



HISTORY OF SEAL CONFERENCES

The idea for conducting a regional advisory leadership conference began in 2000 with interested Extension specialists across the southern region. Lead states at that time were North Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, Virginia, Mississippi and South Carolina. All states agreed that curriculum for orientation and training was a common theme in the region. Another need the group identified was to establish best practices for building advisory leadership.

The First SEAL Conference

The first Southeast Advisory Leadership Conference was held in May 2001 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Approximately 80 extension faculty and volunteer members of extension advisory/leadership councils from ten states from throughout the Southern Region attended this conference.

The objectives for the conference were to:

1. Clarify the benefits of involving people in advisory leadership.
2. Share how advisory leadership is organized and how it is accomplished.
3. Identify critical issues relative to advisory leadership.
4. Identify characteristics and strategies to achieve an ideal vision of advisory leaders and Extension workers who lead them.
5. Share resources and curriculum for building capacity of advisory leaders.

Prior to the conference, a needs assessment was conducted to determine the status of advisory systems in each state of the region. The survey identified baseline data on organizational structure, operational functioning, and issues associated with effective functioning, and organizational needs among states. The survey also indicated that training was needed by both agents and volunteers to enhance the proficiency of the advisory leadership partnership.

That first conference provided an opportunity for discussion of the survey results and featured four advisory leadership models utilized in states throughout the southern region. Conference participants identified the need for training on how to lead an effective advisory leadership partnership. At the end of the conference, there were two mandates from the group:

To develop curriculum to support advisory leadership system development

- 1) To conduct another Southeast Advisory Leadership Conference within a year to sustain momentum.

In August of 2001, the Program and Staff Development group of the Program Leaders Conference held in the region each year helped drive the proposal for curriculum development and a second regional conference. The Association of Southern Region Extension Directors supported the multi-state advisory leadership initiative. Unfortunately, when time came for registration for the conference, states were hindered with shrinking budgets so the second conference was delayed.

The Second SEAL Conference

The second Strengthening Extension Advisory Leadership (SEAL) Conference was then held October 29-31, 2003 in Atlanta, Georgia with ten states attending. Approximately a third of the delegates were volunteers who serve in advisory leadership roles in their states. Six of the southern region states were involved on the planning and curriculum development committee. The committee was composed of Extension Specialists and one volunteer.

The objectives of the conference were for delegates to:

- 1) Understand the curriculum and be familiar with how to teach it to various audiences.
- 2) Share advisory system structure and function practices.
- 3) Validate core volunteer competencies and proficiencies for use in developing additional curriculum modules.

Each delegate received a large notebook with the printed curriculum and a CD containing all the print curriculum and power point presentations. Curriculum was developed around the core competencies of Leadership, Communication, and Knowledge of the Organization. Specifically, the three tracks were:

- Ramping up for Successful Councils
- Organizing for Effective Meetings
- Setting Program Priorities

The Third SEAL Conference

The third SEAL Conference was again held in Atlanta on October 24-26, 2005 with 55 participants attending. Attendees were professional staff and leaders from seven states in the southern region.

The objectives of the conferences were to:

- 1) Reveal effective strategies for advocacy
- 2) Build advocacy groups that work
- 3) Embrace the differences in ourselves and each other

The conference was again presented as a train-the-trainer approach with the introduction of three new curricula. Attendees were able to participate in two of the three topics. The three sets of materials were:

- Effective Strategies for Advocacy: Communicating with Decision Makers
- Advisory Group Development
- Individual Advisory Member Development

The Fourth SEAL Conference

The fourth SEAL Conference was held back in Charlotte, North Carolina on May 19-21, 2009. The objectives of the meeting are to:

- 1) Identify the critical needs of advisory leadership
- 2) Develop new curriculum and materials
- 3) Share approaches and ideas among states
- 4) Collaborate in the development of materials
- 5) Train participants in the use of the materials so they can adapt them for use in their states
- 6) Develop a network of individuals from different states

Four new sets of curriculum are being introduced:

- Orienting New Advisory Board Members and New Faculty
- Teaching Extension Volunteers How to Advocate and Market Cooperative Extension
- New Methods in Extension Volunteerism and How They Impact Advisory Leaders
- Maximizing Impact through Advisory Leader Involvement

Attendees will have an opportunity to participate in three different topics.

To view any of the curricula that were developed in these previous years, go to:

<http://srpln.msstate.edu/seal/>

Other sites that contain SEAL materials or adaptations of them for use by individual states, go to:

Texas A&M --- <http://extensioneducation.tamu.edu/SEAL/>

University of Kentucky --- <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/advisorycouncil/Tools.htm>

Courage happens where people unite.

....Anonymous