

Tip Sheet



Creating Partnerships Between Stakeholders and the Cooperative Extension System

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This tip sheet introduces the Cooperative Extension System (CES) and offers practical tips on how extension specialists can help safety-net service providers in their efforts to strengthen families.

The Cooperative Extension System

The Morrill Act of 1862 granted federally owned land to States in order to develop a new university system with a specific purpose: to interpret and extend university research into relevant and practical educational programs that address citizens' needs and challenges.

Today there are more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities, with at least one in each State, making up the CES. The CES is under the Federal leadership of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Cooperative Extension Programs and Services

The CES advances knowledge and education that promotes agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and community and economic development through an

extensive network of State, regional, and county extension offices. These offices are operated by trained professionals and volunteers who respond to diverse community needs by providing educational workshops, events, and materials—both online and in person.¹

While historically the CES focused on agriculture issues in rural communities, today it offers a broad variety of programs, including healthy relationship and marriage education programming in both urban and rural areas.

Safety-net service providers and extension specialists share the common goal of working to strengthen individuals, couples, and families

Extension specialists at the county level offer a variety of family-related programs based on the needs of those they serve. These programs often include childcare provider trainings, parenting education, relationship education, and programs for children and adolescents. Additionally, extension specialists research topics related to populations with unique needs and develop and adapt programs and curricula—on topics such as parenting, money management, and nutrition—to serve targeted populations. Trainings that may be developed by extension specialists include programs for single parents, seniors, grandparents raising grandchildren, divorced or separated parents, stepfamilies, foster or adoptive parents, parents of children with special needs, and families with limited resources.

In addition to in-person trainings, extension specialists provide research-based resources in

the form of simple fact sheets, brochures, and newsletters, most of which are available free of charge and online. The CES also provides access to the eXtension website (www.eXtension.org), an online interactive learning environment that provides the latest information and educational resources from extension specialists on a wide range of topics.

Strategies for Developing Partnerships

Extension specialists frequently partner with community agencies and local programs to better serve families. Partners may include libraries, schools, courts, Head Start, community action agencies, and other family service providers. Extension specialists also partner with safety-net service providers to integrate healthy marriage and relationship education into existing service delivery systems.

Safety-net services are provided by Federal, State, Local, and Tribal governments, as well as other social service agencies that provide a safety net for families, especially those struggling to maintain or regain economic, emotional, and social stability and financial self-sufficiency. Safety-net services include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child support enforcement, education, child welfare, workforce development, medical, and mental health.

Safety-net service providers can partner with the CES on programs to promote healthy marriage and relationship skills (including communication, relationship building, parenting, financial literacy, and conflict management). Partnering with the CES to educate clients about these relationship skills can occur in a variety of ways:

- Safety-net service providers can share the research-based information they learn from extension specialists and websites about the benefits of healthy marriage and relationship skills with colleagues and clients. Providers are encouraged to share resources developed by the CES, including fact sheets, handouts, and newsletters. For example, some Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), TANF offices, and workforce development agencies distribute parenting, money management, or other CES-developed handouts to clients.
- Safety-net service providers may decide to work with the CES more closely by referring clients to extension trainings and workshops on topics such as goal setting, decision making, positive discipline, and relationship tips, among others. Most extension specialists can also bring trainings onsite. These educational programs and topics can be tailored to the needs of the audience.
- Safety-net service providers can integrate healthy marriage and relationship education skills into existing programming or service delivery systems. Extension specialists can help develop individual components of a larger training or workshop (on topics such as parenting or financial literacy) and collaborate on comprehensive healthy marriage education train-the-trainer workshops. In several States, extension specialists have collaborated on these train-the-trainer programs with child welfare professionals, helping to equip these providers with the knowledge, skills, and tools to better serve their clients.²

There are many ways that safety-net providers and the CES can work together to assist Federal, State, and Local efforts to strengthen relationships and families. Extension specialists are trained and ready to provide research-based resources on a variety of topics to help families. In such a win-win partnership, the CES can serve a broader audience by partnering with safety-net service providers, allowing extension specialists to do more educating and less recruiting, while safety-net service providers have more resources and partners to help them meet specific individual and family needs. Safety-net service providers can use the following CES resources to contact their local extension specialists and identify ways to form partnerships.

Partnership strategies with extension specialists can range from simple information dissemination to full integration into existing service delivery systems.

Cooperative Extension System Resources

To learn more about the Cooperative Extension System:

www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html

To locate the land-grant institution in your State:

www.nifa.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html

To find the nearest Cooperative Extension office:

www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension/index.html

To learn more about eXtension:

www.eXtension.org

Works Consulted

- ¹ Antle, B. F., Frey, S. E., Sar, B. K., Barbee, A. P., & van Zyl, M. A. (2010). Training the child welfare workforce in healthy couple relationships: An examination of attitudes and outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 223-230.
- ² Hill, L. G., & Parker, L. A. (2005). Extension as a delivery system for prevention programming: Capacity, barriers, and opportunities. *Journal of Extension*. [On-line], 43(1) Article 1FEA1. Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005february/a1.php>

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