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| ***CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE SOUTHERN REGION*** |
| *The following issues were identified on the state surveys. The bullets under each topic are intended to provide clarification and some sense of the scope of the issues.* ***Selecting the Right Volunteers*** * Advisory leadership is a challenging role. The job is nebulous unless it has been clearly defined in a job description. Even then, the job is abstract, as opposed to concrete in nature.
* Advisory leaders and Extension faculty agree that it is critical to get the right people and best candidates for the job. Sometimes the people who appear to have time and interest are not the people best suited for the role.
* Diversity of membership on an advisory council is critical. There are the obvious needs for demographic diversity. Beyond that there are needs for expertise on a specific issue or for a specific professional skill such as "marketing " or linkage into the funding community.
* Recruiting busy people can be challenging in small counties, because all organizations are recruiting the same "good" people.
* Identifying leaders with influence who have limited knowledge of extension requires strategy and lots of input.

***Volunteer Competency, Commitment and Training**** Volunteers come to the advisory role with leadership skills from their experiences in other organizations.
* Volunteers need much background information on both the history and philosophy of extension and the current programs available.
* Volunteer advisory leader competencies need to be identified.
* Curriculum for training advisory leaders varies from state to state. Volunteers in NC responded to a survey saying they would welcome more training than they were receiving.
* Volunteer commitment is critical to the success of an advisory council. Commitment has to be earned by engaging volunteers in meaningful roles and providing timely information about issues.
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| ***Agent Competency, Commitment and Training**** Extension agent’s commitment is crucial to success of advisory leadership.
* Agent commitment comes from having successful experiences with their advisory leadership group.
* Extension agent turnover makes training and development a continuous process.
* Agent competencies to master in having a strong advisory leadership system would include leadership, programming, volunteer management, human relations and others. These competencies have not been defined. NC is working on developing a set for County Directors.

***Engaging the Advisory System in Programming**** The programming process goes beyond needs assessment and prioritizing programs. Advisory leaders can contribute to the entire process from program planning, to program design and implementation, and evaluation and accountability. The survey indicated that linking Extension to community problems is an issue.
* Marketing extension programs and university resources for solving problems is part of programming.
* Identifying and recruiting advisory leaders from target communities is another element of programming.
* Helping extension assess impacts of programs and customer satisfaction with programs is something advisory systems can help do.

***Engaging the Advisory System in Organizational Advocacy**** Hard times are facing extension across the Southern Region.
* Advisory leaders can approach key stakeholders and legislators to inform them of client needs for extension programs.
* University leaders are beginning to recognize the power of the extension advisory leadership network.
* In order to be effective, advisory leaders need information about the budget and key talking points to emphasize.
* Personal stories of impact on family, farm and community are valuable.

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| ***Assessing the Impact of ALS**** Must ask the "so what" question about resources devoted to advisory leadership.
* What kind of evidence do we need to collect?
* Often impacts are not seen for several years.
* Who is accountable for an advisory leadership system at each level?

*From Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership in the Southern Region, a Southern Region Extension Advisory Leadership Conference held in Charlotte, N.C., May 3-5, 2001* |