

August 1, 2013

## **UTIA Advisory Council Recommendations for Improvement of Employee Orientation and Communications**

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the UTIA Advisory Council by George A. Henry, Chair.

### **Introduction**

Chancellor Arrington requested recommendations from the UTIA Advisory Council for improving new employee orientation and enhancing employee communications which were identified as areas of concern on the 2011 Employee Engagement Survey.

The UTIA Advisory Council, with the addition of 6 staff representatives, reviewed the 2011 Employee Engagement Survey Summary and additional information provided by Dr. Herb Byrd at the fall 2012 meeting. Solicitation of information from council members and employees in different units of UTIA was followed by discussions by the council during the spring 2013 meeting. The following recommendations and comments are presented based on council discussions and input from individual council members.

### **ITEM 1 - Orientation**

Information gathered by the council indicates new employee orientation content and schedule is currently developed by the employee's unit or department. Each employee is routinely sent to UTK main campus human resources for orientation concerning general university policies, benefits and payroll issues including insurance. A large variation was found in the content, detail and method of delivery of each individual unit/department orientation. There is currently no defined overall UTIA-based orientation for new employees.

Discussions by the council resulted in a consensus that the orientation should go beyond general job benefits, university policy and specific job performance details. An informative exposure to UTIA's history, goals and work ethics should be presented to promote acculturation into the Institute. The council believes there is currently a lack of new employee exposure to the UTIA culture and that inclusion of this information will positively impact employee "buy in" as an important member of the UTIA "family". The employee and the Institute both benefit when the new employee understands that they are part of a larger group of individuals working toward some larger, common goals. The overall objective of the orientation should be to provide the employee with the tools, knowledge and support to produce a desire to perform their job duties to the best of their ability. An employee that believes in the goals of their organization and feels they can contribute in a

meaningful way will be more committed and productive, and have a better sense of accomplishment and higher job satisfaction.

**Recommendation: Provide structured ½ to 1 day UTIA orientation for new employees.**

The methods of presentation for this orientation should vary to hopefully engage the interest of the employees and not be a “boring PowerPoint” presentation. Short “formal” presentations could be interspersed with breakout sessions with a “job-fair”-like approach allowing the employees to meet and obtain information from individuals in areas of interest to them. Example areas represented could include representatives from the library, research foundation, human resources, information technology, extension, career ladder program, and teaching and learning center. These should not be limited to UTIA only entities but include main campus areas as well. Cultural resources should be included such as the McClung Museum, Clarence Brown Theatre, UT Gardens and other campus organizations available to UTK employees. This allows interaction on a one-to-one personal basis promoting the new employee’s connections with individuals, organizations and university entities that can provide them with the specific information and support which will be most likely to enhance their personal experience and productivity. Some light refreshments available during this time may reinforce a more relaxed, informal atmosphere.

In an effort to promote the culture of the UTIA for new employees, the following items of information are suggested as content for the UTIA orientation:

1. An informative, entertaining presentation on the land-grant mission, current relevance, UTIA history with tie-ins to UTK history and traditions should be presented as an overview of UTIA and the University. Care must be taken that this presentation is given by someone capable of presenting the material in a reasonably short time and in an enthusiastic and entertaining format. Pictures showing interesting progression of the campus etc. could be utilized to give a sense of the history of the UTK main and agricultural campuses.
2. Roles of the four units of the UTIA (CASNR, AgResearch, UT Extension, CVM) and how they integrate with UTIA.
3. Research and Education Centers - what they do and where they are.
4. County extension system and roles of the agents and integration with UTIA
5. Services that help faculty and staff with teaching and grant application writing. Separate sessions for an hour or so might be suggested for presentations of resources and support for aspects of faculty interest involving the tenure process, grant development and teaching support. Staff employees could be presented with resources for training and career advancement.
6. Go-to people and explanation of administrative divisions to help the individual understand where they fit in the UTIA structure. Individuals

should be supplied with a handout with specific information relevant to their position or category.

7. Interacting with the main campus - what is there and what is available.

The information may be presented in the form of short “PowerPoint” talks. Additional, more specific information should be available to the employee in a break-out session. Representatives from the different areas and organizations should be available at this time to answer questions and provide a contact for follow-up information and support.

In addition, development of informational websites/orientation modules to provide new employees with timely answers to policy questions. These could also provide contact information for areas of individual interest (for example, grant development and submission, career development, cultural events on campus etc.) However, a live UTIA orientation should remain the means to provide a more personal “welcome” into the UTIA “family” and to foster a perception of belonging and being an important member of the UTIA community.

The timing of these orientations should be based around the times in the year in which the largest numbers of new employees are hired as determined by human resources. The “job fair” format will require significant planning and scheduling and two sessions per year may be all that can be presented initially. Preferably, the UTIA orientation would be presented within no more than six months of a new hire.

Multiple comments were received from new employees that indicated some of the current orientation is overwhelming and confusing. Suggestions were made to provide a contact person within the employee’s unit/college for further guidance/assistance following the UTK orientation. Multiple council members suggested that a mentor or a summary list of contact people within UTIA be provided by the employee’s unit or department immediately following the UTK orientation to assist the new employee in understanding and evaluating benefits, insurance, etc. This information would assist the new employee immediately.

Currently, as far as was ascertained by members of the committee, there is no survey or evaluation instrument in place to gather data on the new employee orientation experience and its perceived value. Continued improvement of the total orientation package must include some form of feedback from the new employees.

**Recommendation: Develop survey to be completed by new employees 1-3 months following orientation on what aspects of the orientation were considered useful or non-useful to provide data for improving the orientation over time.**

Input from new employees following orientation is considered a critical step for providing input for continued revision and improvement of the orientation process for UTIA employees. Appendix A lists some suggested questions for a post-

orientation survey. Human resources should develop a final version of a survey and review responses. The timing of the post-orientation survey should allow the employee time to acclimate to their new position. A better perspective on the positives and negatives of their orientation experience is more likely than immediately following orientation.

## **ITEM 2 - Communications**

Review of the information provided by the Employee Engagement Survey was found to be too general in nature to provide sufficient information for specific recommendations for improvement of communications. The survey did not provide information concerning what levels of the university structure were deficient or what forms of communication the employees preferred. The council discussion was limited on this issue due to the lack of detailed data leaving multiple issues with a scope too broad for development of specific recommendations. Communication issues likely vary greatly in the type and depth of information useful to the employee as well as the method of communication.

**Recommendation: Human Resources should develop a questionnaire / survey for distribution to UTIA employees to obtain more specific data on areas of communication in need of improvement and preferred methods of information distribution.**

Appendix B is a listing of suggested specific questions thought to provide meaningful information for targeting of communication improvements for specific groups of employees. The council was in agreement that a survey instrument is best developed and administered by those with appropriate expertise in surveys.

**APPENDIX A**

**Suggested questions for post-orientation survey of new employees.**

What would be the most important thing you would recommend be changed or included in new employee orientation to make it better?

How would you rate the quality of your orientation at the following levels.

<u>UT Knoxville Orientation</u>	Circle Appropriate number				
	Poor		Good		Excellent
• Quality/Useful	1	2	3	4	5
• Time/Duration	1	2	3	4	5

What was useful in your orientation?

What was not useful in your orientation?

What would you change?

How long should it be?

What subjects should be added or deleted?

What format should it take?

<u>UTIA Orientation</u>	Circle Appropriate number				
	Poor		Good		Excellent
• Quality/Useful	1	2	3	4	5
• Time/Duration	1	2	3	4	5

What was useful in your orientation?

What was not useful in your orientation?

What would you change?

How long should it be?

What subjects should be added or deleted?

What format should it take?

<u>College/Unit</u>	Circle Appropriate number				
	Poor		Good		Excellent
• Quality/Useful	1	2	3	4	5
• Time/Duration	1	2	3	4	5

What was useful in your orientation?

What was not useful in your orientation?

What would you change?

How long should it be?

What subjects should be added or deleted?

What format should it take?

<u>Department</u>	Circle Appropriate number				
	Poor		Good		Excellent
• Quality/Useful	1	2	3	4	5
• Time/Duration	1	2	3	4	5

What was useful in your orientation?

What was not useful in your orientation?

What would you change?

How long should it be?

What subjects should be added or deleted?

What format should it take?

Additional general comments:

**APPENDIX B  
Communications**

**Suggested questions for survey targeted to potential communication deficiencies and employee preferences for type of communication.**

In your opinion what can we do to most improve UTIA communication?

What information do you receive from the following sources that you do not want or need or that irritates you the most?

UT Knoxville

UTIA

College/Unit

Department

What information do you want that is not provided from the following?

UT Knoxville

UTIA

College/Unit

Department

Do you find policies and procedures easily available for your review/guidance?

Circle One

UT Knoxville      Yes    No

UTIA                Yes    No

College/Unit      Yes    No

Department        Yes    No

What form do you prefer for communication/information from the following sources?

UT Knoxville      Circle Preferred Method  
Web Page    Email    Meeting    Personal Contact



Other \_\_\_\_\_

UTIA                      Web Page    Email    Meeting    Personal Contact

Other \_\_\_\_\_

College/Unit            Web Page    Email    Meeting    Personal Contact

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Department            Web Page    Email    Meeting    Personal Contact

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Additional general comments: