

Successful Meetings

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Successful extension council meetings are not accidental! They are the result of many things, the most important of which is the council members. There is no single source of information on how to conduct successful meetings. Experience, along with a knowledge of fundamentals, should provide the means by which meetings are constantly improved.

Function of Meetings

"Why are we here?" "What is the purpose of this meeting?" The council chairman and county program director (CPD) should keep these questions in mind in planning each meeting.

All extension council meetings should be aimed at the ultimate objective of the council, extending the educational resources and knowledge base of Missouri's land-grant universities to the people in the county. The result of using educational resources is a better community in which to live, work, raise families and do business. Specific meetings, however, are generally aimed at accomplishing single steps toward this goal.

A major function of virtually every extension council meeting should be to involve members in the extension council program. A council member who is personally and actively involved will be a more enthusiastic council member.

Getting people involved can be accomplished through work on committees, participation in program planning, making a presentation to the council about needs in the community or organizations they represent, or participation in training.

Type of Meetings

For the most part, extension council meetings are of four distinct types—meetings of the full council, executive committee meetings, committee meetings and annual meetings.

Full Council Meetings

The full council is involved in policy making. The meetings are often deliberative in character. Council meetings are devoted to internal operations of the council—budget, election, personnel and the local plan of work. The council determines the annual budget, conducts elections for council members, hires secretaries, approves assignments of professional staff and determines the emphasis to be placed within the local plan of work.

The CPD provides support to the council for its' internal administration. The policy-making role is reserved for the council, using advice from the CPD on needs for new or updated policies. A clear understanding by council members and the CPD regarding the responsibilities of each will facilitate the smooth running of council meetings.

Council meetings are normally held on a regular basis—monthly or every other month. The frequency of council meetings depends on the workload and custom of the council. Dates for council meetings are set each year at the annual meeting.

The county program director and council chairman make the preparations for the council meeting. These preparations include planning the agenda, providing public notice and ensuring that all needed materials are presented to council members before the meeting.

Executive Committee Meetings

The executive committee is comprised of the officers of the extension council. They may meet in months when full council meetings are not held, and they may authorize the payment of bills and conduct other business as delegated to them by the full council.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings serve a different function than council meetings; and therefore, are a different type of meeting. They may be planning or study meetings. Committee meetings are often the place where policy recommendations are born; however, council policy is not established there. Committees perform studies and develop facts on which policy recommendations may be based, but until the council has approved these recommendations, the organization is not committed to policy or action.

Annual Meetings

Extension council annual meetings differ from those of either committee or council. They approach the motivational type and often have a social side. Most involve dinners where guests attend.

Some parts of the annual meeting program are required by law, such as the swearing in of officers, setting meeting dates and selecting a financial institution for depositing funds. Other parts occur by tradition and may include featured speakers, program plans for the upcoming years, staff and council recognition, or future plans of the council. Distribution of the annual report can provide information on the past year's programs.

Preparation and Staging

The CPD and council chairman are responsible for preparations that lead to successful meetings.

The Agenda

A conference prior to the extension council meeting between the council chairman and the CPD is essential. The agenda should be determined as well as an order of business. Scheduling the most important item first often will help accomplish the meeting objectives. The council chairman should set goals for the amount of meeting time needed for each part of the agenda. This might be 20 minutes for committee reports and 15 minutes for unfinished business. This will help keep the meeting moving, yet it can be adjusted if necessary.

A copy of the agenda should be sent to council members far enough in advance to permit them to prepare to participate in the discussions. Copies of the previous meeting's minutes, the financial statement, committee reports and any printed material relating to agenda items should go along with the agenda. If a committee has met the same day as the council meeting, copies of its report should be made and distributed at the meeting.

Supporting materials may be included. For example, if a meeting is called to set next year's budget, each

person in attendance should have a record of the past year's expenses and the CPD's estimate of next year's operating costs. If nominations for next year's council candidates are to be discussed, a list of current members, their terms, criteria for selecting candidates and a slate of nominees from the election committee should be available. If the farm fair family is to be selected, a description of the event, previous county representatives and the report from the farm fair family nominating committee should be sent with the agenda.

Agenda building occurs on a day-to-day basis in the Extension office where the activities and concerns of all Extension staff are incorporated into the monthly agenda. Council members should feel free to bring their concerns and interests for the Extension program to the agenda. The most helpful way to do this is by talking to the council chairman and CPD prior to the meeting.

Agenda Development

A recommended meeting format:

Call to order

- Take attendance
- Recognize visitors
- Approve the agenda

Presentation of reports

- Approve the minutes
- Hear financial reports
- Hear committee reports
- Hear county program director's report

Business decision making

- Conduct unfinished business
- Ask for new business

Close the meeting

- Make announcements
- Adjourn the meeting

Sending Notice

A meeting notice should include specific date, time and place, and should be mailed far enough in advance to permit council members to prepare for the meeting. For special meetings, where a quorum is important, a reply post card addressed to the Extension office will help determine how many to expect.

Missouri's Sunshine Law requires a posted meeting notice be prominently posted in the Extension office (or courthouse, if appropriate) at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. The notice must include the time, date and place of the meeting; a tentative agenda; and whether the meeting is open or closed.

In certain circumstances, the council may have a closed meeting, record or vote. Closed meetings can be

held for matters relating to litigation; lease, purchase or sale of real estate where public knowledge might adversely affect the transaction; hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting an employee; welfare cases of identifiable individuals; software codes for electronic data processing; individually identifiable personnel records; and records that are protected from disclosure by other law. If a court finds a member of a public governmental body has violated the Sunshine Law, the court may subject the member to a fine of \$5,000 per violation and order payment by such member of all costs and reasonable attorney's fees to any party successfully establishing a violation. The court also may declare void any action taken in violation of the law.