Preparation and Conducting a Steering Committee Meeting  
Iowa Annie’s Project FY-12 Courses  
USDA-RMA grant 11-IE-53102-080 and Sponsors

A **steering committee** meeting is an essential element in preparing for an Annie’s Project course. A steering committee meeting is a well-planned, one-hour discussion with **female** stakeholders from the area. A one-hour discussion means the facilitator must be prepared and keep on time.

**The goal** of the steering committee meeting is to build credibility and investment with stakeholders. Credibility and investment come from stakeholders giving their input and the facilitator using it.

**The objectives** are

- Have steering committee members prioritize and expand on topics
- Gather names of agricultural professionals who will be presenters, preferably female
- Collect names of potential participants
- Ask steering committee members to promote the course

Building credibility and investment starts with the **invitation list**. In 2009, Heidi Carter, Page County Extension Director, asked Page County Extension staff, the County Executive Director and Farm Loan Officer from the Farm Service Agency, and a local banker for names.

Carter and Eggers put together a list of women they thought would be good, which included former Annie’s Project participants. At a staff meeting, Carter presented the list and stated, “I need women who are familiar with agriculture, will share ideas, and will work well together for a short time. If you have comments about potential members that you want to share privately, see me.” Staff members shared their opinions.

Carter sent an e-mail message to Farm Service Agency staff and a local banker. She explained the purpose of the steering committee meeting and the goals from the grant. Not surprisingly, there was overlap on the suggested names ([http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/locbanker.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/locbanker.pdf)).

Carter made a table with columns for Name, Address, and Recommended by. She could have added another column for Date Called to Confirm. The invitation list included 18 people: 2006 steering committee members, former Annie’s Project participants, Extension Council members, a crop insurance saleswoman, an accounts manager for a co-op, agricultural loan officers, bankers, and farmers. Ten women attended representing the previously mentioned categories.

Before you send the invitation letter, **set the dates**, including a snow date, and **line up your Real Colors® presenter** for the first session. Make sure she is excellent. The Real Colors® presenter sets the tone for the next five sessions. Ask other Annie’s Project facilitators or colleagues who have seen the presenter in action. Marsha Laux, Coordinator for the Iowa Annie’s Projects, will be sending a list of Real Colors® presenters.
In the invitation letter, Carter made sure to thank the person for previous service or who recommended her, who else was invited, and that she would be calling to confirm in less than 10 business days. Carter and Eggers have updated the letters and enclosures for you to adapt.

- Letters, make sure to use your letterhead with the updated wordmark and justice statement, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/Recommended.docx) and (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/Appreciated.docx)
- Draft brochure, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/BasicAnnie.pub)
- Draft Presenters’ Matrix, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/GenericPlanningGuide.xlsx)

Carter and Eggers held the steering committee meeting at the Page County Extension office because it has a large conference room. For lunch Carter ordered club sandwiches from Subway and supplemented the sandwiches with potato chips and orange slices. Beverages were water and coffee. The lunch cost will be covered by registration fees or sponsorship. The grant cannot pay for food.

Carter made sure that each member signed the registration sheet. One, the information is needed for civil rights compliance, and two, she added their names in the first media release for credibility (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/FirstNewsRelease.pdf).

The handouts for the steering committee meeting were

- An agenda, make sure to use your letterhead with the updated wordmark and justice statement, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/Agenda.docx)
- Draft brochure, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/BasicAnnie.pub)
- Draft Presenters’ Matrix, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/GenericPlanningGuide.xlsx)
- Potential Participants, make sure to use your letterhead with the updated wordmark and justice statement, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/PotParts.docx)

Carter and Eggers have updated the handouts for you to adapt.

After Eggers introduced himself and stated the purpose of the meeting, he said he would finish promptly at 1 p.m. because he respected members taking time from their schedules to support Annie’s Project. Members introduced themselves, and Eggers ran the introductory video, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYFeGdTW7Y4&feature=player_embedded). If you have the video on the Annie’s Project DVD, use it with a television for higher quality. LCD projectors can make the Caucasian skin tones look white, like bleached paper. Contact Marsha to order an Annie’s Project DVD.

Remember to take an Annie’s Project portfolio with the biostar logo, paid for by the Farm Credit Council. Eggers showed the portfolio and explained that it was one of the items participants would
receive. He used the inside tabs to demonstrate how information would be organized. Eggers also pointed out the Ag Decision Maker CD, pen, and USB stick. A former Annie’s Project participant brought her portfolio to the Clarinda steering committee meeting.

Carter reviewed the Definitions of Risk Management Categories. It helped members understand the types of risks and set the stage for the Presenters’ Matrix. Carter considered the definitions as one of her most important tools. It clarified the risk categories, provided guidance for setting objectives, and gave her speaking points with Eggers.

After Carter’s review, Eggers went through the PowerPoint slides, (http://www.extension.iastate.edu/feci/annie/grants/RMACommittee.pptx). He has updated the slides for the Iowa Annie’s Project sites. You will need to customize slides one and five.

For the Presenters’ Matrix, Eggers explained the topics for each session and suggested names if he knew they were good. He asked members for names and phone numbers of presenters by topic.

Annie’s Project methodology dictates the presenters. The methodology is one-half time in lecture and one-half time in discussion or doing interactive activities, e.g. completing missing numbers in a balance sheet. Try to get several names for each topic. Remember, you do not have to use the presenters that the steering committee members suggest. Some are unsuitable for Annie’s Project. They will not encourage questions or incorporate interactive activities and are intimidating to a female audience. You will need to spend time vetting presenters. During the vetting process, if you do not think the person will fit the requirements, then ask an ISU Extension specialist.

Many of the topics under the five risk categories are standard for every Annie’s Project. They are listed on slides 7, 8, and 9 in the PowerPoint presentation and below.

**Production Risk**
- Crop insurance
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- WebSoilSurvey

**Price or Market Risk**
- Grain marketing

**Financial Risk**
- Women and money
- Basic financial documents
- Interpretation of financial documents
- Farm Service Agency
- Enterprise analysis
- Farm leasing
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Institutional and Legal Risk
- Estate planning

Human and Personal Risk
- Real Colors®
- Insurance for farm families, not crop

Each Annie’s Project course is also unique because of the contributions from steering committee members. The steering committee members mold Annie’s Project to fit the agriculture in the area and current topics. For example, in 2007 in Harlan, steering committee members wanted an agronomist to explain grid soil sampling to increase the efficiency of fertilizer applications. The costs were rising rapidly.

In Clarinda, steering committee members wanted record keeping and how to use records for taxes. To the surprise of Carter and Eggers, members asked for a panel of successful women who had a value-added agricultural business.

One of the members recommended a co-worker at her bank as a presenter for basic financial documents and interpretation of financial documents. She shone in the vetting process and turned out to be a great presenter. Not every recommendation works out as well. It is hard to balance suggestions from steering committee members with the facilitator’s need of quality instructors and local politics.

Before you adjourn the one-hour meeting, make sure to ask steering committee members to complete the Potential Participants table. Add the names to the mailing list for recruiting participants. Eggers has had members register for Annie’s Project, write a check as a sponsor, and recommend sponsors. Also ask members to tell relations and colleagues about the upcoming course.

As facilitators, take time to lay the foundation for success of your Annie’s Project. The foundation starts with the steering committee meeting. Members build credibility and investment by spending their time proposing topics, suggesting presenters, and recommending participants. Facilitators model Annie’s Project methodology by delivering information in a concise time frame and by mixing lecture with discussion. During the meeting, they will also find synergy and excitement about Annie’s Project.

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