Finance Director notes -- NCCEA 2013 Conference

21st Extension Educator Compensation

What type and level of compensation is needed to hire the next generation Extension employee?

A potential employee with the attributes and skills described by the survey/report of Chuck Hibberd, would be considered very marketable. In order to bring someone like that into our organizations, it would take more salary dollars than we are accustomed to paying for starting salaries. We would be competing with organizations like the ones to which we lose our high performers. Unless we, and our county partners, get additional money to support this idea, we would have to reallocate resources and become a smaller organization.

Our current model of hiring people with the attributes we desire and some of the skills we require and developing them, seems like the best model for us, given our limited and decreasing resources. One tweak we might consider is making the salary increases for moving through title progression, meaningful. Some extensions use a percentage increase and some use fixed dollar amounts. Either way, it needs to be "meaningful".

Our attention should also be on retention and creating the work environment the 21st century extension educator would thrive in.

We feel the 21st century extension educator is not solely focusing on money. They are seeking workplace flexibility for personal and professional reasons. Flexible work hours and flexible work location. Technology has made it easier for educators to reach clients/stakeholders and their colleagues. Millennials have grown up with technology and are accustomed to using it personally and professionally. So, time and location could be redefined.

Making time and space for creativity is important for the 21st century extension educator. The traditional county office setting is not always the best place to be creative, especially in environments where office cubicles are the norm. Again, technology makes it easier for our colleagues to stay "connected" to work while not actually being at work. If early morning or late afternoon hours work best, why not allow them to work from a distance to accommodate time to be creative?

Support for this new work environment may clash with the current environment in the counties where "boomer" colleagues have expectations of being in the office early and staying late. Our colleagues should not have to feel the pressure or guilt of working differently, than their county colleagues. Some work will have to be done to bring along our county partners in redefining the work place and work place hours.

We feel strongly that people want to be heard,understood and appreciated. Develop feedback loops where the 21st century extension educator can be heard. And close the communication loop by articulating those concerns and ideas back with sincerity and actions.

The 21st century extension educators need recognition in non-traditional ways. Compensation isn't always the answer, although it would be nice to have the opportunity to give out lump sum awards in recognition of a good job. We should consider leadership opportunities, support for paper presentations, professional development opportunities and other ways not considered here, including surveying our newer colleagues about this.

Lastly, we need a marketing strategy to make potential employees aware of the work environment and flexibilities. Whether it is described in position postings or recruitment materials, the word will have to get out somehow.