

An Overview of Advisory Councils for School-Based Agricultural Education Programs¹

R. G. (Tre) Easterly III, Debra M. Barry, Brian E. Myers, and Edward W. Osborne²

Introduction

Advisory councils can provide practical advice for secondary agriculture teachers. An advisory council is an organized group of selected business representatives, community members, and school stakeholders who provide input in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of a school-based agricultural education program (Phipps et al., 2008). Advisory councils work to ensure the local school-based agricultural education program meets the needs of the community (Masser et al., 2014). Advisory councils, also referred to as advisory boards or committees, differ from an FFA Alumni chapter and should not focus on the FFA or fundraising efforts. They provide an opportunity to connect instruction to the world outside the school walls as well as input that helps to better prepare students for life after school (Pawlowski & Meeder, 2012).

Why have an advisory council?

An advisory council has the potential to provide valuable input on the total components of an agricultural education program by connecting school, community, and local agriculture needs with the agricultural education program (Taylor et al., 2017). It has the potential to provide well-reasoned advice from members of the community who want to see the program be successful. According to Pawlowski and

Meeder (2012), well-managed advisory councils have the potential to:

- Help focus on the right outcomes.
- Bring training expertise to the table.
- Secure potential resources.
- Provide students and staff with new opportunities.
- Connect with the larger community.
- Advocate for the program.

Establishing a New Advisory Council

The request to form an advisory council for a middle school or high school agriculture program should be initiated by the agriculture teacher(s) in the school and approved by school administrators. This approval chain includes the career and technical education (CTE) director, school principal, and school board. The school board may issue a charter for the agriculture advisory council (see example at the end of this publication) to formally establish the council as an important contributor to the overall quality and impact of the agriculture program. CTE programs

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2. Tre Easterly, assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; Debra M. Barry, assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, Plant City, FL; Brian E. Myers, professor and department chair, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; and Edward W. Osborne, professor emeritus, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

that receive federal funding through the Perkins Act are required to have an active advisory council to provide business and industry input on all CTE programs in the school district, including agriculture programs. Specialized advisory councils that focus on a specific program, such as the agriculture and natural resources program, can be a valuable complement to general CTE advisory councils. These program-specific advisory councils are viewed by school districts as either separate advisory councils (also called committees) or subcommittees of a larger CTE advisory council.

An initial step in planning an advisory council for the agriculture program involves carefully examining the school district's general CTE advisory council in terms of its membership and operations. In many ways, the agriculture advisory council should mirror the general CTE advisory council. Typically, the chair of the agriculture advisory council will serve on the general CTE advisory council. Thus, frequent communication with the CTE director is needed when planning and operating the agriculture advisory council.

Key considerations when establishing an agriculture advisory council include the council's purpose, structure, membership, operations, communications, and engagement with school staff and administrators. Preliminary decisions on these items should occur with the CTE director to ensure productive alignment and strong support for the new agriculture advisory council. The agriculture teacher should explore interest in the community for the program-specific advisory council and use those conversations to build a list of potential members. The agriculture teacher can then use these ideas to draft the charter and constitution and bylaws of the new advisory council for review by the CTE director and other school administrators. Once these draft documents are ready and potential members have been invited, the school board will typically call the organizational meeting of the council.

Selecting Members

Advisory council members determine the value of the council to the agriculture program. Thus, the composition of the council membership warrants careful consideration. Membership should be large enough to ensure active discussion and diversity of perspectives and experiences at each council meeting without compromising the opportunity for each member to contribute. In addition, occasional absences from meetings should not jeopardize the council's ability to develop recommendations for program improvement, due to an insufficient number of

voting members. An advisory council consisting of 9–12 members representing the agriculture and natural resources interests and demographic diversity in the community is ideal. Gender, ethnicity, occupation (public and private), agriculture sector, geographical area of the school district, employer segments, postsecondary education opportunities, and other factors should be considered when identifying potential members. Connecting a program with local industry should be a focus. An advisory council can play a strong role in this linkage (Pawlowski & Meeder, 2012).

Council members should be respected community members who will regularly participate in council meetings and actively contribute to the council's work. Consider potential member's knowledge, experience, network, resources, interpersonal skills, time, passion, responsibility, and their key role as a thinker, manager, or doer (Pawlowski & Meeder, 2012). Each council member should bring unique perspectives and strengths to the council, as well as familiarity with and appreciation for the role and purpose of the school-based agricultural education program. To ensure open discussions, close friends and political leaders should not be invited to become council members. After approval of the list of potential members by the CTE director and school administration, the school board should extend invitations to the selected individuals. The teacher can follow this invitation with a personal visit or phone call to further encourage the participation of each prospective member.

Council Operations

Agriculture advisory councils should follow standard operating procedures to ensure democratic member input and decision-making, moving the group toward being self-governing. These procedures should be clearly articulated in the council's constitution and bylaws (see example at the end of this document). In addition to the purpose and activities of the advisory council, this document should explain member selection and rotation, expectations for member participation, officers and their respective duties, meetings, and changes to the constitution and bylaws. This document should be distributed in advance and discussed, modified as needed, and adopted at the organizational meeting of the council. Program-specific advisory councils usually meet twice a year, with additional meetings called as needed. A standard agenda should be followed for each meeting, with draft meeting minutes distributed and approved at the subsequent meeting. Systematic member rotation will ensure a continuing flow of new perspectives and ideas, while maintaining continuity in the council's work. Staggered three-year membership terms with a limit

of two consecutive terms will help maintain the momentum of the council as it makes long-term contributions to the agriculture program.

Keys to Success (Pawlowski & Meeder, 2012)

1. Obtain approval from the school administration including CTE director, school principal, and school board.
2. Develop a charter to document the role and purpose of the council.
3. Work in tandem with the CTE advisory council.
4. Appoint committed and representative community members to the council.
5. Develop the constitution and bylaws.
6. Prepare and distribute meeting agendas well in advance.
7. Ask for RSVPs.
8. Offer refreshments and snacks.
9. Make sure the technology works.
10. Facilitate meetings effectively, staying on task and on schedule.
11. Create opportunities for members to communicate and share opinions and perspectives.
12. Incorporate student successes and program updates into advisory council meetings.
13. Express your appreciation to council members for their service and support.
14. Leave time for socializing.

Conclusions

An active and productive advisory council can be a valuable resource to all agricultural education programs. The advice and information provided by an advisory council can provide the guidance, support, and community capital needed to keep a program strong and relevant. The council should be a self-governing group that works in conjunction with the agriculture teacher(s) and school administration to ultimately build the best program possible to meet the needs of the students and the community.

References

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Advisory Council Charter

The Board of Education of _____ on this _____th day of _____ [year], authorizes the establishment of a continuing committee to be known as the “_____ School Agriculture Program Advisory Council.” This council is to be organized and conducted under procedures to be proposed by the superintendent of schools after receiving advice from the school staff and other suitable consultants and upon approval by the board of education.

The advisory council is not regarded as a substitute for any other form of citizen participation in school affairs. It is intended to supplement and stimulate other types of citizen participation.

The purpose of the advisory council will be to serve as an arm of the board of education by providing advice and assistance to the board on the design and delivery of the agriculture program at _____ School.

The board of education reserves the right to dissolve the advisory council at any time and for any reason.

The advisory council is expected to contribute to the improvement of the education provided by the school system by:

1. Studying and surveying the educational needs of the district's clientele.
2. Reviewing, analyzing and proposing school policies dealing with agricultural education.
3. Working cooperatively with the administrative, instructional and non-instructional staffs of the school system to develop and execute programs and procedures approved by the board of education.
4. Facilitating communication between the staffs of the school system and the people of the district.
5. Studying the effects of existing and new educational programs.
6. Serving as a “sounding board” of community opinion on items proposed by the board of education.
7. Initiating study and proposals on educational issues pertinent to the school and community.

In authorizing the development of the advisory council, the board of education pledges complete cooperation in the council's work. The advisory council will be expected to operate within the guidelines set forth.

Signed,

President, Board of Education (date)

Superintendent (date)

School Agriculture Program

Advisory Council Constitution and By-Laws

Section A. Purposes

ARTICLE 1.

The agriculture advisory council shall direct its advice toward the teacher of agriculture, the administration, or the board of education. It shall limit its activities to matters that, which directly concern the department of agricultural education program.

ARTICLE 2.

It shall be the duty of the agriculture advisory council to:

- a. Study the needs of the community as they pertain to agriculture program.
- b. Suggest and advise regarding the objectives of the school's agriculture program.
- c. Provide input on employment and educational opportunities for program completers.
- d. Provide advice on program curriculum and course offerings.
- e. Support and promote the agriculture program.
- f. Aid in the selection of teachers when the board of education and the administration request assistance.
- g. Offer ideas and support for agriculture teacher development.
- h. Offer ideas and support for student leadership development and engagement in agriculture.
- i. Offer recommendations for improving facilities and equipment.
- j. Assist in evaluating the success of the program, based on identified program goals and objectives.
- k. Study the programs of agricultural education in other communities with the idea of encouraging the use of those practices that may be applicable in the local community.
- l. Revise the objectives of agricultural education as study and experience warrant.

- m. Provide recommendations for program improvement.
- n. Serve as an avenue of communication between the agriculture program and the community.

Section B. Membership

ARTICLE 1.

Membership will be as follows: 12 members, including one from the school board, one from the local FFA alumni and supporters group, a recent graduate of the program, and the FFA chapter president.

ARTICLE 2.

Members shall be selected in such a way that they represent a cross-section of the community served by the agriculture program.

ARTICLE 3.

The agriculture advisory council shall nominate new members after consultation with the agriculture teacher of agriculture and school the administration. Members shall be appointed by the district school board.

ARTICLE 4.

The advisory council and agriculture the teacher of agriculture shall notify members of their appointments.

ARTICLE 5.

Each appointment of an agriculture program advisory council member shall be for three years.

ARTICLE 6.

Four new members shall be appointed each year.

ARTICLE 7.

The term of a new council member shall begin in January.

ARTICLE 8.

A council member may not serve continuously for more than two three- year terms, except that he or she may be appointed for a full term after serving out less than one-half the unexpired term of a member who has left the council.

ARTICLE 9.

After a lapse of a year, a council member who has served a full term may be reappointed to membership in the council.

ARTICLE 10.

An individual will automatically lose membership on the council if he or she fails to attend three successive meetings without presenting to the chair of the council or to the agriculture teacher of agriculture education a valid excuse for these absences. The delinquent member will be notified, in writing, by the council secretary of his or her status.

ARTICLE 11.

The agriculture teacher of agriculture education shall be encouraged to attend all council meetings but shall not be considered to be a council member.

Section C. Officers and Their Duties

ARTICLE 1.

The officers shall be a chair, vice-chair, and secretary.

ARTICLE 2.

Officers shall be elected annually by majority vote of the council members at the meeting in January. Terms are limited to two years in a specific office.

ARTICLE 3.

The chair shall be elected from among those members who have served on the council for at least one year. His or her duties shall be:

- To preside at the meetings of the council.
- To serve as chair of the executive committee.
- To appoint special committees, which may include persons other than council members.

ARTICLE 4.

The vice-chair shall perform the duties of the chair when he or she is unable to perform them.

ARTICLE 5.

- The secretary shall:
- Keep records of the attendance of members at meetings.
- Keep minutes of all council meetings and share a draft of those minutes with council members for approval at a subsequent meeting.
- Maintain a permanent record of council activities.

- Share council meeting minutes and other documents with council members, the board of education, the principal, the agriculture teacher, and others who may be concerned. The secretary shall have the assistance of the school staff and the use of school facilities in performing this function.

ARTICLE 6.

The executive committee shall consist of the chair, the vice-chair, and the secretary. It shall:

- Act on urgent council matters between council meetings.
- Prepare an agenda for council meetings if requested to do so by the council.
- Call special meetings of the council as they are needed or cancel regular meetings of the council.

(add a section here on meeting frequency and location)

Section D. Changes in Bylaws and Constitution

ARTICLE 1.

Changes in the bylaws and constitution may be made by a two-thirds vote of the council membership.

Best Practices of Advisory Councils

for School-Based Agricultural Education Programs

What is an advisory council?



Comprised of business representatives, community members, and school stakeholders



Provides input for planning, development, implementation and evaluation of an agricultural education program



Ensures that the program is balanced and meets the needs of the community



Focuses is on curriculum of the overall agricultural education program

Advisory councils differ from Alumni groups and should not focus solely on FFA and fundraising

Best Practices for Advisory Councils



Establishing New Advisory Councils

- Have personal conversations with potential members to gauge interest
- Use the county Cooperative Extension Office to help identify members
- Establish a constitution and by-laws
- Keep administration in the loop
- Communicate the goals and expectations of participation when inviting stakeholders
- Keep the group small (9-12 members)



Selecting Individuals

- Use personal invitations rather than an open invitation
- Select members that represent different agriculture industries in the school community
- Include individuals who represent the school district



Standard Operating Procedures

- Meet biannually
- Use a pre-set agenda
- Establish the role of the group; major role should be to identify community needs

Keys to Success



Obtain approval from the school administration including CTE director, school principal, and school board.



Prepare and distribute meeting agendas well in advance.



Develop a charter to document the role and purpose of the council.



Facilitate meetings effectively, staying on task and on schedule.



Work in tandem with the CTE advisory council.



Create opportunities for members to communicate and share opinions and perspectives.



Appoint committed and representative community members to the council.



Incorporate student successes and program updates into advisory council meetings.



Develop constitution and bylaws.



Express your appreciation to council members for their service and support.