



Increasing Advisory Committee Interest in Programs

I am a new agent and need to set short term priorities in programming. I want to include my program committee in the process. In the past however, the committee tended to rubber-stamp what the agent proposed. How can I involve the committee in a discussion?

You are not alone in your desire to involve committee members in your planning. Many agents would like more in-depth feedback from their committee but find it difficult to generate and manage a discussion. Until such time you can conduct a thorough needs assessment, try the following strategy to generate thinking and in-depth feedback for short term priorities in programming.

DEVELOP a list of potential programs around issues for specific target audiences. Have it reflect your talents, state and local resources, potential outreach, and issues or needs of the county you perceive to date. Add 'Other' to the list.

JUMBLE the list in the form of a short survey, introducing it with:

To what degree are the issues below a problem in the county?

DEVELOP a range of responses from **Not a problem** to **A significant problem** with at least 5 categories to allow members to discriminate among programs they *support*, often the most difficult challenge.

DISTRIBUTE the survey along with your rationale early in the meeting. You could mail it ahead for them to bring to the meeting completed, a technique which may increase attendance at your discussion meeting.

CONSIDER how to handle the discussion. What's crucial? To make sure all committee members participate: Use round robin often. Ask each member to tell the group the rating they gave 2-3 programs at a time, and what made them rate the programs that way. This technique:

- stimulates thinking and lively discussion about the benefits and barriers of each program, giving you many insights into the county.
- initiates an interactive forum on which you can build at future meetings.
- prevents high status and strong personalities from dominating with their views.

DECIDE whether or not to collect the survey. The ratings are merely one way to stimulate thinking among the committee members and some members may even change their mind when they hear others speak. What is important to you at this time are the justifications the members presented for each program compared to the other programs.

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The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2001). Increasing Advisory Committee Interest in Programs: Tipsheet #33, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension.

Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS33.pdf>

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