



# Texas Agricultural Extension Service

## THE COMMITTEE CHAIR'S ROLE

### Program Area Committees of the Extension Program Council

#### You Hold an Important Position!

Congratulations on being selected committee chair! You hold a vital position of leadership on the committee. That means you take the lead in seeing that your committee effectively carries out its assignment. You'll have an opportunity to work very closely with county 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'll plan how the committee will carry out its assignment.

Your committee is a part of the county Extension Program Council. The Council's executive board establishes program area 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. Some committees are responsible for other special area of concerns to citizens such as home gardening and landscaping. So, your committee is one of several committees 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'll work with you in preparing for and conducting meetings.

#### Committee Chair's Responsibilities

Your overall responsibility is to be in charge of the committee's work. That doesn't mean that you do everything yourself – it means that you organize the committee's work so that all members have op-

portunity to be involved. You'll want each member to take an active role in committee meetings. Also they should help do tasks necessary for conducting educational activities the committee plans for various groups of people.

#### Understanding the Committee's Role

The program area committee's role includes the following functions:

- Planning the educational program
- Helping implement or carry out the program
- Evaluating program results
- Reporting/interpreting the committee's accomplishments to others

A detailed description of this role is contained in another publication entitled, *Program Area Committees*, available from your Extension agents. Several meetings will be required during the year to carry out these committee functions.

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 another special area of concern? The Council's executive board and your county Extension agents can clarify the assignment.

If your committee is in charge of addressing one or more of the issues, they will be described in the Long-Range Extension Program. Obtain a copy of the Long-Range Extension Program and keep it available at all times.

Extension specialists and other local and area resource people who have knowledge about your

committee's area of responsibility should be identified and asked to help when you need them. Extension agents can arrange for specialists to meet with you or the whole committee. Resource people can help you understand issues, situations, concerns and alternatives for addressing problems and concerns.

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

## **Committee Meetings**

Productive committee meetings are essential in maintaining the interest and support 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 planning.

### **Planning the Meeting**

Not every meeting requires extensive planning, but most meetings are successful when details have been carefully thought out. What should happen before the meeting ever takes place? Several weeks before a meeting, visit with your Extension agents to begin 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 meeting place where members will be comfortable.
- Make a preliminary agenda (list the things you want to discuss and accomplish).
- Plan to involve members (give a report on a situation, contact a resource person, lead discussion on a topic, etc.). Assigning members

tasks to do before and during meetings 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 finalizing 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 any suggestions to add to the agenda. Explain any meeting tasks you want them to do.

After you've talked to all of them, set the meeting date and finalize the agenda. When members have been involved in this way, they are more likely to attend, actively participate in decisionmaking and exhibit 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 a copy of the finalized agenda.

### **Conducting the Meeting**

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

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

- Call the meeting to order on time.
- The committee chair presides at the meeting, but you shouldn't do all the talking. 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. Make sure each member has a copy.

- Present each topic on the agenda. Some topics 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.
- Near the end of the meeting, summarize what has been decided.
- Announce plans for the next meeting.
- Express your appreciation for each member's participation.
- Adjourn the meeting at the designated time.

### **Following Through After the Meeting**

You had a good meeting! The 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 the meeting go as you planned? Did most members attend? Could anything be done differently next time to improve attendance or the meeting itself?
- Keep in touch with members who accepted assignments. Offer assistance when needed.
- Contact members who did not attend and share what was accomplished at the meeting.
- Send a written summary of the meeting 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 those who need to understand and support your committee's goals. Report your committee's plans and activities to other groups.
  - Report committee accomplishments to the executive board of the Council. You are a member of the board because you

are a committee chair. One of the board's functions is to coordinate and support the work of its committees.

- Report accomplishments to the Extension Program Council at the annual meeting.
- Keep the public informed through mass media.

## **Maintain an Active Membership**

Keeping the committee active is an important task of the committee chair. Everyone needs to feel important. Express appreciation to members for their help and contributions. An active committee makes your job more enjoyable.

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 executive 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 are created by the county Extension Program Council. They are vital to the Council's effectiveness in providing Extension educational programs that meet people's needs. The committee's role includes planning the educational program, helping implement the program, evaluating the results and reporting the committee's accomplishments. As committee chair, you take the lead in planning and conducting meetings. You organize the committee's work so that members are involved. And you work closely with Extension agents to see that your committee succeeds!

