What are Technical Liaison and Support Personnel?

These are personnel who are usually specialized by disciplines or commodities, who are concerned with the quantity and quality of technology to be disseminated by extension. Some are vertical specialists, such as commodity specialists; others work on systems, such as farm management specialists. Still others cut across commodities, such as engineers. All are concerned with subject matter availability, with its accuracy, its applicability, putting it into useful forms, program development, supporting other elements of the system, evaluating impact, and feeding problems to research. Such personnel will give about equal attention to interacting with research personnel and to preparing information and instructing the field extension staff in its use. In summary, while they are not supervisors, these support personnel must be concerned with all aspects of acquiring and moving information through the extension system and getting it applied by farmers. Hence the job description must be flexible so that problems can be dealt with on an individual basis.

It is the responsibility of TL&S staff to close the functional gap shown in Figure 1.

What are some of the competencies that should be stressed?

Technical liaison and support personnel are difficult to find because they need to be educated so that they can be respected by researchers and interact with them on research activities. Ideally, they should have the same type of training as researchers, plus instruction in teaching techniques, methods, and adult education. It is important that they also have better than average speaking and writing skills.

They must also have an in-depth understanding of the practical aspects of farming. They must understand the farming systems of farmers in a given area and why farmers are using them. They must be at home in setting out demonstrations and in consulting with field agents and farmers about problems in their fields. This practical understanding is especially important in situations in which practical knowledge of farming and farmers is not adequate among new employees.

What are the specific tasks to be covered in the job description?

A summary of the main aspects follows:

Technical liaison and support personnel are not administrative supervisors of field staff. This assignment should be carried by an administrative officer. TL&S personnel instruct, prepare materials and programs, and assist the field agent in using the material accurately and wisely. Hence, it is important the TL&S personnel travel with agents to farms periodically.