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## Team Development and Beyond

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[Return to Current Issue](#)

## **Team Development and Beyond**

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**Abstract:** Team development and leadership remain important roles for Extension. This article demonstrates how Tuckman's model for small group development can be used to examine the evolution of teams retrospectively for the purpose of improving future practice. Our experience leading Nevada's Nutrition Network serves as the example. Critical points in the evolution of this team are identified and alternative actions are cited.

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## **Introduction**

Organizing and leading teams is often the task of Extension educators. While teams have the advantage of providing multiple perspectives and often additional resources, the team development process itself can be challenging. Previously, Tuckman's small group development model (1965) has been used to describe experiences in teams (Fritz, Boren, & Egger, 2005) and to enhance the effectiveness of facilitators (Burns, 1995). This article demonstrates how the model can also be used to examine the evolution of a team retrospectively and to identify strategies that may lead to more effective practice in the future.

## Team Development

According to Tuckman, there are five stages of small group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). "Forming" refers to the start-up period, when members orient themselves to the task and to each other. After the novelty of the group has worn-off, the group moves to the second stage, otherwise known as "storming." This stage is characterized by conflict and polarization. There may be competition among members and disagreement regarding procedures. During the next stage, "norming," members overcome resistance and become more cohesive; a "we feeling" is developed (Maples, 1988). Members work effectively with each other as new roles are adopted. Then in the "performing" stage, members focus on performance and productivity as "group energy is channeled into the task" (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396). In the fifth and final stage, "adjourning," members separate—possibly due to task completion.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)

In 1992, the first year of Food Stamp Nutrition Education funding (now known as SNAP-Ed), seven states had nutrition education plans approved by Food and Nutrition Services, with total federal funding of \$661,076. In FY 2009, over \$341 million dollars in federal funds were approved for SNAP-Ed (Economic Research Service, 2009). During the time frame, Extension in 13 states received federal funds to create statewide nutrition networks for the purpose of developing and implementing nutrition education plans for food stamp households that reflected the principles of social marketing (Research Triangle Institute, 1999; Andreasen, 1995). Using Tuckman's five stages of small group development, we have examined the evolution of Nevada's Nutrition Network below. We do so with the greatest respect and gratitude to those who willingly joined efforts to improve the nutritional landscape for low-income Nevadans.

Nevada's Nutrition Network included members from public and private entities that served the food stamp population in some manner; some served low-income audiences in general, and others served a specific age group or focused on a particular issue. Significant time was spent in this forming stage exploring interests and motivations of the members, and establishing a common vision (Havercamp & Polzin, 2005). Additionally, members agreed on an organizational structure, decision-making processes, and operating principles. The first task was a comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

The storming stage was marked by discussions of the needs assessment findings that pointed to children as a high-priority audience. Members from agencies who served populations other than children expressed concern about their ability to continue. Using the processes agreed-upon by the Network, it was determined that children, specifically adolescents, would be the target audience in the initial statewide nutrition education plan. As a result, several members were not able to continue.

Once the target audience was selected, the Network focused on the educational message. Creativity and scholarship characterized the norming stage. Continuing members worked through their competing loyalties and effectively completed the tasks at hand (Snow and Benedict, 2003).

After months of planning and development, Network members were highly focused on program implementation during the performing stage. The pace was quickened as decisions had to be made quickly and efficiently. Also during this stage, it was discovered that some members did not anticipate that they would be directly involved in the execution of the plan. Rather, they perceived their role to more "advisory" in nature. Their waning involvement eventually led to their discontinuation altogether.

Over a period of several years, the Network membership continued to shrink while Extension assumed greater and greater responsibility for implementing the program. Eventually, adjournment was marked by the Network's dissolution.

## Looking Backward in Order to Move Forward

Looking back, we have identified a number of strategies that might have led to improved outcomes for Nevada's Nutrition Network and should lead to improved outcomes for future team efforts.

- During the forming stage, the use of memoranda of understanding that better clarified roles could have led to sustained partnerships. Although this process places more administrative demands on the participating agencies, it has the potential to formalize relationships, create opportunities to negotiate contingencies, and help to ensure administrative support.
- All members had supervisors and/or stakeholders to whom they reported. Additional discussions about their expectations during or before the norming stage might have helped members justify their continued participation.
- It was during the storming stage that conflicts began to emerge. As members expressed concern about their continued participation, it might have been helpful to explore avenues whereby partners could participate in ways that would have been viewed as beneficial to their agencies.
- To promote a greater sense of ownership over a longer period of time (e.g., while performing), it might have been beneficial to explore ways in which members could have shared fiscal responsibility for the plan.
- When it became apparent that interest and involvement was waning, adjournment could perhaps have been delayed by revisiting the purpose with existing members and "reinventing" the Network. According to Chatfield et al. (2004) periodically rewriting the mission/vision statements may be a useful strategy to accomplish this.

## Conclusion

As communities face new challenges, Extension's role in developing teams is unlikely to diminish. Tuckman's model of small group development was used here to retrospectively examine the evolution of Nevada's Nutrition Network. This was helpful in providing a framework to consider strategies that may lead to improved outcomes. We suggest that others consider using this tool to strengthen their teams.

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