# Cooperative Extension Service New Agent Success Program

Emily Bruton, Sierra Cain, Savannah Daniels, Cooperative Extension Service, New Mexico State University

## Introduction

The New Mexico State University (NMSU) Cooperative Extension Service delivers research-based education and outreach programs to communities across New Mexico through Agriculture, Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS), and 4-H Youth Development programs. Because counties vary in clientele, community needs, staffing, and program responsibilities, a need for a structured agent success program to enhance onboarding, provide professional guidance and support, and improve agent retention was identified.

## Objectives

To enhance new agent support, strengthen camaraderie, and improve agent retention, the 2025-2026 NM WELD Cohort developed and initiated a New Agent Success Program. The program was guided by the following objectives:

- Gather input from state and county Extension leadership to identify priority topics and support needs for new agents.
- Develop a support program that is accessible and manageable for new agents without creating additional workload burdens.
- Provide complementary support beyond existing professional development opportunities, including EDGE courses, District Director trainings, and other Extension training programs.

## Materials and Methods

The NM WELD Cohort developed a presentation and survey to gather feedback from NMSU Extension state leadership, District Directors, and County Directors regarding new agent support needs and priority topics.

Topics identified most frequently were used to guide program development. Based on District Director recommendations, agents with less than 18 months of Extension experience were selected to participate. Participants were organized into two program-area cohorts: Adult Programs (Agriculture and Family & Consumer Sciences) and 4-H Youth Development. Agents with responsibilities in multiple program areas selected the cohort most relevant to their interests. Each cohort identified a shared community or programmatic need and collaboratively planned, implemented, and evaluated a program to address that need.

To ensure the program complemented existing professional development opportunities, the NM WELD Cohort compiled and reviewed current Extension training resources. Monthly virtual cohort meetings were held to support program development and planning. Each meeting included a 10-minute professional development session focused on topics relevant to Extension work. The program was designed to be completed within one year. At the program's conclusion, participants present their project outcomes and an impact statement to their cohort.

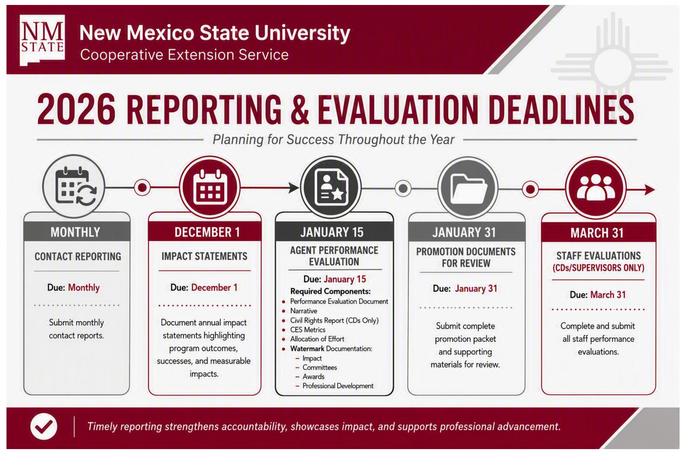



Figure 1. Reporting Calendar developed for the September 2026 meeting professional development section

## Data and Results

Ten new Extension agents were selected to participate in the New Agent Success Program, with nine attending the inaugural meeting in August 2026. Participants engaged in relationship-building activities and identified priority issues within their program areas. The Adult Programs (Agriculture/FCS) cohort identified drought, water resource management, and labor shortages as key concerns. The 4-H Youth Development cohort identified strengthening 4-H/FFA relationships and balancing parental involvement with volunteer management as priority needs. Participant feedback highlighted the value of peer networking and shared problem solving, with many noting they were encouraged to discover that other agents faced similar challenges.

## Conclusions and Implications

The New Agent Success Program provides structured support for new Extension agents through peer collaboration, professional development, and project-based learning. Participants work together to identify and address community needs while developing, implementing, and evaluating programs relevant to their areas of expertise. Through this process, agents gain experience in program planning, evaluation, and impact reporting while building professional networks and peer support systems. The program has the potential to strengthen agent retention, foster camaraderie, and enhance overall professional development, while also providing participants with valuable programming outcomes and documentation to support annual performance evaluations.

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