Grassroots involvement has always helped Extension be relevant to the needs of our clientele. To efficiently develop and implement high-quality educational programs, we must continue to partner with our community leaders. Community leaders work with Extension educators through Program Area Committees and Youth Boards. Program Area Committees advise agents about issues and needs in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and community and economic development. Youth Boards advise agents working with the 4-H and youth development program.

The following core principles define the importance of Program Area Committees and Youth Boards:

• Texas Extension has a rich history of providing high-quality educational programs and services to the people of Texas because citizens at the local level are involved in program planning.
• Program Area Committees help Extension respond rapidly to critical needs and issues.
• Program Area Committees are instrumental in ensuring that Extension programs are relevant to local needs.
• Each county Extension agent should have at least one Program Area Committee to help plan, implement and evaluate educational programs.
• Making good use of the volunteers who serve on Program Area Committees helps county agents be more effective and make a greater impact in the community.
• A group of individuals generates more ideas than a single person can.

Program Area Committees

Tasks of the Program Area Committee

Program Area Committees should be selected and organized according to the direction and needs of the overall program. When a new program is being developed in a county, the committee will be very involved in planning, marketing, implementing and evaluating it. If the county agent is implementing a banner program, the Program Area Committee will not be involved in designing the content or the evaluation process because these tasks have already
been done. However, the committee, or a special task force appointed by the committee, could help market and implement a banner program.

The Program Area Committee and county agent work together in what is known as the program development process. The committee's responsibility is described in the following outline. Note that items 2 and 3 are specific for banner programs and non-banner programs.

1) Assist the county Extension agent with the planning phase of programming.
   A. Annually review the county situation, program evaluations, needs assessments, and the TCFF County Action Plan related to the area for which the committee has advisory responsibility.
   B. Identify and prioritize programming needs, goals and opportunities for the coming year. Appoint or organize task forces and coalitions, as needed, to provide specific direction for addressing high-priority issues.
   C. Select best-practice programs for addressing high-priority needs.

2) Assist the county Extension agent with the implementation phase of programming.

   Non-banner program
   A. Determine the best strategies for addressing each identified programming need.
   B. Set target dates for each educational activity and event and determine the best ways of marketing these programs to the target audience.
   C. Determine what educational methods and techniques will most effectively convey information to the people the educational program is intended to reach.
   D. Engage resource people to help present the program. Gather other resources that are needed to make the program successful.

   Banner program
   (The agent will first contact the specialist responsible for the banner program to let him or her know it will be used.)
   A. Discuss the banner program and how it will be implemented with the county Extension agent.
   B. Help market the program, using the marketing materials provided with the curriculum.
   C. Engage resource people to help present the program. Gather other resources that are needed to make the program successful.

3) Assist the county Extension agent with the evaluation phase of programming.

   Non-banner program
   A. Discuss evaluation strategies before the program begins.
   B. Review proposed evaluation instruments developed by the county Extension agent.
   C. With Regional Program Directors, subject matter specialists and evaluation specialists, review the evaluations at the end of the program and determine how the program can be improved in the coming year.

3) Assist the county Extension agent with the evaluation phase of programming.

   Banner program
   A. Before the program begins, review with the county Extension agent the evaluation methods and instruments prescribed by the program. (These cannot be changed because banner programs must be evaluated and interpreted uniformly across the state.) If there are questions, the agent will contact the specialist.
   B. With Regional Program Directors, subject matter specialists and evaluation specialists, review the evaluations at the end of the program and determine how the program can be improved in the coming year.

4) Assist the County Extension Agent with the interpretation phase of programming.

   A. Identify programming successes and evaluation results to highlight when interpreting or promoting the program to interested stakeholders and to the Leadership Advisory Board.
   B. Identify stakeholders (individuals and groups) who should know about the success of the program so that interpretive information can be targeted to them.
   C. Help make presentations about the program to the county Leadership Advisory Board, County Commissioners’ Court, and other stakeholders.
5) Assist the county Extension agent with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
   A. Review the membership rotation clause in the Program Area Committee by-laws and identify potential new committee members to replace those whose terms have expired.
   B. Help contact potential committee members.
   C. Help orient new committee members to their tasks and the committee’s role.

6) Use the best management practices for the management of external support funds adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.
   A. Help determine how the external support fund (account) will be managed and controlled by committee or task force members and assign that responsibility to members.

Changes in Program Area Committees

The structure of a Program Area Committee can be changed if that will help the group function more effectively and if the change fits the needs of the individual county. There are several options and they are outlined below. A change in committee structure should be agreed to by the county staff, the District Extension Administrator or County Extension Administrator, and the Regional Program Director during annual program planning conferences.

The success of a Program Area Committee depends on good communication, and there should be flexibility in the methods used. Most of the time face-to-face meetings will be necessary, especially when one of the major functions of the committee is to strategically plan and brainstorm ideas for educational programs. But in addition to meetings, everyone should be kept informed via e-mail and phone conferences when needed.

Option A – Traditional Program Area Committee

The committee meets face-to-face at least twice annually with the county Extension agent who is responsible for that particular base program area. The committee should consist of 8 to 15 people (recommended) who work or have interest in the base program area. The committee is responsible for educational programming from year to year. More specifically, the committee helps the county Extension agent plan, implement, evaluate and interpret all major educational efforts by completing the six tasks previously identified.

When to use. If the committee is functioning properly with this approach, by fully addressing its six tasks, then it should continue. For example, this approach may work well in very rural areas where issues may not be as diverse as in other counties.

Option B – Program Area Committee with one or more specific task forces or coalitions

The committee meets face-to-face at least once a year with the county Extension agent who is responsible for that particular base program area. The committee should consist of 8 to 15 people (recommended) who work or have interest in the base program area. At its meetings, the committee discusses and evaluates the educational programming efforts in a strategic way, so that it can help the county Extension agent determine what programs should be implemented from year to year, review the impact of those programs, and decide whether task forces or coalitions are needed to address priority issues.

Once the committee and the county Extension agent have decided what programs will be conducted in the coming year, the agent assigns a smaller group of people to help address a specific issue. This smaller group is a task force or coalition. It is made up of 3 to 5 people who have an interest in that particular educational area and who serve for 1 year. Task force/coalition membership changes yearly as educational programming changes. The agent can appoint as many task forces/coalitions as needed. Members of these groups can include resource people who are not members of the Program Area Committee.

A task force may be used when 1) the committee membership has strong professional and personal interests in the issue and 2) the educational program will be addressed in 1 year or less.

A coalition is useful when the planning group 1) consists mostly of professionals in the related topic or 2) the group needs to meet for more than 1 year.

When to use. One of the major criticisms of Program Area Committees is that members may not feel they are contributing if program efforts do not fit with their individual needs or interests. Thus, the agent may appoint a smaller group, made up of
individuals who do have expertise in the subject, to work on a specific issue. This option should be used when the Program Area Committee is very diverse and the specific issue to be addressed is much more focused.

Option C – for agriculture and natural resources and for family and consumer sciences Program Area Committees in counties with more than one agent or faculty member working in the base program area

(In agriculture and natural resources, examples include agents working in areas such as marine, horticulture, fire ants and IPM. In family and consumer sciences, examples include agents working in areas such as ENP, BLT and financial resource management.)

In counties with more than one agent working within base programs, each agent will develop a Program Area Committee to support his or her efforts. For example, if a county has one agent focusing on row crop and livestock production and another focusing on horticulture, each agent would form a Program Area Committee to assist in those areas under the agriculture and natural resources base program umbrella. If a county has one agent working with the Expanded Nutrition Program and another focusing on financial resource management, each agent would form a Program Area Committee to assist in those areas under the family and consumer sciences base program umbrella.

In addition, with the approval of DEAs, CEDs and RPDs, master volunteer associations such as Master Naturalists or Master Clothing Volunteers can serve as task forces to assist with educational programs in these subject matter areas.

When to use. This option is especially relevant in urban counties or category 6 and 7 counties where having just one Program Area Committee would dilute the efforts of all programs because of the variety of interests among committee members.

Option C – for community and economic development

The Leadership Advisory Board may also serve as the Program Area Committee for community and economic development.

When to use. The Leadership Advisory Board is a diverse group of community leaders who have the expertise to address community and economic development issues. This option is most useful in rural counties.

On pages 7 and 8 are checklists county Extension agents can use when working with Program Area Committees. Beginning on page 9 are position descriptions for Program Area Committees.

County Youth Boards

For many years, programs for youth have been driven by the social problems or risks young people experience. These deficit-based programs are designed to “keep kids out of trouble” by exposing them to positive activities and relationships. They are usually developed and conducted by adult “experts,” with little or no input from young people themselves.

Over the last two decades, there has been a shift in the way many organizations serve youth with the realization that youth-adult partnerships are essential. Key ingredients in a successful program are the role young people play, the relationship between the adults and young people involved, and the settings in which programs take place (The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003).

Research shows that when young people work with adult volunteers

- the youth programs will be more successful and have a greater impact;
- the ability of young people to communicate well, solve problems, and work effectively with others will increase significantly; and
- the young people will mature and become more responsible and compassionate because they are involved in “caring for” other young people.

Thus, it is important for young people to be involved with the county Extension agent and adult volunteers in developing, implementing, evaluating and interpreting educational programs for youth. The County Youth Board supports the 4-H and youth development program just as the Program Area Committees support the other base programs in Extension.

County Youth Board with one or more specific task forces or coalitions

The board meets face-to-face with the county Extension agent at least twice annually. At other times the board is strongly urged to communicate using distance technologies such as chat rooms, e-conferencing and blogs. Members serve 2-year terms.
It is recommended that the board be made up of 8 to 15 people who work or have interest in the area of youth development and who represent the demographics and diversity of the county. Most board members should be young people (three youth to one adult). The ages of youth members should range from 12 to 17, at the discretion of the county Extension agent.

At least two youth members should be from the 4-H and Youth Development Program—one representing a club unit (project, community, school, military, etc.) and one representing other 4-H groups (special interest group, school enrichment, after-school program, etc.). Other youth members could come from organizations such as FFA, boys' and girls' clubs, scouts or student councils. They should represent public and private schools and home school programs.

Adult members should have a broad perspective and be able to think beyond the traditional 4-H program. They should be passionate about serving young people in their communities. Adult members might be youth ministers, public or private school teachers, school board members, legislative aides, county commissioners, city parks and recreation managers, business people, or staff members of youth and family service agencies. At least one adult on the board should be an educator.

The County Youth Board serves a strategic function by helping the county Extension agent determine what programs should be implemented from year to year, reviewing the educational impacts of programs, determining how to reach new youth audiences, and helping decide whether task forces or coalitions are needed to address priority issues.

Once the board and the agent have decided what programs will be conducted in the coming year, the agent may assign a smaller group of people to help address specific issues. This smaller group is a task force or coalition and it functions in the same way as for a Program Area Committee.

Relationship between the Youth Board, 4-H Council and VLAT

The County Youth Board, 4-H Council and Volunteer Leaders Association of Texas (VLAT) have distinct roles. The board is made up of both young people and adults. It supports the county Extension agent in planning, conducting, evaluating and interpreting youth development programs. The 4-H Council is the youth leadership of the 4-H program. The council trains 4-H officers, plans leadership development sessions for members, and promotes the 4-H program. VLAT is an organization of adult volunteers. It trains and recognizes volunteer leaders, promotes the 4-H program, and helps develop program resources.

The two members of the County Youth Board who represent 4-H may or not be on the 4-H Council.

Youth Board programs

The board should sponsor or play a significant role in at least one major program each year. This may be an ongoing program or a different program each year. The key is for the board members to work together and take ownership of the program to ensure its success. The county Extension agent facilitates the work of the Board and carries it through the program development process. Examples of programs a Youth Board might sponsor include:

Leadership workshop. A 1-day workshop to help young people become effective leaders of their organizations. This would be a community-wide event to which all young people in leadership positions are invited.

County-wide community service project. A 1-day event in which young people (or young people and adults) work together on a community service project. The board would solicit potential projects and, with the county Extension agent, assign work groups to each project. At the end of the day, the groups would come together for a recognition dinner and highlight the services that were performed.

Farm safety camp. A 1-day camp to teach young people about safety on the farm.

Having responsibility for projects such as these gives young board members the opportunity to develop their own leadership skills while addressing the issues they believe are most important to their peers.

A position description for County Youth Boards is found on page 12.

Additional reading


Other publications in this series on volunteer administration:

D-1451, Volunteer Administration in the 21st Century: Roles Volunteers Play in Texas AgriLife Extension

D-1452, Leadership Advisory Boards

D-1454, An Overview of Volunteer Associations and Groups

D-1455, Understanding and Managing Direct and Episodic Volunteers

D-1456, Managing the Risk Associated with Volunteer Service
Checklist for County Extension Agents to Use with Program Area Committees
(Non-Banner Programs)

1. Assist the county Extension agent with the planning phase of programming.
   ____ Annually review the county situation, program evaluations, needs assessments, and the TCFF County Action Plan related to the area for which the committee has advisory responsibility.
   ____ Identify and prioritize programming needs, goals and opportunities.
   ____ Select best-practice programs for addressing high-priority needs.

2. Assist the county Extension agent with the implementation phase of programming.
   ____ Determine strategies for addressing each programming need.
   ____ Set target dates for each educational event and activity and determine the best ways of marketing programs to target audiences.
   ____ Determine what educational methods will be most effective with the target audiences.
   ____ Engage resource people to help present the program and gather other necessary resources.

3. Assist the county Extension agent with the evaluation phase of programming.
   ____ Discuss evaluation before the program begins.
   ____ Review proposed evaluation instruments developed by the county Extension agent.
   ____ With Regional Program Directors, subject matter specialists, and evaluation specialists, review evaluations after the program to determine how the program can be improved in the coming year.

4. Assist the county Extension agent with the interpretation phase of programming.
   ____ Identify programming successes and evaluation results that will be highlighted when interpreting or promoting the program to interested stakeholders and to the Leadership Advisory Board.
   ____ Identify stakeholders (individuals and groups) who should know about the program so that interpretive information can be targeted to them.
   ____ Help make presentations about the program to the county Leadership Advisory Board, County Commissioners’ Court, and other stakeholders.

5. Assist the county Extension agent with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
   ____ Review the membership rotation clause in the Program Area Committee by-laws and identify potential new committee members to replace those whose terms have expired.
   ____ Help contact potential committee members.
   ____ Help orient new committee members.

6. Use the best management practices for the management of external support funds adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.
   ____ Help determine how the external support fund (account) will be managed and controlled by committee or task force/coalition members and assign that responsibility to members.

Year: ___________ County: _______________________________________ CEA: ________________________
Checklist for County Extension Agents to Use with Program Area Committees

(Banner Programs)

1. Assist the county Extension agent with the planning phase of programming.
   ____ Annually review the county situation, program evaluations, needs assessments, and the TCFF County Action Plan related to the area for which the committee has advisory responsibility.
   ____ Identify and prioritize programming needs, goals and opportunities.
   ____ Select best-practice programs for addressing high-priority needs.

2. Assist the county Extension agent with the implementation phase of programming.
   ____ The agent will first contact the specialist responsible for the banner program and let him or her know it will be used.
   ____ Discuss the banner program and how it will be implemented with the county Extension agent.
   ____ Help market the program, using the marketing materials provided with the curriculum.
   ____ Engage resource people to help present the program. Gather other necessary resources.

3. Assist the county Extension agent with the evaluation phase of programming.
   ____ Before the program begins, review with the agent the evaluation methods and instruments prescribed by the program. (These cannot be changed because banner programs must be evaluated and interpreted uniformly across the state.) If there are questions, the agent should contact the specialist.
   ____ With Regional Program Directors, subject matter specialists, and evaluation specialists, review evaluations after the program to determine how the program can be improved in the coming year.

4. Assist the county Extension agent with the interpretation phase of programming.
   ____ Identify the programming successes and evaluation results that will be highlighted when interpreting or promoting the program to interested stakeholders and to the Leadership Advisory Board.
   ____ Identify stakeholders (individuals and groups) who should know about the success of the program so that interpretive information can be targeted to them.
   ____ Help make presentations about the program to the county Leadership Advisory Board, County Commissioners’ Court, and other stakeholders.

5. Assist the county Extension agent with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
   ____ Review the membership rotation clause in the Program Area Committee by-laws and identify potential new committee members to replace those whose terms have expired.
   ____ Help contact potential committee members.
   ____ Help orient new committee members to their tasks and the committee’s role.

6. Use the best management practices for the management of external support funds adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.
   ____ Help determine how the external support fund (account) will be managed and controlled by committee or task force members and assign that responsibility to members.

Year: ___________  County: __________________________  CEA: ________________________
Title: Texas Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Area Committee Member

Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Area Committee Advisor: County Extension Agent–Agriculture and Natural Resources

Purpose of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Area Committee: To ensure that programs relevant to local needs are being developed and implemented.

Benefits of serving on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Area Committee:
- Be a significant part of the educational process.
- See the impact the agriculture and natural resources program has in the county.
- See the positive change in program participants.
- Experience personal growth from participating in this vital effort.

Responsibilities of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Area Committee: The committee is responsible for educational programs associated with agriculture and natural resources. Members typically serve for 3 years. The six specific functions of the committee are
  - To assist the county Extension agent (CEA) with the planning phase of programming.
  - To assist the CEA with the implementation phase of programming.
  - To assist the CEA with the evaluation phase of programming.
  - To assist the CEA with the interpretation phase of programming.
  - To assist the CEA with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
  - To use the best management practices for financial management adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.

Qualifications and special skills:
- Resides in the community or county
- Is interested in agriculture and natural resources
- Has a broad, general perspective of the issues related to agriculture and natural resources in the county
- Represents the program’s targeted audience
- Has good visioning and communication skills
- Is interested in the quality of life of the county

Time required: The committee usually meets two or three times a year. These meetings require 4 to 10 hours per year. In addition, about 10 hours may be needed to carry out individual responsibilities. Task force or coalition members who are appointed because of their expertise in a specific area will require more time.

Resources and support available: The county Extension staff will provide the training you need to be a successful Program Area Committee member. Additional information is available at http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/

If interested, respond to: The Texas Extension office in your county
Title: Texas Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee Member

Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee Advisor: County Extension Agent – Family and Consumer Sciences

Purpose of the Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee: To ensure that programs relevant to local needs are being developed and implemented.

Benefits of serving on the Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee:
• Be a significant part of the educational process
• See the impact the family and consumer sciences program has in the county
• See the positive change in program participants
• Experience personal growth from participation in this vital effort

Responsibilities of the Family and Consumer Sciences Program Area Committee: The committee is responsible for educational programs associated with family and consumer sciences. Members typically serve for 3 years. The six specific functions of the committee are
• To assist the county Extension agent (CEA) with the planning phase of programming.
• To assist the CEA with the implementation phase of programming.
• To assist the CEA with the evaluation phase of programming.
• To assist the CEA with the interpretation phase of programming.
• To assist the CEA with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
• To use the best management practices for financial management adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.

Qualifications and special skills:
• Resides in the community or county
• Is interested in family and consumer sciences
• Has a broad, general perspective of the issues related to family and consumer sciences in the county
• Represents the program’s targeted audience
• Has good visioning and communication skills
• Is interested in the quality of life of the county

Time required: The committee usually meets two or three times a year. These meetings require 4 to 10 hours per year. In addition, about 10 hours may be needed to carry out individual responsibilities. Task force or coalition members who are appointed because of their expertise in a specific area will require more time.

Resources and support available: The county Extension staff will provide the training you need to be a successful Program Area Committee member. Additional information is available at http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/

If interested, respond to: The Texas Extension office in your county
Title: Texas Extension Community and Economic Development Program Area Committee Member

Community and Economic Development Program Area Committee Advisor: County Extension Agent(s)

Purpose of the Community and Economic Development Program Area Committee: To ensure that programs relevant to local needs are being developed and implemented.

Benefits of serving on the Community and Economic Development Program Area Committee:
• Be a significant part of the educational process
• See the impact the community and economic development program has in the county
• See the positive change in program participants
• Experience personal growth from participation in this vital effort

Qualifications and special skills:
• Resides in the community or county
• Is interested in community and economic development
• Has a broad, general perspective of the issues related to community and economic development in the county
• Represents the program’s targeted audience
• Has good visioning and communication skills
• Is interested in the quality of life of the county

Time required: The committee usually meets two or three times a year. These meetings require 4 to 10 hours per year. In addition, about 10 hours may be needed to carry out individual responsibilities. Task force or coalition members who are appointed because of their expertise in a specific area will require more time.

Resources and support available: The county Extension staff will provide the training you need to be a successful Program Area Committee member. Additional information is available at http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/

If interested, respond to: The Texas Extension office in your county
County Youth Board Member
Position Description

Title: Texas Extension County Youth Board Member

Youth Board Advisor: County Extension Agent
- 4-H and Youth Development or other county Extension agent

Purpose of the Youth Board: To ensure that programs relevant to local needs are being developed and implemented.

Benefits of serving on the Youth Board:
- Be a significant part of the educational process
- See the impact the youth board has in the county
- See the positive change in program participants
- Develop skills you can use for the rest of your life

Responsibilities of the Youth Board: The Youth Board is responsible for educational programs associated with youth development. Members typically serve for 2 years. The board’s six specific functions are:

- To assist the county Extension agent (CEA) with the planning phase of programming.
- To assist the CEA with the implementation phase of programming.
- To assist the CEA with the evaluation phase of programming.
- To assist the CEA with the interpretation phase of programming.
- To assist the CEA with committee membership rotation to ensure optimum representation and diversity.
- To use the best management practices for financial management adopted by The Texas A&M University System and Texas Extension.

Qualifications and special skills:
- Resides in the community or county
- Is interested in youth development
- Has a broad, general perspective of the issues related to youth development in the county
- Represents the program’s targeted audience
- Has good visioning and communication skills
- Is interested in the quality of life of the county

Time required: The board usually meets two or three times a year. These meetings require 4 to 10 hours per year. In addition, about 10 hours may be needed to carry out individual responsibilities. Task force or coalition members who are appointed because of their expertise in a specific area will require more time.

Resources and support available: The county Extension staff will provide the training you need to be a successful Youth Board member. Additional information is available at http://texasvolunteer.tamu.edu/

If interested, respond to: The Texas Extension office in your county
This material was developed by the Texas AgriLife Extension Volunteer Steering Committee, chaired by Chris Boleman and Angela Burkham. Extension faculty who serve on the committee are Dirk Aaron, Michelle Allen, Joyce Cavanagh, Nelson Daniels, Darrell Dromgoole, Linda Lynch Evans, Alma Fonseca, Pam Foster, Elaine Fries, Richie Griffin, Rick Hirsch, Kit Horne, Shirley Long, Rick Machen, Linda Mock, Carolyn Nobles, Susan Richey, Bob Robinson, Renee Sanders, Robert Scott, Doug Welsh, Neal Wilkins and Ron Woolley. Administrative advisors are Kyle Smith, Associate Director for County Programs, and Martha Couch, Associate Director for 4-H and Youth Development.

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