

Community Development Education team building better government and nonprofit boards

Situation:

Western Wyoming communities are facing growth issues and becoming more complex in their mixture of peoples, cultures, and economic viability. In 2005, the need for board training was identified during an assessment for a leadership institute in Sublette County. A local steering committee was instrumental in designing the first board trainings offered by the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) Community Development Education (CDE) initiative team.

Building Better Boards was implemented for boards appointed in Teton and Lincoln counties in 2006. Shortly thereafter, commissioners in counties from other regions of Wyoming voiced the need for board training. In 2007, the CDE initiative team partnered with the Wyoming Association of County Commissioners to create the *County Appointed Board Member Handbook*, an educational tool for use in Wyoming's communities. The CDE team received funding from UW CES to create an online video training tool for use with the handbook. Individuals participating in Building Better Board workshops are given a copy of the handbook and the link for the companion video (<http://rtadmin.powweb.com/cde/>) for an online opportunity to reinforce the objectives of the workshops.

County-appointed boards, municipal boards, and nonprofits struggle with similar governance issues: parliamentary procedure; meeting management, including recording of minutes; open meeting laws; human resource issues; ethics; confidentiality; liability; fiduciary responsibilities; board roles; planning and implementing programs; maintaining compliance with scope of duties; and "playing well" with others.

Nine board training sessions lasting four to six hours were offered in 2009. More than 100 participated in seminars designed by local steering committees comprised of 40 volunteers who determined topics. County-appointed, elected, and nonprofit board members were invited to participate. Local resources joined extension educators to teach the local courses.

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Impacts:

Elected officials who have offered training for their boards report the boards have more productive meetings, are following agendas, and creating more rewarding experiences for board members. Directors and managers of county boards reported a more reasonable amount of time expended in board meetings, and the meeting management skills of members have improved. Some boards that participated had meetings that regularly lasted until midnight; they now finish their business in two-hour sessions. Decision-making skills have increased, open meeting laws are better understood and complied with, parliamentary procedure knowledge has increased, there is more effective agenda development and better use of the consent agenda, and there is better understanding of officer roles.

The Kemmerer Senior Center readdressed its board governance over its program(s) and was able to bring the center back into compliance with its granting agencies requirements. Members have taken the time to learn about the legal framework of their respective boards and create policies to govern their programs.

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