A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FOR
EXTENSION CAREER GROWTH

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Introduction and Purpose
In 1998, a task force was commissioned to evaluate professional development of Extension faculty at the University of Florida. There were a number of issues and needs that were identified through this effort involving Extension administrators and faculty. The major categories of need included: a revised new faculty orientation and training program that is learner focused; a comprehensive approach to Extension faculty professional development based upon individual needs assessment and individual development plans; greater emphasis on educational process skill development; revised procedures for identifying essential in-service programs via needs assessment; leadership and management development among Extension faculty, and; a system for monitoring and rewarding participation in professional development programs.

Methods and information to be shared
The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication has been charged with taking the lead in this area. A comprehensive organizational professional development plan has been developed within the identified needs, and a number of pieces have been implemented. For new Extension faculty, there are four components of their orientation and training program.

A) A welcoming package that includes an informational packet, a resource notebook, and a video specifically geared for new Extension faculty.
B) Web-based individual learning modules focused on basic orientation and development needs of new Extension faculty. New faculty complete these self-paced modules within their first two months of employment with feedback to their immediate supervisor.
C) A redesigned on-campus orientation and training program focused on adult learning principles and Extension faculty needs. The training is conducted over three sessions to be completed within the first year of employment.
D) A structured Extension-mentoring program designed to provide support throughout the first year on the job.

For current Extension faculty, a Position Analysis Tool (PAT) has been developed. This competency-based self-assessment tool is designed to guide and focus an individual’s annual professional development through Individual Development Plans (IDPs). This tool is also designed to provide a means for aggregating faculty needs to focus statewide professional development offerings. The overarching goal of this effort is greater career enhancement for all Extension faculty.

Educational Importance
University of Florida Extension is dedicated to providing the best professional development possible for its Extension educators. The Extension professional development system represents a holistic approach that includes both staff development and professional improvement activities that lead to enhanced career growth. Through comprehensive and effective professional development, the organization has begun to realize a benefit from greater agent educational effectiveness, improved organizational attitudes and higher retention rates for Extension faculty.