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**COMMUNITY STANDARDS**

**N. C. Cooperative Extension**

In Extension, it is important to clearly communicate expectations identifying acceptable behaviors and standards for our workplaces. These standards define our shared guidelines, which we impose on ourselves and each other within our work community.

The goals of setting community standards are to treat each other with respect and to cooperate in establishing a good and productive place to work. Community standards are integral to Extension’s ability to satisfactorily and effectively serve our public and meet our Extension mission. Further, they describe the behaviors expected of everyone in our organization. Because not all situations are identical, it may be necessary on occasions for administrators to interpret these standards to a particular situation, but at all times we must strive to administer them fairly, efficiently and in the best interest of all employees of the organization.

County Extension team members are expected to follow these community standards at a minimum and to comply with all applicable federal, state, county, and university policies, procedures and rules.

**Harassment and Discrimination Prevention**

Employees are expected to be aware of and adhere to the University’s policy of non-discrimination and non-harassment at all times while at work, in or out of the office, working with fellow staff members, employees, or volunteers outside of the office, and at any time they are conducting NC State University and NC A&T State University business.

 [NC State Policy](https://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-05/)

 [NC A&T State University Policy](https://www.ncat.edu/aggieacademy/policies.php)

**Work Schedules**

Modified work schedules (including managed scheduling and time management) must be approved in advance by the County Extension Director.

* All employees that are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act are expected to complete their jobs within the 40-hour work week. Such employees (County Operations Support Staff (COSS) and Administrative Support Staff) must obtain permission *in advance* to work beyond 40 hours in a work week and therefore earn compensatory time. Time worked without prior approval will be honored but failure to obtain prior approval or repeatedly working overtime without permission will result in disciplinary action. As with all categories of leave, employees will not be able to take the compensatory time off without prior approval as well. Supervisors shall work with COSS employees using time management to avoid overtime whenever possible.
* Employees subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act are required to punch time daily in WolfTime. After entry by the employee, the County Extension Director is responsible for verifying and approving all punched time in WolfTime.
* EHRA employees (Extension Agents and County Extension Directors) are not subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act. As such, they will be allowed managed scheduling to attend to personal needs during the workday as long as such scheduling does not significantly interfere with the work needs of the office. Agents may take time as determined by the consensus of the employee and County Extension Director, and prior approval must be obtained from the County Extension Director.

**Breaks**

Every Extension employee is allowed and encouraged to take lunch breaks and personal breaks throughout the course of the workday based on the local county government’s standard operating procedures on breaks and office hours, if any, or upon the County Director’s direction. Employees are encouraged to disconnect from their computers, eat with colleagues, or go for a walk outside. This is essential for employee health, productivity, and resiliency. [According to research](https://hbr.org/2021/01/take-your-lunch-break), lunch breaks increase employee job satisfaction, productivity, and the likelihood to recommend working there. Furthermore, going for a lunch hour walk can [boost employees’ moods and their ability to handle stress at work](https://archive.nytimes.com/well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/21/stressed-at-work-try-a-lunchtime-walk/).

**Use of Office Equipment**

Office equipment, property, and services such as email, phones, regular mail, faxes, copiers, etc., are intended for official business purposes.

**Use of Office Computers and Networks**

* Employees and guests must abide by university, federal, state, agency and/or county policies, rules, and regulations governing information technology resources. This includes networks and the devices that connect to the networks. The policies, rules and regulations governing the IT administrators who support your network and devices are to be considered the authority, but other entities’ rules may also apply
* If not prohibited by Information Technology (IT) policy, limited amounts of personal computer use, including internet/web use, email, etc. are permissible, but must not interfere with a staff member doing their work, including immediately addressing phone calls, walk-in clients, or responding to another staff member. Such use must abide by all policies, rules, and regulations.
* Recreational games should not be used during office hours unless it is for programming needs.
* Downloading software applications may or may not be allowed by the IT system administrators and must comply with NC State University contract authority policies and the Computer Use Regulation. Any software installed by employees must have a work-related purpose and may not be offensive to co-workers. The employee is responsible for offering proof of license and for maintaining original software for any application they install. All software installed on NC State owned computers, including software with clickwraps agreements, must meet applicable NC State University regulations, notably the Computer Use Regulation and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Accessibility Regulation. The ICT Accessibility Regulation requires that any software or output from software that you share with others must meet the applicable accessibility standards specified in the regulation. For more information, see: https://software.ncsu.edu/faqs/clickwrap-faqs/#regulations
* Software may be removed at the discretion of the IT system administrators if it hinders the performance of the computer or office network, or if it is installed in violation of the license terms or university regulations. It is never permissible to listen to, view, or download prohibited material to one's assigned computer or another device.
* Equipment must be handled with care and respect, minimizing damage and repairs.

**Home Use of Equipment**

See NCSU Regulation: https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-07-30-14/

Equipment which is the property of the state or federal government may be used at home by university faculty/staff employees, provided the following criteria are met:

1. Use of the equipment at home will not interfere with the operational needs of the Extension Office.

2. Home use is approved by the appropriate County Extension Director, or DED if to be used by the CED or an Area Specialized Agent (ASA).

3. The equipment is used only for university business.

Individuals who receive approval to remove equipment from the office for use at home for a period greater than 30 days must complete NCSU Equipment Tracking Home Use Authorization Form (NCSU Form CA-2). Form CA-2 must be completed on any piece of equipment that is taken home regardless of the cost of the equipment or whether the asset is tagged.

When an employee is approved to use University equipment in his or her home for a period greater than 30 days, the CED and employee should complete the top half of NCSU Equipment Tracking Home Use Authorization Form (NCSU Form CA-2).

**Food/Beverages in Work Areas and Within the Office**

It is acceptable to have a beverage and/or snack at your desk. Please avoid eating in the presence of clients. All employees have the responsibility for keeping things tidy and clean in the entire office, including break areas, especially as they relate to food and beverage items.

 **Cell Phones**

Personal phone calls, texting, and/or instant messaging during work hours are to be kept to a minimum. Personal calls and text messaging should not disrupt coworkers conducting regular work. Conversations and virtual meetings on the cell phone must not be disruptive in terms of ringtone volume, voice volume, duration, content, or topic. Employees should not use cell phones for personal reasons during work meetings unless it is for emergencies.

**Appropriate Dress**

Employees will report to work dressed professionally and appropriately for their work responsibilities and the demeanor of the workplace. Business casual is the standard dress code unless conducting field work or similar activities; proper attire for these alternative work-related tasks may be interpreted by the County Extension Director or direct supervisor. All clothing should be neat in appearance and reflect positively on the County and Cooperative Extension.

For the purpose of Extension work, the definition of business casual will include neat jeans. The following items are still deemed inappropriate dress for Extension activities:

t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, casual tank tops, casual flip flop shoes, low-cut shirts/blouses, crop tops, short skirts, clothes with tears or holes, leggings as pants

Extension personnel that are required to be outside the office for farm visits, field days, youth programs, etc. are allowed to dress appropriately for that occasion (event-related t-shirts, shorts, capris, hats, sneakers, etc. may be suitable). Extension personnel should always be dressed in the same fashion or more formally than the clients they are assisting, i.e., field vs. office vs. client meeting vs. formal banquet, etc. Special circumstances, requiring a different standard of dress, may be approved by the County Extension Director. County dress code policies should be followed, if they are in place.

If an employee’s attire does not reflect positively on the County and Cooperative Extension, the employee’s supervisor will discuss the subject of personal appearance with the employee. If the clothing is unacceptable for the day/event, the supervisor may send the individual home to change and/or for the day.

 **Visitors**

Visitors to the office for personal reasons must be kept to a minimum. Visiting children must be supervised and are to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to a place of business.

**Child Care**

It is not acceptable to bring children to the office for long periods of time or as a substitute for regular child care. If a child is ill or out of school for the day, leave must be taken by the employee for the time away from the office unless work from home arrangements have been approved by the CED in advance. Compensatory time, sick, or annual leave is appropriate for these circumstances.

**Pets in the Office**

Except in the cases of certified service animals, it is inappropriate to bring pets to the office. It can be dangerous for staff as well as clients when dogs or other pets are in the office. Make sure you arrange for any pet care or transportation outside of the workplace. The University allows for service animals under [REG 04.20.05](https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-04-20-05/)

**Customer Experience**

Everyone is to participate in covering the phones and in opening and closing the office on time if and when the primary staff persons are not able to perform those functions. All staff members should assist in picking up and answering the telephone or assisting walk-in clients when necessary. All employees need to maintain their calendar via the Google Calendar to ensure appropriate office support. Google calendars need to be shared with the CED and all other office staff (COSS and Agents) with details to ensure appropriate communication in the office. This is fundamental in providing quality customer service.

**Reporting Lateness or Absence**

If an employee will be late or has an unexpected schedule change without prior approval, they should inform the County Extension Director and/or designated staff member as soon as possible. When calling the office, efforts should be made to leave the message with a staff member rather than on voicemail. If someone would like to request to leave early for an approved reason, the request must be communicated to the County Extension Director and/or supervisor as early as possible. All leave, including managed scheduling and time management, is a privilege and subject to prior supervisory approval.

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