

## Ohio State University Extension Advisory Committee Guidelines

### Introduction

Ohio State University Extension is a grassroots organization that addresses needs of local constituents and Ohioans statewide through a variety of educational programs and services. Advice and guidance from local volunteers is essential for success, helping ensure that the local and statewide Extension program is relevant and addressing the highest priority needs. In addition to providing input into program priorities and direction, the local committee serves as a strong voice for OSU Extension with current and potential funding partners, program collaborators, and community members. While not a policy board, the county-based Extension advisory committee's role is to advise, assist, and support the local program and staff.

### Advise:

- Provide input to Extension professionals in the identification and prioritization of local needs, issues and opportunities to address issues.
- Provide critical and constructive feedback gathered from a variety of local sources.
- Provide input into the identification of local staffing needs.
- Connect Extension program staff to staff of potential agencies or organizations with which Extension could partner or provide needed services that fill a gap in the community.

### Assist:

- Identify and help obtain human and financial resources to implement local, educational programs.
- Market Extension and its impacts in the county and state to the community and media.
- Communicate with local nonprofits, government agencies, and other community-based programs to help facilitate inter-agency cooperation.
- Help develop and present a budget to commissioners and other local funding partners.

### Support:

- Educate local, state, and federal funders on Extension's impacts.
- Advocate for adequate funding and resources for Extension.
- Communicate a positive image of Extension to local citizens.
- Turn constructive criticism into positive actions to address concerns and improve perception of OSU Extension.
- Advocate to key stakeholders and partners for support of Extension to provide a balanced program in the county/community.

### Factors that result in an effective advisory committee include:

- Staff who genuinely desire and seek out the committee's input.
- Members of the committee are knowledgeable, committed individuals whose interest in volunteering their time and expertise is recognized and rewarded.
- The committee's group processes and procedures for governance allow for regular meetings, a sense of engagement and ownership, and sufficient access to information about the organization and programs so the committee may offer useful advice and support.
- The roles of the committee in providing advice and support are clear, consistent and communicated to all staff, committee members and community members.

The county Extension advisory committee serves in an advisory capacity and has no legal authority or responsibilities, and assumes no liability for the actions of OSU Extension.



## **OSU Extension's Advisory Committee Structure**

- The State Extension Advisory Committee advises the director of Extension on statewide programmatic issues.
- The county Extension advisory committee advises on total county Extension program issues.
- Program advisory committees advise each of the educators within the scope of their specific program area (agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development).

## **Extension Advisory Committee Organization and Membership**

The committee should include a wide variety of members who represent the diversity of:

- geography
- age, including youth
- race and ethnicity
- gender
- socio-economic status
- program area (agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development)
- political affiliation and perspective
- membership characteristics identified locally (i.e., representation from a specific partners)

By federal law, new advisory committee members should be selected on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to “race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status.”

## ***Additional Recommendations from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) for Advisory Committees, Boards and other Relevant Committees***

- Internal and external advisory boards and committees are diverse, and/or are representative of the population of the county in relation to geographic areas being served.
- Plans to solicit diverse nominations for committees and advisory boards are established.
- Selection and appointment processes are used to staff local committees and advisory boards.
- Determine whether any qualifying mandatory or discretionary membership criteria are imposed and their impact on diversity.
- Identify each existing committee/board by race, ethnicity and gender.
- Determine the percentage of county population by location and race, ethnicity and gender in the identified geographic areas.
- Determine needed changes in the organizational structure and planning procedures to assure representation of minorities on the committees and boards.
- Provide copy of policy and procedures to solicit diverse nominations for committees and advisory boards.
- Provide a copy of the selection and appointment process used to staff committees/boards.
- Copy of any procedures that affect planning and advisory committee membership.
- Provide list of advisory committees/boards by race, ethnicity and gender.

## ***Membership***

- The committee should consist of 15 to 25 members who can provide energetic and progressive assistance to the program.
- The committee should make provisions to replace its members on a rotational plan.
- Members may serve no more than two consecutive terms or a total of six consecutive years.
- Approximately one-fourth to one-third of the membership should change annually.



- Potential members to consider are representatives of agricultural producers, agribusiness, social service agencies, government agencies, limited-resource audiences, youth organizations, civic organizations, faith organizations, businesses, financial institutions, health organizations, foundations, educational institutions, media, public officials including county commissioners or their representatives, and other important groups in the community. Potential members should have expertise and abilities that will contribute to the function of the committee and have personal connection to strategic segments of the community Extension serves or should serve.
- The committee should include a chair, vice-chair, and secretary elected by the members for a term not to exceed two years each.

## ***Meetings***

The county Extension advisory committee will meet a minimum of two times per year and preferably four times per year.

- One meeting should be held before developing the county plan of work that is based on current community needs.
- One meeting should be held before developing the county budget request that ultimately supports sufficient staffing, adequate facilities, communication infrastructure, office equipment, and other office or program development needs.
- Additional meetings may be called when necessary by the county Extension director and the chair of the county Extension advisory committee.

## ***Ad hoc, Issues, and Specialized Committees***

County Extension programs have a variety of individual needs that can greatly benefit from assistance by ad hoc or special issues committees. Ad hoc committees should be initiated to work on such tasks as volunteer and staff recognition, special programs, or member and officer nominations. Issues committees are often built around important issues of immediate community interest, such as developing a committee to educate the public about a tax levy to benefit Extension.

## **Position Description for County Extension Advisory Committee Members**

### ***Responsibilities of County Extension Advisory Committee Members:***

Assist the local Extension staff with overall program determination and issues. Advisory committee members must commit to active participation as an advisory committee member and gain an understanding of Extension's educational roles and philosophy. Skills needed by effective advisory committee members include: listening, speaking, giving feedback, having trust and respect, sharing openly, influencing others, understanding productivity, and problem solving. Additionally, committee members should have a personal interest in total community development, the ability to see and reflect needs of people that can be addressed by OSU Extension, and maintain a long-term focus.

### ***Specific responsibilities include:***

- Participate actively in committee meetings.
- Understand the bylaws governing the committee's operation.
- Accept leadership roles when appropriate.
- Support all committee decisions.
- Understand Extension and all phases of its educational programming, not just what is offered by the local county staff.
- Understand that Extension's programs are based on local needs of citizens and communities, current research, technical information, established best practices, statewide needs and priorities, and national initiatives.
- Acquaint, on a continuing basis, appropriate elected city, county, state, and federal officials, about the nature and importance of Extension educational programs and impacts.



- Develop a system to contact elected officials and opinion leaders regarding Extension's educational programs and budget needs.
- Help secure resources to conduct Extension programs.
- Make direct contact with elected officials and opinion leaders as needed with the support and direction of the county director and OSU Extension Government Relations staff.
- Provide feedback to the county chair and the OSU Extension Government Relations staff about concerns, expectations, and opportunities expressed by elected officials.
- Advise Extension in the development and revision of long-range program plans.
- Advise Extension in selecting phases of the long-range program plans to emphasize in annual program plans.
- Advise Extension in setting priorities among new and existing program areas of emphasis for adults and youth.
- Encourage educators to address issues in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary manner.
- Help integrate and coordinate all Extension programs into a single unified Extension program.
- Assist Extension staff to put programs into action by participating in programs, representing Extension in meetings with other agencies and organizations, and marketing Extension and its programs.
- Provide feedback on the professional staff's work.
- Provide feedback on educational programs and outreach efforts with the goal of improving the programs and efforts.
- Assist Extension in marketing itself to local citizens as an indispensable community asset.
- Advise Extension in the development of budget requests and help present these requests to appropriate officials.
- Help Extension establish and maintain appropriate office(s), equipment, and other facilities.
- Help conduct program reviews to determine program needs and priorities.
- Serve on interviewing committees for new personnel when requested.
- Support new personnel once hired by introducing the new hire to appropriate community leaders and clientele, providing guidance on responsibilities, and providing feedback to improve performance.
- Provide two-way communication between the county Extension advisory committee and the county Extension program committees.
- Provide two-way communication between the county Extension advisory committee and the State Extension Advisory Committee.
- Help build and maintain cooperation and involvement of appropriate agencies, organizations, groups, and individuals with Extension.
- Assist in the review of local programming and outreach to ensure the mission and vision of Extension and the interest and needs of current and potential clientele are addressed on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status.

## **Position Description for County Extension Advisory Committee (EAC) Chair**

The EAC chair is responsible for working with the county director to schedule EAC meetings, set the agenda for meetings, facilitate meetings, and provide leadership to the EAC.

### ***Specific responsibilities include:***

- Planning and leading meetings.
- Assigning tasks to committee members.
- Monitoring progress on committee activities.
- Communicating committee actions to county staff and representative(s) from the State Extension Advisory Committee.



- Managing and resolving conflicts that may arise in the committee.
- Arranging and periodically evaluating the EAC's work.
- Represent the committee at county and statewide functions and activities.

## Helpful Hints for Advisory Board Members<sup>(a)</sup>

### **Promote Supportive Climates – Do:**

- Be sincere, impartial, a good listener, courteous, patient, tactful, and willing to compromise
- Recognize others' service
- Develop objectives
- Follow through
- Be consistent from one meeting to the next

### **Discourage Defensive Climates – Don't**

- Be the expert
- Pressure others
- Use jargon
- Make critical remarks
- Surprise committee members
- Avoid labor
- Alienate those with unpopular opinions
- Dominate the meeting
- Manipulate
- Be complacent
- Conceal facts

### **Supportive Climates**

Description – nonjudgmental questions or statements

Solution-focused – communicate a desire to define and solve problems

Spontaneity – honesty and straight-forwardness

Empathy – expressions of respect for other group members

Equality – to enter discussions and planning with mutual respect

Professionalism – to investigate issues and not take sides; open to other points of view

### **Defensive Climates**

Evaluation – to pass judgment or to blame; causes one to be “on guard”

Control – attempts to change attitudes or behaviors of others in group; creates defensiveness

Strategy – to “manipulate” others; control of group

Neutrality – expresses lack of concern for others in the group

Superiority – air of being superior to others in the group

Certainty – to be dogmatic; to know all the answers; doesn't care to listen to what others say

## **Program Committees**

Program committees assist Extension staff in identifying the needs and opportunities of present and potential clientele. The identified needs and opportunities serve as a basis to develop educational programs. The program committees also help prioritize programming opportunities and assist staff in establishing program direction. Program committees should be in place if Extension staff is working in one of the four program areas (agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development).



## **Program Committee Organization and Membership**

It is highly recommended that the membership on a county Extension program committee:

- Represent and reflect both present and potential areas of program emphasis.
- Give special attention to representation of the specific program area in the broadest sense to reflect the diversity of the community.
- Make provisions for replacing its members. Members shall serve no more than two consecutive terms or six consecutive years. Approximately one-fourth to one-third of the membership should change annually.
- Consist of 15 to 25 members.
- Recommend individuals who can provide the most energetic and progressive assistance to the specific program.
- Represent the various interests and needs within the specific program area. This includes a proper balance in age, income levels, men and women, geographic distribution, under-served populations, and minorities.
- Include a chair, vice-chair and secretary to be elected by the members for a term not to exceed two years.

## **Program Advisory Committee Member Position Description**

Members of program Advisory committees must be willing to commit time to attend meetings and assist with committee projects, share their expertise, provide their opinions, and work for the betterment of the program area and all of Extension. Skills needed by effective advisory committee members include: listening, speaking, giving feedback, having trust, sharing openly, influencing others, understanding productivity, and problem solving.

- Participate actively in all program committee meetings.
- Understand the bylaws governing committee operation.
- Accept leadership roles when appropriate.
- Support all program committee decisions.
- Be fully informed of the functions and other requirements of a county Extension program committee member before their appointment.
- Help Extension staff address the needs in more specialized subject matter such as agronomy, 4-H saddle horse, family economic well being, local government, etc.
- Help Extension staff conduct needs assessments, set goals and objectives, plan appropriate tasks to effectively implement programs and evaluate programs developed to meet the needs and problems of clientele.
- Support programs by communicating with appropriate clientele and the public.
- Help Extension staff in marketing their programming.
- Provide feedback on staff performance when requested.
- Communicate program results to the county Extension advisory committee, the public, and funding sources.
- Recommend priorities to the county Extension advisory committee.

## **Responsibilities of Extension Professionals**

The success of county Extension and program advisory committees requires the active involvement and support of Extension professionals. Specific responsibilities include:

- Understand the structure, function, and policies of OSU Extension.
- Provide new members of advisory committees with an orientation that includes:
  - the purpose of the committee, how the committee functions, the responsibilities of membership, and communication and input processes



- the history and philosophy of Extension
- background on the local programs
- the current long- and short-term Extension and individual program goals
- current programs
- finances
- plan of work and impact reports
- organizational structure
- membership lists
- skills to possess or develop

The Extension professional should also:

- Provide committee with economic, social and cultural data prior to program review discussions.
- Work with the committee chair to develop meeting agendas.
- Distribute the committee agenda in a timely fashion.
- Report the results of educational efforts.
- Provide a written summary/minutes of each meeting to each committee member.
- Involve the committee in meaningful activities
- Use the committee members' time and skills wisely.
- Make sure all members are involved.
- Avoid power struggles.
- Remove problematic members when necessary.
- Encourage commitment and involvement.
- Recognize contributions in meaningful ways.

### ***Tips For Getting the Most Out of the Advisory Committee***

- Provide access to a handbook for each member explaining committee purpose and objectives.
- Plan orientation program.
- Schedule meeting at convenient times for members.
- Send agenda of meeting two weeks in advance.
- Provide maps and parking information to members.
- Stick to schedule of meetings.
- Invite members to attend related business functions.
- Have someone take minutes of each meeting and provide them for members.
- Stay within set time limits.
- Get feedback about committee's effectiveness.
- Consider ethnic and racial minorities for membership.
- Make sure administrators, coordinators or supervisors attend meetings.

### **Program Ideas or Topics for Discussion**

- What is going well and what isn't working as well as it should.
- New opportunities that Extension should address.
- What the community is saying about Extension.
- How could Extension increase its visibility?
- What can be done to improve the diversity plan?
- Have time when each member may share information about their agency.
- Have committee brainstorm a plan to address a loss of funding, a plan for marketing, etc.
- A time when staff are not present allows committee members to discuss what might be perceived as sensitive topics is beneficial. Following the report of concerns and suggestions to Extension staff; full discussion of topics is recommended.



## References

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<sup>(a)</sup>Rauenhorst Recruiting Company. 2006. Creating effective advisory boards. <http://www.rauenhorst.com/index.php?/site/>

Teitel, Lee. The Advisory Committee Advantage. Creating an effective strategy for programmatic improvement. 1994. ERIC ED377783. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, DC.

## Policy and Procedures Handbook

<http://extensionstaff.osu.edu/policy-and-procedures-handbook/ii-administrative-and-program-resources>

