

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

UI Extension educators establish statewide poverty competency task force

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension established a Poverty Competency Task Force to incorporate poverty-informed practices into programming and offer training to organizations, agencies and communities.

The Situation

Forty-three percent of Idahoans earn incomes that do not meet a basic survival budget, suggesting that University of Idaho Extension professionals are regularly engaging with many community members who are living under the weight of poverty. It is important for organizations, agencies and communities to be poverty-informed to challenge widespread myths and stereotypes about people experiencing poverty. By fostering a deeper understanding of the realities they face, we can create more effective policies, programs and attitudes that genuinely address their needs and promote meaningful solutions. The University of Idaho Extension's mission is to improve people's lives by engaging the university and our communities through research-based education. To fulfill their mission, Extension educators must base their work on facts and research. When organizations and communities take the time to understand poverty from a more informed and evidence-based perspective, they can create meaningful systems that address root causes rather than just symptoms. With commitment to this approach, University of Idaho Extension's efforts can help build a healthier and more equitable society.



Poverty Coach Maureen Toomey presents a one-hour poverty competency training to 4-H AmeriCorps volunteers in 2024.

Our Response

In December 2022, UI Extension educators prepared for the Implementation Phase of the Extension Collaborative on Immunization Teaching and Engagement (EXCITE) project by completing Dr. Donna Beegle's poverty coach certification course. As poverty coaches, the team would provide poverty competency training to public health district partners and guide staff in the application of those strategies to immunization education and outreach. Dr. Beegle's training proved to be transformative for the Extension educators. They immediately began considering the value of a poverty-informed Extension system and what it might take to reach that goal.

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Lindsey McConnell-Soong, EXCITE program manager, and Joey Peutz, Extension educator for Payette County, sought to expand the value and impact of poverty competency beyond a single grant project and to effect true systems-level change. They proposed a plan to train additional colleagues from across the state as Beegle certified poverty coaches and subsequently form a UI Extension Poverty Competency Task Force. McConnell-Soong and Peutz received a \$10,000 2023 Innovative Project Award to implement the plan. Eleven UI Extension professionals were invited to complete Dr. Beegle's four-day intensive training course to earn their coaching certification. Participants were asked to complete a Poverty Competency Assessment for one of their programs and maintain active membership in the newly formed Poverty Competency Task Force.

All eleven professionals completed a poverty coaching course between March and December 2023. In addition to the three coaches initially trained for the EXCITE project, this resulted in a total of 14 certified poverty coaches across the state, with at least two in each of the four UI Extension districts.

Program Outcomes

Monthly Poverty Competency Task Force meetings began in August 2023 and continue presently. Primary goals of the task force include:

- Encourage and facilitate continued conversations about poverty that are based on evidence and reliable research.
- Facilitate professional development for Extension staff and external partners across all areas of study, serving as a supportive resource for the application of poverty-informed practices.
- Support the integration of poverty-informed frameworks into Extension programming.

As the task force became established, it was also able to address inquiries received from community health

partners who had heard about the poverty competency training from the EXCITE project. Task force members collaborated to adapt the EXCITE trainings into four workshop templates of varying lengths for general audiences. Responding only to direct requests, and with no formal promotion, task force members were invited to provide poverty competency training to over 300 participants from 14 internal and external partners throughout 2023 and 2024. It is evident from the consistent level of interest expressed that poverty competency training is highly valuable and in great demand from our community partners. UI Extension's programs such as Eat Smart Idaho, Digital Economy Program and 4-H AmeriCorps have integrated poverty competency training into their annual professional development plans.

By embracing poverty-informed practices, organizations can develop policies that remove barriers rather than reinforce them. When multiple community partners integrate these practices, the results move beyond outcomes and into far reaching impacts.

UI Extension Poverty Coaches

Poverty Coach	County
Kari Ure	Bear Lake
Leslee Blanch	Bonneville
Tasha Howard	Canyon
Lindsey McConnell-Soong	Canyon
Grace Wittman	Cassia
Laura Sant	Franklin
Shelly Johnson	Kootenai
Annie Roe	Latah
Katie Hoffman-McFarland	Lemhi
Kathee Tifft	Nez Perce
Joey Peutz	Payette
Siew Guan Lee	Twin Falls

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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