



Mountain Promis

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The Newsletter of the Brushy Fork Institute

Spring 1993

State networking conferences spring ahead

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conferences**
Spaces may
still be
available!

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State networking conferences are ready to bloom in four Central Appalachian states. Committees of Brushy Fork Associates have been working over the winter to organize the conferences, creating fun and productive ways for graduates of the Leadership Development Program to network with other Associates. With time on each agenda for statewide projects, the conferences present opportunities for participants to extend their team leadership activities.

Summaries of plans for each conference are below. If you haven't registered but are interested in attending the conference in your state, call the Brushy Fork office for information: (606) 986-9341 ext. 6838. Remember, these conferences are for all Associates, regardless of whether or not original teams are still active.

Kentucky: "Appalachian Culture,"
March 19-20, Pine Mountain State Resort Park

According to Conference Coordinator Jeanette Shouse of Breathitt County, the influence of Appalachian culture will be considered for each topic explored. In addition to topical sessions, the agenda includes: a workshop on cultivating broad-based participation, county team updates, storytelling and time for sharing insights and lessons learned.

Brushy Fork Program Associate Peter Hille says Jeanette has done a terrific job in keeping the ball rolling throughout the planning process.

Tennessee: "Building Bridges," March 26-27, Cumberland Mountain State Park

A planning team of eight has put together this conference, which begins with dinner on Friday evening. Conference planners say the program can accommodate Associates who cannot stay overnight, and they urge anyone unable to attend the entire conference to register for the full day on Saturday.

Networking, storytelling and a panel discussion on overcoming obstacles in community development work round out the agenda. Associates from Brushy Fork teams in Overton, Jackson, and Pickett counties comprise the panel, and Gene Snowden of Overton County will moderate.

The planning committee includes: Lillian White, Hal Flinsch, Rebecca Smith, Gene Snowden, Buddy Felder, Jack McDaniel, Meta Potter and Debbie Garrett.

West Virginia: "Telling Our Stories,"
March 26-27, Pence Springs Hotel

Given its theme this conference is sure to give attenders plenty of opportunities to speak out. Four exciting workshops are on the agenda:

- *Getting the Word Out: Working With the News Media* with Kristin Zimet of the Coalition on Jobs and the Environment.
- *Helping Communities Deal With Conflict* with Associates Bob Wilson of Calhoun County and Jean Tee of McDowell County, joined by Brushy Fork director Carol Lamm.

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Leadership development makes a difference

Questionnaire reveals program effects

Does the Brushy Fork Leadership Development Program really make a difference to the individuals who participate? If so, what sort of difference? These are questions that Brushy Fork participants, staff and funders all ask each other from time to time.

In many cases, we staff have seen for ourselves that individuals have grown in skills, confidence and understanding. We have heard many stories from participants about new challenges they have taken on, and on evaluation forms almost every individual has reported positive changes in attitudes and knowledge. However, curious skeptics that we are, we wanted to know more.

In the spring of 1992, we sent each new Brushy Fork participant a pre-workshop questionnaire. After the six-month program period, participants filled out the same questionnaire. This made it possible to compare where people were before the program started with where they were at the end.

Here are some of the highlights from the questionnaire results:

Some things did not change very much over the course of the program. For instance, people's ideas about effective publicity did not change much: person-to-person methods ranked highest at the beginning as well as the end. Also, motivating others ranked at the top of the list of leadership skills most important for community organizations both beforehand and afterward.

People became more hopeful about a variety of economic development strategies. More people gave "moderately promising" or "very promising" scores to supporting existing business, helping local entrepreneurs, infrastructure improvements, tourism and local crafts at the end of the program than at the beginning.

People grew more moderate on the potential of recruiting industries, with fewer people ranking this strategy at the two ends of the scale.

Understanding of what it takes to keep a community organization effective over the long term changed. The number of participants choosing "a strong, committed leader" as a critical factor went down, while the number selecting "dealing positively with conflict" went up.

Significant changes showed up in participants' behavior. In the last part of the questionnaire, participants reported on how many times they had taken ten specific leadership actions over the past three months.

The total "0" score, meaning that the person hadn't done this at all over the past three months, dropped from 124 beforehand to 75 afterward. The leadership behaviors showing the biggest gains were:

- preparing an agenda
- calling someone to talk about a project idea or a problem
- taking steps to address conflicts in a group
- thinking about how different people would be suited to different roles in a group
- working out a timeline for a group project.

Participants were also asked which of these actions were easiest and hardest for them. Easy items before the first workshop were preparing agendas, calling others to talk about a project idea or a problem, asking each person in a small meeting for his or her opinion on a topic, and prompting group members to discuss how the group was working together.

Hardest actions at the end of the program included some of these same items. We are guessing that some things became harder because many people had not done them at all before participating in Brushy Fork. In particular, prompting group members to discuss how the group was working together, thinking about how different people would be suited to different roles in a group, and working out a timeline were all activities which many participants had not done before the program but which were scored "hardest" afterward. It's natural that things get harder when you actually try to do them!

We are glad to have this new information, and I, as chief skeptic around here, am particularly glad that we have found a way of measuring before-and-after leadership behaviors. But despite our enthusiasm for this new evaluation method, personal stories are still the primary way we learn what difference Brushy Fork has made and how we might be more useful. So keep those calls and letters coming! We love to hear from you.

Carol Lamm



toolbox

Facilitators' techniques for group discussions

These techniques can be used to serve the needs of a group in exploring ideas and making decisions. They can be modified or combined to suit a group's needs.

Brainstorming: List as many ideas as possible, as quickly as possible. Don't evaluate, discuss or criticize. Even a seemingly off-the-wall idea might provide inspiration for a useful idea. Two or more ideas from a brainstorm can be combined to create something else entirely. Brainstorming generates lots of ideas and sparks creative thinking.

Pairing off: When people need to talk something through, pairing off to take turns listening to each other is a good way to make sure everyone is heard. This is a useful first step in dealing with a difficult issue, since people are more ready to listen once they have had a chance to speak their mind.

Small groups: Breaking up into small groups can be good for exploring ideas and discussing them in greater detail. This is particularly useful if you have more topics to cover than can be dealt with by the whole group in the time available. Small groups let everyone participate more than would be possible in large group discussions. Have someone from each small group give a summary report on the discussion.

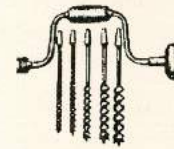
Round-robin reporting: Go around the group and ask each person to respond to the question or proposal at hand. This technique gets everyone's input and helps keep anyone from dominating a discussion. It works in small to moderate size groups, but bogs down with larger numbers (more than a dozen or so). Another application is to have each person write down several ideas, then go around the group and let each give one idea. Go around again and again until no one has any new ideas to list.

Straw polls: When faced with a list of options, straw polls provide an alternative to voting. Try giving each person two to four votes (depending on the length of the list and number of people) to distribute among the choices. This helps to get the sense of the group without forcing a decision and encourages people to express support for more than one idea. You can then eliminate ideas with little or no support, focusing more in-depth discussion on the remaining options.

Listing pros and cons: This is a good way to evaluate an idea. Draw a line down the middle of a flip chart page. Write "pros" on one side and "cons" on the other. Let people list all the pros and cons they can think of. You may occasionally need to ask if something is a pro or a con: some things will be both. This helps people see both sides of a proposal and brings out considerations that may have been overlooked.

Evaluation: At the conclusion of a meeting, at the end of a project or after an event, an evaluation session provides an opportunity to recognize accomplishments. It also lets people air gripes, often before they become major problems. One simple (and very quick) method is to make three columns on a flip chart, with the headings "Good / Bad / Change." Have participants list the things that were good, what was not good, and what should be done differently in the future. List all the comments in the appropriate columns and try not to argue with the suggestions for improvement!

—Peter Hille



Networking conferences

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- *Telling Our Stories* with master storyteller Anndrena Belcher focusing on personal stories of mountain heritage.
- *Self-Direction* with Associate Jim Bragg of Summers County. Jim's workshop will suggest skills and ideas for leadership self-development.

Conference planners are: Logan Rhodes, Linda Rhodes, Clara Deaton, Pete Peterson, Jim Bragg, Danny McMillion, Jean Tee and Violet Hatfield.

Virginia: "Get Together," April 16-17, Southwest VA 4-H Center in Abingdon

The agenda in Virginia includes workshops on fundraising and networking, a panel discussion on the affects of prisons on surrounding communities, project planning and entertainment.

The Virginia planning committee has divided up responsibilities somewhat among county groups. For example, registration duties are being handled by Volunteer Scott County. Wythe County participants are making arrangements with the 4-H Center. Associates from Dickenson County are designing a panel session to explore the affects of prisons. Highland Countians are planning the beginning and ending segments of the conference. Two Lee Countians and Anthony Flaccavento of the Coalition on Jobs and the Environment are designing a workshop on fundraising.

Y'all come!

Brushy Fork kicks off first annual campaign

The staff of the Brushy Fork Institute, under guidance from the Advisory Board and as a result of long-term strategic planning sessions, recognized the need for diversified income to supplement funding provided by foundations and corporations.

In October of 1992 Brushy Fork Institute initiated its first annual fundraising campaign. Brushy Fork Associate and Advisory Board member Betty Jo McKinney opened the campaign with a \$100 challenge to Associates and Advisory Board members.

As of the end of February 1993 contributions to the annual campaign totaled \$1117.00.

Brushy Fork Institute gratefully acknowledges the continuing interest and support shown by contributors to our first annual campaign.

Byrdstown-Pickett County Chamber of Commerce

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