

# The Agenda

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Extension council agendas should be the product of recommendations from extension council members and extension staff. A conference between the council chairman and county program director, approximately two weeks prior to the meeting, should be used to plan the agenda. This should allow sufficient time for meeting mailings to reach council members.

Plan some time before each meeting for socializing. Most councils are composed of people who may never see each other outside council meetings. Prior to every meeting, they need time to warm up and get used to working together.

## Call to order

The council chairman calls the meeting to order—on time. A council meeting that starts on time is a sign that the rest of the meeting has a good chance of being businesslike and productive and of ending on time. A council meeting is a business meeting. When the meeting starts, socializing should end.

1. **Take attendance.** Note in the minutes who is present and absent. The attendance record is important proof that your meeting had a quorum present to conduct official business.
2. **Recognize visitors.** Introduce non-council members who may play a part in the upcoming meeting—such as staff, vendors or reporters. This is the council's meeting, and the council should know who's going to be listening.
3. **Approve the agenda.** The agenda is the council's plan for the meeting. The council should formally accept the preliminary agenda sent before the meeting or modify that plan. Council members should feel free to place items on the agenda. Members should request items be placed on the agenda well in advance of the meeting. That way, other council members and the CPD can consider and research the issue before they have to deal with it at the meeting. Last minute agenda changes often produce poor discussion and poor decisions. One way to receive agenda items is for the CPD to send council members a form two weeks before the meeting to ask if they have business to be included on the agenda. Members can jot down requests and return them to the CPD.

## Presenting reports

4. **Approve minutes of the last meeting.** Minutes are the official record of council actions.

Approval can be handled quickly, but the importance of the minutes should not be taken lightly. Scrutinize them carefully before the meeting, and correct errors before the council approves the minutes. An efficient method of handling the minutes is to mail them out with the meeting notice and then approve them at the council meeting without reading them. This allows council members a chance to prepare for the meeting and to identify errors without taking an

unnecessary amount of meeting time.

Meeting minutes should be concise but still record the official actions of the council. That does not include a blow-by-blow account of discussion on motions. The only official business conducted by a council is the action it takes, not the arguments or discussions that precede votes.

The minutes should include the date, time and place of the meeting; council members in attendance; and the exact wording of each motion and the way in which it was disposed. When a roll call vote is taken, the vote of each council members should be recorded. Time of adjournment should close the minutes.

5. **Hear the financial report.** The council financial condition may affect action in the rest of the meeting, so the financial report should come early on the agenda. Discussion may be facilitated by mailing the financial report with the minutes. The financial report should include current income and expenditures, how current income and expenditures match budget projects, and reasons for variances from budget projections. Often, the CPD can give the council a preview of upcoming expenses or revenues.

The approval to pay bills is implied in the approval of the budget. If the council gives official approval of bills, a list of the bills should be mailed to each council member prior to the meeting. Questions about bills should be directed to the CPD prior to the council meeting unless there are questions the entire council needs to consider.

The CPD, council treasurer and outside auditors assure that finances are being handled appropriately.

6. **Hear committee reports.** Permanent or ad hoc committees all work for the council and should be expected to report to the council regularly about their activities. Don't hear reports from inactive committees solely because "it's tradition." Committees operate only when there's something to do.

To save time, committee chairmen should send written reports to council members prior to the meeting with the meeting notice sent from the CPD. The actual report time at the meeting can then be used to answer council members' questions and clarify the written report. Election, nominating and budget committees should operate in this manner.

Recommendations from the committee that the council take some action should be held until the new business section of the agenda.

7. **Hear the county program director's report.** The CPD's report is like other reports; it should be for informational purposes only. Issues the CPD wishes the council to act on also should be under "new business." The CPD should be active throughout the meeting, providing background on issues and acting as a resource for the council. CPD input is vital to a good meeting.

8. **Hear the staff reports.** Asking other staff assigned to the county to give periodic reports is an excellent way for the council to stay up to date on total Extension programming in the county, promote teamwork, and strengthen council relationships with all staff delivering programs in the county. The CPD can assist by insuring that the reports are concise, informative and scheduled on a regular basis.

## Decision-making

Everything to this point has been preliminary to the real business of the council meeting. "Housekeeping" chores have been cleared away and information has been collected for decision making. Next it's time to consider motions, discuss them and make decisions on matters that affect the entire organization.

9. **Consider unfinished business.** There may be few items of unfinished business on the agenda. These are items that were not completely disposed of at a previous meeting, such as motions tabled or actions interrupted by adjournment or intentionally carried over for discussion or action at the current meeting.

Don't allow unfinished business to be a catchall for any item that the council has ever talked about. An ongoing building project, for example, is not routinely an item of unfinished business. If the council needs to take action about the building project, it should appear under new business.

Unfinished business also should not be a substitute for committee work. Much of the planning conducted with ongoing projects should be done in committee, presented as a committee report and action requested to be taken under new business. For example, farm fair family selection and town and country days should be handled in this manner.

10. **Consider new business.** It's time to consider new business motions in response to council member requests and information heard by the council. Most agenda items under new business should have a motion and a vote.

The council chairman should ask for a motion on each item of new business, followed by discussion of that motion only. If an item does not get a motion and a second, the council should go on to the next agenda item.

Some issues, such as long-range planning or program planning, are handled best in special meetings. Such large council issues tend to dominate a meeting, leaving insufficient time to consider them or other issues on the agenda.

## Closing

11. **Make announcements.** The business of the council is completed, and anything at this spot on the agenda is purely informational and does not require action. Announce future council meetings and activities.

12. **Adjourn the meeting.** A motion, second and majority vote are required to adjourn the meeting. The chairman should not simply declare the meeting adjourned without a vote. The council as a whole must decide when its business is completed.

Adjournment doesn't have to wait until every item on the agenda has been covered. Two hours is the maximum length of time for a productive meeting. A longer meeting produces unhappy council members and poor decisions. When the council chairman determines that little is being accomplished, it's time to ask for a motion to adjourn and hold the remaining business for the next meeting.

**Continue to evaluate your meeting.** Take a few minutes after the meeting, two or three times a year, to evaluate the way your meeting worked. If you had problems, don't be afraid to experiment with changes to make your meetings better. Find what works and is comfortable for the council.