

Evaluation Specialist

Position Description: The Evaluation Specialist will conduct policy relevant program evaluations and train others to design and implement program evaluations. Candidates should hold a Ph.D. or equivalent degree in evaluation or a social science discipline and demonstrate expertise in a range of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches and research designs. Candidates must also have strong interpersonal skills and a record of working well with a range of stakeholder groups. Desirable experience includes publishing evaluation-related articles, managing evaluation teams, and providing technical assistance on evaluation tools and strategies. The Evaluation Specialist will be a member of the Human and Community Development Department at UC Davis. He or she will work closely with a wide range of ANR units and personnel, including the ANR program planning and evaluation staff, as well as with key external stakeholders.

Justification: An evaluation specialist will improve ANR program delivery and increase public accountability, positioning us for new revenues. An underlying assumption of the ANR strategic vision is the need to demonstrate the value of ANR programs to funders, policy makers, and the general public. This requires outcomes assessment of ANR programs, demonstrating not just what we do but the public value we create. A key question for all the strategic initiatives is “how will we know if we are making a difference?” Skilled and carefully designed evaluations are essential to answering this question. Investment in this specialist will reap rewards by increasing ANR’s ability to demonstrate policy relevant results to funders, opinion leaders, and the public.

The Specialist would be in immediate and high demand to support required or desired evaluations of advisor programs in nutrition, youth and family development, and other fields. This position has been identified as a high priority by Program Teams aligned with the Healthy Families and Communities initiative, including Positive Youth Development (chaired by specialist Kali Trzesniewski and Los Angeles County advisor Keith Nathaniel), Youth Science Literacy (chaired by Martin Smith and Monterey County advisor Lynn Schmitt-McQuitty), and Healthy Behaviors for Obesity Prevention (chaired by Los Angeles County advisor Brenda Roche and San Diego County advisor Patti Wooten Swanson).

Extension: This Specialist will conduct evaluation studies and provide training to build system-wide capacity on program evaluation and outcomes assessment. They would work with strategic internal and external ANR stakeholders to demonstrate program impact and improve programs over time. For example, they could work with NFCS Advisors on required evaluations of federal nutrition programs, including new community-scale interventions to prevent childhood obesity. Where community or youth development advisors or others are working in local collaborations, they might design evaluations that identify what works or doesn’t work to facilitate collaboration that achieves meaningful community results. The Specialist would also design strategies for better telling the ANR story by “aggregating to scale” the impact of local extension programs, such as Master Gardener programs.

Research: The Specialist will conduct high priority evaluation studies for ANR, government, nonprofit agencies, or foundations. The overarching questions this Specialist can help ANR address are the fundamental questions of public accountability: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Who benefited and how? They will also address questions about how to most effectively train extension personnel, students, or others in evaluation skills and techniques, and questions about the most appropriate methodologies for conducting various types of evaluative research. A key challenge is creating meaningful outcome indicators which meet multiple criteria, including being credible, understandable, cost-effective, and relevant. A pressing research agenda is to identify approaches to outcomes assessment that meet these criteria and lead to more standardized impact measures. Publication outlets will include the *American Journal of Evaluation*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, *California Agriculture* and the *Journal of Extension*.

ANR continuum: The specialist will serve as a key campus point of contact for CE advisors with evaluation support needs, connecting them as needed with AES scientists and CE Specialists in appropriate fields. While the primary focus will be on building these linkages in the areas of youth, nutrition, and community development, the specialist can serve other topic areas as well, particularly those related to strategic initiatives or federal reporting requirements. As such, the Specialist will work with Katherine Webb-Martinez and the ANR program planning and evaluation staff to identify—and in some cases conduct—high priority evaluation projects. The Specialist will also provide a point of contact for foundations and public agencies as they seek ANR help in conducting program evaluations. This Specialist can not only attract their evaluation funds but also build relationships that might lead to other financial support for extension programs.

Support: The Human and Community Development Department will provide basic support for the position, including office space and supplies, administrative support, internet and telephone access, etc.

Other support: Funding for program evaluation has grown exponentially in recent decades, driven by the accountability demands of public and private funders. Federal, state, and foundation funders of extension programming often require program evaluation data and require a percentage of funds be used for that purpose. The Specialist would help guide the use of those funds and/or use them to support their own work. Examples of funding sources include major California state agencies such as Health and Human Services, key departments such as Employment Development, Social Services, and Public Health, and the California Endowment and James Irvine Foundation.

Location: The Specialist will be located in the Human and Community Development Department. The department has been the home for Specialists focused on evaluation in the past (Joan Wright), and the new specialist could benefit from proximity to other departmental specialists (Campbell, Ontai, Trzesniewski) and to AES scientists in Human and Community Development whose programs include research and evaluation for public agencies and California foundations. The specialist's program will be enhanced by partnering with faculty and professional staff on grants and contracts and by connections with graduate students on research projects.