

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 external revenues. Classes now offered have flexible class content and schedules, new electives are created from participant feedback, and program marketing and volunteer support have been increased. Additionally, more 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 in a decentralized fashion. 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 interests, local issues, and instructor expertise.

In 2000, Extension took on a more active role in managing the program. This led to more centralized management and greater consistency 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 for every offering and about half was location-specific and flexible to meet local needs.

Beginning in 2003, the program moved away from a cohort-based format. Currently, classes are offered on a variety of topics around the state all year long. Participants are responsible to complete 10 core and any 5 elective modules. Upon completion of core and elective credits, 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 come only to classes of the most interest to them. This has led to increased total participation in the program. A possible disadvantage of this new model is participants may not complete all the courses; however, to date, this has not proven to be a problem.

Revenue Sources

Participant fees are typically \$20 per 3-hour class. Fee revenue generally covers class costs.

Grants are also used to help subsidize class costs and cover other program expenses.

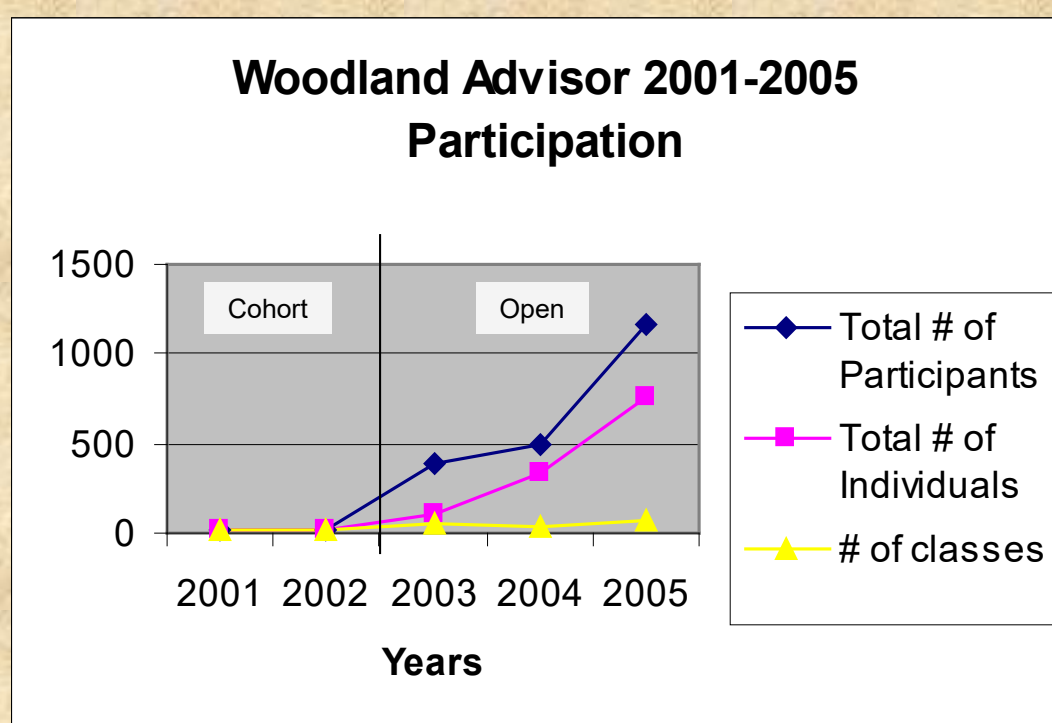
Partnerships are another important aspect of the Woodland Advisor program's sustainability. Currently there are three primary partners: Extension, Minnesota Forestry Association (MFA), and local partners/woodland councils. Some partners provide in-kind services while others do more logistical work like printing and mailing class postcards.

Sales are the final component of the program's financial structure. Recently we have been able to sell the whole program, 10 core and 15 elective classes, to a local group for a fee.

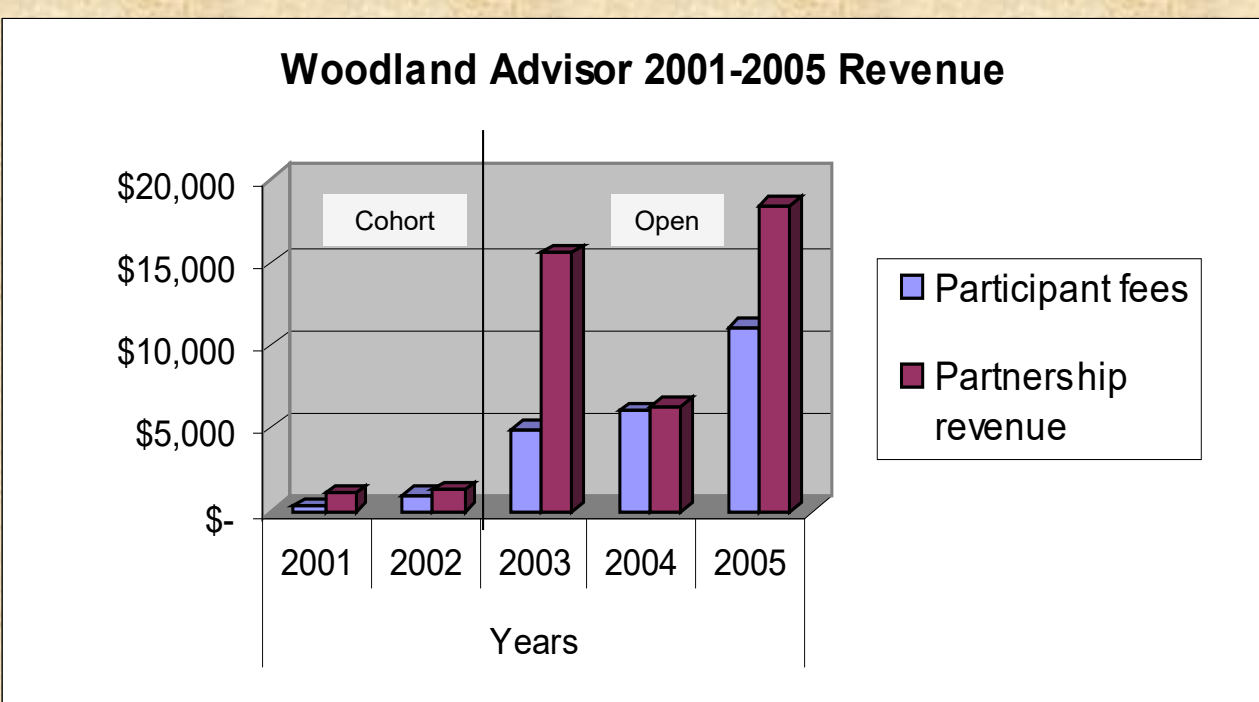
Program Structure



Since the 2003 change from cohort groups of 11-17 to the open program format the number of classes, participants, and individuals has steadily increased as represented in this graph.



Since the 2003 change from cohort groups of 11-17 to the open program format the revenue from both participant fees and partnership revenue have both increased substantially.



Woodland Advisors volunteers hosting a forestry field day in 2005



Woodland Advisors in Wood Products class



Woodland Advisors in the How to Use a GPS Receiver class

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 all year round and targeted towards 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 been developed because of audience need are *How to Use a GPS Receiver*, *Intermediate and Advanced GPS*, *Buckthorn Removal*, *How to be a Successful Volunteer*, and topics related to immediate natural disturbance events such as insect outbreaks and large scale wind events.

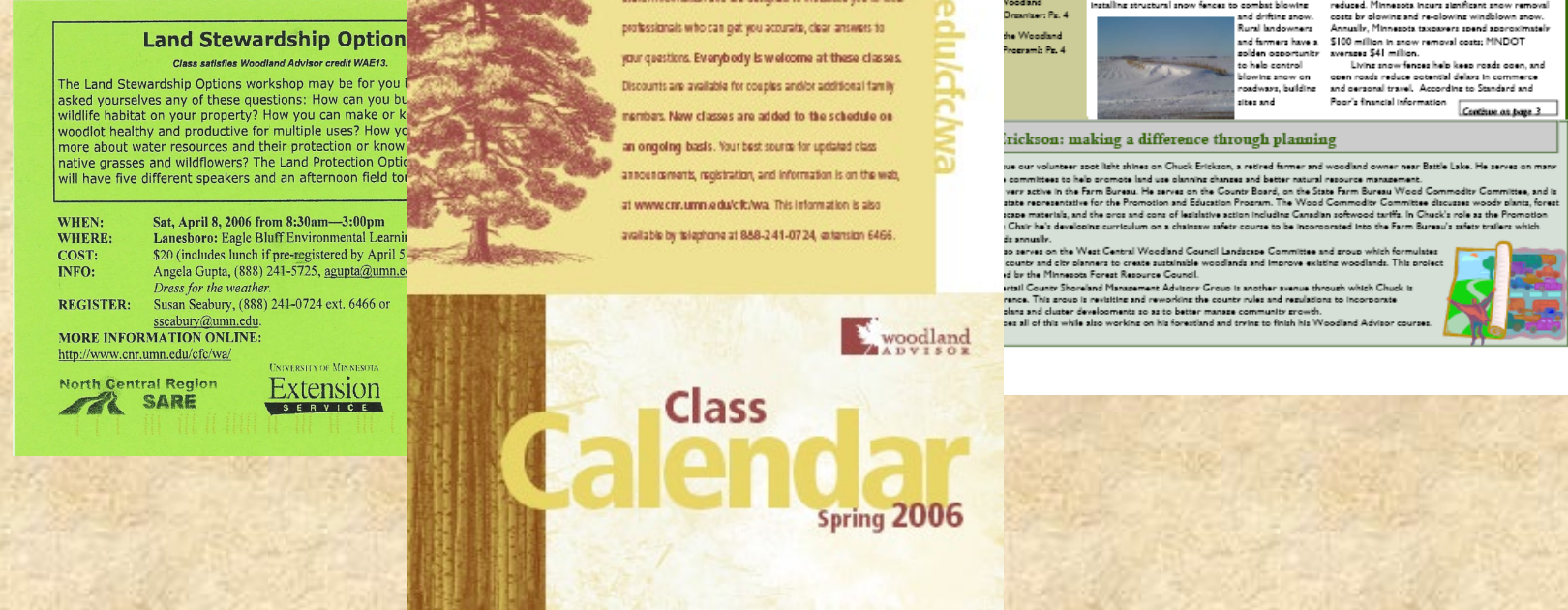
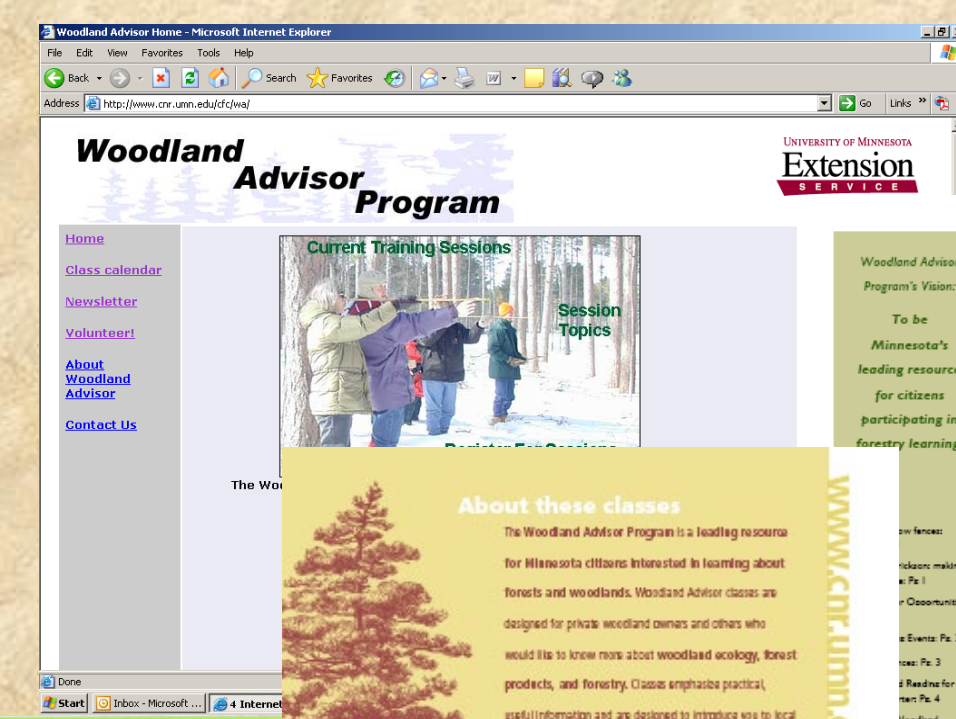
Repeat participation and program growth is encouraged during classes by presenting a program promotional before each session. We also promote repeat attendance by adding participants to our postcard, calendar, and newsletter mailing.

Program marketing has also been increased. Class announcement postcards are mailed 3 weeks prior to each class. A quarterly newsletter builds community and encourages engagement and volunteerism. Three times per year we also distribute a tri-fold pinup calendar listing 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 vision 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.



Woodland Advisors in a Growing & Tending Your Forest class



Woodland Advisors attending a Measuring & Reading Your Forest class in 2005

Vision Statement: To be Minnesota's leading resource for citizens participating in forestry learning.

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