

## **Developing Volunteer Leaders in Florida Farm Bureau**

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### *Introduction:*

The Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF) is Florida's largest general agricultural organization with more than 140,000 member-families in 64 counties. Nationally, Farm Bureau is the largest farm organization, with membership at over 6 million member-families (Florida Farm Bureau Federation, 2006). As a grassroots organization, membership is Farm Bureau's greatest strength.

The mission of the American Farm Bureau Federation is "to implement policies that are developed by members." However, FFBF has been concerned in recent years about the lack of member involvement and the flow of ideas from individual members to the larger organization. In addition, FFBF has established membership growth as a statewide priority, recognizing that a large membership base is vital to maintaining a strong, fiscally sound organization. The leadership of local Farm Bureau members has been considered pivotal to issues of member involvement. FFBF has decided to centralize efforts in leadership development programs to improve the leadership skills and practices of the local Farm Bureau members and officers.

Although a variety of leadership training models exist, none have been identified as potential programs for meeting the leadership needs specific to local Farm Bureau members. Hustedde and Woodward (1996) identified 15 essential public skills which often need to be developed in rural leadership training programs; one of the skills identified was volunteer management. At the local level, Farm Bureau is an organization of volunteers leading volunteers, so volunteer management is key to organizational success. This program seeks to increase the volunteer base by improving member recruitment, while at the same time developing current members into volunteer leaders. The four objectives for the Member Recruitment, Involvement, and Development workshop are:

- Objective # 1: Improve strategies to educate the public about the Florida Farm Bureau Federation and its efforts.
- Objective # 2: Identify innovative practices for recruiting Farm Bureau members.
- Objective # 3: Develop motivational techniques to engage members as volunteers and Farm Bureau leaders.
- Objective # 4: Outline successful leadership development practices for Farm Bureau members and leaders.

This paper will focus on objectives three and four as they relate to developing volunteer leaders and leadership development practices for the Florida Farm Bureau organization.

### *Background:*

Grassroots leadership is the foundation of the Farm Bureau Federation. Local leaders are instrumental in identifying, promoting, and accomplishing goals in the agricultural industry. County leaders are at the heart of effective state Farm Bureau

Federations. Local committee leaders have a unique perspective of problems and challenges facing the industry, and they can help to identify goals and objectives that lead to viable solutions through public policy and legislation.

The Florida Farm Bureau is committed to the development of local leadership and a strong committee structure. To ensure that local leaders have the tools they need to be successful, the Florida Farm Bureau Federation desired leadership training for local leaders, officers, committee chairs, and committee members. The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida possessed the resources and expertise to prepare local leadership training curricula for the Florida Farm Bureau. Through a grant sponsored by Florida Farm Bureau, university leadership educators prepared a leadership development program to meet the needs of Farm Bureau leaders in the state.

A series of five leadership development workshops entitled, “*Strengthening the Voice*”, were delivered to Farm Bureau in a "train the trainer" format. The workshops prepared staff to deliver the workshops to county board leaders. Curriculum for the workshops, development and publication of support materials, and instructional materials for the workshops was provided to the trainers. The topics identified for delivery were:

1. Farm Bureau foundations
2. Organization management
3. Effective meetings
4. Member Recruitment, Involvement, and Development
5. Advocacy Involvement & Leadership

The Member Recruitment, Involvement, and Development workshop is the focus for this paper. The outcomes of this workshop are for county Farm Bureau leaders to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively recruit and involve members in the organization, learn practices to train members to become future leaders, and improve personal leadership development behaviors. This workshop uses the concepts of Best Practices to encourage leaders to apply leadership skills and capabilities in real-life settings.

*How it works:*

The emphasis of the workshop is not to acquire new members, but more importantly, future leaders of the organization. Therefore, the focus is placed on looking at the progression of members into leaders. In order to develop future leaders, new members must be recruited, become involved in the organization and its activities, and encouraged to acquire leadership positions.

The workshop is structured around adult learning theory that states adults learn in a variety of ways and rural leaders learn best by a process of action and reflection (Dhanakumar, Rossing, & Campbell, 1996). As a result, learning opportunities engage participants in proper activities to expand their knowledge base and facilitate understanding. The program involves a number of activities to assist in learning and understanding of the content. In addition, time is taken to process and reflect on the activities and is a critical part to the success of the program.

The workshop is divided into four one-hour objectives. Within each objective, various experiential activities, video interviews, group discussion, and reflective thought are included. Engagement in active learning is applied to potential situations that encourage future implementation of the Best Practices. Focus on leadership development of volunteers is highlighted in objective three and four of this workshop.

### **Objective Three**

Volunteer motivation and volunteer development models offer structure to objective three:

- Objective #3: Develop motivational techniques to engage members as volunteers and Farm Bureau leaders.
  - Point 1: Identify motivations of members to participate in activities and volunteer their time
  - Point 2: Develop and manage volunteer leaders

Motivations of volunteers and the ISOTURES model are combined into learning activities that guide volunteer leader development. The ISOTURES model is analyzed according to current practices and areas for improvement in volunteer leadership development. Best practices for this objective include:

- Commit to involving one or more new volunteer leaders in each activity
- Conduct an annual survey of volunteers to assess motivations and interests
- Apply the ISOTURES model of volunteer management to develop leaders
- Retain leaders by engaging them in all phases of volunteer development
- Initiate an annual volunteer recruitment and orientation session
- Use both informal and formal methods for recognizing volunteers

### **Objective Four**

Leadership development practices, skills, and concepts offer structure to objective four:

- Objective #4: Outline successful leadership development practices for Farm Bureau members and leaders.
  - Point 1: Build a diversified and representative county board
  - Point 2: Identify key leadership development practices for sustainable county boards

The first point of this objective involves group discussion of a variety of leadership quotes focused on diversity in leadership and reflective thought on the benefits of leadership to the organization. Best practices include:

- Assign leaders to new challenges at the first board meeting of each year
- Adopt and apply board and committee member guidelines

The second point identifies key leadership development practices for volunteer leaders. Activities include a self-assessment of leadership styles, personal definitions of leadership, challenges of leadership styles, and a critical analysis of leadership styles. The inclusion of Kouzes and Posner (1995) and competencies for Farm Bureau volunteer leaders encourages reflection on the commitment to leadership and needed improvements. The final activity allows participants to identify potential ideas, changes,

challenges, and future needs in leadership development for county board leaders. The Best practices for this objective include:

- Read one new leadership development book each year
- Assess leadership development needs annually through personal assessments
- Rotate county board members to new committees on an annual basis
- Adhere to the “18 Core Competencies for Effective Farm Bureau Volunteer Leaders”

*Results to date:*

The five “*Strengthening the Voice*” leadership development workshops have been delivered to twenty Florida Farm Bureau staff members. The Member Recruitment, Involvement, and Development workshop is scheduled to be presented to county board leaders across the state in the summer of 2007. Scheduled trainings will be implemented by teams consisting of state and field staff. The implementation of Best practices from this workshop are designed to increase overall membership for Florida Farm Bureau, improve the leadership development of current county board leaders, and ultimately improve the quality of leadership exhibited by the entire organization.

*Conclusions/Recommendations:*

Organizations are searching for leadership development education. Qualified leaders are being recognized as a critical component to the success of volunteer organizations, such as Farm Bureau. Volunteer leaders must regularly take the time to reflect on the concept of leadership and practice skills. Through reflection and active learning, leadership behaviors can be developed for personal and professional success. By applying fundamental leadership skills, extraordinary results can be achieved by anyone within an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Continual commitment to leadership development is growing as organizations need to be prepared to respond to leadership challenges. Leaders can be better prepared by developing leadership skills, practices, behaviors, and actions to confront these challenges.

Public and private organizations are turning to leadership educators and universities to provide professional development for staff. Leadership educators must work with all industries and organizations to implement leadership development programs. The partnerships created are mutually beneficial. The organization receives critical leadership training and the university gains a site for student internships and service learning opportunities that provide practical, relevant field experiences.

*References*

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