

CPAG Lessons Learned...

Tips for Getting Your CPAG Off To A Dynamic Start!

Pre-Planning:

- It's a team effort! Approach the planning and coordination of your CPAG as an office TEAM effort...not as the department head's job. Include support staff whenever you can. These colleagues are particularly helpful when it comes to identifying potential members. Any staff member can head the initiative. When everyone does a small part, it makes the project manageable and leads to a better return on your investment as your CPAG matures.
- What worked in another county may not work for you. Take what you can from others, but use your creativity and good judgment to guide the development of your CPAG.
- Educate your Extension Education Committee (EEC) on this initiative...and the benefits to the Extension staff, Extension Education members, and CPAG members. Let them take some ownership in the development of the advisory group.
- Encourage Extension committee engagement in planning. They can be very helpful in the identification of CPAG members. Many counties have put CPAG recruitment on the agenda for a monthly meeting and participated in a facilitated process to identify a diverse list of potential CPAG members.
- Determine how EEC and CPAG members will communicate. Discuss up front during the planning phase how Extension Committee members and CPAG members will interact with each other. An Extension Committee member may choose to attend CPAG meetings; or occasionally a CPAG member might attend an Extension Committee meeting to report on CPAG discussions. It's not important how the communication is set up...what's important is that there is a communication network between UWEX staff, Extension Committee members, and CPAG members.



Recruitment:

- Identify a diverse membership. When identifying names of potential members remember to look for:
 - Some people who don't know us (and we may not know them!)
 - Some people whose support for Extension may be "questionable"
 - Some people who know us



- Look beyond your own staff to identify potential participants...it's hard to identify people we don't know if we don't know them! The local coffee shop, gym, local newspapers, and staff in other county offices are good places to learn about some of the respected leaders in the community.
- Consider the size of membership for your CPAG. How many members should a CPAG have? A CPAG needs to have enough members to represent the diversity of the county. The group also needs to be able to engage in diverse dialogue and

group activity in the absence of a few members. Most counties have a range of 12-20 members.

- Plan for attrition in the group. To successfully achieve an adequate size membership, it's important to invite many people to participate. As an example, it's not unusual to send out 60 invitations that result in 40 responses. Of those responses, only 20 might indicate a willingness to serve. After your first meeting or two, you can expect attrition of some individuals for any number of reasons. This could leave you with fewer members than you planned for. Take the time to develop a long list of potential members and invite them all!



- Consider term lengths and operating guidelines. One of the goals of CPAG is to build a broad base of citizens throughout the county who are knowledgeable about Extension and can speak with authority about Extension programs. This base of citizens will grow with each rotation of CPAG membership. Term length should be communicated to potential members so they understand the length of the commitment they are making. Terms should be long enough to create stability in the group,

so educated decisions can be made and CPAG activities pursued. At the same time, an annual turnover of members helps ensure new representation, new ideas, and new energy. Term limits are highly encouraged to keep new members coming on to your CPAG and moving experienced members back into the community to continue telling the Extension story and supplementing the work of the existing CPAG. Two or three year terms are recommended. Be cautious about renewable terms, as they slow down the growth of your knowledgeable citizen base. You might consider allowing CPAG members to renew for no more than one term. Keep in mind that if your CPAG is meeting 3-4 times in a year that it will take time to build the knowledge and skills of the new members.

The First Meetings:

- Build relationships among CPAG members...at the first meeting...at every meeting! Resist the temptation to think of team-building activities as “fluff”! It lets the members have fun together and builds trust among the group. Teambuilding is important for the enthusiasm, creative thinking, and enduring survival of your CPAG!
- Get members engaged in meetings! Develop your meeting agendas so that a minimum of 50% of the time spent at each meeting engages members in activity/dialogue, etc. Be cautious of having each program area spend a meeting “talking” about their programs. If you choose to take a program area approach, be sure that you engage members in lively activity and dialogue! This is an advisory committee...be sure and seek their advice!
 - Some related words of advice from Marinette County: “In the early meetings, avoid getting into detailed individual programming as our experience has shown this to create a feeling of “information overload” and becomes potentially “boring” to some members.”
- Caution! A word of caution about Extension Committee members attending CPAG meetings. The attendance of the entire Extension committee can “overwhelm” CPAG volunteers...especially if the Extension committee members are very vocal. CPAG members



need to know that staff and Extension Committee members are genuinely interested in hearing their ideas and opinions...they need to feel ownership of their group.

- Networking. When CPAG members know each other well, they are able to make connections outside of CPAG. The mapping exercises provided on the CPAG website have been very helpful to some CPAGs in getting members and staff to see the full range of connections that exist among members. Members can help each other and they help UWEX staff connect with new resources!
- Extension as a “whole”. Keep the focus on the “whole” of Extension as much as possible. If CPAG members see that all program areas are inter-related and that educators work together, they will understand the importance of promoting the entire Extension program.
- Assess community needs. One effective strategy for getting CPAG members engaged early is to conduct some process related to the quality of life in your county (a process such as a SWOT analysis, brainstorming, nominal group, etc.) As the group identifies local community issues, this provides Extension educators an opportunity to demonstrate how their current programming is targeted at addressing these needs. These processes can also be used with your CPAG as part of the program planning process.

Additional Tips:

- Meeting frequency. Meeting frequency should be given consideration. If a group only meets once or twice a year, it’s difficult to build relationships and active engagement. On the other hand, be cautious about too many meetings. Monthly meetings might be too frequent to maintain good attendance and energy in the group. Consider three or four meetings per year in order for members to see accomplishment without “burning out” the group.
- Leadership. After your group is established and identifies a chairperson/facilitator (and perhaps a co-chair/co-facilitator), this will send a signal to the group that the CPAG is not only run by UWEX staff, but is in partnership with them.
 - One or two staff members might meet with the CPAG chairperson(s) prior to each meeting to develop the agenda. The chairperson can facilitate the meetings.
 - Be cautious about turning the entire “show” over to CPAG members too quickly. They might flounder about what their role is. CPAG members want to work as partners with us...not as a group making independent decisions about what their group is involved with.
- Educate, educate, educate! An informed CPAG is a strong CPAG! A discussion on Extension resources, including how your office budget operates, how we leverage additional funding, our web-based resources, etc helps to inform and educate these advisors. They will use this knowledge to educate stakeholders and other community members about the value of UW-Extension.
- Plan ahead! When your CPAG is first beginning, it can be helpful to plan out the entire first year of meetings to help get momentum going and get CPAG members engaged. Planning ahead will bring continuity to your meetings.
- Take advantage of and share resources. Be sure and visit the CPAG website frequently at <http://cpag.uwex.edu> for further information,



including meeting resources, recruitment templates, upcoming events, and tools for communicating value. The liaisons each have a CPAG display board available and informational brochures to promote your CPAG. In addition to utilizing the available resources, be creative in exploring or creating new ones. Send materials that you have developed or discovered and successfully used to your liaison to be shared statewide.

References:

- “CPAG Lessons Learned from the Marinette County Experience”. Shawn Kaskie. February, 2006
- “MSU Extension Councils. Suggestions for Working Effectively to Address Issues of Concern in Michigan”. MSU Extension Staff Handbook. September, 1997

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