Breakout Session Reports

2023 Leadership Summit

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Aligning Community Leadership Programs with Local Leadership Priorities

Break-out Summary from the 2023 Community Leadership Program Coordinator Summit*

Understanding the leadership needs and priorities of the residents of the community is vital for community leadership program designers. Knowing the skills and experiences prioritized by participants keeps the program focused, in demand, and valued by the community and program sponsors. How to keep a step ahead of community leadership needs, however, can be a challenge. Participants in this session discussed challenges and strategies they have found successful for staying focused and relevant to their audiences.

Challenges of Aligning Programs

- A common challenge is the attitude of; "This is the way we have always done it - and this is how it worked. Let's just do that!"   How do [leadership program coordinators] push back against comfort/familiarity?
- [Participants] want to see the value of leaving the office for the day!
- Keeping conversations constructive.
- Who can help us mediate tough problems?
- How to get others to weigh into your program and the key values that should define your work moving forward.
- How to not give my opinion when I do facilitate!
- I question what our groups priorities are.
- Our program needs help with leadership training. We go out in the community and do projects, but need for more leadership focus [we also need] to expand our skills for public speaking and being comfortable in front of others.
- How can Cooperative Extension better partner with [Community] leadership programs and help facilitate these projects and training?
- We have moved across leadership focus and just go visit things; want to rethink our approach.
- We want to diversify our programs. If we can facilitate that.
- to develop training and experiences that support the needs of the participants
- Keeping costs down and value up.   Looking for ways to add value to our program because we generate income for our Chamber and create a solid program for the community.

 Summary:

Community Leadership Program Coordinators need support too! Assistance with program coordinator skill development would be helpful – including group facilitation. Tools or processes for assessing community resources would be helpful.

Several programs expressed that they were having success in aligning their programming with community leadership development priorities. Examples shared included:

- [Maintaining consistent program] Focus is so important.
- Commerce Lexington is launching a regional competitiveness plan (7 initiatives out of it). [We make sure] our leadership programming is in alignment and complementing that. Leadership Lexington – makes sure our projects are hitting the mark with the focus on community development. Our processes need to be complementary with, and incorporating aspects of community development.
- Balancing community IQ…[information on how the community works] with leadership development. [we are looking for] New books that I'm missing out on…what the broader picture is. Regional program we started because population decline in our region.
- Louisville Ag Club – trying to create a new leadership academy. Being part of the planning process, - Is there a way [a program] can start out and tailor it to the needs to the people we want to attract?
- I'm interested in evaluation, so like the idea about aligning programs.
- Balancing from "go visit things" to redevelop a leadership program with intention to make sure the value is there. Instilling and creating new leadership in our community. Work towards thinking outside of the box (that is the value).
- On going workshops/training in community: [for example] How to lead a business meeting (Roberts Rules of Order).
- One participant noted success through a speaker at a chamber event. The speaker discussed the book *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*.[1] So eye-opening to highlight all those things groups can do to shoot themselves in the foot. This was a good way to have difficult conversations. The conversation allowed us to talk about big ideas instead of pointing out [our own local issues]. It was really good. Read that book!
- Leadership sessions - (Grayson County Cooperative Extension) offers free lunch and learn for Chamber; we use the Kentucky Extension Leadership Development (KELD) Program materials. We did a survey of Chamber members. We created 3-5 month lunch and learn program. We reworked the KELD focus on: Different learning styles, volunteer management, parliamentary procedure, etc. We focus on small business who don't have HR offices or get to attend professional development conferences and stress how to use this in the workplace.
- Facilitation master online class that are outstanding…not free, but put a team together and go through together.
- Workshops where they can leave with a skill. We all have local people who can teach us skills – have them teach the skill. We have an HR panel. Use your Extension offices too!
- Extension can help teach leadership skills!!! Can they also teach how to think about how to understand a thorny community issues, how to engage diverse participants beyond sending out a survey, how do you build solidarity and agency? How do you think about investing broadly in building your community assets? How do you have difficult conversations?
- Holding focus [our program] was getting too touristy… so we set 4 leadership development criteria for every day. Now we program the day to meet those criteria.

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[1] Griffiths, D., & Clemmer, K. (2010). 13 Ways to Kill Your Community. Frontenac House. ISBN-13: 978-1897181423

Valuable Take-Aways

Bringing clarity of focus to the program helps make learning more effective. Setting clear leadership development goals guide time and activity planning for leadership programs. When leadership programs are focused on the participants' priorities, we expect increased enrollment of highly interested and engaged participants. Programs sharing success had developed leadership learning goals and were assessing growth around those goals.

A key takeaway is the importance of continued leadership development opportunities for program coordinators as well as for program participants. The note-taker highlighted: *Facilitation training is important for participants… but is also a training that would be useful for leadership program facilitators.*

Finding resources is important to continued program growth. Examples of resources brought up in the session included Cooperative Extension and resources provided through the Leadership Louisville Center.

A key objective of the coordinating team of the Kentucky Community Leadership Summit is to create a network of programmers and connections to resources and services in order to facilitate the continued leadership growth of Kentucky residents. It was enriching to learn from successes, and identify areas for improvement in our efforts to design and deliver better leadership programs.

* Participants at the 2023 Community Leadership Program Summit broke into topic discussion groups on May 24, 2023. This report is a summation of the notes from the *Aligning Community Leadership Programs with Local Priorities* breakout session: Daniel Kahl, University of Kentucky, Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK)- Facilitator. Notes taken by Nicole Breazeale, UK CLD Extension, and compiled here by Daniel Kahl, University of Kentucky, Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK).

Fundraising in Leadership Programs

Break-out Summary from the 2023Kentucky Community Leadership Program Summit*

Sustaining community leadership programs requires creative fundraising skills. While many programs are supported by their community or organization sponsor, the ability to expand services, offer scholarships, or support applied leadership learning often requires additional financial resources.

Interested participants at the 2023 Kentucky Community Leadership Program Summit discussed the challenges of fundraising and shared ideas and strategies for garnering funds to support programs.

Challenges for Fundraising

There is a common perception that leadership programs meet their expenses through participant fees. Program leaders, however, know that not everyone can afford the enrollment fees, and that fees do not always cover expenses. Participants identified the following challenges to fundraising:

- Raising costs requires changes to tuition – and raising tuition often receives pushback.
- Often participants are not able to pay program costs. Securing scholarships can be challenging.
- Sponsors and sponsorships are vital to keeping our programs running. Finding those willing sponsors can be challenging.
- Getting employers to pay for program costs helps, but it is often difficult for individual participants to pay higher tuition.
- Small class size means higher costs per person.
- Keeping the impact of our program at the top of our talking points is both a strategy for success and a challenge. We must continuously showcase students and participants in programs who have been impacted by scholarships.
- Capturing the impact/value of the program through an evaluation is both a challenge and essential for monitoring impact. Tangible positive impacts aid funding requests.
- Communicating program value to partners and sponsors is a challenge.
- Not wanting to chase people down over small dues (Those $35 annuals can add up!) when a card expires.
- Youth programs often are free or reduced cost due to wanting youth to have opportunities.
- Never having enough money for cross-promotion events.
- "If it wasn't for donors, we would be losing money." No pushback on raising funds or costs for flagship programs, partner programs are harder.
- Finding mission-oriented sponsors who would rather spend money on a monthly class meeting for 50 people over one event (i.e. an annual dinner).

Fundraising Strategies that are Working

Many programs shared successful strategies for leadership fundraising. Discussion topics ranged from tuition fees, scholarships, project funding, program sponsorships, to partner dues. Participants identified the following fundraising strategies that work:

- Seek overall support before small events to represent sponsors throughout the program year.
- Creating Sponsorship packages can detail in advance the type of publicity and support a sponsor can provide.
- Establish ongoing organizational partners. (i.e. Montgomery County Extension has a scholarship

established to assist participants).
- Sharing the VALUE of the program is so important for communicating the impact of the program you are asking sponsors to support.
- Sharing across leadership programs is very helpful. Sharing application questions, processes, and ideas is invaluable and can assist with creative fundraising ideas.
- Limiting the number of program participants from any one program area.
- Promote other programs!!
- Showing the impact of our programs through program alumni, scholarships for students/participants, and presentations with pictures.
- Cross-promotional events, one participant found a lot of success with an "ag-day" by inviting local farmers to host a farm-to-table lunch.
- Participants/class members writing thank-you notes to sponsors.
- Examples were shared where a donor would put forward funds and have the class or community nonprofits give project pitches. Donors would choose projects they are willing to support in the community. Variations of this were shared. In other programs, the criteria were established by the donor or class, and class members could choose the project for funding support.
- Leadership Tri-county sells tables for a banquet. The event identifies a leader of the year, celebrates luminary awards. The proceeds go toward three scholarships to high school students. The event models the impact of the program, engages alumni, empowers outstanding leaders, and is hosted completely through the work of volunteers.
- Seeking marketing skills of graduated members of leadership program.
- Participant feedback towards the program, "90-95% of the participants think the program is the best thing ever."

Valuable Take-Aways

This session was filled with creative ideas for generating support for community leadership programs. Primary income sources discussed included *participants* (program fees), *the public* (fund raising events), and *institutions or organizations* (project support funding and sponsorships). When seeking support, the participants noted ongoing support has greater impact than one-off events, though both are important. Levels of support can be offered to institutions and organizations in sponsorship packages. Effective fundraising was linked to the ability to showcase program benefits either through testimonials, project results, or tangible monitoring of program impact. Leadership programs with demonstrated impact have high community credibility and increase the motivation for collaborative partnerships.

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Marketing Strategies

Break-out Summary from the 2023 Community Leadership Program Coordinator Summit*

This breakout session discussed the importance of marketing for their community leadership programs. How a program is marketed determines how the community perceives the value of the program. Effective marketing can assist with financial support, recruitment for participation, and determines how the community values the program. Participants in this session discussed challenges and strategies they have found successful for marketing their community leadership programs.

Importance of Marketing

- Supporting commitments from organizations who want to partner.
- Keeping current with audiences… (Youth, participants, potential participants, local government, funders, etc.)
- Employers need to see value in the program they send employees to.
- Keeps engagement consistent and high (especially across social media).
- Establishing credibility and respect within the community.

Challenges of Marketing

Challenges of effective marketing discussed in the session include:

- Keeping engagement consistent and high (especially across social media).
- Marketing across all of our different social media channels and audiences, managing and maintaining expectations about our levels of engagement.
- Knowing where to look to find processes, programs and materials that add value to our program while keeping our focus.
- Marketing to youth and keeping up with trending topics. Finding ways to keep youth engaged with new strategies, (social media, poster-boards with QR codes, real pictures over graphics)
- Reflecting value to employers who are sending employees to the program.
- Maintaining professionalism. When everyone can post – it can be a challenge to keep the posts related to the program professional.
- Keeping the right focus of marketing for your audience. I.e.: "We have a multi-county outreach, which can be challenging to manage broadly since every county needs different things."
- Marketing to the middle in leadership, and to upper management who need to know the value of the program.
- Finding materials and resources for marketing that we know how to use, that are easily accessible, and that can be shared easily.
- Understaffing. Both for our program to market, and for employers not allowing people from other organizations the time to come.
- Funding allocation and seeing the value in marketing as opposed to something else. Keeping costs down and value up.

Marketing of Community Leadership Programs is no easy task and requires support from the program leaders and staff to get the message out loud and clear. Finding the focus of message for marketing was a challenge because of the breadth of stakeholders. Under-funding of marketing efforts is common due to the prioritization of sustaining and enhancing programs. Community outreach to youth and employers was a common challenge. Tools or processes for easily locating quality marketing resources and ways to add value to programs through marketing tools would be helpful.

Strategies that are working

Several programs expressed that they were having success in aligning their marketing strategies with community leadership development priorities. Examples shared included:

- Using real photos as opposed to graphics to showcase the strength of the leaders and participants in your programs, show smiling faces.
- Commenting encouraging things on others social media posts helps to boost them in the algorithm. Having fellow program members and participants share and comment to social media posts also helps gain priority visibility.
- Field trips are effective when engaging youth. Getting the students out of the classroom and into a new learning environment or outdoors provides diversified learning experiences.
- Recorded live videos, having a folder or catalogue on social media of past livestreams and videos for people to go through.
- Testimonials and engagement from outsiders.
- Finding diverse voices to speak or post about program effectiveness.
- Personal and individual conversations and discussions have always been our tried-and-true method. We use social media here and there, but we really focus on the individual before marketing to a broader group.
- Having animals in pictures always boosts engagement (everyone loves cat/dog pictures).
- Using social media driven contests, having people record themselves doing something and submitting it as a trend. One leadership group mentioned that they ran a cook-from-your-home video contest on their Facebook page as a community-based campaign during the height of COVID and found great levels of success and engagement.
- Easy to access resources like QR codes, physical small posters and signs to stick in the grass.
- Promoting the successes of board members, recently elected members, graduates, and other personal recognition or appreciation posts always are our most successful ones.
- Partnerships getting approved is an issue itself, but when they can, having another organization's following backing your program is always great. New members get interested in your program and want to reach out.

Valuable Take-Aways

Marketing of Community Leadership Programs is an important aspect of shaping and maintaining the image of the leadership program. Effective marketing of the program can impact donor willingness and showcase the value of program participation.

Sharing the successes and accomplishments of program leaders, graduates, new members, organizations, and board members has remained a consistently popular focus to drive engagement across social media. Using real photos of people and animals over graphics or text-only posts is more strongly preferred among community members.

Maintaining consistent focus when marketing is important, both across social media and in person. Leadership program coordinators should be aware of the importance of keeping the conversation alive. When participants share stories and testimonials, both in person and online, the program stays in the public attention. Recorded promotions are always available for viewing. Speaking events, sharing memories, and follow-up interviews can be effective marketing opportunities.

Program coordinators recognize the importance of forming a positive public reputation for their programs. Effective marketing will include identifying key audiences to reach out to, and key information each audience should know about your program. Program coordinators might consider engaging youth or volunteers to manage their marking presence. Establishing key messages for social media posting throughout the year can help with consistent messaging.

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Recruiting Participants for Community Leadership Programs

Break-out Summary from the 2023 Community Leadership Program Coordinator Summit*

Finding participants for local leadership programs can be difficult. Community Leadership Program Coordinators noted that successfully reaching the audiences who would benefit from Community Leadership Programs can be a challenge. In addition, participants must weigh the costs of registration fees, time dedication, and schedule conflicts with other work requirements.

Connecting with potential participants

Summit participants shared some successful communication strategies for reaching out to possible participants. They included:

- Emailing alumni and seeking referrals
- Sharing promotions and applications on social media
- Promotion through the local newspaper
- Promotion through banks and industry
- Promotion through Chamber News releases
- Promotion through Cooperative Extension News releases

Recruitment strategies that are working

Breakout participants shared actions they have found effective for recruitment including:

- Establish clarity on who would benefit through participation (and how) and share with partner organizations.
- Host a discussion with alumni to brainstorm individuals who could most benefit from the program.
- Keep an up-to-date list of alumni.
- Actively connect with alumni to discuss recruitment.
- Engage groups (Chamber/Rotary/Lions) to discuss recruitment.
- Use a steering committee to identify participants.
- Work with employers to identify employees who could benefit from leadership development.
- Use board members to recruit.
- Testimonials – especially from people in similar fields/interests.
- Develop Mentor/Mentee connections (perhaps between an alumni and new participant from the same employer or industry)
- Appeal to the interests of organizational gatekeepers (those with influence to support and approve involvement) … [It is all about relationship building]
- Breakfast with videos and testimonials
- Boards, Councils, -even the PTA for schools – may provide recommendations for participants.

Managing/Balancing Program Costs

Breakout conversation shifted to reducing or managing program costs for participants. Some suggested cost balancing approaches were mentioned.

- Took off overnight stay (managing program to reduce costs)
- Gradual enrollment increases (tuition hikes)
- Payment Plans – setting up the potential for installments.
- Sponsorships (of events, meals, other support)
- Scholarship money – set aside to assist with costs when individuals need extra support.
- Asking for (Accepting) In-Kind Donations: Facility, Meal, Gift Cards
- Trade Outs (Transportation/Space/Food)
- Working with Cooperative Extension office (for meeting space, transportation, supplies, etc.)
- Increasing class size.

It was noted that some communities were resistant to increasing enrollment fees. Recorded notes indicated:

- $25 application fee (covers shirt)
- Not raising it, is not an option
- It is not to make money; you want to be able to break even and pay the bills.

Valuable Take-Aways

As with every investment, enrolling in a leadership program is a calculated investment of time and resources for the potential participants. The more explicit and convincing programs can be about the specific benefits that others have received, the less of a "sale" recruitment will be. This requires evaluation and documentation of the changes and benefits brought about through the program.

A second key takeaway is to consider who is telling the story. Former participants willing to tell of the benefits of the program can be influential program advocates. Make certain to build the network of people willing to speak on behalf of your leadership program.

Be open to brainstorming new ideas for program promotion with your community partners. They may surprise you with new ideas and new connections!

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