

# Working with Committees

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## Why Use a Committee

Strong committee work leads to more efficient meetings, better decisions and greater involvement of extension council members. Committee work is one of the most important elements of good council management.

## Value of committees

- A variety of experience and knowledge is brought to bear upon a certain subject.
- Committees broaden participation of council members and provide them opportunities to learn about the extension council.
- Committees provide continuity, training new members in specific subjects.
- Interest prospective council members.

## Limitations of Committees

- They can require extra time.
- Everybody's responsibility becomes nobody's responsibility; a chairman may be left with all the follow-through.
- Compromise decisions may occur because committee members are pressed for time.
- A few people may dominate the committee's work.

Extension council chairmen may try to avoid these problems by asking committees to set regularly scheduled meetings, clarifying the committee chairman's and member's responsibilities, seeing that minutes are kept and distributed to committee members, and asking for minority reports from committees so that all views are represented.

Information on committee responsibilities, planning sheets and reporting forms are available from each county program director.

## When to Use Committees

1. Committees can be used profitably when one or more of the following circumstances exist:
2. A variety of information is needed to reach a decision;
3. Informed volunteer workers can be effective in putting plans into action;
4. Coordination in planning is needed;
5. The council officers or county program director (CPD) cannot and/or should not make the decision; and
6. Sufficient time is available to utilize a committee fully.

## Types of Committees

Committees are either temporary or standing. Temporary committees work on a particular project, and then the committee is dissolved. Permanent or standing committees work on a project throughout a year or, in some cases, several years. Below are some of the committees in use in extension council operations.

**Budget** — Develops the county budget with the CPD and presents the budget to the county commission.

**Election and Nomination** — Oversees the election process by reviewing election procedures, assessing compliance with affirmative action guidelines and representation of minorities, and determining occupations and geographic areas in the county needing representation; and nominates and contacts candidates and officers for the council.

**Program** — Serves in an advisory capacity for developing programs relating to youth at risk, family life, health, agriculture profitability, conservation of natural resources, etc.

**Personnel** — Makes recommendations regarding hiring and placement of county and university staff.

**Special Events** — Plans and implements special events, including the annual meeting, town and country dinners, fall festival, summer ice cream social, etc.

**Recognition** — Nominates candidates for the annual farm fair family program; develops other recognition programs.

**Endowment and Gifts** — Plans and implements the county endowment and gifts program.

**Public Relations/Marketing** — Develops and implements a public relations plan.

**Facilities** — Analyzes existing facilities and their capacity to meet the needs for educational programming; and plans for improvements in office facilities and equipment.

## Committee Size

The purpose for which the committee is formed generally determines committee size. In carrying out many council functions, small committees have advantages. The larger committee tends to be harder to coordinate and more unwieldy; to bog down in irrelevant issues; and to take too much of the member's time on subjects that are not related to the committee's particular problem.

There are, however, times when a large committee is required. On occasion, the total membership may serve as a committee in determining the program of work. There is no set rule, but basically, the smaller the committee the better and faster the action.

## Orientation

An orientation session for committee chairmen can provide them with the information they need for a successful year. Each chairman should be given a kit which includes:

1. A personal letter of thanks from the council chairman;
2. A complete list of committee members, their home and office telephone numbers;
3. A list of the council members, their home and office telephone numbers and addresses;
4. Necessary background material on previous committee's work: committee reports, minutes, etc.; and
5. A list of last year's committee members.

After the kit is distributed, the CPD should discuss the overall program of work and members' parts in it. They should be told what Extension staff help they can expect and from whom. Possible areas of overlap should be noted and the authority of each committee spelled out in light of existing policy established by the extension council.

By doing these things, the council chairman and the CPD let the committee chairmen know what is expected of them and where their activities fit into the overall picture. After a question-and-answer period, they, along with Extension staff help, are ready to recruit committee members (if they are not already selected) and to call the first meeting.

## Orienting the Members

Mere assignment to a committee does not guarantee positive action by the committee member. Proper orientation will go a long way toward guaranteeing participation.

Orientation normally should take place in the first meeting of the entire committee and consists of the following:

1. The chairman thanks the members for accepting their assignment and gives basic reasons for their selection. Their "looking toward community good," ability, leadership, analytical minds and so on may be mentioned as criteria used in making the choice;
2. The chairman introduces each member to the group to increase the feeling of cohesiveness;
3. The chairman advises the committee of its role in carrying out its part of the extension council local plan of work;
4. The chairman defines the committee's authority and activities;
5. The chairman or designee presents background material on the past committee's projects; and
6. The chairman presents each committee member with a file with the committee roster and any written material that would clarify the above items.

Members should come away from this meeting with an understanding of the objectives of the committee and a feeling of wanting to participate on a team

## Committee Responsibilities

Committees carry out the responsibilities in different ways, but all committees need to have a clear vision of their tasks and goals. During the first committee meeting, the chairman or CPD should clearly define the tasks that need the committee's attention, their responsibilities and the support they can expect from the Extension staff.

Printed materials on extension council committees and their activities are available.

## Meetings Preparation

It is important that the extension council chairman (or CPD) and the committee chairman confer before the meeting concerning the agenda, the problem or problems to be discussed, possible alternative solutions and other pertinent matters. Materials needed for the meeting and physical arrangements also should be planned.

## The Agenda

Once the need for a committee meeting is determined, it is necessary to prepare an agenda built around that need. This agenda, prepared by the committee chairman and the CPD, should ordinarily include such items as:

- A review of the previous meetings either by minutes or by the chairman;
- Background of facts on the problem to be discussed;
- Discussion of the problem;
- Possible decision; and,
- Setting of the next meeting.

**The Time and Place** for the meeting will depend on the availability of the committee members. The chairman normally makes the decision on day and time.

*Notices* should be mailed early enough for the member to reserve time to attend the meeting, yet late enough so the meeting will not be forgotten. The notice should include time, place, date, purpose and background material (if needed). It should be signed by the chairman. Reply cards may be used.

## Physical Arrangements

Preparation of the meeting room leads to success of the meeting. Size is the first consideration. A five-person committee should not sit in a room set up for 100 people.

Committee members should be introduced. If the meeting is large and the members are not acquainted with each other, name tags or table tents should be used.

## Meeting and Follow-up

The chairman is the key person in promoting discussion during meetings, bringing the group to decisions and ensuring that follow-up is completed.

## How to Get Discussion

Non-participants can be brought into the group action by asking them questions. This helps the retiring person keep his or her identity. The chairman might say, "Jim, we haven't heard your ideas on the matter." The big talker becomes a problem, which the chairman must solve by planning for controlling him. One method of dealing with big talkers is for the chairman to briefly re-state the points made by speaker and then ask another person for their ideas. If a discussion is extremely important and heated, with many people wanting to express ideas, a time limit might be given to each speaker.

Four recommended methods of getting participation and ideas are found in the Nominal Group Technique, Quick Discussion Techniques, Brain Drain and Brainstorming leaflets.

## Writing the Minutes

A committee secretary should keep minutes. After the meeting, the minutes are distributed to the committee members, whether they were present or not. The committee's report (or minutes) also should be mailed to extension council members.

The minutes should include date; place; time; those present; those absent; presiding officer's name; action taken; what should be done to follow up this action; and date, time and place of next meeting. Enough summary of discussion should be carried to justify any decisions reached. Minutes should be signed by the secretary.

## Follow-up

Committee decisions are meaningless unless action follows the meeting:

If no decision has been reached and the next meeting is to cover the same subject, the follow-up may be in the nature of gathering additional data or making assignments to subcommittees and requiring that their reports be submitted.

If the committee reaches a decision, follow-up may be a written recommendation to the council, a minority report, letters to government agencies or active participation by committee members in reaching whatever goal the decision establishes.

Follow-up may also entail sending out notices for another meeting and releasing information to the local press, radio and television. Care should be exercised not to portray committee action as policy until the extension council has actually approved committee recommendations.

## Evaluation

Committee effort can be evaluated jointly by the chairman and the committee. This evaluation is continuing but should be formalized in report form once a year.

Without some sort of control, committees will become self-perpetuating. The number and types of committees should be evaluated periodically to determine whether the same committees are needed year after year.

The extension council chairman and CPD must work for turnover in each committee each year, keep committees supplied with new talent and use committees in developing leadership.