Using External Revenue & Partnerships to Sustain an Extension Forestry Program

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Abstract Summary
The Woodland Advisor program moved from a cohort participation model to an open model in 2003. This change created new partnerships, expanded delivery capacity, and increased extension outreach. Classes now offered have flexible class content and schedules, and program marketing and volunteer support have been increased. Additionally, many business tools are used to help focus activities and identify areas of potential growth.

Background of the Woodland Advisor Program
The Woodland Advisor program was first offered in Minnesota in the late 1980s to a decentralized audience. Local woodland owner associations partnered with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and others to deliver core content to a cohort of interested landowners. The duration and content of the training varied based on landowner interest, local issues, and instructor expertise.

In 2000, Extension took on a more active role in managing the program, which was characterized by decentralized management and greater variability of content and format. One cohort was trained per year. The 40-hour curriculum was standardized so that about half of the content was the same across offerings, and about half was local-specific and tailored toward local needs.

Beginning in 2003, the program moved away from a cohort-based format. Currently, classes are offered on a variety of topics across the state all year long. Participants are responsible to complete 15 core and any 5 elective modules. Upon completion of core and elective modules, the individual is named a Woodland Advisor and moves on to engage in volunteer and leadership activities.

The current format offers greater flexibility for participants, allowing them to attend classes at times and locations most convenient to them. It also allows individuals to enroll in classes of the most interest to them. The focus has increased total participation in the program. A possible disadvantage of this new model is that participants may not complete all the modules. However, this has proven to be a problem.

Revenue Sources
Participants fees are typically $20 per 3-hour class. For revenue purposes seven classes costs.

Program Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Participants</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Individuals</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>1500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership &amp; Materials</td>
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<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2003-2005 Changes in Woodland Advisor Class Structure
Flexible class content and schedules are key to the new Woodland Advisor program structure. Classes are offered throughout the state at your own time and location for local needs. Participants can register for a single class or receive a discounted price if they pay for the whole series in advance.

Program evaluations and audience feedback help to drive new class development. Examples of classes that have been developed because of audience need are Biotic Resources: Basic Concepts, Advanced GPS, Buckthorn Removal, How to be a Successful Volunteer, and topics related to immediate natural disturbances events such as forest outbreaks and outbreaks scale in size events.

Repeat participation and program growth is encouraged during classes by presenting a program promotional brochure with each session. We also promote repeat attendance by adding participants to our quarterly, calendar, and newsletter mailing.

Program marketing has also been increased. Class announcements postcards are mailed 3 weeks prior to each class. A quarterly newsletter builds community and encourages engagement and volunteering. Three times per year we also distribute a field guide calendar highlighting upcoming classes.

Volunteer support has increased by assigning volunteer-related duties to one program organizer and having large portions of the newsletter devoted to volunteer opportunities and activities.

Implementing Business Tools
Business tools have been utilized to help focus the program. These tools include developing a strategic statement, focusing activities, and identifying areas of potential growth as well as aggressive program marketing. We are also developing a strategic plan to continue this business approach.


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