Duties of Council Members

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Congratulations! You have been elected a member of the University of Missouri Extension council in your community. As a council member you will work with the officers of the council, your fellow council members, and professional and office staff to meet the educational needs of residents of the county.

Council duties

What are the purposes of the University of Missouri Extension council?

The council is the legally responsible group that oversees all activities of University of Missouri Extension at the county level. The council is responsible for carrying out four main duties:

**Working with Extension specialists to provide the county educational program**

Council members assist in the determination of educational needs in the county and in the planning and delivery of programs. They are responsible for assuring equal opportunity to participate in Extension programs at the local level. County extension councils are authorized to cooperate with other counties in Extension activities.

**Managing the finances of local Extension operations**

The council is responsible for working with the county commission to prepare the local budget and obtain county funds adequate to finance the county educational program. The council is responsible for paying salaries of non-professional staff and expenses related to the operation of the county extension center. It also is responsible for collecting fees for specific programs and activities, conducting private fund raising and for requisitioning the monthly appropriation from the county commission. The council reports to the commission on expenditures for Extension operations.

**Providing personnel to carry out Extension activities**

The council approves the assignment of Extension specialists headquartered in the county. It has responsibility for making recommendations related to the removal of personnel and is to be consulted prior to the discharge of personnel. The council hires non-professional staff in the county Extension center.

**Electing and organizing the local extension council**

The council establishes districts and determines the number of elected positions within the county. It is responsible for setting the time, date and place of elections. Through a nominating committee, the council proposes at least two people for each elective position on the council, solicits appointments of members by farm organizations and eligible municipalities within the county, and may accept nominations by petition. The council publishes a notice of election, canvasses the vote and certifies the election to the county clerk. To manage extension council activities, the council elects a chairman, vice chairman, secretary and treasurer. The council is responsible for holding an annual meeting and at least bimonthly meetings. Officers
must meet monthly.

Being a representative

The residents of your county look to you to represent their ideas and to make your own contribution. The success of University of Missouri Extension will depend upon your ability and enthusiasm as a council member. The following suggestions may help you undertake this role:

Know how University of Missouri Extension operates.

The University of Missouri Extension council is governed by the statues of the state of Missouri, and in some counties, a set of bylaws stating its purpose, goals and methods of operation. Acquaint yourself with the statues (in your County Extension Manual) so you will be able to participate fully in University of Missouri Extension activities. If your council has bylaws, be sure to read them so you will understand how your council carries out its duties.

Talk to people in your county.

Find out what other residents of the county consider to be important educational needs and issues, and be prepared to introduce their ideas at the proper time with suggestions for an appropriate course of action.

Be a source of information about University of Missouri Extension.

To be effective, people of the county must know about University of Missouri Extension's educational opportunities. You have the responsibility to know about these opportunities, to tell your fellow citizens about their availability and to inform officials who support University of Missouri Extension of their results.

Get to know the staff.

The extension specialists assigned to your county are responsible for carrying out day-to-day activities of University of Missouri Extension. They will welcome the opportunity to discuss current programs with you. They work closely with other faculty and staff in the Extension network and can offer valuable information to make your job easier and more enjoyable.

Understand the issues.

As in every organization, the number of activities going on simultaneously is often confusing. The officers will help you identify those issues that require attention. Your unique insight and opinion always will be welcomed.

Do your homework.

A council member is effective only when well prepared and informed. It is important that you study the details pertaining to issues about which you must make a decision at council meetings.

Attend council and committee meetings.

You have been accorded a position of trust by the people of your county. You can demonstrate that you are worthy by conscientiously participating in the activities of the University Extension council. Everyone has unexpected schedule interruptions, but members should make extra effort to attend all council and committee meetings. If you cannot attend a meeting, call the council chairman or staff secretary so your absence can be noted appropriately.
Be a decision maker.

The authority of the council comes from its group actions. Only the total council has ultimate authority. Individual council members do not have independent decision-making powers.

Working with officers

The officers of the council hold positions that carry great responsibility. You can help the officers fulfill their roles by offering authentic information and by keeping them informed of the current needs and wishes of the residents in your county. Your greatest contribution will be your intelligent and active participation in council meetings. To make every meeting productive, be prepared and participate. Here are a few suggestions:

- When you get your meeting agenda, study it and see how you can contribute. If there is any item on it you do not understand completely, contact the chairman or county program director and ask to be briefed.
- During the meeting, stick to the agenda. If you have other items to be discussed, ask to have them included under "new business."
- The chairman will ensure that the meeting is conducted so all sides of an issue are discussed before action is taken. Make sure that your ideas on an issue are heard by keeping your short and to the point.
- Don’t hesitate to comment on suggestions or ideas raised by others, but be sure that you do so in a constructive manner.
- Everyone is new to an organization at some time, so don’t be afraid to join in the discussion. You have been elected to serve because you have a contribution to make, and it will be welcomed accordingly.

In conclusion

Perhaps the most important qualification for being a council member is the willingness to involve oneself in activities that will benefit others. Edward Lindeman summed it up when he said:

"The person who of his own free will decides to work on behalf of the good of the community is in effect saying: "I have gifts and talents which are needed. I am a person who accepts responsibility, not because it is imposed upon me, but rather because I wish to be useful. My rights to be thus used is a symbol of my personal dignity and worth."

Your willingness to be a part of this University of Missouri Extension council will be remembered and rewarded by the progress we all will enjoy in the years to come.