

Committee Meetings

Productive committee meetings are essential in maintaining the interest and support of members. The committee members will appreciate your leadership when meetings are well organized, have a worthwhile purpose, and accomplish what needs doing in a reasonable amount of time. A good meeting must be planned in advance. That is part of your job. Remember, the Extension agents will help you in planning.

Planning the Meeting

Not every meeting requires extensive planning, but most meetings are successful when details have been carefully thought out. What should happen before the meeting ever takes place? Several weeks before a meeting, visit with your Extension agents to begin plans. Consider the following points:

- Agree on the purpose of the meeting and what should be accomplished.
- Identify two or three dates (including starting time) from which members can choose.
- Arrange for a convenient meeting place where members will be comfortable.
- Make a preliminary agenda (list the things you want to discuss and accomplish).
- Plan to involve members (give a report on a situation, contact a resource person, lead discussion on a topic, etc.). Assigning members tasks before and during meetings is an efficient way to conduct committee

work. You will find it easier to maintain their interest when they help perform tasks.

- Identify needed resources (written materials, resource persons).

Before finalizing the meeting plan, contact each committee member. Explain that you are planning a meeting and need their advice. Ask them their choice for the meeting date. In addition, tell the purpose of meeting and ask if they have any suggestions to add to the agenda. Explain any meeting tasks you want them to do.

After you have talked to all the members, set the meeting date and finalize the agenda. When members have been involved in this way, they are more likely to attend, actively participate in decision making and exhibit enthusiasm. Everyone enjoys being a part of something they have been involved in planning.

Your county Extension agent can notify members by letter or e-mail to announce the meeting date and other details. Each member should receive a copy of the finalized agenda.

Conducting the Meeting

Before the meeting begins, make sure the room is comfortable, and arrange chairs, and tables so members face each other. Have materials and equipment available (chalkboard, notepads, etc.). Greet members as they arrive.

You are now ready for the meeting to begin. Following are some tips to help ensure that the meeting goes as planned:

- Call the meeting to order on time.
- The committee chair presides at the meeting, but you should not do all the talking. Give members the opportunity to express their thoughts on each topic.
- Keep a record of decisions and plans. This can be assigned to another member ahead of time.
- Set a relaxed atmosphere by being informal but business-like. Members tend to act or react according to the tone set by the chair. Use the agenda. Make sure each member has a copy.
- Present each topic on the agenda. Some topics will require a committee decision. After a decision has been reached, repeat it so that everyone understands.
- Keep the meeting moving so that you complete the agenda in the allotted time.
- Near the end of the meeting, summarize what has been decided.
- Announce plans for the next meeting.
- Express your appreciation for each member's participation.
- Adjourn the meeting at the designated time.
- Keep in touch with members who accepted assignments. Offer assistance when needed.
- Contact members who did not attend. Share what was accomplished at the meeting.
- Send a written summary of the meeting to all members. The Extension agent can help in this effective way of communicating with everyone. The summary also serves as a reminder to those who volunteered to carry out a task.
- Keep people informed about your committee's activities, especially those who need to understand and support your committee's goals. Report your committee's plans and activities to other groups.
 - Report committee accomplishments to the overall council. You are a member of the council because you are a committee chair. One of the council's functions is to coordinate and support the work of its committees.
 - Report accomplishments to the County Extension Council at the annual meeting.
 - Keep the public informed through mass media.

Following Through After the Meeting

You had a good meeting! The members did their part and the meeting accomplished its purpose. Now follow through on any tasks to be done after the meeting. Usually you will:

- Evaluate the meeting. Did the meeting go as you planned? Did most members attend? Could anything be done differently next time to improve attendance or the meeting itself?

Maintain an Active Membership

Keeping the committee active is an important task of the committee chair. Everyone needs to feel important. Express appreciation to members for their help and contributions. An active committee makes your job more enjoyable.

New members will be needed as individual terms expire. The County Extension Council has standing rules that should be followed in

selecting new members. You should alert the council when new members are needed. Help identify and recommend new members. Contacting them directly and asking them to serve assures that new members are involved early in the committee's work.

Summary

Program area and issue committees are created by the County Extension Council. They are vital to the Council's effectiveness in

providing Extension educational programs that meet people's needs. The committee's role includes planning the educational program, helping implement the program, evaluating the results and reporting the committee's accomplishments. As committee chair, you take the lead in planning and conducting meetings. You organize the committee's work so that members are involved. And you work closely with Extension agents to see that your committee succeeds.