



## **2015 Federation Forum/ Business Meeting**

The forum was opened by Spring Williams-Byrd. Amy gave the definition of the Federation and introduced the panel that answered questions previously submitted for the forum. There were 13 typed pages of questions; some will be answered by Specialists. The panel consisted of NC State- Dr. Travis Burke, Dr. Tom Melton, Sheri Schwab, Dr. Mike Yoder, NC A & T-Dr. Roselyn Dale and Dr. Claudette Smith.

### **Questions for Federation Forum Thursday, Dec. 10, 2015**

#### **Topic: Opportunity for Promotion and / or Recognition**

**#1 - How will we maintain competent and qualified leadership at the county level as CED's with subject matter responsibilities retire and move on? (With the new base model- have we painted ourselves into a corner by ONLY filing vacant CED positions with staff that have the same subject matter previously held, or only considering a current county staff member?)**

Ultimately we want someone with leadership responsibilities. With the new strategic model, it does not lock them in, there is a candidate pool and local government plays a role. Encourage people to apply no matter what area of responsibility is. Encourage current employees to take advantage of leadership development trainings.

**#2- Is there any way to shorten or simplify the process for nominating employees for awards?**

We couldn't fix the process this year due to the timing but is currently working on simplifying. Trying to make the webpage friendlier, cut down on reference letter requirements and reach out to the Federation and Associations for input. A & T is seeking feedback from the RE Jones Award application.

**#3- How are we planning for keeping good employees from leaving Extension to take jobs with other state agencies or private industry?**

As an organization, understand that it is hard to compete with Industry because we can't afford to give a \$50,000 salary or a new Ford truck, but get them trained to enjoy their work. If we want to keep them, look at what they can do, or offer something to let them know we want them. It was stated that they have talked to/recruited students on campus, it's hard maintaining crop agents. NC A&T will try to do the same as State, career ladders and salaries are important but some of our perks are outside of the paycheck, ex. flexibility. We should be able to move salary a little bit to let them know they're valued even if we can't compete dollar for dollar.

## Topic - Marketing & Communication

**#1- Is there a way NC A&T employees can be added to an electronic travel system? This would help be more efficient and timely.**

Dr. Dale stated that at this time, it is not an option because the NC A & T has its own travel system that is on a paper system. Hopefully one day A&T will get an electronic travel system.

**#2- Would it be possible to have a statewide initiative to have road signs erected throughout the counties, following DOT laws and guidelines? (Like the past “4-H Welcomes You” signs.) These could be Extension & 4-H.**

Dr. Burke stated that it sounds good. Talked about this in the past. It used to be the 4-H signs could be just approved by the landowner, now it is a DOT thing.

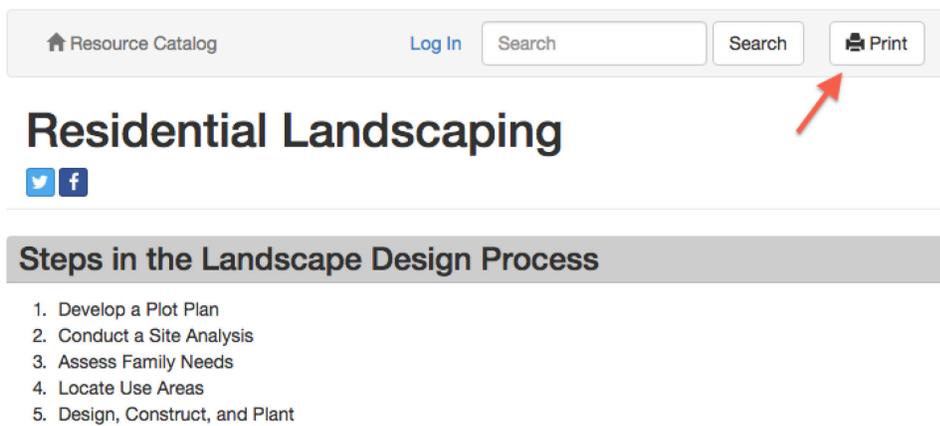
**#3- Can a system be put in place or emphasis given to specialist and area agents, to let counties know when they are working in a county? Specifically to provide a united front and to help with relationship building and branding.**

Dr. Smith stated that A & T protocol is let the county know when they will be in the county. Hopefully they connect with the office in the county. Sometimes a grant has been given by an organization but have not connected with Extension or the agent.

**#4- Agents are eager for printable pdfs of Extension publications. The new on-line format is not printer friendly. What other options are available? Also, are there plans to address the search system for publications?**

Some of the agents who contact EIT about this are unaware that they should use the Print option at the top of the Extension Publication screen, rather than their browser Print button. Our publication stylesheet suppresses extraneous browser details and other information. Images print at the end of a section, each 1/3 of a page wide on the printed page.

NC Cooperative Extension Resources



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the NC Cooperative Extension Resources website. It includes a home icon, 'Resource Catalog', a 'Log In' link, a search box with a 'Search' button, and a 'Print' button with a printer icon. A red arrow points to the 'Print' button. Below the navigation bar is the main heading 'Residential Landscaping' with social media icons for Twitter and Facebook. A grey bar below the heading contains the text 'Steps in the Landscape Design Process'. Underneath this bar is a numbered list of five steps: 1. Develop a Plot Plan, 2. Conduct a Site Analysis, 3. Assess Family Needs, 4. Locate Use Areas, and 5. Design, Construct, and Plant.

Landscape design is the conscious arrangement of outdoor space for human enjoyment and satisfaction. A well

Using PDF format for documents is undesirable for many reasons.

- 1) PDFs are not accessible, in terms of ADA compliance. They make it harder for people with disabilities to access our content.
- 2) PDFs are not full text searchable. This limits search engines' ability to find our content and present it in search results. Some prominent search engines like Google downgrade websites that offer a high percentage of content in PDF formats.
- 3) PDFs are cumbersome to use on a mobile device. Almost 50% of our web traffic came from a mobile device in 2015. Our goal is to offer content that is viewable on all devices, not restricted to an outdated idea of an 8 ½ by 11 inch sheet of paper.
- 4) Analytics are harder to capture for PDF documents. We need to learn more about how the public is using our content, not less.
- 5) PDFs leads to versioning issues.

Our publication system stores content in a database. Content stored in databases can be used in many ways and by many applications. For example, databased content can be delivered as a publication or it can be inserted into a Plant Clinic response or used in a diagnostic tool.

When content is updated in the database, it is updated universally, wherever and however it is delivered. There is only one version of the content. PDFs are not editable in this way, so use of PDFs leads to outdated content, multiple inaccurate versions of content being delivered from our websites. We have many examples of this on our websites and are working to remedy that situation by removing the outdated, incorrect PDF versions.

EIT has partners with CALS Communication to create a modern publication database solution. EIT will work on making the Print option more noticeable and improving on the stylesheet. We are committed to reducing the use of PDFs for Extension publications, except where it is necessary to present highly formatted information (e.g., complicated tables) on a traditional printed page.

**#5- The Wordpress portal framework has been presented as fairly limited in structural innovations. However, some portals do have unique tools providing some flair. Is it possible to have a menu of the “extras” that portal curators can pick from?**

Our Wordpress solution is highly customized to meet the needs of the organization. A small team in EIT manages over 200 websites and must keep website security and system stability as our highest priorities.

Part of doing this means very rigidly controlling the use of external widgets. Widgets are small applications that may offer said “flair” but they are commonly used as pathways for hackers to infiltrate and destroy WordPress sites.

We welcome new ideas and will consider creating customized solutions that may have broad use across the organization, provided 1) there is no risk to site security and 2) the solutions are scalable and manageable within our constraints.

**# 6- In order to have Success Stories web-ready or to be able to share on portals, can photographs be added to Success Story Submission?**

ERS is a reporting application, not a content delivery system. All employees have the ability now to post content on their county web sites or portals. All can upload and link to images, videos, social media links there. ERS is not be the appropriate place to upload and store images for publication on portals and websites.

**Topic - Resources and Support**

**#1- A number of members of the various associations have to incur ALL costs including membership dues, mileage, hotel, and conference registrations without reimbursement. Can there be some discussion about solutions to better support staff financially in the counties to assist more with professional and personal development? This will help more staff consider involvement in association work at all levels.**

Dr. Dale – The budget has been cut, but additional discussion will follow.

**#2- NC A&T employees have had professional development funds cut this past year. We (staff at both Universities) need more funds for professional development. Also, is there a way for county staff to get purchasing or travel cards, so that we don't have to pay out of pocket for travel incurred for Extension?**

A & T - Advance payment is the key, the timeliness of your application. It is needed 45 days ahead of time. Schwab- State does not have purchase cards yet. We represent 70% of travel for all the University- Have staff working on it. Dr. Burke- Work with your CEDs. Sometimes counties can do things that can't be done on campus.

**#3- Many CEDs and Administrators are not familiar with or do not understand fully what the actual job responsibilities are for each staff member and are often unable to provide support needed. CEDs often send new agents or PAs to other counties to get support informally. Is there something in the works to help CEDs and administrators and / or establishment of a more formal support or mentoring program?**

Looking at creating a mentoring program and CED training for career ladder. First we want to look at what other states are doing to see what works. NC State recently hired Dr. Rhonda Sutton to look at it on county operations. Can use Field Faculty guide for 12 months. Dr. Smith stated that Specialist can go out face to face to see what is needed to help field staff.

**#4- What is being done to address issues that arise from annual one-time payments, which do not move salaries up over time?**

We are frequently limited by the guidelines from the State of North Carolina in terms of salary increases. At NC State, our Chancellor directed us over the past 2 fiscal years to cut our own budgets in order to give salary increases; NC A&T's Chancellor did this in the first year but not this past year. NC State has been able to move salaries up due to these 2 years – we have increased the starting salaries of agents from \$33,500 to \$35,000 for a Bachelors degree; we moved up the salaries of current agents to \$36,000 to address salary “compression/inversion” (when new people get paid as much or more than current people who have not had raises in several years). Similarly, we bumped the starting salaries for masters people from \$38,500 to \$40,000, and also raised salaries for those current employees with Masters up to \$42,000, again to address salary compression/inversion. Again, we are often restricted by the decisions and parameters of the State of NC/General Assembly and their restrictions as it relates to salary increases, so we do our best within those tight constraints.

**#5- There is a significant pay gap across agent positions and in comparison of agent positions with other educators and administrators. Area agents are paid higher salaries, but do not serve more clientele nor do they work more hours than other agents. New agents are being hired at higher rates without adjusting tenured agent salaries. What is being done to provide pay increases more equitably?**

- Sheri Schwab stated the salaries have increased slightly, may have to cut the number of agents to increase other agents pay. (see above about “compression/inversion” to address this question. We have raised current employee salaries).
- Dr. Dale stated there will be increase in salaries for new agent; Administration salary is higher. Regional coordinators follow through as NC State to start.

**#6- Can the Title Promotion process be revamped or reworked? The process is very discouraging and overwhelming for many agents to even consider.**

We took a deep look at the process last year, implemented some changes, and are going to use them in the process this year and see if there work well, etc. Then we will again evaluate the process and see if it can be improved. Certainly the process is rigorous, and that is part of the promotion process! We have compared our process with what other states do for agent promotion – we hope to tackle the topic of revamping a career ladder (of which title promotion is one part) in late 2016, early 2017.

**Topic – Training**

**#1 - Why are there different sets of guidelines for Association state meetings? Why are the agendas not reviewed and approved by the same person, so that everyone adheres to the same set of standards?**

Dr. Melton-haven't talked about that but if we need to have that discussion; Sherri –rely on districts to send in agenda. Can use work time to insure that people who are attending are doing business of the Association- Subject matter-skills. Dr. Dale stated that professional development is a component of evaluation. Dr. Smith stated that A &T would also like an agenda in advance.

**#2 - What training priorities are being considered for leadership and other skills for agents and staff?**

There was discussion about leadership programs and development. Dr. Marshall has a few leadership development programs through the college. There is not a formal training but there is leadership training. Recently hired someone for organization development for the next 11 months. COMPASS is being utilized. Everything doesn't have to be formalized training, involvement in Federation, Associations, and local achievements for additional training. A & T Program- Center for Leadership of Excellence and is campus-based. Also there is online options similar to COMPASS.

**#3- National Conferences for all Associations provides a variety of high quality training. The cost for attending these conferences continues to rise, but financial support from administration for voting delegates has remained the same. Is there a way to receive additional funds to be utilized for staff to attend National meetings, not only for professional development - BUT to take advantage of the HIGH Quality training available?**

Dr. Melton- National meetings are great. We want people to participate, but also want it to be in a meaningful way. Papers, presentations, posters, etc, where our people are contributing to the subject matter of the conference.

Dr. Yoder- Will provide partial funds for voting delegates at National Conference.

Schwab- 15% of one's annual travel allocation is available for professional development; this is a guideline for travel.

**#4 - More training is needed from Specialist. This year the RFP for Extension Conference came out late and some specialist were not able to plan to provide training. Are specialist and field faculty included in planning in-service trainings, such as that of Extension Conference?**

Dr. Dale- Specialist are 100%. Encourage Specialist to do some trainings.

**Topic - Professional Time**

**#1- Are all staff supposed to take annual leave or professional scheduling for Association meetings/ conferences?**

No. You do not have to take leave. Professional development is part of Association meeting/conferences.

**#2 - Extension is known to be family friendly to its clientele, but not to its own employees. There is a huge disparity in the amount of time different agents work. Professional scheduling by no means makes up for the many overnights or weekends that some agents are away from their families. How do you "professional schedule" for working an 80 hour work week?**

Professional scheduling can not make up for 80 hrs a week. If there are trainings we need to do for supervisors to understand a little better, we can do that. Hope supervisors understand some times of the year are more hectic. If you are working 60 or over 80 hours a week constantly, you really should look at your schedule with your CED to better schedule and to prioritize work and, hopefully, look for things that may not need doing. We truly do not want people working 60+ hour weeks on a regular basis.

### **Topic- Staffing Plans**

**#1- With the new Area Specialized agents, there are some concerns about where expectations come from the DED and Dept. Heads, not counties. Will these positions work with the counties to identify and develop strategies to have common ground and understanding of expectations?**

Dr. Yoder- 5 Specialists for 3 year positions. Involve CEDs and DEDs.

Dr. Burke- Trying to bring Specialist and Field Staff together

**#2- Now that the first phase of the new staffing plan has been implemented, (the reduction in support staff) has there been a measureable change in the impact Extension is having on citizens?**

Dr. Burke stated that it is not known, some counties may have been impacted worse than others.

Sheri Schwab stated that there were only 20 reductions in workforce, and more than ½ were saved by counties.

**#3- There are some area agent positions identified that counties, (CEDs, Agents, and advisory members) were not given the opportunity to give input for the need of such position or its effectiveness. Are there any more discussions or changes coming on the model for staff or area positions? Also, what about the model for large and/or urban-related counties?**

We do not have plans at this time for other changes in the model.

**#4- What are we doing to align with the CALS Strategic plan?**

Dr. Burke stated that there is a CALS meeting at 2:30 pm at the Talley Center where there will be discussion on CALS Strategic plan. All are welcome to attend.