

Texas Agricultural Extension Service

THE COMMITTEE CHAIR'S ROLE

Program Area and Issue Committees of the Extension Program Council

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You Hold an Important Position!

Congratulations on being selected committee chair! You hold a vital position of leadership on the committee. This means you take the lead in seeing that your committee effectively carries out its work. You'll have opportunities to work closely with Extension agents in preparing for and conducting committee meetings. They'll look to you for leadership when your committee needs to take action. Together you will plan how the committee will carry out its assignment.

Your committee is part of the county Extension Program Council. The Council's executive board establishes program committees and task forces to develop educational programs. Most of these committees have responsibilities for addressing one or more of the critical issues in the *Long-Range Extension Program*. Various groups may be responsible for special areas of concern to citizens, such as health and well-being, community economic viability, water quality/conservation, or food safety, or broad areas related to agriculture, youth development, or home economics. So your committee is one of several that provide leadership for educational programs through the Extension Program Council.

This publication will help you understand what the committee's job is about, your responsibilities as committee chair, and how to have productive meetings. Extension agents are your advisors. They can help you. Keep in touch with them on a regular basis. They will work with you in preparing for and conducting committee meetings and the activities that committees sponsor.

Committee Chair's Responsibilities

The chairperson's role includes guiding the program committee in the following functions:

- Planning the educational program
- Helping implement or carry out the program
- Evaluating program accomplishments
- Interpreting the committee's work and accomplishments to others

Several meetings will be required during the year to carry out these committee functions. A detailed description of this role is contained in *Program Area Committees* [L-2336], a publication available from Extension agents.

Make sure that you understand the committee's assignment. Are you expected to address one or more issues in the *Long-Range Extension Program*? Or is your group responsible for a different broad area of concern? The Council's executive board and your county Extension agents can clarify the scope of your work as a program development committee.

If your committee is charged with addressing one or more of the issues, these will be described in the current *Long-Range Extension Program*. Obtain a copy and keep it available at all times for reference.

Extension specialists and local or area resource people who have knowledge about your committee's area of responsibility should be identified and invited to help when you need them. Resource people can clarify problems within issues, provide data about situations, and help you analyze alternatives for addressing problems and concerns. Extension agents can arrange for specialists to meet with the whole committee or you, in preparation for committee problem-solving.

Extension agents have publications and guides that will be helpful to you. Some are slide-tape sets and Program Guides related to various issues, slide sets on the committee's role, and worksheets to use when arranging to carry out various functions of the committee. Use these resources to help plan and conduct your work throughout the year. As you gain experience, you will become even more confident in carrying out your role as committee leader. And you'll find this experience very rewarding.

Committee Meetings

Productive committee meetings are essential in maintaining the interest and sup-

port of members. They will appreciate your leadership when meetings are well organized, have a worthwhile purpose, and accomplish what needs doing in a reasonable amount of time. A good meeting must be planned in advance. That's part of your job. Remember, the Extension agents will help you in this planning.

Planning the Meeting

Not every meeting requires extensive planning, but most are more successful when details have been carefully thought out. What should happen before the meeting ever takes place? Several weeks before a meeting, talk with your Extension agents to make plans. Consider the following points:

- Agree on the purpose of the meeting and what should be accomplished.
- Identify two or three dates (including starting time) from which members can choose.
- Arrange for a convenient place where members can meet comfortably.
- Make a preliminary agenda - list the things you want to discuss and accomplish.
- Plan how to involve members. Assigning members tasks to do before and during meetings (give a report on a situation, contact a resource person, lead discussion on a topic, etc.) is an efficient way to conduct committee work. You'll find it easier to maintain their interest when they help perform tasks.
- Identify needed resources (written materials, resource persons).

Before you complete the meeting plan, contact each committee member. Explain that you are planning a meeting and need their advice. Ask them their choice for the meeting date. In addition, tell the purpose of meeting and ask if they have suggestions about items to put on the agenda. Explain any meeting tasks you want them to do.

After you've talked with all of them, set the meeting date and complete the agenda. When members have been involved in this way, they are more likely to attend, actively participate in decisionmaking and show enthusiasm. Everyone enjoys being a part of something they've been involved in planning.

Your county Extension agent can notify members by letter to announce the meeting date and other details. Each member should receive an advance copy of the agenda.

Conducting the Meeting

Before the meeting starts, make sure the room is comfortable; arrange chairs and tables so members face one another. Have materials and equipment available (notepads, chalkboard, etc.). Greet members as they arrive.

You are now ready for the meeting to begin! Following are some tips to help ensure that the meeting goes as planned:

- Call the meeting to order on time.
- Preside at the meeting, but don't do all the talking or turn it over to the Extension agent. Give members the opportunity to express their thoughts on each topic.
- Keep a record of decisions and plans. This can be assigned to another member ahead of time.

- Set a relaxed atmosphere by being informal but business-like. Members tend to act or react according to the tone set by the chair. Use the agenda and make sure each member has a copy.
- Present each topic on the agenda. Some will require a committee decision. After a decision has been reached, repeat it so that everyone understands.
- Keep the meeting moving so that you complete the agenda in the allotted time.
- Just before you adjourn, summarize what has been decided.
- Announce plans for the next meeting.
- Express your appreciation for members' participation.
- Adjourn the meeting at the designated time.

Following Through After the Meeting

You had a good meeting! Members did their part and the meeting accomplished its purpose. Now follow through on any tasks to be done after the meeting. Usually you will:

- Evaluate the meeting. Did it go as you planned? Did most members attend? Could anything be done differently next time to improve attendance or the meeting itself?
- Contact members who didn't attend the meeting and keep them informed on what was accomplished.

- Keep in touch with members who attended and accepted assignments. Offer assistance when needed.
- Send a written meeting summary to all members. The Extension agent can help in this effective way of communicating with everyone. The summary also serves as a reminder to those who volunteered to carry out a task.
- Keep people informed about your committee's activities, especially individuals and groups who need to understand and support your goals.
- Report your committee's plans and activities to the Council's executive board.

When you report committee accomplishments to the Council's executive board, you convey the importance of your work to others who share in coordinating and leading the total Extension program in your county. You are a member of this board because you're a committee chair. One of the board's functions is to coordinate and support the work of all its committees.

Also report accomplishments to the overall Extension Council at the annual meeting, and keep the public informed by available mass media throughout the programming period.

Maintain an Active Membership

Keeping the committee active is an important task of the committee chairperson. An active committee makes your job more enjoyable.

Become acquainted with members you do not know well and find out how to help them become involved in ways that are meaningful to them. Everyone needs to feel important. Express appreciation to members for their contributions.

New members will be needed as individual terms expire. The executive board of the Extension Program Council has **standing rules** which should be followed in selecting new members. You should alert the board when new members are needed. Help identify and recommend new members. Contacting them directly and asking them to serve assures that new members are involved early in the committee's work.

Summary

Program area committees, issue committees, and short-term task forces are created by the county Extension Program Council. They are vital to the Council's effectiveness in providing Extension educational activities that meet people's needs. The committee's role includes planning the educational program, helping implement them, evaluating the results, and interpreting or reporting the committee's achievements. As committee chairperson, you take the lead in planning and conducting meetings. You organize the committee's work so that members are fully involved, and you work with Extension agents to see that your committee succeeds!

This publication was originally prepared by Burl B. Richardson (now retired) and the present author.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

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