**UF/IFAS Extension Guidelines for Safely Resuming County Extension Office Operations**

15 May 2020

*Note: These guidelines change as events change due to the dynamic nature of the pandemic and its effects on the population*.

The purpose of this document is to provide UF policy and procedure-based guidelines for resuming County Extension Office operations as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Our highest priority remains the health and safety of Extension clientele, faculty, staff, and volunteers as we continue to deliver the UF/IFAS Extension mission.

Current situation

As Florida moves through its “flattening the COVID-19 curve” stage, state and local governments and the private sector are gradually re-opening for business. (“Re-opening” in this context refers to increased physical proximity of workers and clientele, such as returning to a typical office environment with public access.) On May 4, the state of Florida began to reopen according to Executive Order 20-112. County governments have developed and adopting their own reopening guidelines.

**The county perspective**: Currently, County Extension Offices are in various stages of resuming operations. Workers are returning to the office and measures are being taken to include limited public access. When faculty are in the office, their numbers are limited and in some cases a rotation plan is used. County government-imposed closings (to workers or the public) are expiring. County governments are collaborating with UF in the resumption of Extension Office operations.

**The UF perspective (personnel policy and procedure)**: In March, UF provided the option for faculty and staff to use an Alternative Work Location (AWL), usually their home, instead of traveling to a UF facility for work. In addition, business travel was suspended unless approved by UF Administration. Most county extension faculty are using AWL to some extent. **UF has authorized use of AWL through July 1**. Also, **business travel has opened up** to allow travel for professional development or conferences if authorized by the Dean.

Moving forward

County Extension Offices can gradually and safely re-open to the public beginning in May but **should not re-open until they are ready to do so**.

* County Extension Directors (CEDs), in cooperation with their county government partner, are responsible for assuring a safe workplace for workers and the public. Prior to “getting back to normal,” CEDs will have a phased, CDC guideline-based plan to follow as they resume operations. The CED will share this plan with his/her District Director and county government liaison. Components of such a plan could be:
  + Allowing only a limited number of agents or staff in the office
  + Applying social distancing to employees and the public
  + Visitors by appointment only
  + Make sure workers and volunteers are aware that E.O. 20-112 encourages the vulnerable population to stay at home and take all measures to limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19
  + Limiting or preventing public access
  + Requiring workers to wear face coverings
  + Washing hands regularly
  + Disinfecting common surfaces, tools, and other shared items throughout the day
  + Proper meal preparation, service, consumption, and clean-up
  + Following other measures recommended by the CDC (see page 4 and reference website at the end of this document).

This resumption plan should be made in collaboration with county government with the understanding that the county will cover any reasonable cost of implementation.

* County faculty and UF-employed staff may return to the workplace in some capacity if they follow the office CDC guideline-based plan. These workers may also continue to use AWL all or part of the time. The proportion of in-office vs. AWL time will be determined through consultation with the CED. Workers who self-select as members of the vulnerable population may heed the recommendation in E.O. 20-112 and remain working at their AWL until the office is completely open to the public.
* UF-sanctioned volunteers may return to the workplace in some capacity if their program-leading Extension Agent has approved the volunteer activity, if the volunteer follows the office CDC-based guidelines, and if volunteers do not gather in groups greater than 10.
* CEDs or the appropriate Extension Agent will assure that all returning volunteers read, understand, and react to Section 2, Part B of E.O. 20-112: “…senior citizens and individuals with a significant underlying medical condition (such as chronic lung disease, moderate-to-severe asthma, serious heart conditions, immunocompromised status, cancer, diabetes, severe obesity, renal failure and liver disease) are strongly encouraged to stay at home and take all measures to limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19.” As volunteers are provided this information and acknowledge they understand it, CEDs or Agents should record it on a checklist with names and dates.
* The directive to postpone UF/IFAS Extension in-person events and gatherings expires on May 15. Starting May 18, **limited-capacity** essential Extension events and gatherings will be allowed as County Extension Offices resume office operations. The ability to hold limited and controlled in-person events allows faculty to resume pre-COVID-19-type operations **if it benefits their extension programs to do so**. No faculty are being required to hold in-person events. **Virtual events and gatherings should remain the highest priority mode of delivery for all** until the County Office is open to walk-ins that may be some time into the future. The following specifications must be in place to hold an in-person event:
  + Follow the reopening guidelines in Executive Order 20-112. Note that among many other things, this order specifically states “Avoid congregating in large groups. Local jurisdictions shall ensure that groups of people greater than 10 are not permitted to congregate in any public space that does not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing.”
  + Follow the CDC guideline-based “Resumption of County Operations” plan developed for the County Extension Office
  + Hold events in the County Office or its immediate environs
  + Groups must number 10 or less
  + Faculty in charge must have advanced knowledge of who will participate in the event through invitation or by appointment; no unidentified walk-ins allowed
  + Any use of in-person meetings at this point **must be highly essential and of a limited nature**, e.g., for situations where virtual learning is not possible or practical. Examples include administering Pesticide Licensing Exams and ServSafe Certification training. Other events could involve volunteers returning for service or small-group training that has high private value to clientele.
* Revised travel policy: For travel approvals associated with research and extension activities, continue to use the portal found at <https://researchtools.ifas.ufl.edu/apps/essentialActivities/>

Approval at the UF/IFAS Dean’s level will be considered approval for this travel.

For travel that is not associated with research and extension-related activities, for example professional development and conference travel, submit these requests via the following website: <https://researchtools.ifas.ufl.edu/apps/essentialTravel/>

References

Section 4, Florida State Statute 1004.37: Although county extension agents are jointly employed by the state universities and federal and county governments for the purposes of administration of the cooperative extension service, the personnel policies and procedures of the University of Florida or Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, depending on appointment, will apply except in those instances when federal legislation or the basic memorandum of understanding is applicable.

The latest UF/IFAS-related COVID-19 information can be found here:

<https://ifas.ufl.edu/covid19-information-updates/>

The latest updates describing County Extension Office accessibility can be found here:

<https://ifas.ufl.edu/covid19-information-updates/extension-offices---local-updates-/>

CDC resources for businesses and employers:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html>

CDC guidelines for using cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

and

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

The vulnerable population (people who need to take extra precautions):

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

Print resources (posters) can be downloaded from this site:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>

CDC Decision Tree for Reopening Workplaces



Example – This is one way, but not the only way, for CEDs to develop plans

**Plan to Safely Resume County Extension Office Operations**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County**

1. Background and context – Provide a narrative to include:
   1. How UF guidelines are balanced with county needs
   2. A description of the e-work that has taken place since E.O. 20-91
   3. How the CED has managed faculty working from AWL
   4. How the CED has communicated with UF and county government
2. Safety guidelines that will be followed during phased resumption of operations
   1. List source of CDC guidelines
   2. Provide specific measures taken in the office. For example:
      1. Social distancing
      2. Face coverings
      3. Hand sanitizer
      4. Disinfectant and cleaning
      5. Health practices
      6. Reminders, posters, and rules:
         1. Stay at home if symptoms arise
         2. Wash hands frequently
         3. Avoid touching face
         4. Cover mouth and nose if coughing or sneezing
      7. Additional health considerations
         1. Will body temperature be taken or required?
         2. Will asking health questions be required?
         3. Will visitors be required to wear masks?
      8. Other measures
3. Phases of resumption
   1. Phase 1: Describe what your county office is doing now.
      1. Who has taken an alternative work location?
      2. Who goes to the office?
      3. How are faculty and staff available to clientele?
      4. How is programming being delivered?
      5. How are diagnostics being handled?
      6. What is not receiving coverage due to E.O. 20-112?
      7. What business travel has been approved?
   2. Phase 2: Reopen the office to the public by appointment. Describe:
      1. How services will be provided with minimal faculty and staff in the office while others continue to e-work.
      2. How appointments with clientele will be arranged and managed.
      3. How protections will be put in place.
      4. The potential challenges.
      5. Volunteer management:
         1. Will volunteers assist from their homes?
         2. How will you prepare for a phased reentry of volunteers?
   3. Phase 3: Office open to walk-ins. Describe:
      1. How social distancing will be managed.
      2. How walk-ins will be treated when some faculty are in the office and others are e-working.
      3. How appointments will be treated vs. walk-ins.
      4. How returning volunteers will follow CDC guidelines.
      5. Potential challenges protecting workers and visitors.
   4. Phase 4: No social distancing, office is open to all with no restrictions. Describe:
      1. How e-work for faculty will fit into the new normal.
      2. How you will adapt to provide comfort for clientele when face-to-face and group events return:
         1. Social distancing
         2. Limited class sizes
         3. Use of larger facilities
         4. Continue to provide online content
         5. Sanitizer stations
      3. Potential challenges
4. List any additional considerations not covered above.