



**ANR Workgroup Evaluation Report
April 2008**

**Requested by
Agriculture and Natural Resources
Program Council**

**Submitted by
ANR Workgroup Evaluation Committee**

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PURPOSE OF ANR WORKGROUPS

The stated central purpose of ANR Workgroups is to collaboratively plan and coordinate research and extension activities. Workgroup functions may include:

- needs assessment and program planning
- communication and networking
- planning collective research and extension programming
- subject matter outreach education
- evaluation and reporting of program results
- subject matter in-service training
- extramural fund development

Workgroups are a primary mechanism for accomplishing ANR's high priority research and extension goals through collaborative grassroots leadership. They bring together Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) and Cooperative Extension (CE) personnel along with non-ANR partners to work on emerging and continuing priority issues in Division program areas.

(from FY 2007-2008 Call for ANR Workgroup/Coordinating Conference Reports and Funding Requests)

COMMITTEE PROCESS

The committee conducted a three pronged approach to gathering information from ANR personnel regarding the effectiveness of workgroups. A web-based survey was developed with questions structured to acquire information directly related to the charge of the committee. Following the survey, three focus groups were conducted engaging current and past workgroup chairs to expand upon the information gained from the survey and to solicit information regarding additional issues. We attempted to conduct three focus groups with external clientele that had participated in ANR workgroups, but this effort was not successful in attracting sufficient external participants, so was not completed. The final aspect was a review of a sub-sample of workgroup proposals and reports from across the program areas over the past few years.

The committee developed a web based survey intended to gather information from ANR personnel to assist in proving answers to the questions posed in the committee's charge letter. The committee received a total of 287 responses. Of these, 182 came from campus based ANR personnel and 105 from county based. Fifty-five of the responses were from ANR personnel who had not participated in the workgroup process (48 campus based, 7 county based).

Focus groups were conducted in Riverside, Fresno and Davis with past and present workgroup and coordinating conference chairs. The focus group size ranged from 7 to 12 individuals. These 2 hour sessions were structured around the questions given to the committee and information developed from our survey.

The third aspect of the review was comprised of reviewing a sub-sample of workgroup proposals and annual reports for the past several years. This review was in an attempt to gather information regarding the activities and accomplishments of workgroups.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS POSED IN CHARGE TO COMMITTEE

The ANR Workgroup Evaluation Committee was provided a charge with a series of questions. The short answers to these questions follow.

Have workgroups provided a central point for the planning and conducting of research and extension activities?

- ANR personnel value the workgroups as an important venue for planning and conducting research and outreach programs. Most workgroups report that they are planning and conducting research and extension activities on an annual basis. Some workgroups have concentrated on information sharing as a focus, rather than planning and conducting research and extension activities.

Have workgroups provided a primary mechanism for accomplishing high-priority research and extension goals?

- Workgroups have served as a mechanism for accomplishing high-priority research and extension goals. There are many examples of workgroups developing and implementing programs that are directly in line with ANR Core Issues or have addressed important emerging issues.
- Research – $\frac{3}{4}$ of county based and $\frac{1}{2}$ of campus based survey respondents indicated that workgroups were important to their research program.
- Outreach – approximately 70% of both county and campus based respondents indicated that workgroups were an important part of their outreach programs.

Have workgroups provided grassroots leadership for statewide program development?

- In many areas, the workgroups have been the catalyst for development of information and education programs utilized in statewide efforts. Workgroup reports provide examples in each of the program areas. It is not apparent that workgroups have been involved in the development of any stand alone “ANR statewide program.”

Have workgroups brought together AES and CE personnel along with non-ANR partners to work on emerging and continuing issues?

- By numbers, AES participation in workgroups is dwarfed by CE participation. However, it appears to be the case that workgroups are receiving the input and participation needed for successful research and outreach programs. Engagement of non-ANR partners has been mixed, with some workgroups effectively involving non-ANR members, others having no non-ANR involvement. Each workgroup has determined their approach to involving non-ANR partners based upon their issues and efforts to address issues. With the direction given to workgroups to “include non-ANR partners and clientele as active workgroup members or cooperators as appropriate” this diversity of membership is not unexpected.

Have workgroups generated an appropriate quantity and quality of collaborative scientific, professional and general publications?

- Workgroup efforts have resulted in numerous collaborative scientific, professional and general publications. It is difficult to determine the exact number of publications as it is not a required

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part of the workgroup annual reports. While a large number of publications are reported by the workgroups it is difficult to determine which of these, or how many, would have been published if workgroups did not exist.

Do workgroups have objectives and plans of action that are relevant and responsive to ANR's mission and/or critical issues?

- Workgroups generally have clearly stated goals and objectives at the time they are ratified or re-ratified. These goals and objectives are relevant to ANR's mission and critical issues and meet the stated objectives for ANR workgroups.

Do workgroups effectively interact with other programs inside and outside ANR without significantly duplicating the efforts of those programs?

- The review did not generate any metrics on this important question. Focus group results varied but, in general, did not report significant formal interactions with other programs.
- No one reported negative duplications of effort.

Do workgroups have clearly identified clientele for its outputs and activities, and an effective mechanism for assessing the needs of that clientele?

- Many workgroups have clearly identified clientele for their outputs and activities. Most appear to rely on Advisor involvement as their mechanism for assessing the needs of clientele, rather than any formal process directly involving clientele.

Do workgroups engage in outreach activities to transfer knowledge to that clientele?

- Workgroups have a wide range of outreach effort with many actively engaged in outreach activities to transfer knowledge. This appears to be second only to internal information sharing as the primary activity of many workgroups.

Do workgroups have effective leadership?

- The perception of workgroup leadership varies widely as would be expected from over 90 workgroup chairs. Effective leadership was identified as a critical component of an effective workgroup.

Do workgroups have effective internal communications and coordination of workgroup activities?

- Most workgroups have effective internal communication and coordination of workgroup activities. There may be an opportunity to enhance these efforts through increased use of technology such as net meetings and video conferencing.

Do workgroups have regular meetings that are well attended by membership and provide a valuable form for interaction?

- Most workgroups have regular meetings that are attended by a core group of ANR personnel. With the rare exception of some coordinating conferences, the vast majority of workgroups do not have attendance at meetings that include all of the listed membership. Workgroup meetings have provided venues for valuable interaction among ANR personnel.

Has the process for the establishment of new workgroups and the renewal of existing workgroups been effective?

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- The process for the establishment of new workgroups has been effective, particularly for those identified through grassroots mechanisms, i.e. ANR personnel proposing a new workgroup. The Division has been responsive in dealing with the proposals in a timely manner.
- The process for identification of needed workgroups through ANR processes, including Program Council discussions, development of ANR Core Issues, etc., has been inconsistent. While some new workgroups have been generated in this manner, there has not been a coalescing or combining of workgroups or workgroup effort to address some of the important issues identified by ANR. Workgroups that seem to be effective are those where ANR academics have identified the need and desire for creation, rather than those identified through administrative efforts. This “bottom-up” approach appears to be more effective in creating workgroups that generate projects than the “top-down” efforts.
- Some focus groups felt that workgroup formation efforts have been hampered by the lack of accessible flexible funds for groups to quickly come together outside of the workgroup formation process. A reserve of funds was recommended as a means for ANR academics to quickly come together to initiate efforts to address emerging issues.

INFORMATION FROM WORKGROUP CHAIR FOCUS GROUPS

Workgroup Chair focus groups were conducted in Davis, Fresno and Riverside. The groups invited contained a mixture of workgroup chairs (from the past 3 years) that represented a cross section of program areas and academic departments with which workgroup chairs were affiliated. The selection of chairs from the past 3 years was intended to provide the Review Committee with information regarding the current workgroup process, rather than information based upon workgroup chairs that were only familiar from earlier processes where the proposal and reporting structure were different and when research and extension project funds were available through a workgroup-only application process. The participants within the focus groups ended up being a mixture of workgroup chairs from only the past 3 years and workgroup chairs with a longer tenure. These groups were presented with six questions and provided with an opportunity to comment and discuss. A short synopsis of comments and discussion follows.

In your view, does your workgroup have sufficient representation from the continuum (advisors, specialists, AES scientists) and clientele?

- In terms of numbers, many workgroup chairs indicated that AES involvement was far below CE involvement in workgroups. Discussion of workgroup functions and the need for AES contribution generally resulted in agreement that the workgroup was receiving the type of AES support they needed in terms of contributions to collaborative research programs. There was general agreement that it was difficult to get AES faculty to take the chair role with workgroups.
- Non-ANR and clientele participation in workgroups was highly variable. There is a range from significant external partner involvement to no external partner involvement. Workgroups have followed the direction within the ANR Workgroup Guidelines to include external members as appropriate, with many workgroups feeling that their efforts are better conducted without external members. Reasons for this ranged from the ability to better discuss controversial issues, concern about “ownership” of workgroup products, need to discuss UC internal issues in an open manner, among others. Chairs felt that external participation might be increased if workgroup funds were available to support non-ANR personnel travel to attend workgroup events.

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- All groups discussed what it would take to increase AES involvement. These ideas revolved around the issues of credit for workgroup involvement in the merit and promotion process and lack of significant funding available directly from the workgroup to support research efforts.

In your opinion, what are the key functions or value of workgroups?

- The groups of workgroup chairs were consistent in their responses.
 - Networking – the ability to interact with colleagues across the CE / AES continuum
 - Internal communication
 - In-service training
 - Discussion and prioritization of issues to address
 - Opportunity to develop collaborative research and educational programs
 - Development of publications – both research results and outreach publications
- A consistent message was the strong value of workgroups for their enabling of networking within ANR which creates a sense of support among colleagues. Focus group members commented that after participation at a workgroup event that they felt a sense of renewal or re-energizing resulting from interaction with their peers.

What are the key products your workgroup has developed / implemented over the past 2 – 3 years?

- Workgroup chairs created a wide ranging list of products. These included:
 - Prioritization of outreach needs
 - Identification of research priorities
 - In-service training
 - Enhanced internal communication
 - Improved communication with those outside the workgroup
 - Statewide information products
 - Handbooks and manuals
 - Systems for pest control
 - Trade publications
 - Peer review publications
 - Curricula
 - Educational workshops

What are your biggest frustrations with the workgroup process?

- The administrative burden placed on chairs was a consistent issue across the three groups. Specific issues included the annual proposal process, annual reports and the organization of meetings.
- The other consistent issue raised regarded use of workgroup funds. This included the inability to utilize workgroup funds for web assistance, non-ANR personnel travel support, general restriction of use of workgroup funds and lack of significant funding for staff support for the workgroup chairs..
- Some groups discussed the number of ANR workgroups with the general feeling that there were too many workgroups to be effective and that the re-ratification system should take a hard look at the need and effectiveness of each workgroup before granting continuation.
- There was frustration expressed by the lack of consistency among program areas and program leaders in promoting coordination among workgroups to address issues and in the interpretation of workgroup policies regarding use of funds.

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Other than Workgroups, is there another system that would accomplish bottom-up planning across the county-campus, outreach-research continuum?

- There were no alternative systems proposed that would accomplish the goals of workgroups at any focus group session.

Do you have other comments?

- Workgroup chairs expressed their support and their recognition of the value of workgroups.
- Workgroup chairs felt that if funding for workgroups was not provided that some commodity based workgroups would continue to function but that the issue based workgroups would be less likely to continue.
- Participants strongly felt that, for a relatively small amount of funding, workgroups have generated much value for ANR and the state.
- Chairs stated that ANR needs to focus on measurable outcomes in order to evaluate the future success of the workgroup process. We realize from examining the reporting structure that it does not provide us with information that is needed for evaluation.

RESPONSES TO SURVEY DEVELOPED BY REVIEW COMMITTEE

An online survey was developed and made available to all ANR academic personnel. This survey contained 25 questions designed to gather information regarding the effectiveness of workgroups and relevance of workgroups to the programs of ANR academics. We received 287 responses, which included 55 responses from people who are not members of any workgroup. The vast majority (80%) of the non-workgroup members had AES/I&R assignments.

Of those not participating in workgroups, the top two reasons given were that they did not know much about workgroups or that no workgroup had approached them. This indicates a need by ANR to do a better job in spreading the word about workgroups and for workgroups to directly target individual AES faculty for contributions to workgroup efforts. The next most common response (25%) was that their AES and outreach requirements were met in other ways.

Workgroup member responses represented a cross section of the continuum. Of the respondents: 41% were CE Advisors; 23% CE Specialist; 14% had AES / I&R appointments; 5% were AES; 5% had AES / CE assignments; 3% had AES / CE / I&R appointments; and 8% had other assignments.

The survey identified some differences among the county and campus based workgroup participants. The majority of county based personnel reported membership in 3-4 or 5-6 workgroups (47% and 32% of respondents, respectively). In contrast, the majority of campus based personnel, 52%, reported that they belonged to 1-2 workgroups with another 34% indicated they belonged to 3-4. A similar difference appeared in the number of workgroups in which academics reported making a significant contribution. County based personnel were fairly evenly split between 1-2 and 3-4 workgroups, while the campus based personnel were largely (77%) in the group significantly contributing to 1-2 workgroups. The time spent on workgroup activities also varied among these groups. County based personnel were evenly split among groups contributing 1-5, 6-10 and 11+ days per year to workgroup activities, while more than 50% of the campus based personnel indicated they spent 5 days or less on these activities.

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Perception of significant AES contribution to workgroups differed among county based and campus based personnel. Fifty-two percent of those in the counties agreed that AES faculty made significant contributions compared to 64% of those on campus. Considered in conjunction with the findings from the focus groups, these results warrant additional investigation to determine what constitutes effective AES contribution. There appears to be differing expectations ranging from AES sitting in chairs for the duration of workgroup meetings to strategic contributions to workgroup efforts.

There was general agreement concerning specialist and advisor contributions to workgroups, with about 80% of county and campus based personnel agreeing that both groups made significant contributions to workgroup efforts.

Perhaps most telling of the survey items was that almost 75% of the county based personnel and over 50% of the campus based stated that the workgroups have been a very worthwhile aspect of their research activities. Similarly, over 66% of the county based and 61% of the campus based personnel responded that workgroups have been a very worthwhile aspect of their outreach activities. These results indicate that the workgroups are important in the development and implementation of ANR's applied research and outreach programs.

A large majority of respondents indicated that workgroups are working well in the areas of needs assessment, communication and networking, planning collective research programs, planning collective extension programs and subject matter in-service training. A weakness of the workgroups appears to be in extramural fund development, with less than 1/3 of the respondents indicating that workgroups were functioning well in this area.

While the level of workgroup funding is perceived to be low, the vast majority of the workgroup chairs / co-chairs responding (over 90%) stated that the workgroup funding provided was important to their overall workgroup activities. Two-thirds stated that the activities of the workgroup could not be conducted without the ANR funding.

The survey results are extensive and the results can provide valuable information for Program Council in conducting an in depth discussion of how workgroups are functioning for ANR academics.

COMMITTEE CONCLUSIONS

The workgroup process has been beneficial for ANR. It has provided a venue for networking, information sharing, collaborative planning, development and implementation of research and educational programs, and issue identification and prioritization on an individual workgroup basis. Via the workgroup process, collaborative research and educational programs have occurred that would have been unlikely in its absence.

While survey respondents indicated that the workgroups were working well for needs assessment, the assessment has largely been via advisor input. It does not appear that workgroups have actively engaged in formal needs assessment directly involving clientele. This approach appears to have served the workgroup process, but is not at the level needed by ANR to develop strategic goals.

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The value of networking that occurs within workgroup activities cannot be overstated. It became clear during the review process that interaction with peers resulted in creating a support network and provided a re-energizing effect for ANR personnel participating in workgroup activities.

There is value in having a system with the flexibility to form groups to initiate an effort to address emerging issues. Workgroups are the only current process in place that regularly enables ANR members to come together to collaboratively develop research and education programs. The workgroups provide the opportunity for groups of ANR academics to identify and set statewide priorities for their own programmatic area based upon the needs of clientele. They provide the structure for collaborative program planning, development and implementation across the county-campus and outreach-research continuum that does not exist in any other venue.

The workgroup process has been less successful in providing information for bottom-up planning for ANR. The workgroups seem to be working rather independently of each other and much of the information developed has not been transferred to ANR in any formal manner, outside of annual reports. This may simply be a function of the lack of organized issue identification or strategic planning effort by ANR in the past few years. The last process utilized the Program Planning Advisory Committee model with the workgroups serving as a resource, if contacted, rather than in a primary planning role.

While focus groups expressed frustration with the inability to utilize workgroup funds to support non-ANR personnel travel to workgroup meetings, the Committee also heard that external members received great value from attending and participating in workgroup meetings and activities. Therefore, the Committee concluded that, with value accruing to external members, workgroup funds were better utilized to insure broad ANR participation across workgroups.

The current reporting structure for workgroups did not produce an abundance of information that was useful in the evaluation. This is due to both the flexibility given to workgroups in choosing their functions, which is not necessarily a bad decision, and to the information requested in the annual reports.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue the workgroup process over the next five years while exploring other mechanisms for bottom-up planning.

Convene a group to define a more useful reporting format that has the ability to provide information better suited to evaluating workgroup effectiveness and other purposes desired by ANR.

Explore the potential for administrative support for workgroup chairs to assist in meeting logistics, reporting, etc.

Program Leaders should evaluate workgroups on a biennial basis, including workgroup chair effectiveness. Program Leaders should provide guidance to chairs and workgroups that are not performing.

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Develop a more stringent re-ratification process. Perception is that the main criteria for workgroup re-ratification is the workgroup's existence and desire to continue, rather than a meaningful review.

Institute a regular structure for in-service training and communication through the workgroups.

Incorporate (if not already present) a paragraph in the departmental merit/promotion letters for CE Specialists that describes their statewide leadership and a paragraph in the departmental merit/promotion letters for AES faculty that describes the outreach component of their program. In both cases, acknowledge those that demonstrate leadership and active participation in ANR workgroups.

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ITEMS FOR PROGRAM COUNCIL DISCUSSION

What is the appropriate external stakeholder involvement in workgroups? What should their role be? What does our failure in successfully recruiting focus groups with external audiences in Riverside, Fresno and Davis indicate relative to their interest and commitment to the workgroup process?

What is the appropriate number of workgroups? Should all workgroups receive funding each year?

What is meant by “adequate AES participation?” Is broad-scale AES involvement in all aspects of workgroup meetings essential? Is it possible in light of expectations for AES faculty? Is there a need for a new paradigm for workgroups that clearly outlines what is needed from AES faculty?

Should workgroups be required to utilize more technology for communication and interaction, such as net meetings, video conferencing, etc.?

Should a reserve of funds be created in order to be available for groups to come together quickly to address emerging issues?

Should workgroup funds be expended in a more flexible manner, specifically, to support web assistance, staff support, non-ANR travel and at chair discretion as mentioned in the focus groups?

Should an in-service training model be developed to bring workgroups together around cross-cutting issues?

ANR has invested over \$7M in workgroups since 1999. PC should discuss if the benefits are aligned with the costs.

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Appendix Documents
(sent as separate documents)

ANR Workgroup Survey Summary
ANR Workgroup Chairs Focus Groups Summary
ANR Workgroup Historical Data Summary