

Report on Identified Issues of the Joint Annual Program Leadership Network Structure

**Submitted to the
Association of Extension Administrators
Association of Southern Region Extension Directors**

**Submitted by the
Program Leadership Committee
Dr. Mitchell Owen, Chair**

The mission of the SR-PLN is to foster and strengthen Extension education programming throughout the Southern Region by:

- 1. Promoting multi-state cooperation,*
- 2. Anticipating emerging program issues and needs, and*
- 3. Implementing action processes to address them in a timely manner.*

Promoting Multi-State Cooperation

One of the primary strengths of the SR-PLN is its ability to bring professionals, institutions and states together in a seamless manner to address common issues. However, given multiple demands, limited funds, and other challenges, some committees lack the participation that might foster greater cooperation. Thus, one of the identified recommendations is to work with administrators/directors and committee chairs to increase participation on all program committees. This participation will help strengthen and foster engagement between institutions. Recommendations to promote multi-state cooperation are three-fold:

1. Identify appropriate communication bridges to each of the land-grant universities in the Southern Region:
 - Ensure that issues addressed are important and timely, impacting all institutions and their stakeholders. By focusing on solutions to vital issues, administrative support is likely to be greater. (Section Two addresses this challenge of identifying appropriate issues in more detail.)
 - Recognize that some institutions do not have persons in roles that correlate with all eight committees and that it is the role of the Administrator/Director to designate committee members. Additionally, some institutions may lack the budget necessary to send representatives to each committee during the PLN Conference. Thus, if an institution lacks representation on a committee, the committee should share information with that institution's Associate Administrator/Director or Executive Administrator/ Director or his/her designee.
2. Foster year-round engagement in the work of PLN. For some, the most costly portion of the PLN work may be that which tends to get the most attention – annual conference. While this face-to-face time is vital to year-round planning and collaboration, individuals that cannot attend conference can still play vital roles within committees by joining conference calls, projects selected for the year, etc. Thus, by embracing a year-round perspective of PLN work, more individuals and institutions may be able to get involved and more progress will be made.
 - Foster buy-in from Administrators and Directors by embracing important multi-state issues.

- Develop a logic model and plan of work embraced by each committee member, chair and advisor that provides meaningful direction for the year. Provide updates to the model and Plan of Work on a regular basis (monthly/quarterly vs. waiting until the PLN Conference to look at the year's plan.) Make addressing the Plan of Work a part of every conference call and/or meeting agenda. Post updates to the Web site after each call.
 - Ensure that those in committee leadership roles understand the year-round process and obligations of their positions and that their administrators support their participation in those roles before accepting the challenge. (See Section Three below for more details on job descriptions).
3. Pursue multi-state funding opportunities to enhance and expand multi-state efforts. During challenging financial times, funding can be a barrier to much needed, positive initiatives. Committees should focus efforts to purposefully seek avenues to bear the cost of these vital programs.
- Seek alignment with multi-state programming/funding mandates from the federal level. (This opportunity fits some program committees better than others.)
 - Develop programmatic logic models (Being piloted during 2009 with the four subject matter committees.) Identifying and measuring multi-state impacts provides a more solid foundation for future multi-state funding.
 - The informal networking resulting from PLN has probably led to multi-state cooperation. Capture successes of previous multi-state initiatives through accomplishment reports or other mechanisms supported by administration.
 - Monitor RFA's from CSREES (AFRI grant) and all special programs that are grant funded to seek appropriate matches to jointly identified concerns.
 - Strengthen connection between committee work and funding streams by involving National Program Leaders and other important stakeholders when it is advantageous. Strategies might include:
 - Invite National Program Leaders to attend PLN Conference
 - Invite National Program Leaders to participate in conference calls

Anticipating Emerging Program Issues and Needs

The South, like other regions of our nation, faces many unique issues and concerns that ignore state and institution lines. Yet with the combined strength of 13 states, two territories and 29 universities, positive strides can be made against even our toughest challenges. In order, though, to unite our forces, we must jointly identify the issues in a timely manner and be ready to cross the visible and invisible boundaries of states, institutions and committees while still valuing the uniqueness of each. Two recommendations are identified below:

1. Encourage committees to work jointly to identify and address overarching and emerging issues as they arise throughout the year.

Strategies for identifying joint issues include:

- Involve committees in identifying issues. Assess committee members through a group process at intervals throughout the year.

- Involve outside experts and stakeholders in identifying emerging issues. Individual committees are best positioned to identify their stakeholders and experts related to their fields.
- Ensure that all committee conference calls include an agenda and follow-up report/minutes. (See Section Three below)
- Ask for emerging/overarching issues on each committee call – report results to PLC/PLN. Post results on the Web site.
- Encourage each committee to address key issues in the Plan of Work. A column could be added to the Plan of Work form to allow committees to designate the connection of a strategy to the key issues addressed.

Strategies for jointly addressing issues include:

- Designate representatives from each appropriate committee to brainstorm on issues identified. (Ensure that the person identified has the interest, expertise, and time needed to contribute to the process.)
 - Form action focus teams composed of members from each appropriate committee around strategic issues.
 - Use time outside of PLN to strengthen connections around issues. For instance, technology can provide a bridge to year-round, multi discipline work (Webinars, eXtension, Centra, etc.)
 - The Program Committee structure (number of committees, responsibilities and program focus of individual committees, etc.) should reflect pre-existing structures commonly found within State Extension Services and Programs.
2. Balance time during the face-to-face annual conference to allow for both joint committee work and individual committee time. Both are needed to develop appropriate strategies to address common issues from a variety of directions.
- Encourage each committee to build flexibility into its committee agenda to include time for multi-committee items/issues, realizing program committees need their own time, too.
 - Limit general session time during PLN to one keynote speaker during the morning session of the PLN Conference. Follow up with a lunch speaker.
 - Create and showcase an overall relationship between the general session and Program Committee meetings
 - Design and build a multi-committee session on emerging/over-arching issues.
 - Encourage committees to have draft action/info items before the annual meeting.

Implementing Action Process to Address Issues in a Timely Manner

In order for the vital work of PLN to be accomplished, individuals willing and able to take leadership roles are essential. However, great variance exists in the way these roles are filled within the committees, leaving some committees with a void while others flourish. Thus, roles and responsibilities of key committee leadership positions should be clarified to foster better communication and progress toward identified goals. Additionally, participation guidelines should be adopted to ensure adequate involvement takes place. Below are suggested guidelines for each key committee leadership position:

Administrative Advisors:

- Serve as a liaison between the committee and ASRED and AEA
- Communicate the thinking, priorities and expectations of ASRED and AEA to the committee
- Provide administrative guidance and perspectives on behalf of AEA and ASRED.
- Communicate the work, ideas and contributions of the committee to ASRED and AEA
- Encourage committee progress by participating in the annual meeting , conference calls, listserv communication, committee meetings, and video conferences of the committee
- Communicate and clarify operational procedures governing actions of the committee (i.e., that proposals have to be channeled through PLC)
- Encourage the PC to have a workable Plan of Work that guides its activities and encourage progress on it
- Encourage the committee to work jointly with other committees and suggest instances in which joint committee work is appropriate
- Help the committee to focus on high priority issues of the region on which committee members can make an important contribution
- Stress the importance of producing concrete deliverables, not just getting together for a meeting
- Articulate summative reports and/or findings from other state or national meetings that may directly impact the committee's interests.
- When informed by the chair of a committee that an individual is not fulfilling his/her role on a PLN committee, the Administrative Advisor will notify the committee member's administrator/director.
- Help the PC to understand issues/actions that are appropriate for multi-state versus those that are the prerogative of individual institutions

Committee Chair

- Convene committee conference calls on at least a quarterly basis. This entails setting dates and arranging logistics, sending out notices appropriately, preparing and disseminating an agenda, and ensuring that a record of the decisions is maintained and posted on the Web site.
- Promote meaningful multi-state and cross-committee work to address emerging and over-arching issues.
- Seek input from committee members on key issues needing attention.
- Incorporate issue-focused strategies in the Plan of Work, ensuring that timely progress is made toward identified goals.
- Cultivate cross-committee work on appropriate issues by seeking out and/or allowing time for joint committee discussions and planning.
- Lead the annual face-to-face meeting, which includes preparing the agenda, facilitating the development of a Plan of Work for the next year, updating the current Plan of Work, completing accomplishment reports, preparing information and action items to be shared with ASRED and AEA, and any other reporting required from the committee.
- Serve as the first point of contact for the committee ensuring that timely communication advances to all members via conference calls, Web site, listserv.
- Work with the PLN webmaster to ensure that all committee information is submitted in a timely manner and kept current. (i.e. minutes, contact information, officers, Plan of Work, etc.). NOTE: Some committees assign a role of "secretary." If this position exists, the Chair is still charged with ensuring that tasks are complete.

- Communicate with committee AEA and ASRED advisors to ensure that committee work is meaningful and useful to both the committee and their advisors during the allocated times of advisor participation in Program Committee meetings.
- Ensure fulfillment of committee member obligations by monitoring individual commitments and discussing expectations with members to ensure understanding and commitment. When necessary, the Committee Chair should notify the Administrative Advisor of emerging participation issues so the Director or Administrator of the employing institution may be alerted.
- Explore the appropriate use of information technologies that allow extended participation in committee meetings of as large an audience as possible.

Committee Vice-Chair

- Provide side-by-side support for the Committee Chair in all assigned roles.
- Provide leadership for the Chair's assigned roles if he/she is absent for a call.
- Be prepared to serve as Chair the following year to provide a sense of continuity for the Program Committee.
- Be prepared to assume tasks delegated by the Committee Chair.

Program Leadership Committee (PLC) Representative:

- Participate in PLC calls and meetings to represent the Program Committee.
- Be prepared to report committee successes/progress to the entire PLC.
- Serve as a communication bridge between the PLC and Program Committee.
- Ensure that the Program Committee Chair is apprised of any new information coming to or from the PLC.
- Ensure that the needs and concerns of the Program Committee are voiced to the PLC as appropriate.
- Serve as an effective member of the planning and implementation team for the Annual PLN Joint Conference.

Participation guidelines for those in key roles to foster performance of duties:

- All Program Committee members should be encouraged to take ownership of the committee's work year around. However, given the nature of the leadership role, officers, advisors and representatives should be required to participate in at least 75 percent of all committee communication including conference calls, meetings, etc. (Current guidelines currently have a different attendance/participation requirement, and will be need to revised).
- If a person cannot participate, he/she should designate someone to sit in and report in his/her place.
- All representatives and officers should have the support of their administrators/directors before accepting a leadership role.
- If an individual serving on a Program Committee is not fulfilling his/her role (i.e. chair, vice-chair, committee member) on a PLN committee, the Administrative Advisor, after being notified of the issue by the chair of the committee, will notify the person's administrator/director.
- If an individual serving as Administrative Advisor is not fulfilling his/her role, the Chair will notify the appropriate Executive Administrator/Director

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