

WORKING WITH COUNTY EXTENSION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEES

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 more productive on a specific task than a larger group such as the entire County Extension Council. This paper is intended to answer some questions being asked about Membership Committees. All counties are asked to implement such a committee if it does not already have one functioning.

Why have a Membership Committee? Does it matter who is on the County Extension Council?

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 is 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, socio-economic and ethnic populations, and others as needed to ensure the group 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 some other tool to assess "who is" and "who is not" on the council.

Who should be on the Membership Committee? What do they do?

Membership Committees should be named and assembled to work with the agent serving as County Extension Council and Marketing Coordinator. Their mission is to do the 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 the council membership is expected to do. When starting a new group, members can be assigned or draw for terms of 1, 2, and 3 years, which will ensure rotation. Council officers are sometimes represented on the Membership Committee but should not dominate the process. For some groups, the Vice President chairs the Membership Committee and represents the "Executive Board." Membership Committee participants certainly need some knowledge of the broad scope of Cooperative Extension activities, be open minded, and committed to securing the best council members possible. This committee may be given the charge of acknowledging the service of council members and recognizing them as they rotate off.



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

As noted above, we should strive to be sure the County Extension Council is representative of the population to be served. At the same time, we must select a County Extension Council membership that does, in fact, 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 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 represent 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 whole picture, flexible, positive, et al.

As Cooperative Extension seeks to broaden its vision, then its advisors must be visionary, aware of emerging issues and able to define Extension's response to that, 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.
- 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.

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