

Preparing for Committee Meetings

This guide is designed to help county Extension agents in preparing for program area or issue committee meetings. As part of the County Extension Council, these groups are responsible for accomplishing much of the Council's work. Each committee has a specific assignment. Some may be responsible for educational programs that address one or more issues in the county plan of work. Other committees may be in charge of an ongoing area of county concern/need or programming for a targeted audience.

As they carry out their assignment, program committees will be involved in four program development functions:

1. Planning the educational program for the year.
2. Conducting the educational activities.
3. Evaluating what the program has accomplished.
4. Marketing the program to specific clientele and the public.

Committee meetings provide a means for members to make decisions collectively about the educational program in their assigned area. Several meetings are needed during the year to effectively involve a committee in these program development functions. Meetings should be well planned. Use the guidelines that follow to help you plan effective committee meetings.

Develop a General Strategy

First, think through a general strategy for the committee's work. To be effective, it is crucial that the committee's purpose and functions be clearly understood by each member. As you plan the general strategy, decide the best time to orient the group on their role and responsibilities.

- () At least one committee meeting is needed to do the planning function. Usually, this meeting is held sometime during August or early September. The committee's input for the educational program will be used in preparing your annual plan of work (due prior to your program planning conference with your Extension District Director).

Target date: _____

- () Additional committee meetings will be needed at strategic times during the year to perform the other functions noted above. The exact number will vary, depending partly on the number of educational events to be conducted during the year. Establish dates (months) for additional meetings, those that will arrange details for educational activities, evaluate program results, prepare annual meeting report for County Extension Council, review committee membership, etc.

Plan the Committee Meeting

Committee meetings have to be planned ahead of time to be effective. The committee meeting itself is an end point in a series of activities rather than the beginning point. Once the meeting begins, the course of events is largely determined by what has happened before the meeting is called to order!

Not every meeting requires extensive planning, but most meetings are more effective when they are planned. What should happen before the committee meeting takes place? Work with the program/issue committee chair to plan the meeting.

1. Three to four weeks before the meeting, meet with the committee chair to initiate plans for the meeting:

() Discuss the purpose of the meeting (what needs to be accomplished):

() Identify two or three dates from which members can choose:

() Discuss meeting arrangements:

Location _____ Time _____

() Make a preliminary agenda. List items that need to be covered so that members have an opportunity to add suggestions before the agenda is finalized:

() Plan to involve members *before and during* the meeting. (Members can arrange for meeting facility, contact local resource person, lead discussion on agenda topic at meeting, give a report, etc.).

List what needs doing before and during this meeting

Person responsible

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(List people to be contacted)

Person responsible

Committee members

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(List people to be contacted)

Person responsible

Local resource people

Extension specialists

Representatives of networking groups

2. Soon after meeting with the committee chair (next day or two), contact members (in person or by telephone) about the purpose of the meeting, their choice of meeting date, their ideas for the agenda, and any task they are being asked to do before and during the meeting.
3. After all committee members have been contacted to get their input for the meeting, the agent and committee chair should set the meeting date and finalize the agenda.
4. The agent should notify members by letter or e-mail (to arrive at least 10 days in advance) to confirm the meeting date, time, location, and assignments. Enclose a copy of the finalized agenda. (If you anticipate that any member will need your help/advice on an assignment, this should be done before the meeting.)
5. The day before the meeting the committee chair and/or agent should telephone or e-mail members to remind them of the meeting.
6. Before the meeting begins:
 - () Make sure the room is comfortable, arrange chairs and tables so that members face each other, to encourage discussion.
 - () Have extra copies of the agenda available.
 - () Have resource materials ready (printed material, guides, equipment, writing pads, chalk-board, newsprint, etc.).

When the committee chair and members have been involved in planning the meeting, they have more commitment to its effectiveness. They're more likely to attend, participate in the discussion, and be enthusiastic about what the committee needs to accomplish. Remember, once the meeting has begun, it is generally too late to do any last minute planning that will have any marked influence on a meeting.

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