

Association of Leadership Educators
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Bozeman, Montana

PRESENTATION PROPOSAL

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2. Title of Presentation: Creating Effective Boards and Committees 101
3. Presentation Track: Practice
4. Description:
Public boards face unique challenges as they work in the public arena. Often, though, boards and advisory councils are unaware of what processes and group behaviors can make them the most effective. This workshop will model a “core training” to enhance leaders’ capacity to work on committees and to facilitate effective public meetings. Presenters will solicit experiences from the group to reinforce understanding of what happens in committees and share their teaching materials entitled *Twenty Things Everyone Needs to Know When Serving on a Committee*.
5. Biographical Profiles
Mike Liepold was first hired by the University of Minnesota Extension Service as a 4-H Summer Assistant during his junior year of college at South Dakota State University. Nineteen years later, Mike continues to serve Extension as Regional Educator in Leadership and Civic Engagement. Mike has specialized in leadership education since the mid-80’s. He took a sabbatical to work as an Intern with the

Vice President's Reinventing Government Group, the National Performance Review in Washington DC. There he studied performance based management for local units of government. As part of his current Extension role, Mike manages the Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership Program. MARL is a two-year, statewide cohort leadership program offered through a partnership between Southwest Minnesota State University and the University of Minnesota Extension

Katie Rasmussen is a Regional Extension Educator and Associate Professor with the University of Minnesota Extension Service. She has over 25 years of teaching experience from her previous work in secondary education and her current work in the area of leadership and civic engagement. She has worked with appointed and elected officials, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups in developing new skills for working together. Her passion in developing working relationships among communities resulted in creating a customized countywide leadership program which has received statewide recognition. Besides her work with local boards and community groups, Katie has been a presenter/trainer for state conferences and leadership development programs.

Creating Effective Boards and Committees 101

Introduction

Those who work in organizations and communities know the need for effective boards and effective forums where decisions are made and local governance is provided. In the forward to *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making* by Sam Kaner, Michael Doyle presents two important lessons: 1) Leaders must have the ability to elicit, harness and focus the vast intellectual capital and goodwill, and 2) If people don't participate and "own" the solution to problems or agree to decisions, implementation may be half-hearted at best, and more likely than not, will fail. As leadership educators, we must enhance emerging leaders' capacity to work on committees and to facilitate effective public meetings – meetings that satisfy participants, create local ownership, and gain investment from participants.

The workshop will present a core training for members of boards, advisory councils, and committees to understand:

- The key functions of a productive committee
- Strategies for providing effective committee leadership and management
- The roles and responsibilities members play in helping committees be productive

Background

Extension regional center directors work with local extension committees to identify programming needs in their communities. Providing training for effective boards and committees was identified as a strong need in the rural counties of southern and central Minnesota as well as the metro counties. The University of Minnesota Extension Service, Leadership and Civic Engagement team developed the project design and materials for a two hour workshop that would provide a core training for anyone who serves on a board or committee. Participants have been county/city department heads, county/city/township board members, committee members of chambers, United Ways, churches, and 4-H leaders.

Delivery of the trainings have clustered into two categories –

County Sponsored Workshop – One-time groups of 20-30 people meet for a 2 hour length of time. Regional Center Directors work with local Extension Advisory Committees to fund and promote the workshop in their respective communities.

Module Component of Leadership Cohort – Groups of 20-40 people meeting together 6-12 times over a time period of 10-18 months. The 2-3 hour training is included as a session of the overall program.

How It Works

The training is designed for anyone who serves on a committee. The primary source of research for the training was the *Facilitation Resources*, an eight volume curriculum co-authored by the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1999. A resource booklet entitled *Twenty Things Everyone Needs to Know When Serving on a Committee* is provided to workshop participants. It is a practical, easy to use resource with additional information, tools, and strategies they can apply. (Research sources are listed with references)

Presenters use various learning strategies to engage participants during the workshop:

- Soliciting experiences from the group to reinforce understanding of what happens in committees
- Small group discussion to consider critical questions regarding committee work
- Exercises and individual assessments in which participants discover the characteristics of effective committee leaders
- Case study to identify effective board processes and behaviors

Key concepts taught are:

Six traps to avoid: poor facilitation, lack of direction, letting private interests influence public decisions, getting stuck in the cycle of conflict, letting challenging personalities dominate, and making decisions outside the meeting.

Four keys to committee productivity: excellent meeting management, right expertise on the team, great relationships among team members, and results that are understood and adopted.

Five skills for group leaders to succeed: set shared vision and goals, keep your group on track, get feedback on how the meetings are going for people, seek input from all group members and set up information and communication system.

Five skills for group members to make a difference: ask others for input to bring to the committee, seek and share relevant data, propose group decision making processes, solve problems creatively, and contribute ideas for an overall improved group process.

Results to Date

In 2005, the training was sponsored by eight counties in both rural and urban communities with a total of 183 people participating. Another 30 people

participated in the training as a component of a leadership cohort with an additional three leadership cohorts including the training as part of their 2006 programs.

Following the workshop, learning outcomes are measured utilizing a retrospective methodology, using an end-of-event form where participants rate their knowledge changes before the program and after the program. Knowledge of the concepts is rated from 1 (poor) to 4 (good). The following example is the evaluation of learning outcomes for 19 participants from a training held on 9-12-05 in Canby, Minnesota.

Key Concept	Before This Session					BEFORE Total	After This Session				AFTER Total	Overall Change
	Poor			Good	Poor				Good			
	1	2	3	4	1		2	3	4			
1. Goal #1 The key functions of a productive committee	2	8	5	4	64.5%	0	0	7	12	90.8%	26.3%	
2. Goal #2 Strategies for providing effective committee leadership and management	1	6	9	3	68.4%	0	0	5	15	94.7%	26.3%	
3. Goal #3 The roles and responsibilities members play in helping committees be productive	2	7	7	3	64.5%	0	0	7	15	90.8%	26.3%	
TOTALS					65.8%					92.1%	26.3%	

Conclusions/Recommendations

Community work happens in formal and informal organizations – often through committees - that work best when they operate with integrity, professionalism and thoughtful approaches to their mission. This training explores the fundamental committee work that makes up much of a community’s efforts, what can go wrong, and how to do it right. Those who work in organizations and communities know the need for effective boards and effective forums where decisions are made and local governance is provided. Even the most experienced of committee members will benefit from reviewing the basics of effective group work. The resource *Twenty Things Everyone Needs to Know*

When Serving on a Committee provides trainers with a curriculum that can be applicable to any group. Participants also walk away with practical knowledge and a thoughtful analysis of how to make community organizations work better.

References

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Daryl K. Heasley, James E. Van Horn, and Dan E. Moore, Associate Professors of Rural Sociology Extension for the Health Trustees Leadership Program, established through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to the Cooperative Extension Service of the Pennsylvania State University

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Jo J. Jones, Ed.D, and R. Dale Safrit, Ed.D., Associate Professor Agricultural Education, Ohio State University Extension as part of the presentation *Developing Leadership Through Critical Thinking Strategies*, given at the Southern Region Leadership Conference, April 10-12, 1996, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Justice, T. and Jamieson, D. (1998) *The Complete Guide to Facilitation: Enabling Groups to Succeed*

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