

A Guide for Using the Community Capitals Framework to Build Advisory Committees¹

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Introduction

Many organizations and groups use advisory committees to provide structure to receiving advice and guidance on direction, scaling, problems, and programs (Advisory Board Centre, 2025). UF/IFAS Extension agents are expected to have advisory committees to help advise, provide Extension program recommendations, and advocate for the mission of Extension when needed (UF/IFAS Extension, 2015). The question always remains: “Outside of demographics, how do I build a committee that represents all aspects of my community?” One answer is to use the Community Capitals Framework (Flora et al., 2016) to help guide the development of your advisory committee. This publication discusses the Community Capitals Framework as well as the stakeholder group representatives who could be invited to the committee based on various content or program areas.

Community Capitals Framework

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) provides a structure for addressing issues and challenges in various multidimensional communities. The CCF identifies seven capitals or assets that affect the livelihood and well-being of the community. The seven capitals include natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built (Flora et al., 2016). If the seven capitals are balanced and given equal attention and resources, a strong and sustainable community is developed with a healthy ecosystem, vibrant community, and positive social well-being. The economy, environment, or social equity tends to break down when one or two capitals are prioritized over the other capitals (Flora et al., 2016). For example, if all attention in a community is focused on built capital, then the community has failed to consider natural capital and cultural capital and ways those capitals are affected or could add value to creating a sustainable, healthy community. In an Extension context, attending to the capitals through programming can help yield long-term social, economic, and environmental impacts. Beaulieu (2014) developed a comprehensive table that defines and provides examples of each capital (Table 1).

Application for Extension Advisory Committees

Given that balanced attention to each form of community capital contributes to the development of healthy and vibrant communities (Flora et al., 2016), it is recommended that Extension advisory committees be structured using this framework as a guiding principle. Incorporating the CCF ensures balanced capitals and varied perspectives to inform and support Extension programs.

This approach involves providing advisory committee members with background information on the community capitals (e.g., the table referenced above), explaining the rationale behind the committee’s design (e.g., one representative per capital), and clarifying which capital each member is invited to represent. Members should also be encouraged to engage in discussions through the lens of their designated capital. This strategy fosters purposeful participation and helps members feel that their contributions are valued and integral to the committee’s work.

Below is a guide of stakeholder groups from which a representative could be invited for each of the seven capitals, broken down by Extension program or content area. Note that this is not an exhaustive list, but it provides suggestions or ideas for each capital.

Agriculture, Natural Resources, Horticulture

- Natural capital: Representatives from water management district, parks and recreation, large landowners.
- Cultural capital: Generational farmers/growers with historical or cultural significance.
- Human capital: Agriculture and natural resources/horticulture researchers or educators, agriculture teachers/FFA advisors, representative from school district career and technical education.
- Social capital: Representatives from Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s Association, Beekeepers Association,

garden clubs, plant associations, Master Gardener Volunteers, agritourism operations, or community gardens.

- Political capital: Soil and Water Board members, Farm Bureau representative, policymakers, decision makers, county/city commissioners/council person.
- Financial capital: Representatives from Farm Credit/agricultural lending institutions or local banks/credit unions.
- Built capital: Representatives from homeowner associations (HOA), neighborhood development companies, utility authority, county building and zoning.

Family and Consumer Sciences

- Natural capital: Representatives from parks and recreation, community gardens, agritourism operations.
- Cultural capital: Representatives from the public library, art leagues/associations, local cultural organizations.
- Human capital: Health educators, registered dietitians, real estate agents, culinary teachers.
- Social capital: Representatives from the Department of Health, human resources, local nonprofits, school district.
- Political capital: Housing and Urban Development (HUD) representative, faith-based organization leaders, policymakers, decision makers.
- Financial capital: Representatives from a housing finance company or bank.
- Built capital: Representatives from hospitals/health care, developers, utility companies.

4-H Youth Development

- Natural capital: Representatives from parks and recreation, natural resources department, fish and wildlife agencies, forestry department.
- Cultural capital: Representatives from fair boards, local cultural organizations, public library, art leagues/associations.
- Human capital: Teachers, youth volunteers.
- Social capital: Representatives from other youth organizations.
- Political capital: County commissioners with an interest in youth programs, school board members.
- Financial capital: Bank representative, financial planner, financial advisor.
- Built capital: Representatives from parks and recreation, construction, county building and zoning, school district construction, agricultural producers with knowledge of infrastructure needed for youth programs.

Sea Grant

- Natural capital: Representatives from government agencies (e.g., fish and wildlife agencies, the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], etc.), local environmental groups, marinas, bait and tackle shops, and ecotourism businesses.

- Cultural capital: Representatives from local cultural organizations, public library, art leagues or associations, historical societies.
- Human capital: Natural resources educators or researchers, environmental educators or researchers, park docents.
- Social capital: Representatives from environmental groups/associations, parks and recreation, Master Naturalists.
- Political capital: Representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), fish and wildlife agencies, natural resource agencies.
- Financial capital: Representatives from local banks, natural resource grantors/foundations.
- Built capital: Representatives from parks and recreation, marinas, county natural resources department.

Overall (or Whole Office) Advisory Committees for County Extension Directors

- Natural capital: Representatives from fish and wildlife agencies, water management district, parks and recreation.
- Cultural capital: Representative from military base, Chamber of Commerce, theatre/museum/arts/historical society, college student (if located in a college town).
- Human capital: Representatives from school district career and technical education, local college educator/professor, high school and/or elementary school teachers.
- Social capital: 4-H club leaders, Master Gardener Volunteers, Master Naturalists.
- Political capital: County commissioner, school board members, other elected officials (e.g., sheriff, tax collector, supervisor of elections, etc.).
- Financial capital: Local bank representative, Farm Credit/agricultural lending institutions, grantors/funding agencies.
- Built capital: Representatives from neighborhood development companies, county government planning and zoning representative, large landowners.

Summary

Utilizing the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as a structural guide for developing varied and representative advisory committees can promote a holistic approach to program advisement for Extension agents. While advisory committees are valuable for providing strategic guidance and community insight, their effectiveness is significantly

enhanced when members are intentionally selected to represent a broad spectrum of community assets.

The CCF emphasizes the importance of investing equally in seven forms of capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built. By ensuring that each of these capitals is represented and considered in decision-making processes, Extension programs can better support the development of healthy, vibrant, and sustainable communities, which is a core goal of the Extension mission.

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Table 1. The seven community capitals and examples.

Capital	Definition	Examples
Natural	The quality and quantity of natural resources existing in a community.	Parks; lakes; rivers; wildlife; forestland; farmland; mountains; other natural resource features.
Cultural	The values, norms, beliefs, and traditions that people inherit from the family, school, and community. Also includes material goods produced at a specific time and place (such as paintings, books) that have historical or cultural significance.	Cultural events/festivals; musical heritage; libraries; museums; multilingual populations; historical associations.
Human	Attributes of individuals that provide them with the ability to earn a living, strengthen community, and otherwise contribute to community organizations, to their families, and to self-improvement (Flora et al., 2004). It includes access to education and knowledge development, training and skill building activities, and efforts to build and expand local leadership.	Formal and informal educational programs; adult and youth leadership programs; lifelong learning activities.
Social	Connections existing among people and organizations that help make things happen in the community. Includes close ties that build community cohesion (bonding) as well as weaker ties with local and outside people and organizations that help promote broad-based action on key matters (bridging).	Activities that build trust among people and groups of different races and ethnic backgrounds; citizen involvement in community discussions and events; community celebrations or parades; involvement in civic and service groups; organizations that link diversity of people and organizations together.
Political	The ability to influence and enforce rules, regulations, and standards. Access to individuals and groups with the power to influence decisions. Participating in civic discourse on difficult public issues.	Elected and appointed government officials; citizen participation in issue forums; congressional representatives and staffers; political organization leaders; voting rates in local, state, and national elections.
Financial	The variety of financial resources available to invest in local projects or economic development initiatives. Efforts to build wealth to support community development activities.	Community foundations; grants; micro-loan programs; revolving loan funds; community development financial institutions; banks.
Built	Represents the infrastructure of the community — the basic set of facilities, services, and physical structures needed by a community.	Broadband and other information technologies; utilities; water/sewer systems; roads/bridges; business parks; incubator facilities; hospitals; health care buildings; main street buildings; housing stock.

Note: Table is work of Beaulieu (2014). Beaulieu cited the following sources for the information provided in the table: Flora & Flora (2008); Flora, Flora, & Fey (2004); Jacobs (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d); Flage & Hauser-Lindstrom (2007); Emory, Fey, & Flora (2006).

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