



# Ten Basic Responsibilities of Cornell Cooperative Extension Boards

BOARD FACT SHEET

## 1. ESTABLISH, PRIORITIZE AND EVALUATE THE ASSOCIATION PROGRAM PORTFOLIO

The Board is responsible for the overall program direction and quality within the Association. CCE has been moving towards a program delivery approach that includes statewide, regional and local program development and delivery options and depending on the size and scale of your Association, you may have a great deal of latitude for local programming decisions beyond participation in statewide and regional program networks. The fundamental role of the Board in this regard is to ensure that current and proposed programs are consistent with the mission of the CCE, meet the CCE program development and delivery standards, are based on some type of local needs assessment that is updated every few years at least, and are of high quality. Advisory committees, staff and resource providers also play key roles in identifying program opportunities. Extension Administration's program development staff have developed a number of resources that can help boards in this role. Links to Appropriate Program Development Resources.

## 2. SELECT A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Securing and supporting the highest level administrative leadership for the Association is a critical function that the Board is responsible for in collaboration with Extension Administration at Cornell. As the funding environment has evolved in recent years and the size and scope of Associations has become more and more divers, Extension Administration is expecting local Extension Boards to explore multiple options for Executive leadership, considering the needs of the Association and the possibilities for multi-county shared services options. When an opening exists in the position of Executive Director it is the boards job to work with their State Extension Specialist to assess the needs, engage with the staff and the community and move forward with the appropriate staffing plan. This process will often necessitate some type of interim or transitional leadership. The State Extension Specialist can help the board consider the options for this process as well.

## 3. SUPPORT AND EVALUATE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Board is responsible for supporting the Executive Director through frequent and constructive feedback, helping make connections to key local leaders, and providing annual performance reviews. While the Board President and the State Extension Specialist are the direct supervisors, it is important for the entire board to be involved in the process. A major part of the supervisory process for the chief executive is the development and sharing of both long and short term organizational goals. If handled well this process creates an ongoing dialogue and a great way for the Director and the Board to develop shared vision and accountability for the Association. The board must be willing to stand by the executive as new directions are pursued. An Executive Director who is providing leadership for change will meet with resistance from staff and stakeholder groups and must have the support and trust of the Board to succeed.

*Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities.*

#### **4. ENSURE EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PLANNING**

Strategic planning allows the board and staff to translate the mission and purpose of the Association into measurable goals and objectives. Board members must enforce the expectation that long range planning is a priority and work to keep board agendas focused on strategy, policy development and evaluation and leave the day to day management decisions to the Executive Director. Operational plans; such as the plan of work, annual implementation plans, while prepared and implemented by the staff, must be developed in support of Board established strategic directions. The Board is responsible for ensuring that the Association is looking far enough down the road to ensure stability in the long term for the Associations fiscal health, program effectiveness and physical assets. The Associations State Extension Specialist can provide support to strategic planning efforts and resources.

#### **5. ENSURE ADEQUATE RESOURCES**

A major component of the strategic planning function is to pay adequate attention to the Association's financial position and ability to carry out its plan. Traditional sources of funding for Associations (County, State and Federal) continue to be foundational, however it is increasingly necessary for the board to work with the Executive Director and key program leadership staff to develop plans and strategies to enhance this core support through appropriate grants and contracts and fund development strategies. Board members also play a key role in helping to communicate local value and impact to County and sometimes State elected officials. Volunteer voices are far more effective in communicating the public value of CCE than staff members. Extension Administration is providing support to the development of effective tools for documenting the economic value of our educational programming. [LINK TO PUBLIC VALUE TOOLS.](#)

#### **6. MANAGE RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY**

Boards are responsible for effective stewardship and management of all Association fiscal resources and assets. This includes development and approval of a responsible annual budget, ensuring that the budget is reflective of strategic Association priorities, and monitoring its implementation and insisting on receiving regular/monthly financial reports that are up to date and accurate. Reducing the Associations exposure to risk is another important aspect of effective resource management and board members should expect to be updated annually on cash-management controls, existence of adequate liability insurance (including Board Member/Officer Liability insurance that includes employment practices liability coverage) and that authority for financial decision making is properly assigned. (SEE BOARD FACT SHEET #1 for more information on this issue)

#### **7. ENHANCE THE ORGANIZATION'S PUBLIC IMAGE**

Board members serve as public ambassadors for CCE Associations and the overall CCE system in the community. These responsibilities include building support for Cornell Cooperative Extension through formal and informal contacts with civic organizations and elected officials, financial contributors, the media and the general public. Extension Administration can provide support to the development of an effective Association communication plan. The development and implementation of a communication strategy should be a component of strategic planning efforts. [CITE WEB LINK TO COMMUNICATION PLAN OR BOARD FACT SHEET – ASK KATHY to do one.](#)

#### **8. ENSURE LEGAL AND ETHICAL INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

To ensure accountability, legal and ethical behavior, Boards must establish policies for staff and board members. Areas that require attention include regularly approving Extension Administration updates to the Human Resource policies, and conflict of interest policies for both board and staff members.

The Board is also responsible for understanding, updating when necessary and adhering to the Association Constitution, making sure it has been reviewed recently by Extension Administration, and for the development of Operating Guidelines. Operational Guidelines serve as a decision making process outline for the Board that goes much further into the details than the broad strokes of the Constitution. CITE RESOURCES FOR POLICIES AND OP GUIDELINES

#### **9. PROVIDE INITIAL ORIENTATION AND ONGOING TRAINING**

High functioning boards are a result of bringing together a strong, diverse and well intentioned group of volunteers and providing excellent training and support on an ongoing basis. The purpose of this document and the Board Tool Kit is to provide ongoing support to CCE boards and individual board members across the State. In addition to the resources provided by Extension Administration

The board should develop its own strategic goals and hold itself accountable for achieving them as the Executive Director Is held accountable and also holds the rest of the staff accountable. Board members should be encouraged to fully utilized Extension Administration resources designed to support their role such as the Board ToolKIT –INSERT SITE and the monthly Report to Boards. Associations should also seek to set aside an annual budget that provides for some training resources for the board and the opportunity to participate in board level development opportunities held regionally and at Cornell.

#### **10. RECRUITMENT OF NEW BOARD TALENT**

The most effective boards are always on the lookout for opportunities to add new members who bring a balance of experience, needed skills and diversity to the group. Although the nominating committee in Cooperative Extension is a committee of the Association, not the board of directors, the board can and should provide this committee with guidance regarding what the current needs of the board are and stress the importance of developing a board that is reflective of the demographic diversity found in the County. When establishing the nominating committee the board has an ideal opportunity to seek input from community leaders on the committee with ties to under-represented groups and communities and ask for their assistance in identifying potential board candidates who will bring a new perspective to the Association.

Based on “Ten Basic Responsibilities”

National Center for Nonprofit Boards by Richard T. Ingram

Adapted/Updated for CCE in 2012 by CCE Administration Board Development Group  
(Turner, Dayton, Landre and Fleming)