NORTH CAROLINA
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Report and Recommendations of the

2010-11 NCACC Youth Involvement Task Force

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Proceedings of Task Force meetings
Available online at www.ncacc.org/committees/youthtf.html

Task Force membership

The Honorable Ray Jeffers, Task Force Chair
Person County Commissioner

The Honorable Linda Massey
Alamance County Chairman of the Board

The Honorable Kenny Poteat
Avery County Chairman of the Board

The Honorable Brenda Howerton
Durham County Commissioner

The Honorable Tony Cozart
Granville County Commissioner

The Honorable Kay Cashion
Guilford County Commissioner

The Honorable Robert Carter
Northampton County Commissioner

The Honorable Valerie Foushee
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Message from Ray Jeffers, Task Force Chair

As county commissioners, we regularly make decisions that impact the youth in our communities – funding for schools, parks and recreation facilities and programs, and libraries are obvious examples. What is often missing in our decision-making process, however, is input from youth.

During our initial Youth Involvement Task Force meeting in December 2010, we were joined by Seth Bollenbecker, an astute Cabarrus County 10th-grader with a bright future ahead of him. He told us about a program he was involved with in middle school, in which the school superintendent hosted a roundtable discussion each quarter with two students from each of the school system's middle schools. The meeting provided students a forum to develop solutions to issues and problems at their respective schools. Seth told us how much he valued those conversations with other students – with an influential school leader present – and how he wondered why that forum was not present at the high school level.

County governments need that same face-to-face interaction with youth. The importance of initial and regular contact between county leaders and youth is important to the futures of both the youth and the county. Counties need responsible and informed citizens, as well as future elected officials and capable, creative staff. Youth need to know they have a future in their county and that county government leaders are willing to hear their voice. Neil Howe, a renowned authority on generations in America, says that today's youth will become engaged if they feel their voice is valued and will impact a decision.

As we looked to build upon Cleveland County Commissioner Mary Accor's presidential initiative on developing youth leaders, the top 10 youth issues identified at our 103rd Annual Conference were at the forefront of our discussions. We identified one of those issues, "lack of youth voice in community," and developed a handful of recommendations for counties that can provide youths with a voice in local political decisions as well as opportunities to express their opinions to county government officials.

NCACC membership voted to include the top 10 youth issues in the Association's 2011-12 package of legislative goals, and YouthVoice 2011 is dedicated to providing youth with the capacity to develop solutions to each of those issues. We hope that you find this report and our recommendations useful as you consider the best way for your county to involve youth in county government.

B. Ray Jeffers, Youth Involvement Task Force Chair
Person County Commissioner

Objective

Develop a resource to help counties provide youths with a voice in local political decisions and opportunities to express their opinions to county government officials.

Recommendations

1. Work with a county agency, such as 4-H, to develop a program to bring high school students to a county government facility to learn more about county government and reinforce what students learn about local government in the classroom. Involve local elected officials and department heads in these outreach events.

See pages 6-9.

2. Form a Youth Stakeholder Council and assign a County Commissioner as a liaison to that Council. The Council represents an opportunity for County leaders and community groups such as foundations, nonprofits, school administrators and faith-based organizations to discover the array of services that can be provided to youth and coordinate those services.

See pages 10-17.

3. Form a County Government Youth Council and assign a County Commissioner as a liaison to that Council. Convene the Council on a semiannual basis to provide a regular forum for youth to share issues of concern with county leadership. Serve as a facilitator for Youth Councils and task members with developing solutions to issues that youth face. Affiliate your local youth council with the State Youth Council, which is part of the N.C. Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office.

See pages 18-21.

4. Use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to stay in contact with youth. Follow the Cooperative Extension Service's guidelines for engaging youth through social media.

See pages 22-29. A workshop on this topic will be held at the 104th Annual Conference.

5. Encourage careers in County Government through internship and job shadowing programs for local high schools and institutions of higher learning. If your county runs a PEG (Public, Education and Governmental) channel, utilize the NCACC's Welcome to Your County video, which includes a County Careers segment to showcase various jobs in county government.

See pages 30-32.

Youths identify top 10 statewide issues

The NCACC held its inaugural Youth Summit – YouthVoice 2010 – on Aug. 27-28 in Pitt County in conjunction with its 103rd Annual Conference. More than 80 youths and adults representing 74 counties attended the event. During YouthVoice 2010, attendees had a chance to interact with county commissioners, attend the annual Horn O' Plenty event sponsored by NC Cooperative Extension, participate in workshop sessions and attend a general session featuring NC SPIN.

In addition, the youth attendees debated and decided on the top 10 issues facing youth. These issues stemmed from ones that 4-H'ers and youths in every county identified and compiled. Youths then met in groups to prioritize the top 10 issues in their Extension district. One youth from each county was invited to attend YouthVoice 2010.

From more than 60 issues, the delegation attending YouthVoice 2010 determined the top 10 issues facing youth in North Carolina. The State 4-H Council officer team shared the top 10 issues with county commissioners during the NCACC's business session.

YouthVoice 2010 was developed because of NCACC's 2009-10 President Mary Accor's commitment to youth and to developing youth leaders. The event was sponsored by the NCACC. North Carolina 4-H Youth Development and North Carolina Cooperative Extension were the lead partners and led the efforts to plan the conference and organize YouthVoice 2010.

YouthVoice 2010: Top 10 Statewide Issues of Concern

1. Teen pregnancy
Prevention, sex education and related health issues. It starts a chain reaction and teenagers face tough decisions.

2. Substance abuse
This includes illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs. Younger children are trying tobacco.

3. Dropouts
North Carolina's drop-out rate is at one-third; more dropout prevention programs are needed.

4. Violence
This includes bullying, gangs, crime and physical harm. Education is needed on safety issues, recognizing that "unsafe" actions impact others, such as friends and family.

5. Recreation
This includes community activities, intramural sports, funding for youth centers and other facilities and safe places, and unstructured activities. Re-evaluate current parks and recreation programs. Paying for sports can be expensive.

6. Socio-economics
Adults and teens need jobs; unemployment is getting worse. Poverty and hunger are problems, especially in small counties with low economic ratings; family income is below average. Other issues are identity theft, and family money management; many grandparents with low incomes are raising grandchildren.

7. Education issues/school funding
Schools need money to provide more classes and extracurricular activities. Young people need to prepare for and find money to help pay for college. Youths want to think their needs are recognized, and they want more opportunities at school.

8. Lack of youth voice in community
Youths need to have their voices included in political decisions; youths should take the initiative with governmental officials to have opportunities to express their opinions.

9. Health issues
Obesity, healthy lifestyles education, healthy food in school cafeterias, and chronic disease reduction are important to young people.

10. Lack of things to do
There should be more safe and effective activities for youth to participate in. There should be a partnership between youth development programs, with constructive and positive activities.

County Youth Involvement Programs

Pages 7-9 include several examples of county programs that provide youth with face-to-face exposure to their county government.

Cabarrus 4-H Citizenship Focus has been designated as a model program because it attempts to involve all 10th-grade high school students and reinforce what those students have learned in the classroom about local government with exposure to elected officials, county department heads and real county problems.

Having face-to-face interaction with elected and/or appointed county officials is a key first step to making a memorable impression on youth, increasing the likelihood that they will become involved in county government and/or become more civic-minded and engaged in their home counties.

Each April, the National Association of Counties leads outreach efforts on National County Government Month. This celebration represents an opportune time during the calendar year for county governments to tout their services and host events for youth at county facilities.

Youth involvement program examples

Model program
Cabarrus 4-H Citizenship Focus

The Cabarrus County 4-H Citizenship Focus program bridges the gap between the civics classroom and applicable situations of citizen involvement for high school students. The program not only provides hands-on reinforcement of what students learn about local government in the classroom, but provides face-to-face contact with local elected officials and exposes students to various jobs in county government. Programs such as Citizenship Focus can provide a great starting point for impactful one-on-one or group-setting discussions between local decision-makers and youth.

Networking conversations between the 4-H extension agent and high school Civics teachers revealed students needed more hands-on experience in local citizenship activities to better understand course objectives. These objectives include knowing how to actively communicate with public officials, exploring roles as a citizen, and how local laws are enacted and enforced.

Cabarrus County 4-H planned and implemented the program. There are three components:

- Interviews with county employees: Students are divided into small groups to conduct interviews with county employees. Students make a list of questions to ask prior to attending the program, and interview several employees from different departments.

- Panel discussion with elected officials: Students participate in a large group panel discussion in the Board of Commissioners chamber. Elected officials on the panel include county commissioners, mayors, school board members, city council members and the sheriff. Each panel member introduces himself or herself, and individual students are given the opportunity to address the panel with a question.

- Budget simulation activity: A deputy county manager and county budget manager lead students in a budget simulation activity that tasks students with balancing a budget. Students can be assigned roles as county commissioners or as department heads asking for money.

Students prepared for the day by learning how to address elected officials, how to dress appropriately and some basic knowledge of how local government operates. The preparation allowed the program to have a more meaningful impact with the students. Through the 2011 spring semester, the program had been implemented during four school semesters, reaching more than 1,300 students.

During Spring 2011, nearly 650 students participated in the program. Eighty volunteers made the experience successful with a value of $5,000 in volunteer time. As a result of the program, 87 percent of participants reported that they had a better understanding of their citizenship responsibilities, 83 percent said they had a better understanding of how the local economy and local government affect one another, 72 percent said they had gained confidence in speaking with elected officials, 68 percent said they would encourage adults they know to vote in local elections, and 65 percent said they would talk with others about what they learned.

Cabarrus 4-H Citizenship Focus will continue to be held each semester with a new group of students. With overwhelming support from county employees and elected officials, the program has reached students in seven high schools. Because the program components align with the Civics course objectives and follow the 4-H "learn by doing" model, school administrators and teachers are supportive of Cabarrus 4-H Citizenship Focus. In addition, the Cabarrus Rotary Club provided a grant to the program to fund student transportation from schools to the government center.

Cabarrus 4-H Citizenship Focus was recognized as a 2010 Outstanding County Program Award winner by the NCACC. For her work in developing the program, Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Agent Heather Jones was honored by the North Carolina Center for Voter Education through its 2011 Spectrum of Democracy Awards as "Outstanding Citizen."

Contact: Debbie Bost, Director, Cabarrus County Center of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, (704) 920-3310 or DGBost@cabarruscounty.us.

Person County Local Government Day

Twice annually (in November and March) Person County hosts a Local Government Day for 10th grade students. In partnership with the school system, which selects the dates, the county invites students to observe a Board of Commissioners meeting. The county typically changes the venue of the meeting to a larger room (the Office Building Auditorium) to accommodate students. Students are given the opportunity to speak one-on-one with commissioners after the meeting to learn more.

Contact: Heidi York, Person County Manager, (336) 597-1720 or hyork@personcounty.net.

Robeson County Government awareness

In 2011 the Robeson County Board of Commissioners began an initiative to meet with high school seniors to enhance their understanding of county government. Attending county commissioners provide a general overview of county government during the 45-minute county government awareness presentation, which is held at each high school. Participating department heads discuss their department's role in the county.

Contact: Noah Woods, Robeson County Chairman of the Board, (910) 521-9006 or noahwoods@bellsouth.net.

Warren County High School Jr. ROTC Program

Established in 2009, this Warren County program exposes high school Junior ROTC participants to county offices and encourages them to volunteer in the community. The County Manager's Office conducts two tours for students each year.

Contact: Angelena Kearney-Dunlap, Warren County Clerk to the Board, (252) 257-3116 or adunlap@co.warren.nc.us.

Junior Leadership Durham 4H

Junior Leadership Durham 4H (JLD-4H) is designed to provide high school sophomores with in-depth knowledge of the Durham community and to promote active civic engagement through stimulating leadership and volunteer opportunities. This special interest club, set up as a 501(c)3 nonprofit in 2003, is intended to also support many N.C. Department of Public Instruction Civics curriculum objectives through the activities and scenarios JLD-4H youth are involved in throughout the seven planned experiential sessions. General JLD-4H Club goals include:

- developing citizenship and leadership skills to serve and lead others;
- increasing volunteerism among high school students;
- fostering more involvement in teens through leadership by promoting communication between students from different high schools in Durham;
- increasing youths' awareness of diverse community needs and resources; and
- exposing youths to various careers and volunteer leadership opportunities.

The Government and Citizenship session particularly focuses on participation in government. Durham County and City of Durham governments support the effort and alternate hosting the event. Students receive an overview of city and county governments by the city and county managers. Students then shadow a department head to understand that department's mission and report their experiences to the other students. Participants inquire how a chosen problem might affect each department. The students also participate in a mock city-county meeting to address a community concern. Research is done prior to the session, and students were given a presentation by the city-county sustainability director. Students are assigned roles such as staff, city council members, county commissioners and citizens (pro and con). Available elected officials attend to encourage students and to guide the mock process.

Students who participate in this and the other JLD-4H sessions and outreach projects gain a fundamental understanding of the politics and workings of Durham and what the important issues are. They get to meet, ask questions of, and interact with Durham's leadership. They also have the opportunity to develop friendships across Durham with students in different high schools and from different socio-economic, ethnic and philosophical backgrounds. Building diverse relationships and learning about others enriches each individual and promotes growth. Students are required to complete a community service project, and can apply their individual focus to a 4-H project or presentation. Small groups of four choose projects specific to session topics.

This valuable experience empowers teens to find and to nurture their leadership skills while increasing their confidence. The program costs approximately $10,000 annually but is made free to participants through funding for operations support made by various corporate and community benefactors who recognize the importance of growing youth leaders. Ninth-grade students attending a Durham public, private, charter or home school can obtain program applications available through school guidance counselors or online at www.juniorleadershipdurham.org. Applicants are also required to submit two letters of recommendation.

Contact: Peggy Kernodle, Family and Consumer Sciences Associate, Durham County Center of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, (919) 560-0523 or peggy_kernodle@ncsu.edu.

Engaging youth stakeholders

As elected officials, commissioners have the influence and opportunity to advocate for a cohesive community response to youth issues. Counties play a vital role in not just responding to needs of youth, but also for engaging in prevention activities that prepare them to lead successful lives.

There are in any county a multitude of organizations that provide services and assistance to youth. These can be directly affiliated with a county, such as Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development, or can be offered through a nonprofit that receives county funding, or can be faith-based. Engaging all these groups in a face-to-face meeting can help a Board of County Commissioners gain a better understanding of which county youth issues are being addressed, which require further attention, and which organizations offer county governments the best opportunity to address youth issues. An NCACC intern from N.C. Central University, Karen Jasmine, developed a toolkit for counties to use to form a Youth Stakeholder Council and hold an initial meeting. The toolkit, which is on pages 11-15, includes suggested guidelines and a sample first meeting agenda. The structure would be based on a county's needs, with a purpose of:

- evaluating critical metrics that broaden knowledge of young people, what they need, and how to care for and work with them more effectively.

- providing tools, resources and services to equip parents, educators, youth workers and other leaders to create a county where all young people are valued and thrive.

- collaborating with partners (foundations, corporations, schools, communities, faith-based organizations) to broaden and deepen commitments, capacity and effectiveness in fostering healthy development of youth.

A short summary of the Wake County Collaborative Partnership for Excellence in Youth Development is included on pages 16-17 as a model program for engaging youth stakeholders and formulating a plan of action to resolve youth issues.

Stakeholder council formation guidelines

Purpose: To aid in creating/maintaining a county-level forum for addressing youth issues.

1. Convene: Invite key stakeholders who are committed to the youth cause. You may find that there is already a strong alliance of stakeholders. If that is the case, affiliate with them and jointly determine which role you can play.

- High school student body presidents, 4H – NC (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fourh/)

- Local faith-based organizations

2. Assess: Consider the issues raised during the 2010 Youth Summit. What do these issues look like in your county? Visit www.djj.virginia.gov/Initiatives/YASI.aspx for an example of a framework for examining youth development areas.

3. Discuss: Facilitate meaningful dialogue about the outcome of this assessment and the implications for the county if left unattended. Explore programs other counties offer to address their youth-specific challenges, noting the ones that are successful. Establish what metrics accurately assess whether your youth council is making an impact on your desired outcomes. Gather data in intervals, analyze and report progress to stakeholders.

4. Plan: Decide what type of council is best suited for the needs indicated in the survey. Devise a plan for what your council would like to accomplish. Develop some goals and objectives in accordance with the type of council you chose.

5. Ask: Ask attendees what role they would like to fill on the council depending on their area of expertise and the resources they are able to commit.

6. Assign: Consider if there are appropriate assignments based on the discussion and divide tasks among the members so that they feel a sense of purpose. Build a reasonable accountability structure. People feel valued when they know what is expected of them and they have opportunities to contribute to this meaningful group. The first task will be information gathering goals and a reporting frequency.

7. Market: Market the meeting of the council and the work of constituent organizations whenever possible. Create a portal to share information with the Board of Commissioners. Utilize Youth Ambassadors to raise awareness in your county. Post links to stakeholder websites to your county website.

8. Work! Be about the work of Youth Building!

First meeting suggested agenda

Time		Agenda item	Action	Handout
mins. 20	1	• Welcome • Housekeeping • Purpose • What we want to accomplish	Open the meeting	Attendance sign-in (see page 13)
	2	Year in review	• Review the list of youths' most pressing issues • Facilitate discussion about how those issues relate to what you presently experience in your county	2010 YouthVoice Top 10 issues (see page 5); five action strategies (to be presented at 2011 NCACC Annual Conference)
	3	Assessing your county's youth state of affairs	Attendees complete assessment tool	Youth services evaluation
	4	Our youth population	• Review results as a group • Discuss the general issues that youth face • Develop a shared response	Data; sample "Bill of Rights" (page 14); Principles for Asset-Building Communities (page 15)
	5	Roles and responsibilities	• Determine the type of council that is appropriate for your county's needs • Establish leadership and supportive roles, and terms of service • Ask people/agency representatives to fill those roles • Assign first set of tasks	
	6	Communication methods • Conference Call • Email • Video Conference	Discuss frequency, duration and mode of subsequent meetings	Invitation to other community partners
	7	Next meeting	Determine date, time and location	

Meeting handout: Sign-in sheet

DATE_____

Name	Organization	Area of expertise	Address: email/phone

<u>Meeting handout: "Youth Bill of Rights"</u>

Stand by us, not over us. Give us the feeling that we are not alone in the world, that we can always count on you when we are in trouble.

Train us by being affectionately firm. You really will achieve more with us through patient teaching than by punishment or preaching. Say "NO" when you feel you have to, but explain your rules, don't merely impose them.

Say "nice work" when we do something really well. Don't hold back the praise when we deserve it.

Show interest in what we're doing. Even though by your standards our activities may not be important or interesting, don't reduce them in our eyes by your indifference.

Teach us by example. "What you are speaks louder than your word." Treat each one of us as a person in his own right. Children are people, not carbon copies of grown-ups. Treat all children in your care fairly; that is, as of equal value to you. That is how we will learn to respect the rights of other people and to treat them fairly.

Give us the right to a major voice in our own lives. Decisions that will affect our whole future should be made with us, not for us. We have a right to our kind of future.

Don't try to make us feel inferior. We doubt ourselves enough without your confirming it. Predicting failure for us won't help us to succeed.

We need fun and companionship. Help us share our interests and happy feelings with groups of friends. Give us time to be with them and make them welcome when they come to visit.

Prepare us to lead our lives, not yours. Find out what we can do or want to be before you force us beyond our capacity or make us become what you want us to become.

From <u>How to Be Happy Though Young</u> by George Lawton, Vanguard Press, Inc.

<u>Meeting handout: Principles for Asset-Building Communities</u>

1. Assets are nurtured in all young people. Rather than focusing primarily on specific groups of young people for intervention (those "at risk"), asset-building communities embrace and intentionally seek to nourish all young people.

2. Relationships are key. Rather than defining themselves primarily in terms of programs, asset-building communities view themselves more in terms of relationships. Initially, programs may be developed to help create connections in neighborhoods, schools, businesses, congregations, and other settings across all generations. But programs become less central as "natural" relationships, networks, and activities emerge to care for youth.

3. Everyone contributes to the vision. In an asset-building community, caring for young people is not the sole responsibility of families or schools or professional care providers. All residents—parents, neighbors, young people, educators, business people, senior citizens, congregation members, and others—see themselves as guardians of the community's young people.

4. Asset building never stops. Asset building begins before birth (equipping parents-to-be with skills) and continues at least until young people become independent adults. At each developmental stage, the community emphasizes different assets that respond to the young person's needs. Furthermore, the community explores how to nurture the assets that adults need.

5. The community is filled with consistent messages. If you spend time in an asset-building community, you quickly sense harmony in the messages that young people hear. One way communities and institutions are beginning to develop consistent messages is simply by using the language of asset building in describing relationships, activities, and programs. In this way, people consistently hear that young people are a priority in the community.

6. Duplication and repetition are valued. Just as marketers have learned that people need to hear a message several times before they fully grasp and act on it, the asset-building community knows that young people need to experience many expressions of care, guidance, and opportunities in all areas of community life. Rather than delegating one part of asset building to a particular segment of the community, the whole community recognizes its responsibility in strengthening the whole asset foundation.

From <u>Search Institute</u>, www.search-institute.org/key-themes-asset-building-communities

Stakeholder group example

Model program
Wake County Collaborative Partnership for Excellence in Youth Development

The Collaborative Partnership for Excellence in Youth Development is a value-added piece to Wake County's Human Capital development efforts. The partnership was developed based on the need for a cohesive and intentional approach in providing community-based services to address youth issues such as unemployment, school suspensions, adolescent pregnancies, unhealthy lifestyle choices, delinquency and institutionalization. County leaders recognized a lack of system-wide infrastructure for planning, communication or collaborative evaluation between private and public youth-serving entities working within the community, and realized that a fragmented approach among public, private and community entities for dealing with increasing challenges faced by youth contributed to minimized program effectiveness and low sustainability.

The partnership for youth development aims to build a sustainable infrastructure that advances positive development for school-age youth (between ages of 5-18), with an emphasis on reaching under-served youth. The Collaborative seeks to improve youth outcomes in the following areas: improved educational success, health and wellness, workforce readiness and civic engagement. The Collaborative hypothesizes that system-wide improvements in the three areas will lead to improved outcomes for youth in Wake County: human and organizational capacity building and sustainability; producing and reporting collective results; and engaging youth and the community.

Since January 2010, youth, community leaders, youth-serving organizations, educators, public safety and juvenile justice officers, foundations, business and workforce development professionals, elected officials and government agencies have convened in a cooperative effort to erase gaps in services, share resources and information, build capacity to improve programs and engage young people and their families in creating a positive future. As of March 2011, the Collaborative was in the process of developing shared community indicators and outcomes in support of its vision. The Collaborative has been awarded a four-year, $1.25 million grant from John Rex Endowment to implement its key strategies.

Collaboration partners represent the diverse breadth of voices and stakeholders within the community that are committed to the success of young people. The role of the partners is to inform and support the strategy. Partners then join Action Teams to inform and support the execution of the strategies. Action Teams are the engine that makes this collaborative effort successful by producing the changes needed to achieve the vision — a day when all young people in Wake County are safe, physically and mentally healthy, cared for, successful in school and in life, and prepared to become productive adults. A 15-member Steering Committee guides and frames the execution of the strategies and assures the commitment of resources (fiscal and human). The Steering Committee reflects the diversity of the stakeholder population, not just their organization. A Blue Ribbon Team guides and frames the strategy. Team members champion the mission and facilitate the vision into action, regardless of political climate.

Partners, Action Teams, the Steering Committee and the Blue Ribbon Team all have defined roles and responsibilities in the process that are included in a strategic plan, available online at www.ncacc.org/committees/youthtf_wakecollaborative.pdf. The strategic plan also lists commitments from partners such as the City of Raleigh, the Public School System, the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board, United Way of the Greater Triangle, and N.C. State University.

The project has a full-time director and a part-time administrative assistant. United Way of the Greater Triangle is acting as the fiscal agent.

Contact: Katherine Williams, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development, (919) 250-1109 or kwilliams@wakegov.com.

Working with a county government youth council

A County Government Youth Council can provide a Board of County Commissioners with a formal avenue to not only learn about issues that youth are facing, but also a forum to work with youth to develop solutions to their problems. Having a county commissioner serve as a liaison to a county government Youth Council is beneficial for both parties. Understanding youth issues can help commissioners make better youth program funding decisions. Having a community opinion leader at meetings let youth know that their county government values the input of their youth.

For help creating a Youth Council, the Civic Education Consortium based at UNC-Chapel Hill has a comprehensive Guide to Creating a Local Government Youth Council. The Guide is available online at www.civics.unc.edu/resources/docs/Creating_a_Youth_Council_Final.pdf.

After your Youth Council is up and running, affiliate it with the State Youth Council, which is part of the N.C. Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office, to create greater avenues for learning and involvement in government for your county's youth. Learn more about the State Youth Council at www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio/councils.aspx, or contact Cynthia Giles at (919) 807-4400 or cynthia.giles@doa.nc.gov.

Examples of North Carolina county government youth councils is available on pages 19-21.

Youth Council examples

Model program
Catawba County Youth Council

The Catawba County Youth Council was organized in 2008 to bring a youth voice to local government to help high school students develop and improve their leadership and citizenship skills, and improving their understanding of local government and local issues. The Youth Council is comprised of 30 high school students representing each high school and selected community organizations within Catawba County. The Council was conceived by Catawba County Assistant Manager Lee Worsley, who approached Cooperative Extension to provide leadership in the formation of the Council.

The Council evolved into an issues-based organization. Each year members identify and rank community/youth concerns and select one or two to focus on during the council year. Programs presented at monthly meetings enlighten members to learn more about the issue and develop an outreach project that is to be planned and implemented by the Youth Council. Through their work Council members support appropriate county government projects and volunteer at various community events. Three such projects are:

- Youth Literacy: In 2010, the Council developed "Spring Into Reading" in cooperation with the local libraries to encourage more youth to read for enjoyment. Council members, who knew from firsthand experience that being a good reader can impact one's academic success, were concerned that so few children seemed to like to read for "fun." They began by meeting with library staff to develop a project to be lead by council members each month during story time at three local libraries. Thirteen teens volunteered 27 hours to lead story time at three local libraries, reaching 67 elementary age youth. "Spring Into Reading" proved to be a success, and it was continued at Ridgeview Library, a low-income, high-crime housing community. Hickory community police officers volunteered to assist in the continuation of the program as a way they could interact in a positive manner with youth in the community. Officers also wanted to provide a positive role model for the children, just as Council members had done through the reading program. In addition to reading with children, the community officers worked with co-workers from the Hickory Police Department to donate books for the children to take home.

- Homeless Awareness: The Youth Council teamed up Catawba County 4-H and the Hickory Youth Council to focus on homelessness in 2010. A grant for $500 was secured and used to purchase fleece fabric. 4-H and Youth Council members made 54 blankets and donated to agencies to give to low-income families. By their visiting and volunteering at three agencies that provide services to homeless families, the youth gained an awareness and understanding of the homeless community. Using grant funding, they planned and cooked two meals that served 87 homeless individuals. The impact on youth volunteers was enormous. One young lady was so moved she expressed an interest in continuing as a volunteer at one of the agencies.

- Distracted Driving Video Contest: In 2009, Youth Council members identified texting and driving as an issue of concern. Uncertain as to how to implement a project to address this particular issue, they opted for a program about Safe Driving. In 2011, the Council is joining with the Catawba County Child Fatality Team to offer a video contest designed to bring attention to the issue of distracted driving. While the Fatality Team initiated the idea of the video contest, the Youth Council devised rules and suggested awards. Council members will play a key role promoting the contest at their respective schools. The program was launched in March 2011.

Catawba County Youth Council members also volunteer with several Catawba County programs including Kids Voting; worked with county Information Technology on a video for Catawba County's Tobacco Free Policy; supported Green Team projects; and participated in events planned by the City of Newton Festival and Special Events Committee.

The Catawba County Youth Council receives no county funding, and is dependent upon grants received and Cooperative Extension resources to implement their programs. Initially, Donna Mull, the county's 4-H agent with Cooperative Extension, provided the only support for the Council. She was able to incorporate several county employees representing different county departments to become involved and share their leadership roles. This additional expertise is being utilized to support council projects and allow Council members to broaden their vision of county government. They collaborate and share extensively with county agencies their ideas and, whenever possible, county employees are utilized to present educational programming at Youth Council functions. As well as learning about a topic, this process allows them to learn how county government is involved and addresses local issues. For example, when Council members expressed an interest in Teen Pregnancy, staff from Catawba County Public Health and the Department of Social Services provided an informational program relating to teen pregnancy. The Youth Council continues to seek opportunities to become involved in meaningful projects offered in other sectors of county government and to work more collaboratively with the City of Hickory Youth Council.

North Carolina Cooperation Extension offers youth programming through 4-H, making it a natural fit to provide oversight for the Catawba County Youth Council. The 4-H leadership and citizenship curriculum has been utilized as part of Youth Council meetings, allowing its members the opportunity to volunteer through 4-H.

Survey and project results reflect the Council's effectiveness in helping young leaders learns about community issues and develop skills to plan and implement projects. Utilizing an online survey, 100 percent of the students who have been involved with the Council during the last nine months indicate they have improved their skills in working with others, interacting with adults, and working collaboratively to develop a project. They also unanimously reported an increased knowledge about the issue of teen pregnancy (one area of focus for 2009-10 school year) and services provided by county government. Members have said they value their experiences on the Council, stating that participation provided them an opportunity to learn about key community issues and develop and implement projects with their peers and other citizens in their communities.

Contact: Lee Worsley, Assistant County Manager, Catawba County, (828) 465-8262 or lworsley@catawbacountync.gov; or Donna Mull, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development, Catawba County, (828) 465-8240 or donna_mull@ncsu.edu.

Cabarrus County Youth Council

The Cabarrus County Youth Council provides teens with an opportunity to be active citizens and empowers those teens through experiences and education. Selected participants from each high school in the county – including private and home schools – serve two year terms and can elect to run for an officer position or serve on a committee. The Youth Council exposes teens to county government, and allows them an opportunity to discuss issues and interact with county commissioners and employees through youth-adult partnerships.

Contact: Debbie Bost, Director, Cabarrus County Center of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, (704) 920-3310 or DGBost@cabarruscounty.us.

Robeson County Youth Leadership Cabinet

The Robeson County Youth Leadership Cabinet consists of two high school students from each of the six high schools in Robeson County, plus Early College. It is non-faith-based, supported by the Public Schools of Robeson County, and is a project of the nonprofit organization Sacred Pathways, Inc. The Cabinet's mission is to educate county youth about the importance of government and civic duty; to involve communities, civic leaders, educators and other organizations in developing opportunities for youth engagement in their communities; and to assist youth in developing an appreciation of democracy and government and a desire to fulfill civic duty through vocation and volunteerism.

Contact: Dr. Ruth Dial Woods, Project Director, Sacred Pathways, (910) 521-2685 or youthleadershipcabinet@yahoo.com.

Communicating with youths

Maintaining a continuous and open line of discussion with youth is paramount to a county government's involvement with youth. Outside of regular meetings with Youth Council members, county officials can request to stay in contact with youth leaders through popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. There are and should be "rules of engagement," however.

A workshop on communicating with youth via social media – "Social Networking: Can You Hear Me Now?" – will be held at the 104th Annual Conference in Cabarrus County. Presenters from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (CES) at N.C. State University will lead attendees in a discussion on social media strategy and best practices for communicating with youth, using a CES guide that is available on pages 23-29. Guidance on working with youth is on page 27.

Social Media Strategy and Best Practices
Version 1.1: July 15, 2010

Today's Internet-based technologies are changing the way that people communicate. The connectivity of the Internet and the social media tools being used are continually expanding. Individuals and businesses are increasingly looking for and finding free and abundant news and information online. North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCCE) has been a leader in utilizing these technologies. This document outlines our strategies for utilizing social media, and provides best practices for NCCE employees who engage in social media communications.

What is Social Media?

Social media continues to evolve as new technologies advance; there is no clear-cut definition. Social media can be thought of as a set of online tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, blogs, etc., that facilitate engaging communications between people. Social media can also be thought of as the conversation with others in an open, engaging and interactive communication through the use of these online tools. In fact, the white paper, *Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina* (2) says, "a social networking presence has become a hallmark of vibrant and transparent communications."

Why Should NCCE Embrace Social Media?

Properly planned and implemented participation in social media will bring such benefits as increasing internal communication, building leadership, improving relationships, increasing organizational visibility, improving media coverage, expanding influence, improving customer service, learning from our clientele and increasing responsiveness. All of these benefits may contribute to achieving our organizational objectives.

As our mission states, *North Carolina Cooperative Extension partners with communities to deliver education and technology that enrich the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians.*

In the few years since this mission statement was developed, online communities have become vibrant entities that share many characteristics of place-bound communities (4). In keeping with our mission, we should be engaging with North Carolina residents who utilize these new communities as we continue to serve our traditional communities. Done well, our presence in each will strengthen our success in both environments.

There is risk involved in ignoring social media. In 2006 during the NCCE marketing study, the Core Team identified four strengths that characterize our best work (3), including our ability to:

- Respond rapidly and with flexibility
- Use multiple resources to catalyze solutions
- Respond in a multidisciplinary way to societal, economic and environmental issues
- Work across disciplines and across (perceived) boundaries

Social media technologies provide a new conduits which are being leveraged to accomplish each of these strengths. Much of what was once a unique competence of Cooperative Extension, because of our statewide presence and our deep connections with the public, may now be accomplished online by entities that may or may not have physical proximity to our North Carolina communities.

To be our best, to compete, and to continue to be seen as relevant sources of education and significant partners in our communities, NCCE professionals need to engage in online communities and embrace social media technologies.

NCCE Social Media Strategy

NCCE actively engages in the use of social media in a coordinated effort to openly communicate with the citizens of North Carolina on the issues where we can impact the quality of life and business in our state.

Having an organizational presence is one piece of the overall strategy. NCCE currently maintains an organizational level social media presence in Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This is managed through cooperation of Extension IT and CALS Communications. Efforts are made to distribute timely information through this presence, and also to engage with and listen to the people who are following us.

Similarly, county and state-level programs are encouraged to maintain appropriate social media presences related to the specific program areas addressed. Shared blogs, Facebook Pages and Twitter are the commonly used applications for this purpose at this time.

Individual NCCE employees are also encouraged to actively participate in social media communities where their presence can add value to the communications and bring valuable attention to our organization. Most studies of social media report that this personal level is where the greatest benefits can be obtained, because of the trust relationships that develop and the human networks, both strong and weak ties, that are created and reinforced at this level.

The foundation of a good social media strategy involves setting goals and objectives. Like any media strategy, this includes considering the target audience and how to reach them, identifying the desired objectives, and creating a plan to achieve those goals. eXtension has identified the following likely objectives of social media engagement within Cooperative Extension (4).

- To become a significant contributor/catalyst for non-formal public education for improving people, families, and communities.
- To build new and enhance existing clientele relationships.
- To listen to and learn from the diversity of participants in community conversations.
- To reach learners that Cooperative Extension has not traditionally reached.

- To become a part of community conversations, resulting in increased referrals.
- To increase relevancy by gaining greater insight into what people need or lack.
- To increase responsiveness by using conversations to identify emerging issues.
- To create greater public awareness of Cooperative Extension as a significant educational resource.
- To increase accessibility and discoverability of Extension educational resources so they can be easily found by search engines.

To be most successful, all social media activities, whether organizational or individual, should follow established best practices.

Social Media Best Practices

Participate

All NCCE employees are encouraged to participate in social media, however, whether or not to participate in social communications is an individual's personal decision. Those who participate in social media must be aware that any message which they deliver can reflect on the organization.

If you aren't using social media yet, start with one or two tools. See [A Beginners Guide to Social Media in Extension](#) (1) to get started.

Measure Your Time - Keep Your Focus

There is a time investment required if you expect results from social media. Be conscious of time spent on social media. Some people will find that setting aside a few minutes a day will work. Others will find that they work best being in and out of their social media communications. Think of this the same as you would think about how you use your email.

Keeping your focus will help you manage your time. Make sure that the main focus of your social media efforts are related to the work initiatives for which you are responsible and the goals you set for using social media.

Be Yourself

Don't be afraid to be yourself on social media. People want to communicate with a real person. Being able to identify the person behind the message is important to building a relationship.

Likewise, be open about your affiliation with NCCE. Remember that NCCE's credibility in the social media world depends on *your* credibility (6). Be professional, courteous, and respectful of others, just as you would in the real world.

Participate as a Peer

Social media environments are communities, not classrooms. Your role as an expert in your subject matter area makes you a valuable member of the community, however, you should participate in discussions as a peer.

Use Common Sense

Probably the most useful best practice in social media is to use common sense. NCCE employees use common sense every day in deciding what to say in a news interview, newsletter article or personal appearance. This same decision-making process applies to social media. If you feel uneasy about posting a message, then you should probably not post it. Everything you say both personally or professionally reflects on you and the organization. Think about how others might perceive your comments before making them.

Participate Regularly

Make social media a part of every day. Participate consistently.

Be Available

One of the most valuable benefits of social media is the connections that can be made with others. Most of these connections will be maintained via social media, however, providing contact information like your email address, phone number, and mobile number makes you more accessible. This will improve your credibility within the community.

If you decide to provide a phone number, consider using an Internet phone service like Skype or Google Voice to help you manage calls received via social media contacts.

Listen

Social media provides you with the ability to easily listen to large numbers of people. Listening to your community will help you identify needs and issues.

Listening also helps you to gain respect and followers. Responding to and acknowledging others' thoughts, ideas and opinions and re-broadcasting, with attribution, valuable content someone else posted shows that you are actively listening.

Responding to Negative Comments

NCCE employees should be prepared to deal with negative criticism that might enter the discussion. Unless the negative comments are spam or frivolous, they should always be responded to in a timely manner. Responses should be positive, professional, factual, and not emotional. Using common sense and responding as you would in any other format should be appropriate.

Write to Encourage Interaction

Your social media activities should encourage communication and interaction.

On organizational efforts that allow for comments, like Facebook pages or blogs, you should use a disclaimer, for example, *The opinions expressed here by participants are attributable to the individual posting them and do not represent the opinions of NC State University.*

Expand your Reach

Participation in communities outside of Extension is a great way to take our expertise to people where they are. Don't expect your audience to come to you. Look for discussions or groups around your subject matter and jump in to participate. Make sure to connect these groups back to Extension resources when it is appropriate.

Respect Privacy

Privacy is a very important consideration when using social media. Always respect the privacy of others and make sure you have permission before providing information about someone else.

You need to obtain photo releases prior to posting images of people on your social media website. This is no different than what is required to print these images in other formats.

Protect your own personal privacy as well. Think about what you are sharing and how much you want to make public.

Working with Youth

Communicating with youth via social media should be accomplished with great respect to their privacy. Privacy concerns are amplified when dealing with youth. Be particularly vigilant in not revealing personal information which could be dangerous in the wrong hands.

Youth and their parents may be unnerved by an adult request to friend or follow childrens' personal pages. Creating organizational pages for youth to follow is a better practice than instigating personal social media contacts with youth.

Those who communicate with youth should always be aware of the potential for misunderstandings or unfounded allegations. This is no different when working with social media. You should keep all interactions with youth public and professional. For example, always include another adult on direct communications with youth.

Build NCCE's Organizational Brand

Make sure to identify your affiliation with North Carolina Cooperative Extension when providing content related to your responsibilities. Be clear as to whether you are stating your own opinions or speaking as a representative of the organization. Providing links and recommendations to NCCE

resources is a great way to strengthen your credibility and build awareness of NCCE.

Use organizational logos appropriately. For example, the extension logo should not be used on a personal Facebook page or Twitter home page, whereas it may be appropriate on a Facebook Fan page or Twitter home page for your program. Check with Communication Services if you have questions about the use of the NCCE logo within social media.

Gain Influence

Gaining influence in your community will help to achieve your goals. Post regularly but not excessively. Share links to valuable content in your area of expertise, whether it is something you created, or content that belongs to NCCE or others. Participate respectfully, comment on others' work, and stay involved in the conversation.

Honor Copyright

Use of copyrighted materials such as logos, graphics, music, art, photographs, video or text should be avoided in social media.

Remember Permanence

Keep in mind that anything you share online can potentially live forever. An offhand comment made in person will eventually fade away, but a comment made online will always be there.

Leverage our Network

Connecting with other NCCE and land-grant university social media users will help enhance your own social media presence and contributes to the overall visibility of Cooperative Extension.

If you don't already have one, obtain an eXtension id at http://people.extension.org. Include your public social media identities in your eXtension profile, and link them to your NCCE extension directory information. Complete instructions are available here (5).

Many of your extension colleagues are using social media. Find colleagues by network: https://www.extension.org/people/colleagues/socialnetworks

Keep Learning

Participate in eXtension Professional Development workshops on social media topics to keep up with trends and new technologies.

Join the eXtension Learn community to receive the professional development email announcement each month. Details are available at: http://about.extension.org/wiki/Schedule_of_Professional_Development_Opportunities

Learn from your peers in extension (7).

References

1. *Beginners Guide to Social Media in Extension*, Anne Adrian and Rhonda Conlon. http://collaborate.extension.org/wiki/Beginners_Guide_to_Social_Media_in_Extension

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4. *eXtension Social Media Guidelines*, Adopted 6.3.2010. http://about.extension.org/wiki/eXtension_Social_Media_Guidelines

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9. 21 Rules for Social Media Engagement. Brian Solis, Mashable. http://mashable.com/2010/05/18/rules-social-media-engagment/

Promoting careers in county government

North Carolina counties not only need to help develop future elected officials, but also future professionals who care about their county and can help improve it as county government employees. By offering internships and job shadowing programs to youth – not just public school students but those in higher institutes of learning – counties can inspire interested youth to seek a career in county government.

Examples of current county internship and job shadowing programs are listed on pages 31-32.

Counties can also educate the public on the various professional skills a county government needs to provide services and promote itself as a potential employer through PEG (Public, Education and Governmental) channels. The NCACC's Welcome to Your County video includes a regular segment called County Careers, which showcases various jobs in county government through profiles of employees from counties across the state. The NCACC makes this video available to counties to loop on their PEG channels. To learn how to download the video file, contact the NCACC's Communications team (Todd McGee or Jason King) at (919) 715-2893. The video is also accessible on the NCACC's YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/ncacc1908.

Internships and job shadowing programs

Granville County summer internships for rising sophomores

Each year since 2000, Granville County has accepted six rising high school sophomores for a five-week summer internship program. Participants rotate between as many departments as possible and receive hands-on experience in county government. Participants must also attend two meetings of the Board of County Commissioners. In 2011 the county added a mentorship piece to the program by matching a county employee with each student to provide a more personal experience. Also new for 2011, participants are being tasked with recruiting applicants for the next summer. At the conclusion of the internship, each participant is provided a $1,000 scholarship.

The county solicits for applicants via a notification to the school superintendent in January. The superintendent distributes the notice to counselors at schools with a high school sophomore class. The county manager and five other county employees form a committee that interviews all applicants and selects a group of interns that represent a diverse student base.

Contact: Debra A. Weary, Clerk to the Board and Assistant to the County Manager, Granville County, (919) 693-4761 or debra.weary@granvillecounty.org.

Moore County Government Internship Program

The Moore County Public Information Office and 4-H co-sponsor a County Government Internship Program for youth age 14-21. The program began in the summer of 2010 with 14 participants selected through an application process and placed in county departments based on their interests.

The program was designed to develop citizens who care about and contribute to their communities. By helping students discover how Moore County Government solves problems pertaining to roads, schools, fire and police protection, and water supply), program leaders hope to build an informed citizenry ready to assume leadership roles in the communities. The program provides role models and mentors, and work orientation to enable participants to increase their social and work-related skills. Experiences are designed to bring about increased confidence, information about the world of work, and positive self-concepts.

Participants are given the opportunity to use the skills they develop in the internship program to participate in a community service project to address the issues they feel are most important to them. Project end results have included youth lead workshops, an informational website, and a school garden. Students are given information and general counseling on how to further their education in college and/or technical schools, and the tools necessary to get involved in local government and civic organizations. There is a $25 cost to participants.

Contact: Linda Gore, 4-H agent, Moore County Center of the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service, (910) 947-3188 or lwgore@ncsu.edu.

Northampton County 'Intern of the Month'

Northampton County began its Intern of the Month program in September 2009 with the goal of giving a high school student an in-depth look at how county government operates. Each month, the county contacts the guidance counselor from one of its five high schools (five public, one charter, one private) to select a participant. The participant joins members of the Board of Commissioners for meetings, and receives the same information and meeting packets that commissioners receive. High school principals and guidance counselors are key partners for the county in this arrangement.

Contact: Robert Carter, Northampton County Commissioner, (919) 724-5160 or rvcarter40@yahoo.com.

Randolph County Student Election Assistants

The Randolph County Board of Elections hires Student Election Assistants (SEAs) as needed. Thirty-two SEAs assisted during the November 2010 General Election. Board of Elections staff work with administrators in public and private high schools in the county to recruit talented students age 17 or older to serve as SEAs. Each student is assigned to work in a different polling place, attends a poll worker training course, and works as a precinct assistant on Election Day, just like other precinct officials. Board of Elections staff report that the SEAs are particularly helpful in assisting with electronic poll books and computer programs.

Contact: Melissa T. Johnson, Director, Randolph County Board of Elections, (336) 318-6902 or mtjohnson@co.randolph.nc.us.

Warren County New Tech High School Senior Intern Program

Each senior at Warren County New Tech High School is required to volunteer at least 50 hours prior to graduation. The county makes volunteer opportunities available to students in an attempt to encourage students to return to the county to live or "give back" following their graduation from a college or trade school.

Contact: Angelena Kearney-Dunlap, Warren County Clerk to the Board, (252) 257-3116 or adunlap@co.warren.nc.us.