

idea corner

Program Team Leader

For many years, Iowa employed home economics district leaders to serve as *program facilitators between field and central staff*. These people assumed program development leadership in cooperation with the area director.

District leaders helped field staff establish a program development process that would collect information from clientele, maximize input of planning committees, establish criteria to make decisions, and develop programs to meet the needs of clientele. District leaders helped specialists be more sensitive to "grass-roots" needs. In turn, district leaders shared specialists' analyses and findings with field staff.

As of July 1, 1970, district leaders assumed a new title and role. Instead of providing program guidance in cooperation with the area director, they assumed a functional leadership role related to *Focus* concerns and/or priority audiences. These staff members spent less time in the field.

Within a year, specialists expressed concern about the change. Unless specialists were directly involved in a program effort, they didn't always know what was happening in the field. Meanwhile, field staff indicated they had limited knowledge of program directions identified by specialists. Even though every staff member has direct access to all co-workers, field and central staff found

they could only spend so much time communicating.

After exploring alternatives in relation to available resources, the program "team leader" concept was introduced in October, 1973. As proposed, there would be a program team leader in each of the 12 geographic areas. The team leader would be an Extension home economist or area specialist in home economics. About one-fifth to one-quarter of their time would be devoted to the team leader role and the remainder committed to the ongoing assignment. The time commitment remains flexible to allow for changing needs.

All staff helped define the role of team leader. A team leader would:

- Facilitate communication related to programming between field, area, and central staff.
- Provide leadership for area interdisciplinary programming if this didn't logically fit into another staff member's subject-matter assignment.
- Serve as a reaction panel for programming ideas generated by central staff.
- Provide leadership so that the area developed a program meeting the needs of people and reflecting the influence of the academic community.
- Keep the area director abreast of current home economics philosophy and direction.

- Help co-workers select and use *ideas* for ways to effectively work with a home economics committee.
- Help area Extension director with orientation of new staff.

To ensure that all staff had a common understanding of relationships, a guide was developed. Team leaders would:

- Continue to be administratively responsible to area directors.
- Relate with other Extension home economists and area specialists on a parallel level rather than as a supervisor. The team leader assignment wasn't designed to be part of a career ladder.
- Serve as spokesperson for the area when promoting home economics program ideas with central staff. This doesn't mean that other staff members can forget about this obligation. This responsibility creates one more option for interaction.
- Encourage and expand relations with agencies, organizations, and institutions on a regional level. This relationship hasn't minimized the importance of each staff member establishing workable interactions with others in the community.

Team leaders represent different staffing patterns in Iowa—some are two-county employees, others have a single-county assignment, and four are area specialists. This variation has been healthy when each person shares program and personal concerns.

Team leaders spend two days on campus at least three times each year. While on campus, they share program development ideas from their area and concerns of the staff, respond to

ideas generated by specialists, and participate in at least three hours of program development in-service education.

The team leader concept has provided one answer for needed program leadership in the field.

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