



Building Your Extension Career: Preparing for Applications and Interviews

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Introduction

Extension offers many paths to leadership at the district and state levels. This publication is based on an online seminar with experienced Extension professionals sharing their insights, tips, and experiences applying and interviewing for various district and state roles. The information below is derived from that conversation and is intended to offer strategies and advice for district and state level applications and interviews.

Career Advancement Opportunities

In addition to the agent promotion process, VCE offers several different career advancement opportunities for Extension Agents. Administrative advancement opportunities include Unit Coordinator, District Director, and various state administrative positions. Programmatic advancement opportunities include Area Specialized Agents, District Program Leaders, and various state level tenure track and non-tenure track specialist roles. There are also opportunities to advance in other state Extension systems, and these positions may vary slightly from those available through VCE. (For a more thorough description of these roles, please refer to the publication *Career Advancement and Leadership Opportunities for Agents in Virginia Cooperative Extension*).

Agents exploring advancement opportunities are encouraged to build strong local programs, participate in professional development, seek leadership roles within Extension committees, and

professional associations, pursue promotional opportunities, and build a strong, diverse network.



Figure 1: AI-generated photo of a man interviewing for a job at Virginia Tech.

Application Strategies

Take ample time to prepare your application packet for Extension positions and be sure to ask a colleague to review your application materials prior to submission. Carefully read the position announcement and position description, then tailor your resume or CV to that specific position. A good practice is to highlight your relevant experience and impact statements, as well as other meaningful metrics. Align your qualifications with the stated job requirements, and make sure that your application meets all the minimum requirements.

One tip is to use your annual reports and impact statements to build a cover letter and resume/CV specific to the position. Remember that Extension positions are academic positions with high expectations for professionalism, written and oral communications, and scholarship in the relevant subject matter. Be sure to proofread your application for spelling and grammar prior to submission. Listed references should be aware that you are applying and have received a copy of the position description, so they can speak to your abilities in the context of the preferred qualifications.

Interviewing Strategies

Many Extension positions will have a first round of interviews via Zoom, followed by a round of in-person interviews for candidates who advance. Prior to a Zoom interview, make sure your technology is working well and that you are comfortable with the platform that will be used (e.g., Zoom, Teams, Google Meet, etc.). Choose a simple, non-distracting background with appropriate lighting and a quiet, comfortable space for connecting.

In-person interviews may include several different interview sessions with the search committee, stakeholders, relevant departments, and/or Extension administrators. You should be provided with an agenda by the search committee prior to the interview. Learn as much as you can about the process and the various groups you will meet with prior to attending the interview. It is also advised that you accept the interview date and time you are offered rather than expecting the hiring committee to accommodate your personal schedule.

Prepare for your interview by creating a “playbook” of talking points that highlight why you are the right person for the position. Be aware of non-verbal cues during the interview and remember that every moment, even walking between buildings or sitting in a waiting area, is part of the interview process. Prepare thoughtful questions to ask each interview group; it demonstrates your interest and that you have researched the position. Be mindful of the length of your responses to questions, as answers that are too short (and lack sufficient detail) or too long (and become rambling and unfocused) can both be detrimental.

As an internal candidate, don’t assume the committee knows the full breadth and depth of your work; prepare as if you are applying for an external position. You may also need to help the committee “see” you in the new role.

Hot Tips

1. Participate in professional development opportunities such as the Faculty Leadership Development Program, the Joint Council of Extension Professionals Annual Leadership Development Conference, and local community leadership programs.
2. Build your professional network through involvement in professional associations and university committees.
3. Practice interview skills and prepare thoughtful questions for the interview panel.
4. Seek feedback from colleagues or mentors on your application materials and interview presentations.
5. Consider removing graduation dates from resumes to avoid potential age bias.
6. Prepare a 30, 60, 90-day action plan when applying for leadership positions, even if not explicitly requested.
7. Send thank-you notes to interview committees after interviews.
8. Seek feedback from the search committee chair on areas for improvement if not selected for a position.
9. Review Career Advancement & Leadership Opportunities on the VCE Intranet. It can be found under Personnel > Promotion, Career Advancement, and Leadership Opportunities.

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