

The Case for Competency Based Volunteer Training and Curriculum

Judy Groff
Program Development and Advisory System Leader
NC Cooperative Extension
Personal and Organizational Development
Box 7569, Raleigh, NC 27695-7569
Judy_groff@ncsu.edu
Phone# 919-515-8481
Fax# 919-513-1242

Spring Williams
County Extension Director
North Carolina Cooperative Extension
130 Ammons Drive, Suite 2
Morganton, NC 28655
Spring_Williams@ncsu.edu
Phone# 828-439-4460
Fax# 828-439-4468

A volunteer competency needs assessment tool was the basis for developing the Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership (SEAL) curriculum. Participants will discuss the competency assessment tool and experience a sample of exercises from modules for the three competency areas of leadership, communications, and orientation to Extension. Agents, administrators and Specialists will receive a CD with the curriculum and an annotated bibliography describing contents of the CD.

Dr. Judy Groff is the Program Development and Advisory System Leader for North Carolina Cooperative Extension at North Carolina State University. She has a BS Degree in Home Economics from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; a Master's Degree in Adult and Community College Education from North Carolina State University; a Doctorate in Adult Education from North Carolina State University. Judy has been an Extension Agent with 4-H and Foods and Nutrition responsibilities, a 4-H Specialist doing volunteer leadership development, and currently the Program Development and Advisory Systems Leader. Judy's professional interests are program development, volunteer systems management, leadership development, and psychological type used in building teams and professional development. Judy is professionally certified as an administrator of Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Human Patterns, FIRO- B, and the Communications Wheel. In 1992 she received the Epsilon Sigma Phi Distinguished Mid Career Award, one of four given nationally. She has been President of the North Carolina Extension Specialists Association, the North Carolina Federation of Cooperative Extension Professional Associations, and President of XI Chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi. She is married to Don, a middle school administrator and has a daughter Liz who is a student at North Carolina State University.

THE CASE FOR ADVISORY LEADER TRAINING

Abstract:

Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership (SEAL) curriculum is newly developed in the Southern Region. Participants will discuss the competency assessment tool and experience a sample of exercises from modules for the three competency areas of leadership, communications, and orientation to Extension. Agents, administrators and Specialists attending will receive a CD with the curriculum and an annotated bibliography describing contents of the CD.

Introduction:

Beyond orientation training, what do advisory leaders need for training? Some Extension faculty and advisory leaders say they come to the role with all leadership skills needed and time is too valuable to waste on training. Agreed we should recruit leaders with leadership expertise, but can these leaders perform to maximum proficiency for this specific role? Experts in the Southern region have reached consensus on what competencies and proficiencies are important to an advisory leader's success. This workshop will share the competency/proficiency needs assessment tool and the SEAL (Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership) curriculum developed to address three competency areas. Participants will:

1. Identify and discuss training issues and competencies needed by volunteers in advisory groups.
2. Experience exercises from several of the modules in the SEAL curriculum.
3. Dialogue a user of the curriculum about advisory leaders reactions to training.

Background:

Extension Directors in the Southern region supported and encouraged staff development leaders to develop training curriculum to push advisory leadership to a higher level of performance. A fully engaged advisory leadership system has become essential as more and more states across the country have experienced budget crises from state legislatures.

How it works:

Six states worked collaboratively in developing competency based, experiential learning modules agreed to be critical for advisory leaders. North Carolina led the initiative. There have been two regional advisory leadership conferences; one to benchmark exemplary advisory leadership systems and identify advisory leader needs, the other to train state teams on use of the SEAL curriculum.

Can all advisory leaders articulate the two roles they perform as advisory leaders? Can these advisory leaders plan and or lead a meeting to ensure maximum participation? What about conflict that arises in a meeting? Do they know the breadth and scope of all

Extension programs and collaborators in the county? These are a few of the questions the SEAL curriculum addresses. Besides being experiential in delivery, it is also designed to be flexible to meet the training needs of individuals, groups and Extension educator. There is an overview of Cooperative Extension and advisory leadership presented in an on-line format. The other modules range in time needs from 40 minutes to two hours. The modules can be compressed or expanded, mix and matched to develop a totally learner centered program. All the modules come with lesson plan, power point visuals, handouts, and worksheets.

Results to date:

In January 2004, three months after the conference, a follow-up survey was administered. In response to the question, "Has your state used the curriculum from the 2003 SEAL Conference," all but one state reported doing something positive with the curriculum upon returning. Georgia and North Carolina have duplicated the CD and are providing a copy to each county director. Mississippi, Kentucky and Tennessee are planning to use the curriculum for training with County Directors and/or agents this spring or summer. Arkansas and Florida are using some of the curriculum in training 4-H agents. Texas has used it as a part of facilitation trainings with all agents. Several commented that they like the flexibility of being able to mix and match different elements of the educational modules. They also indicated that the curriculum provided a solid foundation for advisory leader training, but more modules should be developed to address additional needs. The curriculum is available via the SRDC web site at <http://srpln.msstate.edu/seal/>.

Conclusions and Future Implications

Advisory leadership is going to remain an important area of development in Cooperative Extension as long as programming is important to survival and subsequently; advocacy with elected officials is critical. The development of competencies and proficiencies to guide curriculum development will help Extension leaders stay on the cutting edge.