

idea corner

Telecommunications Training

Telecommunications can substantially reduce the cost of a meeting that involves people from widely separated geographic areas. Extension Advisory Council members frequently have no experience in telecommunications, but may be asked to support programs that should use this method of getting together. Here's how we involved our council.

We set up their monthly meeting as usual and advised the council president before the meeting date of the plan. We'd set the telecommunication equipment in the meeting room and leave a note saying that we'd been called away for an emergency meeting in another town, but that we'd meet with them via the teleconference.

The plan was carried out with the Extension staff being just across the hall from the meeting room. The teleconference lasted one hour and then we informed them of the hoax.

Their reactions to a teleconference meeting were basically positive and they were quick to see the advantages

it offered. They also experienced the normal "stage fright" that goes with the first time use of the system and correctly identified its shortcomings. All in all, everyone agreed it was an interesting and educational experiment.

Our office serves an area about the size of the state of Texas, so telecommunications has tremendous potential for us. We use the system frequently for Extension committee meetings as well as educational programming. Effective use of the system requires planning and preparation. It's best used with a facilitator at each site and complemented with slides, pictures, and handouts.

If you'd like to give your council a similar experience, you only need a local telephone system, the telecommunications equipment, and a little ingenuity.

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