Empowering and Motivating

NDSU Extension
Advisory Boards, Councils and Committees

A Hands-on, Practical Approach

Guide written by Michael F. McKinney, Extension educator, Public Policy Education. Permission to adapt received from the University of Florida/Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Service.


Appendix compiled by Rachelle Vetter with the assistance of Brad Cogdill, Cass County Extension District Director; Nels Peterson, Nelson County Extension Agent; and Colleen Svingen, Richland County Extension Agent. Edited by Brad Cogdill, Cass County District Director, and Gerald Sturn, Southwest District Director.
Top 10 Reasons to Have an Extension Advisory Council

10. **Assist your successor.** Having an effective advisory council in place is the best gift you can give a new agent coming into your county. Advisory council members can assist the new agent in understanding the needs of your county, can introduce the new person to key leaders in your communities and can provide a support system while this individual is getting established.

9. **Give input about your programs.** It is important to know that what you’re doing actually is meeting the needs of your constituents. Advisory councils can be a barometer to let you know if you are making a difference in your county with the work you are doing.

8. **Make your work life easier.** Advisory council members can assist you in prioritizing the programs that are most important for you to carry out during the upcoming year.

7. **Help you sunset programs that are no longer relevant to your county’s needs.** Sometimes giving up sacred programs is hard, but if a group of people is telling you to and supporting you when you do so, that can make ending a program easier.

6. **Have organized citizen input into your programming.** NDSU Extension’s purpose is to create learning partnerships that help adults and youth enhance their lives and communities. Your advisory council can help you achieve this purpose.

5. **Make new connections, develop new advocates and form new friendships in your county.** As an Extension professional, you never can know too many people or be too connected. Your advisory group members also appreciate the connections they form with you and other members.

4. **Offer individuals in your county a new leadership development experience.** One of our roles in Extension is to develop people. Many Extension advisory council members have gone on to accept other leadership roles because they gained the confidence and skills to do so by being part of an Extension advisory council.

3. **Tell the Extension story.** Volunteers can be our best form of marketing. If inspired and empowered, advisory council members can be our best advocates to county residents, legislators, county commissioners and other decision makers.

2. **Provide a group to try out all of these new, cool Extension advisory council tools on.**

1. **Leave a legacy for future generations.** If the right individuals are members of your advisory council, they can assist in making sure the vision for Extension is carried out long after you ride off into the sunset.

*Developed by Rachelle Vettern, Ph.D., NDSU Extension Leadership and Volunteer Development Specialist*
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Introduction

Working with your advisory boards, councils or committees should be one of the most rewarding experiences in your Extension career. At times, it also can be the most challenging.

This training manual, *Empowering and Motivating Extension Advisory Boards, Councils and Committees: A Hands-on, Practical Approach*, is designed to give you a practical look at ideas and examples that have worked for Extension professionals from numerous states.

Today’s political, social and economic conditions call for strong volunteer advisory groups to extend the mission of Extension education. Not only can they expand Extension’s presence in a community, but they can represent our needs to governing bodies and decision makers at all levels. For them to represent us, we first must make empowering, motivating and training our Extension advisory members a priority.

**Working Definitions**

**Extension Agent/Educator/Specialist** – the professional person designated to work with the advisory group.

**Empowerment** – giving your advisory members responsibility, along with the authority and resources, to accomplish the mission of the board, council or committee.

**Motivation** – instilling a sense of enthusiasm and ownership so your advisory members will want to accomplish their mission.

**Types of Extension Advisory Groups**

**Administrative** – a group that has a legal or administrative function, such as personnel, evaluation, budget, etc.

**Legitimization** – this kind of group has no function other than to serve as a “rubber stamp” for the Extension professional or organization.

**Volunteer Advisory** – this format serves as a vehicle for local residents to participate, influence and provide support in the planning and implementation of Extension education programs within their community.

**The Selection Process**

**Selection** is one of the most critical components of establishing or maintaining a viable working advisory group. The people you select ultimately will determine the direction your organization will follow in serving the needs of your community.

**Who Should I Select to Serve On My Advisory Group?**

- Select individuals with a genuine interest in your organization or program and look for people who communicate well with others.
- Look for individuals with a proven record for volunteering, but don’t overlook those citizens without prior volunteer service or past association with Extension.
- Avoid personal friends and individuals with a personal agenda. Example: The angry father who’s daughter was disqualified from the county horse show might not be the most objective person to serve on your advisory group.
- Try to balance your council with individuals who bring a wide range of interests and backgrounds to your group. Example: A typical overall advisory council might look like this: school administrator, Chamber of Commerce representative, public relations consultant, banker or real estate broker, ag. producer, teacher, youth, nonprofit agency director, elected decision maker, collaborative agency member, community activist, environmentalist, former policymaker, homemaker, newspaper editor, faith community/ministerial association representative, retired senior citizen.

When selecting your advisory group, having a diverse council is extremely important. Consider demographics like gender, age and ethnic makeup when selecting your membership.
In addition, factors such as geographical boundaries, program representation and community profile are key in the selection process. Having a good mix of those with a strong tradition and affiliation with Extension and those with no prior association with Extension is important. We suggest that at least one county commissioner serve and act as a liaison between the county advisory group and the county commission.

- To assist you with forming a diverse advisory council, Item IV in the Appendix has been created. It contains Finding a Committed and Enthusiastic Extension Advisory Council, Community Recruitment Worksheet for Advisory Groups and Selecting a Diverse Advisory Council Grid.

* Please consult Item V in the Appendix to view your county’s demographics from the North Dakota State Data Center related to age, gender and ethnic diversity. The Appendix also contains information on including youth as partners.

From time to time, unseating a member from your group might be necessary. Usually this results because of poor attendance. For your convenience, a sample letter of dismissal is included in Item XXXI in the Appendix.

**How Big Should My Advisory Group Be?**
The rule of thumb is that councils and program committees should have eight to 12 members and an overall advisory group should have 15 to 25 members.

**How Long Should Committee or Council Members Serve?**
Again, this will depend on your own situation and/or administrative directive. However, being up-front with your prospective member and letting them know in advance the amount of time and commitment necessary to fulfill their obligation is extremely important. Program committees generally tend to be less formal and require fewer meetings to complete their task. Overall Extension advisory groups, however, require more structure and commitment. This type of advisory group needs to have some structure in the form of bylaws or operating procedures to cover such things as term limits, attendance, duties of the officers and a clear mission and vision of the group.

Constantly bringing in new people with new ideas is important. The fastest way to generate an inefficient and stagnant advisory group is to retain the same members year after year. Ideally, people will commit to serve a minimum of three years on an overall advisory group. If this is your first advisory council meeting, you will need to work with the group to brainstorm a set of ground rules and develop bylaws for governing the council meetings. Item XVI in the Appendix includes an example of some common group ground rules. Item XXI also contains an example of the Richland County Extension Advisory Committee Members Guide and Bylaws. They may be used as a reference while creating your resources or they may be adapted to suit the needs of your county group.

**Empowering Yourself to Serve Others**
One of the best ways to recruit a volunteer is to be a volunteer yourself. Remember, Extension is not the only show in town. Other educational, governmental and nonprofit organizations will be contacting you to serve on their councils, too. Through this collaborative effort, you soon will be recognized as a team player and a community resource. The number of organizational contacts you will make from this endeavor is amazing. Your collaborative effort will open all kinds of professional opportunities for you. Not only will you obtain greater knowledge of your community, but you will expand your presence in the community and have an opportunity to promote Extension and educate other professionals about the many resources available through our university and county Extension offices.
Orientation of Advisory Members

**Orientation** is a way of leveling the playing field for your new members and is a perfect time to establish ground rules and to review the group’s mission and vision.

**Why Is Orientation Important?**
1. Orientation allows an individual to join a committee or council in progress as an informed equal with the existing advisory members.
2. When orientation is not provided, volunteers report being less motivated to serve the organization.
3. The orientation session provides the perfect forum for the Extension professional to explain the expectations, goals and objectives for serving on the Extension advisory group.

**What Should Orientation Training Include?**
1. Include a brief history of the advisory group and review any documents, such as the bylaws or past minutes.
2. Define their role as an adviser and their limitations.
3. Define your role as the Extension professional and your limitations.
4. Provide other pertinent information, such as:
   - What the NDSU Extension Service is and what are the relationships with the federal, state and county partners. The NDSU Extension “Who We Are and What We Do” PowerPoint is an excellent resource to provide this information. A copy of this presentation is included on the CD that came with this guide. To obtain the most current version of this PowerPoint, call the NDSU Extension Assistant Director’s office at (701) 231-9688.
   - The history of the land-grant institution. D.C. Coston, Vice President for Agriculture and University Extension, provides an overview of this subject on the DVD presentation included on the CD that goes with this guide. This presentation also can be found at [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/orientation/landgrant/landgrant.htm](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/orientation/landgrant/landgrant.htm).
   - Introduce your new members to your office faculty and staff.
   - Give your new members a tour of your Extension facility.

**Suggestions When Conducting New Member Orientation**
1. Don’t overwhelm your new members with a lot of statistical data.
2. Keep the orientation session short (60 minutes or less is ideal).
3. Make the session relaxed and comfortable (provide refreshments).
4. Share a little of yourself with the group (let them get to know you as a person as well as an Extension professional, and do the same with them).
5. Give your new members an orientation packet to take home. Item XVI in the Appendix provides some suggestions for material you might include in your packet.
6. Provide this orientation training in a one-on-one format if a member cannot attend the scheduled group session.
Motivation: How Do I Motivate My Advisers?

The answer seems almost too elementary, but it is so true.

The best way to motivate your volunteers is to be motivated yourself.

Motivation and enthusiasm are both extremely contagious.

Most Extension councils are just waiting to be infected!

The simple truth is that we hold the keys to motivating our advisers and we have to assume the blame if we fail.

Here are some simple suggestions on how you might motivate your council members:

1. **Project a friendly and positive persona** even when you have one of those down days. How can we expect our volunteers to be excited about our program when we fail to project a positive image?

2. **Meeting Frequency**: In a study conducted among six states, Extension advisory members reported that meeting frequency played a major factor in their levels of motivation. When a board, council or committee had three or fewer meetings a year, volunteers reported being poorly motivated, while of those attending four or more meetings, 65.5 percent reported being extremely motivated.

3. **Meaningful Tasks and/or Projects**: In the same study, Extension advisory members said underutilization was one of the root causes of poor motivation and group apathy. Having Extension professionals utilize their councils to the fullest is critical.

4. **Be Creative**: The picture shows an Extension professional utilizing a role-playing game to creatively prioritize program objectives. Getting people out of their seats and engaged in physical activity will greatly enhance the motivation factor in any advisory group.

5. **Be a Listener**: Advisory members are least motivated when Extension professionals dominate more than 50 percent of the discussion. As members assume a greater portion of the dialog and discussion, the motivation factor increases dramatically.
Empowerment: What Can I Do To Empower My Advisory Group?

1. Understanding the Concept:
   An Extension professional’s ability to manage his or her advisory committee or council successfully is influenced greatly by several factors, including experience, training and a personal commitment to the concept of empowering volunteers. To empower, you have to share ownership. For some Extension professionals, giving up control can be extremely threatening.

2. Setting the Rules:
   An advisory group should not get involved in certain things, especially if they serve in a volunteer capacity. Administrative items, such as agent/educator evaluations, professional salaries, and policies, should be left to the administrators, but council members may provide input.

3. Putting Your Advisory Group to Work:
   Advisory boards, councils and committees can play a vital role in dialoging with decision makers, fundraising, recommending program priorities and being a sounding board to the community.

4. The Benefits of Empowerment:
   When Extension professionals give their advisory groups meaningful assignments, not only will meeting attendance and motivation increase, but the Extension professional will also benefit from the satisfaction of knowing he or she has been responsible for developing leadership.

What Can I Do If My Council Refuses To Be Empowered?

This may be the case, especially if you inherit your council from a predecessor. Just go slowly and let your advisory group feel your passion and enthusiasm. It is contagious!

If a committee fails to feel empowered, that may signal that other problems exist. Every group must have a certain degree of mutual trust, respect and friendship. Members learn from one another as well.
1. **Advocacy for Resources:** Local advisory groups are very effective in encouraging officials to increase Extension resources. The Extension professional should not be seen as the coordinator of this effort.

2. **Event Planning:** Give your advisory group responsibility for planning special programs or events during the year. Example: annual volunteer recognition program, candidates breakfast or sponsorship of the Friend in Government Award. The Extension professional must let the group carry out the task and take ownership of the project.

3. **Educational Programming:** The purpose of the NDSU Extension Service is to create learning partnerships that help adults and youth enhance their lives and communities. Citizen input is important to making the NDSU Extension program meet the needs of North Dakota constituents. As Extension professionals, it is part of your program development and educational design competency. Involving your advisory group in giving input to the NDSU Extension program for each of the eight program planning areas ensures we are meeting the needs of North Dakota citizens. The eight program planning areas are:
   1. Community, Economic Development and Leadership
   2. Competitiveness and Profitability of Animal Systems
   3. Cropping Systems in the 21st Century
   4. Farm and Family Economics
   5. 4-H Youth Development
   6. Human Development and Family Science
   7. Natural Resources and Environmental Management
   8. Nutrition, Food Safety and Health

   *For more information on the NDSU Extension plan of work process, please visit the NDSU program planning Web site at [www.ext.nodak.edu/progplan/programplans.htm](http://www.ext.nodak.edu/progplan/programplans.htm)*

4. **Award Recognition:** Rewarding council members for a job well done is important. This can be done with a special public recognition or a simple personal thank you. Our job as Extension professionals **always** is to make our council members feel **special!** Extension advisory groups can be the award givers as well. Awarding a deserving decision maker or community citizen with “A Friend in Government” or “Friend of Extension” award can be extremely beneficial for an advisory group member.

   Each volunteer appreciates being recognized in different ways. Volunteer recognition comes in three major styles: achievement oriented, affiliation oriented, and power and influence oriented. **Achievement-orientated** volunteers appreciate tangible awards, letters of recommendation and opportunities to utilize their ideas. **Affiliation-orientated** volunteers enjoy unexpected, creative thank you notes and being invited to social events. **Power and influence-orientated** volunteers like having an impressive job title and are honored by being asked to be a featured seminar presenter, your media contact or your public relations coordinator.

5. **Public Relations:** Feature your council members on your Extension radio segment, your television spots or in your Extension newspaper column. Also, give them the opportunity to speak in support of Extension education in your community.

6. **Utilize Special Talents:** Each advisory member will bring a special talent to the group. Be observant and recognize these talents. You may want to establish subcommittees within your advisory group to allow members an opportunity to specialize in areas of special interest. Example: fundraising, promotion and recruitment, long-range planning, speaking and special events.

7. **Evaluation:** Ask advisory groups to evaluate different Extension programs and welcome their feedback and comments. Sometimes, an advisory group can give you a perspective that you have not considered.

8. **Appreciation:** Show your appreciation to your advisory group by **always** having refreshments available during meetings and **always** follow up with a thank you note. (See Item XXVII in the Appendix). Most volunteers still prefer mailed thank yous rather than e-mails. This may take more time, but it is worth the effort. Ask your support staff to partner with you to send out thank yous.
Ensuring Effective Advisory Meetings

A Checklist For Success

- Did I consider my group when selecting a date, time and location for the meeting, or did I routinely make the arrangements to fit my schedule? Keeping a consistent day of the week, time of the meeting and location of the meeting makes attending easier for individuals. Example: Advisory council meetings are held every third Thursday of the month from 12 to 1:30 p.m. at the county courthouse meeting room.

- Did I give my members ample advance notice of the meeting?

- Did I convey the purpose and importance of the meeting?

- Did I prepare and distribute an agenda? (Possibly in advance so members come prepared to discuss agenda items)

- Did I work collaboratively with the council chair in developing the agenda?

- Have I utilized available resources to ensure the meeting is going to be interesting and designed to encourage group participation? (Example: visuals, guest speakers, various communication techniques)

- Oops, did I send out a reminder notice or call the membership a few days prior to the meeting? And did I request an RSVP?

- The Day of the Meeting (Is my meeting room ready?)
  - Do I have the room arranged to maximize communication?
  - Do I have adequate light and temperature in the room?
  - Have I promoted my land-grant university (NDSU banners, posters, etc.)?
  - Do I have the necessary equipment and supplies?

- Meeting Courtesy
  - Was I present to greet my volunteers as they arrived at the meeting?
  - Did I open the meeting by thanking the volunteers for coming?
  - Did I introduce new advisory group members or guests?
  - Did I make sure that all members were given an opportunity to participate in the dialog?
  - Did I provide refreshments for my volunteers when they arrived?
  - Did I/we establish a date, time and location for the next meeting?

- Special Considerations
  - Did we provide ample parking and offer to provide accommodations for those with special needs?

- Meeting Follow-up
  - Did I send follow-up correspondence with minutes?
  - Did I communicate with those not in attendance? (See Item XXX in the Appendix).
  - Did I follow through with recommendations and/or suggestions the advisory group made?
Empowering and Motivating

Walking the Extra Mile: Why Say Thank You?

Extension volunteers are busy people. They are doing us a tremendous favor by serving on our advisory boards, committees and councils. We constantly need to think of them as our guests. They are serving at our request and they are giving us many gifts, such as wisdom, commitment and loyalty, in return. As Extension professionals, we need to honor, respect and appreciate these gifts.

How Do I Say Thank You?

The first step is to make their appointment to your advisory group a special acknowledgment. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Letters of Appointment**: Present each new member with a letter of appointment from your Extension office and your county administrators. This formality makes the appointment extra special and will help reinforce the importance we place on volunteers and advisers. *(See Item X in the Appendix)*.

2. **Installation Ceremonies**: Take a little extra time to install your advisory members and officers at the beginning of each program year.

3. **Introduction and Promotion**: Announce the appointments in your county newsletter and in local newspapers. Pictures are even better!

4. **Rewards**: Reward your volunteers for special accomplishments. This can be as formal as presenting a plaque at a public occasion or as personal as picking up the telephone.

   * Keep in mind the recognition style of each volunteer as referenced above.

5. **Communication**: Never pass up an opportunity to communicate with a member of your advisory group. If you see a newspaper clipping about that person, clip it out and send it along with a personal note. If a member is extra helpful to you or your program, take time to send that person a thank you note. If you are aware of an occasion in the life of a council member (birth, anniversary, family death) send the appropriate note. *(See Item XXIX in the Appendix)*

You would think the courtesy of saying “Thank you” would be automatic, but we live in such a hectic world, we really need to remind ourselves from time to time how important this simple task is in managing our advisory group.
Self-Empowerment

We have devoted this publication to the empowerment of others, but before we can successfully empower others, we must first empower ourselves. This includes:

1. **Ownership:** Don’t be afraid to share or even give up ownership of a special project, program or issue.

2. **Leadership and Citizenship:** Establish yourself as a community leader and be known as someone who can get the job done. *(Volunteer to serve on another agency’s advisory council, join a community service club, be an active citizen in your community.)*

3. **Partnering and Collaboration:** Today, many organizations and groups are involved in the same community issues as Extension. Rather than consider these groups as competition, work to engage them in partnering and collaboration. Extension can be the catalyst and facilitator in bringing these groups together. In many of our communities, Extension still is the best kept secret in town.

Resources and Opportunities: Where Do I Find Help?

Many resources and books are available on leadership styles and dynamics. In-service training and experiential opportunities are critical in teaching Extension professionals how to successfully recruit, train, empower, motivate and reward their Extension advisory groups. Extension agents/educators in five of the six states surveyed felt they were not receiving adequate training and instruction in managing their advisory groups. It is important to communicate your training needs to your supervisor and Extension specialists and to participate in professional development opportunities when they are offered.

The best place to find help is to look within. Becoming threatened in sharing leadership, not being enthusiastic about your own program or failing to properly recognize the importance of your volunteers may result in challenges with your advisory group.
Summary

1. Empowerment and motivation are the key elements of a progressive and dynamic Extension advisory group.
2. Empowerment is directly linked to motivation.
3. Underutilization of Extension advisory members is one of the root causes of poor levels of participation.
4. Meeting frequency has a direct connection to motivation and satisfaction levels of our volunteers. (Meeting twice a year does not keep members connected or engaged.)
5. Orientation of new advisory members will produce higher levels of motivation.
6. Motivation and enthusiasm are contagious. You never can say “Thank you” enough.
7. As Extension professionals, we must be willing to share ownership of our program and be empowered ourselves.
8. An Extension professional must put a high priority on his/her commitment to volunteer leadership development and share the personal belief in the concept of empowerment and motivation.

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References


Michael McKinney’s Practical Experience: Thirty-five years of working with some of the best advisory groups in Indiana and Florida in the areas of 4-H, Agriculture, Administration and Public Policy Education.

Nelson County Potential Advisory Council Member Letter


