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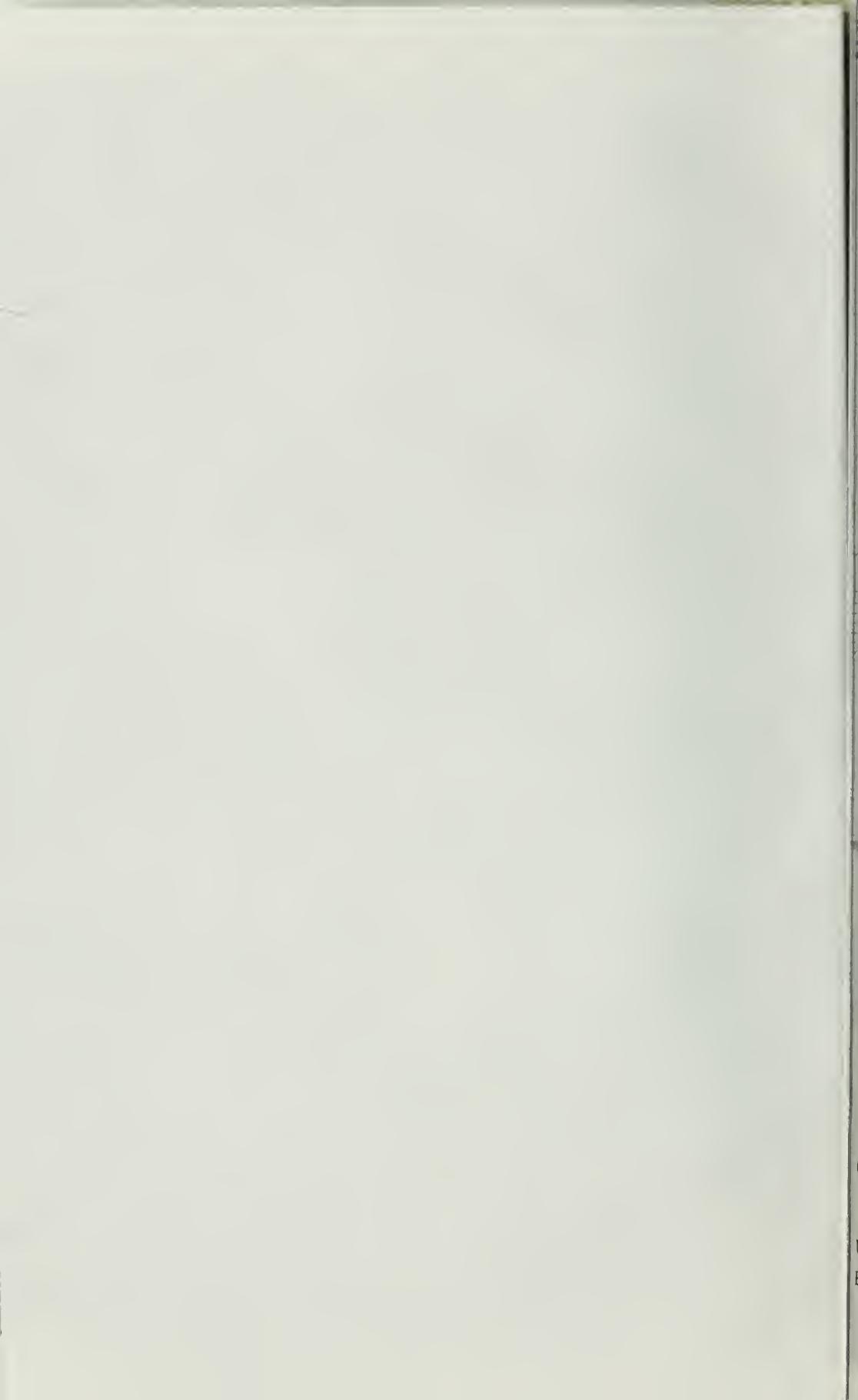
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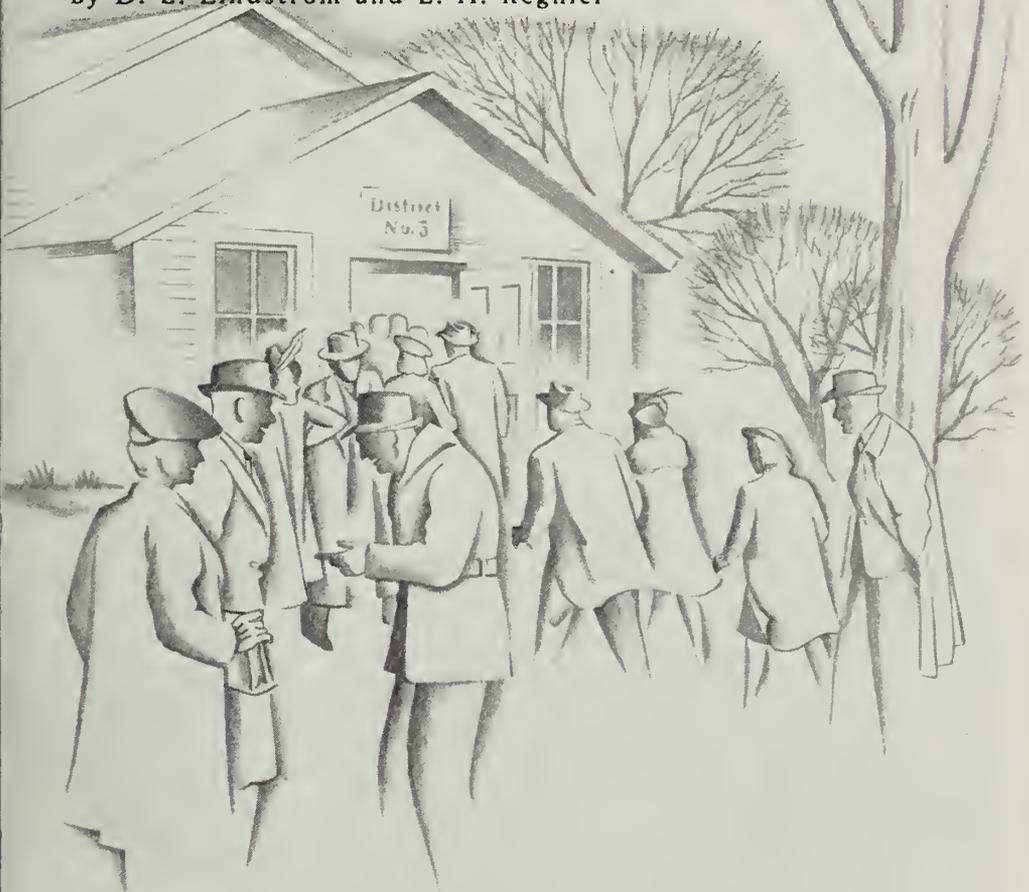
GOOD

COMMUNITY

MEETINGS

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Circular 594

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS · COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics

Good Community Meetings

A friendly, cooperative spirit is a big asset to any community, and good community meetings are one of the best means of fostering such a spirit. Every rural community can have good meetings.

The suggestions given here are for leaders who are responsible for community meetings, whether such meetings are held regularly or called for special discussion or recreation. Many of the suggestions may be helpful also to local leaders working with the Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics of the University of Illinois.

Some come to play and visit, some to listen and discuss, some to take part in the program



Know Why People Come to Meetings

The proof of a good meeting is that people will want to come again. Everyone likes to go to a meeting:

- Where he feels wanted and welcome
- Where he gets ideas he can use
- Where he has a good time

A good time may mean different things to different people, but almost everyone has a good time if given an opportunity to visit with his neighbors, to be entertained, to learn something new, to have a voice in the meeting, a chance to take part on the program or help plan it, or a job he is able and willing to do.

Ask Others to Help

Community meetings to discuss some current problems — farm, home, school, church, and health — can be held without an organization. The leader can simply:

Call the meeting to order.

Open the meeting for discussion of problems and suggestions for their solution, presenting materials secured at county or other training schools or sent out by farm advisers or home advisers.

Make plans for the next meeting.

Adjourn.

If, however, the community is interested in forming a club, now is a good time to start one. Every neighborhood has people capable of helping to direct or take part in such an organization. A group of interested men and women can form a committee to work up an organization and plan some meetings. Young people should of course be included in the planning group. From this committee a chairman can be chosen to preside at meetings, and also a secretary, a program chairman, and a reception chairman.

Many community clubs and many local leaders working with the Extension Service find advantages in working together. The clubs like the materials and interest which local leaders can bring to their meetings, and the leaders make their work more effective by cooperating with an existing club which has a representative community membership. Combining efforts in this way means fewer and better meetings.

Plan Ahead

If you, as chairman of a committee, are responsible for organizing some community meetings, get the committee together well in advance of the first meeting. Make general plans for the several meetings and specific plans for the first meeting. The committee will decide:

1. When to meet
2. Where to meet
3. Who is to take part or be responsible
4. What to have on the program
5. How to advertise the meeting

The committee will also make outlines for several meetings ahead. The chairman will appoint a *host committee* and a *program committee* for each meeting.

Do not stick so rigidly to planned outlines that you can't make use of new ideas that develop later or of speakers who happen to be in your neighborhood at the time of the meeting.



Leaders of community units are meeting to work out programs for the year ahead. Such meetings are usually followed by committee meetings in the home community to plan the local program.

as school, church, or lodge. Stick to your schedule so that the whole community will get the "It's community meeting night" habit.

When to Meet

To insure good attendance, have a regular time for meeting if it is practicable and desirable to meet regularly. Choose the night of the week and the week of the month that conflicts least with heavy work at home or other scheduled activities such

Where to Meet

Homes usually make good meeting centers. Whatever the place chosen, it must be one to which the people of the community or neighborhood will naturally come. It is especially important that the place be within easy reach of all the people.

If the meetings are to be held in a schoolhouse or a church, or a town or club hall, ask the *reception* or *host committee* to see that the place is open, clean, properly heated, and ventilated, and that the chairs

are so arranged that people will be comfortable and will not have to face a strong light.

Placing Responsibility

The first and, likely, the heaviest responsibility will fall on you and the committee, but others will be glad to help if they are approached in the right way and given jobs they think they can do.

Give jobs to people who want them, know something about them, and are willing to learn more. Help each officer as long as he needs help, but turn the job over to him as soon as he is ready and able to work alone. Then check with him now and again to help him further if he needs you.

Have a *program committee* for each meeting. Meet with these committees to talk over what is to be done. Ask each committee to furnish the program, not to be on the program. Get suggestions from the members and turn the job over to them when they are ready to take hold, not before. Encourage them to seek out new talent. Sometimes the most entertaining people in the community are too shy to put themselves forward, but once they feel that others like what they do, they will perform eagerly.

Select a *host* or *reception committee* for each meeting, keeping in mind the music and recreation leader as a possible member. This committee will take charge of refreshments, plan the "starters," "stretchers," and "socializers," welcome people as they arrive, and in every way help them to feel welcome and wanted.

How to Advertise Meetings

Suggestions for the publicity committee:

Talk up your meetings well in advance of the meeting day. Make every one feel that he is wanted and needed.

Interest the teacher in having the school children write invitations to their parents and others in the district.

Use the telephone.

Put a notice in the local paper telling when, where, who, and what. Be sure to include names in all publicity.

Notify your farm and home advisers of your plans.

Have each member of the committee contact his neighbors a second or a third time just before the meeting is to be held.

What to Have on the Program

Give folks a chance to sing a little, talk a little, listen, play, visit, eat, and go home early. For mixed groups, a program must always have variety, but you may wish to stress one part of it—the educational program, for example. If you do, make it good. The following program, with suggestions for officers, may be used as a pattern.

7:30 “Opening Exercise” . . . Reception chairman

Open the building. Check on ventilation, light, and cloak rooms. Greet the people as they come in. You may enlist their help in completing the room arrangement and in welcoming others.

7:40 “Starter” . . . Recreation leader

Begin with exhibits, guessing games, skill games, puzzles, or stunts. Such an informal period encourages people to visit and take part.

8:00 Call to Order . . . Chairman

Have the chairman take over and present the following features.

8:01 Community Singing . . . Song leader

Use one or more songs everyone knows.

8:10 Roll Call and Reading of Minutes . Secretary

Read brief interesting minutes (*see page 8*). Include names of those who have helped with the meeting and names of those who will help next time. Call the roll either before or after reading the minutes. Vary the roll call, sometimes calling family names and asking for numbers present, sometimes asking each person to respond with a current event or an idea he has tried and found useful since the last meeting. To save time you may wish merely to check families and numbers present.

8:15 First Entertainment Number . Program chairman

Plan this for the children or the young people (not necessarily to be given by them). Provide a skit, a humorous reading, or a good story.

8:25 Talks, Discussion, Demonstrations . Chairman

Choose topics that interest you and your neighbors (*see page 8 for sources of materials*). Invite some outsiders to talk, but use your own people as much as possible. Remember that people develop by giving expression to their own opinions, experiences, and points of view, and that the more they participate in the meeting, the more interested they will be.

Always encourage questions and discussion. If it is thought that participation will be slow, ask some people before the meeting to be ready with questions. Give everyone a chance to be heard, but keep the discussion

on the topic and close it while it is still lively. If the group should desire to take action, let them do so unless you think it too soon to act. If you believe the subject deserves more thought, summarize what has been said and announce that there will be a chance for further discussion and action at a specified future date. (Then don't forget to keep your promise.)

Demonstrations are useful because most people would rather be shown than be told. You may ask someone to illustrate one of the several soil-testing devices, a home-bureau member to demonstrate canning methods, or a 4-H club or some school children to exhibit some of their work.

9:00 "Stretcher" Recreation chairman

To give everyone a chance to stand, stretch, or move about, try a story or song with motions, or an audience game. For example: The leader may say, "*All stand and face toward home. Ask the person who faces you what he thinks is a good ration for baby chicks.*" The fun of this game depends on the leader's questions and on native wit.

9:01 Second Entertainment Number Program chairman

Choose a group of musical numbers, a skit, a one-act play, a monolog, dialog, pageant, or movie—any one or two of these, but *not all* of them!

9:30 "Socializers" . . . Recreation or host committee

Have games, marches, folk dancing, or group singing. Serve refreshments limited to two items, each family bringing enough for its own members and serving "potluck."

10:15 Closing Number Chairman

Ask the group to repeat the "American's Creed" or the "Pledge to the Flag" or to sing "America" or some other appropriate song.



One-act plays give everyone, young and old, a chance to take part

Conducting Meetings

Suggestions for the chairman: Even if you have had no previous experience in presiding at meetings, the following notes will help you to do a good job.

1. Know the program.
2. Know the people who are taking part.
3. Introduce people on the platform in a courteous and friendly manner.
4. Keep the program businesslike but informal, encouraging questions and discussion.
5. Tactfully keep all speakers to the point, preventing long drawn-out discussions.
6. Let the group take action (perhaps vote) on the questions discussed.
7. Have something doing all the time. Be so aware of your audience that you will know when to take time out for visiting or when to close the meeting earlier than planned.
8. Adjourn only when you are ready to go home. Recreation, refreshments, and the closing number are all parts of the program.

Suggestions for the secretary: Your main job is to record and read minutes. Much of the success of the meeting, however, depends on you. Remember that altho minutes must be brief, they should be interesting. By making them so, you can start the meeting off happily. Use your originality. You may wish to make a short summary of any unusual talk, stunt, happening, or joke—a high spot of the meeting—if for no other reason than to give members who were absent a hint that they missed something.

Program Materials

As chairman, see that your program committee, and your discussion and recreation leaders attend the county or other extension meetings. Make use of the brief factual outlines, circulars, bulletins, etc., distributed at these meetings.

Call on your farm and home advisers for other materials.

Call on your library for help.

Use every opportunity to attend leader training meetings.

Have your name put on the mailing list to be sent notices of publications and periodicals, such as *The Community Leader*, issued by the University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, Extension Service, Urbana, Illinois. Get a copy of Circular 581, "Let's Talk It Over."

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H. P. Rusk, Director. Acts approved by Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914.

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