

Professional Improvement Funds

County Extension budgets may include identifiable funds for professional improvement. Funds identified may be established only if all other needs of the county Extension program are met in the budgeting process (travel, rent, support staff salary and additional agent salary, etc). Professional improvement funds may be up to but not more than \$4,000 per agent per year. Support staff or program assistants may also receive professional improvement funds (up to \$1,750 is suggested). Additionally, counties may allocate up to \$1,000 additional Professional Improvement Funds for Agents to be used for participating in state and/or national Epsilon Sigma Phi professional meetings.

Professional Improvement Funds may be used for Extension supported Associations and Extension Supported Professional Development opportunities.

All professional associations dues, and other professional improvement expenditures must be approved by the County Director and Area Extension Director. International Professional Development trips and other Professional Development opportunity requests must be approved by the County Director and Area Extension Director and final approval made by the appropriate Regional Extension Director. Funds budgeted for one year cannot be carried over to the next year to increase the agent's total amount over the annual guideline. Funds expended must follow the current state expenses reimbursement guidelines for travel, meals, lodging, etc.

Accounting Procedures

A line item account for each agent, support staff, and program assistant is to be established in the county Extension budget for professional improvement funds.

An electronic request should be submitted to the County Director and Area Extension Director for use of professional improvement funds prior to participation in the event.

Agents and staff are responsible for keeping their account accurate and balanced. Any over-spending of professional improvement funds must be repaid by the agent or other staff involved. This cannot be accomplished by transfer of funds from travel, etc. A paper trail must prove the repayment, and be documented in county Extension District Board minutes.

Attendance At Professional Meetings

All staff members are encouraged to participate in professional associations relating to their fields of training or position of assignment.

Travel time of up to one day to and from the meeting will be allowed, depending on distance to meeting location. Time at this meeting will be on official time.

Agent attendance at other professional meetings will be reviewed on the merits of each case. Additional approval to attend, allowed time, possible reimbursement, etc. will be based on the agent's role at the meeting, participation at other meetings, and the effect on the county program.

Support Staff are encouraged to join and attend Chi Epsilon Sigma's Annual State Meeting. Some important points to remember:

- *Requests to attend this and other professional development opportunities should be submitted in writing at least 30 days in advance to the supervisor for consideration.
- *Support staff may use Professional Improvement funds for state meetings only, no national conferences.
- *Support staff must stay within the budgeted Professional Improvement amount within each year (no carryover of account balances).
- *Unless your work station is more than 4 hours away from the conference site, all non-exempt staff will be expected to report to your normal work station and work until noon the day prior to the conference.
- *Pre-conference attendance to CHIES Board of Director's meeting or Conference Planning Committee meeting is allowable; however, this must be discussed with the supervisor.
- *Agents should make arrangements to keep the office open during the support staff absence.

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