

# Program Area or Issue Committee

## Welcome to Your Committee!

Congratulations on becoming a member of the County Extension Council! You have been selected to serve on one of the Council's program area or issue committees. You were chosen because of your concern for people and your willingness to help people improve themselves and the community in which they live. You are viewed as someone who can help "get things done." As a member of your committee, you will be representing the views of other people where you live as well as those in the entire county.

The County Extension Council, in cooperation with county Extension agents, provides leadership in "Extension education" in the county. The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service is in a unique position to help Arkansans apply research-based information to improve their lives. Your participation on the County Extension Council makes you part of a dynamic system of education – one that can help bring the resources of the university to the people in your county!

## It's Stimulating and Rewarding

Serving on the committee will be a stimulating and rewarding experience! Here's how:

- People in your community will recognize you as one who holds a position of leadership that can help them and their

families. They will rely on you to communicate their concerns and needs to the committee.

- You will meet and get to know people from other parts of the county and from other organizations that serve on the overall Council.
- You will also have opportunities to work with experts in their subject areas, such as Extension specialists and other resource people from your county and region of the state.
- One of your most rewarding experiences will be seeing people benefit from educational activities that your committee sponsors. Perhaps you'll see agricultural producers helped with new ways to increase their profits, a community improve its facilities and services to residents, families enhance their quality of life, or youth become active, contributing members of society as adults.

## A Challenge, Too

Your role on the committee will be challenging. Issues you'll be examining may be complex with no easy answers. To be an effective member, you will need to understand how your committee functions, how educational programs are developed and carried out and what you should do to help the committee with its assignment. This publication is designed to help you learn the following topics:

- The importance of the committee
- The role of the committee
- How the committee works
- What you should know and do to be an effective committee member.

## Why Committees Are Important

“People centered” describes the educational programs developed through your Cooperative Extension Service office. People understand, support, participate in and benefit from a program that they have helped design and carry out. The County Extension Council provides citizens with the opportunity to develop educational programs that people want and need.

The County Extension Council has two parts – an overall council and several program area or issue committees (yours is one of these committees). The overall council determines the scope of the county Extension program in a planning and prioritizing process. After studying the county situation and identifying critical issues and other areas of concern, a county plan of work is developed.

The council establishes committees and task forces to deal with priority issues in the county plan of work and other areas of concern that aren’t included in issues. Examples of areas in which committees/task forces work are beef cattle, agricultural diversification, cotton, community development, 4-H and youth, family and consumer sciences and water quality.

Your committee has a specific assignment; you should know what that assignment is. County Extension agents are your advisors. They work closely with the committee chair and members in program planning, implementing, evaluating and marketing.

## How Your Committee Works

Remember when you learned to drive a car? First, you had to know what made the car go. Then came the steps in starting the engine and putting it in gear. Finally, after some practice, you learned to drive. And you learned some principles to follow to be a good driver. In a way, committee work is like learning to drive a car. You need to know how the committee works and what you must do to help the committee carry out its assignment. The committee’s role is divided into these parts:

- Planning the educational program
- Carrying out the program
- Evaluating the program
- Reporting accomplishments

Follow along to see what the committee does in each of these parts.

### Planning the Educational Program

Good things don’t just happen – they are planned!

#### Annual Planning

The Extension educational program is planned in advance of the coming year. Your committee will meet at least once and perhaps several times in making program decisions for the year. What’s involved in annual planning? The main points are as follows:

- Review the county situation relating to your committee assignment. Your group may be responsible for addressing an issue in the county plan of work or another area of concern in the county. Study the facts. What are the problems that need to be worked on? Who is affected by the problems? Extension specialists and other local resource people can help identify and

explain facts, data and problems as well as who is affected by the problems.

- Set goals the committee would like to accomplish. Goals help your group to know what and how much it will try to accomplish within a year.
- Identify the appropriate practices that people should be using to overcome the problems.
- Determine which subject matter topics should be offered so people will learn how to use the practices.
- Select appropriate educational methods and techniques to convey the information to people you want to reach. Here are some examples of educational methods:
  - Clinic
  - Tour
  - Seminar
  - Workshop
  - Result demonstration
  - Symposium
  - Field day
  - Short course exhibit fair
  - Verification trials
- Set target dates for each educational activity and identify potential resource persons to present information.
- Plan how you will evaluate the year's program, even before it begins.

## **Carrying Out the Program**

Carrying out the program is the most exciting part of your committee's role! You and other members have an opportunity to be part of the action.

The committee will work closely with Extension agents and resource people, such as Extension specialists, in arranging and

conducting educational activities that your group planned. You'll want to take an active part in making events successful so that people in your community will benefit from them.

Before each educational activity, your committee will meet well in advance to make important decisions about details of the activity. A good way to accomplish this is to identify the things that need to be done before, during and after the activity. Important things to be done to assure program success include the following examples:

### **Before the Activity**

- Select/confirm resource people
- Arrange for facility
- Do advance publicity
- Provide equipment
- Plan agenda
- Arrange for refreshments
- Plan how audience will be contacted/ encouraged to attend

### **During the Activity**

- Greet people
- Keep attendance list
- Assist speakers
- Introduce speakers
- Distribute handouts
- Serve refreshments

### **After the Activity**

- Evaluate the activity
- Make thank you calls
- Send letters of appreciation to speakers/ donors

Educational events are more successful when everyone on the committee helps with the tasks. The committee chair will assign tasks to each member. Do your part. Each member should encourage people to participate in programs that can benefit them.

## Evaluating the Program

Evaluation is an important part of the committee's role. How did it go? Was each educational activity successful? Did the people your committee tried to involve participate? Did participants learn something they can use? What practices have people put to use? Was there anything the committee could have done differently that would make events more successful? These questions are important and can be answered by evaluating the program. The committee should spend some time during a meeting in reviewing and evaluating its work and the educational program.

## Reporting Accomplishments

The final part of the committee's role is reporting. Your committee should keep the County Extension Council informed of its plans and accomplishments. The Council is responsible for the overall Extension program and needs to know what each committee is doing and accomplishing. The committee chair, as a member of the council, is responsible for reporting.

The council will ask each committee to report its accomplishments at the County Extension Council's annual meeting, so all committee members and guests will know the results of the Extension program. Keep the committee's work before the public to gain support for and participation in the program. What you do is important and people need to know about it!

## Resource People Can Help

Resource people have knowledge and capabilities that are important to the work of your committee. They can help to accomplish the committee's goals. Some examples of resource people are:

- Extension specialists
- University of Arkansas Experiment Station
- Vocational agriculture instructors
- Veterinarians
- Bankers
- Area college representatives
- School officials
- School family counselors
- Youth group directors
- Ministers
- Law enforcement officials
- Utility company personnel
- Business and industry representatives
- City and county government representatives
- Vocational family and consumer sciences teachers
- Health professionals
- Public health agency personnel
- Building contractors
- Chamber of Commerce representatives

Resource people can help your committee in person, by teleconference or with written information/ideas. They can help in all phases, such as annual planning, teaching at educational events or providing helpful methods for evaluating program results.

## The Committee Member's Job

You're the most important part of the committee. Like a group of people in a rowboat, the combined efforts of all persons using oars help to make the boat move at a desired speed and in the right direction. No committee can perform its role and be productive without the active participation of each member.

Here are some tips that will help you to be a productive member and to enjoy serving on the committee.

## **Know Your Committee**

- Because you will be working together as a group, get to know other members.
- Understand the purpose of your committee and what its assignment is. Ask the committee chair and Extension agent to explain this if you're not sure.
- Know who you have been asked to represent. As a member of the committee, you represent others who are not members.
- Become familiar with how the committee operates, such as number of meetings, how often, procedures followed for agenda, etc.
- Learn what other committees and task forces make up the County Extension Council. Occasionally two or more committees might work together when program plans are similar or when combined efforts could accomplish more.

## **Committee Meetings**

You'll want to prepare for each meeting, participate in discussions and committee decisions and follow through on specific assignments.

### **Before the Meeting – Prepare!**

- Understand the purpose of a meeting so you will be prepared to participate in discussions and decision making.
- Mark the meeting date on your calendar.
- Talk with others you represent. Get their ideas and suggestions for program activities.
- Make notes. After a meeting has been set, jot down any thoughts and program ideas you have for discussion at the meeting.

- Carry out assignments. Take care of any pre-meeting assignments that you've been asked to do.

### **At the Meeting – Participate!**

- Attend as many meetings as you can – people are counting on you!
- Arrive on time for meetings so that the committee can accomplish its purpose in the allotted time.
- Be enthusiastic about the committee's work. Enthusiasm is contagious!
- Take part in discussions, committee actions and decisions. Your ideas are important.
- Listen carefully as other members express their ideas and suggestions.
- Ask other members to clarify points that may not be clear to you.
- Help the committee chair keep the group working on the business before the committee. Don't waste time.
- Volunteer to do tasks that need to be accomplished.
- Remember to consider the interests of people you represent, as well as your own. Help make decisions for the general good.

### **After the Meeting – Follow Through!**

- Support the actions taken by the committee.
- Carry out any post-meeting assignments you agreed to do.
- Keep the people you represent and others informed about plans and actions of your committee.

- Tell other interested organizations about the committee's program and ask for their support and participation.
- Help conduct educational activities and events planned by the committee,
- Encourage people to attend upcoming activities sponsored by your group.
- Participate in meetings of the County Extension Council when it meets as a whole organization.

Committee work is both challenging and rewarding. Through your success and accomplishments, you will always find new challenges and opportunities to help people in your community and county. You will enjoy seeing citizens improve their lives as a result of programs your group conducted.

Information in this publication has been adapted for Arkansas. Original materials were prepared by Burl Richardson and Mary Marshall, Extension Program Development Specialists, Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

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