

OSU Extension Programming Updates – March 24, 2021

Please be sure to read this entire message for information about in-person program preparation, event planning, county fairs and camps, as well as return-to-office transition planning.

Rationale

OSU Extension leadership has been working on a plan for “re-opening” as additional COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. In fact, we have been considering a variety of options for what a return-to-office scenario would look like. Please also remember that we have been working throughout the pandemic to provide education and services at the pace and level that are safe and prudent for our Extension employees, volunteers, and clientele, and that are in alignment with CDC, state and local health department, and university guidelines.

These existing services have included on-farm research and blanket approvals for critical and time-sensitive programming (e.g., 4-H club meetings, fairs, ServSafe®, pesticide applicator recertification training, etc.), additional in-person training exemptions (700+ approved so far), and ongoing office schedule plans that are sensitive to the community and employee needs.

As the numbers of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths decrease in Ohio and the percentage of vaccinations increase, we are planning the next phases of “re-opening.”

I would like to thank Dean Kress for continuing to advocate for Extension to be able to move forward with our ability to expand in-person programming, participate in fairs and camps, and reinstate the CFAES event approval process. Details about each initiative are listed below.

In-person Programming Attendee Number Adjustments

OSU Extension has been given permission to increase the number of participants who can be hosted at in-person educational programming. Currently, the cap is at 50 persons, but we can also begin planning to offer programs (in mid-May) for between 50 and 300 persons under the following guidelines:

- The first preference for hosting an educational session of this size is to hold it outdoors and continue to practice social distancing.
- Make sure individuals are aware that they cannot attend the meeting if they or anyone living their household is experiencing any of the following symptoms: fever, cough, or shortness of breath; and consider providing an option for individuals to participate virtually.
- We expect face masks will be properly worn during the session, indoors or outdoors.
- These larger sessions should be the exception and not the rule until all COVID-19 restrictions and health orders have been revised to address larger-group gatherings.

***As a reminder, all in-person programs continue to require exemption approval. The in-person training course must be completed by ALL Extension employees by March 31, 2021.**

To access the online training course, visit: osu.instructure.com/courses/100537.

To submit exemptions for in-person programming, visit: go.osu.edu/CFAESf2fEventRequest

For additional guidelines and safety precautions, review the [OSU Extension Planning Guide for In-Person Meetings and Events](#).



Fairs

The DeWine Administration recently released the [Director's Order that Reopens Fairs and Animal Exhibitions, with Exceptions](#). As long as fair boards and local committees work closely with local boards of health and comply with the guidance in this order and any other applicable state director of health orders, they are able to reopen or continue to operate as set forth in the order. We appreciate the strong support of our county fair board partners, the Ohio Expositions Commission, elected officials, Ohio Farm Bureau, and other key industry partners. As has been the case throughout our long history, OSU Extension professionals are expected to remain engaged and work as active partners to support these important learning experiences in the communities we serve. *Exemptions remain in place for 4-H clubs and other in-person programming related to junior fair activities, including junior fair board meetings and quality assurance training.* We will continue to follow all applicable guidance in place at the time these events take place.

Camps

Kirk Bloir and Hannah Epley, working closely with members of the 4-H camping design team, 4-H camp facility managers, and college and Extension leadership, have developed and received support for updated 4-H in-person camping guidelines that allow the modified design and delivery of 4-H residential (overnight) and day camps this summer. The 4-H camping guidelines draw heavily on guidance provided by the CDC, American Camping Association, Ohio Department of Health, and Ohio State-based health experts. Kirk and Hannah will be sharing more information about the guidelines and expectations at this Friday's (March 26) Koffee with Kirk.

Event Planning and Hosting of Non-Ohio State Clientele

This section is specifically for our non-Ohio State clientele who work and collaborate with CFAES and use our event facilities (e.g., Fisher Auditorium, Sequest Arboretum, 4-H Center, South Centers, research facilities), and how we can begin to address facility use requests again. All rules for safe operating procedures under COVID-19 as outlined by the governor and CDC must be followed. This includes wearing of masks and 6-foot distancing between participants. The number of participants allowed will be different depending on the activity.

- For educational programming hosted by non-Ohio State clientele – in classroom style: currently no more than 50 people may attend in total, and only if the room fits the spacing guidelines.
- Business programming: currently, the maximum number of attendees is 10, similar to student gatherings. We do predict that this will continue to change depending on the number of COVID-19 cases reported statewide.
- Social events (weddings): these remain on hold until more university guidance is provided (expected after May 10).

Please note that venue guidance will be coming out at the university level. Due to the exemptions given to our college to manage our internal events and our outreach programming, this information may differ. If you have any questions or need clarification, let Anne Dorrance (dorrance.1@osu.edu) know, and she will discuss with the committee for guidance.



Reminder: Guidelines are Subject to Change at any Time

These plans for transitioning to the next level of expanded operations and programming are being formulated in partnership with Human Resources and in alignment with university guidelines. As additional information about increasing in-person programming and the updated guidelines for camps and fairs is shared this week, it is important to keep in mind that all guidelines are still subject to change depending on current statewide health conditions and pandemic precautions.

OSU Extension Return-to-Office Transition Planning

Another aspect of “re-opening” will include transitioning back to a full in-person presence at our statewide campuses (county and state offices). Our goal timeframe for achieving this return to statewide campuses is mid-May. We are committed to having a presence in the community and within all of our offices. We will continue to respond to local conditions, but we will be moving toward the majority of our work being done from our statewide offices. We will take into consideration requested accommodations for individual needs; and our supervisors remain committed to working with their employees and each office unit to ensure the needs of those we serve (both internal and external stakeholders) are met.

Our intent is to continue to have some flexibility and schedule options, while increasing our presence in the county and other unit offices. However, there will be parameters and guidelines to enable us to maintain optimal coverage of the offices, with all individuals attending to the roles and responsibilities outlined in their position descriptions. Guidance will be based on balancing individual, team, organizational, and community needs. More specific information will be shared as soon as it is available, along with applicable resources.

Thank You

Thank you all for your conscientious approach to serving the people of Ohio by exemplifying the OSU Extension mission through the many phases of this pandemic. Stay safe and well.

