

**NC STATE**

**EXTENSION**

**County Operations Support Staff (COSS)  
Employee Handbook  
(Effective April 1, 2018)**

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# EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

This employee handbook provides important information about employment with NC State Extension, and I understand that if I should have any questions regarding its contents, I should consult my immediate supervisor or the Extension Personnel office.

I understand that the information contained herein is supplemental to the policies regulations and rules of NC State University and applies specifically to COSS employees. I understand that the information contained herein also may be revised from time to time and I understand that unless otherwise specified, I am subject to any revisions to the handbook. I understand that the revised information may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that this handbook is neither a contract of employment nor a legal document. I have received the handbook, and I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the information contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it. I understand that this form will be retained in my personnel file.

\_\_\_\_\_  
EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
EMPLOYEE'S NAME (Printed)

**Welcome to NC State Extension, the largest educational outreach program at NC State University!** Based in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), we reach millions of N.C. citizens each year through local centers in the state's 100 counties and with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

NC State Extension often works in tandem with N.C. A&T State University, as well as federal, state and local governments, to form a strategic partnership called N.C. Cooperative Extension. Our N.C. Cooperative Extension partnership began with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, when county, state and federal governments agreed that by joining together we could provide all citizens with access to the wealth of research and knowledge generated by our land-grant universities. Together we enrich the lives, land, and economy of North Carolinians.

This handbook has been prepared for County Operations Support Staff (COSS) employees as a guide to the various employment policies and benefits of NC State Extension. A thorough review of this handbook will help you to better understand what you can expect of NC State Extension, as well as what NC State Extension expects of you.

## **1. Introduction: COSS Personnel**

Effective July 5, 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted legislation to make employees of the NC State Extension and of NC State exempt from chapter 126 of the General Statutes (known previously as the State Personnel Act now the State Human Resources Act), except Article 5-Political Activity, Article 6-EEO, Article 7-Privacy Act, and Article 14-"Whistleblower" Protection. See N.C. General Statute § 126-5(c1).

While there are general policies, regulations and rules (PRRs) at NC State that apply to all employees, this handbook includes the personnel policies that are applicable specifically to COSS employees that may be different from, or in addition to, the PRRs applicable to all employees of NC State.

The application for, and acceptance of, a COSS position, which is acknowledged in writing by every employee, confirms understanding of certain differences in policy for COSS employees versus employees subject to the State Human Resources Act (SHRA employees) or other categories of EHRA employees.

The policies outlined in this handbook do not apply to those COSS employees who work directly for and are paid by N.C. A&T University, an individual county government or any other funding source, but they do apply to COSS employees who are paid via the NC State payroll (regardless of funding source).

## **2. Drug-Free Workplace**

Illegal drugs endanger the health and safety of members of the NC State community and imperil the integrity of the pursuit of learning and working. In order for NC State to continue its efforts to address the threat of illegal drugs, and to comply with UNC policy, the Board of Trustees adopts the policy. This policy is intended to demonstrate the University's primary commitment to education, counseling, rehabilitation, and elimination of illegal drugs. This policy additionally provides for the imposition of penalties in the event of violation of the policy.

Please refer to the policy at: <https://policies.ncstate.edu/policy/pol-04-20-05>

Please also refer to the Chancellor's memo on the drug-free community at NC State: <https://projects.ncsu.edu/3d-memos/details.php?id=178>

## **3. Workplace Violence Prevention and Management**

NC State is committed to providing a safe and secure work environment for all members of the University and Extension community. NC State strives to create an educational environment for students and a work environment for employees that promotes achievement of educational and career goals. Workplace violence impedes such goals. Therefore, each member of the NC State community has the responsibility to understand, prevent and respond appropriately to campus/workplace violence.

Please refer to the policy at: <https://policies.ncstate.edu/regulation/reg-04-05-02>

## **4. Interpersonal Relationships**

This policy serves to uphold the university's high standards of professional and ethical conduct, specifically with respect to interpersonal relationships. The intent of this policy is to provide assurance that all students and employees are able to learn or work in an environment where they can be objectively supervised, instructed, or evaluated.

This policy defines the types of interpersonal relationships among faculty, staff and students that by their very existence create an inherent conflict of interest that affects a student or employee's ability to be objectively supervised, instructed or evaluated. This policy also proscribes conduct with respect to interpersonal relationships among faculty, staff, and students including improper relationships between students and employees and employment of related persons (anti-nepotism) and provides for disciplinary action for policy violations.

Please refer to the policy at: <https://policies.NC State.edu/policy/pol-04-20-06>

## **5. Secondary Employment**

NC State Extension is considered the primary employer for COSS employees. Before employees engage in secondary employment (any work that produces income and is performed for an entity outside of the University), they must obtain supervisory approval via the approved [University Secondary Employment form](#). Approval is valid for one year and yearly renewal is required. Employees wishing to request approval for secondary employment should contact the Extension Personnel office for the necessary form.

The supervisor must consider whether the secondary work will adversely affect performance or create a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists when an employee is or may be in a position to influence activities or University decisions in ways that would lead to personal gain for the employee or their immediate family, or when it gives an improper advantage to third parties in their dealings with the University. If guidance is needed, supervisors should contact Extension Personnel.

## **6. Equal Opportunity Employment**

It is the policy of the state of North Carolina to provide equality of opportunity in education and employment for all students and employees. Educational and employment decisions should be based on factors that are germane to academic abilities or job performance. NC State strives to build and maintain an environment that supports and rewards individuals on the basis of relevant factors such as ability, merit and performance. Accordingly, NC State engages in equal opportunity and affirmative action efforts, and prohibits discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, as defined by this policy

Please refer to the policy at: <https://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-05>

## **7. Probationary Status**

All newly hired (on or after January 1, 2018) COSS employees shall serve a twelve (12)-month probationary period. At a supervisor's request, this probationary period can be extended up to six months after consultation with the Extension Personnel Office. During the probationary period, an employee may be separated at any time for any reason so long as the reason is not unlawful.

This probationary period provides time for new employees to adjust and work closely with their supervisor to learn and fully understand the job responsibilities and expectations. This period also allows the supervisor to provide the employee with necessary support, guidance, and feedback. Upon successful completion of the probationary period a COSS employee will achieve permanent employee status and may not be separated except for cause or as otherwise provided for in this handbook.

Items to consider during this period:

### **Communicating with Supervisor/Department**

Maintaining an open line of communication between a supervisor and employee is essential to create and maintain a successful work relationship. The University encourages all new employees to ask questions, familiarize themselves with expectations and determine if the position is right for them.

An employee should first contact their supervisor to answer questions, to address concerns as well as to review job responsibilities, expectations and local and University policies and procedures.

Supervisors and employees are encouraged to work closely during this period. This will include quarterly meetings to discuss the employee's progress and to address and/or correct any performance or conduct.

Prior to achieving permanent status, an employee may be separated from service without right of appeal. Supervisors must contact Extension Personnel before taking any action to separate the employees during this period.



## **8. Personnel Files**

Extension Personnel serves as the official repository for personnel files of permanent COSS employees and County EHRA employees. A personnel file consists of personal information and employment related information.

Counties may keep county-based working files. These files usually include the performance appraisals, leave records, and correspondence pertinent to the permanent file and are also considered as part of the employee's personnel file.

### **Access to Files**

Employees have access to their personnel files regardless of where the files are located. Certain personnel information can be disclosed by the University, upon written request, as stated in N.C. General Statute 126-23 (see below "Public Information") during regular business hours.

Any employee may view his/her personnel file, or an authorized supervisor may view the personnel file of a direct report, by making an appointment with Extension Personnel. Please be sure to bring a photo ID to the appointment so that Extension Personnel may verify your identity and access to the file being requested.

An employee who objects to the information in their personnel file may place a statement in the file relating to that which is considered inaccurate or misleading.

### **Public Information**

Information required to be maintained by Extension Personnel for public inquiry includes:

- Name;
- Age;
- Date of original employment;
- Current position title;
- Current salary;
- Date and amount of most recent change in salary (increase or decrease);
- Date of most recent personnel action (promotion, demotion, transfer, suspension, separation, classification change);

- Date and type of each dismissal, suspension or demotion for disciplinary reasons taken by NC State Extension (if disciplinary action was a dismissal, a copy of the written notice of the final decision); and
- Assigned office location at NC State Extension.

### **Confidential Information**

Information in an employee's file that is not identified specifically as public information is considered confidential and available only to the following persons:

- The current supervisor of the employee or any individual within the organizational unit who is in the chain or authority above the employee;
- Members of the General Assembly;
- A party by authority of a proper court order;
- An official of federal, state or other political subdivision agency: e.g., State Auditor's Office. The official may inspect any personnel record to complete assigned duties, except for purposes of assisting in criminal prosecution or tax investigation;
- An agent of another state agency considering employment of a current or former employee;
- A party to a quasi-judicial hearing of a state agency or a state agency that is conducting a quasi-judicial hearing. The file must be required evidence in the hearing. Such a file can be disclosed either by the employee's consent or upon a properly issued subpoena;
- An employee or authorized agent for the employee. The personnel file of a current or former employee may be examined or its information disclosed by an authorized University official if inspection is essential to maintaining University integrity or quality; or
- In compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), information pertaining to employment held by certain current or previous students of the University can only be released with written consent of said employee/student.

## **9. Performance Management**

NC State Extension maintains a system in which every COSS employee participates in a work planning and performance appraisal program. NC State Extension may create and utilize its own performance appraisal form and timelines, but will work within University guidelines wherever possible. Supervisors manage this program while promoting active employee involvement.

The performance management process begins on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year and concludes the following March 31<sup>st</sup>. The cycle is repeated yearly.

Within the employee's first 30 days of a new employee's initial employment, and yearly for each continuing employee, the supervisor will schedule a work planning meeting. The supervisor will set the expectations around the employee's work plan including the performance and conduct expectations, development plans and performance tracking methods.

Midway through the performance cycle the employee's supervisor will conduct an Interim Review with the employee to review the employee's performance and conduct and set any action goals for the future period.

At the end of the performance cycle, the employee's supervisor will conduct a final appraisal meeting to discuss the employee's performance and conduct during the entire cycle as it compares to the expectations documented in the work plan. Final appraisals occur at the end of the cycle, in April. This stage of the process results in a completed performance appraisal document and an annual rating.

## **10. Timekeeping Procedures**

COSS employees are subject to the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and are considered "subject" or "non-exempt" employees. All COSS employees are responsible for clocking in and out each day and for accounting for any unpaid time off (i.e. breaks) via WolfTime in the MyPack Portal.

### **Standard Work Week and Holidays**

Given the unique nature of NC State Extension, COSS employees shall follow the work schedule in accordance with that set by their local government partner(s). This includes hours of operations as well as following local government holiday schedules and closings for emergencies, adverse weather, and other days of closure.

A workweek is a regularly recurring period of 168 consecutive hours. The University workweek begins on Saturday at 12:01 a.m. and ends on Friday at 12:00 midnight. County offices may set daily schedules other than 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. but cannot adjust the beginning or ending of the workweek as established by NC State.

Supervisors are responsible for verifying and approving COSS employee time in WolfTime on a regular basis. A falsified time record violates state of North Carolina and University policy. Anyone who prepares, certifies, or approves a falsified record is subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

## **11. Overtime**

COSS employees earn overtime (recorded as Compensatory Time) when they work more than 40 hours (includes part-time employees) in a workweek. All overtime must be pre-approved by the employee's supervisor. Overtime is accrued at the rate of 1.5 hours for each hour over 40 in a workweek. The WolfTime system will automatically calculate and credit employees for compensatory time earned when the supervisor approves the online time sheet.

### **Compensatory Time (Comp Time)**

Comp time is accrued at either a straight hour-for-hour rate, called "extra" time, or at time and one half (1.5) hours for each one (1) hour worked over 40 hours in a workweek, called "overtime."

COSS employees earn comp time as time to use rather than pay. Comp time earned is encouraged to be used prior to the one-year anniversary of earning the time and the supervisor may instruct the employee to take such time off prior to the one-year aging anniversary. Any comp time earned but not taken by the one-year anniversary will be paid out to the employee in the next paycheck cycle.

The 40-hour workweek standard for earning overtime is required regardless of a county's stated standard hours, which may be less than 40 (e.g. 37.5 hour workweek).

All extra time and comp time worked must be approved by the employee's supervisor in advance. Comp time must be used by the employee before annual and/or bonus leave is used for any time off. Employees may not take comp time prior to earning it.

### **Extra Time ("Straight time")**

Extra time is earned during a week where an employee has worked less than 40 hours but more than what is required for that week. It accrues at a straight hour-for-hour rate. COSS employees will earn comp time for extra time, which will be calculated automatically via the WolfTime system.

Examples of overtime and straight time calculations:

- A full-time employee in a county whose standard hours are 40 works 43 hours in one week. This employee earns 3 overtime hours accrued at 1.5 hours for each hour. This would total 4.5 hours of comp time.
- A full-time employee who works 35 hours in a week with a holiday (32 hours of work time), would receive 3 hours of extra time.
- A full-time employee in a county whose standard hours are 37.5 hours works 39.5 hours in one week. The two (2) additional hours are earned as two (2) hours of extra time.
- A full-time employee in a county whose standard workweek is 37.5 hours works 43 hours in one week. Two and one-half (2.5) hours are earned as extra time, calculated hour-for-hour; 3 hours are earned as comp time at the 1.5 hour rate for 4.5 hours of comp time.
- A half-time employee in a county whose standard workweek is 40 hours works 43 hours in one week. This employee earns 20 hours of extra time earned at straight time and 3 hours of overtime accrued at 1.5 hours for each hour, for a total of 24.5 hours.

## **12. COSS Managed Scheduling**

Whenever possible, COSS employees should try to modify their schedules so they will not earn comp time. To allow for this we have created Managed Scheduling. The following principles apply to Managed Scheduling:

- Managed Scheduling is a privilege that can be revoked if abused. This is to be reviewed on a per person basis and not across the board in a county; and
- Managed Scheduling is not an issue tied to performance appraisal unless abuse results in unsatisfactory or poor program performance or improper personal conduct.
- All requests for Managed Scheduling should be requested and approved in advance.
- Managed Scheduling can be looked at as a form of flexible scheduling to avoid excessive hours over 40 when possible.
- Supervisors should monitor hours worked and recommend schedule alternatives to prevent overtime and burnout.
- Managed Scheduling for COSS employees is hour for hour and should be arranged in the same time period.

### 13. COSS Adverse Weather Policy

COSS employees will follow the adverse weather policy/procedure of the local authority to which they report. This includes the determination of whether local operations are open or closed during an adverse weather event and how information is communicated to employees regarding the adverse weather event in their assigned location.

### 14. COSS Annual Leave Accrual

Full-time COSS employees earn annual leave on a monthly basis. The earnings rate schedule is based on length of service. All leave accruals shall be maintained through the WolfTime system.

Annual leave is adjusted proportionately for part-time employees who work halftime or more (0.50 - 0.99 FTE). The monthly earnings amount is equal to one-twelfth of the annual rate for each month the employee works or is on approved leave with pay. Leave is earned while an employee is working or is on approved leave with pay at least half the working days of a month.

#### Full Time COSS Accrual Rates

<b>Years of Service</b>	<b>Leave Accruals- Earned Per Month</b>
0-5 years	9 hrs. 20 min.
5-10 years	11 hrs. 20 min.
10-15 years	13 hrs. 20 min.
15-20 years	15 hrs. 20 min.
20+ years	17 hrs. 20 min.

Annual leave may be used for a variety of circumstances, including:

- Vacation;
- Other periods of absence for personal reasons;
- Absences due to adverse weather conditions;
- Personal illness (in lieu of sick leave);
- Illness in the immediate family;
- Time lost for late reporting; however, deductions should be made from the employee's pay where excessive tardiness or absenteeism occurs;  
or
- Donations to an employee who is an approved voluntary shared leave recipient.

## **15. Leave Carryover**

On December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, accumulated annual leave time in excess of 240 hours is converted to sick leave so that no more than a balance of 240 hours is carried forward to January 1st of the next calendar year. Accumulation for part-time employees is prorated.

## **16. Leave Payout**

If an employee separates from employment due to resignation, dismissal, workforce reductions, or death, accumulated annual leave will be paid in a lump sum. However, payment for accumulated leave must not exceed 240 hours (prorated for part-time employees).

If a separating employee is overdrawn on leave, deductions will be taken from the final salary check for the overdrawn leave amount.

## **17. Civil Leave**

COSS employees are entitled to civil leave with pay when serving on a jury or when subpoenaed as witnesses. Full-time and part-time (more than half-time) COSS employees are covered by this policy.

Employees with a temporary, intermittent or part-time (less than half-time) appointment are not eligible for non-job related civil leave but are eligible for job-related civil leave and other job-related proceedings.

To take Civil Leave, an employee needs to:

- Notify the supervisor when jury duty is scheduled or when subpoenaed as a witness.
- Enter civil leave into the WolfTime System

## **18. Community Service, Literacy & Tutoring/Mentoring Leave**

### Community Service Leave (CSL)

Provides leave-eligible COSS employees paid time off to volunteer in NC schools, communities, institutions of higher education, NC State agencies, and not-for-profit organizations; as long as the employee is not receiving pay for the service. All CSL must be preapproved by supervisor prior to volunteer event.

### Literacy CSL

Type of Appointment	Community Service Leave	Literacy CSL	Tutoring/Mentoring CSL
<b>Full-time:</b> permanent or probationary	<b>24 hours</b> a calendar year	Up to 5 hours a month not to exceed <b>45 hours</b> a calendar year	1 hour a week, not to exceed <b>36 hours</b> a calendar year
<b>Part-time (half time or more):</b> permanent or probationary	Prorated – equal to percentage of full-time amount.	Prorated – equal to percentage of full-time amount.	Prorated – equal to percentage of full-time amount.
Temporary or part-time (less than half-time)	None	None	None

Literacy CSL is a special provision available in lieu of regular Community Service Leave to support a literacy program in a N.C. public school. Leave under this option shall be used exclusively for assisting students in reading and/or writing skills in accordance with established rules and guidelines for such arrangements as determined and documented by joint agreement with NC State and the public school. Advisory Note: For employees who live in a state adjacent to North Carolina, the agency may grant community service leave to parents for involvement in the child’s school.

Tutoring/Mentoring CSL

Tutoring/Mentoring CSL is a special provision available in lieu of regular Community Service Leave and Literacy CSL to provide tutoring and mentoring for a student in a formal standardized approved tutoring/mentoring program in a public or a non-public school. Leave under this option is to be used exclusively for tutoring and/or mentoring an “at-risk” student in accordance with established rules and guidelines for such arrangements as determined and documented by joint agreement with NC State and the public/non-public school.

With approval of the supervisor, an employee is eligible for the following types of CSL:

- All types of CSL are credited to each eligible employee on January 1 of each year.
- If an employee chooses to change options from one type of CSL to another, the maximum hours that may be granted is the maximum allowed under the new option chosen minus the amount already used under the original program.



- For the calendar year of employee transfer – the employee should secure approval from the new supervisor to continue the CSL option prior to the transfer.
- CSL does not carry over from one year to the next.
- CSL is not paid out upon separation.
- Newly hired employees shall be credited with leave immediately upon their employment, prorated at two hours per month for the remainder of the calendar year. Separated employees that are re-employed within the same calendar year are credited Community Service Leave the same as newly hired employees; however, the combination of re-employment credit hours and total hours used prior to separation in the same calendar year cannot exceed the annual 24 hour maximum leave benefit.
- Questions about what activities are allowed under CSL should be directed to the Extension Leave Coordinator.

In order to be approved for CSL, employees must:

- Submit a request for community service leave to their Supervisor. If the CSL is for Literacy CSL or Tutoring/Mentoring CSL then program documentation should be provided to the supervisor as well.
- Enter and track all leave in the WolfTime system under the correct CSL field.

## **19. Educational Leave Program**

This program provides leave for employees to take a course that is available only during working hours. Employees wishing to use Educational Leave must submit their request in writing to their supervisor prior to enrollment in a class. Supervisors will approve or deny such requests based on local business needs.

The Educational Leave program is a tool for supervisors to support academic activities that directly relate to developing an organization's key competencies. The Educational Leave Program is not an employee benefit, right or entitlement; it is a management program for workforce development.

## **20. Family & Medical Leave**

Family and Medical Leave (FML) provides up to 12 workweeks of paid or unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period for one of the following qualifying reasons:

- Birth and care for a newborn;
- Care for an adopted or foster child;
- Care for a child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition;

- A personal serious health condition that prevents the employee from performing one or more of the essential functions of the position;
- Because of any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the spouse or a son, daughter, or parent is a military member on covered active duty (or has been notified of an impending call or order to active duty) in support of a contingency operation; and
- An eligible employee who is the spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of a covered service member shall be entitled to a total of 26 workweeks of leave during a single 12-month period (commencing on the date the employee first takes leave) to care for a covered service member who has a serious injury or illness incurred while on active duty and for which he or she is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation or therapy; or otherwise in outpatient status; or on the temporary disability retired list.

All periods of paid leave or periods of unpaid leave (including leave without pay while drawing short-term disability benefits) count towards the 12 (or 26, as appropriate) workweeks to which the employee is entitled. This includes leave taken under the Voluntary Shared Leave Policy.

Eligibility:

- COSS Staff who have been employed for 12 months; and,
- Who have worked at least 1040 hours in the previous 12 months at another state of North Carolina agency or university;

To request FML, contact the Leave Coordinator and the employee's supervisor. FML for COSS employees is managed through the Extension Personnel Office utilizing Extension Personnel Forms. Employees must follow FML guidelines as directed by the Extension Personnel Leave Coordinator.

## 21. Family Illness Leave

Family Illness Leave (FIL) is provided for an employee to care for the employee's child, parent, or spouse when that child, spouse, or parent has a serious health condition. It is not available for the employee's illness.

Employees must exhaust their FML entitlement prior to utilizing benefits under the FIL policy. Employees cannot use intermittent FML and intermittent FIL concurrently.

An employee's eligibility for FIL is based on months of service and hours of work as of the date leave is to commence. An employee is eligible if:

- The employee's appointment is full-time, permanent, probationary, **OR**
- The employee is part-time (half-time or more), permanent, probationary **AND**

- The employee has 12 months total service with the State and has been in pay status at least 1040 hours during the previous 12 months.

An eligible employee (full-time or part-time) is entitled to up to 52 weeks of leave without pay during a 5-year period to care for the employee's seriously ill child, spouse, or parent. Although this leave is without pay, an employee may elect to cover some or all of the period of leave taken under this policy by using vacation, bonus, sick, or voluntary shared leave. Leave earned under the comp time policy may also be used.

To request FIL contact the Extension Leave Coordinator and the employee's supervisor.

## **22. Leave Without Pay**

Leave without pay may be granted to a permanent or probationary full- or part-time COSS employee for various reasons not otherwise covered in separate sections of this handbook. Leave without pay may be taken to cover periods of time not worked when all other leave is exhausted or for reasons not covered by other leave provisions.

Temporary, intermittent, or part-time (less than half-time) employees are not eligible for leave without pay.

Supervisors shall submit the employee's request to the District Extension Director first; the Director of County Operations is responsible for the final decision to grant leave without pay and the amount of time granted.

An employee must submit a written request for leave without pay to the employee's supervisor, including: reason for leave, date expected for beginning of leave, duration of leave and expected date to return to work. In addition, the employee will need to:

- Notify the supervisor in writing immediately if the conditions of the leave change; and
- Notify the supervisor of the intent to return 30 days prior to the expected date of the return

If the employee fails to give written notice of the intention to return, NC State Extension is not required to provide reinstatement, but may do so if feasible. Failure to report at the expiration of a leave, unless an extension has been requested and approved, will be considered a voluntary resignation.

While on leave without pay, an employee may select to continue benefits by paying the full premium for coverage. Please contact the Extension Benefits Coordinator for details. Some benefits cannot be continued, including:

- Accumulation of Vacation and Sick Leave;
- Retirement Contributions;
- Supplemental Retirement, 401(K), and
- Retirement Annuity, 403(b) and 457.

### **23. Military Leave**

COSS employees who are full-time or part-time (half-time or more), and who are permanent, probationary are eligible for Military Leave. Leave with pay, up to a maximum of 120 hours each federal fiscal year (Oct-Sept) (pro-rated for part-time employees) shall be granted to members of the uniformed services for:

- Active duty for training (annual training or special schools, including an authorized training program for the National Disaster Medical System).
- Inactive duty training (drills - usually on weekends).

If the drill is not scheduled on the employee's off-day, the employee has the option of requesting that the work schedule be rearranged, or the employee may use any unused portion of the 120 hours leave with pay, annual/bonus leave or leave without pay to cover the absence.

Additional military leave needed for training can be charged to annual/bonus leave or leave without pay at the discretion of the employee.

Application:

- Employee should provide notification to County Extension Director of upcoming duty and/or schedule changes as soon as known.
- Employee should present a copy of the orders received, which reflects the effective date of the military service obligation.
- For periods eligible for military leave with differential pay, the agency requires the employee to provide a copy of their Leave and Earnings Statement or similar document covering the period eligible for differential pay.
- The employee is responsible for advising the supervisor verbally or in writing the intention of returning for reinstatement within the time limits defined under USERRA. [https://benefits.hr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/military\\_leave.pdf](https://benefits.hr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/military_leave.pdf)

### **24. Sick Leave**

Sick leave allows an employee to cover personal illness, injury, or disability that prevents performance of usual duties. Full- and part-time permanent COSS employees, and probationary employees are eligible for sick leave.

Sick leave is earned at 8 hours per month for full-time permanent, probationary. Accruals will be prorated as a percentage of time for employees that work less than full time. Sick Leave accumulates indefinitely.

The supervisor may advance sick leave not to exceed what the employee can accumulate during the current calendar year. Employees may not carry over a negative sick leave balance into the next calendar year.

Sick leave may be used for:

- Illness or injury;
- Medical appointments;
- Temporary disability due to childbirth (also see FML section);
- Care for member of immediate family (including care for mother during temporary disability after childbirth);
- Death in immediate family;
- Donations to a member of the immediate family and non-family members who are approved to receive voluntary shared leave; and
- Adoption of a child, limited to a maximum of 30 days for each parent (which is equivalent to a biological mother's average period of disability).

**Note:** This is interpreted to mean at the time of physical possession of the child and have either adopted or are in the process of adoption.

All leave must be entered and tracked on the WolfTime System and requested in advance whenever possible. For information on who qualifies as immediate family, please contact the Extension Leave Coordinator.

## 25. Voluntary Shared Leave

The voluntary shared leave (VSL) policy allows one state employee to assist another state of N.C. employee affected by a personal or immediate family member's medical condition. These conditions require absence from work for a prolonged period of time, resulting in a possible loss of income due to a lack of accumulated leave.

Immediate family members may donate sick leave to shared leave participants. Immediate family members include spouse, child, parent, mother, father, sister, brother, grandparent, great grandparent, grandchild, and great-grandchildren or other dependents living in the household including step- and in-law relationships.

Non-family members may donate sick leave to shared leave participants. The specifications include: The donor cannot donate more than five days (40) hours of sick leave per year to any one non-family member. The combined yearly total of sick leave donated to a participant from non-family member donors may not

exceed 20 days (160) hours. Donated sick leave shall not be used for retirement purposes.

COSS employees may qualify for the VSL if they meet the following criteria:

- Has serious and prolonged medical conditions requiring absence from work for at least 20 consecutive days. [Note- If the employee has had random absences for the same condition or has had a previous, but different prolonged medical condition within the last 12 months, an exception to the 20-day period may be made];
- Apply or be nominated to the shared leave program;
- Submit the Certification of Healthcare Provider for Employee's Serious Health Condition or family member form. These forms are available from the Extension Leave Coordinator;
- The applicant's sick and annual leave balances combined are 160 hours or less;
- An employee who has received formal disciplinary action for abuse of leave within the previous 12 months is not eligible.

Applicants should discuss the situation with their supervisor and the Extension Leave Coordinator to be sure they are eligible for voluntary shared leave. Employees should then:

- Contact the Extension Leave Coordinator to request necessary forms; and,
- Submit the forms to their supervisor and the Extension Leave Coordinator for verification of current leave balances. If approved for participation in the Voluntary Shared Leave program, the Extension Leave Coordinator will advertise for a total of 15 days. At the close of the advertisement period, the Extension Leave Coordinator will notify the county contact of the total number of donated hours the employee has received.

The amount of leave a recipient may receive is 1,040 hours (pro-rated for part-time employees), either continuously or, if for the same condition, on a recurring basis. Management may grant continuation, on a month-to-month basis, to a maximum of 2,080 hours.

## **26. Attendance at Extension Professional Association Meetings**

All COSS employees are encouraged to become members of and actively participate in their district and state level Extension professional associations. To support this involvement, COSS employees are provided guaranteed amounts of time to dedicate to these activities.

COSS employees are granted four (4) approved days per calendar year for attending authorized district meetings. One (1) additional day will be granted for member COSS employees to attend the state conferences, if this day is needed for travel based on the location of the meeting. Officers will be granted two (2) additional days per year to facilitate officer duties.

All requests for travel time and reimbursement must be submitted to and approved by the CED in advance of travel. Employees must be in good standing otherwise, as deemed by their supervisor, to attend such meetings.

These provisions are not paid leave, have no cash or payout value, and do not carry over from year to year. They may not be utilized for other purposes of any kind. They are given in whole day increments; therefore, if the meeting takes only a portion of the day, as indicated by the approved agenda, then all non-work hours or hours not approved as business-related must be charged to other leave available to the employee under other leave provisions.

## **27. Worker's Compensation**

The purpose of the program is to ensure that all eligible employees who experience a work related injury or illness receive appropriate medical care and equitable benefits as provided under the Workers' Compensation Act.

Workers' Compensation will be administered pursuant to N.C. General Statute 97. As such, the County will provide full and direct coverage for those employees subject to the County Workers' Compensation insurance. Counties will maintain workers' compensation coverage for all COSS administrative positions and for all Program Assistants/Associates who are not funded by directly- allocated federal funds such as EFNEP, or Program Assistants/Associates who are paid in part by EFNEP funds but which account for less than 50% funding.

In the case of a life-threatening accident or injury, employees should, immediately contact **911**.

In the case of a non-life threatening accident or injury, employees should notify a supervisor or manager immediately. The supervisor or manager will assess the situation, help arrange for proper medical care and begin the injury reporting process. It is important to report a work-related injury, accident or illness immediately. All work related accidents or injuries need to be reported to the Extension Leave Coordinator as soon as possible. The Extension Leave Coordinator will provide reporting procedures and forms needed.

State Health Plan coverage may continue while on Workers' Compensation. The employer's monthly contribution continues to be paid by the University; however,

the employee must pay premiums for their portion and dependent coverage to the University.

Retirement contributions stop while an employee is on workers' compensation leave. An employee who is a member of the State Retirement System may purchase credit for the period of time on an approved leave. For more information, please contact the Extension Benefits Coordinator.

Annual and sick leave continue to accrue while covered by Worker's Compensation and are credited for use upon the employee's return to work. If an employee does not return to work, vacation and sick leave accumulated during the first twelve months of leave should be paid in a lump sum along with other unused vacation credit. The payout of the vacation leave may exceed the 240 hours normally allowed.

Upon returning to work, salary will be computed based on the last salary plus any legislative increases to which the employee is entitled upon reinstatement. Any performance increases that would have been granted had the employee been at work may also be included in the reinstatement salary, or it may be given on any payment date following reinstatement.

Employees continue to receive longevity credit and, if eligible, receive annual payments.

Depending upon the benefit plan, coverage may continue through direct pay to the vendor or payroll. Please contact the Extension Leave Coordinator for further information.

## **28. COSS Workforce Reduction**

As a result of the unique partnership nature of NC State Extension, adjustments in the staffing patterns among COSS staff may require more flexibility for the expeditious adjustment to changing financial needs of various local governments. The Director of County Operations, in consultation with the local partner, has the responsibility and authority to separate COSS employees according to this policy.

A Workforce Reduction (WR) may occur as a result of shortages in work; budget deficits; loss of local funding; reorganizations; elimination of programs, services, grants, or contracts. A WR can also occur when a position changes so significantly that an employee is no longer qualified or able to perform the required duties.



This WR Policy applies to any COSS employee who is no longer in probationary status.

Severance payment calculations for COSS employees are designed to be consistent with the practices of our local partners. The WR Policy provides for the following:

Severance Pay based on length-of-service as an employee in a North Carolina state agency State employee:

<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Continuation Period</b>
Less than 1 year	2 weeks base salary
1 but less than 5 years	1 month base salary
5 but less than 10 years	2 months base salary
10 but less than 20 years	3 months base salary
20 or more years	4 months base salary

Employees will be paid out for accrued Annual Leave paid in lump sum up to 240 hours and any accrued Legislative Bonus Leave paid in lump sum up to maximum allowed.

The State and County will continue to pay health insurance premiums for up to twelve months for employees with twelve or more months of service who are separated due to WR. These employees may continue to pay for spouse and/or dependent children coverage. At the end of the twelve-month period, the employees may begin paying for their own coverage as well as the coverage for spouse and/or dependent children indefinitely via direct billing with the State Health Plan.

Employees can access counseling services through the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FASAP), including employment assistance and benefit counselors.

The period covered by severance pay is not credited for state service or retirement service.

Employees may continue to receive severance pay while working outside of state or county government or in a temporary capacity. Severance payment is discontinued once re-employment is obtained within state, county or tribal

government. If a county agrees to pay an employee 100% via the county payroll, the employee will not receive benefits under the WR policy.

A COSS employee affected by a WR has the right to appeal the separation, but only on the following grounds:

- Unlawful discrimination in selection for WR; or
- Retaliation, including against whistleblowers, in selection for WR.

The appeal must be received in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Dean's office within ten (10) business days of the affected COSS employee's receipt of the WR Notification.

## **29. COSS Resignation Policy**

Any COSS employee terminating employment with NC State Extension is expected to give written working notice to their supervisor at least two (2) weeks prior to the last intended workday. Employees are expected to work during the notice period.

Preapproved leave will not be considered part of the working notice. As is normally the case, any request for annual leave during this notice will be subject to management's discretion.

Failure to provide adequate notice will be documented in the employee's personnel file and may impact eligibility for rehire with the University.

Job abandonment will result in immediate separation from employment. Job abandonment is defined as failure to report to work 3 or more work days in a row with no notification to the supervisor.

## **30. Absenteeism & Tardiness Policy**

Good attendance habits form an integral part of every employee's job and are essential job functions. Among other things, good attendance means:

- Reporting to work at the designated time;
- Being at the work station ready for work by the start of the work day;

- Remaining at the work station unless the needs of the job require being elsewhere, except during authorized breaks (including restroom breaks);
- Remaining at work until the scheduled end of the work day, unless excused by a supervisor;
- Leaving promptly at the end of the work day, unless given advanced permission from the supervisor to work past that point; and
- Contacting your supervisor or designee if you are going to be either absent or tardy, unless a verifiable emergency makes it impossible for you to do so.

**Tardiness:** All employees are expected to be at their assigned work location at the start of their workday. Employees who are not at their workstation at the scheduled start time of the workday will be considered tardy without prior management approval. This includes reporting at the beginning of a workday, returning from meal and/or other breaks. Tardiness is defined as a brief unexcused absence from assigned work and may occur in increments as small as 5 minutes, and includes leaving early prior to the end of a shift. Calling your supervisor immediately before the workday starts will be considered as tardy. Excessive tardiness can result in disciplinary action.

**Excessive absenteeism** occurs when one or more trends of absenteeism are apparent, such as:

- A pattern of unscheduled absences; or
- Repeatedly leaving work early or arriving late.

**Chronic/Excessive Absenteeism:** Chronic absenteeism occurs when an employee utilizes leave in excess of accrued time and/or frequently takes time off without advance approval. Excessive absenteeism refers to being out more often than what is routinely considered normal. Although not clearly defined by a specific number of days allowed, it often is demonstrated by the patterns listed in the definition above.

Employees unable to report to work at their scheduled starting time must notify their supervisor and state the reason for being late or absent prior to the start of the shift. It is the responsibility of the employee to make contact with the supervisor or other designated individual before the beginning of the work shift. Messages from a spouse or other representative are discouraged unless the employee is rendered unable to call.

Excessive absenteeism or tardiness will be addressed by supervisors and may be grounds for disciplinary action. The supervisor will notify an employee when attendance is approaching unsatisfactory levels, and the supervisor will begin the disciplinary process if there is not an immediate improvement in attendance. Individual performance appraisals will reflect attendance.

Personal time off or non-urgent appointments should be arranged in advance whenever possible and considered planned absences. The supervisor should approve requests for time off in advance.

### **31. COSS Disciplinary Policy**

The purpose of this section is to provide written guidelines covering some of the more serious or specific problems regarding employee activities, practices, or conduct, which could lead to disciplinary action. Any questions regarding interpretation or application of the COSS Disciplinary Policy should be referred to the Extension Personnel office.

There are three categories upon which disciplinary action may be administered:

**Unsatisfactory Job Performance:** Work-related performance that fails to satisfactorily meet job requirements as set out in the relevant job description, work plan, provisions within this handbook or as reasonably directed by management.

- Cases of unsatisfactory job performance can result in a verbal warning or a written warning. These can lead to dismissal depending on the severity of the situation and with consultation from Extension Personnel. An employee may be dismissed from employment after other disciplinary measures have failed and/or when an incident warrants it.

**Unacceptable Personal Conduct,** including but not limited to:

- Conduct for which no reasonable person should expect to receive prior warning; or
- Job-related conduct which constitutes a violation of State or federal law; or
- Conviction of a felony or an offense involving moral turpitude that is detrimental to or impacts the employee's service; or
- Conduct unbecoming of an employee that is detrimental to State service, including insubordination; or
- The abuse of animals over whom the employee has charge or to whom the employee has a responsibility; or

- Absence from work without notifying the supervisor and/or after all authorized leave has been exhausted; or
- Negative leave balances causing payroll adjustments; or
- Falsification of an employment application or other University records.

Unacceptable personal conduct also pertains to all University-affiliated resources managed or owned by an external entity. If a University employee's responsibilities require the routine use of resources (e.g., computer applications, equipment, facilities) of an external entity, and the employee's ability or approval to use the resource(s) is (are) terminated by the external entity due to the action of the employee, the employee will be subject to this disciplinary policy's processes up to and including dismissal.

**Gross Inefficiency:** Failure to satisfactorily perform job requirements as set out in the job description, work plan, or as directed by management; and, the act or failure to act causes or results in:

- Death or serious bodily injury or creates conditions that increase the chance of death or serious bodily injury to an employee or a member of the public, or to a person for whom the employee has responsibility; or
- Failure to obtain or maintain legally required certificates, licenses, bonds or other credentials for the employee's position; or
- The loss/misuse of or damage to state/county/tribal property or funds or to those of an Extension client.

In cases of Unsatisfactory Job Performance and Gross Inefficiency, disciplinary actions can include a written warning, personal improvement plan or further action up to and including dismissal. An employee may be dismissed at any time without regard for any progressive steps if he/she commits an offense for which immediate dismissal is specified and/or warranted. Before a demotion or dismissal of any COSS employee, the supervisor is required to consult with Extension Personnel.

There are four types of disciplinary action. Below are the potential levels of disciplinary action that can be used in any order to fit the given circumstances. Those actions are:

- Verbal Warning;
- Written Warning;
- Suspension Without Pay: A suspension without pay may be issued when it is determined that the incident warrants action more severe than a warning but less severe than a demotion or dismissal. Before a suspension without pay may be issued for any COSS employee, the

supervisor is required to schedule a pre-disciplinary consultation with Extension Personnel;

- Demotion or Dismissal: An employee may be dismissed from employment after other disciplinary measures have failed and/or when an incident warrants it. An employee may be dismissed at any time without regard for any progressive steps if he/she commits an offense for which immediate dismissal is specified and/or warranted. Before a demotion or dismissal of any COSS employee, the supervisor is required to schedule a pre-disciplinary consultation with Extension Personnel.

The following are grievable issues for COSS employees:

- Overall performance rating of less than meets expectations;
- Denial of veteran's preference;
- Actions under the NC Whistle Blower Act [NC Gen Stat. 126-84](#)
- Lack of cause for suspension, demotion or dismissal;
- Items covered in the University's AA/EEO statement which promote diversity and inclusion but not within the definition of unlawful discrimination, harassment or retaliation as contained in NCGS 126-34.02(b) (1) and (2).

### **32. Conflict Resolution**

Problems, misunderstandings and frustrations may arise in the workplace. It is NC State Extension's intent to be responsive to its employees and their concerns. Therefore, an employee who is experiencing problems may use the procedure described below to resolve or clarify his or her concerns.

Our goal as an organization is to encourage positive and open employee dialogues in order to resolve disagreements or conflicts at the lowest level possible.

#### Procedures

##### Step 1: Informal discussion with supervisor

Initially, an employee should bring his/her concern or complaint to his/her immediate supervisor. The employee should make an appointment to meet with the supervisor within five (5) working days of the date the incident occurred.

The supervisor should respond in writing to the complaint within five (5) working days of the meeting held with the employee.

## Step 2: Written complaint and decision

If the discussion with the supervisor does not resolve the problem to the mutual satisfaction of the employee and the supervisor, or if the supervisor does not respond to the complaint, the employee may submit a written complaint to their District Extension Director (DED). The DED should forward a copy of the complaint to the Extension Personnel Coordinator.

The submission of the written complaint is due within five (5) working days of the response from the supervisor. The complaint must include:

- The problem and the date when the incident occurred.
- Suggestions on ways to resolve the problem.
- A copy of the supervisor's written response or a summary or his/her verbal response and the date when the employee met with the supervisor. If the supervisor supplied no response, the complaint should state this.

Upon receipt of the formal complaint, the DED must schedule a meeting with the employee within ten (10) working days to discuss the complaint. Within five (5) days after the discussion, the DED should issue a written decision to the employee filing the complaint.

## Step 3: Appeal of the decision

If the employee is dissatisfied with the decision of the DED, the employee may, within five (5) working days, appeal this decision in writing to the Extension Personnel Coordinator.

The Extension Personnel Coordinator may call a meeting with the parties directly involved to facilitate a resolution. All individuals involved, other than representatives of Extension Personnel, are prohibited from discussing the situation with any other employee or with the complaining employee.

## Additional Guidance

If an employee fails to appeal from one level to the next of this procedure within the time limits set forth above, the problem shall be considered settled on the basis of the last decision, and the problem will not be subject to further consideration.

Since problems are best resolved on an individual basis, the conflict resolution procedure may be initiated only by individual employees and not by groups of employees. All complaints must be made in good faith.

NC State Extension reserves the right to impose appropriate disciplinary action for any conduct it considers to be disruptive or inappropriate. The circumstances of each situation may differ, and the level of disciplinary action may vary, depending on factors such as the nature of the offense, whether it was repeated, the employee's work record and the impact of the conduct on the organization.

No NC State Extension employee will be subject to retaliation for filing a complaint under this policy.

### **33. Complaints Alleging Discrimination**

A COSS employee wishing to file an internal complaint alleging discrimination prohibited in the University's Nondiscrimination Policy should contact the University's Office for Institutional Equity & Diversity (OIED). Any grievance or complaint that alleges unlawful discrimination, harassment or retaliation shall be addressed and completed through the university Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Informal Inquiry process before being considered in the formal internal grievance process. Contact information for OIED is as follows:

Office for Institutional Equity & Diversity  
NC State University  
231 Winslow Hall  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7530  
919.515.3148  
<http://oied.ncsu.edu/oied>

The complainant alleging unlawful discrimination, harassment or retaliation has the right, at any time, to bypass or discontinue the EEO Informal Inquiry process or the formal internal grievance process and file a charge directly with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).



Information about filing an EEOC charge and deadlines for filing the charge can be found at: <http://www.eeoc.gov/employees/charge.cfm> or by calling the EEOC regional offices located in Raleigh, Greensboro and Charlotte at 800.669.4000.

Information about filing through the Civil Rights Division of the Office of Administrative Hearings can be found at: [www.ncoah.com/civil](http://www.ncoah.com/civil) or by calling 919-431-3036.

### **34. Other Resources**

Contact numbers for Extension Personnel:

Personnel Coordinator – 919.515.1382

Benefits Coordinator – 919.515.1383

Leave and Employment Coordinator – 919.515.1377

NC State University Policies, Regulations & Rules: <https://policies.ncsu.edu>

**NOTICE: All policies are subject to periodic amendments or updates. Please refer to the Extension Personnel Office if you have any policy questions or concerns.**