

Results of Area and County Director Administrative Survey

By Lynn Schmitt-McQuitty, Director for County Cooperative Extension

In May of 2024, all Cooperative Extension employees were given the opportunity to assess the administrative performance of area and county directors. The 45-question survey sought feedback on the areas of leadership, administration, finance and partnerships, and resulted in a 50.59% response rate (N=343) from county academics, program staff and administrative professionals.

The intent of the survey was to:

- Identify area and county director administrative goals for FY 24-25.
- Inform new area and county directors on local administrative needs and opportunities.
- Assess the administrative performance of County Directors (CD's - directors with academic appointments) and Area Directors, (AD's - directors with 100% administrative appointments).
- Identify and implement professional development, mentoring and resource development for area and county directors.

Assessing the administrative performance of County Directors and Area Directors

Using a 5-point scale of 0 = Not Applicable or Unsure, 1 = Does Not Meet Expectations, 2 = Partially Meets Expectations, 3 = Meets Expectations, 4 = Exceeds Expectations, and 5 = Exceptional Performance, the survey asked county UCCE employees to assess area and county director skills in the areas of:

1. Administration of the UCCE unit – 14 questions
2. Leadership to the UCCE unit team members – 18 questions
3. Fiscal development and management – 3 questions
4. Partnership and relationship building – 10 questions

The statewide high and low means in each of the four areas of administration were identified as:

Question and Number	CD's & AD's Together	CD's Only	AD's Only
Highest Mean Score: Administration			
A05. My director uses personal knowledge and professional experience to envision the future, anticipate change, capitalize on opportunities and develop innovative options that further the strategic direction of the organization	3.87	3.98	
A07. My director values and delivers high quality, professional, responsive and innovative service.			3.70
Lowest Mean Score: Administration			
A09. My director uses merit, promotion, and evaluation processes to mentor, educate and provide feedback to support my success.	3.34	3.51	3.28
Highest Mean Score: Leadership			
L08. My director personally demonstrates commitment to the job, the county, and the University and their respective missions by acting in ways that further the accomplishment of goals.	3.86	3.88	
L14. My director provides useful and timely feedback.			3.52
Lowest Mean Score: Leadership			
L14. My director provides useful and timely feedback.	3.47	3.44	

L09. My director actively engages with CE employees to understand and advocate for their programs.			3.46
Highest Mean Score: Fiscal			
F02. My director demonstrates integrity, accountability and efficient stewardship of university and county resources	3.86	3.88	3.81
Lowest Mean Score: Fiscal			
F03. My director works with UC ANR development officers to increase the number of donors and average gift value to secure funding for county extension programs outside of support from county budgets.	3.57	3.67	3.32
Highest Mean Score: Partnerships & Relationships			
P05. My director cultivates relationships with new and existing partners that include County Government to obtain the resources to build new programs thus expanding UCCE's reach in the region.	3.78	3.83	
P10. Provides active, ongoing advocacy and support for UC ANR programs.			3.73
Lowest Mean Score: Partnerships & Relationships			
P09. My director convenes an Advisory Committee from county and city government, NGOs, and academics, as a sounding board for ideas and strategic planning.	3.58	3.57	
P01. Cultivates, maintains, and nurtures internal UC relationships.			3.61

Qualitative Feedback

In addition to the quantitative data, 275 separate qualitative comments were provided by respondents in the four areas of administration for directors. Thematically, the comments identified the following professional development needs for all directors.

Administration of the UCCE unit

- Conduct monthly staff meetings with the entire UCCE team and share information from ANR first-Friday leadership calls, AD/CD in-person meetings, and county department head meetings including updates on staffing, budget, reporting, policy, and deadlines.
- Develop and implement consistent employee on-boarding processes.
- Implement team building activities to improve morale and relationships.
- Increase the time spent in the field with your team members to improve program understanding and ability to promote our relevance to stakeholders and the public.

Leadership to the UCCE unit team

- Establish standing group or individual meetings with advisors, administrative teams, and program staff with academic supervisors to engage, understand needs and support employees to be successful.
- Develop, implement and assess local communication strategies for team.
- Increase timeliness on needed signatures, email responses, and deadlines, and reporting back on needed items and decisions.

Fiscal development and management

- Clearly communicate with the team how budget decisions and allocations are made.
- Ensure all programs have adequate resources (human and fiscal) to successfully generate impacts.
- Work closely with UC ANR development services to diversify funding strategies for local UCCE efforts.

Partnership and relationship building

- Enhance community understanding of UCCE in county by personally attending community events and stakeholder meetings to represent all CE programs.
- Improve communication with the team through your efforts to build partnerships and external relationships with community stakeholders and decision makers.

Putting the data to work

Identified areas of opportunities are being addressed in the following ways to meet the survey goals:

- *Identify area and county director administrative goals for FY 24-25*
- *Inform new area and county directors on local administrative needs and opportunities.*

All area and county directors met with the Director for County Cooperative Extension (Lynn Schmitt-McQuitty) in August and September of 2024 to review survey data specific to their unit. Each director outlined specific steps they would take to address the quantitative and qualitative opportunities identified in the survey by their unit, including addressing common qualitative themes that resonated across the system. All county and area directors will have their progress assessed at the conclusion of their next review cycle.

- *Assess the administrative performance of County Directors and Area Directors*
- *Identify and implement professional development, mentoring and resource development for area and county directors.*

Professional development to assist with meeting these opportunities has been realized through intentional learning and development programs to address areas of opportunity. This has taken place through director participation in the UC ANR CORO leadership program, through the area director community of practice monthly meetings, and the twice-yearly multi-day director professional development meetings. Additionally, a new mentoring program for directors to build their competency on coaching, mentoring and guiding academics successfully through the merit and promotion process will officially roll out in FY 25-26.

Concluding remarks and recommendations for the future

It is my hope that the Cooperative Extension community continues to provide feedback on the administrative performance of area and county directors, and this model of assessing performance continues biennially.

To more thoroughly understand the success and opportunities of the new area director model, additional evaluations will need to be conducted that are inclusive of the local CE Office, deploy focus groups, and engage our county partners and stakeholders. This will aid in ensuring we stay on top of needs, provide appropriate professional development and continue to address administrative efficiencies.

Thank you to Kit Alviz at UC ANR Program Planning and Evaluation for developing the survey and managing and analyzing the data.

¹ Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Kings, Solano, Yolo, Sacramento, Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, Alameda, Contra Costa, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino. N = 15 counties