North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
Advisory Leadership System - Functional Advisory Groups

There are many different kinds of advisory groups - those that are very functional, some average and others that have very little value. What makes the difference? Is it worth the time and effort involved to have a functional group?

The investment in volunteer leaders is one of the best investments of time and effort that you can make to strengthen Extension programs. Bringing in others to help extend the resources of the Universities pays high dividends to our clientele base, our organization, our funding partners and Extension professionals. All county Extension faculty are expected to utilize volunteers to develop strong and effective educational programs.

To have a functional advisory group, the following criteria are essential:

- Purpose of Advisory Leadership System is understood
- Structure is in place
- Membership is balanced and rotation system is in place
- Role of Advisory Leaders and Extension professionals is clearly defined and understood
- Advisory Leader’s Expectations are met

Purpose of Advisory Leadership System

When volunteers and Extension professionals understand the purpose of Advisory Leadership, they are more committed to advisory functions. The purpose of the Advisory Leadership System is to:

- Functions as a valuable partner to North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (NCCES)
- Gives grassroots connection
- Helps NCCES stay relevant, responsive and focused
- Provides communication to key groups
- Expands resources
- Assists with programming – designing, implementing and evaluating educational programs
- Builds and nurtures relationships with key leaders, citizens and elected officials
- Markets Extension programs in the community
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Structure

When you combine all the advisory leaders statewide, there is a combined force of around 22,233 volunteers. These volunteers are one of our greatest resources!

Volunteers Statewide – 22,233
Three keys to success for Advisory Groups are balanced membership, rotation system and recruitment.

◆ **Balanced Membership**
  
  - Represents county (includes advisory leaders from program and specialized committees, community leaders and government leaders).
  - Reflects diverse populations and geographic areas
  - Complies with Title VI (1964 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance)
  - Complies with Title IX (1972 - No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.)
  - Identifies emerging issues and is engaged in the community
  - Knows and interacts with influential leaders
  - Understands community – political, social, economic, demographic issues, etc.
  - Represents non-users

A “Membership Chart” for all advisory groups ensures that membership is balanced.

◆ **Rotation System**
  
  - 3-year term
  - 2 consecutive terms – 2 years off before returning

◆ **Recruitment**
  
  - Continually search for new leaders
  - Have existing advisory leaders, staff members, government officials, etc. provide recommendations for new members
  - Cultivate relationships with Extension clientele
  - Have other agencies, departments, recommend individuals to serve
  - Have individuals from partnering agencies and departments serve
  - Look for individuals willing to make a commitment to CES
Advisory members provide input in an “Advisory Mode.” They are not a board of directors. The main functions of Advisory Leaders are: programming, advocacy, marketing and resource development.

◆ **Programming**
  - Assist with needs assessment
  - Advise on priorities and emerging issues
  - Help with program design, implementation and evaluation
  - Assess program impacts

◆ **Advocacy**
  - Serve as an advocate for NCCES
  - Build and nurture relationships with elected officials and key leaders at all levels
  - Report on Extension programs and impacts
  - Educate clients, friends, elected officials and key leaders about NCCES
  - Build relationships with Extension faculty and partners

◆ **Marketing**
  - Market programs to targeted audiences and communities
  - Speak positively about NCCES
  - Recommend practices to market NCCES
  - Be the eyes and ears of the community concerning NCCES
  - Market NCCES to the public

◆ **Resource Development**
  - Identify potential resources for NCCES programs
  - Make requests to possible contributors
Role of Extension Professional Working With Volunteers

New Advisory Leaders need an orientation to prepare for their role. Also existing volunteers need continuing education so that they can be more effective in their roles. Volunteers share their time and resources with Cooperative Extension – it is very important to recognize volunteers for their efforts.

◆ Provide training on:
  - Overview of NCCES
  - Connection of the Land-Grant System
  - Understanding of Advisory Leadership
  - History and Philosophy of NCCES
  - Role of the advisory leader
  - Significant Programs
  - Expectations
  - People Involved
  - Funding
  - Leadership

◆ Provide continuing education
◆ Clearly define the volunteer’s role
◆ Recognize volunteer accomplishments
◆ Communicate regularly to volunteers

Expectations of Advisory Leaders

People volunteer for many different reasons. Some want to give back part of what they have been given – others want to do their part to make a difference in this world. Volunteers should have positive experiences and be treated with kindness and respect.

◆ Volunteers expect:
  - Faculty committed to working with volunteers
  - Meaningful involvement
  - Communication and early involvement in discussions concerning issues of importance to NCCES
  - Education of key programs
  - Meeting agenda planned in advance with advisory input
  - Yearly calendars
  - Clear expectations and direction
  - Opportunity to provide “real” input, freedom to disagree
  - Enjoyable, well-organized meetings
  - Food and fellowship
  - Minutes distributed promptly
  - Sense of accomplishment
  - Not to feel “overused”
Volunteers and Extension faculty understand purpose.

Council and/or committee structure is in place.

Membership is balanced.

Rotation system in place – 3-yr. terms – 2 consecutive terms – 2 yrs. off before returning.

Recruitment is an ongoing process.

Volunteers and Extension faculty understand the role of Advisory Leaders.

Advisory Leaders help with needs assessment.

Advisory Leaders help with prioritizing needs.

Advisory Leaders are involved in design, implementation and evaluation of programs.

Advisory Leaders help identify resources.

Advisory Leaders help assess program impacts.

Advisory Leaders build and nurture relationships with elected officials and key leaders.

Advisory Leaders help communicate CES programs and impacts.

Advisory Leaders continuously educate others about CES.

Advisory Leaders speak positively about CES.

Advisory Leaders are the eyes and ears of the community concerning CES.

Advisory Leaders help with marketing efforts.

CES provides adequate orientation training.

CES provides continuing education for all volunteers.

Volunteers are recognized for their efforts.

Extension faculty is committed to working with volunteers.

Meaningful involvement is provided.

Good communication flow exists between Advisory Leaders and CES.

Volunteers are aware of key programs.

Meetings are planned in advance with advisory input.

Yearly calendars with dates of meetings and events are available.

Volunteers have clear expectations and direction.

Opportunity to provide “real” input exists; there is freedom to disagree.

Meetings are enjoyable and well organized with food and fellowship.

Minutes of meetings are distributed promptly.

CES & Advisory Leaders utilize ALS website.