet Spencer, District Director, Southeast District, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Cathy Sutphin, Associate Director Youth, Families, and Health, Virginia Cooperative Extension

John Thompson, District Director, Northwest District, Virginia Cooperative Extension

April Wood, Human Resources Manager, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Appendix B: General Timeline

Year 1

Month	Week	Activity	Expectations
1	1	Office orientation, meet with people located near them, learn how to complete basic procedures, complete hiring paperwork and begin prescribed online training (5 days) EE • Office communication • Office finance basics • Office situational analysis report • Unit plans of work • Online civil rights training • Reporting	Begin paperwork submission Begin developing Networking & Expertise Map (Appendix F) Begin Online training Develop and share questions with mentor team
1	2	Participate in shadowing experience	Reflections on how the person they shadowed carried out their work and implications on how they might begin to approach their work Make additions to Networking & Expertise map Develop and share questions with mentor team
1	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team ¹ and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days) ²³	Reflection on content and how it connects to their work Development of Mentoring plan Question and Answer session with mentors Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map
1	4	Continue local orientation, paperwork, online training, Individual Mentor check-in ⁴	Paperwork submission Complete online training Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team

¹Time will be allotted for initial meetings with the mentor teams for new hires prior to the start of the Face-to-Face or virtual cohort session.

² Face-to-Face and Virtual sessions alternate from month to month. A virtual session will replace any face-to-face session that has to be canceled for reasons of weather or illness. Face-to-Face sessions will be spaced across the state at different types of Extension locations (Extension offices, ARECS, 4-H Centers, universities). Face-to-Face sessions will run Tuesday to Thursday. Virtual sessions will be spaced across Tuesday to Thursday to minimize online program fatigue.

³ Agent will begin participation in sessions during the first full month following their hire. Content will be arranged seasonally where it matters.

⁴ May be in-person, by phone, or online depending on time availability and location. There will be specific areas for inquiry based on the timing.

2	2-4	Participate in shadowing experience with content area mentor (~3 days)	Complete shadow reflections Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
2	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
2	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Q &A with mentor team
3	2	Participate in shadowing experience with alternate location or university mentor	Shadow reflections Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
3	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days) – Local Extension Office	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
3	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
4	2	Participate in shadowing experience with alternate role mentor	Shadow reflections Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
4	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual/ Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team Identification of self-selected mentoring experience
4	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team Complete arrangements for self-selected mentoring experience
5	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days) – AREC	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
5	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
6	2	Participate in self-selected shadowing experience	Shadow reflections Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
6	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual/ Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM) –	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team

6	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
7	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days) –	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
7	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
8	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual/ Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
8	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
9	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
9	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
10	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual/ Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
10	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
11	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Face-to-Face Cohort Session (3 days) -	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
11	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
12	3	Initial meeting with mentoring team for new hires and Virtual/ Cohort Session (3 days; 1-4 PM)	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
12	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team

Year 2

Month	Week	Activity	Expectations
13	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
14	3	Face-to-Face Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team

15	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
16	3	Virtual/ Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
17	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
18	3	Face-to-Face Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
19	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
20	3	Virtual/ Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
21	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
22	3	Face-to-Face Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
23	4	Individual Mentor check-in	Develop and share questions with mentor team
24	3	Virtual/ Cohort Session	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team

Year 3

Month	Week	Activity	Expectations
25	4	Mentoring Session	Develop and share questions with mentor team
26	3	Personal and Professional Development Fair & Program Specific Content, 4-H Center	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
27-30	4	Individual professional development activities. Mentoring Session	Develop and share questions with mentor team
31	3	Mid-Year 3 Cohort Checking- Virtual	Content reflection Make additions to Networking & Expertise Map Develop and share questions with mentor team
32-35		Mentoring Session	Develop and share questions with mentor team

36	3	Graduation, Onboarding/Mentoring Program Evaluation, Needs Assessment for Colleague Stage Professional Development Programming	Develop and share questions with mentor team Professional Development Plan Promotion documentation Program reflection Expertise map
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Appendix C: Proposed Structure of Face-to-Face & Virtual Cohort Sessions

Face-to-Face Cohort Sessions

Day 1

10:00 AM – Noon – New hires meet with the mentoring team in a coordinated session. Outcomes are to be getting acquainted with each other, getting contact information and preferences, identifying initial questions/answers, and developing a mentoring schedule for the three-year period

PM – Earlier additions to the cohort join the session to participate in introductions and participate in VCE Onboarding Training as scheduled.

Day 2

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM - VCE Onboarding Training, Site Tour, visit with hosts at site

5:00 – 8:00 PM – Graduation Ceremony, dinner and celebration for those completing 1, 2, and 3 years when appropriate

Day 3

AM - Program Specific Training- directed by program leaders and appropriate staff

Virtual Cohort Sessions

Day 1

10:00 AM – Noon – New hires meet with the mentoring team in a coordinated session. Outcomes are to be getting acquainted with each other, getting contact information and preferences, identifying initial questions/answers, and developing a mentoring schedule for the three-year period

1:00 – 4:00 PM – Earlier additions to the cohort join the session to participate in introductions and participate in VCE Onboarding Training as scheduled.

Day 2

1:00 – 4:00 PM – VCE Onboarding Training

Day 3

1:00 – 4:00 PM – Program Specific Training directed by program leaders and appropriate staff

Appendix D: Draft Onboarding Content

Document Notes:

This has been developed based on content identified by the VCE Onboarding Committee work from 2021-2022 and is provided only as an example. An advisory group should be appointed to work with a VCE Onboarding/Mentoring Coordinator to finalize plans as the program is implemented. Section categories identified by the Onboarding Committee include Extension Organization, Employee Expectations, Networking Relationships, Professionalism, and Programming Process. There is overlap among many of these and they are intermingled throughout the program outlined here.

As individuals enter the system they will enter at the next available cohort session and complete a year cycle before entering years 2 and 3. As individuals complete the year 1 program, they will move to year 2. New professionals should be assigned mentors as they enter the organization. The intent is that new employees and mentors will have their initial, get-acquainted meeting prior to the first session the new professional attends. Mentors are welcome but not required to attend sessions with mentees.

Mentors and supervisors for individuals coming into VCE with Extension experience will work with them to determine the extent of their participation in this program.

This work is based on the career stages as defined by Rennekamp and Nall (1994) and Bengtson et al. (2011). The onboarding program is intended for professionals in the early entry stage. These sessions will be supported with appropriate materials and refresher opportunities to be provided throughout the professional's career. In addition, more advanced sessions will be developed or used to allow students to gain more in-depth knowledge in specific areas as they move into colleague, counselor, and mentor roles.

Cohorts will include agents, specialists and administrators in the early career stage. For each session, where appropriate, break-out sessions will be provided to increase applicability for specific roles, while also allowing increased understanding of those roles, and opportunities for collaboration across roles and programs.

Place-based and virtual meetings throughout the program will be interspersed. Places for the place-based sessions will rotate around the state geographically to include 4-H Centers, Agricultural, Research and Education Centers (ARECS), Local Extension or District Offices, Virginia State University, and Virginia Tech.

Overview of Cooperative Extension, Expectations, Communications, and Reporting (Year 1 – Session/Month 1)

Location: Local Extension Office or District Office

Objectives:

1. Increase the familiarity of Extension professionals with the Cooperative Extension organization and VCE.
2. Equip new Extension professionals with communication tools and knowledge to help them be successful in working in the VCE organization.
3. Assist new Extension professionals in understanding expectations of them within this Early Career Stage
4. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

An Overview of Cooperative Extension: What is Cooperative Extension? What is the history of Cooperative Extension? What is unique about Cooperative Extension in the US? How does Cooperative Extension work at the local, state, and federal levels?

Core values of VCE.

Employee Resources: Communication preferences and methods in VCE and work communities. Identification of resources – Who is known for what? Who can help me? Where do I find answers? Overview of career stages and expectations for employees within career stages. Position requirements v. Optional v. Opportunities.

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges?

Overview of VCE program areas and cross-programming.

Educational approaches of Cooperative Extension, Programming models and process with practical applications, Big P and Little-p programming

Building local relationships with local communities (geographic, industry, interest-based). Developing strong interoffice relationships. DEI- Civil rights reporting and inclusivity in our work.

Integrating work and personal lives

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Cooperative Extension Community Education & Needs Assessment (Year 1 – Session/Month 2)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Increase knowledge and skills of early career Extension professionals in providing education in a non-formal learning environment.
2. Introduce methods of needs assessment and analysis that early career Extension professionals can use to shape their programming.
3. Increase early career Extension professional's skills and comfort in various methods of reporting.
4. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Non-formal Teaching and Learning Theory 101 with application in Cooperative Extension audiences

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Teaching and Learning Theory 101 practice (continued)

Needs Assessment and Analysis – Stakeholder Input

Reporting 101 – What do I need to collect? How? Where do I put it?

Teamwork versus Independent Programming

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Needs Assessment Data Collection, Analysis, & Priority Setting, Connecting Programs Across VCE, Characteristics of Successful Programs (Year 1 – Session/Month 3)

Objectives:

1. Increase early career employee's ability and comfort in involving key program clientele in program visioning.
2. Increase early career employee's skill in collecting and analyzing needs assessment data to identify program priorities.
3. Provide early career employees with understanding to increase connection across local, district and state levels to better meet community needs.
4. Guide early career employees in identifying long term objectives to obtain program success.
5. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Including key program clientele in program visioning

Practical experience – data collection and analysis experience

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Needs assessment: Data analysis from previous afternoon, addressing community issues, Identifying program priorities

Connecting local programs to district and state efforts and working across county and district lines to benefit citizens of the commonwealth.

Characteristics of successful Extension programs. Panel discussion and synthesis.

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges?

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Financial Management, Risk Management, Emergency or stressful situations, Analyzing existing programs, Program Partners (Year 1 – Session/Month 4)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Increase early career professionals in managing program finances.
2. Provide early career professionals with tools to reduce program risk.
3. Increase early career professional's comfort in addressing stressful or emergency situations.
4. Increase early career professional's ability to assess their program.
5. Aid early career professionals in identifying partners, their expertise, and their roles.
6. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Financial management basics – travel authorizations, quotes and requisitions

Risk Management

Dealing with stressful or emergency situations

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Analyzing your program (gaps and opportunities, volunteers, program participants, etc.)

The role of partners in programming (county/local government, industry organizations, funders)

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

AREC's, Professional Roles in VCE, Programming Across the Organization, Communication, & Intergenerational Differences (Year 1 – Session/Month 5)

Location: Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Objectives:

1. Increase understanding of early career professionals of the role of Agricultural, Research, and Education Centers in VCE and Cooperative Extension at the national level.
2. Increase competency of early career professionals in providing communication across different generations of clientele and colleagues and roles within VCE.
3. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timeline for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Intergenerational Differences Training

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges? What is an AREC? Who works there? What do they do?

Communications Workshop – Communication methods and preferences with community leaders, co-works, etc. Interoffice communications.

Roles of professionals in Cooperative Extension, specialist-agent relationships, participation in district and state committees and programs, program teams – what they are and what do they mean for programming at the local, regional, and state levels?

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Partnerships & Collaboration Year 1 (Session/Month 6)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Set a basis for early career Extension professionals to establish strong collaborations and partnerships that incorporate contextual knowledge
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Volunteer/Partnership Recruitment - Identifying potential partners, building partnerships, and emphasizing collaborative relationships

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Developing Advisory boards and/or leadership councils

Volunteer Engagement and Development

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Meeting Community Needs (Year 1 – Session/Month 7)

Location: Virginia State University

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals will become familiar with the VCE situational analysis process and how it is used to develop programs at the local level.
2. Early career VCE professionals will become aware of resources and increase skills in helping communities work through challenges.
3. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

VCE Situational Analysis process and how these are used, unit plans of work, and individual buy-ins to state plans.

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Recognizing the value of local expertise, reading an audience, and understanding local challenges.

Dealing with controversial topics.

Working on inter- or trans-disciplinary teams.

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges? What is an AREC? Who works there? What do they do?

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Building a Foundational Program (Year 1 – Session/Month 8)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will gain skills and confidence to build a foundational program
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Building a Foundational Program Workshop – Part I

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Building a Foundational Program Workshop – Part II

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Personal & Professional Development (Year 1 – Session/Month 9)

Location: 4-H Center

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals will identify resources and build skills to assist them in developing a healthy work-personal life integration.
2. Early career VCE professionals will begin developing professional development plans for long-term professional growth.
3. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Balancing commitments, time management, competing priorities

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges? What is an AREC? Who works there? What do they do?

Project management – balancing programming with administrative responsibilities

Professional Development – Advanced degrees, professional associations, in-service, and other professional development opportunities

Stress Management

Ropes course or other team activities

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (Year 1 – Session/Month 10)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will learn the importance and how to practice equity and inclusion in supporting diversity.
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion - Introduction

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Diverse populations – clients and colleagues

Case studies

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Competency Camp for VCE Professionals (Year 1 – Session/Month 11)

Location: Virginia Tech

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals will identify competency areas in which they have strengths and others in which they need to work.
2. Early career VCE professionals will work to improve competencies in areas of weakness
3. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

Noon – Lunch for new professionals, mentors, and program personnel

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Competencies – What are they? Assessment of competency? How do I improve

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Important technologies in VCE work

Competency specific breakout sessions

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges?
What is an AREC? Who works there? What do they do?

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Conflict Resolution & Onboarding Program Evaluation (Year 1– Session/Month 12)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will become more comfortable in confronting conflict to develop positive resolutions.
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

10:00 AM – Noon

Get acquainted sessions to develop advising timelines for early career professionals who have been hired in the past month and their mentors only.

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Conflict Resolution Training – Part I

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Conflict Resolution Training – Part II

Onboarding program evaluation (focus group or other approach with participants)

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Resource Development (Year 2 – Session 1/Month 14)

Location: AREC

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals will identify resources and become more comfortable seeking resources to support programming
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

VCE Program Resources and Resource Development

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Generating external funding (Gifts, Donations, Grant Writing 101, Cost Recovery, Etc.)

Site tour – Facilities overview. Who works here? What do they do? What are their successes and challenges?
What is an AREC? Who works there? What do they do?

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Variation in National Extension Programs (Year 2– Session 2/Month 16)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will increase knowledge related to the differences in Cooperative Extension programs across the country.
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Overview of differences in Cooperative Extension from state to state and region to region within the US

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Case studies to showcase differences across states

Identify areas of inquiry across states

Select state for site visit/exchange

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Comparative Analysis of Two State Extension Programs (Year 2– Session 3/Month 18)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will increase knowledge related to the differences in Cooperative Extension programs across the country.
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 – Travel to State

Day 2 – Joint sessions with Extension professionals in other state

Day 3 – Tour different types of Extension facilities in other state

Day 4 – Joint sessions with Extension professionals in other state

Day 5 – Return to Virginia

Using Comparative Analysis to Improve VCE Programs (Year 2– Session 4/Month 20)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will use comparative analysis to develop and implement recommendations in their programming.
2. Early career VCE employees will recommend changes to improve VCE based on observations from comparative analysis.
3. Early career VCE employees will increase appreciation for unique, favorable aspects of VCE.
4. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Comparison of states based on identified areas of inquiry

SWOT analysis of other state program and VCE

Comparison of the results

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Complete comparative analysis

Moving forward - Lessons learned, ideas for collaborations, change, etc.

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Needs Assessment & Situational Analysis (Year 2 – Session 5/Month 22)

Location: VSU

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals will become confident in conducting different types of needs assessments on an on-going basis.
2. Early career VCE professionals will increase understanding of the VCE Situational Analysis process.
3. Early career VCE professionals will use needs assessment and Situational Analysis reports to guide programming at local, district, and state levels.
4. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Identifying community needs – Needs assessment & Situational Analysis overview

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Practice using community needs in an Engaged Programming Approach

Identify programming needs for next cohort session

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Family-Personal Life Integration (Year 2– Session 6/Month 24)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE employees will increase ability to make decisions to provide more successful family-personal life integration.
2. Early career VCE employees will identify resources that can assist them when family-personal life integration is unbalanced.
3. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Review of previous sessions

Family-personal life integration

Day 2 – 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Address needs identified in previous session

Evaluation of years 1 & 2 of the Onboarding and Mentoring Program

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Personal and Professional Development Fair (Year 3 – Session 1/Month 26)

Location: 4-H Center

Objectives:

1. Early career VCE professionals increase ability in competencies related to personal and professional development.
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Day 1 –

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Brief review of previous session – sharing of experiences and results

Personal and Professional Development Fair – Overview of workshop opportunities

Day 2 – 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Development of Personal/Professional Development plan – Possible areas of longer-term study include but are not limited to: Communications, Evaluation, Leadership, PDI Program Planning Process (if not already completed), planning evaluation, strengthening your Facilitation Skills, Exploring Use of Emerging Technologies, Working with Media and Other Outward Facing Communications, Non-formal Education, In-depth Introduction to Cooperative Extension, Managerial Skills, Conflict Resolution, Formal education in pursuit of an advanced degree

Mini Concurrent Workshops to set the stage for selected personal and professional areas of personal and professional development in the coming year(s)

Day 3 – Time Determined by Program-specific Leadership

Program specific training provided by program-specific leadership

Mid-Year 3 Check-in (Year 3– Session 2/Month 31)

Location: Virtual

Objectives:

1. Help Early Career VCE employees address challenges they are facing
2. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

1:00 – 4:00 PM

Introductions and Questions

Discussion on challenges and accomplishments Early Career VCE employees are encountering

Graduation and Onboarding Program Evaluation Year 3 (Session 3/Month 36)

Location: VT

Objectives:

1. Celebrate transition of VCE Professionals from the early career to the counselor stage.
2. Gather insight into ways to strengthen professional development programming for VCE employees in the counselor stage.
3. Gather data to strengthen the onboarding and mentoring program for future early career VCE employees.
4. Strengthen VCE by providing connections and understanding of roles within the organization.

Agenda:

Evaluation of VCE Onboarding and Mentoring Program – Possibly Ripple Effect Mapping Approach

Needs Assessment for Professional Development Programming and Support for VCE Employees in the Counselor Stage – Possibly Focus Group Approach

Graduation Celebration – Include mentors, office staff, families, in addition to graduates as possible.

Appendix E: Draft Mentoring Plan

Early Career Employee Data:

Name	Hobbies	Work Location	Expertise	VCE Role	Perceived Strengths	Perceived weakness	Meyers-Briggs, KAI, KELP, etc.

Mentor Team Data:

Name	Hobbies	Work Location	Expertise	VCE Role	Perceived Strengths	Perceived weakness	Meyers-Briggs, KAI, KELP, etc.

Communication Method for the Team:

Selected date/time for Recurring Meetings:

Schedule for Mentor Sessions:

New Hire Month	Mentor Presiding	Meeting Date & Time	Topics	Remaining Questions
1	All present	First cohort session	Getting Acquainted & Mentoring Plan	
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
15				
17				
19				
21				
23				
24				
36	All Present	Program Graduation	Evaluation, Needs Assessment & Celebration	

Appendix F: Networking and Expertise Map

In Cooperative Extension we are only successful when we are able to develop strong relationships and strategic collaborative networks. This table is intended to help you begin to keep a running list of the people they meet and think about their expertise so you can consider how they might collaborate with future programming. Feel free to adapt this table to fit your specific needs.

Table 1. Log of people and expertise to guide in CE work.

Name	Referred by:	Contact information	Expertise	Interests	Involvement

It may also be helpful to make a simple map showing connections and how they relate as you develop this map to assist you with identifying and working with those connections most effectively. Using a sample table, see how these pieces connect. See how the sample table below connects to figure one to provide a visual representation of that map. These will hopefully get very messy as you continue to add to them. Develop a method of collecting the data so you can access it easily that works best for you.

Table 2 - Sample Networking & Expertise Table

Name	Referred by:	Contact information	Expertise	Interests	Involvement
AB	Unit Coordinator		A	C	Potential
CD	AB		A	CD	4-H Council
EF	District Director		B	EF	On-farm research
GH	Mentor		G	C	Potential

Figure 2- Sample Expertise Diagram developed from Sample Networking and Expertise Table. A, B, and G represent expertise areas. AB, CD, EF, and GH represent individuals you identify to meet or that are referred to you by others to meet. In this example, the diagram also connects to the individuals making the recommendations for connection (Unit Coordinator, Mentor, District Director).

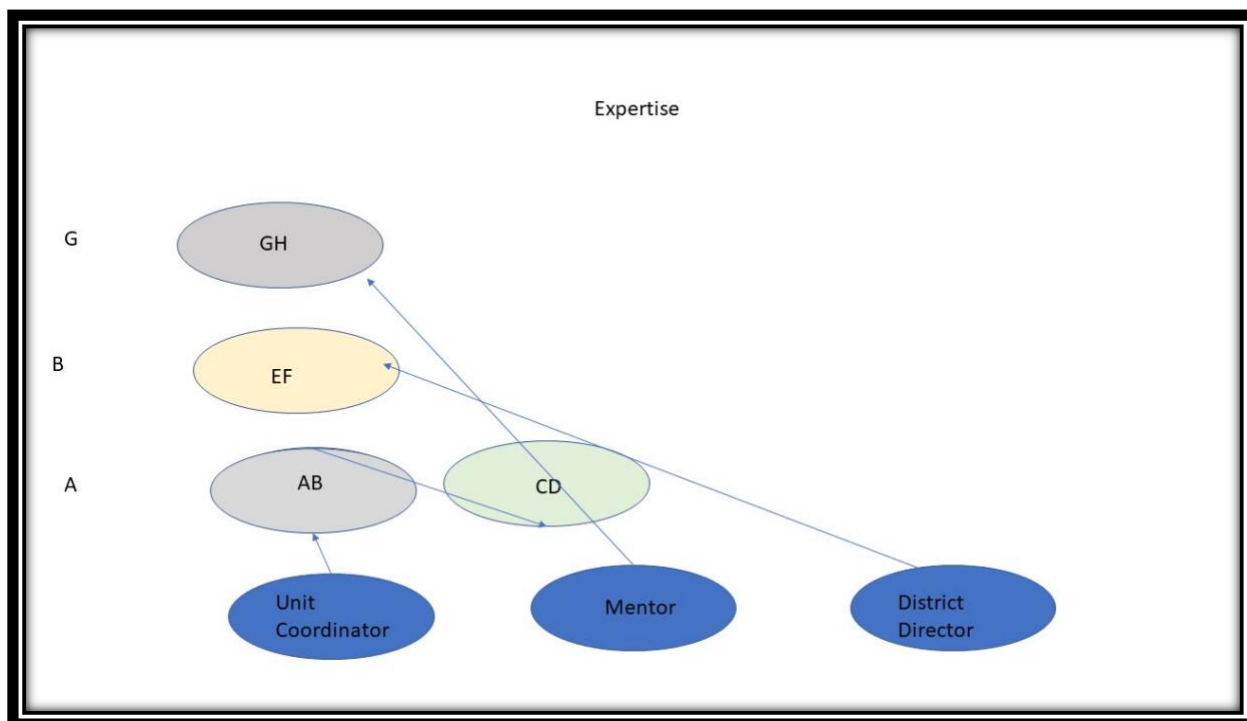


Figure 3 - Sample Involvement Diagram developed from Sample Networking and Expertise Table. In this example, contacts are grouped by current involvement.

