

Regional Teamwork and Best Practices: More Bang for Your Buck

Julie Garden-Robinson¹, Shannon Coleman², Barb Ingham³, Joyce McGarry⁴, and Londa Nwadike^{5,6}

¹North Dakota State University Extension; ²Iowa State University Extension and Outreach; ³ University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension;

⁴Michigan State University Extension; ⁵ Kansas State University Extension; ⁶University of Missouri Extension



PURPOSE

We wanted to find out the unique qualities of our team that make it successful, the most pressing issues brought to us by our constituents, and the challenges of networking, communication, and growth in a regional group.

INTERVIEWS

In May 2020, we had 17 members from the 12-state North Central region. Out of these, 11 agreed to be interviewed. Our outside program assistant conducted the 18-question interviews over Zoom, transcribed them manually using iTunes, analyzed the data, and wrote up the results.

9 BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING YOUR OWN REGIONAL EXTENSION NETWORK

<p>1 ORGANIZE. Find out who is interested in founding a network in your multi-state region and what their specialties and interests encompass.</p>	<p>6 DIVIDE AND CONQUER. When your group begins to grow, divide into subcommittees. We currently have three. Now reorganized, our subcommittees meet every other month, and our larger network meets every other month. We keep to the same third Friday of every month, for both small and large group meetings.</p>
<p>2 LEAD. Feel out who (besides yourself) might be interested in helping to organize your team. This may not always be the obvious person. In our network, we use a leadership duo that presides over our meetings. In day-to-day practice, we have shared leadership.</p>	<p>7 RESEARCH AND PUBLISH. When you have the opportunity for research amongst your group, go for it! We decided we needed an evaluation tool for the various education programs in our individual states, so we developed one together and implemented it. Later, we published the results of the tool's success.</p>
<p>3 MEET MONTHLY. Get an email list going, and be sure to have one person maintaining the list and doing the online video gatherings (our network uses Zoom). Keep the meetings to no more than an hour and a half. Consider maintaining a cloud storage for all documents and meeting minutes (our network uses Box).</p>	<p>8 MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK ! Just think—you could do all this in your multi-state region, too. You will find your group has its own expertise in whatever topic you choose, like ours does in food safety. There will be successes and challenges, opportunities and outreach. We are so much more effective when we are united with a common purpose, building on each other's experience and accomplishments.</p>
<p>4 COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE. Share the workload by sending email messages whenever a client has a question for which you don't have a ready answer. Keep everyone in the loop by using your group's listserv. Someone in your network may already have a resource to share on the topic in question, or a few of you might perform some impromptu research for an answer.</p>	<p>9 CONTACT ONE OF US! If you have more specific questions, please drop us a line, either by email or phone. We are excited about seeing new groups form and mentoring them.</p>
<p>5 MENTOR. We found that by virtue of being in our network, we automatically mentored each other, usually informally. Mentoring doesn't always happen from the more experienced to the newbie—it travels in all directions.</p>	<p>Watch for the upcoming paper in the 2022 Journal of NEAFCS.</p>