

Membership Committee

The process for working with and on a County Extension Council Membership Committee is much the same with membership of any group. A smaller group with a more concentrated effort can be more focused and productive on a specific task as compared to a larger group such as the entire County Extension Council. It is recommended that all County Extension Councils have a standing Membership Committee.

Why have a Membership Committee?

It is important to involve various people in the County Extension Council's process of programming. A variety of people that are representative of the population to be served can help ensure a wide range of community issues are analyzed, priorities are set, and programs are implemented to address diverse community needs. Many members of the County Extension Council are nominated by their respective program councils where they are involved. Other council members should be chosen to represent geographic areas, community and governmental partners, educational and grassroots organizations, diverse populations, socioeconomic groups and others as needed to ensure the council is truly representative of the county and the potential clientele for Cooperative Extension. An analysis of current membership can be done by using the "County Extension Council Membership" spreadsheet or similar tool to assess "who is" and "who is not" on the council.

Member Committee Functions

The Membership Committee will work with the agent serving as County Extension Council and Marketing Coordinator. The committee is charged with overall coordination of identifying, selecting, recruiting, and orienting council members. The group should be small enough to function efficiently yet be representative of the various programs and groups affected. The people on the Membership Committee should rotate just as is expected with council membership. Committee member terms should be a set length, typically indicated in council bylaws, and staggered to ensure a blend of new and continuing members each year. Council officers may be represented on the Membership Committee but should not dominate the process. For some groups, the Vice President chairs the Membership Committee and represents the officer team. Membership Committee participants should have knowledge of the broad scope of Cooperative Extension activities, be open minded, and be committed to securing the best council members possible. This committee may be given the charge of acknowledging the service of council members and recognizing outgoing members.

What are the qualities of leaders asked to serve on the County Extension Council?

As noted above, the County Extension Council should be representative of the population to be served. At the same time, members must represent the groups or clientele from which they were chosen. Good council members bring expertise or knowledge in some areas that leads to gaining information for more rational decisions. Council members should be interested in the goals and programs of Cooperative Extension broadly and make a commitment to participate.

Since the County Extension Council is a group representing a myriad of others, members must be open to diverse ideas and issues. Although members of the council are defined by various classifications for membership, it is expected when they meet with the council that they will holistically consider multiple interests in their efforts to determine the best use of Extension's resources. Members must have skills that enable them to function in a group – good speaker, good listener, able to see the big picture, flexible, positive, etc.

As Cooperative Extension seeks to have a broad vision, then its volunteer leaders must be visionary, aware of emerging issues, and able to define Extension's response. Council members should be critical thinkers and team players with attitudes conducive to collaborating.

In summary, council members must be able to:

- Know who they represent and be willing to do so while understanding the needs of other groups.
- Bring experience, expertise, and knowledge to the table that contributes to identifying needs and developing an appropriate Extension programming response to those needs.
- Think holistically about local Extension programming and the breadth of community needs.
- Partner with Cooperative Extension program staff and others throughout the programming cycle of the Plan of Work.
- Communicate Extension program value to both clients and stakeholders.

Revised by Kim Henken, Director, Extension Engagement and Administrative Initiatives, from an original work by Ralph C. Prince, State Extension Advisory Leadership Coordinator, October 2003.

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