

Penn State Extension
District Model for Administrative Services
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will there still be an Extension office in each county?

Yes. This structure will maintain Extension's local connection by providing Extension Educators and access to Extension programs in all counties and by maximizing personnel dedicated to program development and delivery.

2. Will there still be extension boards in each county in the region?

We will not shift away from county boards initially, but it is expected that the county board model will shift to a district board model in time, with representation from each county. The new District Director will work closely with County Commissioners and county board members to develop a plan and model to migrate to a single district board. The new model must be equitable and fair to all counties.

3. How will the district business center location be determined?

The new District Directors will develop a business plan for the district. This will include working with the County Commissioners and boards to determine the most efficient structure for that district.

4. How will this change reduce costs?

The District model for providing administrative services is designed to increase efficiency of operations over time, resulting in a cost savings. Where centralization has already occurred, there has been documented savings in travel, office equipment, overhead, and staffing. This structure will also eliminate the need for some regional and University Park administration. It will also reduce redundancy in financial management, program registration, etc. allowing staff to focus on program delivery. An important benefit of this restructure will be the added resources of 34 County Extension Directors who will now focus on program delivery.

5. How will the new district structure impact county budgets and control?

The role of the District Director will be to steward county budgets in accordance with the business plan and make sure the county's, as well as the Extension board's, expectations are met. Separate cost centers will be maintained for each county, unless the counties agree to consolidate the funding into one budget. The District Director and Penn State will be accountable for appropriate use of county provided funding.

6. Will my local educators travel outside the county for the statewide programs and if so who funds that travel?

As is the case currently, Educators' that travel outside of the county will be supported by county and program funds. In the counties where the district model has been implemented, this has not been an issue, as the costs tend to balance out due to the movement of Educators in and out of the counties. District Directors' travel will be paid by Extension's central administration office.

7. How will this impact administrative staff in county offices?

Each district director will develop a business plan for the new district. This will inform the types of positions that will be needed to support the operations. Staffing decisions will be made in consultation with the county commissioners. In the short term, this will free up some county staff to shift focus from administrative support to programmatic support. Over time there will be a centralization and downsizing of some staff resulting in cost savings.

8. Who will supervise local support staff, locally funded educators / technicians, etc.?

The district director will supervise all staff (not educators) within the district and any educators funded by the county that are county, not Penn State, employees. District Directors will also provide to the appropriate State Program Leaders a performance assessment of Educator's in their district to be considered in the Educator's annual performance review.

9. How will the district directors be chosen? Will there be an application and interview process?

Several County Extension Directors have expressed an interest in the position. Administration is considering each candidate and will make selections. In cases where there is more than one candidate, interviews will be conducted.

10. When will this transition begin?

Consolidation of the first five districts began October 1. A second round will begin on January 1, 2012 for districts currently in the transition phase. The remaining districts will be launched beginning March 1.

11. What about Allegheny and Philadelphia counties?

Extension is working on the concept of urban centers, such as the Penn State Center in Pittsburgh, to address some of the unique priorities and needs of these regions.

12. Will 4-H programming be county-based or district-based?

We anticipate having a 4-H Educator in every county that will participate on a state-wide team. The administration of 4-H in the district will be worked out as part of the district plan.

13. We currently have regional events, such as camps, horse shows, etc. Will we work as a region or state?

These are regional events – independent from the district structure. The 4-H Penn State Extension Team will need to determine the best approach and structure to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.