

Extension Leadership Councils

Advocacy Guide Building Relationships with Key Stakeholders, Legislators and Representatives

The purpose of an advocacy effort for Extension Leadership Councils (ELCs) is for Virginia Cooperative Extension to have the resources needed to carry out its programs.

The following is a guide to conducting an effective advocacy program focused on obtaining local, state and federal support for programs that are designed to address community needs.

Strategy 1: Form a relationship with all elected officials (local, state and federal) serving the service area. Actions:

- Develop a list of all elected officials (local, state, federal) including contact information (addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses) that serve the locality. Each ELC member assumes responsibility for maintaining contact with an elected official. The contact should be 2-3 times a year and can be as simple as speaking to the legislator at a public event.
- Once a year, hold an event and invite legislators and key stakeholders to participate (may be different events for different types of legislators). Ask them to participate by performing a role at the event, i.e., hand out awards, introduce topics/speakers, or make remarks.
- Once a year, hold an event involving volunteers for elected and appointed officials and other key stakeholders to discuss issues of mutual concern and to showcase programs and their results. Engage officials in a discussion of issues of mutual interest.
- Once a year, contact legislators to personally deliver the annual report (see below) and/or share highlights of programs. This contact should occur in the locality (with federal legislators when they are in the district, with state legislators after the election and before they go to Richmond in January or for local officials before an election or immediately following it).
- Become known to the legislators' aides (state and federal legislators and local legislators in the larger localities, such as Fairfax County)

Strategy 2: Be a source of reliable information relative to community needs and what Extension is doing to address them. Actions:

- ELCs develop "shared messages" to be shared with officials so there is a coordinated approach to information-sharing
- Develop an annual report of the community needs extension programming is addressing along with the difference (impact) the programs are having on the people and community affected by those needs. The report should be brief, understandable and easy to read.

- Members of the ELCs hand-deliver annual reports to the majority of elected officials and ask if they have questions and/or concerns the ELC should be exploring/addressing.
- Members share the results of situation analysis or other forms of community needs assessments with elected and appointed officials in a timely manner. Situation analysis results should also be shared with the heads of other county/city agency/nonprofit organization heads.
- Maintain a world wide presence (the ELC) on the web by publishing calendars, press releases, and the work of the ELC.

Strategy 3: Form coalitions with other agencies/organizations that have an interest in the community needs Extension programming is addressing.

Action:

- Form coalitions with other agencies/organizations that share a common concern for the community needs Extension is addressing through programming. For example: persons interested in youth and youth-serving organizations. Develop joint requests for funding and approach funders together for greater impact.
- Encourage legislators (local, state, federal) to serve as ex-officio members on ELCs and coalitions.

Strategy 4: Form relationships with representatives from the media (print, radio/TV, Web, etc.) serving the service area. Action:

- Share the annual report, the results of situation analysis and any other community needs assessments with the media; prepare and distribute news releases.
- Develop relationships with members of the media, including those who do the editorials. Invite them to Extension events and share information about community events. Acknowledge their contribution to Extension's marketing and public relations efforts.

Strategy 5: Coordinate all state and federal advocacy with the Virginia Cooperative Extension Leadership Council (VCELC) and report contact/results to the district representative in a timely manner.

Strategy 6: ELCs and members of the VCELC, who have had success performing the above roles, mentor ELCs in other areas seeking such a relationship through a peer mentoring arrangement.

Note: District representatives on the VCELC will work with the unit ELCs in their districts to develop work plans relative to the above strategies.